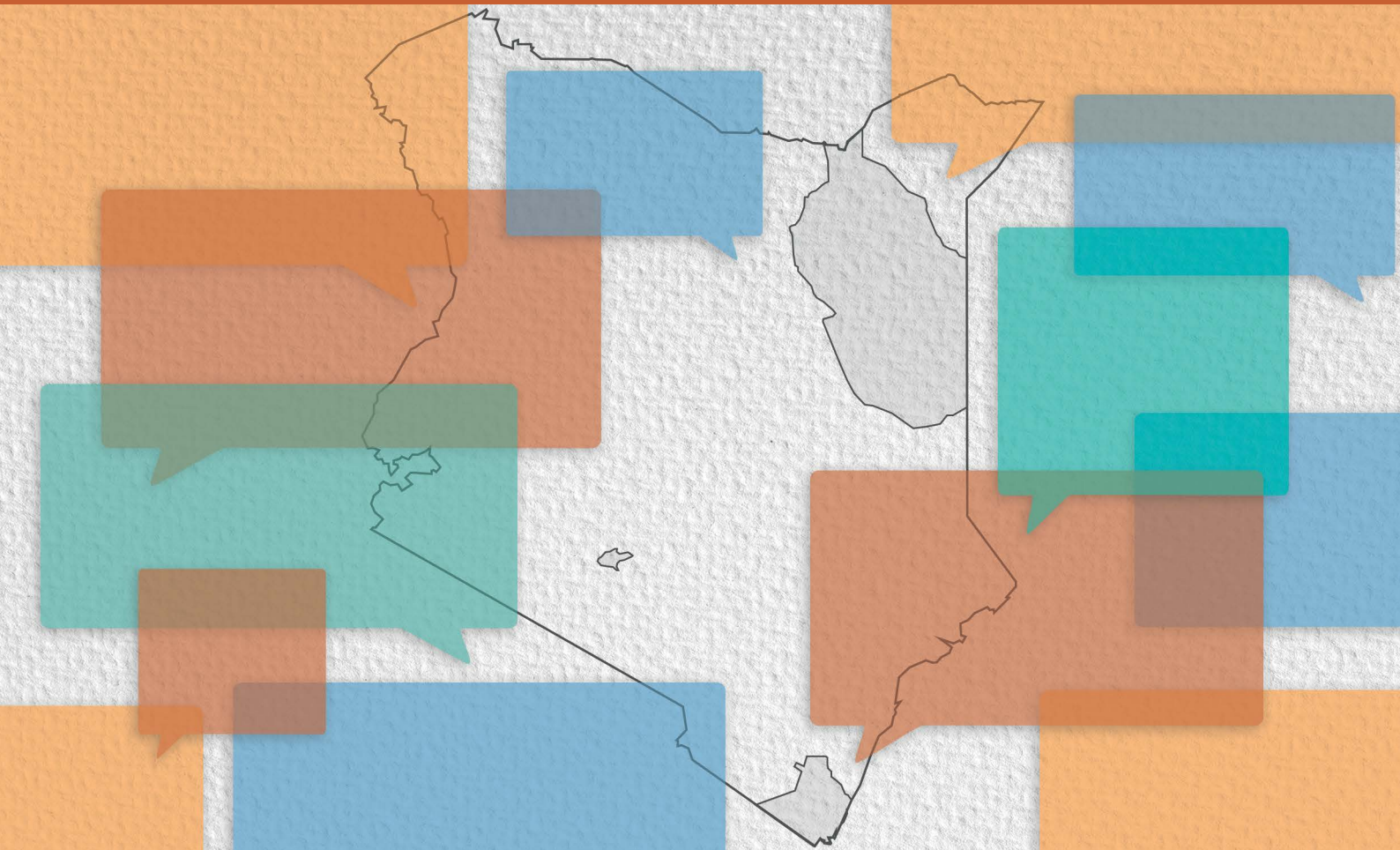# Resilience and dialogue

Preventing violent extremism in Nairobi, Wajir and Kwale Counties in Kenya

Romi Sigsworth, Akinola Olojo and Zaina Kombo

Kenya continues to suffer multiple threats from violent extremism. While communities across Kenya are faced with challenges that can be considered risk factors for radicalisation and violent extremism, they also demonstrate strengths that can be developed into building resilience against such violent extremism. This study sought to understand how affected communities in Kenya demonstrate resilience to violent extremism, as well as what conditions encourage dialogue between various groups to address and resolve problems that might otherwise result in radicalisation and violent extremism.

Key findings

▶ Various fault lines for violent extremism were identified by participants, including intra- and intercommunity tensions, distrust of security agencies as a result of human rights violations, socio-economic deprivation and marginalisation.

▶ Signs of existing community resilience can be found in the integration between identity groups, coordination and agency on common problems and loyalty to one's community.

▶ Community members identified a range of goals and strategies to further build resilience, including: raising awareness, maintaining cultural or religious identity, strengthening social cohesion, including the voices of the marginalised, improving the relationship between state authorities and community members, economic development, and ensuring access to justice for victims of human rights abuses.

▶ Dialogue within communities is impeded by ethno-religious discord, mistrust of elders who represent the local population and the exclusion of certain groups, particularly women.

▶ Barriers to dialogue between communities and law enforcement include police harassment and religious profiling of groups, extrajudicial killings and the exclusion of community voices.

▶ Dialogue between the community and justice actors is made more challenging due to the inaccessibility of the justice system to many, a lack of accountability for historical injustices, and the complex and dangerous nature of terror-related cases.

Recommendations

Communities

▶ Communities should foster intra-community civic awareness and information sharing.

▶ Religious leaders must work together to strengthen interfaith collaborations.

▶ Community leaders must promote forums for intra- and intercommunity dialogue in their counties.

▶ Deliberate efforts must be made to include women in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) initiatives.

▶ The youth must be included in community forums and allowed to express their concerns.

▶ Community leaders need to build trust between their communities and security agencies.

Law enforcement and justice actors

▶ Law enforcement officials who commit human rights violations must be held criminally accountable.

▶ Enhanced collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the justice sector should be promoted to address the delayed prosecution of cases.

▶ The capacity to investigate terror-related cases should be extended beyond the capital city Nairobi.

▶ Law enforcement agencies should actively foster collaborative relationships with affected communities, reformed returnees, civil society and human rights organisations.

Policymakers

▶ County action plans should be evaluated for implementation, efficacy and impact; lessons learned should be integrated into future plans.

▶ Policymakers should allow for the active participation of community members in policy formulation.

▶ Empowering communities with the infrastructure and skills to engage with social media platforms should be prioritised.

▶ There is a need for greater investment in economic development programming to strengthen affected communities.

▶ Enhanced collaboration between national government agencies, county governments, local leadership and development partners must be prioritised to ensure P/CVE work is positioned within development goals.

Introduction

East Africa continues to face multiple threats from violent extremism and terrorism. Although other groups operate in localised spaces, Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen – more commonly known as al-Shabaab – poses the most persistent threat to security across the region, including in Somalia (where it is based) and in neighbouring Kenya.

Kenya has endured numerous terrorist attacks by al-Shabaab over the last decade, costing the country countless lives and having a profound impact on its people, physical infrastructure, development and economic growth. Major attacks on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in 2013, in and around Mpeketoni in 2014, on the Garissa University College in 2015 and the DusitD2 complex in Nairobi in 2019 claimed over 400 lives in total.

Certain areas within Kenya have also become key locations for al-Shabaab recruitment and radicalisation. These insecurity dynamics have compelled the Kenyan government to respond in various ways, from militarised counterterrorism operations to the development of strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) at the national and county levels.

> Al-Shabaab poses the most persistent threat to security across the region, including in its base, Somalia, and in neighbouring Kenya

Many Kenyans have therefore had direct experience of violent extremism. This has either been through the radicalisation of family or community members (especially among the youth), being stereotyped and discriminated against by people within their own communities, being profiled as terror suspects by law enforcement agencies, or even experiencing direct attacks from violent extremist groups. Different identity groups (including men, women, the youth and Muslims) within communities affected by violent extremism in Kenya have had vastly different experiences of both the process of radicalisation and their exposure to violent extremism.

While all of the different groupings in affected communities are faced with challenges that can be considered risk factors for radicalisation and violent extremism, some groups and some communities have proven to be more resilient than others. This resilience is both to direct radicalisation campaigns by violent extremist groups and to the radicalising effects of state-sponsored violence.

This research study sought to understand the factors that enable a community (or identity group within a community) to adopt processes, strategies and relationships that will help them respond to the often-dynamic threat of violent extremism affecting their peace and/or development.

SOME COMMUNITIES ARE MORE
RESILIENT THAN OTHERS

Figure 1: Map of Nairobi, Kwale and Wajir Counties in Kenya

The study aimed to consider two distinct but interrelated issues:

- How do different identity groups within communities affected by violent extremism in Kenya demonstrate or build resilience to violent extremism?

- What are the conditions conducive to dialogue within these communities, as well as between these communities and security and justice actors, to address and resolve problems that might otherwise result in radicalisation and violent extremism?

This paper begins by outlining the methodology used in the research and giving a broad context to the threat of violent extremism in Kenya. It then explores the concept of community resilience to violent extremism as well as the question of dialogue and the accountability of security and justice actors in the context of Nairobi, Kwale and Wajir Counties in Kenya. The paper concludes by providing recommendations that can be used or adapted to help strengthen the resilience of and use of dialogue in similar communities.

Methodology

A mixed methodology was employed for this study.

Desk-based literature reviews were conducted on the two interrelated themes of community resilience to violent extremism and the role of dialogue in addressing violent extremism in Kenya.

Primary data was collected in July and August 2020 through semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) and facilitated focus group discussions (FGDs) in Nairobi, Kwale and Wajir Counties (see Figure 1).

> The process of identifying FGD participants was driven by the need for diversity

Nine key stakeholders were interviewed, including law enforcement officers, academics, criminal justice actors and religious leaders. FGDs were conducted with selected identity groups within the communities (see Table 1). The process of identifying FGD participants was driven by the need for diversity and therefore included marginalised and ethnic minority groups, such as people living with disabilities (PWDs), Nubians and other informal settlement residents within each county. It is important to note that the fieldwork complied with all the Covid-19 regulations as directed by the Government of Kenya.

The target areas were chosen because communities in each of the selected counties have experienced

Table 1: Focus group discussions

Geographical location	Target group	No. of males	No. of females	No. of PWDs	Total
Nairobi County	Youth (mixed gender, faith and ethnicity)	6	4	2 women	10
	Men (mixed faith, ethnicity)	10	0	1	10
	Women (mixed faith, ethnicity)	0	11	1	11
	Community leaders	8	1	0	9
Kwale County	Youth (mixed faith, ethnicity)	5	5	2 women 1 man	10
	Men (mixed faith, ethnicity)	10	0	2	10
	Women (mixed faith, ethnicity)	0	10	1	10
	Community elders only	6	4	1 man	10
Wajir County	Youth (mixed gender, clans)	7	3	1 woman 1 man	10
	Men (mixed clans)	10	0	2	10
	Women (mixed clans)	0	10	1	10
	Community elders (mixed clans)	10	0	2	10
Total FGD participants		72	48	18	120

direct terrorist attacks as well as the recruitment and radicalisation of (especially young) people into violent extremist groups.

There were a number of limitations to this study. These included:

- The study was restricted to urban and peri-urban areas across the three counties.

- Insecurity in some of the target counties made it impossible to visit the most affected areas in the villages. This was particularly the case in Kwale and Wajir.

- There was, to some extent, a language barrier in Wajir that made it challenging to capture all the stories from the victims of either violent extremism or the extrajudicial excesses of law enforcement agencies.

- Illiteracy levels slowed down the process of data collection since some participants had to be assisted with the consent forms.

- Some participants initially consented to be cited in the report, but later withdrew that consent due to the sensitive information eventually provided.

- Fewer than expected participants were available for face-to-face interviews due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, where participants agreed to take part in the study, interview schedules were emailed to participants for their completion.

Recruitment, radicalisation and violent extremism

Besides Somalia, the East African country that has experienced the most recurrent incidents of violent extremism is Kenya. The frequency of terror attacks and activities linked to groups such as al-Shabaab largely explains why Kenya is of particular interest for an examination of issues related to resilience and dialogue in the context of violent extremism.

Although Kenya had experienced notable terror incidents such as the Norfolk Hotel bombing in 1980,[1] the attack on the United States (US) embassy in Nairobi in 1998 was a turning point. This attack set the scene for what would become a long-running and global struggle against one of the deadliest terror groups to date.

The attack in question was perpetrated by a group known as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad with links to al-Qaeda, the global terrorist organisation previously led by the late Osama bin Laden. Over 200 lives were lost in this incident, while neighbouring Tanzania also suffered casualties in a parallel attack at the US embassy in the country's capital Dar es Salaam.[2]

The attacks in 1998 propelled the activities of al-Qaeda into the focus of Kenyans and the international community. To the keen observer of global dynamics, this laid the foundation for what happened on 11 September 2001 when the same group was implicated in the attacks at the World Trade Center in New York.

Following this period, countries such as Nigeria began to witness the nascent stages of groups like Boko Haram, while others like Somalia were soon embroiled in the web of terror spun by al-Shabaab. The real wakeup call for Kenya was in late 2011 when the country sent troops into southern Somalia under the mission code name 'Operation Linda Nchi' (Protect the Country).

> Major incidents have been perpetrated by al-Shabaab in Kenya nearly every year since 2013

The threat posed by al-Shabaab in neighbouring Somalia had reached a point where Kenya considered it necessary to act decisively against the terror group. However, Operation Linda Nchi formally ended in 2012 and the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) were integrated into a regional peacekeeping mission known as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The nature of this coalition, which included countries such as Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Uganda, underscored the transnational nature of the problem; a characteristic further emphasised by al-Shabaab's declaration of allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012.

Kenya's involvement in AMISOM operations in Somalia did not prevent the occurrence of further attacks in either Somalia or Kenya. In fact, there have been major incidents perpetrated by al-Shabaab in Kenya nearly every year since 2013. Following warnings from al-Shabaab regarding reprisal attacks as a result of Kenya's military involvement in Somalia, the group

carried out a coordinated attack at the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi in September 2013, resulting in over 70 fatalities.[3]

The scope of these attacks has not been limited to Nairobi. Coastal counties such as Lamu have also borne the brunt of this problem. In 2014, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for another major attack, in Mpeketoni, Lamu, leaving scores of people dead. Although there has been some controversy over what inspired this attack, it was indicative of al-Shabaab's capabilities.

A year later, al-Shabaab attacked Garissa, a town in Kenya's northeastern province.[4] With nearly 150 people killed at a higher institution of learning, this attack is considered one of the deadliest in Kenya since the bombing of the US embassy in 1998. During the Garissa attack, assailants held over 700 students hostage and reportedly freed individuals who identified with the Islamic faith.

This particular incident underscored a fundamental objective of al-Shabaab – the replacement of the United Nations-backed Federal Government of Somalia with its own version of an Islamic government. This point has been demonstrated on several occasions when the group deliberately targets not only individuals or institutions affiliated with the West but also those who are associated with the Christian faith. However, the inconsistency of al-Shabaab has also been exposed considering that several Muslims within and outside Somalia have also lost their lives.

Amidst the string of assaults by the group in Kenya, the DusitD2 incident that occurred in Nairobi in January 2019 was once again a stark reminder of previous attacks in the capital.[5] Although lives were lost, Kenya's law enforcement units were better prepared to respond and stabilise the emergency. First responders were also on hand to support the security apparatus with ambulances, evacuation assistance, personnel and medical staff. The coordination between the various response agencies was well done as compared to previous incidents.[6]

Over the years, Kenya's experience of various terror incidents demonstrates the compelling nature of the threat posed by al-Shabaab. It also shows how the country has evolved in terms of responses based on the hard lessons emerging from the threat the country faces.

How Kenya equips itself and moves forward in terms of preventing and countering violent extremism through the resilience of local communities is, however, a discussion that deserves further attention.

Community resilience to violent extremism

The concept of resilience – the quality of recovering quickly from life's challenges – has been used for many years in a range of different fields and disciplines as, among others, an analytical framework, theoretical tool, approach for guiding interventions and measure of progress. Resilience has been, and can be, applied to any number of systems including the environmental, ecological, social, economic, mechanical and political. Within a system, resilience can be applied on a number of levels – from the micro to the macro, the individual to the societal, and the local to the national.

Over the last decade, there has been a growing emphasis on the concept of community resilience, which at its most basic describes how well a community – composed of a 'interconnected network of systems that directly impact human society at a grassroots level'[7] – navigates through and responds to adversity of any kind.

> There has been a growing emphasis on the concept of community resilience over the last decade

Community resilience is considered to be both a process of and a capacity for successfully adapting to, addressing and ultimately overcoming challenging or threatening circumstances.[8] As such, it is dynamic and can occupy any space along a spectrum of responses, from extreme vulnerability to consistent resilience. In other words, there is no absolute resilience, but rather a conflation of factors and actions that limit vulnerability or enhance resilience in a community.[9] This means that careful attention needs to be paid when assessing communities' innate vulnerability or resilience, as these characteristics might fluctuate and change relatively quickly.[10]

Table 2 provides an overview of the important elements of community resilience.

Research has shown that while there are numerous pathways to community resilience, those that centre

Table 2: Important elements of community resilience

Resilience is:	Resilience requires:	Resilience exhibits:
A set of behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned by anyone Systemic, depending on the overall interconnection of factors and the way in which actors play a role in shaping those factors Not always or necessarily deliberate, but can occur by chance	An awareness of the problem Vulnerability and exposure to risk and adversity A focus on strengths rather than on problems and risks Agency among a range of stakeholders	The ability to listen, empathise, manage ambiguity, understand and negotiate immediate issues within a wider environment The capacity for cooperating and developing social networks The ability to access and mobilise the community's interdependent individual, social, economic and political resources

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources[11]

on social capital and community competence are often the most effective.[12] Broadly, social capital refers to the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society that enable that society to function effectively, while community competence speaks to the collective ability of individuals to learn about their social environment and use that information to identify problems and develop solutions to address those problems in order to meet the needs of the community.

Five factors that shape social capital and community competence influence community resilience.

1. Bonding capital: This refers to cultural identity and connectedness, an individual's familiarity with and anchoring in his or her own cultural or ethnic heritage, practices, beliefs, traditions, values and norms. Grossman et al point out that in the context of violent extremism, a group's capacity to be culturally robust, flexible, open to and tolerant of others offers significant protection against the appeal of violent extremist narratives.[13]

2. Bridging capital: This entails social connections, relationships and active engagement with people outside of an individual's cultural or ethnic group. This builds trust, confidence and reciprocity, as well as enabling access to more or different resources with people in alternative social, religious, ethnic or cultural networks. Learning to be tolerant towards different views also enhances the ability of a community to participate collectively in finding solutions to common local problems.

3. Linking capital: This speaks to the respect, trust, confidence and communication between community members and those in authority (be they government officials, community leaders or religious leaders). Particularly in socio-culturally disadvantaged or economically resource-poor contexts, communities without sufficient linking capital 'remain at a persistent disadvantage in being able to either grasp or intervene in the policy structures that shape their social relations and identities and govern their everyday lives.'[14] In addition, a trust gap between communities and local authorities exacerbates any fault lines that may make communities more vulnerable to social harms.

4. Socio-economic wellbeing and development: Socio-economic conditions play a role in creating an environment that is more conducive to the narratives of violent extremists, with poverty and marginalisation encouraging members of a community to seek economic security and social acceptance elsewhere. The quality of education, and particularly religious education, also plays an important role in strengthening critical thinking and building resilience.

5. Violence-related behaviours and beliefs: This is the balance between those in a community who accept and normalise violence as a legitimate means of resolving conflict and those who are willing to challenge and speak out against the use of violence by others.

When used specifically in relation to violent extremism, community resilience can be defined as:

… a community's ability to leverage social capital – understood as the existence of stable trust-based relationships and networks among the actors (civil society, local government, local businesses) – to detect radicalization risks, prevent the recruitment of community members into violent extremism, and bounce back after instances of recruitment via learning and adaptability that permits the community to better limit future recruitment.[15]

Ellis and Abdi point out that the process of becoming a community resilient to violent extremism involves inherently reducing potential vulnerabilities or risk factors and promoting protective experiences or conditions.[16] The section below summarises the potential vulnerabilities and risk factors to violent extremism in three Kenyan communities, as well as exploring the protective areas that exist in these communities that can be strengthened going forward. It also outlines what the communities themselves have identified as goals for building community resilience, and the strategies by which those goals can be achieved.

Building community resilience

Within the three communities involved in this research, the majority of people maintain that they identify first and foremost by either religion or ethnicity. It became apparent through the FGDs, however, that people in these communities also identify by clan, family name, gender and generation. Figure 2 depicts these identity groups as they fall into the analytical framework outlined above.

Fault lines and risk factors

Several fault lines for community vulnerability to violent extremism were identified by the research participants.

Within identity groups, fault lines were centred around gender and generational gaps, as well as religious expectations.

Women across the communities feel that they are excluded from key decision-making forums within their identity groups, relegated to the roles of domestic helper and source of pleasure in the home. In Wajir,

Figure 2: Bonding, bridging and linking groups in Kenyan communities
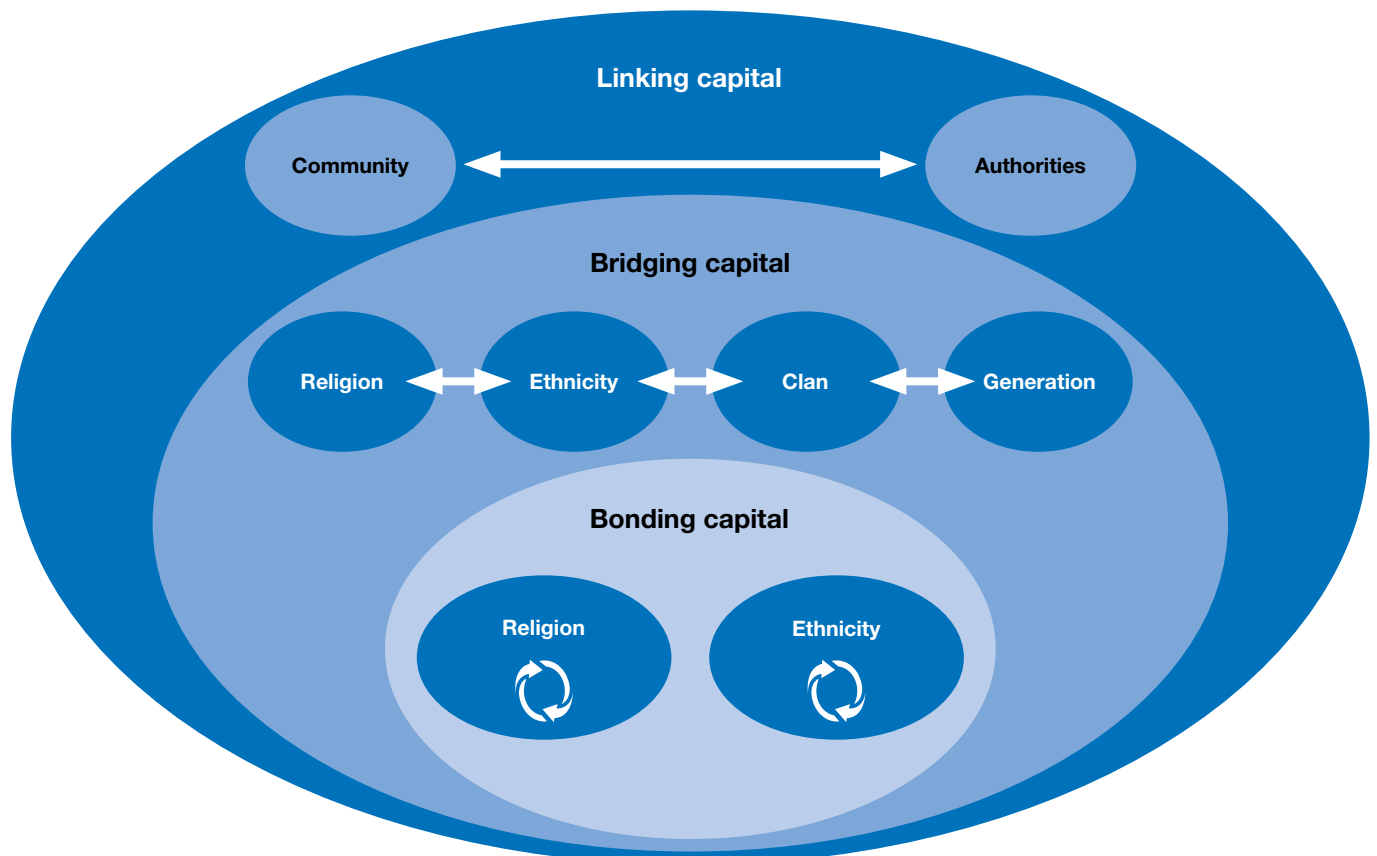
women pointed to the Maslaha traditional justice system as a manifestation of the patriarchal system they are subjected to.[17]

However, men in Nairobi and Kwale feel that female empowerment means that men are overlooked and that the boy child has been left vulnerable. Young Muslim men in Nairobi reported experiencing discrimination from other members of their faith who feel they are not conforming to the religious norms – one Muslim youth with dreadlocks said that he had been repeatedly questioned by other Muslims about his hairstyle.

Another important fault line is the intergenerational tension between the youth and community elders. The youth feel excluded from community discussions and decision-making. The elders reported being mistrusted by the community for benefitting from government incentives (such as food relief), being involved in witchcraft or 'snitching' to government officials.[18]

> One important fault line is the intergenerational tension between the youth and community elders

Between identity groups, the dynamics were specific to each community. In Kwale, there was deep mutual suspicion between Christian and Muslim women. The Muslim women believe they are branded as terrorists, which makes it difficult for them to interact with non-Muslims; the Christian women reported that the Muslims have branded them 'kafirs' and isolate them. Despite reporting that different identity groups are happy to do business and socialise with each other, mistrust was also acknowledged between specific identity groups, including the Digo, Duruma and Kikuyu ethnic groups.

In Wajir, the community reported interclan clashes and competition between identity groups for resources such as water points, land and animals. Although Nairobi was acknowledged to be a cosmopolitan city where identity groups were fairly well integrated, some respondents highlighted that certain ethnic groups, such as the Kikuyus, 'stood out for not being trusted in most instances due to the stereotype that they are thieves.'[19]

There are a number of common fault lines to the relationship between communities and state authorities across the three different research sites, all encompassed within an acute lack of trust.

Political influence, preferential treatment and bias were reported as key factors in the mistrust between identity groups within the communities, with some respondents saying that the politicians are dividing communities along ethnic lines ahead of the 2022 national elections. Respondents in Nairobi and Wajir stated that there is no equity in elected office due to corruption, nepotism and political affiliation.

The respondents believe these alliances have contributed to the reluctance of leaders to address community issues since those leaders benefit from crimes such as land grabbing and drug businesses. In Kwale, community leaders and men blamed local politicians for only addressing issues that suited them politically. The community leaders acknowledged that they lose the trust of the community by being the link between the community and local authorities.

The tension between communities and law enforcement was evident across the sites, with respondents referencing police brutality, profiling and extrajudicial killings as the source of the mistrust. In Wajir, many respondents complained that law enforcement agencies mistreat them when they try to cooperate by providing information about violent extremism; instead, the police treat them as suspects and victimise their families. In Nairobi, respondents spoke of being harassed and arrested as suspects if they raised concerns with security agencies. Respondents in Kwale reported that if they gave information to law enforcement officers, their names would be disclosed to the community.

Poverty, unemployment, lack of economic opportunities and exclusion by the government were spoken of across the board as socio-economic challenges in each of the communities. In addition, women complained about being left out of political and decision-making positions. Interestingly, young men in Nairobi reported that because they trust their mothers, they are surprised that women are rarely actively involved in discussions on countering violent extremism by security agencies.

These fault lines feed into and intersect with the challenge of radicalisation to violent extremism in the three communities, with the two most prevalent being the abuse of community members at the hands of the police and economic distress.

In Nairobi, respondents maintained that the police have contributed heavily to radicalisation due to their approach in dealing with terror suspects and the general population. Both the youth and women's groups reported that revenge against the police's use of excessive force has motivated both the victims of police brutality and the families of those who have been forcibly disappeared or killed extrajudicially to join violent extremist groups. One woman from Eastleigh borough stated that 'police brutality victims also become vulnerable due to seeking vengeance towards the security agencies.'[20]

Respondents in Kwale complained that the police profile Muslim youth and people from the Digo ethnic group as terrorists, subjecting them to ongoing harassment. They also accused the police of acting above the law, with one elder from Magutu village in Ukunda narrating how the police had raided a house allegedly belonging to a terror suspect, setting it on fire and abducting two youths who have not been seen since.

All identity groups in Wajir expressed their concern over cultural profiling by the police – this is targeted particularly at those living near the Somali-Kenya border, who have been branded terror suspects by the police.

The opportunities offered by illegal overseas employment agencies are used to lure women and young girls into violent extremist groups

Respondents across the different sites affirmed that this unchecked behaviour by police can cause (especially young) people to join violent extremist groups to seek protection and exact revenge.

All the identity groups in Nairobi and Kwale agreed that due to the poverty, marginalisation and corruption experienced in their communities, no one is immune to the temptations of recruitment and radicalisation. This is attributed as much to the push factors of unemployment and lack of opportunities as to the pull factors of the alleged financial gains and offers of employment and marriage that come with radicalisation. Women in Nairobi explained that the opportunities offered by illegal overseas employment agencies were used to lure women and young girls into violent extremist groups.

In Wajir, stark marginalisation coupled with rising levels of corruption have led respondents to perceive themselves as 'less Kenyan and more Somalian.'[21] It was reported that some parents prefer their sons to go to Somalia to seek better opportunities rather than staying in Kenya to engage in crime and drug abuse. One woman in Nairobi explained that some mothers 'started pushing

POLICE ABUSE CAN CAUSE SOME YOUNG PEOPLE TO JOIN VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS

their sons to join al-Shabaab saying that "you are just here sleeping while others are making money and helping their families … go out and do something."'[22]

Signs of resilience

Despite the fault lines and vulnerabilities experienced across the three communities, there were also numerous signs of resilience as well as evidence of areas where existing strengths can be enhanced and developed in order to build a more robust resilience.

In Nairobi, there was consensus across the focus groups that the cosmopolitan nature of the city makes socialising across identity groups inevitable. Two key factors that seem to influence the level of social or business interaction are financial standing (with less interaction happening between the haves and the have-nots) and some distrust between ethnic groups.

> There are numerous signs of resilience and evidence of areas where existing strengths can be enhanced

The respondents agreed that people in their community do collaborate to find solutions to problems and have the agency to follow through. For example, organised public participation forums are spaces where people meet to discuss and draft memorandums on common issues affecting them, including hospitals, roads and markets. The youth, in particular, reported that where they used to live in fear of the police, they now feel more empowered to ask questions and demand answers from law enforcement officers despite knowing that their concerns may not be addressed.

In addition, a law enforcement officer interviewed for the study said that police had begun to work with the youth. He gave the example of a meeting between the police, the Directorate of Criminal Investigations and a group of youth after a community member was killed by a gang in Kibera. As a result of the meeting, the police provided extra security and support to the community to ensure the incident was not repeated.[23]

The youth in Kwale stated that they see no harm in socialising, doing business and solving problems with people from other identity groups – they are happy to

meet in different social spaces and interact with each other. One area of competition was reported, however, with any 'boda boda' (the local motorcycle taxi) business denied to upcountry youth because it is reserved for the local Digo and Duruma youth.

Respondents maintained that they do collaborate on common issues that affect them all, including development, unemployment and security. Some women said that they interact during peace committee meetings in Matuga, where they are actively engaged in peace and security discussions.

Some Kwale respondents reported that they are able to demonstrate resilience as a community because cultural norms dictate that Digos should not live away from their homes, despite the security challenges that they face on an ongoing basis. One youth in Kwale explained that 'Mbuani is my home … I can't stay away from my village because I feel like I'm betraying my community.'[24]

According to a religious leader in Kwale, his mosque engages at-risk youth through Quran reading competitions and school outreach visits, and use the Kwale Muslim Development Initiative (KMDI) to develop counter-narratives aimed at the youth for dissemination through social media platforms. The respondent did stress that local religious leaders need to be capacitated to have the courage to talk about violent extremism and trained on social media strategies to enable them to engage the youth.[25]

All the groups in Wajir indicated that they are comfortable doing business with other identity groups – some went so far as to say they trust non-locals over their kin in some of their business dealings. They confirmed that Wajir town is full of non-locals, some of whom were born and raised in Wajir because their parents have conducted business there for such a long time.

Some community leaders indicated that the Somali community has a structured way of solving their own communal social issues. However, respondents generally agreed that the community does meet to solve local problems, especially related to security, and has organised to protest over police atrocities together.

This is supported by previous research, which found that Wajir County has established local, interclan and associational networks of civic engagement that

are protective factors against violent extremism.[26] Respondents in Wajir pointed to the fact that non-locals live peacefully in Wajir, and that many have done so for a long time, as a sign that the whole community has built resilience to violent extremism.

Police-community forums have allowed for the adoption of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms

Although there is mistrust between the police and the community in Wajir, FGD participants confirmed that they are encouraged to share information with law enforcement. This was confirmed by a local law enforcement officer who said that the relationship between the police and the community is improving due to forums where all ethnic groups in the county are represented and suggestions from the community are taken on board. He indicated that these police-community forums have allowed for the adoption of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.[27]

Goals towards building community resilience

To enhance these existing strengths, respondents identified seven goals for building community resilience and the strategies that might help to achieve those goals.

1. *Raising awareness of the challenges*

   Respondents pointed out that sensitising the community about violent extremism and its dynamics means that people are alert to the different strategies violent extremist groups use to recruit new members. One respondent noted that 'when community members are ignorant of the situation facing them, it is not possible for them to devise solutions to the challenges bedevilling them.'[28]

   Morina et al have identified a lack of awareness of the problem as being a key factor in increased vulnerability to violent extremism. Conversely, understanding the risks and dangers associated with allowing extremism to take hold within communities 'fosters another line of resilience against this phenomenon.'[29]

   Strategies for achieving this goal identified by the communities included:

- Continuous sensitisation to the negative impacts of violent extremism and access to digestible, factual information. This can be achieved through the following: translated literature; public presentations/lectures; structured religious education in schools or through faith-based institutions and organisations; and formal and informal gatherings of different identity groups within the community to raise awareness of the problem and to hold further discussions on how to deal with it.

- Improving the quality of education in communities in Kwale and Wajir Counties since literacy levels there are especially low. One suggestion for how to achieve this in Wajir is to allow teachers from other areas to teach in their schools.

2. *Maintaining cultural or religious identity*

   Identified by the respondents as an important goal, research has shown that there are strong links between resilience and 'the maintenance of cultural identity, continuity and traditions for both individuals and groups.'[30]

   In a multicultural society, which describes all three of the communities in this study, evidence suggests the following:

   > … people who master the rules and norms of their new culture *without* abandoning their own language, values and social support are more resilient than those who tenaciously maintain their own culture at the expense of adjusting to their new environment [and] more resilient than those who forego their own culture and assimilate completely with the host society.[31]

   It is thus important for identity groups to maintain and invest in their own culture while acknowledging and acting on the conviction that their identity is compatible with other identities.

   The strategy suggested by respondents for realising this goal was:

- Influential religious and ethnic leaders need to play a proactive role in fostering cultural cohesion within their identity groups – this role needs to extend to advocating for cultural tolerance and the advantages of cultural pluralism.

3. *Strengthening social cohesion and intergroup trust*

    Respondents recognised that it is important to develop and strengthen relationships between different identity groups within their communities. In Kwale, respondents spoke about finding creative ways for the community to embrace peace and encouraging the youth to integrate with young people from other communities. Being open to and tolerant of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds strengthens the social and collective identity of a community. A collective sense of identity, hope, agency, altruism and trust has been found to promote resilience at the community level.[32]

    Indeed, previous research in Kenya reinforces this point, finding that 'communities with genuine associations (through clubs, investment groups, dialogue, intermarriage, familial interactions) with religious members from different groups experience less violent extremist activity.'[33]

    Respondents recommended the following strategies for strengthening social identity:

    *   Cross-cultural and interreligious events that are designed to foster a shared sense of identity among all community members.

    *   Dialogue – the importance of dialogue will be explored in depth later in this paper. However, it is important to note here that constructive dialogue helps to develop a sense of connection between a diversity of actors within a community. It can also help 'to avoid constructing "suspect communities", something that has been identified as a major flaw in programmes aimed at preventing radicalization.'[34]

4. *Giving a voice to the youth and women in community decision-making*

    The respondents strongly emphasised that the meaningful engagement of all members of the community – including the youth, women and any marginalised groups – in all community processes would go a long way towards building community resilience. This would also ensure the legitimacy and openness of decisions that later affect the community. The collective resources and strengths of a community cannot be mapped or mobilised if people are not afforded the space or opportunity to articulate their perspectives and be listened to.[35]

    The following strategies for giving a voice to the voiceless were suggested by respondents:

    *   Mentorships for the youth to support them on how to actively and constructively engage in community forums.

    *   Leadership-skills capacity building for women.

    *   Capacity building for male leaders on good governance, with an emphasis on the principles of participation, representation, inclusivity, human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion.

    *   Continuous sensitisation throughout the community on the processes and activities that would allow for the meaningful participation of

OPENNESS AND TOLERANCE STRENGTHENS THE SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY OF A COMMUNITY

all groups (with a particular emphasis on women and the youth) in community discussions, solution development and decision-making.

5. *Economic development*

Across the communities, respondents felt that enhancing the economic status of the communities and expanding opportunities for the youth would divert their attention away from the temptation of joining an extremist group for the financial stability offered. In addition, the development of a collaborative and collective network of resources that can be made available to the community may facilitate joint actions that feed into a shared identity. The foregoing will contribute to reducing violent extremist tendencies and will also go a long way towards addressing crime and other societal problems in general, thus contributing positively to broad economic development.

Strategies to enhance economic development suggested by respondents included:

- Economic empowerment via grants to support engagement in meaningful economic activities that will sustain the breadwinner as well as his/her family.

- The creation of socio-economic and skills development opportunities for the youth and women.

- Capacity building on entrepreneurship skills and opportunities at the local level.

6. *Improved relationships and greater cooperation between state authorities and community members*

There is clearly a need to improve state-community relations. Echoing previous research in Kenya, respondents pointed to the erosion of public trust in government institutions and leaders, as well as the securitisation of the government's responses to violent extremism, as weakening communal mechanisms of resilience.[36] Respondents strongly believed that law enforcement agencies should more fully include and engage all community members in key security decisions affecting the community.

Respondents suggested the following strategies for achieving this goal:

- Developing or strengthening existing community policing efforts.

- Increasing police community outreach efforts with an emphasis on reaching those identity groups within a community that are usually ignored or marginalised.

7. *Ensure access to justice within local communities*

Research has shown that high levels of profiling at the community level may erode resilience when this discrimination questions or damages the normative status of minority ethnic and religious affiliations.[37] Equally, resilience will be undermined in a community that is struggling to recover from

THERE IS A NEED TO CREATE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND THE YOUTH

ongoing experiences of police harassment, brutality or extrajudicial killings, especially when it relates to the targeting of particular identity groups within a community.

Respondents noted that any process of building resilience would need to ensure justice for the victims and their families, in order to enable healing and support. This would prevent those who might want to join an extremist group for revenge from doing so.

Respondents suggested the following strategies for achieving this goal:

- Human rights training for both the police and community members (to know and be able to demand their rights under the law).

- Legal aid clinics to assist and support the victims and their families.

- The development of trauma and counselling interventions to facilitate healing.

Barriers to building community resilience

The respondents also identified a range of barriers that may impede the achievement of these resilience-building goals. The following barriers were fairly common across identity groups and geographical sites:

- Ignorance among community members due to, at best, a lack of information and, at worst, discussions and decision-making being kept secret from the majority of the community members. This also speaks to a lack of trust between community members and community leaders.

- The gap and lack of trust between the youth and their elders, which manifests in the elders not wanting to include the youth in community forums or listen to their needs and concerns.

- The poorly thought-through packaging of community issues or problems, which may lead to discrimination towards or marginalisation of the very people that should be included to build community resilience.

- A lack of resources, coupled with ongoing corruption surrounding the available resources, results in competition, distrust and conflict.

- A lack of agency within the community – interventions 'without commensurate capacity and action'[38] can result in threats overwhelming even highly resilient communities.

- Poor leadership and a lack of political will to participate in community activities and be part of the resilience-building project.

- Unresolved historical injustices coupled with profiling and ongoing human rights violations allegedly committed by law enforcement officers has resulted in very poor relationships between the communities and law enforcement agencies. This makes it difficult for the communities to work well with and build resilience together with government agencies.
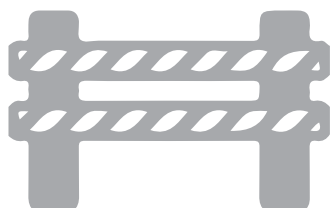
POOR LEADERSHIP IS A BARRIER TO BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Interventions to build community resilience

Building the resilience of local communities in Kenya to the threat of violent extremism necessarily involves more than the traditional concept of P/CVE. The challenges identified by respondents in this study, as well as the goals and the barriers, all point to the need to develop interventions that are both preventative of violent extremism as well as beneficial in building general community resilience. These interventions will also help move the community forward towards broader and longer-term governance and development goals.

In previous research on risk and resilience to clan violence and violent extremism in northeast Kenya, Chome points out that current resilience interventions in that region of the country focus on building communal resilience to environmental shocks, without considering or supporting the significance of communal resilience to conflict and violent extremism.[39] In other words, interventions can be designed and developed to work towards mutually supportive goals that build community resilience to withstand multiple interlocking threats – environmental, conflict and violent extremism.

This means making a policy shift away from P/CVE-*specific* interventions (measures designed to address extremism directly) to P/CVE-*relevant* interventions (measures designed to reduce vulnerability to extremism).[40] As such, community resilience interventions would be mutually supportive of P/CVE objectives. However, they would primarily be designed to strengthen the protective factors and mechanisms within a community, integrate knowledge and practice concerning a range of factors (including socio-economic, political, governance and security), and work collaboratively with all identity groups within communities to ensure that programmes and policies work in their real-world settings.[41]

In other words, a transformative approach to violent extremism is needed. An approach which recognises that 'the reasons and motivators leading to an individual being drawn to violent extremist movements can be transformed into a different type of agency or engagement.'[42] In addition, an approach through which programmes are developed that 'take into account the "human factors" – the community context, culture and religion, building trust with the community, fostering

intra-community relationships through dialogue, finding a language of peace and peace education, etc.'[43]

Using dialogue to address violent extremism in communities

Flowing from the examination of resilience, thoughtfully exploring the idea of dialogue presupposes that there is an inadequacy with existing approaches to preventing or countering violent extremism. Dialogue as considered in this study is not limited to the idea of negotiating with terror groups.[44] Although communities in Kenya interrogated the angle involving terror groups, this paper expands the focus on dialogue to include three main aspects of dialogue: within and between local communities; between local communities and security agencies; and between local communities and justice actors.

> Tensions within and between communities weaken the collective resolve to address violent extremism

Tensions within and between communities, fuelled by religious, political or even natural resource questions, tend to weaken the collective resolve required to address violent extremism. Most terror groups recognise this and have exploited such discords. In expanding its operations to Kenya's north-east region, al-Shabaab is also known for co-opting the narrative of marginalisation and victimisation of the ethnic Somali population. Within such a narrative, ethnic Somalis are portrayed as victims of a strategic campaign led by the Kenyan government and its Western allies to keep Somalis oppressed and poor.[45]

Political debates such as the historically tumultuous relationship between Kenyan Somalis and the Kenyan state are increasingly interpreted using religious images. This is more common of the limited but powerful circulation of the Salafist-Jihadist doctrine reminiscent of al-Shabaab.[46]

In this study, some respondents in Kwale County drew attention to issues of mistrust between members of the Muslim and Christian communities. A cleric from Diani explained how Muslims are perceived as terrorist sympathisers by some Christian adherents, while at the same time a Muslim perceives his own fellow

Muslims as *kafirs* (infidels or unbelievers) when they are seen associating with Christians.[47] Apart from religious concerns, intercommunity tensions and mistrust have also stemmed from problems caused by land grabbing.

The second aspect of dialogue, dialogue between local communities and security agencies, is a persistent concern, not only in Kenya but across the world, of countering violent extremism on the continent and globally. Elements of the strained relationship with law enforcement feature prominently in this study and the section that follows presents more data on this.

It complicates the opportunities for cooperation between law enforcement and local populations because trust has been weakened as a result of the numerous human rights violations committed by law enforcement. Due to this, in all three counties investigated in this study – Nairobi, Kwale and Wajir – the respective age groups and genders alluded in related ways to the declining legitimacy of law enforcement.

The multi-dimensional nature of violent extremism requires multiple levels of engagement

In addition, the multi-dimensional nature of violent extremism is such that it requires multiple levels of engagement that go beyond the traditional methods of using force. Numerous studies show that confronting violent extremism with heavy-handed or extrajudicial law enforcement is likely to backfire by inflaming real or perceived socio-economic cleavages and exclusionist narratives used by terror groups.[48]

The unconventional warfare waged by terror groups such as al-Shabaab is characterised by the infiltration of local communities among whom recruitment takes place and the execution of attacks occur. This speaks to a scenario where it is paramount to ensure the right balance of hard and soft approaches that reflect dialogue and partnership between communities and law enforcement.

The third dimension of dialogue is between local communities and the justice sector. Similar to law enforcement, when communities do not perceive legitimacy in the entity responsible for justice provision,

it detracts from efforts aimed at addressing violent extremism or the risks associated with it. Therefore, an effective criminal justice system is a key tool in the fight against violent extremism.[49] In recent years, following the surge in violent extremism involving groups such as Boko Haram in countries like Nigeria, the spotlight has intensified on the role of the justice sector.

Most respondents in the three aforementioned Kenyan counties highlighted the problem of delayed justice for victims of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. These concerns cannot be ignored. Unlike Nigeria, where this sector has struggled to dispense justice to over 5 000 terror suspects amidst a full-blown insurgency,[50] Kenya still has relative time and space to build institutional capacity as well as confidence in aggrieved communities.

Overall, communities appear to be the linchpin that is critical for successful efforts by law enforcement and the justice sector. If the idea of dialogue is further extended to consider engaging violent extremist groups, communities should still be the starting point for consultation before such a complex undertaking. Communities bear the worst impact of terror attacks and their insight into the workings of violent extremist groups is crucial. Thus, their perspectives on the framework of engagement are essential for shaping the outlines of dialogue as a complementary component of P/CVE.

Community perspectives on dialogue

What complicates dialogue in communities?

A number of challenges that render the process of dialogue problematic are discussed here. At the heart of these challenges is the prevailing issue of mistrust and this deserves some analysis as it relates to communities, law enforcement and the justice sector. In the counties under enquiry, there are members within and between communities who are divided along ethnic and religious lines. These divisions are further complicated by political trends in the broader context of the state and particularly in light of electoral issues and leadership.[51]

Religious identity seems to be exploited in already existing divisions within communities, with a number of respondents in Kwale County pointing to levels of mistrust between Christians and Muslims.[52] In some instances, some members of a religious faith refer

to members of the other faith as sympathisers of violent extremism. The existence of intra-faith discrimination is reflected in the attitude of some members referring to others as non-conformists due to their mode of dressing or the degree to which they associate with adherents of other religious faiths.[53]

Beyond the veneer of ethno-religious discord, there is also a layer of mistrust harboured by community members in general against elders who represent the local population. Community elders in Kwale County claimed that some members of the public perceive them as enemies of the society because it is believed that they benefit from government incentives such as food relief. Community elders tend to act as the bridge between the local population and government officials and there are times when this relationship makes them susceptible to what the community recognises as collusion against the public good.

In extreme cases, there are narratives by youth respondents who underscored how community members in Mbuani (Kwale County) violently targeted elders suspected to be involved in sorcery. The response from law enforcement led to a violent crackdown on youths who in turn embraced a more radical approach and moved towards violent extremism in the community.[54] This state of affairs is, however, not to suggest that some members of the community do not have recourse to the elders when domestic disputes arise.

> There are instances when, in the wake of violent extremism incidents, community members conduct meetings in mosques to find solutions

There are also instances when, in the wake of violent extremism incidents, community members conduct meetings in mosques to find solutions. Some of these meetings resulted in the formation of the KMDI which focuses on addressing religious stereotypes, economic challenges and the empowerment of Muslim women in their participation in peace initiatives. There are also occasions where Christians and Muslims collaborate and organise meetings in social halls to deliberate on security concerns. Such interfaith engagements led to the formation of the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC) and the Kwale Women of Faith.

Besides these positive examples, opportunities for dialogue in communities tend to exclude certain groups and women are often affected. As mentioned earlier in this report, young men in Nairobi have a high level of trust in their mothers and are repeatedly surprised that women are rarely included in conversations on countering violent extremism. This gap should not be disregarded in efforts to engender dialogue in communities.

The inclusion of women and girls, and indeed gender mainstreaming, are often overlooked in efforts to counter violent extremism, despite the

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE IN COMMUNITIES OFTEN EXCLUDE WOMEN

participation of women and girls in violent extremism and terrorism, as well as their roles in prevention. These points have long been emphasised by the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) in its report on good practices on women and countering violent extremism.[55]

What complicates dialogue with law enforcement?

On this level, a number of concerns were identified in the respective counties. These ranged from harassment and religious profiling of groups to exclusion of community voices and extrajudicial killings. There is already a long and problematic history involving communities and law enforcement across the continent. In fact, for over a decade a strong case has been made not just for the reform of the entire security sector but a call for transformation.[56] Minimal progress has been achieved and consequently, the symptoms of this structural challenge keep manifesting in the experiences of many respondents.

In Wajir County for instance, while community members are encouraged to share information with law enforcement officers, many people refrain from doing so because of a fear of victimisation after witnessing what has happened to other individuals.

> ### Ethno-religious profiling of the local population, and particularly those living near the Kenya-Somali border, is not uncommon

Ethno-religious profiling of the local population, and particularly those living near the Kenya-Somali border, is also not uncommon.[57] One of the youth respondents recounted the following experience:

> One man (a tea vendor) was killed by the police because he warned them that the route they wanted to take had also been used by al-Shabaab. The law enforcement officers then shot him instead of cooperating with him to know more about al-Shabaab's whereabouts. So, if you were the son of the man killed, how would you feel?

Marginalisation and persistent cultural profiling in the present-day period echo back to historical injustices such as the lack of reparations for victims of the 1984 Wagalla Massacre by security forces in Wajir.[58] These issues, which reinforce the contemporary challenges, make it difficult to convince local communities to support security agencies or to dissuade individuals from joining groups like al-Shabaab.

Extrajudicial killings and mysterious disappearances also fuel grievances and the tendency for many youths to become radicalised to the point of joining violent extremism groups.[59] Many respondents in Nairobi noted that harassment by the police had reached the point where they were willing to take revenge if the opportunity surfaced. In the neglected parts of Nairobi, such as Majengo, cultural profiling is a big concern and inhabitants believe

MINIMAL PROGRESS HAS BEEN ACHIEVED TOWARDS THE REFORM OF THE SECURITY SECTOR

that their neighbourhoods have been marked as terror hotspots. Consequently, the area is prone to raids by law enforcement and other harsh methods employed to counter violent extremism.

Extrajudicial killings have also rendered a number of children orphans while deepening the risk factors for violence. Within these dynamics, a number of female youth have suffered sexual harassment and various forms of gender-based violence.

Although some people remain afraid of the police, others prefer to risk resistance against the police and demand explanations for unaccounted killings and enforced disappearances. In some cases, youths are willing to protect individuals from the police, irrespective of whether the accused in question is culpable or not. Interviews with a police commander in Kwale County confirmed that the relationship with community members in the county is indeed not a perfect one and although efforts are being made to address this, individuals tend not to cooperate with law enforcement.[60]

The importance of establishing and sustaining a system of dialogue between community members and law enforcement is particularly important in Kwale. This county is regarded as a hotspot of violent extremism and there have been attacks especially in places such as Msambweni and Matuga.[61] Respondents recounted how police officers guarding a church in Ukunda were once ambushed and killed by suspected al-Shabaab returnees.

Islamic clerics have also been killed. In 2019, two imams suspected of spying on the activities of al-Shabaab sympathisers in Msambweni were murdered. Warnings were reportedly sent to the victims before the incident.[62] Occurrences like this underscore the risks community members take in the process of trying to provide information that may be useful to law enforcement.

There is a responsibility for law enforcement when it comes to ensuring the protection of community members, particularly in a societal context where trust is a matter of life and death. When the Covid-19 pandemic created lockdown conditions in Kenya and globally, Kenyan security agencies, such as the police, made efforts to initiate online interaction with the public every week. The Inspector-General of Police noted that there

was a clamour by the public to have a closer engagement with the police and that live Twitter chats provided the opportunity for such dialogue.[63]

Although this appears to be a constructive move towards bridging the gap between the police and communities, there is a blind spot in this approach that must be considered. A huge proportion of the local population that are victims of police harassment or violence do not have the economic means to afford internet services that will enable them to access social media platforms launched by security agencies. Most of these individuals struggle in disadvantaged conditions and are primarily occupied with trying to provide food for themselves and their families; internet bundles are the least of their priorities.

During the focus group discussions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were acknowledged as very important entities that can help in the convening of dialogue sessions or initiatives between communities and law enforcement.[64] There are quite a number of these efforts currently being made by NGOs and the data obtained in the current study hints at the role that organisations such as HAKI Africa play with regard to facilitating dialogue in different communities.[65]

NGOs are important in convening dialogue sessions between communities and law enforcement

A final challenge that contributes to the difficulty in building a bond between communities and law enforcement relates to insensitivity on the part of the latter. For example, in Nairobi, it was observed that the police authorities frequently redeploy officials so that communities find it frustrating to develop and sustain rapport with law enforcement officers. A community leader further noted that while community leaders strive to foster good relations with the police, the frequent transfer of cooperating officers gives the impression of a vested interest in hindering the process of dialogue.

In addition, community members in Nairobi were distressed that police personnel deployed to settlements such as Kibera and Majengo appeared to be 'killer cops'. One community elder described it as follows:

It's as if they do not want any police to befriend the community. Once they realise that a particular police officer is now treating the community well, they don't last, they are quickly transferred. Extra-judicial killings have also been a pain to this community. Prior to Covid-19, we could bury six to seven people killed by police in one month in Majengo. Right now, at least we bury only two per month who are killed.[66]

What complicates dialogue with the justice sector?

The aforementioned challenges that define the relationship (or lack of it) between communities and law enforcement are usually accompanied by a range of additional problems, some of which require attention by the justice sector. For instance, when extrajudicial killings occur, affected family members or friends of the victim normally want to seek recourse at the law courts. There are many instances where individuals are unable to afford the fees for a lawyer. However, in situations where this is possible, individuals still face challenges regarding the delayed dispensation of justice. There are cases where victims' families remain aggrieved because they are unable to seek redress. This contributes to a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system as a whole.

The inability of the system to be accountable for historical injustices over decades in the communities does not instil confidence. In Kwale County, communities complained about land grabbing by influential politicians and how such issues were never resolved by the judiciary. They pointed to how the political elite collude with local administration officials on these land seizures. In Wajir County, most participants noted that although the relationship with the justice sector is not as bad as that with the security agencies, there are still challenges that need to be addressed.

Furthermore, if aggrieved families are not given justice as a result of the harm caused by law enforcement, there will be no healing and the objective of preventing violent extremism will be jeopardised.

The societal challenges posed by violent extremism – or the threat of it – also extend to the justice actors themselves. Interviews at the Office of the Director of

Public Prosecutions (ODPP) in Nairobi revealed that even the lives of prosecutors are at risk as a result of the nature of cases they are involved in. Worse still, there is limited to no protection from the state and even getting witnesses for some cases is challenging. The fear that accompanies these circumstances is compounded by the fact that individuals in communities perceive some prosecutions as unjustifiable.[67]

Prosecutors have had to deal with problems caused by the 'disappearance' of files in the middle of ongoing cases and this makes it difficult to proceed with the legal process. This is a challenge which can be addressed to a great extent by the digitisation of case files with backup copies. In other instances, there is limited evidence available and it is thus hard to ensure prosecution. Beyond these issues, prosecutors need to conduct extensive background checks in the course of investigations and this, along with other intervening legal variables, contributes to prolonging the cases; something that affected community members perceive as the delay of justice.

> There will be no healing if aggrieved families cannot access justice for harm caused by law enforcement

Considering all the challenges and strategies outlined above that have been identified by the communities themselves in relation to addressing violent extremism at the local level in Kenya, the following section outlines key recommendations for various stakeholder groups.

Key recommendations

Communities

- Beyond the activities and engagement of NGOs, sections of the community should endeavour to foster intra-community civic awareness and information sharing.

- Religious leaders must work together regularly to strengthen interfaith collaborations.

- Community leaders must, with a sense of urgency, promote and convene forums for intra- and intercommunity dialogue in the different counties.

- Women are disproportionately impacted by violent extremism and their voices as active stakeholders in the community should not be excluded. Deliberate efforts must be made to include women in P/CVE initiatives.

- The youth are the most affected when it comes to recruitment into radical and extremist organisations. As such, the youth, particularly female youth, must be given a voice to express their concerns and needs and must be included in community meetings as well as decision-making forums and consultations regarding P/CVE initiatives.

- Community leaders need to work collaboratively with security officials to facilitate building greater trust between their communities and security agencies.

Law enforcement and justice actors

- Law enforcement officials who commit human rights violations and acts of violence in communities should be held criminally accountable for their actions.

- Enhanced interaction, synergy and collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the justice sector should be promoted to address challenges related to the delayed prosecution of cases.

- The capacity to investigate, analyse and address terror-related cases should not be limited to the capital city Nairobi. The various counties should be afforded some responsibility for responding to these issues.

- Law enforcement agencies should work extra hard to nurture and sustain collaborative relationships with affected communities, reformed returnees, civil society organisations and human rights organisations.

Policymakers

- Although efforts are being made to address violent extremism through the various county action plans, monitoring and evaluating these policies is crucial for ensuring implementation, assessing efficacy and impact, as well as integrating lessons learned into future iterations of the plans.

- Policymakers should allow more space for the active participation and ownership of community members in policy formulation, such that the needs and realities of the counties are adequately reflected.

- Recent efforts by the government to engage communities during the Covid-19 pandemic entailed the use of social media platforms. However, some community members affected by violent extremism in the counties lack the financial means to access such platforms. Empowering communities with the infrastructure and skills to connect to and engage with social media platforms should be an urgent priority for these kinds of initiatives to reach all communities, no matter how isolated.

COUNTY ACTION PLANS MUST BE MONITORED AND EVALUATED TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

- There is a need for greater investment in economic and governance development programming to strengthen the broad resilience of affected communities.

- There is a need for greater collaboration and enhanced partnerships between national government agencies, county governments, local leadership and development partners to ensure that P/CVE work is prioritised and positioned within the broader, long-term goals of socio-economic and governance development.

Conclusion

Although from time to time, Kenya experiences a reprieve from attacks by al-Shabaab, the incentives for a constant threat remain. Among other factors, Kenya is a major hub in Africa for diplomatic activity, business and tourism. Targeting Kenya also highlights the utility of propaganda for terror groups who benefit from undeserved media coverage, which in turn offers visibility for these groups and their ideas.

In light of the unfolding threat, there is an urgent need to stem the tide of insecurity while making a case for enhancing community resilience and multi-stakeholder dialogue as part of comprehensive efforts. These two aspects were examined in this study through the lens of communities in Nairobi, Kwale and Wajir Counties. The study explained the factors that enable communities to adopt processes, strategies and relationships that bolster responses to violent extremism, as well as to prevent it. At the heart of this is resilience, which is supported by the concept of dialogue in the context of relations involving communities, law enforcement agencies and the justice sector.

Kenya's efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism should take these concerns into consideration, as they remain critical for the country and indeed the region.

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20   Focus group discussion with women in Nairobi County.

21   Focus group discussion with youths, women, men and community elders in Wajir County.

22   Focus group discussion with women in Nairobi County.

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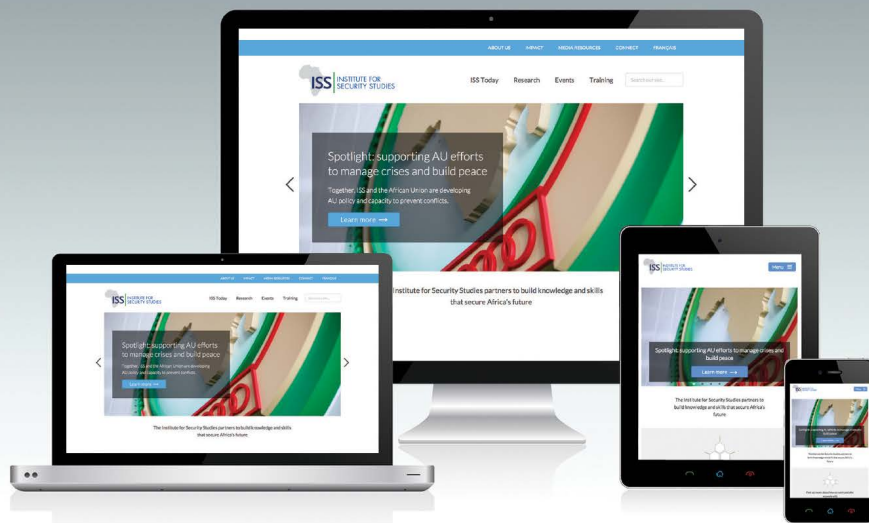
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HAKI Africa is a national human rights organisation based in Mombasa working to improve livelihoods and enhance the progressive realisation of human rights in Kenya. Initiated in 2012, the organisation promotes partnership between state and non-state actors in order to constantly improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities and ensure respect for human rights and rule of law by all. Particularly, the organisation seeks to agitate for the recognition and empowerment of local communities in Kenya to fully participate in rights and development initiatives with a view to improving the standards of living amongst all including the poor and marginalised.

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