

# Preventing violent extremism

## Lessons from Africa

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Many efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism in Africa are being carried out by local and international organisations. Despite this work and considerable amounts of funding for these initiatives, practitioners still struggle to determine what effect their efforts are having, both negative and positive. Based on an analysis of many projects in Central, East and West Africa, this report considers questions of donor funding, the duration of funding, theories of change, and monitoring and evaluation.

## Key findings

- ▶ The majority of activities being implemented by African organisations working to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) include education, training and capacity building, followed closely by peacebuilding and violence prevention.
- ▶ The majority of donors behind P/CVE projects in Central, East and West Africa are the European Union and individual states within Europe.
- ▶ The majority of P/CVE projects are funded for 12 months or less.
- ▶ The most frequently used theory of change holds that by raising awareness around the drivers of violent extremism, individuals and communities will be less vulnerable to exploitation by groups such as Boko Haram and al-Shabaab.
- ▶ Most P/CVE projects consider 'observations' as an integral part of their project monitoring and evaluation.
- ▶ Suspicions among communities about the motives of P/CVE projects, along with fear about retribution from extremist groups and security forces, are notable challenges experienced by P/CVE projects in Africa.

## Recommendations

- ▶ States and international organisations supporting P/CVE initiatives should consider that many local practitioners chose not to label their work as 'P/CVE' to avoid negative attention from the governments where they are operating or from violent extremist organisations. They also seek to avoid further marginalising certain ethnic and religious groups.
- ▶ International organisations should collaborate with African states in order to expand the funding base for P/CVE projects and encourage states to accept both accountability and the responsibility of addressing the threat of violent extremism on their own soil.
- ▶ Donors should consider funding projects for longer than 12 months to allow for an extended duration of implementation, as well as adequate time for monitoring and evaluation (M&E).
- ▶ Bearing in mind that skills training, capacity building and education are reflected in P/CVE activities, practitioners should aim to involve governments and the private sector with a view to creating job opportunities and considering traineeships in private and public enterprises.
- ▶ Challenges persist regarding the monitoring and evaluation of projects. Donor organisations should first consider building the capacity of local organisations to conduct M&E and then, regardless of the methods of evaluation, ensure they document their findings and share them with other P/CVE practitioners in the region and on the continent.

## Introduction

In 2018, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) launched the report *Preventing extremism in West and Central Africa: Lessons from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria* during a side event at the 73<sup>rd</sup> United Nations General Assembly. In 2019, a similar study was conducted on *Preventing violent extremism in East Africa: Lessons from Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda*. These research reports provide insight into how local and international organisations and practitioners are designing projects aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) by addressing the drivers of violent extremism in West, Central and East Africa.

The data gathered in these reports has raised some concerns regarding P/CVE projects in the three regions. Despite the large amounts of funding provided for these activities, challenges remain for practitioners and researchers regarding the impact that these activities have on the areas that they target.

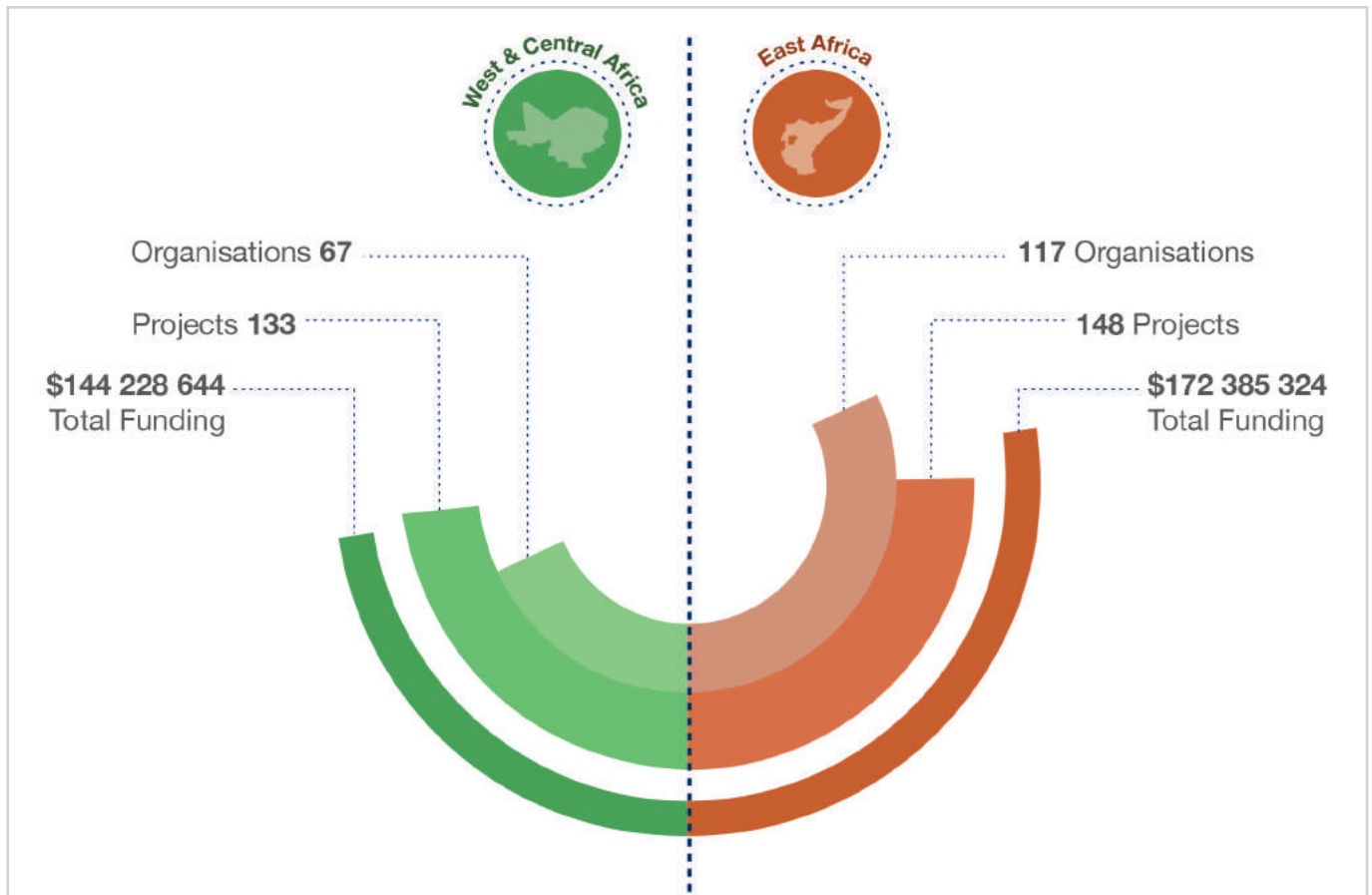
This report outlines specific trends that relate to P/CVE projects on the continent, with particular attention to the manner in which participating organisations describe their general work, their theories of change, the measurement of their results and their key challenges.

## Methodology

This report draws upon data gathered through the two ISS reports mentioned above. In the West and Central Africa study, 133 projects implemented by 67 organisations were described and in the East Africa study, 148 projects implemented by 117 organisations were discussed.

The research conducted for these reports aimed to describe as many projects functioning in the regions as possible. While not every P/CVE project in the three regions was described, the number of projects accessed in the research enables this report to draw conclusions regarding the nature, purpose, scope and potential efficacy of P/CVE interventions in the regions under review.

**Figure 1: Overview of projects, organisations and funding per region**



## Development aid flows into Africa

Despite the larger West and Central African region, which included six countries, more P/CVE projects were mapped and discussed in the four East African countries. This does not however mean that East Africa has more P/CVE initiatives than the other two regions, but that the organisations in East Africa were more accessible. In the study, East Africa had 15 P/CVE projects more than did West and Central Africa. However the funding that organisations received in order to do P/CVE projects was not much higher than the total funding that West and Central African countries received. The bulk of the donor funding for West and Central Africa can be found in regional P/CVE projects being implemented by organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and USAID.<sup>1</sup>

The P/CVE space in Tanzania has shrunk significantly and respondents said government disapproves of using the term 'violent extremism'

According to the 2018 *Africa Development Aid at a Glance* report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 2016, Africa received more than US\$50 billion in funding. The largest international contributors towards Africa's development aid are the United States, European Union institutions, and the United Kingdom. Most of this funding goes towards social sectors (44%), 20% goes towards economic sectors, and 11% towards humanitarian aid.<sup>2</sup>

In the P/CVE field in Africa, the international community aims to lessen the effects resulting from the conflict that is caused by groups like Boko Haram and al-Shabaab.<sup>3</sup> These effects include mass migration to European countries, increased local criminal activity and the further weakening of weak states.<sup>4</sup> The main priorities appear to be raising awareness and education as well as putting a stop to human rights abuses committed by certain military forces in African states (see Figure 2).

### Working on P/CVE: First, redefine your field of activity

Respondents who participated in the two studies were asked to briefly describe the work their organisations do. The responses to this question support some debates on whether the prevention of violent extremism differs substantially from violence prevention and peace building efforts that have been undertaken on the African continent for decades.

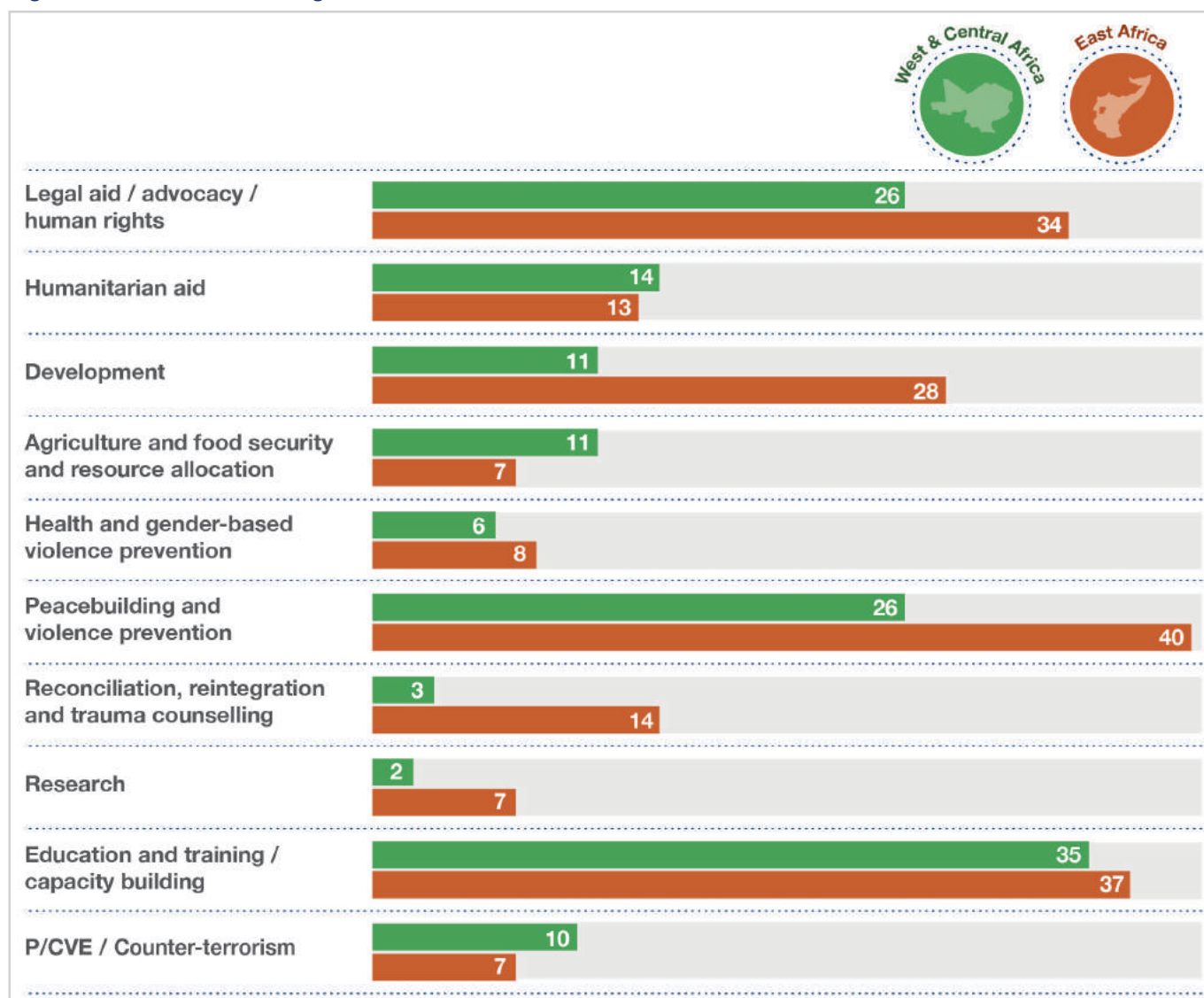
Experts and practitioners increasingly agree that violent extremism is an issue overarching both the international security and developmental realms.<sup>5</sup> The prevention of violent extremism is increasingly spilling over into the developmental domain. Data in Figure 2 presents the notion that P/CVE is mostly incorporated in other initiatives. Only a small number of organisations list 'P/CVE' or 'counterterrorism' as the general work that their organisations do.



IN KENYA ORGANISATIONS WORKING ON P/CVE ARE TIGHTLY REGULATED



Figure 2: General work of organisations



In countries where conflict exists, there is generally a decline in the social and economic development of that country. Declining health and education, disruption of social services, marginalised communities and unemployment are considered structural drivers of violent extremism.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that so many P/CVE organisations are including development and other work into their general activities. It can be argued that development and humanitarian aid cannot be successfully delivered in conflict-ridden countries, and without P/CVE projects integrating development and humanitarian aid as part of their activities, both initiatives will be equally unsuccessful.

According to respondents, the P/CVE space in Tanzania has shrunk significantly and organisations

operating in the country are forced to label their projects differently. It is not necessarily the actual activities implemented that cause the grievance, but rather the use of the term 'violent extremism' that is disapproved of by the government, according to Tanzanian respondents.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, in Kenya, organisations working in the P/CVE field are tightly regulated, with an increased level of administration, and would therefore rather label their activities as another initiative in order to circumvent these regulations, according to several of the Kenyan respondents.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of organisations listed their general work as 'education and training/capacity building'. In the UNDP's *Journey to Violent Extremism in Africa* report, respondents were asked what their biggest need

was before they decided to join the violent extremist group. The majority listed ‘employment’ as their biggest need, with the three following needs being access to water and electricity, access to education and security.<sup>9</sup> This supports the argument that although organisations do not label the work they do as ‘P/CVE’, they are still contributing to the prevention of violent extremism by addressing some of the biggest drivers of violent extremism.

According to International Alert, the various ‘peacebuilding’ approaches are diverse, ‘but they all ultimately work to ensure that people are safe from harm, have access to law and justice, are included in the political decisions that affect them, have access to better economic opportunities, and enjoy better livelihoods’. Most of the activities listed in Figure 2 can in fact be considered as part of ‘peacebuilding’, for example:

Approaches to peacebuilding <sup>10</sup>	Work listed by respondents
Strengthening democracy and inclusive politics	Legal aid/advocacy/ human rights
Improving justice systems	Reconciliation meetings and, again, legal aid/ advocacy/ human rights
Improving general security	Peacebuilding and violence prevention
Increasing sustainable economic opportunities	Education/training/ capacity building
Improving infrastructure	Development
Peace education	Education/training/ capacity building
Improving healthcare	Health and prevention of gender-based violence
Making development programmes in conflict areas more sensitive to conflict dynamics	P/CVE

In 2006, the UN adopted its Global Counter Terrorism Strategy with a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, annexed thereto. This Plan of Action called for a ‘whole of society’ approach to addressing violent extremism and outlined seven key areas that needed to be addressed. These key areas included:

- dialogue and conflict prevention;
- strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law;
- engaging communities;
- empowering youth;
- gender equality and empowering women;
- education, skill development and employment facilitation;
- strategic communications.<sup>11</sup>

Again, the data in Figure 2 supports the UN’s Plan of Action which has similarities to the peace building approaches mentioned earlier. This raises questions around the difference between P/CVE and peace building or, more relevantly, substantiates that the prevention and countering of violent extremism could be considered one of the approaches of peace building. Still, the only aspect that could be considered unique to P/CVE is the inclusion of ‘counter-narratives’ in activities and projects.<sup>12</sup>

### Where the money comes from – and goes

Respondents who participated in the two studies were asked about their donor organisation, as well as the amount received.

The main donor organisations across all three regions are listed below. The amounts below do not include funding between partnerships:

- the EU and countries within the EU, accounting for US\$12 488 422 donated towards projects in West and Central Africa, and US\$47 867 043 towards projects in East Africa
- the US, accounting for US\$109 551 927 towards projects in West and Central Africa, and US\$60 089 784 towards projects in East Africa
- intergovernmental organisations like the United Nations, accounting for US\$10 327 383 donated towards projects in West and Central Africa, and US\$23 440 170 towards projects in East Africa.

Eight organisations in East Africa are receiving funding from within their own countries or from their own governments directly. However, only six organisations in West and Central Africa are receiving funding from donors within the region. Canada and Australia are funding projects solely in East Africa and South Korea is only funding projects in Nigeria.

Figure 3A: Donor funding per country and per region, West and Central Africa

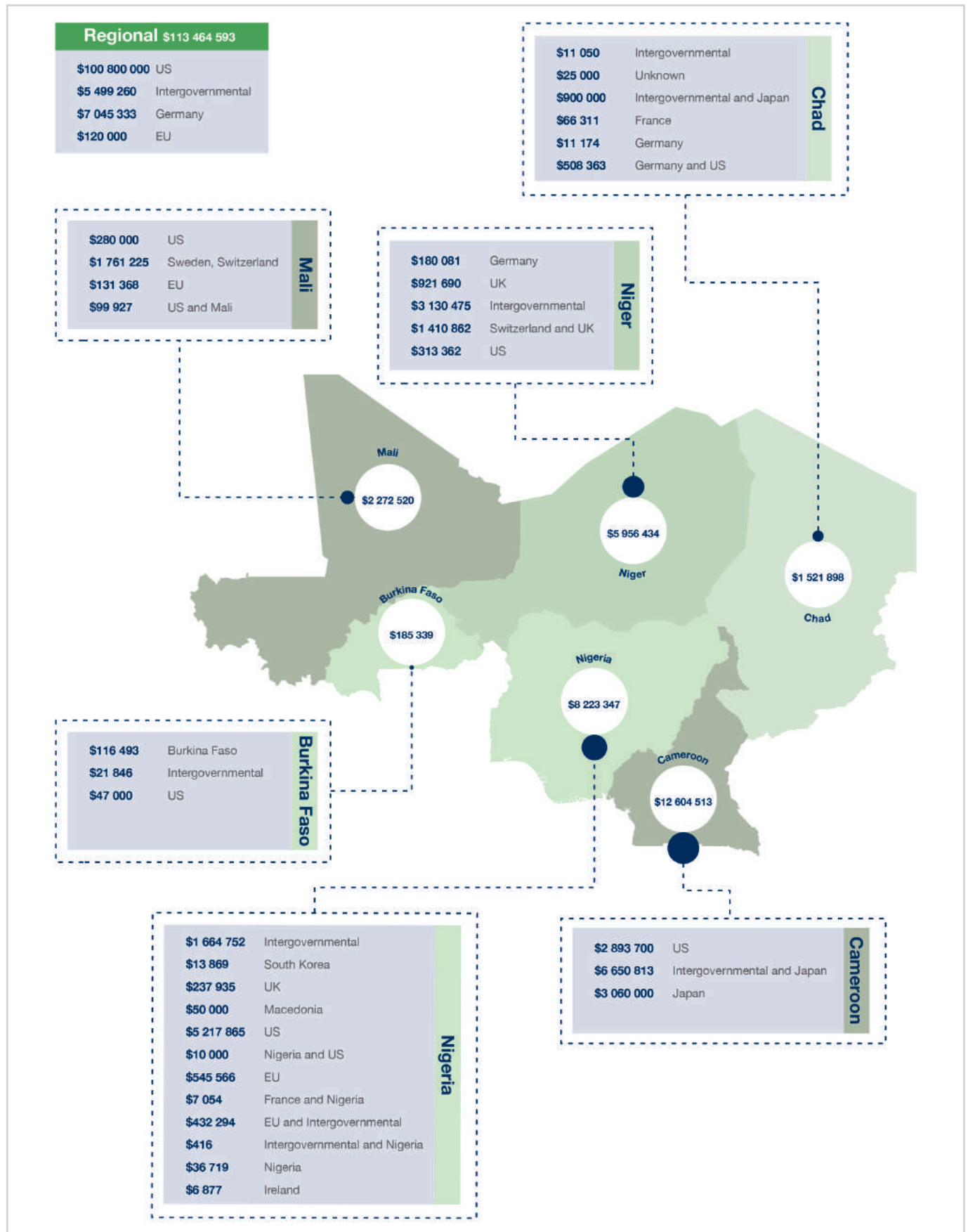
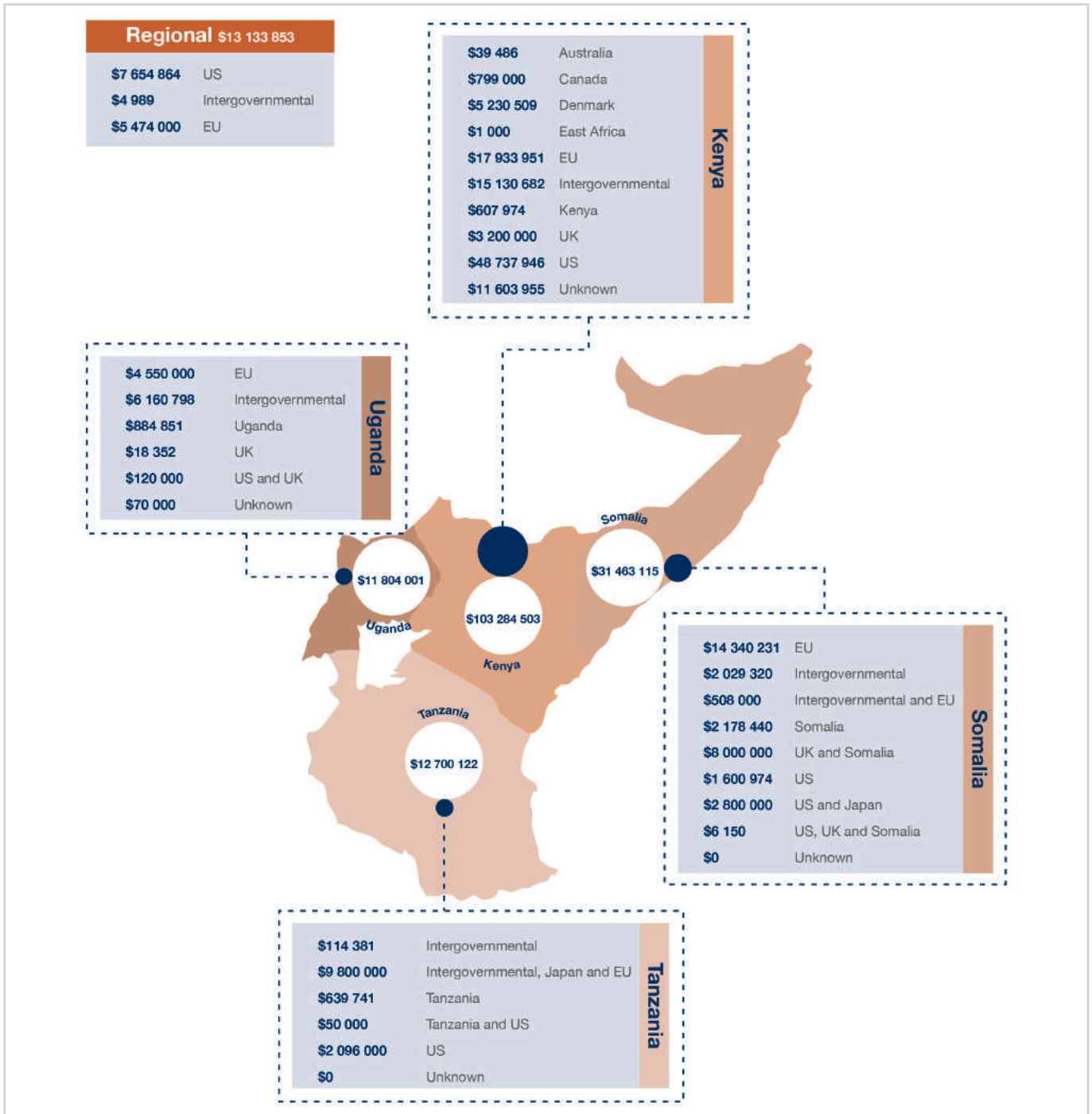


Figure 3B: Donor funding per country and per region, East Africa



Sub-Saharan Africa receives the largest amount of development aid in the world, However, this amount has been declining in the past few years. Increasingly, middle-income African states are expected to address their own developmental challenges. This raises concerns among economists on whether continuous foreign and development aid prevents African states from assuming the responsibility of addressing their own

development goals, such as alleviating poverty, improving socio-economic marginalisation and ensuring quality education for children and youth in their countries.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1990s, there was a sharp decline in development aid to Africa. What followed was economic growth, increased human development and reduced poverty in the 2000s.<sup>14</sup> It needs to be acknowledged that other factors may have contributed to this increase in growth,



but it proves that Africa is able to support itself should foreign and development aid decline, which the current trend is indicating.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to the prevention and countering of violent extremism, there are disadvantages for civil society organisations (CSOs) in receiving funding from their own governments, international organisations and other states. External funding will most likely be granted to organisations working on the themes that the external donors believe deserve priority. For example, funding towards education is prioritised by countries like France and Germany. Funding towards health and improvement of livelihood is prioritised by the EU and Canada, and the US prioritises both these themes.<sup>16</sup>

Funding received from local governments is often laced with corruption and nepotism. For example, governments will often favour certain organisations over others. A respondent from Kenya explained that their organisation consulted with the government in order to allow for a collaborative approach to their P/CVE project. The government recommended certain communities as the target group of the proposed project. However, the organisation soon realised that the communities were chosen because the government officials' family members resided there. Another respondent admitted that 'there are challenges posed by the politicians who prioritise their political agenda over the needs of their citizens'.<sup>17</sup>

A challenge with receiving external donor funding was the fact that some western countries attract negative

attention within the communities where the activities are being implemented. Local organisations admitted that they would prefer to omit the logo of their donor from their project documentation and marketing material in order to ensure participation by the local communities and avoid potential conflict.<sup>18</sup>

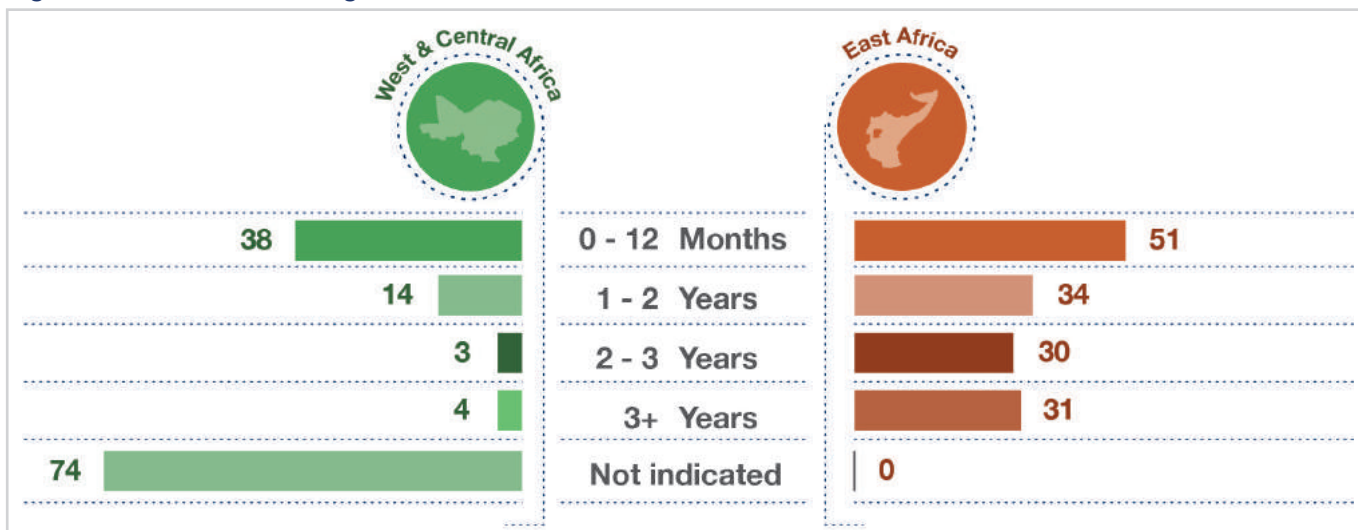
There is no doubt that P/CVE practitioners and organisations in Africa are dependent on external funding. This is not because African states are unable to fund these projects, but because they are not necessarily prioritising the prevention and countering of violent extremism, or because they prefer diverting funding towards strengthening their military.

In the cases where African states do provide funding, they often overlook marginalised groups, and the intent of the funding does not always match the need of the target groups. For example in East Africa, the use of counter-narratives, which are considered essential to P/CVE projects, seems to be a sensitive topic. Respondents were reluctant to discuss this aspect of P/CVE initiatives and admitted that the funding should rather go towards promoting intercommunal and interethnic peace. African states should be encouraged to fund local P/CVE initiatives and understand that if they do not start addressing the structural drivers in their countries, violent extremist groups will continue to drive their propaganda.

### Funding: a short-term solution

Respondents who participated in the two studies were asked about the duration of funding.

Figure 4: Duration of funding



In all three regions, the majority of projects for which the respondents provided an answer are funded for less than a year. There are more projects in East Africa funded for 2+ years than the mere seven projects in West and Central Africa funded for that same duration. Possibly, donor organisations are hesitant to fund projects for longer than one year, as they are uncertain that these projects will make progress towards the prevention and countering of violent extremism, prior to committing to a long-term agreement. Taking into consideration the high amount of funding (see Figure 3), these organisations are expected to implement a multitude of activities that would allow them to use their donor funding sufficiently.

The objective of any P/CVE project should be to ensure the sustainability of their activities. Funding cycles are short in duration, inconsistent and infrequent and local P/CVE organisations should be given the relevant training and skills development opportunities to continue with a project, or at a minimum, to continue some of the activities after the funding cycle ends. Within these short funding cycles, the donor organisations should aim to build the capacity of the organisations and create a culture of dialogue within the local communities, which should encourage the relevant parties to become self-reliant in the prevention and countering of violent extremism. Donor organisations could thus consider supporting the capacity building of local organisations in an attempt to increase the sustainability of their local partners.<sup>19</sup>

## Theory of change

Respondents who participated in the two studies were asked what the theory of change of their project was, as well as what they expected to achieve through their activities.

Considering that P/CVE is such a diverse field, it is widely accepted that the theories of change of these projects will also differ greatly. However, there were some trends that were consistent across all three regions. To illustrate whether P/CVE organisations in the three regions are aiming to achieve relevant objectives, Figure 5 includes a list of drivers discussed in the UNDP's *Journey to Violent Extremism in Africa* report, as well as the factors that make individuals vulnerable to exploitation by violent extremist groups, which was discussed during the data gathering of the two ISS reports.<sup>20</sup>

The most frequently cited theory of change is that increased awareness of violent extremism and its driving factors will enable communities and government agencies to contribute to the P/CVE efforts in the country.<sup>21</sup> This is the reason behind the high number of communication campaigns to sensitise, raise awareness and educate people from communities all over the regions.<sup>22</sup>

Another frequently cited theory of change, especially by respondents in West and Central Africa, and one which is often ignored when discussing the drivers of violent extremism, relates to addressing interethnic, intercommunal and interreligious conflicts. A high number of projects aim at promoting tolerance among varying groups whose conflict is often caused by a decrease in the natural resources of the area. Further tension is caused by religious and/or traditional leaders spreading hate speech about other religious and/or ethnic groups.

One driver that projects didn't address is the ideological reasons why people join extremist groups

Skills training and socio-economic empowerment were also high on the list of theories of change for all three regions. However, P/CVE practitioners questioned the efficacy of these initiatives, taking into consideration the current weak economic state of the countries at issue. Target groups are given opportunities to attend skills training workshops, but end up being further frustrated as they are still unable to find employment opportunities, especially in cases where the job market is mostly weak or non-existent. This emphasises the need for a cooperative approach with the government and a stronger call to end corruption.

There is one driver of violent extremism which is clearly not being addressed in the theories of change: a study of the ideological reasons why people voluntarily join violent extremist groups. This is usually addressed by counter-narratives, but because of the sensitivity around this term, respondents referred to 'awareness raising' that often includes discouraging messages.

Given the extensive role that human rights abuses and injustice play as a push factor of violent extremism, a related theory of change does not present itself as one

Figure 5: Theory of change used for projects by P/CVE organisations in the three regions

<p>Total</p>  	Description of the theory of change	Drivers behind violent extremism in Africa
<p>73 52</p>	<p><b>Increased awareness</b> on what violent extremism is and its driving factors, the better equipped community members and government agencies will be to help P/CVE efforts in the country</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No access to education</li> <li>• Individuals that join voluntarily and agree with the group's ideology</li> </ul>
<p>41 50</p>	<p><b>Skills training and education</b> will improve the access to employment opportunities and livelihood alternatives and will therefore make individuals less vulnerable to recruitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unemployment</li> <li>• No access to education</li> </ul>
<p>52 42</p>	<p><b>Improving the cohesion</b> and trust and tolerance between different communities, as well as between communities and disengaged combatants who need to be reintegrated, the individuals will be more resilient to recruitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socio-political marginalisation</li> <li>• Intercommunal, interethnic and interreligious conflict</li> <li>• Individuals that join voluntarily and agree with the group's ideology</li> </ul>
<p>4 39</p>	<p>By providing traumatised individuals (community members, victims of attacks, and disengaged combatants) with <b>psychosocial support</b> and counselling, they will be less vulnerable to recruitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty and poor quality of life (no access to medical, livelihood, counselling services)</li> </ul>
<p>18 38</p>	<p>Levels of violent incidences and recruitment will decrease when the <b>trust between the government</b> and its <b>citizens</b> improves</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human rights abuses and neglect by the government</li> </ul>
<p>43 38</p>	<p>By <b>building the capacity</b> of CSOs and the government agencies in CVE-related issues, they will have more success in addressing the problem</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human rights abuses and neglect by the government</li> </ul>
<p>33 38</p>	<p><b>Increased participation</b> in peacebuilding and civic duties will reduce violent incidences and reduce vulnerability to recruitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals that join voluntarily and agree with the group's ideology</li> </ul>
<p>32 28</p>	<p><b>Improving quality of life</b> for people (improving sexual health, access to medical care, access to education) will make individuals less vulnerable to recruitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty and poor quality of life (no access to medical, livelihood, counselling services)</li> </ul>
<p>4 0</p>	<p>The <b>management of small arms</b> by the <b>government</b> and <b>organisations</b> will decrease violent activities in the communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intercommunal, interethnic and interreligious conflict</li> </ul>



of the three most mentioned.<sup>23</sup> More organisations in East Africa than in West and Central Africa focus on mending the relationship and building trust between the government and its citizens.

### Monitoring and evaluation can be difficult

Respondents who participated in the two studies were asked how they evaluated their projects and which methods (formal or informal) they used to establish whether their projects were successful.

The methods of evaluation differ significantly in the three regions. Both reports show that the majority of P/CVE practitioners use ‘observations’ as their method of evaluation. According to respondents, observations refer to trends noticed by the project implementers, for example the amount of interethnic friendships made; the decrease in violent incidents; the number of people participating in meetings; and how many young people are taking on leadership roles in their communities. Sixty-one projects in East Africa have M&E plans in place, compared to only 22 projects in West and Central Africa. The East African organisations, which are generally funded for longer, have the time to put M&E plans in place.

Challenges persist regarding the evaluation of P/CVE projects across the regions. These are divided into analytical challenges, which include establishing valid and relevant outcome indicators, and practical

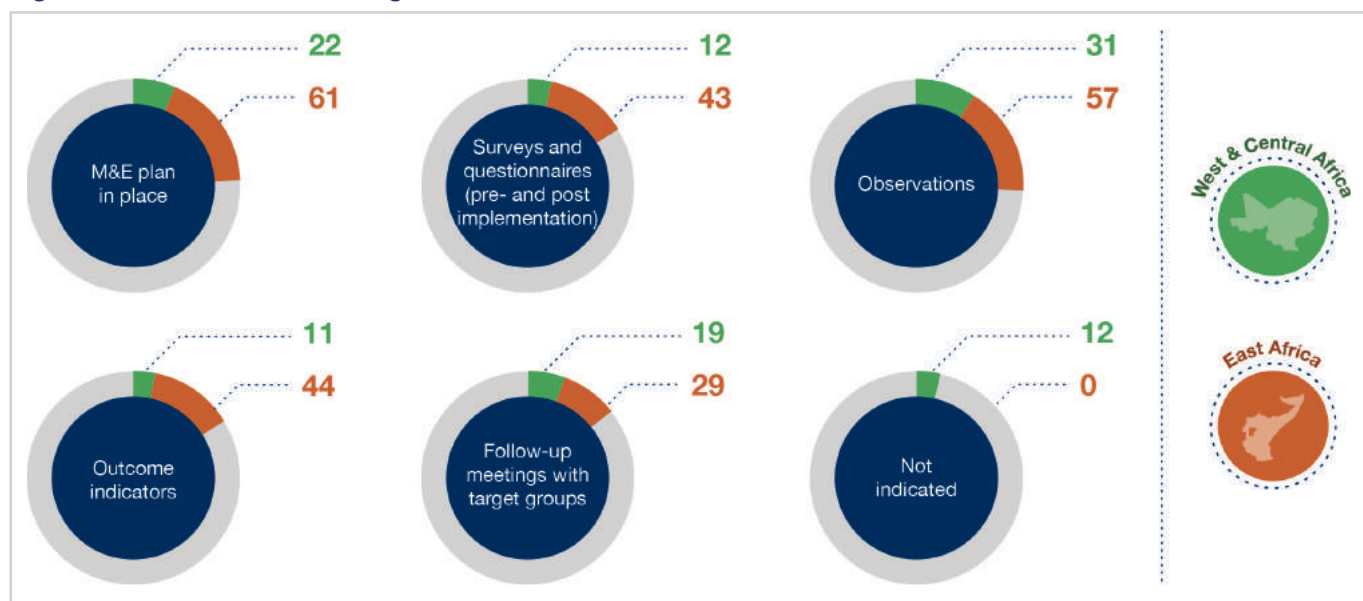
challenges, like the lack of capacity to gather the data. According to a report by the US Institute of Peace regarding the monitoring and evaluation of P/CVE projects, it is difficult to attribute change directly to these activities and projects. It is impossible to evaluate a ‘negative’, which in essence means trying to prove that recruitment would have happened had there not been a P/CVE project.

Considering the complex nature of violent extremism and the variety of factors that contribute to an individual joining the group voluntarily, or factors that contribute to the increased vulnerability to recruitment, how would P/CVE practitioners evaluate each activity and each component of the project?<sup>24</sup>

Donor organisations need to allow projects to evaluate their activities according to local realities

One respondent in East Africa said that ‘The evaluations were difficult to conduct. The duration of the project was also a challenge because the project focused on behavioural changes. These changes are difficult to see evidently in a short space of time (like a year for example is too short). Only had three months with the mentees so that makes it difficult to do an effective behavioural change programme with them.’<sup>25</sup>

Figure 6: Methods of monitoring and evaluation





A respondent working in West Africa said that ‘The duration of the intervention did not provide adequate opportunities to consolidate on the success of the action, especially as it relates to the strengthening of the bond between community members and the security agencies’.<sup>26</sup>

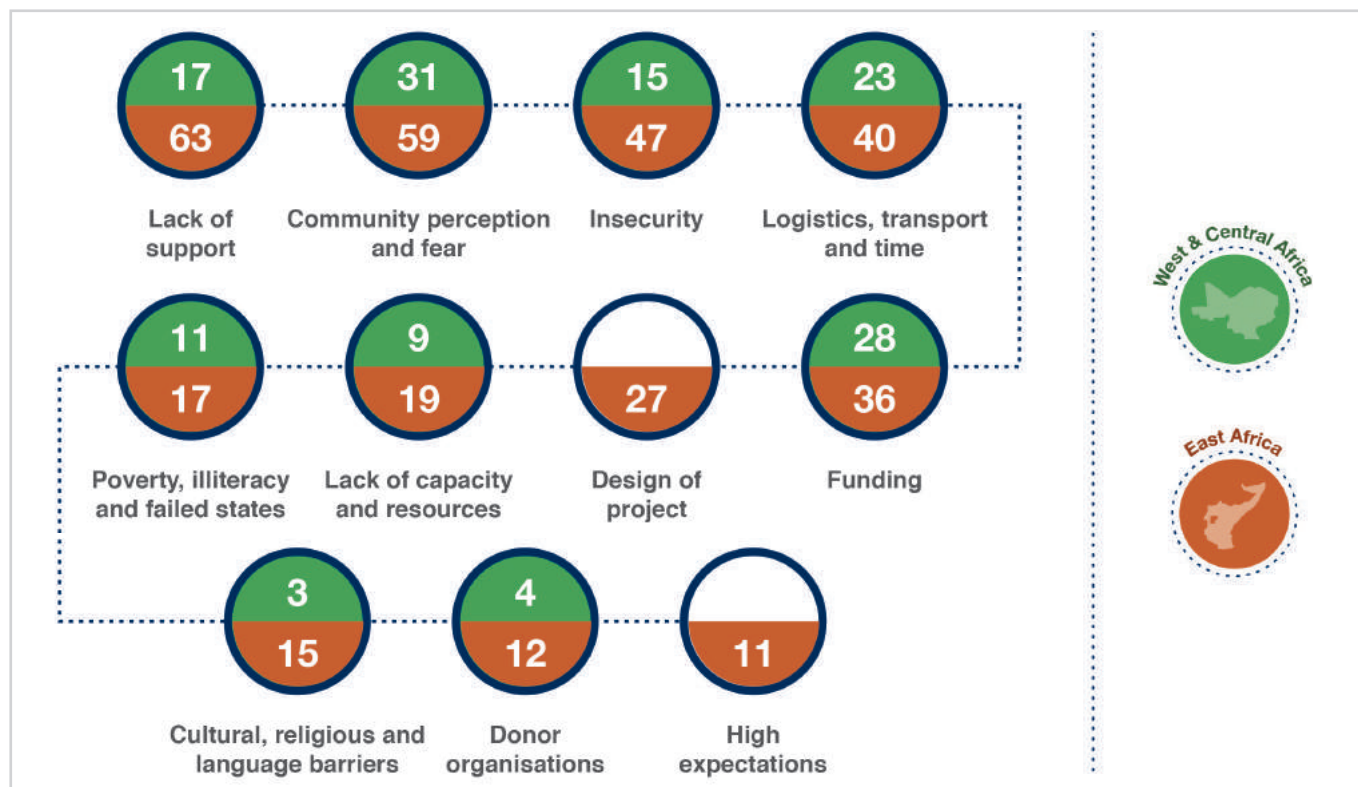
Taking into account the diverse variables of violent extremism, compiling this list of indicators takes time and expertise which local practitioners do not always have. Donor organisations need to take into account the lack of capacity hindering some of these local organisations and allow them to evaluate their activities according to local realities. As long as the practitioners are recording their findings, this should be considered progress made. Because of this lack of capacity, donor organisations should not expect these practitioners to be able to measure something as intricate and complex as behavioural changes without proper training.

Despite not all projects having comprehensive M&E plans in place, it is encouraging that regardless of funding, P/CVE practitioners do have indicators they measure with, as informal as they may be. The data in Figure 6 could inform possible evaluation approaches for organisations with limited capacity.

### Challenges in preventing violent extremism

Respondents who participated in the two studies were asked what challenges they experienced.

Figure 7: Challenges faced during implementation of projects



Challenges experienced by P/CVE organisations in Africa differ across the three regions. East African organisations have listed ‘lack of support’ as their biggest challenge. West and Central African organisations have listed ‘community perception and fear’ as their biggest challenge, and a large number of East African organisations concurred. Two challenges that are unique to East Africa were ‘high expectations’ and ‘design of project’.

High expectations refer to communities believing that once the P/CVE organisation comes to their village, all their problems will be solved and the door will be opened to more livelihood opportunities. However, the reality often sets in when these P/CVE organisations are carrying out training without providing meals for the communities. When asked what the organisations would do if given the opportunity to re-implement the project, the respondents said they would incorporate a livelihood/humanitarian component and provide these beneficiaries with food for the day. Respondents pointed out that beneficiaries would be more incentivised to participate if these additional needs were met.

The ‘design of project’ refers to challenges posed by working with international donor organisations. According to respondents, some donor organisations have strict guidelines regarding the area of work, the target groups and the activities, and respondents are often frustrated because these rarely correlate with the realistic needs of the country and region.

Another challenge that respondents mentioned during the data gathering involved the labelling of projects and the priorities of donor countries and international organisations. This challenge was discussed under ‘community perception and fear’ as well as under ‘donor organisations’. A respondent from West Africa said that ‘people are afraid to speak about Boko Haram and therefore people are afraid to participate in our project activities.’<sup>27</sup>

By labelling a project as ‘P/CVE’ and by working with certain target groups or beneficiaries, the organisations are indirectly labelling them as ‘vulnerable groups’. This stigmatisation could be exploited by both security forces and violent extremist groups. According to some respondents, with regards to communication, some governments, especially those who refuse to ‘negotiate with terrorists’, will prevent international organisations

from delivering P/CVE and humanitarian aid to some communities that are considered vulnerable, or communities in the proximity of violent extremist territories. A respondent said it was ‘hard to penetrate the communities because people believed that any CVE programme was just another attempt to profile them. CVE at the time was perceived in a very negative light by the communities, and the CVE terminology had negative connotations.’<sup>28</sup>

### African states can't rely on external funders to foot the bill for preventing violent extremism

P/CVE may to a greater extent marginalise certain groups and the stigmatisation may make them targets for the security forces and violent extremist groups. Other communities that are not considered ‘vulnerable’ by external donors may become resentful because they are not receiving development and humanitarian aid that often accompanies P/CVE activities. For example, many projects in Kenya are being implemented in Mandera and Wajir where it is believed the most vulnerable communities are located and the most recruitment takes place.<sup>29</sup> However, this is also where the security forces are placed and, according to one respondent, where the most human rights abuses at the hands of the military take place. ‘Even while the project was going on, there were still sporadic cases of revenge killings (by the military). This tended to set back the healing process in the affected communities.’<sup>30</sup>

Considering that the term ‘violent extremism’ usually refers to Islamist extremism, labelling projects as ‘P/CVE’ may be doing more harm than good when these projects are mostly implemented in Muslim communities. One respondent in East Africa said ‘we would reduce our activities in Christian centres, we would focus more on Muslim centres. Christians have life skills through Sunday school. It is easier to recruit people from mosques than churches, therefore we should focus more on Muslim centres.’<sup>31</sup> This statement is supported by the fact that in the UNDP’s *Journey to violent extremism in Africa* report, 92% of the former violent extremists were Muslim whilst only 8% were Christian.<sup>32</sup>

## Funding, evaluation and possibility of harm

Despite the vast amount of data gathered in the two ISS reports, three key findings surfaced that are either often excluded when P/CVE projects on the continent are discussed, or when they are discussed, local realities are not considered. The three key findings that surfaced concern the funding of these projects, the manner in which these projects are evaluated, and how these projects are possibly causing harm to communities.

Firstly, most of the funding for these projects comes from outside of Africa, raising the question of the sustainability of these activities, as well as the political will of the African governments to address the violent extremist threat on their own soil. The majority of funding received from external donors has proven to be short in duration and dependent on the political priorities of external states (see Figure 4). This means that African states will not always be able to rely on external funders to contribute towards the prevention of violent extremism.

Funding provided by African states themselves, however, may not necessarily translate into the sustainability of projects, considering that some states continue to remain the catalysts of their own violence.<sup>33</sup> There continues to be a lack of willingness of these governments to assist CSOs working in this field, which could affect the level of success of activities like education and vocational training. It is a question of how much these initiatives can hope to achieve if governments remain reluctant to acknowledge and/or address some drivers of radicalisation such as economic and social marginalisation on the basis of political or other grounds.

Communities not considered 'vulnerable' may become resentful because they don't receive development and humanitarian aid that often accompanies P/CVE activities

The second finding worth noting is that the monitoring and evaluation undertaken by organisations and practitioners working on P/CVE initiatives is not consistently conducted. The benefits of consistent evaluation of initiatives would be, for example, to improve working methods for maximum impact. Although this M&E inconsistency may be perceived as a shortcoming, one needs to consider the fact that structural drivers, threats and donor organisations vary among communities, countries and continental regions. Under these circumstances, therefore, the theories of change and methods of evaluation cannot be reasonably expected to align.

Organisations often have a limited logistical and financial capacity to conduct an evaluation of their activities, which often results in the international community relying on insufficient information to draw conclusions with regards to both the positive and negative effects of P/CVE projects in Africa.

Throughout the interviews and data gathering for these two reports, as well as during the discussions on project objectives, target groups and challenges

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< 12 months

DURATION OF  
FUNDING FOR MOST  
PROJECTS STUDIED

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faced by the organisations, respondents provided unique insights into the effects of these P/CVE projects. Although these projects are well-intended, some unforeseen negative side effects are sometimes found.

Thus, the third finding is about the possible harm that these P/CVE projects can cause to their target groups. The term ‘violent extremism’ often implies a relation to Islamist extremism, especially when referring to the main violent extremist groups operating in a number of African countries, like al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and the Islamic State in Somalia. The generalisation is understandable, given the strong religious ideologies which these groups use as propaganda.

Local practitioners don't label their work as 'P/CVE' to avoid negative attention from their governments and from violent extremist groups

Therefore, when it comes to designing a project and establishing its target group, many organisations focus on marginalised Muslim communities in these countries. This becomes a double-edged sword, because even though these communities are receiving much-needed assistance, they are also informally being labelled as ‘vulnerable’ and can easily become victims of security forces’ human rights abuses.<sup>34</sup> By targeting marginalised communities, other communities that are not considered ‘vulnerable’ are excluded from projects and become hostile towards the communities that are favoured.

## Recommendations

- States and international organisations donating to groups working towards the prevention and countering of violent extremism should consider that many local practitioners and organisations are choosing not to label their work as ‘P/CVE’ to avoid negative attention from their governments, from violent extremist groups and in order to avoid further marginalising certain ethnic and religious groups.
- In view of the high number of external donor organisations, it is increasingly necessary for a collaborative approach with African states in order to expand the funding base for P/CVE projects. Alternatively, the funding should be labelled as ‘loans’ and not ‘grants’ to encourage accountability and the responsibility of African states to address the threat of violent extremism on their own soil.
- Donors should consider funding projects for longer than 12 months, as a longer time is needed both to allow for the project to be implemented and for monitoring and evaluation to be conducted. Alternatively, donor organisations could consider funding in phases to ensure that organisations deliver on their activities before the next phase of funding is approved. This would help ensure greater accountability on the part of local organisations. It would also allow for



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local organisations to learn from previous phases and adjust their activities accordingly.

- Bearing in mind that skills training, capacity building and education are reflected in P/CVE activities, practitioners should aim to involve governments and the private sector in invigorating the job market, creating job opportunities and considering traineeships in private and public enterprises.
- Challenges persist regarding projects' monitoring and evaluation. Donor organisations should first consider building the capacity of local organisations to conduct M&E and secondly, regardless of the methods of evaluation, ensure they document their findings and share them with other P/CVE practitioners in the region and on the continent.

## Conclusion

The narrative around the prevention and countering of violent extremism remains complex and as much as organisations are hoping to achieve successful results, attention needs to be given to the ways in which P/CVE

on the African continent may not be succeeding. If P/CVE organisations can more accurately record findings on a continuous basis, which would include both successes and failures, the P/CVE community will have much more information regarding the future design of projects.

Donor organisations and African states need to collaborate to expand the funding base for P/CVE projects

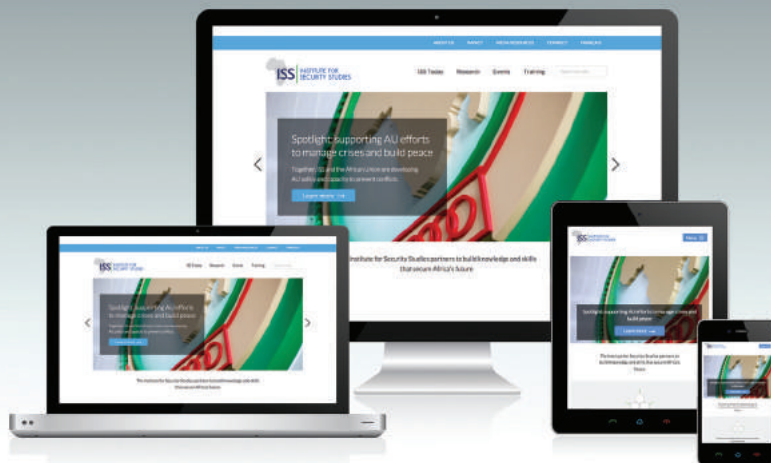
Despite the challenges and ambiguity around P/CVE projects, organisations continue to receive external funding. African states should to be motivated to take responsibility for the growth of their own economies and the well-being of their citizens and should not solely rely on the funding and capacity supplied by external donor organisations. Regarding the possible stigmatisation of certain groups, donor organisations and local P/CVE practitioners should consider changing the name of their P/CVE projects in order to prevent further marginalisation.

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