

Communication and the Changing Face of Terrorism in Kenya

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Abstract: *Over 50 well-coordinated and largely successful terrorist attacks by Al-Shabaab militants on Kenyan soil since late 2011 have inspired this study. This empirical study is premised on the realization that there is more to stemming terrorist attacks than military reaction. The paper examines the government's communication mechanisms and how it handles communication on terrorism. The paper also examines the citizen's preparedness in the event of an attack and what role the government should play with regard to the citizens' information needs on terrorism. The descriptive survey methodology employed unravels the mystery of a people with dangerously very little knowledge and awareness levels about preventing and foiling terrorist attacks, making them likely victims on a large scale. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of data suggests a government that has not invested in communication strategies that could be harnessed to deter Al-Shabaab militants from carrying out their evil intentions.*

Keywords: Al-Shabaab, terrorism, communication strategy, government, citizens

1. Introduction

Kenya has recently seen an upsurge of aggressive terrorism against her. It started with the bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi on 7th August, 1998 where explosives were detonated, killing 258 people with 5,000 injured, according to local media sources. There would be other attacks in between but the 21st September, 2013 Westgate Mall attack brought a totally new narrative to the terrorism mayhem. Terrorists with a face appear at a crowded location and indiscriminately spray bullets to shocked victims, or sometimes have the time to separate Muslims from non Muslims and kill the latter.

The attack on 2nd April, 2015 at Garissa University College exposed serious gaps in the government's security apparatus not only in preventing the attack but also in rescuing the affected as well. These gaps were related to gaps in a clear communication strategy by the government. Media sources quoted survivors recounting horrendous stories of a more than 8 hour siege that saw helpless and hapless students killed in large numbers largely due to fear and not knowing what to do. Fred Mukinda, in an article entitled, *Shame of slow response in 15-hour campus terror* (Sunday Nation, April, 2015) said the first rescue team arrived at 12:30pm, 7 hours after the terrorist struck. This paper is therefore premised on the assumption that communication deficiencies provide a strong foundation for the success of terrorist activities.

Rationale

This study is necessary because clearly, the government may be losing the war on terrorism if the number of deaths from the Garissa attack is anything to go by. The number of casualties is rising, given that at the Westgate mall attack by the same Al-Shabaab militia on 21st September, 2013, the country lost 67 people while in Garissa, it rose to 148, according to government sources. Moreover, Kenya's tourism industry, once very vibrant, has taken a beating with 20 hotels shutting down at the cost with 3,000 jobs lost

following a wave of Al-Shabaab hits. (Business Daily, 22 April, 2014). The US, Britain and other powerful nations where Kenya benefits through tourism have been issuing frequent travel advisories since the attacks intensified. Unfortunately, the Government of Kenya dismissed those advisories as ill-intended. (Quartz, 5 April, 2015). In addition, Alinoor Moulid Bosh, in an article entitled, *Kenya's Garissa students thought a poster warning of an imminent terror attack was an April fools prank* quoted student survivors saying the university had actually been warned of an impending attack. Someone thought it worthy to share this information on a notice board but the recipients of this message understood it to be a possible April Fool's joke or the imagination of an overly cautious person. (Quartz, 5 April, 2015). It's obvious therefore that we are dealing with a population that is still unprepared to deal with terrorism at a personal level and a government that is in denial whenever terrorism alerts are released, which most often than not, prove the government of the day wrong when Al-Shabaab attacks hence the need for this study.

Objectives/Research Questions

In order to understand the role of communication in terrorist attacks, the paper sought to address the following questions:

- What communication strategies has the government put in place to alert citizens of possible terror attacks? Is there any purposeful communication to help citizens protect themselves? Has miscommunication or a lack of it contributed to the deaths of Kenyans through terrorist attacks?
- Are citizens aware of any defence tactics they could employ in the face of terror? If they know, how did they come to know? What gaps exist in communication that would see people ignorant about defending themselves where security organs delay to rescue them?

2. Literature Survey

When Al-Shabaab attacks Kenya, that in itself is communication, according to scholar Matusitz (2013). This

would mean therefore that when Al-Shabaab attacked non-Muslims in Garissa, they were passing a message: that Kenyans cannot hide from them. When they terrorized and harassed students for more than 10 hours whom they eventually killed, the militants were also communicating: that Kenya is hopelessly handicapped when it comes to protecting her own. The Kenyan security forces too sent a clear communication of incompetence when they took more than 10 hours to respond. That the government rubbished terror alerts and scoffed at the UK and US for protecting their citizens (The Independent, 3rd April, 2015) is also clear communication about how much it values her citizens.

In a study called *Terrorism and Communication: A Critical Introduction*, scholar Jonathan Matusitz (2013) explores the ways that terrorists communicate messages through actions and discourse. Using a multifaceted approach, he draws valuable insights from relevant disciplines, including mass communication, political communication, and visual communication, as he illustrates the key role that media outlets play in communicating terrorists' objectives and examines the role of global communication channels in both spreading and combating terrorism.

The aim of the paper was two-fold: to describe and to consider the implications of the synthesis between terrorism, the media and strategic communication, using the Norway attacks as an example; and to describe and analyze the challenges and execution of crisis communication during and after the Norwegian attacks. (Matusitz, 2013)

The crisis challenged the linear process of standard planning and information transmission. The terrorist attacks in Norway and how they were framed, especially before the perpetrator was identified, are linked to a global discourse on terrorists, and demonstrate the need for developing specific terrorism crisis communication theory. The news media coverage gave the perpetrator and his political messages publicity, but more as a lone disturbed individual, associated with school shootings more than with terrorism. The study concluded that there is a need for increased knowledge about terrorism as strategic communication or public relations. The variety among stakeholders and the increased possibilities for terrorists to control and plan their communications have implications. New strategies and tactics that oppose and defeat the terrorist's communication goals must be developed. (Matusitz, 2013).

In another study by Aino Ruggiero and Marita Vos entitled *Communication Challenges in CBRN Terrorism Crises: Expert Perceptions* (2014), the authors' aim was to investigate experts' perceptions on communication in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism crises, including challenges and good practices. They posited that the challenges of communication concerning CBRN terrorism arise from the complexity of such incidents, having to do with the nature of the threat, leading to problematic public perceptions and response.

According to a respondent, few communication experts and competences are available, and the authorities are not 'focused on enhancing preparedness and knowledge in this field'. The respondent further called for 'a common national

programme' to train and prepare all those involved in such emergencies – from physicians and security services to citizens. Research activities in this field also need to be increased. Another respondent stressed that CBRN terrorism crises are not priorities at national and local levels, and hence, it was 'a matter to put CBRN crises as a priority'. (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014).

Moreover, another expert noted that when the cooperation for crisis communication is not smooth, it may happen that too many organizations and 'so-called experts' will communicate and create confusion. Having too many players communicate without coordination may also evoke more fear in the population. Furthermore, one respondent mentioned that schools also need to be involved when planning crisis communication, 'so that they can act in loco parentis' in the event of a CBRN terrorism crisis, with parents trusting them to do so. (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014).

According to the respondents, people's psychological reactions have to do with, for example, anxiety because of a lack of understanding and control regarding the handling of such a crisis. The respondents also mentioned problematic behavioural reactions of the public in CBRN terrorism crises caused by not following instructions or possible ignorance as such crises hardly occur. (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014).

A further challenge, specific to terrorist situations, would be a fear of future attacks among the public and high levels of anxiety caused by exaggeration of the danger inherent in such situations. Several respondents mentioned challenges regarding the need to calm people. (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014).

It ought to be noted that a week after the Garissa attack, one student from the University of Nairobi's Kikuyu campus died due to a stampede caused by a blast from a faulty transformer which the students mistook for another Al-Shabaab attack. (Reuters, 12th April, 2015)

One respondent mentioned 'panic from misinformation' as a potential challenge, indicating that anxiety may be caused by e.g., problems hampering information dissemination by response organizations. Moreover, according to the respondents, a limited understanding of the risks may cause problems for people. (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014).

According to some respondents, concerning CBRN terrorism crises, preparedness communication and education are lacking. The public tends to delegate preparedness for unlikely threats to response organizations. Some respondents consider preparedness needed. It is a long-term challenge, according to one respondent, of how 'to avoid that the population enters the "it won't happen to me" mode, thus reducing their attention and preparedness'. In the words of another respondent:

IF we continue to NOT TRAIN the public in what to expect, there will simply be too much to do, too much disinformation and noise, and it's too late to teach people after the crisis begins. (R11)

The role of citizens was stressed by one respondent, who stated that 'citizens must be able to track activities as close

as possible (measurements taken, risks, etc.)' to be able to create 'their own operational picture'. The latter may also be seen as an ethical point of view. Ethics, however, were addressed in a separate question. (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014).

In yet another study, *Communicating the Terrorist Risk: Harnessing a Culture of Fear*, (2006) Gabe Maythen and Sandra Walklate, following the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, Madrid and London delve into the issue of how state agencies have been bound up with the problem of how to effectively communicate the risk of terrorism to the general public. This article charts the UK government's attempts to engage in this process and illustrates how the communication of the terrorist risk meshes into broader cultural formations of crime and (in)security. Their analytical framework utilizes the risk society as the scene in which governmental strategies are parcelled up and unpacked. It is posited that the framing of the terrorist problem through the political discourse of 'new terrorism' has built upon and escalated a cultural climate of fear and uncertainty. At the level of political communication, it will be elucidated that media representations of the terrorist threat have served to further embed discourses of responsabilization.

In *Language Use, Communication and terrorism: A critical Discourse*, (2014), Nigerian authors Ken Uche Chukwu, Fidelia Azuka Okeke and Chioma Chinedu-Okoro posit that the dominant strategy adopted against terrorism so far, and in the recent times is military action. Surprisingly however, just as terrorism has caused severe destruction to lives and property, just as it has dangerously threatened global peace and security, it is an observable fact that the adoption of military action against terrorism has always led to almost equal level of devastation within the affected territories. Thus, the search for an alternative strategy that can address the scourge, with minimal devastative consequences has become very necessary. The aim of the paper was to examine how effective use of language and other communication tools could be harnessed in this regard. The paper holds that terrorism is a product of loss of trust, mutual suspicion, betrayal, deceit among other factors. It is a reactionary mechanism for settling scores. The paper therefore, asserts that effective use of language holds great panacea towards engendering mutual trust and peaceful co-existence, and by extension, also, holds the potential to forestalling terrorism. The paper in its conclusion does not rule out the need for military action as an option to counter terrorism. It however submits that there is need to look beyond military action for further solution, especially from the point of view of avoiding terrorism instead of fighting terrorism.

In a commentary, renown columnist, Mutuma Mathiu, in the *Daily Nation* (2015) says the following on the Garissa attack:

I think this country let down those poor children who were massacred in their beds. Their stories have broken my heart; their unpreparedness in the face of evil, their simple trusting natures when confronted by jihadist killers who lied to them that if they came out of their hiding places, they would be spared. They have been brought up to behave themselves and to obey those in authority, in this case the man with the

gun. If only they had been trained to survive, to know that when Al-Shabaab arrives, the only way to survive is to fight them, to rush them, and overwhelm them with your numbers. They will kill some, but only a few. (Daily Nation, April 2015 Pg 12). It is upon this foundation that this paper is premised: that failure in communication or in coming up with effective communication strategies will continue to see Kenya ravaged by the scourge of terrorism.

Theoretical underpinning

Medium theory underpins this study whose assumption are that: media infuse every act and action in society; media fix our perceptions and organize our experiences; media tie the world together. One of the proponents of this theory is Marshall McLuhan who contends that media transform society and that we are directly influenced by media. We may begin to live our lives according to the types of stories we watch. (West & Turner, 2004). This is what possibly happened to those University of Nairobi students who panicked after a weeklong intensive coverage of the Garissa University attack. McLuhan's 'the message is the medium' could be a pointer towards the decision by policy makers on the best possible medium to communicate messages that would help keep terrorism in check.

This paper also employs social construction which refers to the processes by which events, persons, values and ideas are first defined or interpreted in a certain way and given value and priority, largely by mass media, leading to the (personal) construction of larger pictures of reality. (McQuail, 2010)

3. Methods

A descriptive method was employed where questionnaires were used. To gain a better understanding of the problem, a questionnaire was administered to a simple random sample of 100 respondents purposively drawn from two universities, namely Mount Kenya University (MKU), a private university, and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), a public institution. They were each issued with 50 questionnaires. Universities were sampled because their colleagues bore the brunt of recent terrorist attacks in Garissa town in North Eastern Kenya. The respondents included students and staff of both universities (both administrative and academic.) Universities were also sampled because these are supposed to be a more knowledgeable group compared to the ordinary person in the streets.

Ontology

The nature of inquiry of this study follows an ontological approach. Ontology is the study of being and nonbeing, or in other words, it is the study of reality. (West & Turner, 2004). Ontology gives us a certain vision of the world and on what constitutes its important features. Communicating terrorism or the lack of communication in terrorism was a reality worth investigating and documenting in the field of social sciences.

4. Results and Discussion

The study had two objectives: How the government handles communication in relation to terrorism and how prepared Kenyans are in the face of terrorism including what knowledge they possess with regard to terrorism. The following are the responses:

a) Knowledge of terrorism: The question required respondents to list down 5 terrorism activities that have taken place in Kenya in the last decade. Only 46 % of respondents cited 5 recent correct episodes of terrorism attacks in Kenya in the last decade. This was a surprise response given that Kenya has been hit more than 50 times and yet the respondents to this questionnaire are among the most educated in the country. This could mean a good number of Kenyans have average awareness levels concerning terrorist activities and outcomes in their community or they have become so used to it that they forget them as soon as they happen. It must also be borne in mind that the respondents were mature in age, with 74% or respondents aged 30 and above. The medium responsible for this awareness was largely social media at 30% followed by electronic(TV& radio)at 26% and print media at 22%. This demonstrates that even though mainstream media is still a dominant force in passing information to the public, new media is turning out to be an alternative.

b) Involvement in a terrorist attack: Only 6% had ever been caught up in a terrorist attack with 94% never having been involved in one. One respondent survived by lying flat on the ground inside a nearby building during the 1998 bomb blast at the US embassy in Nairobi. Another who was caught up in the same attack in an adjacent building escaped by running out of the shaking building. Still another pretended to be dead when terrorists attacked their bus and began shooting indiscriminately. The findings show that a good number of Kenyans are yet to experience a direct terror attack, and therefore, may still not be in a position to know how to respond in such instances.

c) The first thing Kenyans would do when caught in a terrorist attack: The dominant group of respondents, 47% said they would turn to God in the form of prayer to rescue them. The next category of respondents, at 24% said they would remain calm and cooperate with the terrorists, look for an escape route and run, look for a safe place to hide, communicate to their loved ones on mobile phones to call for help or call the police. 14% said they would engage in a physical fight with the terrorists. 8 % said they would scream or do nothing and wait for death. The lowest percentage of respondents, 7%, said they would engage the terrorists in a conversation, panic and play tricks on the terrorists. The responses are a clear indication that majority of Kenyans, while being religious, do not know effective means of fighting terrorism. In a terrorist situation, one thing one needs to do is to assess the risk, make a decision on the safest way out and implement remedial actions among other advices.(Prasanta, 2006).

d) Formal training: 76% of respondents have never received any formal training or ever considered it prior to the terror attacks but interesting enough, they would

willingly submit themselves for training today if an opportunity arose. The need to stay alive informed their new consideration or change of heart, arguing that it's extremely difficult to negotiate and reach a compromise with a terrorist. Of those who received formal training, 24% cited martial arts(Karate and Tae Kwo Ndo), military training, First Aid and the Internet as being responsible for their training. These respondents cited unsafe neighbourhoods, increased terrorist attacks, interest in knowledge of self-defence, exercise, fun, experience of insecurity and compulsory youth training before joining university as motivations behind their training. Interpersonal communication at 33% was largely cited as the medium that motivated these respondents to train, followed by experience of insecurity (25%), social media (17%), electronic media (17%) and the Internet (8%). None made reference to print media as having been responsible for their decision to train in self-defence, quite telling, given that Kenyans are good consumers of print media, according to Magaga(1982) who says Kenya has a glut of newspapers and periodicals.

e) What tactics would respondents employ when faced with a terrorist attack?

23% would look for a hiding place if they found themselves in a terrorist attack.22% would either take flight or use the nearest object to hit the terrorist in order to disorient him and run. 33% would surrender, cooperate, negotiate or simply do nothing. 7% said they would fight or overpower the terrorist, disarm the terrorist and kill him. The same percentage of respondents said they would inspire a team spirit to physically engage the terrorist and defeat terrorism. This group is of the opinion that a terrorist does not negotiate and his mission is one: to kill as many as possible hence they would rather die trying, not cowering under cabinets and beds. Again, the same percentage of respondents said they would use tricks such as pepper spray, surprise attack on the terrorist's chin or groin while another 5% said they would use deception or camouflage or psychological games such as posing as a Muslim. In fact some respondents have already started learning key verses from the Quran which they believe may come in handy in future. This same 5% said they would pretend to cooperate while working out an escape plan or feign death, or use hot water if available while some would do nothing and wait to die. Tuman(2009) argues that in a terrorist situation, one can still make a rational choice whether to give in or fight back.

On which medium is responsible for their knowledge of these tactics, 50% surprisingly cited interpersonal communication as having been responsible lending credence to Katz & Lazarsfeld Two-Step Flow theory where they posited that opinion leaders play a critical role in decision making of a majority of people. That there will be people who will attend to mass mediated messages who will in turn pass this information to the wider public.(Baran & Davis, 2014). Closely following that was social media,(38%) a recent phenomena that has changed the dynamics of communication where the public no longer needs to wait for mainstream media to inform them. It has come to deeply penetrate our lives and it defines many of our daily habits of communication and creative production.(Jose, 2013). In addition, Poynter(2010), argues that the largest change to have affected the Internet is social media. The Internet, at

8% came third while mainstream media tailed at 4% combined. This in effect means that whereas mainstream media led in informing people of the occurrence of terrorism in the country, informal media is responsible for the people's knowledge of life saving techniques, no matter how faulty they may be. A paradigm shift is therefore necessary where formulating a communication strategy is concerned.

f) Whether the government is doing enough: 24% felt the Government of Kenya is doing enough to fight terrorism citing recent safety clips running on mainstream media. These segments on radio and TV show the population what to do in the event of a terrorist attack. This in effect would mean those who benefit are those who have access to, and attend to these messages. They also cited the 'Nyumba Kumi' Initiative (community policing) as being a good strategy to prevent the occurrence of terrorism. They said that this initiative has already taken off in some areas and all the government needs to do is reinforce it across the country to seal any loopholes that may arise where a section of the country is policed while another is not. They suggested that government could come up with a better communication strategy that would reverberate across the country for effective community policing. Their views get support from Palmiotto (2000) who argues that a rapid response time to calls for service has long been considered a key objective of community policing. This same group of respondents also cited the presence of Interpol, the liaison between Kenya and the West in fighting terror, police hotlines and alerting people of terrorist attacks as being some of the measures the government has put in place.

76% of respondents however said the government is not doing enough or much to stem terrorism and cited among other reasons: slow response to terrorism; lack of proper coordination by those agents responsible to plan for preventions or respond to attacks; ignoring intelligence or security alerts; knee-jerk reaction to an attack and being reactive as opposed to proactive since they only sensitize people after an attack has occurred; being full of promises but lacking in action; too many frequent repeated attacks which succeed; leaders to blame in some cases for politicizing security issues; leaders including the President always provoking terrorists; not enough sensitization of the public on critical terrorism issues; conflicting information coming from the government which further confuses the public concerning the extent and seriousness of an attack; military and security organs not owning the process of educating the masses which creates a deep chasm hence a fertile ground for terrorist activities; no meaningful program that targets and engages each and every citizen on terrorism; a lot of miscommunication especially when a terrorist attack has occurred and poorly trained security personnel yet lacking in will and zeal to secure better training for them.

"Everybody knew this was coming," Cedric Barnes, an analyst at the International Crisis Group and Director of Horn of Africa, told Al Jazeera. "It demonstrates that Al-Shabaab is an active threat against these targets. We know that many other plots have been disrupted over the past two years – this is the one that got through." (Al Jazeera, 2015).

What the government can do: Respondents had the following suggestions for the government:

On radicalization: be vigilant where radicalization is concerned by identifying where radicalization is taking place and act or raise not military but communication strategies to fight it. Another thing the government can do is to find communication strategies to win would-be terrorists before they become ensnared in the allure of terrorism. This they can do by working closely with religious and village leaders who would assist in identifying potential wayward young people. McCauley & Moskalenko (2011) say radicalization is the development of feelings, beliefs and actions in support of any group or course in a conflict. Radicalization in response to threat is so reliable that a terrorist can count on it as a strategy. It can move a talented mathematician, a rich man's son, a group of idealistic students, or a whole nation toward political violence. They conclude by saying that it is a psychological trajectory, which, given the right circumstances, can happen to any person, group or nation. Hence those concerned with fighting terrorism must realize the war will not be won by military might alone.

On community policing: enforce Nyumba Kumi by engaging citizens to embrace it. When the initiative was unveiled, it was politicized so much that some people became averse to it. The government may have to liaise with opinion leaders in order for people to own the process.

On security personnel: train more personnel on security and invest more in intelligence. They could also scale up intelligence gathering while motivating and facilitating defence forces. The government should consider retraining the security forces in Kenya and also recruit more so that the ratio between security personnel and citizens would improve.

On military action: some respondents felt Kenya should withdraw its forces, the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) from Somalia which would send a communication that Kenya is gunning for peace. On October 16th 2011, KDF moved into Southern Somalia to pursue insurgents group Al Shabaab after a series of kidnappings of tourists along the border. Another group of respondents felt the government needs to invest heavily in communication technology and weaponry to fight terrorism. The government can also scale up on military intelligence and make more use of aerial patrols and surveillance. The government has the responsibility of using sophisticated means to thoroughly and continuously screen high risk areas.

Government relationship with the public: sensitize the public through media on how to respond to a terrorist situation or the negative effects to befall one who is an Al-Shabaab sympathiser. The government could also introduce information for money which will increase security and offer youth employment or incentives. Another thing the government can do is appreciate those engaged in the fight against terrorism publicly in any acceptable way possible. Appreciation could range from offering monetary incentives to awarding of medals of honor.

On corruption: do away with corruption by not only sensitizing the public through the media on the ills of corruption but by being examples themselves and enforcing punishment for those caught in the vice, be they leaders or not. Abigail Higgins (AP 2015) quotes a famous activist in Kenya, Boniface Mwangi:

“Entrenched corruption in the security system allows Al-Shabaab to move freely in and out of Kenya and carry out such attacks with ease,” said prominent Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi in a statement online.” (AP 2015)

On Government responsibility: Respondents felt the government should strengthen border patrols and check or seal off porous borders. The government should consider closing down Daadab and Kakuma refugee camps and build a wall between Kenya and Somalia. Again this would be a strong communication to the effect that enough is enough. Other things the government can do is effect severe punishment for those caught engaging in terrorism and also deal heavily with those who back terrorism either financially or otherwise, and make it their business to inform the public of these negative consequences. The government should also decisively act on intelligence instead of ignoring such vital communication.

Abigail Higgins (AP 2015) quotes Rashid Abdi, an Independent Horn of Africa analyst: “There was no doubt that North Eastern Kenya has become insecure. I think there was enough intelligence that education institutions and basically any facilities with non-Muslims in North Eastern Kenya were at risk; I’m surprised that that college wasn’t sufficiently protected.”

If the government would work towards improving the economy, a lot of youth would be empowered and cease being idle which would make it increasingly difficult for the youth to be enticed with promises of wealth and eternal life. The government could also inspire patriotism in people by running programmes on local media outlets on the value of patriotism. Patriotism can also be a brand to be sold across the entire nation. Respondents felt bribery and corruption at the borders is what is responsible for an upsurge in arms and explosives’ smuggling because people do not feel patriotic enough. Another critical thing the government could do is institutionalize paramilitary training offered to students before they join the university. This happened in the late 80’s where it was mandatory for one to do 6 months of training as an in-house member of the National Youth Service. A good number of respondents felt this would be a good way to offer basic defence training to young people. Given the recent Garissa attack, it’s imperative that university students be trained.

• **On Government Initiated Communication:** The respondents felt the government could do well to educate or sensitize people on religious tolerance which would go a long way in counteracting terrorism propaganda. The government could also include terrorism in the school curriculum or teach defence in schools or even offer paramilitary training to individuals. Some survivors of the Garissa attack recounted how the terrorists taunted them showing the terrorists knew they were dealing with people

who were totally unprepared. *Daily Nation* (April 2015). The government could also use all possible mediums to release information on how to fight terrorism. Rather than concentrate on mainstream media, they can also diversify the communication process by investing in opinion leaders and social media. Another critical thing the government could do is establish a well-coordinated communications department charged with the sole responsibility of managing communication on terrorism related issues from receiving of terror alerts to responding to terror attacks.

g) How the government can use effective communication to combat terrorism: Most respondents were in agreement that the government is not alive to the fact that when well-managed, communication can be used effectively to prevent and fight terrorism. The following were ideas shared by respondents:

Technology: Respondents felt it was now time to invest heavily in CCTV cameras across a broad spectrum of public places most frequently visited or inhabited by many people such as churches, schools, stadia, markets, functions etc. Another technology the government should invest in is the internet and social media. A good number of urban dwellers (where serious attacks have so far taken place) possess a phone that has GPRS functions. Erikson (2008) says mobile phone usage in Kenya went from 1m to 6.5m people in 2006. In the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections, presidential candidates made use of social media and internet platforms to reach a wide section of Kenyans who are to be found on the internet. In the same way, the government should institute measures that make use of the internet and social media in a significant way. The typical Nairobiian spends at least 2 hours in a traffic jam and will most likely be found on the internet in those 2 hours. Semungal (PBS Newshour 2014) has this to say:

Drive into Kenya’s capital on any day of the week — to Nairobi’s bustling streets — and witness a nation in love — with the mobile phone. Mobile phone usage is exploding here, everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa, growth of 18 percent every year. The population in Kenya is 43 million — roughly 30 million have cell phones. Virtually everyone has one and if they aren’t talking on it they are texting with it or just holding it. (PBS Newshour 2014)

Another way the government can take advantage of technology is by liaising with mobile service providers to transmit carefully crafted text messages to the public: either informative messages on what to do in the face of terrorism or mechanisms the public can use to report any suspected cases of terrorism activities in their areas. Flashy billboards can also be used and the quantity should be increased as they tend to flash critical messages in flashy lights that would quickly arrest the attention of audiences. Billboards boast of permanency unless removed hence an effective means of communication.

A one stop communication centre: The government should establish a special designated communications department that would be charged with the responsibility of receiving and disseminating information from and to the public on the issue of terrorism. This centre would be run by personnel

trained in effective communication who will be responsible among other things of ensuring free lines are open to the public on a 24 hour basis. This department would also have a research unit that would look into emerging trends in communication strategies and terrorism, and even in conducting research in and out of Kenya on communication and terrorism. This unit would be linked to security organs within the government so that any communication about an attack or an impending attack would be handled by them. This will ensure effective coordination hence the government could manage communication in a way that it flows from the national government to county government to the grassroots. This centre can be replicated across the entire country in the form of decentralization.

Mainstream media: While this is the traditional medium used to reach a wide number of Kenyans, respondents agreed that it can still be used but scaled up. Hence the government can continue using radio, newspaper advertisements and TV but increase the frequency of the messages and the creativity behind the messages. Even print media for example, can contain more commentaries, opinion pieces and others to relay the message across. Another thing the government could capitalize on is community radio which has the potential to reach each and every Kenyan due to its uniqueness in terms of the local language used in a particular area.

Using the local community: Respondents felt the war against terrorism would be half won if the government would embrace communication strategies that involve every citizen. This is where the government needs to package information and request local entities to help distribute or share that information. For example, fliers, brochures, leaflets and such brief messages can serve well to engage every Kenyan. The best avenue or distributor of such messages would be churches, mosques, schools, universities, markets etc. This will require concerted efforts between local leaders whether religious or administrative. Mandaville(2009) is of the view every citizen needs to be trained to be a soldier in their own right and the best avenue would be in local communities.

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Institutional visits: Some respondents felt the government could do well to organize a team of security experts who would go round institutions in terrorism hotspots in the country and have a one on one session eg in schools, churches, mosques, markets and anywhere where many people may be found congregating at one go. Similarly, the government could also organize the holding of public rallies across the country to engage citizens in safety procedures when faced with terrorism. These forums will enable the government to share ideas and information with citizens. Such forums can also be used to communicate to the public the law on terror, where people can report suspects, emergency hotlines and also inform the public on the dangers of radicalization. This is where citizens can be empowered to report any suspicious activities to the government.

Monthly sensitization forums: Rwanda is a small country in Central Africa that has managed to institutionalize 'Umuganda' a kind of community service that takes place

every last Saturday of the month. After the clean up, people sit down to be engaged or to engage local community leaders where all manner of issues affecting Rwandans are discussed (Uwimbabazi, 2012). In this study, some respondents suggested that Kenya could model this kind of set up and after the clean up, security personnel could engage the people on matters to do with terrorism. Such forums could easily assist local administration units to identify strangers or unusual activities. It is also at this time that seminars can be organized where the public would get an opportunity to interact with security personnel and learn a thing or two about terrorism. These meetings can also happen in estates in urban areas. This is also where the government could package and disseminate information that counters terrorism propaganda and also one that would assure people of security and avoid panic or false alarms. It is in such meetings where the government can inspire patriotism among the citizenry.

Private-Public sector dialogues and liaisons: Respondents said that the issue of cost could deter or limit the government in implementing safety procedures that could considerably reduce incidents of terrorism, or if an attack were to happen, then it could also limit the number of casualties. Hence, the government could source for partnerships not only with private firms but with international organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations as well.

Government Control: A very small number of respondents suggested that the government should adopt radical measures like tapping phone lines and establishing free and secure lines, arguing that time to smile with terrorism is long gone. The feeling was that even though tapping phone lines may appear to be immoral, the need of the moment necessitates such drastic and invasive measures.

Measures put in place at universities: Mount Kenya University and Jomo Kenyatta University were sampled. One recurring comment was that both universities have build emergency exit doors. In addition, screening using metal detectors was ongoing at both campuses. Both universities have employed the services of professional security companies who man entrances and patrol the premises. Fire extinguishers are also placed at strategic places within the universities. However, 78% of the respondents felt nothing significant had been done that could deter or put off terrorists from carrying out an attack. Mount Kenya University respondents said that sensitization sessions with all stakeholders on security and terrorism had taken place and that programs for students on self defence are being drafted, soon to be released. There had also been memos on security awareness, and also, a security awareness creation public lecture was due to take place at their Thika campus in the month of June, 2015.

Suggestions for increasing safety at universities and any other learning institution: 85% of respondents were categorical that universities and other learning institutions should provide self-defence classes even if it meant charging students a little bit more, and that these classes be compulsory, embedded into the curriculum. In addition, guidance and counselling sessions would significantly

prepare students psychologically in the event of an attack. Seely(2008) says counselling and psychological therapy is needed even long after the incident has happened. Another popular view by respondents was that institutions establish several more exit routes and also construct a safe house, like a bullet and fire proof basement where students can run to and be locked in. Institutions could also separate exits because the current ones merge at some point thus increasing the risk of lumping students in one location. Respondents suggested that more CCTV cameras be installed so that the entire establishment is put under surveillance, like it's done in all US embassies across the world. The US took those measures after being hit during the 1998 August 7 bombing in Nairobi. Some respondents suggested the use of simulations or emergency drills like it's done in fire drills. Another suggestion was the establishment of a police post in each institution across the country thus improving the ratio of police to citizens. A significant number of respondents felt that establishing a security plan for response and evacuation would go a long way to minimize casualties in the event of an attack. Some respondents felt that deploying military personnel to institutions would help while some were of the view that a thorough investigation of students' backgrounds before admission would be welcome. A toll free line from the nearest security services should be made available to students. Some respondents urged the government to make use of sleeper agents who would work as undercover agents while studying at the same time. Another suggestion was the installation of automatic lock systems on main doors or gates. Still, some respondents said that all students must show their IDs at the entrance which must include their blood group. Another idea suggested was the establishment of a system where there are several tiers of security checks, for example, at the gate, reception and the issuing of a card to visit other offices upon production of an ID. Security officers must be given VHF i.e two-way communication radios and that a sick bay be established while ensuring all students have medical cover. Still another suggestion was to establish forums where students can interact with security organs. A system needs to be devised where alarms and alert messages are sent to students as much as possible.

5. Conclusion

This study sought to examine the issue of communication and terrorism in the wake of several terror attacks in Kenya. There have been increased activities of terror attacks with most classified as successful due to the recorded number of deaths and injured. This study was born out of a concern that since October 2011, Kenya has borne the brunt of more than 50 terror attacks with more than 300 dead and many more injured. This translates into one terror attack in 2 weeks, too frequent for any developing nation.

Nick Thompson (CNN 2015), quotes David Mackenzie also of CNN who says Al-Shabaab is trying to maintain its relevance as other terror groups like Boko Haram, ISIS and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula who vie for power and influence. McKenzie says it's also possible that Al-Shabaab may have abandoned aspirations of seizing a large chunk of territory after taking losses in Somalia, and decided instead to focus purely on terrorism. This means Kenya cannot

afford a moment's rest from seeking means to protect her people.

More reason the government needs to change tactic and embrace communication widely is the profile of the present day terrorist. Today's terrorist is no longer the poor, hungry terrorist enticed by money. The *USA Today* (2015), in an article entitled, *Kenyan lawyer among terrorists killed in school attack*, by John Onyulo and John Bacon, identified well-educated Abdirahim Abdullahi, aged 24, and a son of a Kenyan government official as the mastermind behind the Garissa attack.

Abigail Higgins (AP 2015) quotes Kenyans who say they have lost faith in their government's ability to protect them. "It's not that Al-Shabaab is so good at what they're doing — the government just does such a terrible job that they make them look good. Al-Shabaab is probably at its weakest point since 2006," said Abdullahi B. Halakhe, a Nairobi-based East Africa researcher with Amnesty International. (AP 2015).

Ben Rawlence, an Open Society Foundation Fellow, in an article entitled, *Kenya's anti-terror strategy begins to emerge*, (2014) after the Westgate attack, gives his version of a pattern of the government's response to terror attacks: force where police have been issued with shoot-to-kill orders, 4000 people arrested in Mombasa and Nairobi, all urban refugees ordered to return to Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps, police going house to house in Muslim and Somali neighbourhoods beating, looting and ransoming people without proper ID cards; and finally with newspapers awash with vitriol against Somalis and ethnic Somali MP's who have made public statements questioning the utility and manner of the crackdown have been branded traitors.

Conspicuously missing in the above strategy is a clear communication strategy that this research recommends as an alternative to force since force targets only a few people while communication would seek to reach every fibre of society.

In conclusion therefore the study makes the following recommendations:

- a) The war against terrorism will only be won when every citizen is involved. However, a citizen cannot get involved if not shown how to get involved. The one organ that is able to reach every citizen with an organized strategy is the government that must begin to hold serious conversations with the public.
- b) Military reaction has been used time and again without tangible results. The effect is only that more and more terrorists are getting bolder and bolder instead of being deterred. This study offers the solution of the creation of a clear communication strategy that will find ownership in both the government and the people of Kenya.

6. Future Scope

The research focussed on citizen and government responsibility to ensure the safety of the nation of Kenya. The findings reveal Kenyans are tired of terrorist attacks and

want tangible solutions to the problem. They are also willing to spend time to be trained on self-defense. However, this research was unable to reach key government officials who would offer their perspective on what the government is doing about the issue. A qualitative study is therefore needed where key communication specialists from the government need to be interviewed and the findings documented. In addition, Muslim religious leaders also need to be interviewed on the depth of the problem of radicalization, especially in Mombasa and other coastal towns.

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