

**ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS
TO CURB
HATE AND DANGEROUS SPEECH
IN NIGERIA**

A POLICY BRIEF



CENTRE FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT

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PREFACE

Economic crisis and a set of complex political dynamics in the country are throwing up new challenges to the unity and social cohesion of Nigeria. Divisive discourses have taken over the air. Rumours calculated to cause confusion and unleash conflicts are daily dose of the social media in particular. But even more frightening is the increasing spade of hate and dangerous speech that suffuses all the media channels. The hate and dangerous speech we see is largely grounded in religious and ethnic narratives. All of a sudden, hate and dangerous speech has expanded from the media channel of politicians and has entered places of worship where religious leaders are preaching hate and inciting their followers to kill.

The dangers of dangerous speech are not far-fetched. We have seen how hate speech has led to mass killings in a number of countries. Already, in our country at the moment, hate and dangerous speech is woven around specific community and religious conflicts making it difficult to address the problem, resulting in the killings of many people. Nigeria cannot be isolated from the possible consequences of allowing hate speech to be key feature of our communication.

More than any time before, the country is challenged to find bold and effective strategies to curb dangerous speech in our communication realm. Over the last two years, CITAD has been engaged in monitoring and countering dangerous speech in the country. While the campaign has been very useful in terms of neutralizing the possible consequences of some dangerous speech and in inoculating the population against the dangers of being provoked by dangerous speech, we feel that as a nation, we have not taken this issue with the seriousness it deserves.

Government has not addressed itself to uncovering and addressing the the key drivers of dangerous speech in the country, some of which are the making of the government itself. Without addressing these drivers of hate speech, strategies for curbing it cannot be effective. Government has also not sought to rally round different stakeholders to join a well-defined agenda to curb hate speech in the country.

We studied the nature and pattern of hate and dangerous speech in the media that our dangerous speech monitoring observatory has collected over the last two years and came up with what we think are the key drivers of hate speech in the country. On the basis of this, we have offered a number of suggestions on what different shareholders should do to address the problem.

It is our hope that this **Policy Brief** which synthesizes these findings and presents appropriate recommendations would not only help in drawing the attention of policy makers and other critical stakeholders to urgently join the efforts to curb hate speech in our country but also provides government with clear tools with which it has to lead the campaign and action to rid our country of hate and dangerous speech and hence move us toward a more peaceful and socially cohesive society.

CITAD would like to acknowledge and thank MacArthur Foundation for supporting the dangerous speech project and providing resource for the publication of this Policy Brief, among other publications. We thank our team of dangerous speech monitors who daily keep us informed about what dangerous speech is being spread in our various communication channels as well as the countering team who work to neutralize dangerous speech in the media. We thank also all those who have in one way or the other contributed in the production of the policy brief.

Y. Z. Ya'u
Executive Director,
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INTRODUCTION

Dangerous or Hate Speech has been defined as speech act that denigrates people on the basis of their membership in a group, such as an ethnic or religious group that has a reasonable chance of catalyzing or amplifying violence by one group against another, given the circumstances in which it is made or disseminated. A Speech act in this context includes any form of expression, including images such as drawings or photographs, dance, films, cartoons, etc.

While Hate Speech has been commonly used, there has over the years been an effort to differentiate between Hate and Dangerous Speech. The former as a collection of all forms of inflammatory speech practices while Dangerous Speech is reserved for that specific category that *leads to itself to inciting people to act or accept violence against others as normal*. This distinction is necessary to allow for monitoring of speech that is capable of leading to violence.

In this context, it is also important to concretely specify what qualifies for Hate/Dangerous speech within the Nigerian context. In our context, we regard Dangerous Speech as any speech that is aimed at inciting the audience to denigrate against others of the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, geography and any other socially conceived parameter with the purpose of marginalizing them or placing them at some disadvantage that is contrary to the provisions of the universal declaration on human rights as well as the international covenants on rights of the people. This does not include the peculiar joking relations that exist in some communities, practiced between two or more ethnic/linguistic groups that have historically been used as a conflict resolution mechanism. Substantively, we see dangerous/hate speech in the Nigerian context as speech act that:

1. Insults people for their religion
2. Abuses people for their ethnic or linguistic affiliation
3. Expresses contempt against people because of their place of origin
4. Disparages or intimidates women or girls because of their gender
5. Condone discriminatory assertions against people living with disability
6. Abuses or desecrates symbols of cultural or religious practices
7. Denigrates or otherwise ridicules traditional or cultural institutions of other people
8. Deliberate spread of falsehood or rumours that demeans or maligns or otherwise ostracizes other people on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender or place of origin or for the accident of one form of disability or the other

Hate Speech in Nigeria used to be associated with electioneering campaigns and politicians. However of recent, it is expanding to the domain of everyday life, spreading into places of worships and community halls where ethnic and religious leaders engage in the spread of dangerous speech. The arrival of ethnic and religious leaders as propagators of dangerous speech has further given boost for the spread of such speech in the social media. This can be seen from our tally of last year's capture of hate items of over 6000 to a little over 2000 in the previous years. Of this volume, religious-based and ethnicity related dangerous speech constituted over 80%.

The convergence of ethnicity-based and religious hate speech is an explosive mix for the country. This is why it is necessary for all stakeholders to work together to combat the generation and spread of hate and dangerous speech in the country. Accordingly, this policy brief is aimed at providing insights into the dynamics of hate and dangerous speech in the country, drawing from which a specific set of recommendations directed at different stakeholders is made.

THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF HATE SPEECH IN NIGERIA

During the period June to December, 2016, CITAD's Hate Speech Monitoring Platform captured 6258 items of hate and dangerous speech. These are broken down as follows:

- Religion based 2603
- Politics 421
- Ethnicity based 2449
- Biafra agitation related 283
- Terror Recruitment 32
- Resource Control 178
- Farmer/herders conflicts 134
- Election 118

As seen above, religious and ethnicity constitute more than 80% of the hate and dangerous speech captured. This means that Nigerians are becoming ethnically and religiously insensitive, or even intolerant. The co-occurrence of these to a polity that is multi-ethnic and multi-religious can be very dangerous as past ethno-religious violent conflicts have shown. When it is taken that over 90% of the hate speech is in English, it supposes that the speakers are relatively educated, male (over 84%) and mostly using Facebook.

In other climes, hate and dangerous speech is usually embedded in codes and local idioms such that only the target audience who could understand them. In the case of Nigeria during the period we monitored, over 90% of the hate and dangerous speech items did not use any code, signifying an open attitude that is more contemplative of violence. About 22% was by our coding found to be extremely inflammatory while 62 % was coded as moderately inflammatory. In analyzing the influence of hate speech and its potential of catalyzing violence we look at whether the hate speech was used before or not. Our report shows that 22% of the hate speech item reported were used before with negative consequences, indicating a high risk of inflaming violence.

The volatility of a dangerous speech can be seen from its ability to attract response even online. Overall, 42% of the items were reacted to with messages either reinforcing the original hate message or in the alternative giving rise to new hate speech as a response. Although the majority of the speech items were people that could be said not be influential, about 22% were by influential people.

It is particularly horrifying to read by some of the messages that people peddle, clearly calling for the killings of others, dehumanizing and demonizing others to create the condition for people to act the call to action.

TRENDS IN HATE SPEECH IN THE COUNTRY

A number of key trends can be identified from the data:

1. There is increasing circulation of fake materials (such as picture, news, etc) which are meant to create confusion. The Facebook in particular appears to be a place for the cooking and spread of fake and false news with pictures taken years back or in other countries circulating as authentication of the manufactured tales.
2. There is considerable use of accusation in the mirror, mobilizing one's community to launch a "preemptive" action on others by claiming that the others were planning to attack them. This serves to create a climate of fear in some communities and indeed in a number of cases had led to spiral of mass killings as has happened in Southern Kaduna.
3. Hate speech tends to deploy or draw from existing conflicts in the country even when the message has no relation with those conflicts referred. For example, we see reference to the Kaduna communal conflict, the farmer/herders conflict and the various ethno-communal conflicts in the content of the hate speech. Many of these conflicts are either deliberately given different expressions or are actually poorly understood. For instance while the farmer/herder conflict has claimed more people in Zamfara and Katsina where it is actually Fulani versus Fulani or Fulani versus Hausa, in other communities it said that it was a religious conflict by the Fulani (some of who are not even Muslims) to Islamize others.
4. There is an increasing stereotyping. This is typically most striking in the newspapers labeling of every act on Fulani herders, Igbo armed robbers and Muslim terrorists and murderers.
5. Religious hate speech is not only inter-faith but also intra-faith. For example following the conflict between the Shia movement and the army in Zaria last year, there has been a number of hate speech against and by members of the movement.
6. Over 82% of the hate and dangerous speech items were response to statements made by others. The original statements themselves might not necessarily be dangerous speech. This indicates our inability or unwillingness to draw the line between freedom of speech and hate speech.

UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF HATE

Developing appropriate strategies for combating hate speech in the country requires understanding the key drivers for hate speech in the country. In this regards, the following drivers can be identified:

1. Increasing impoverishment of the people: over the last one year, the economy of the country has been contracting, resulting in increasing hardship for majority of the people. This impoverishment has made people to become susceptible to a mobilization whose narrative is based on victimhood.

2. **Opacity in Government:** Government has not been proactive in terms of explaining its action, policy options and programmes to the people. This allows for those who are at the receiving end of such policies and actions to cast themselves as victims and be willingly used by powerful people who exploit the fear of the people from this.
3. **Perceived Marginalization:** There are people who rightly or wrongly believe that they are being discriminated upon and in their efforts to address this, they found every type of language, including the use of hate and dangerous speech as useful tool.
4. **Elites Contestation for Positions:** One of the functions of the state is the distribution of offices. These offices or positions are few and contest is very fierce. In the circumstance, politicians are using everything to either enhance their bargaining power or to express their disappointments and frustration for being sidelined.
5. **Shield Against Corruption Trial:** The government's anti-corruption agenda although popular among ordinary people is hugely unpopular with political actors, even within the ruling party. Such people are using every means to derail the agenda.
6. **Inability of government to resolve communal conflicts:** The country has been beset by a number of communal and religious conflicts which government has not been able to satisfactorily resolve. In fact, its handling of some of these conflicts has tended to conflict matters than resolve them. Four of the most divisive of these conflicts include the Shia conflict in Zaria, the Southern Kaduna ethno-religious conflict, the Niger Delta militancy and the Biafran agitation. All of these are providing grounds for the articulation and spread of hateful messages.
7. **An unhealthy Attitude to Elections:** The run up elections that held in December in Rivers State was preceded by a campaign in which top politicians of the two major political parties freely deployed hate and dangerous speech. Not surprising the election turned out to be violent in a number of communities in the states resulting in the killing of many people, including security personnel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Much of the hate speech arises from perceptions associated with action or inaction of government. Others are located within the complex contest of space and resources by various ethnic groups in the country. Not least is also the rise of new violent groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers as well as the continuing Biafran agitation. We feel that the country more than any other time is called upon to manage its diversity. This means that opening spaces for genuine conversation towards promoting national understanding is needed.

Government

1. The Federal Government should step efforts promoting inclusive dialogues with a view to arriving at national consensus on national issues.
2. The Federal Government should hasten to roll out programmes that will address the hardship that citizens are experiencing which are providing the fertile space for the generation and circulation of hate speech.
3. Governments at all levels should promote inclusivity in access to decision making processes and to the benefits of governance programmes.
4. Promote transparency and openness in the conduct of government and its officials so that citizens are carried along.
5. Provide adequate information on all decisions taken so that the true circumstances of such decisions are understood by all.
6. Should review media regulatory laws to make them effective in curbing hate speech in the media.

Media

- Join the campaign against hate speech by providing space to counter hate and dangerous speech.
- Refrain from providing space for the promotion of hate and dangerous speech by others.
- Adhere to all regulations governing the control of inflammatory and inciting language as such those contained in the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code, the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) Act and the press council.
- Enjoin all media regulatory agencies/organizations, particularly the NBC, APCON, Press Council, the Guild of Editors and Nigeria Union Journalists (NUJ) to proactively monitor the media and ensure that those found spreading hate and dangerous speech are appropriately sanctioned.
- Individual journalists to adhere to high professional and ethical standards in carrying out their trade.

- Provide continuing training for journalists on conflict sensitive reporting.

CSOs

- Intensify campaign against hate and dangerous speech by sensitizing the public against the making or being provoked by dangerous speech.
- Engage in active countering and neutralization of hate and dangerous speech as to preempt the potential of hate speech from catalyzing violence.
- Facilitate interfaith and inter-communal dialogue to promote national understanding, unity and social cohesion.
- Engage in more peace building efforts and conflict apprehension/mediation to ensure that such conflicts are successfully resolved.
- Those engaged in hate and dangerous speech monitoring should share their reports with all stakeholders, especially those who can easily intervene, to prevent the consequence of hate speech.

Security and law enforcement agencies

- Establish or enhance robust early warning systems, that include capacity to monitor and neutralize hate and dangerous speech.
- Liaise with civil society organizations to utilize reports and alerts from monitoring of hate and dangerous speech schemes run by the CSOs.
- Be vigilant as to always preempt the potentials of hate and dangerous speech to catalyze into violence.
- Embrace community policing as to create the necessary trust that would enable law enforcement agencies to have access to community generated early warning information on hate and dangerous speech.

Religious and Community Leaders

- Should enlighten the public against hate and dangerous speech.
- Should refrain from using inciting language and caution their followers from using hate speech to voice their grievances.
- Must always condemn hate speech where it is made.

- At all times, they should promote dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts and support the promotion of inclusivity in all governance programmes and activities at all levels.

Others

- There is need to mainstream peace education in the civic education syllabus of secondary schools so as to educate pupils on the imperative of peace building.
- There is need for all stakeholders to support capacity building for community leaders in conflict management skills.
- Establish legal frameworks to regulate religious preaching to curb extremist doctrines and sanction breaches accordingly with clear regulations against the use of inflammatory, discriminatory and hateful languages.



CITAD (www.citad.org) is a capacity building civil society organization whose activities covers research, advocacy, training and publicity in all areas of ICTs. Its vision is; a knowledge-based democratic society free of hunger while its mission is; using ICTs to empower citizens for a just and knowledge-based society that is anchored on sustainable and balanced development.

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