

NURU TRUST POV

CODE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS · SPECIAL EDITION · NURU TRUST NETWORK

From Communities to Code: Youth Innovators Rise to Champion Human Rights

A seven-week incubation program transforms lived experience into technology — countering violent extremism, one prototype at a time

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) refers to efforts aimed at preventing and addressing the conditions that lead to violent extremism while upholding human rights and freedoms. Through the Code for Human Rights project and as part of the Nuru Team, participants were introduced to the broader landscape of CVE — gaining an understanding of the relationship between security, human rights, government policies and the role of technology.

The first phase consisted of Focus Group Discussions with participants representing counties including Turkana, Baringo, Isiolo, Wajir, Marsabit and Kilifi. These engagements provided a rare opportunity to listen to civic organisation members and community representatives — to ask questions and learn directly from lived experience.

Expert insight was achieved through Key Informant Interviews that explored national frameworks and their intersection with human rights and civic restrictions.

BUILDING THE INNOVATORS

Building on community insights, the project entered its next phase: onboarding youth innovators from target counties including Baringo, Isiolo, Marsabit, Kilifi and Wajir. Every team included members with lived experience of the local context — essential to guide the development of each team's tools.

Innovators came from diverse professional backgrounds — law, international relations, computer science, information technology, social work and community development. Their varied expertise strengthened the development of solutions that were technically sound while remaining deeply responsive to community realities.

SEVEN WEEKS OF TRANSFORMATION

Throughout the seven-week incubation program, innovators participated in training sessions, mentorship, assignments, progress meetings and prototype development. Alongside this process, project staff coordinated reports, monitored progress and supported teams as they refined their ideas.

“Something I discovered about myself during these two phases was my limited perspective on what terrorism really is. Listening to participants during focus group discussions greatly helped expand my understanding.”

— George Ngaru, Project Coordinator

Through these conversations, the team developed a deeper understanding of the realities faced by communities experiencing violent extremism — including travel restrictions, limited access to public services, difficulties obtaining identification documents and birth certificates, and limited participation in democratic processes.

One critical finding emerged clearly: while security frameworks are intended to protect civilians, they can sometimes restrict the rights and freedoms of marginalised communities, with women and young people often bearing the greatest burden.

“The focus group discussions and key informant interviews gave us a clear understanding of the realities on the ground.”

— Esther Kimani, Projects Intern

One factor became unmistakably clear: innovator motivation was decisive. Spotting early signs of fatigue, the Nuru team responded with coordinated one-on-one meetings — listening to challenges and working through solutions together.

The response was remarkable. Re-energised innovators surged in activity, setting the stage for an outstanding Hackathon event.

“Seeing the innovators build their applications completely from scratch and troubleshoot complex bugs in real time was truly inspiring.”

— Nick Njau, Projects Volunteer

THE HACKATHON

The journey culminated in the Code for Human Rights Hackathon at USIU-Africa, where innovators presented their completed prototypes. The event brought together participants, mentors and stakeholders to showcase solutions developed through collaboration, research and continuous learning.

“Working closely with innovators throughout the incubation program showed me that they were more than tech developers — they were advocates determined to address the challenges affecting their communities.”

— George Ngaru, Project Coordinator

Looking back, the project was a learning experience for everyone involved. From understanding the realities of CVE through community consultations to supporting innovators in developing human rights-centred technological solutions, the journey demonstrated the value of collaboration, lived experience and youth leadership. While the prototypes mark the conclusion of one phase, they represent the beginning of a broader journey — towards strengthening human rights, promoting youth leadership and supporting innovative responses to violent extremism.