IGAD IGAD Centre of Excellence for
Preventing and Countering Violent
Extremism (ICEPCVE)

HORN INTERNATIONAL
INSTITUTE FOR
STRATEGIC
STUDIES

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON P/CVE:
Setting the Research Agenda

A Webinar Conference Report

July 2, 2020

🔍 FIVE THEMATIC AREAS

- COVID-19 and trends in terrorism, al Shabab and Islamic State (IS)

- COVID-19 and the changing narratives for radicalization and violent extremism

- COVID-19, gender and radicalization

- Impact of COVID-19 on PCVE interventions

- The role of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in addressing radicalization and violent extremism in the time of COVID-19

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON P/CVE

Organized and Hosted by:

IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (ICEPCVE), and HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies

IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (ICEPCVE)

HORN INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Contents

Acknowledgements

The IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and the HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies would like to relay special gratitude and acknowledge all individuals who made this webinar conference a success. First and foremost, the Webinar Secretariat would like to thank the leadership of both ICEPCVE and the HORN Institute led by Dr. Simon Nyambura, Director ICEPCVE; Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali, Chairman and Co-founder, the HORN Institute; and Dr. Hassan Khannenje, Director, the HORN Institute, in organizing this webinar conference.

Sincere gratitude goes also to all webinar panellists: Yasmin Ahmed, Legal and Sanctions Adviser, Office of the President (Somalia); Dr. Halkano Wario Abdi, Lecturer, Egerton University (Kenya) and Associate Director, Center for Study of Terrorism, Violent Extremism and Radicalization at the HORN Institute (Kenya); Dr. Sophie Komujuni, Lecturer, Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda); Namfuka Zuleika, Senior Program Specialist, Uganda Muslim Development Forum (Uganda) and Senior Research Consultant at Wasafiri Consulting (Kenya); and Prof. Mesenbet Assefa, former dean, Addis Ababa University School of Law (Ethiopia).

The Secretariat would also wish to thank all participants. Indeed, this conference would not have been a success without the participation of various individual researchers, P/CVE practitioners and other participants.

Finally, special gratitude to all staff, both from IGAD and the HORN Institute, for their invaluable support during the planning and hosting of this webinar.

Keynote Speakers and Panellists' Profiles

Webinar Convenors

Dr. Simon Nyambura, Director, ICEPCVE

Dr. Mustafa Yusuf Ali, Chairman, HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies and Secretary General, Global Network of Religions for Children

Dr. Hassan Khannenje, Director, HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies

Moderators

Racheal Mpiriirwe, Head of Civil Society and Community Outreach Unit, ICEPCVE

Joel Otieno, Researcher, HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies

Panellists

Ms. Yasmin Ahmed (Somalia)

Yasmin Ahmed is the legal and sanctions adviser seconded to the National Security Office at the Office of the President (Somalia). She works closely with the National Security Adviser to the President and advises the Office on matters pertaining to the United Nations Arms Embargo on Somalia. She oversees various portfolios and works primarily on security sector reform, the rule of law, and strengthening the national capacity for the governance of weapons and ammunition.

Halkano Abdi Wario, Ph.D. (Kenya)

Dr. Wario is a lecturer in Religious Studies at Egerton University (Kenya). He currently holds the position of the Deputy Director, Planning and Development at the university. He is a Senior Volkswagen Foundation Humanities Research Fellow at the same university with research project that explores the nexus between religious knowledge and counter-radicalization strategies in Muslim-majority urban spaces in Kenya. He is also the Associate Director, Center for Study of Terrorism, Violent Extremism and Radicalization at the HORN Institute. Dr. Wario's research interests span mediatization of religious knowledge, religious transnationalism, religion and spatiality, religion and security, Islamic reformism in Eastern Africa and emerging trends in Islamic law and Muslim politics in Africa and dynamics of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in the Horn of Africa. He has authored and co-authored several research papers and published extensively in peer reviewed journals.

Ms. Nanfuka Zulaika (Uganda)

Ms. Zulaika is the Senior Program Specialist with Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum, and a Research Consultant with Wasafiri Consulting. She has five years of experience working on research projects specific to violent extremism in eastern and central Uganda. She is also a Participatory Action Research Trainer, Mentor, and Principal Research Supervisor of Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum's Youth and Participatory Action Research (PAR) Program from 2016, to date. In this role, she has trained and mentored over 300 young people in conducting Participatory Action Research, and how to conduct an 'inclusive' research which listens to the voices of many people, especially their own voices as youth. Additionally, she has done extensive work in PVE program design and monitoring and evaluation, and currently serves as the National Co-Chair of the Civil Society Coalition Against Violent Extremism, a network of CSOs working in P/CVE in Uganda.

Prof. Mesenbet Assefa, Ph.D. (Ethiopia)

Prof. Mesenbet is an Assistant Professor of law at Addis Ababa University, School of Law, where he has served in various positions including as the Head of School of law; Associate Dean, and as the Director of Makelle University Human Rights Centre. Prof. Mesenbet has extensive experience in international law, comparative constitutional law, criminal law and human rights. Mesenbet has published in numerous international and local journals. He has presented his research findings in numerous Universities including Yale School of Law, London School of Economics, and University of Seville. His research interests include development, security, counterterrorism, human rights, constitutional law and freedom of expression. Currently, he serves as a committee member in the National Legal Reform Council of Ethiopia.

Sophie Komujuni, Ph.D. (Uganda)

Dr. Komujuni is a Lecturer in the Department of Governance, Peace and International Studies at Uganda Martyrs University.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
BLM	Black Lives Matter
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
IEDs	Improvised Explosive Devices
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IS	Islamic State
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
P/CVE	Preventing or Countering Violent Extremism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SSF	Somalia Security Forces
VE	Violent Extremism

Executive Summary

In the Horn of Africa, the pandemic has presented yet another layer to the complex challenges that the region continues to grapple with, including the threat of terrorism and violent extremism

COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world to a near standstill with widespread direct and indirect consequences spanning public health, socio-economic, political, and security dimensions. In the Horn of Africa, the pandemic has presented yet another layer to the complex challenges that the region continues to grapple with, including the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. This webinar was convened for researchers, policy makers and development partners to engage in a discussion and a cultivation of ideas toward understanding the potential impact that COVID-19 might have on P/CVE work. The main objective of the webinar was to set a new research agenda on the impact of COVID-19 and P/CVE. The webinar brought together researchers, policy practitioners and development partners from the region to engage in brainstorming, cultivate ideas and identify new trends in radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism within the context of COVID-19 pandemic. The webinar attracted an expansive audience drawn from all the countries in the region, and whose participation enriched the outcomes of the webinar.

Discussions were structured along five thematic areas, namely: 1) COVID-19 and trends in terrorism, al Shabab and Islamic State (IS), 2) COVID-19 and the changing narratives for radicalization and violent extremism, 3) COVID-19, gender and radicalization, 4) Impact of COVID-19 on PCVE interventions, and 5) The role of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in addressing radicalization and violent extremism in the time of

COVID-19. Each panelist made initial presentations on each thematic area followed by an interactive session of question and answer.

Specific outcomes from each thematic area include:

COVID-19 and Trends in Terrorism; Al Shabab and IS: From the discussions, it was apparent that terrorist organizations are using the pandemic to expand their operations. Major trends in terrorism include:

- A significant reduction in counterterrorism security operations particularly for AMISOM and Somalia Security Forces (SSF) attributed to COVID-related restrictions.

- Reduced incidents of IED attacks mainly attributed to restrictions of movement and operation.

- Use of the pandemic as an opportunity to step up service delivery in form of foods and provision of healthcare services to its adherents and the general public.

- Labelling of the pandemic as a foreign propaganda.

COVID-19 and the Changing Narratives for Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Since the outbreak of the pandemic, a number of changes have been witnessed with regard to extremist narratives. These include:

- At the onset of the pandemic, extremist groups appeared very cautious about the outbreak of COVID-19 and how it might impact on communities. Common narratives associated the virus with a plague from *Allah* that would only affect non-believers.

- As the virus continued to spread and proved unrelenting, most *Jihadi* organizations resorted to the *Islamization* of the health protocols and urged adherents to practice the conventional measures.

- The extremist narratives have evolved from attribution of blame and punishment to much more progressive understandings about the nature of the pandemic.

- Extremist organizations have sought to mimic government measures, exemplified by the setting of a COVID-19 isolation and quarantine facility in Jilib.

COVID-19, Gender and Radicalization: With the outbreak of COVID-19 a number of factors have increased the susceptibility of both women and youth, but also men to radicalization and violent extremism. These include:

- The closure of schools has left many young people, especially of the school going age, more vulnerable, as many of them are idle and spend more time online.

- The economic burden of the pandemic, including rising poverty and unemployment can be exploited by extremist groups to lure youth, women and men to join.

- As initial statistics revealed there has been an increase in domestic and gender-based violence since the outbreak of COVID-19. This can perpetuate extremism as the victims seek support and help.

Impact of COVID-19 on P/CVE Interventions: Just as in all other social development projects, COVID-19 has disrupted the implementation of P/CVE interventions in the Horn of Africa. The impact of COVID-19 can already be witnessed in the following ways:

- Challenges in accessing project areas and beneficiaries due to the restrictions on movement and ban on gatherings following the outbreak of COVID-19.

- COVID-19 has also brought about changes in community needs and expectations, which have deflected attention from peacebuilding and countering violent extremism interventions to more material support in terms of food, cash hand-outs and other in-kind support to communities and beneficiaries.

- Additional costs, such as equipping staff with protective equipment, adjusting to new travel requirements, among others which have strained budgets

COVID-19 and the Role of Government and Non-governmental Stakeholders: Since Covid-19 presents a system-wide challenge, it calls for concerted efforts in addressing both the impact of the pandemic and the influence of radicalization and violent extremism. Particularly, there is need to ensure sustained security vigilance against terrorism, while at the same time, allow P/CVE interventionary measures to continue. Both government and non-government stakeholders can undertake the following roles;

- Enhancing collaboration and strategic partnership with P/CVE actors to stimulate actions and pull together resources.

- Need to integrate CVE related programming and interventionary measures into the ongoing COVID-19 containment measures.

- The need for continued funding and perhaps increasing allocations to P/CVE interventions in necessary. This includes allocating funds for research and implementation of various programs.

Introduction

There is fear that the pandemic might also provide a renewed opportunity for extremists and terrorist organizations to advance terrorist propaganda, scale up recruitment and/or launch attack

Since March 2020, the world has been swamped by a global pandemic caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), first diagnosed in December 2019, in Wuhan, China. The pandemic has presented a complex public health emergency with extreme and multifaceted impact on social, economic, political, and security dimensions, both for states, non-state actors, and individuals. In the greater Horn of Africa region, the pandemic continues to wreak havoc; overstretching government systems and threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions. There is fear that the pandemic might also provide a renewed opportunity for extremists and terrorist organizations to advance terrorist propaganda, scale up recruitment and/or launch attacks. Indeed, incidents of extremist activity, both in virtual spaces and in physical attacks, have been witnessed in the region, with al Shabab and its adherents claiming responsibility. The containment measures imposed by various countries in the region such as lockdowns and movement restrictions, ban on public gatherings, closer of schools, among others, have also disrupted the implementation of P/CVE interventions, leaving many people, especially the youth who spend more of their time online, vulnerable for extremist manipulation and recruitment.

Against this backdrop, and building on the emerging evidence on the nexus between COVID-19 and violent extremism, ICEPCVE and the HORN Institute organised and hosted a webinar bringing on board researchers, development partners, policy practitioners and like-

minded participants in the P/CVE space to discuss and set a new research agenda on the impact of COVID-19 on P/CVE work.

The objectives of the webinar were:

- To bring together researchers, policy practitioners, and development partners in the P/CVE space to discuss the evolving research agenda on P/CVE in the context of COVID-19.

- To cultivate ideas and create a common understanding on the impact of COVID-19 on P/CVE work in the IGAD region.

- To identify existing gaps in research and create a basis for future research in the P/CVE space.

- To create a new research agenda on the impact of COVID-19 on P/CVE.

The proceedings of the webinar centred around five thematic areas, in which new research and data and evidence is critically needed:

COVID-19 and Trends in Terrorism: Al Shabab and Islamic State (IS). This thematic area focused on how terrorist organizations, particularly the al Shabab and IS, are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated crisis moment. Terrorism remains a dominant challenge in the search for sustainable peace and security in the Horn of Africa. Previously, al Shabab has used similar crises such as famine and hunger as a pretext for launching terror attacks and for propagating terrorist propaganda in the region. Going by initial predictions that terrorist organizations across the world would exploit COVID-19 crisis to propagate a terrorist rhetoric and attack their 'enemies', discussions under this thematic area paid a close attention to the operations of the al Shabab and IS during the pandemic with the aim of capturing emerging trends in terrorism.

COVID-19 and the Changing Narratives for Radicalization and Violent Extremism. With the outbreak of COVID-19 in the Horn of Africa, indications that extremists' narratives are changing to exploit the health and political crisis created by the pandemic have been evident. Discussions under this theme sought to create a base for further research by answering such questions as; what new narratives are being used by extremists and terrorist organizations in the context of COVID-19? What is the impact of these narratives on radicalization and violent extremism? How can researchers step into place and engage in informative, action-oriented research to identify new narratives and counter-narratives?

COVID-19, Gender, and Radicalization: The specific impact on vulnerable groups such as youth and women but also men, and the emerging trends. Just like other disasters, COVID-19 pandemic has affected people differently based on their vulnerability. These effects are further textured by various forms of gendered vulnerabilities that make youth, women and men more susceptible to radicalization and violent extremism. Discussions under this thematic area sought to develop a conceptual and analytical nexus at the intersection of COVID-19, gender, and radicalization. The overriding question for discussion was, how does the COVID-19 situation expose various groups of people to radicalization and violent extremism?

Impact of COVID-19 on P/CVE Interventions. The imposition of various COVID-19 protocols, especially, restrictions on movement and travel, ban on all gatherings, closure of schools and a general call to adopt a home-based work policy, brought with it significant interruptions and disruptions to the implementation of various P/CVE interventions in the region. Various organizations including civil society organizations and government agencies working in the P/CVE space have been forced to scale down their operations in compliance with the issued protocols. This has meant reduced access to various projects sites and beneficiaries. Against this backdrop, discussions under this thematic area sought to unravel the nature of impact that COVID-19 is having on P/CVE interventions.

COVID-19 and the Role of Governmental and Non-governmental Stakeholders in Addressing Radicalization and Violent Extremism. The pandemic has shaken every aspects of life with actual and potential effects already starting to show. The impact of the pandemic calls for the adoption of collective action in combating the virus and its effects, especially those that might propel radicalization and violent extremism. Both government and non-governmental organizations have a role to play in addressing influences on radicalization and violent extremism. Discussions under this thematic area sought to chart out the opportunities that various stakeholders have in addressing radicalization and violent extremism in the context of COVID-19.

The impact of the pandemic calls for the adoption of collective action in combating the virus and its effects, especially those that might propel radicalization and violent extremism

Discussions and Outcomes

Opening Remarks

Dr. Simon Nyambura underscored the significant role that researchers have to play in creating and deepening knowledge and understanding on the trends, tactics and different strategies that extremist groups are using to cope and exploit the pandemic

The webinar began with opening remarks from Dr. Simon Nyambura, Director, ICEPCVE, and Dr. Mustafa Yusuf Ali, Secretary General, Global Network of Religions for Children and Chairman and Co-Founder, the HORN Institute. The speakers extended their warm welcome to all participants and reiterated the purpose of the webinar, its timeliness and the need for researchers to engage in continuing policy-oriented research as a way of identifying best practices for enhancing P/CVE work in the region. Dr. Simon Nyambura underscored the significant role that researchers have to play in creating and deepening knowledge and understanding on the trends, tactics and different strategies that extremist groups are using to cope and exploit the pandemic. He challenged researchers to understand the specific changes in extremist behavior, recruitment schemes, and narratives that take on a COVID-19 slant as a rapid action for informing policy formulation and implementation.

On his part, Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali noted that extremist groups across the world, and al Shabab in particular, had started to organize themselves around COVID-19 – offering health services and propagating new narratives to incite and radicalize the masses – given the surging trend in terrorist activity especially in Somalia. He underscored the efficacy of research as a tool for revitalizing knowledge and creating consensus in policymaking on the best way to tackle radicalization into violent extremism and terrorism at the community and national level. Looking at the linkages between terrorism, racism and COVID-19, he noted that

Discussions and Plenary

it is important for researchers to start thinking and interrogating the linking nodes that might exist between terrorism and racism given the recent spike in anti-racial protests dubbed as the Black Lives Matter (BLM), that has gained traction across the world. He challenged researchers to occupy their rightful place in the policy making process, particularly, by leading policy discussions regarding the evolving nature of terrorism and violent extremism in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

The opening remarks ushered the main discussions which were structured along thematic areas. The discussions entailed initial presentations from each panelist, followed by an interactive plenary session, whereby the audience were invited to make comments and ask questions. The plenary session provided a unique opportunity to for the audience to contribute to the discussions and catalyse the outcomes of the webinar.

The discussions and main outcomes of the webinar are presented in the following sections:

1. COVID-19 and Trends in Terrorism; Al Shabab and Islamic States.

Yasmin Ahmed noted that at the outbreak of the pandemic, government and security agencies in Somalia had flagged the potential and possibility of a new wave of terrorism to emerge, fuelled by terrorists seeking to ramp up both rhetorical and physical attacks against government authorities and security agencies. Overtime, the al Shabab terrorist group has transformed itself from a militia to an agile force that frequently utilizes new tactics, techniques and procedures of operation and attack with great flexibility. Predominantly, these tactics include use of improvised explosive devises (IEDs) to attack both military and civilian targets. In light of COVID-19, however, she noted that incidences of IED attacks have significantly reduced.

Overtime, the al Shabab terrorist group has transformed itself from a militia to an agile force ...

Major trends in terrorism during the pandemic have included:

- A significant reduction in counterterrorism security operations particularly for AMISOM and Somalia Security Forces (SSF) due to restrictions on movement in the wake of COVID-19.

- Reduced incidents of IED attacks mainly attributed to by restrictions movement and operation.

- Two major incidents of al Shabab attack in Barawe Airport and in Puntland, albeit with low number of casualties.

- Al Shabab initially reacted to the outbreak of COVID-19 as a foreign propaganda that was being spread by 'enemies' who have invaded Somalia. The rhetoric is consistent with the broader al Qaeda communication delivered in the statement 'The Way of the Belly of the Whale: Commandments and Disclosures about the Coronavirus Pandemic', that described the pandemic as a divine punishment.

- The Islamic State, on the other hand, adapted speedily to the deepening health crisis and managed to turn the plight of the pandemic into an opportunity. This can be substantiated by the various serious attacks in various countries such as Mali. However, there has been no changes in the operations of the group in Somalia, especially during the pandemic.

- Al Shabab has also used the pandemic as an opportunity to step up service delivery in form of foods and provision of healthcare services to its adherents and the general public, especially in areas where state presence is weak and contested. Reportedly, the al Shabab set up a COVID-19 treatment centre in Jilib, 380 kilometres south of Mogadishu. This is in a bid to expand their terrorists' footprint. Historically, the al Shabab has spread terrorist propaganda by exploiting situations of drought and famine to supply food and other essentials to needy families.

- The Federal Government of Somalia, on its part is said to have moved into action to disrupt the operations of the al Shabab, ensuring that the terror group does not gain access to critical resources, such as food, money and weapons. In this vein, the government has activated community outreach programs, working with religious leaders and other community gatekeepers to debunk the terrorist propaganda, and create community awareness on outbreak and control of COVID-19. The government has also deployed medical teams to conduct community testing and disseminate information on the prevention of COVID-19.

> Al Shabab has also used the pandemic as an opportunity to step up service delivery in form of foods and provision of healthcare services to its adherents and the general public ...

2. COVID-19 and the Changing Narratives for Radicalization and Violent Extremism

Dr. Halkano Wario noted that there were noticeable changes in the narratives used by extremist groups mainly tailored along the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic. While the imposition of COVID-19 containment and mitigation measures meant limited travel and movement within and across country borders, the extremists have turned to online spaces especially, social media platforms to spread extremist narratives and related propaganda to at risk communities and population segments. He stressed, however, less is actually known how narratives for radicalization and violent extremism are spread, and that for researchers to monitor the circulation of extremist *jihadi* narratives, there is need to first understand, what narratives really are, how they are created, their audiences, mediums of production and circulation, and finally function do they serve. In addition, he stressed that understanding jihadi narratives in the time of COVID-19 is extremely important for P/CVE practitioners because only by understanding how extremist narratives emerge can they better design and implement counter narratives.

He noted that COVID-19 poses two critical threats for Eastern Africa countries, namely, on security and health dimensions. However, in terms of P/CVE, there is need to understand how the pandemic is affecting communities living in locations of high risk for radicalization and violent extremism (VE) recruitment, especially with the challenges of hand washing, availability and affordability of face masks, as well as the socio-economic impact created by COVID-19.

Dr. Wario noted that extremist narratives tend to take two dimensions: (i) ideological and, (ii) territorial. While ideological-leaning narratives might not have tremendous impact as far as COVID-19 is concerned, territorial-leaning narratives might exacerbate the impact of COVID-19 as communities in the regions of capture will downplay the impact of COVID-19.

> ... there is need to first understand, what narratives really are, how they are created, their audiences, mediums of production and circulation, and finally function do they serve

Particularly, the following changes in extremist narratives have been witnessed:

- At the onset of the pandemic, extremist groups appeared very cautious about the outbreak of COVID-19 and how it might impact on communities. Common narratives associated the virus

with a plague from Allah that would only affect non-believers. However, as the virus continued to spread, dominant jihadi organizations resorted to the 'Islamization' of health protocols calling on adherents to practice the conventional measures.

- The extremist narratives have evolved from the attribution of blame and punishment to much more progressive understanding that the virus can be controlled within the areas of control.

- The al Shabab sought to mimic government response to the virus, mainly, by establishing a health and quarantine facility in Jilib.

3. COVID-19, Gender and Radicalization: The specific impact on vulnerable groups such as youth and women but also men, and the emerging trends.

Dr. Sophie, noted that in Africa the pandemic has amplified a number of challenges that special groups such as youth and women have been facing for a long time, including perennial unemployment, social protection and poverty. Various containment measures put in place by governments, have compounded the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism such as historical injustices, uptick in insecurity and a general climate of instability, mistrust and lack of confidence in the democratic institutions. These realities have inadvertently exposed various groups to radicalization, especially the youth and women, who in most cases are choice targets for radicalizations and VE.

Although the specific impact of COVID-19 on various groups as far as VE is concerned is still premature to delineate, it became apparent from the discussions that COVID-19 has significant potential to lay significant impact on various groups, and thus make them particularly vulnerable to radical manipulation and recruitment by extremist groups. Some of the factors include;

- Since nearly all schools and universities in the region have been closed, many young people, especially of school going age, have been left idle and disengaged, which makes them an easy target for radicalization and VE. Further, with the infiltration of technology many young people now spend most of their time on online spaces where they can easy access radical messaging and subscribed to radical content. These makes them more susceptible to radical indoctrination and recruitment into VE.

- As COVID-19 has disrupted the lives and livelihoods of millions of people, causing under- or unemployment, thrashing economic activities and undermining the social fabric of societies, extremist organizations have a new-found opportunity to up-scale radicalization targeting

vulnerable youth, women and men, who are lure for material gain and provision of food and medical needs.

- COVID-19 has also disrupted related CVE operations due to restrictions on travel and social distancing rules.

- There is also an element of diminishing resources as donor-institutions are diverting funding toward responding to the immediate challenges of the pandemic.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has increased incidences of domestic and gender violence with most victims being women. This also ties to the huge economic burden that families have to undergo and which, in most cases, is borne by women. As such, it follows that violent groups, might take advantage of the pandemic to exploit the prevailing social inequalities and attract women with promises of financial support and protection.

Taking consideration of the above realities P/CVE researchers and policy makers should step in place to investigate and understand with adequate scientific backing, the nature of impact that the ongoing pandemic will have on various groups. Ultimately, the major question is how P/CVE interventions can be integrated into the COVID-19 containment measures.

4. Impact of COVID-19 on PCVE Interventions

Ms. Nanfuka Zulaika stressed the need for researchers to document and cultivate new knowledge on the specific impacts that COVID-19 will have on P/CVE interventions as a mechanism for mainstreaming policy decisions and resource allocation in supporting P/CVE work. She noted that the pandemic has had and continues to have a greater toll on the majority poor, who lack access to clean water, are unable to practice social or physical distancing measures and whose income streams have been utterly disrupted.

However, the pandemic is also affecting P/CVE interventions in many significant ways;

- Many P/CVE organizations are grappling with challenges in accessing project areas and beneficiaries due to the restrictions on movement and ban on gatherings following the outbreak of COVID-19.

- NGOs and CSOs working on various interventions including on P/CVE were not enlisted as essential service providers, which implicated their operations and activities. Most NGOs have been unable to deploy staff, respond to emergencies and carry out their activities as usual.

- Communications on P/CVE have also been affected by the pandemic, whereby COVID-19 related information sharing has taken centre-stage and thus have crowded out all other essential communication on P/CVE matters.

- COVID-19 has also brought about changes in community needs and expectations, which have deflected attention from peacebuilding and countering violent extremism interventions to more material support in terms of food, cash hand-outs and other in-kind support to communities and beneficiaries.

- P/CVE interventions, in places in which they have been allowed to continue, have had to cater for extra costs, such as equipping staff with protective equipment, adjusting to new travel requirements, among others which have strained budgets.

- Other measures like imposed curfews have reduced the contact time with beneficiaries.

5. COVID-19 and the Role of Governmental and Non-governmental Stakeholders in Addressing Radicalization and Violent Extremism.

COVID-19 has exposed significant governance and administrative weakness in the way interventions have been applied. Most governments in the region have also reacted to the pandemic in a securitized manner; deploying security forces to monitor and enforce COVID-19 related rules, thus leaving terrorists and violent extremist groups unchecked. However, in the light of the prevailing circumstances, Prof. Mesenbet, the lead discussant on this thematic area, stressed the need for sustained security vigilance against terrorism.

In terms of the role of government and non-governmental stakeholders, several areas of action and further research were identified as follows;

- Need to enhance collaboration and strategic partnerships with CVE actors including NGOs and CSOs to stimulate action and pull together available resources to combat both the pandemic and violent extremism in the region. In addition, CSOs need to have a shared ownership of CVE intervention and step into action to avert potential radicalization into violent extremism.

- Need to integrate CVE related programming and interventionary measures into the ongoing COVID-19 containment measures. This is essential in avoiding compartmentalization of interventions and using available resources to make the greatest impact.

- The need for continued funding and perhaps increasing allocations to P/CVE interventions in necessary, in light of the mounting numbers of people who are susceptible to radicalization and violent extremism.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Hassan Khannenje duly appreciated all participants for choosing to be part of the discussions. In his statement, Dr. Khannenje echoed the sentiments that threat of violent extremism is real and immediate and urged all actors, especially the research community, to swing into action and create knowledge necessary to inform policy and action. It was evident from the presentations that the pandemic presented a real threat as far as radicalization and violent extremism is concerned, with a possibility to witness a rise in violent extremism. He noted that the discussions served as a foundation for many other successive discussions among researchers who may be called upon to share ideas, and advise on best practices. He concluded by calling upon researchers to take it upon themselves to conduct research that are solution-driven and supported by unique contextual analysis of the Horn region.

… the pandemic presented a real threat as far as radicalization and violent extremism is concerned, with a possibility to witness a rise in violent extremism

Conclusion and Way Forward

From the proceedings of the webinar, it is clear that COVID-19 pandemic is affecting P/CVE interventions in the region, whether in the way it has presented new opportunities for terrorist organizations and violent extremist groups to exploit the crisis for attack and manipulation or in the manner it has interrupted the ongoing P/CVE work in the region. However, research and data are lacking to back the above assumption. Bringing researchers together to discuss the threat of the pandemic in relation to P/CVE, is a first step towards stimulating the search for evidence into understanding the nature of impact, actual and potential, that COVID-19 pandemic is having on P/CVE and on regional peace and security in the Horn.

Throughout the discussion and deliberations in the webinar, a number of trends and patterns of radicalization, violent extremism emerged. These were taken as key points for discussion and thus are meant to inform further inquiry, research, and analysis. Particularly, researchers both in academic and policy practice spaces are encouraged to engage in further research to generate concrete findings for evidence-based policy making. The convening partners, ICEPCVE and HORN Institute, agreed to put out a call for papers to invite researchers to participate in an upcoming IGAD research conference.

Way Forward

The following action points were suggested:

1. That a concrete research agenda on the impact of COVID-19 on PCVE be formulated from the outcomes of this webinar.

2. That the convening partners to organize a larger conference as follow-up to this webinar.

3. That in line with the idea of planning a larger conference, a 'call for papers' be sent out inviting researchers and policy practitioners to submit research abstracts and full papers to be featured in the conference.

4. That both ICEPCVE and the HORN institute, to constitute a research consortium to undertake the planning of a larger conference.