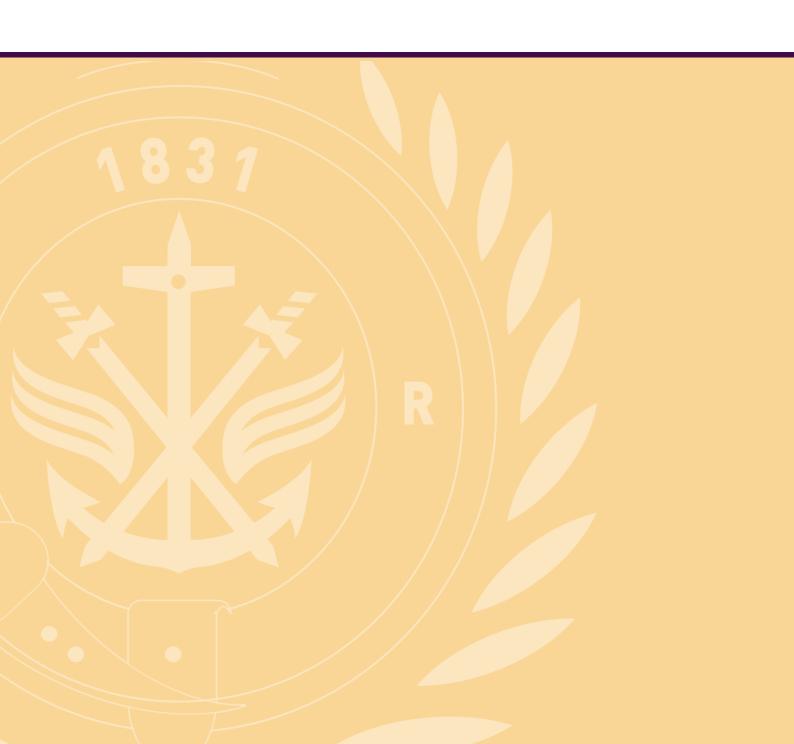EMERGING INSIGHTS

A Template for the Global South?
Understanding the Promises and Pitfalls of Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kenya has made significant progress in preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE), and provides valuable findings for policymakers and practitioners, especially in the Global South.

As part of the Prevention Project, a global assessment of P/CVE activity commissioned by the Norwegian government, a RUSI research team conducted fieldwork in 2019 that sought to capture a snapshot of Kenya's prevention space and collect insights from relevant stakeholders. It revealed clear dividends from both the coordination and design of P/CVE activities from Kenya's National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (NSCVE)[1] and subnational offshoots, including regular County Action Plans and Rapid County Action Plans (CAPs/RCAPs). Aligning with international good practice, these frameworks help streamline external support and encourage greater contextual nuance by devolving decision-making processes to subnational actors. They also contribute to a mutually beneficial feedback loop, with innovative components from the county level reintegrating into the national strategy.

However, there are financial dependencies and shortfalls that constrain genuine local ownership and definition of the P/CVE agenda, reducing the consultative process in some areas to more of a perfunctory exercise or unfunded 'wish list'. This issue is particularly evident with fast-tracked RCAPs, which extend and expedite strategic coverage at the expense of practical utility. Kenya also needs to reconcile the competing trends of centralisation and localisation. Security policy, provision and practice, for instance, are still dictated by national authorities but contradict or diminish the efficacy of county-led prevention work. Even encouraging outcomes from neighbourhood 'police cafés' – dialogue forums between communities and law enforcement to improve trust – are contingent on buy-in from central government.

Interviewees also emphasised the benefits of systematic interventions that deploy layers of programming concurrently rather than insulated or piecemeal projects addressing individual recruitment factors. This requires a drastic increase in collaboration, especially between P/CVE and broader development efforts, to satisfy expectations and resolve the wider conflict systems perpetuating violent extremism. Incongruences in the logic, priorities and mechanics between prevention and more orthodox peacebuilding work raise challenges, but without synergy and scale, instances of local traction displayed by, for example, mentorship schemes may be short-lived. The breadth and resources of the 'whole of society' are likewise necessary to sustain such approaches, although its scope in the Kenyan context was unclear. Programmes were often described as reductive, overlooking a

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1.   Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Kenya, 'President Kenyatta Launches Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism', September 2016, <https://www.mfa.go.ke/?p=744>, accessed 4 September 2020.

slate of informal authority structures, social networks and influencers that could help bolster interventions. Integrating these unconventional voices and ensuring responsibility is not simply outsourced to civil society organisations (or self-ascribed gatekeepers) or offloaded onto unprepared, unsupported parents, given the importance of 'family' in Kenya's P/CVE space, is therefore essential.

Clearly, Kenya has made progress both strategically and programmatically, but continues to face procedural, operational and contextual challenges that need to be resolved. Accounting for national and local peculiarities, it is nevertheless important for stakeholders working in the wider prevention field to draw on this experience and learn from the cross-cutting lessons it offers.

INTRODUCTION

Announcing Kenya's National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (NSCVE) in 2016, President Uhuru Kenyatta declared that 'together, in coordinated fashion, we must … drain the swamp of violent extremism'.[2] Such frameworks have received criticism for derivative approaches,[3] inconclusive evidence[4] and gesture politics, but the Kenyan experience appears unusual in how far it has advanced these ideas: emerging as something of a 'donor darling' in 'P/CVE World' and a possible template for prevention work across the Global South.

As part of the Prevention Project, a RUSI research team conducted fieldwork to capture a snapshot of the issues and dynamics shaping Kenya's prevention space. This paper is not a comprehensive evaluation but a brief scoping of progress, limitations and insights from local stakeholders to inform a series of nationally focused prescriptions with potential relevance to the wider P/CVE field.

The paper draws on 23 semi-structured, key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted in Nairobi and Mombasa during January and February 2019. These included national and county government officials, civil society organisations (CSOs), P/CVE programmers, faith-based groups, international NGOs and foreign embassies. Participants were selected based on their experience with prevention initiatives, an approach supplemented by a snowballing process to identify additional interviewees in-country. KIIs were followed by three focus group discussions with religious authorities (Christian and Muslim), female community representatives and youth activists, each comprising

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2.   *Ibid.*

3.   Eric Rosand et al., 'A Roadmap to Progress: The State of the Global P/CVE Agenda', Prevention Project and RUSI, September 2018, p. 9.

4.   Sebastien Feve and David Dews, 'National Strategies to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism: An Independent Review', Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2019, p. 35.

around 10 members to offer grassroot perceptions of P/CVE. All interview data was anonymised to encourage open discussion.

There were, of course, methodological limitations. Fieldwork was only conducted across two (albeit major) sites and, due to ethical and logistical constraints, researchers were generally unable to directly access programme beneficiaries. Much of the resulting analysis is therefore framed by the perspectives of P/CVE suppliers rather than consumers. Some stakeholders such as religious or community leaders blur these boundaries (due to their involvement in capacity-building schemes) but specific 'at-risk' individuals participating in prevention projects were not included. It is also important to acknowledge some findings may now have changed due to the impact associated with the coronavirus pandemic.

The paper briefly examines the dynamics of violent extremism in Kenya before outlining the country's strategic approach, its limitations and important programmatic issues raised by interviewees, which feed into a series of concluding recommendations.

A CHALLENGING CONTEXT

Kenya's contemporary security concerns are largely defined by its role as a 'frontline' state grappling with the spillover from conflict in neighbouring Somalia,[5] primarily orchestrated by Al-Shabaab, a Salafi-jihadist insurgency that emerged from the fringes of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts Union in 2006, and evolved into a flourishing 'Islamist' proto-state replete with governance systems and public services.[6] Suffering a territorial decline in 2011 and 2012 following external interventions and an ongoing African Union-led peace-enforcement mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Al-Shabaab nevertheless remains a resilient force capable of launching sophisticated military operations.[7] Incursions into Jubbaland by Kenyan Defence Forces in 2011[8] and Al-Shabaab's formal rebranding as an Al-Qa'ida franchise in 2012 have also accelerated the group's 'regionalisation', leading to an increase in raids across the Kenyan border and a series of high-profile terror attacks, including Westgate (2013), Mpeketoni (2014), Garissa (2015), the dusitD2 complex (2019) and an assault on a joint US–Kenyan military base in Lamu (2020). While Al-Shabaab continues to be a Somali-centric movement in both geographic scope and composition, it has also assumed Kenyan inflections over time, consolidating local fundraising channels, recruitment networks

5.   Andrews Atta-Asamoah, 'The Nature and Drivers of Insecurity in Kenya', East Africa Report, Institute for Security Studies, Issue 2, April 2015.

6.   Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group* (London: Hurst, 2016).

7.   Christopher Anzalone, 'The Resilience of Al-Shabaab', *CTC Sentinel* (Vol. 9, No. 4, 2016).

8.   Dubbed 'Operation *Linda Nchi*', which means 'Protect the Country' in Swahili.

and links with affiliates such as Al-Hijra,[9] an outfit that eventually folded into a new military unit called 'Jaysh Ayman'.[10]

Under these circumstances, recruitment trends within Kenya are well documented,[11] although the underlying motivations appear fluid and highly contextualised. Structural issues, individual incentives and enabling dynamics[12] all play out concurrently at different levels, from the macro to the meso and micro, creating separate combinations across and within communities and between individuals.[13] Socioeconomic and political grievances, horizontal inequalities, the instrumentalisation of ethnicity, corruption, the marginalisation of Muslims, poverty and state repression are prominent drivers, but they manifest in diverse ways and enjoy varying currency across the disparate areas of Kenya.[14] CSOs and community representatives also cited the role of 'broken families' in exposing children to malign influences, or parents actively encouraging Al-Shabaab membership to their children to receive supplementary income[15] – findings similar to socialisation processes identified by Anneli Botha.[16] Notably, both criminality and violence were often blamed on narcotics and 'drug barons' in Mombasa, although the veracity of this remains unclear.[17] In historical 'hotspots' such as the northern borderlands, coastal counties and Nairobi's slums, many young people face severe deprivation, with bleak employment prospects, little access to services and frustration with the exclusionary politics practised by the Kenyan state, whether real or perceived.[18] Al-Shabaab's recruiters, fixers and charismatic preachers have proved adept at exploiting

Recruitment trends within Kenya are well documented, although the underlying motivations appear fluid and highly contextualised

9. Intergovernmental Authority on Development and Sahan Foundation, 'Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat', March 2016.

10. Ngala Chome, *Violent Extremism and Clan Dynamics in Kenya* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2016).

11. See Peter Romaniuk et al., 'What Drives Violent Extremism in East Africa and How Should Development Actors Respond?', *African Security* (Vol. 11, No. 2, 2018), pp. 160–80.

12. See James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation', *Whitehall Report*, 2-16 (June 2016).

13. UN Development Programme (UNDP), 'Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment', 2017.

14. Romaniuk et al., 'What Drives Violent Extremism in East Africa and How Should Development Actors Respond?'; Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci, 'The Jihad in Kenya: Understanding Al-Shabaab Recruitment and Terrorist Activity Inside Kenya – In Their Own Words', *African Security* (Vol. 12, No. 1, 2019), pp. 3–61.

15. Author interview with CSO representative and focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.

16. Anneli Botha, 'Political Socialization and Terrorist Radicalization Among Individuals Who Joined Al-Shabaab in Kenya', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (Vol. 37, No. 11, 2014), pp. 895–919.

17. Focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.

18. Author interview with CSO representatives, Mombasa, February 2019; author interview with P/CVE practitioner, Nairobi, February 2019.

these milieus: offering financial enticements and social welfare, capturing neighbourhood mosques, broadcasting messages[19] or – where necessary – coercing, blackmailing and abducting.[20]

These dynamics regularly intersect with or accentuate other conflicts such as electoral violence, mass displacement, irredentist and secessionist militancy,[21] nomadic and pastoral cleavages, and land appropriation.[22] While the threat from Al-Shabaab brings its own nuances and dynamics, it is a feature of a much wider violent ecosystem,[23] extending P/CVE's prospective scope and necessitating a more organised approach to addressing issues of insecurity.

STRATEGIES AND PLANS

As a Western ally, a fragile state and a long-time recipient of counterterrorism funding, it is perhaps unsurprising that Kenya is considered a favourable candidate for P/CVE investment. Nevertheless, the country has shown remarkable progress in developing innovative, endogenous strategies – the NSCVE and its sub-national offshoots – to better coordinate and manage prevention work.[24] A comparatively unusual accomplishment, it offers an important case study of processes repeatedly cast as 'good practice' in the P/CVE space.

In a departure from Kenya's Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012) and the Security Laws Amendment Act (2014), the NSCVE prescribes a suite of non-coercive, development-oriented measures to counter violent extremism.[25] Led by the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), its cascading framework reflects the increasingly decentralised complexion of Kenyan politics; devolving both authority and autonomy to county governments in pursuit of a development-oriented 'whole-of-society' approach.[26] While security responsibilities remain largely confined to the national level, the design and implementation of prevention activities is delegated through a series of complementary CAPs to address local

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19. Author interviews with CSO and international NGO representatives, Nairobi and Mombasa, February 2019.
20. Fathima A Badurdeen, 'Women and Recruitment in the Al-Shabaab Network: Stories of Women Being Recruited by Women Recruiters in the Coastal Region of Kenya', *African Review* (Vol. 45, No. 1, 2018), pp. 19–48.
21. Including insurrections led by the Mombasa Republican Council.
22. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.
23. Author interview with P/CVE practitioner, Nairobi, January 2019.
24. Author interview with international expert, Nairobi, January 2019.
25. Ben Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism: Lessons from Kenya', Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, January 2020; UNDP, 'Journey to Extremism in Africa'.
26. Author interviews with international NGO representative and international donor, Nairobi, January 2019.

needs, interests and specifics.[27] This seems to set Kenya apart from many other efforts in the Global South, producing a process that not only satisfies recommendations from the UN's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, but recognises the eclectic dynamics and drivers conditioning terrorism across different contexts.[28] The social norms, politics, cultural fabric and historical experience of Mombasa and coastal cities, for instance, diverge from that of Nairobi, the Rift Valley or the North-Eastern peripheries, creating discrete – albeit sometimes overlapping – patterns of insecurity that require different responses. These plans facilitate a more flexible set of hyper-local interventions that, in theory, cater to the assorted nuances of recipient communities and incentivise inclusivity and public buy-in through County Engagement Forums (CEFs).[29]

Described as 'incubators where initiative is born',[30] such platforms draw on the NCTC's guidance while allowing civil society organisations, youth groups, community representatives and private companies to partner with state authorities in the customisation, coordination and monitoring of P/CVE programming.[31] Although an initial draft preceded the NSCVE, the Mombasa County Action Plan (MCAP) (alongside the first CAP rolled out in Kwale) is often considered a template in this respect: grassroot practitioners, social networks, CSOs and community leaders lent insights into 'what [was] happening on the ground',[32] feeding into 12 pillars that eventually drew on the NSCVE but accommodated local realities. Collaboration is, in itself, indicative of progress: improving state–community links,[33] fostering greater pluralism, co-creativity[34] and mitigating latent authoritarian tendencies that have historically framed some aspects of Kenya's public sphere. Certain parties involved in the process were previously blacklisted by the government, suggesting a growing appreciation of the credibility and knowledge these CSOs offer.[35] While some of the MCAP's content is not necessarily feasible in the short to medium term, due in large part to financial constraints, there is nevertheless value in its aspiration and the dialogue it motivates.[36] The 'open door policy' adopted by the governor's office in Mombasa, for example, has seen 'significant success in building trust and stronger community relations'.[37] Likewise, domestic and international practitioners acknowledge opportunities for low-cost technical and procedural improvements in P/

27. This initially included Kwale, Mombasa, Lamu and Kilifi.
28. Author interview with international donor, Nairobi, January 2019; Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.
29. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.
30. Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.
31. Author interviews with CSO representative, international NGO representative and P/CVE practitioner, Mombasa and Nairobi, February 2019.
32. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.
33. Author interview with international donor, Nairobi, January 2019.
34. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.
35. Author interview with international donor, Nairobi, January 2019.
36. Author interview with CSO representative, Nairobi, January 2019.
37. Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism', p. 34.

CVE work,[38] from encouraging synchronicity through multi-sectoral steering committees like the CEF, to monthly monitoring updates and better strategic planning.[39]

Furthermore, both the NSCVE and its county variants provide a cohesive architecture for donors to navigate, helping to map existing interventions and streamline international support.[40] Importantly, they also contribute to a mutually beneficial feedback loop within Kenya.[41] Creative components at the subnational level like the MCAP's gender pillar, which itself drew on a local CSO-led 'Coast Women CVE Charter', are reintegrated into the national strategy,[42] and an upcoming objectives and key results framework should strengthen vertical integration alongside monitoring and evaluation.[43] Consequently, these function as 'living' documents, subject to continual revision and adaptation, which help strengthen P/CVE coverage, collate good practice and lessons learned, and cater to Kenya's evolving threat landscape.

This apparent embrace of a P/CVE architecture receptive to both external support and local agency, and its implementation of 'good practice' advocated by the UN and international donors, is therefore promising and offers a valuable case study for understanding how preventive efforts can be better coordinated to nurture synergies between national and sub-nationally owned frameworks.

Those interviewed did, however, also identify constraints and problems that need to be navigated. These limitations are explored below.

LIMITATIONS

Several respondents questioned the conceptual relevance of P/CVE in Kenya, casting the NSCVE more as an aesthetic concession to donors rather than essential policymaking.[44] This argument does not dismiss the threat of violent extremism but suggests prevention may not be a priority at the street level: communities were often preoccupied with more salient, day-to-day concerns associated with poverty and widespread structural inequalities.[45] Similarly, there appears to be confusion over what P/CVE means and how success is defined, especially in local contexts where interests and needs

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38. Author interview with international NGO representative, Nairobi, January 2019.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism', p. 36.

42. Author interviews with CSO and international NGO representatives, Nairobi, January 2019 and Mombasa, February 2019.

43. Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.

44. Author interviews with P/CVE practitioners and CSO and international NGO representatives, Mombasa and Nairobi, February 2019.

45. Author interview with P/CVE practitioner, Nairobi, February 2019.

remain fairly transient.[46] Some stakeholders described a 'denial' of the 'VE problem' as analogous to that of HIV/AIDS,[47] others referenced a general lack of grassroots awareness, particularly outside major urban hubs.[48] Many residents across marginalised, Muslim-majority areas also seemed to conflate countering violent extremism with 'countering Islam', leading practitioners to stress the importance of communities reframing P/CVE in their own vocabulary and engaging on their own terms.[49] Imposing pre-packaged solutions based on Western-centric logic may not be appropriate or applicable in the Global South, highlighting the need for a concerted, locally owned understanding of how to resolve insecurities, even when they are partially tied to transnational dynamics and ideological currents.

The NSCVE and Kenyan CAPs offer a framework for negotiating these issues, but interviewed practitioners flagged two major difficulties. First, while contributions from civil society, youth groups and non-governmental actors were encouraged in county workshops, their perspectives were not always included. How far these plans can be understood as the organic output of such discussions is therefore debatable, at least in certain areas where participation risked becoming tokenistic.[50] Second, devolving the process too far can lead to convolution and confusion, as earlier CAP drafts were criticised for 'ballooning' the scope of P/CVE,[51] 're-branding' development programmes and diminishing the feasibility of targeted interventions.[52] Finding and maintaining a balance between P/CVE specificities and local demands necessitates an iterative approach rooted in conversations that extend beyond the publication of the 'plan' itself.

Moreover, the NSCVE is largely contingent on external funding, extending and entrenching Kenya's dependencies on foreign interests.[53] The ownership and agency of domestic stakeholders over the design process could be diminished if they are (even implicitly) compelled to align with or subscribe to donor preferences and priorities. Unfortunately, the strategy's current funding streams cannot cover all of its envisaged activities and largely rely on the appetite of foreign sponsors.[54] As a result, it will be difficult to translate many of the proposed CAPs and RCAPs (examined below) into tangible outputs, at least in the near future, leaving them as 'unfunded mandates'

46.   For an analysis of community-level perceptions of violent extremism, see Sahla
      Aroussi et al., 'Body Maps of Resistance: Understanding Everyday Resistance to
      Violent Extremism in Kenya', University of Leeds, 2020.
47.   Author interview with faith-based group, Nairobi, January 2019.
48.   Focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.
49.   Author interview with faith-based group, Nairobi, January 2019.
50.   Author interviews with CSO representative and P/CVE practitioners, Mombasa
      and Nairobi, February 2019.
51.   Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.
52.   Author interview with international NGO representative, Nairobi, January 2019.
53.   Author interview with P/CVE practitioner, Nairobi, January 2019.
54.   Author interviews with CSO and international NGO representatives, Nairobi,
      January and February 2019.

and 'wish lists'.[55] Of the 12 pillars enumerated in Isiolo's CAP, only two – law enforcement and education – are currently being actioned.[56] Given such documents tend to outsource responsibilities for project implementation to CSOs, there may also be negative externalities if these organisations are blamed by communities and/or donors for failing to deliver despite a lack of resourcing.[57]

It is also unclear how far the MCAP, as a 'successful' procedural model for subnational engagement, can be exported or replicated across other counties given its unique genealogy. P/CVE work has been a fixture in Mombasa for over a decade, leading to a set of mature, locally embedded programmes strengthened by international partnerships such as the Strong City Network and support from the governor.[58] Much of the MCAP's anatomy was already featured in the informal strategies of CSOs like Haki Africa, and policymakers could leverage a network of seasoned practitioners to help refine an existing framework rather than build one from scratch.[59] These ingredients are not ubiquitous and the quality of other CAPs therefore differs considerably. Many regions do not even have fully developed plans but RCAP variants were rolled out after the dusitD2 attack. Marketed as 'prompt and concrete actions' to target 'low-hanging fruit', these fast-tracked alternatives extended P/CVE coverage across all 47 counties by July 2019, but their content and structure diverge depending on 'when and how the plan was developed'.[60] While consultative workshops helped capture local dynamics, their expedited production often led to generic prescriptions in regions lacking experience in preventive programming and diminished opportunities for public sensitisation or ownership. Many in Nyeri County, for example, did not know about their plan 10 months after its inception.[61] In contrast to the five-year timeframes of regular CAPs, RCAPs only cover 12 months,[62] raising additional questions as to whether they are more perfunctory or practical exercises capable of developing sustainable strategies.

Disparities in the country's bureaucratic dispensation create further problems. While Nairobi is saturated in P/CVE programming, most of its public institutions and line ministries are heavily centralised, limiting their flexibility and making state support for specific projects difficult to elicit or

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55. Author interview with international donor, Nairobi, January 2019; Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.

56. Christopher Hockey, 'Countering Violent Extremism: Isiolo County Needs Assessment', internal report, RUSI, 2020 (unpublished).

57. Author interview with international NGO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.

58. Author interview with CSO representative and focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.

59. Author interviews with international expert, Nairobi, January 2019, and international NGO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.

60. Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.

61. Christopher Hockey, 'Countering Violent Extremism: Nyeri County Needs Assessment, STRIVE II', internal report, RUSI, 2020 (unpublished).

62. *Ibid.*

maintain.[63] Conversely, Kenya's peripheries do not necessarily have the same level of administrative capacity, but they are less hierarchical and comparatively open to civic engagement.[64] Consequentially, change and progress were considered more achievable at the local level, especially outside the capital.

Important domestic tensions likewise need to be resolved, especially the preservation of control over security matters at the national level. Due to its intersection with P/CVE, this monopoly is problematic when 'softer' responsibilities are devolved to counties, but they cannot address structural grievances associated with police brutality or deal with defectors from Al-Shabaab.[65] The process of 'return' has become increasingly contentious in recent years without a clear legal regime or regulatory oversight, leaving former combatants vulnerable to abuse by state authorities.[66] Improvised, county-led schemes offer alternative options – in early 2018, 40 returnees arriving in Kilifi were sent to Mombasa's rehabilitation centre[67] – but they lack direction, cross-county consistency or formal standing in the absence of a comprehensive national framework.[68] While there is a degree of vertical coordination through county security/intelligence committees and county commissioners – officials directly appointed by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to co-chair CEFs – their partnerships with county governors are usually highly personalised.[69] While they function relatively well in cities like Mombasa, a rotation in personnel or change in party affiliation could quickly 'derail' any working relationship.[70] Similarly, while some have been passed through county assemblies, many plans are nested in improvised arrangements composed of 'ad hoc bodies without legislative authorisation', making long-term strategic planning difficult when managing so much uncertainty.[71]

While the NSCVE and CAPs have advanced thinking in this space, there are clearly procedural and contextual problems with developing the multi-tiered P/CVE strategy prescribed by international 'good practice' that need to be resolved.

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63. Author interviews with P/CVE practitioners, Nairobi, February 2019.

64. *Ibid.*

65. Author interview with CSO representative, Nairobi, January 2019.

66. Author interviews with CSO and international NGO representatives in Nairobi, January 2019 and Mombasa, February 2019; focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.

67. Richard Downie, 'Kenya's Struggling Amnesty Experiment: The Policy Challenge of Rehabilitating Former Terrorists', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 26 October 2018.

68. Author interview with CSO representative, Nairobi, January 2019.

69. Author interview with international expert, Nairobi, January 2019.

70. Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.

71. *Ibid.*

KEY ISSUES IN P/CVE PROGRAMMING

Interviewees also raised several programmatic issues and debates that frame Kenyan P/CVE, both in terms of its progress and ongoing challenges. These included: the use of systematic interventions; the mechanics and parameters of a 'whole-of-society' approach; and how to navigate Kenya's security sector.

SYSTEMATIC INTERVENTIONS

Given violent extremist recruitment is a protean product of many variables, senior practitioners called for more 'systematic' approaches, describing the need for multiple, targeted programmes working concurrently at every level.[72] Instead of piecemeal projects focusing on a single factor, this would deliver an aggregated matrix of activities that embed specialised P/CVE interventions for specific 'at-risk' individuals within a more holistic set of development and peacebuilding initiatives tackling broader structural problems.[73]

Without this scope, and the commensurate increase in resourcing and coordination necessary to implement it, even promising projects may experience diminishing returns if they fail to meet participant expectations or rely on isolated points of entry.[74] For example, pilot P/CVE peer-to-peer mentorship schemes employing highly tailored, interactive initiatives, counselling and support networks to strengthen individual resilience show some positive effects, including mentees transitioning into mentors themselves.[75] However, difficulties with continuity limit the longer-term impact of such projects as graduates still face wider structural challenges such as unemployment and socioeconomic marginalisation. Despite the importance of follow-on resources like business start-up kits, micro-financing and vocational training to help sustain progress, demand is rarely satisfied.[76] This was blamed on incongruencies between preventive and development approaches, which sometimes display contradictory mechanics, objectives and assumptions. The background and experience required of those on conventional tuition courses, for instance, are usually very different from that

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72. Author interviews with international NGO representatives, Nairobi, January 2019.
73. Author interview with international expert, Nairobi, February 2019.
74. Author interviews with international NGO and CSO representatives, Nairobi, January 2019.
75. Author interview with P/CVE practitioner, Nairobi, February 2019. Similar findings are highlighted in Gayatri Sahgal and Timothy Kimaiyo, 'Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: An Evaluation of a Mentorship Intervention in Kenya', *Journal for Deradicalization* (No. 24, 2020).
76. Author interview with P/CVE practitioners, Nairobi, February 2019.

of a typical mentee, who often have criminal histories and little education.[77] Consequently, it is challenging to properly synchronise projects, leaving P/CVE participants without a clear pathway forward. Given the expectation of financial returns or economic dividends – as consistently emphasised by focus groups – there is a risk this disappointment could lead to malign outcomes.

Where vocational training and youth empowerment efforts are available, they are usually standalone and lack scale. Various CSOs strengthen participants' technical skills and steer them towards competitions for public tenders, grants and seed funding – a proportion of which is earmarked for young claimants.[78] Others facilitate internships with local industries, blending recipients to incorporate local youths alongside those specifically identified as 'at risk'.[79] This includes helping clients apply for identification cards – a complex bureaucratic procedure widely viewed as discriminatory towards Muslims and ethnic minorities.[80] By expediting the process, practitioners claimed CSO-led 'clinics' ameliorated key drivers of violent extremism by enfranchising beneficiaries, encouraging a sense of national identity and mitigating frustrations with government apathy.[81] However, the same interviewees were more pessimistic regarding economic 'success stories', arguing the number of 'vulnerable individuals' receiving a job offer on the back of P/CVE interventions 'only scratches the surface'.[82] Unfulfilled expectations therefore remain a cross-cutting problem, especially given the short lifespan of activities such as one-off trainings or capacity building[83] that rarely account for the slow process of trust-building.

A lack of connective tissue between prevention projects (concomitant and sequential) and wider development programming has therefore left many initiatives struggling to sustain otherwise encouraging outcomes. The NSCVE and subnational strategies provide useful platforms for coordinating activities, but this remains a significant problem given the fragmented dispensation of a P/CVE industry beset by operational and conceptual specificities that do not always align with other fields of intervention.

'WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY' APPROACHES: WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

Realistically, the volume, depth and bandwidth demanded by systematic interventions are beyond the capabilities of any single actor and only become feasible when drawing on a 'whole-of-society' approach that mobilises

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77. *Ibid.*
78. Author interviews with CSO representatives, Nairobi, January 2019 and Mombasa, February 2019.
79. Author interviews with CSO representatives, Nairobi, January 2019.
80. This is disputed by some government officials and CSO representatives who rejected any claims of discrimination.
81. Author interviews with CSO representatives, Nairobi, January 2019 and Mombasa, February 2019.
82. Author interview with CSO representative, Nairobi, January 2019.
83. Focus group, Mombasa, February 2019.

concerted, multilateral input. This is a staple recommendation in the prevention literature to compensate for resource shortfalls and recognises the importance of an inclusive P/CVE arena that integrates non-government actors and recipient communities to improve the quality and resonance of specific programmes and create opportunities for the collective collaboration and economies of scale needed to sustain holistic coverage.

In practice, however, the scope and composition of a 'whole-of-society' approach is often unclear and can tend to focus on CSOs specifically rather than a broader selection of stakeholders. Such parochialism raises problems in the Kenyan context where some studies cast CSOs as fairly peripheral to the social circuitries of local communities: less than 2% of those interviewed by Search for Common Ground, for instance, listed civil society as an 'influencer'.[84] Focus group discussions convened for this paper cited similar concerns, mentioning financial bottlenecks and unnecessary middlemen that were not always plugged into local affairs or 'doing what they were supposed to be doing'.[85] While many organisations are professional, high-performing and subscribe to comprehensive accountability criteria, P/CVE markets can also become dominated by a small cluster of 'elite CSOs', reducing opportunities for experimentation or diversity.[86] Accordingly, respondents urged donors to bypass self-declared gatekeepers, engage directly with recipient populations and extend greater oversight in their programming.

While interventions like Strengthening Community Resilience Against Extremism are attempting to build the capacity and credibility of CSOs along the Coast,[87] there is arguably a value in reconsidering who should be involved in P/CVE.[88] Western-centric interpretations of civil society's relevance and functionality are not universal, and donors' reliance on these norms risks relegating other voices that resonate within Kenya. This does not preclude CSO leadership – they are an essential ingredient for credible prevention work – but calls for a broader appraisal of perspectives and skillsets, especially at a subnational level where many different structures and informal powerbrokers regulate Kenyan society.[89] Coalitions of youth groups and local peace committees (LPCs), for example, have developed as

84. Olivia Russell, 'Meet Me at the Maskani: A Mapping of Influencers, Networks, and Communication Channels in Kenya and Tanzania', Search for Common Ground, June 2017.

85. Focus group discussions, Mombasa, February 2019.

86. *Ibid.*; Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen and Paul Goldsmith, 'Initiatives and Perceptions to Counter Violent Extremism in the Coastal Region of Kenya', *Journal for Deradicalization* (No. 16, 2018).

87. Badurdeen and Goldsmith, 'Initiatives and Perceptions to Counter Violent Extremism in the Coastal Region of Kenya'.

88. Author interview with international NGO representative and focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.

89. Author interview with international NGO representative in Mombasa, February 2019.

The volume, depth and bandwidth demanded by systematic interventions are beyond the capabilities of any single actor

organic locally-led platforms to facilitate inclusive peacemaking within their own particular contexts.[90] Across the North East, restrictive security policies and experimental forms of hybrid governance created a type of 'mediated state',[91] leveraging idiosyncratic, clan-based mechanisms for conflict prevention in 'frontier regions' largely disconnected from 'national life'.[92] P/CVE specialists similarly highlighted the centrality of kinship bonds and communal solidarities in coastal centres like Mombasa, anchoring networks of social support to help spread information and mobilise collective action.[93]

Such arrangements are not without their limitations. Many are distorted or co-opted by local politics, remain riddled by intergenerational tensions or display patriarchal proclivities – several LPCs have achieved gender parity but women rarely have the opportunity or social capital to influence decision-making.[94] Claims of exclusion should also be treated with caution due to fierce competition over P/CVE funding. Nonetheless, donors and practitioners need to recognise these social geographies as a reality framing subnational power dynamics and community networks, especially if they advocate a 'whole-of-society' response that includes genuine influencers and agents of change.[95] This is not to inflate the scope of P/CVE but to avoid prospective spoilers and leverage a pre-existing infrastructure with additional clout, audiences and points of entry.[96]

Role of the Family

Most interviewees and focus group participants also described a heavy emphasis on the role of mothers, families and the domestic sphere in Kenya's 'whole-of-society' approach. Recruitment patterns are routinely understood through this lens, with a specific focus on 'poor parenting'.[97] These interpretations reflect the country's cultural governance and an expansion of P/CVE research beyond the traditional focus on young men, leading to a greater emphasis on the supervisory duties of families, their role in early warning systems and the delegation – both operationally and legislatively – of significant responsibilities to the household level.

90. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019. See Andries Odenaal and Retief Olivier, 'Local Peace Committees: Some Reflections and Lessons Learned', Academy for Educational Development, USAID, 2008.

91. Ken Menkhaus, 'The Rise of a Mediated State in Northern Kenya: The Wajir Story and its Implications for State-Building', *Afrika Focus* (Vol. 21, No. 2, 2008).

92. Author interview with international NGO representative, Mombasa, 2019; Chome, *Violent Extremism and Clan Dynamics in Kenya*.

93. Author interview with P/CVE practitioners, Nairobi, February 2019.

94. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.

95. Author interview with international NGO representative in Mombasa, February 2019.

96. *Ibid.*

97. Author interview with CSO representative and focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019. There are similar findings in Russell, 'Meet Me at the Maskani'.

Although the influence of mothers has been disputed in the wider literature,[98] CSOs and community representatives emphasised their ability to spot signs of radicalisation, act as effective mentors, convene peer-to-peer training and mobilise neighbourhood buy-in for preventive programmes.[99] Consequently, many interventions seek to strengthen parents' awareness of violent extremism through, for example, locally designed efforts to organise minibus rides for commuters in exchange for P/CVE-based discussions en route. While some consumers simply exploited a free fare, positive feedback regarding its content and convenience has fed into plans to replicate and expand this 'transit-training' model elsewhere.[100] Similar campaigns are circulated on social media, and, in rare cases, psychological treatment, supplemented with micro-credit schemes, have been extended to help 'at-risk' families.[101]

However, NGOs and international experts noted clear ethical problems if parents are deputised as P/CVE practitioners and held culpable (socially and legally) for any shortcomings, but do not receive the requisite training, resources and assistance. Based on anecdotal observations and personal experience, CSO representatives suggested women are still under-represented in therapeutic and psychosocial programming, contributing to high rates of unaddressed trauma and a lack of curative measures.[102] Female community leaders also dismissed slogans of local empowerment and gender-sensitive programming as 'empty promises', arguing that they rarely translate into anything tangible.[103] This is a problem given the proclivity of Al-Shabaab cadres to recruit their relatives, and interviewees underscored the importance of counselling and socioeconomic support for victimised families to avoid further exploitation.[104]

The frequent persecution of households of Al-Shabaab members also weakens already tenuous bonds with the state, leaving parents fearful of reporting any warning signs or actively intervening.[105] NGOs and CSOs offer some recourse but they do not always have the capacity nor mandate to handle such issues, exposing a gap in institutional support, coordination and service provision that needs to be resolved. Collectively, the emphasis and obligations placed on families, and mothers especially, create sizeable

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98. See Emily Winterbotham, 'What Can Work (And What Has Not Worked) in Women-Centric P/CVE Initiatives: Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism', *RUSI Occasional Papers* (May 2020).

99. Author interview with CSO representative and focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.

100. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.

101. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.

102. Badurdeen and Goldsmith, 'Initiatives and Perceptions to Counter Violent Extremism in the Coastal Region of Kenya'.

103. Focus group, Mombasa, February 2019.

104. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.

105. *Ibid.*

risks if they are left carrying the burden of a 'whole-of-society' approach by proxy while having to manage other day-to-day priorities.

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS

Faith-based programming and religious actors were also flagged as important features of Kenyan P/CVE. Theological arguments and counter-messaging have become increasingly prominent, with organisations like the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) and Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism regularly using scripture to deconstruct and rebut extremist discourse.[106]

However, their influence and impact appear mixed. Violent extremist narratives are diffuse and versatile, making them difficult to track and counter with the necessary specificity.[107] Instead, clerics often lean on outdated or abstract messaging that lacks resonance or focuses too narrowly on ideology and overlooks the more banal grievances occasionally drive recruitment. Although typically framed in a religious rubric, such issues frequently revolve around current affairs and economic frustrations, topics that sometimes fall outside the expertise of local imams.[108] Consequently, these actors can struggle to connect with or even access vulnerable individuals, especially those who abandon 'mainstream' sermons early in the radicalisation process. Some may even exacerbate the problem by monopolising authority structures like mosque committees at the expense of younger voices.[109]

There does seem to be progress in key areas: younger imams received tuition in social media to extend outreach beyond their usual audiences[110] and mentorship schemes for 'female religious leadership' and 'train the trainer' projects along the Coast have seemingly contributed towards more pluralistic, inclusive mosque management.[111] Inter-faith dialogues were likewise applauded for encouraging social cohesion and stemming local violence in cities such as Mombasa during the 2017 election. While this was referenced in relation to violence prevention rather than countering violent extremism specifically, focus group respondents claimed, 'we can see it working, we can see a reduction [in social conflict]'.[112]

Nevertheless, monitoring and evaluation generally remains weak – a common symptom of the wider P/CVE space – creating difficulties for accurately tracing the effectiveness of interventions.[113] Interviewees also

106. Badurdeen and Goldsmith, 'Initiatives and Perceptions to Counter Violent Extremism in the Coastal Region of Kenya'.
107. Author interview with faith-based group, Nairobi, January 2019.
108. RUSI, 'STRIVE Horn of Africa: Lessons Learned', April 2017.
109. Focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.
110. Author interview with faith-based group representative, Mombasa, February 2019.
111. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.
112. Focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.
113. Author interview with faith-based group representative, Mombasa, February 2019.

cited a tendency to reproduce unsubstantiated or deleterious assumptions regarding radicalisation that could misinterpret or delegitimise structural, socioeconomic and political grievances as the 'irrational' symptoms of extreme ideology.[114] Questions over authenticity are similarly problematic when quasi-state institutions like SUPKEM – umbrella bodies that regulate Islamic organisations, societies and groups across the country – are at times perceived as surrogates for government influence, reducing their credibility among vulnerable individuals.[115] Subsequently, various local practitioners identified a disconnect between 'at-risk' populations and an elite 'religious establishment' conversing in a different language and recycling the party line.[116]

KENYA'S SECURITY SECTOR

It is important to emphasise that most interviewees and focus group participants remained relatively enthusiastic about the direction of P/CVE in Kenya, repeatedly referring to the progress of initiatives like 'police cafés' as positive examples. The Kenyan Police Service is widely seen as 'politicised, demoralised, under-resourced'[117] and corrupt,[118] with little institutional accountability or public confidence[119] amid long-running allegations of extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances.[120] Against this backdrop, 'cafés' – dialogues between law enforcement officials and civilian stakeholders – were described as 'impactful and effective', especially when they facilitated bilateral engagement with youth groups.[121] Sessions usually focus on local grievances, providing opportunities for participants to articulate their insecurities and cultivate shared understandings. Over time, these discussions appeared to develop their own momentum: security personnel became more receptive, circulating their phone numbers and organising meals after scheduled meetings.[122] A notable change was apparent in their attitudes and appearance, with many gradually adopting

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114. Author interview with CSO representative, Nairobi, February 2019.

115. Author interviews with CSO representatives and faith-based groups, Nairobi, January 2019 and Mombasa, February 2019.

116. Author interview with CSO representative, Mombasa, February 2019.

117. Alice Hills, 'ICT4COP Contextual Assessment: Africa', Norwegian University of Life Sciences, A Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Project, 2016.

118. Narrelle Gilchrist and Norman Eisen, 'Corruption and Terrorism: The Case of Kenya', Brookings, 22 August 2019.

119. Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies and African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum, 'Local Policing Accountability in Kenya: Challenges and Opportunities for Action', 2014.

120. Author interviews with several CSO representatives, Mombasa, February 2019; author interviews with religious-based group and P/CVE practitioners, Nairobi, January 2019; Matthew Schwartz and Naz Yalbir, 'Desecuritizing Kenyan Youth: Young People's Perspectives on Community Priorities in Mombasa', Policy Brief, Global Center on Cooperative Security, March 2019.

121. Author interviews with CSO representative and focus group discussion, Mombasa, February 2019.

122. Author interview with P/CVE practitioner, Nairobi, February 2019.

an informal, relaxed and empathic demeanour.[123] In contexts such as North-Eastern Kenya, where borderland communities have long experienced a trust deficit with paramilitary outfits like the National Police Reserve, this represents a significant step forward. Upticks in the number of citizens willing to report crimes and missing individuals to state authorities also suggests growing confidence in the security services, although these trends are at best nascent and uneven across the country.[124] Despite some concern over officers exploiting the cafés for intelligence-gathering, the outlook was largely optimistic.[125]

This correlates with broader cultural shifts across the security space.[126] In contrast to the ethno-centric crackdowns associated with Operation *Usalama Watch* (2014),[127] law enforcement agencies were described as comparatively measured and sensitive in their response to the dusitD2 complex attack in 2019.[128] Similarly, state officials are increasingly open to conversations about 'homegrown extremism' and human rights – topics generally deemed unpalatable before 2016.[129] Various iterations of 'community policing' have also received political backing, from the National Police Service's community policing committees[130] to the Nyumba Kumi model championed by the president's office.[131] NCTC itself emphasises the importance of softer, sophisticated law enforcement, convening trainings and community outreach to better ingrain this mentality across the country's security sector.[132]

However, these reforms do not always filter down to frontline officers, due in part to the insularity of Kenya's institutions, the difficulties of cross-departmental collaboration[133] and frequent rotations of personnel.[134] Discrepancies between national and county approaches compound the problem and often produce contradictory outcomes. For instance, progress made through police cafés are sometimes undermined when paramilitary bodies, administration police, military intelligence or the Anti-Terrorism

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123. *Ibid.*

124. Author interview with P/CVE practitioner, Nairobi, February 2019.

125. *Ibid.*

126. Author interview with international expert, Nairobi, January 2019.

127. See Jeremy Lind, Patrick Mutahi and Marjoke Oosterom, '"Killing a Mosquito with a Hammer": Al-Shabaab Violence and State Security Responses in Kenya', *Peacebuilding* (Vol. 5, No. 2, 2017), pp. 118–35.

128. Author interview with P/CVE practitioner, Nairobi, January 2019.

129. Author interview with international NGO representative, Nairobi, February 2019.

130. Including security personnel and community representatives working with the county policing authority.

131. A neighbourhood-watch scheme based on 10-household clusters that facilitate community leadership in security provision.

132. Author interview with international donor, Nairobi, January 2019.

133. Author interview with CSO representative, Nairobi, January 2019. Similar findings are in RUSI, 'STRIVE Horn of Africa'.

134. Author interview with P/CVE practitioner, Nairobi, February 2019.

Police Unit conduct raids in the same neighbourhood.[135] Given the propensity of communities to conflate and homogenise security personnel, any relationships developed with the county police may quickly sour, alienating participants and weakening the credibility of P/CVE interlocutors.[136] Change could therefore be feasible at the subnational level, but it requires national coordination if projects are to be sustainable and avoid contradictions between government rhetoric and action.

CONCLUSION

Kenya has clearly made progress in developing its P/CVE strategy and programming but continues to face challenges that need to be navigated by stakeholders at every level. Despite national and local peculiarities, the country may also offer lessons that cut across contextual specificities and have relevance for the wider prevention space.

Several key recommendations are therefore proposed.

1. ENSURE ACTION PLANS ARE ENACTED

Creating these strategies may be a time-consuming, resource-intensive process, but if done sensitively – building in opportunities for stakeholder consultation, participatory approaches and a clear delegation of roles, funding and accountability – they can be of greater value to donors and practitioners. Contextual specificities, local vocabularies and the creation of organic solutions can all be advanced through these discussions, especially when devolved to a county or sub-county level. However, given the dynamic nature of violent extremism and the importance of an iterative response, the conversation cannot conclude with the plan's publication, or it risks becoming a box-ticking exercise. Instead, any outputs should be considered 'living' documents subject to continual revision and adaptation. Kenya has advanced much of this work, using CAPs to feed back into the national strategy and anchor a subsequent set of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This logic should be applied to county derivatives as well, through their own objectives and key results frameworks.

2. REDUCE DEPENDENCY ON FOREIGN CASH THAT CAN OTHERWISE CONSTRAIN LOCAL LEADERSHIP

For genuine ownership, flexibility and contextual specificity, national and county stakeholders need the autonomy and discretion to decide their own needs and objectives. This cannot happen at scale without sustainable domestic funding streams. Kenya's reliance on international donors leaves both its strategy and programming as either an unfunded mandate or hostage to the whims of outside interests. Often, these external actors are well intentioned, but they tend to export Western-centric concepts, models

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135. Author interviews with CSO representatives, Nairobi, January and February 2019.
136. Author interview with faith-based group representative, Mombasa, February 2019.

and norms that do not always align with local realities or expectations. Problems with time lags and budget cycles have also led to unresponsive or short-term projects that often leave activities unfinished. If P/CVE is a priority for authorities in Nairobi, political capital should be backed by financial commitment, not necessarily to replace but to supplement international support. Crucially, this resourcing cannot just be contained within national government but should be circulated to county, sub-county, municipal and local levels. Not all these tiers have budgetary modalities, but where necessary representatives could feed into higher decision-making bodies to ensure allocations are based on as much contextual granularity as possible.

Likewise, external stakeholders need to strengthen their financial oversight to make sure investments do not become an additional source of rent in the Kenyan political economy and create perverse incentives to maintain or expand foreign dependencies. At a local level, shorter feedback loops and direct donor engagement with recipient communities could improve accountability and mitigate financial bottlenecks.

All of the above needs to be framed by a reappraisal of whether P/CVE is relevant for certain communities, and what success should look like. This should be informed by greater anthropological nuance, assumption testing and participatory approaches, not (just) the preferences of the national government or Global North.

3. RECONCILE THE COMPETING TRENDS OF CENTRALISATION AND LOCALISATION

Devolving space for counties to design their own action plans has allowed Kenyan P/CVE to better address the local drivers that so often condition radicalisation and recruitment, and offer new opportunities for subnational input and leadership through CEFs. Isolating security concerns from this process introduces disruptive variables that can undermine CAP programming, especially when coordination is contingent on personal relationships between governors and county commissioners. Systematising such links and improving institutional cohesion, both horizontal and vertical, is therefore essential for avoiding contradictions and inefficiencies. The NSCVE provides a useful framework for organising responsibilities among line ministries but it should be extended to the security sector given the NCTC's leadership and the involvement of the MOI.

Cross-departmental communication needs to be strengthened where possible to allow county officials opportunities to explain security interventions to recipient communities as and when they occur. This transparency may not alleviate the frustrations of residents but could help preserve the trust police officers cultivate across the districts and neighbourhoods within their 'beat boundaries'. It not only requires greater public ownership over security provision but the inclusion of representatives from central agencies in 'cafés'/dialogue forums to bridge the gap between local and national stakeholders. Such provisions would

improve relations between the state and wider Kenyan society, and boost accountability within the police itself.

Human rights training should be delivered and monitored across all levels of Kenya's security apparatus. Significant progress in P/CVE has in part been possible due to systemic, cultural shifts expedited by institutional learning and buy-in from senior and middle management. To sustain these achievements, learning should be filtered down to frontline officers and paramilitaries.

The responsibilities for screening, processing and rehabilitating Al-Shabaab defectors should be clarified and systematised. Currently, arrangements appear opaque and ad hoc, creating opportunities for extrajudicial abuse. To safeguard returnees and incentivise further defections, this gap must be immediately addressed.[137]

4. ENSURE P/CVE REFLECTS SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY AND A 'WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY' APPROACH

While many CSOs are professional and high-performing, local P/CVE markets risk becoming dominated by a small cluster of 'elite' organisations that may dampen opportunities for experimentation or not always have access to or the confidence of 'at-risk' populations and host communities. International donors and P/CVE practitioners need to better understand the informal governance structures, information networks and influencers that hold sway in different contexts and integrate these unconventional stakeholders where possible in the design and delivery of activities. Leveraging existing infrastructure like local peacebuilding committees, peace ambassadors, civic associations and youth clubs should be done cautiously to avoid both co-optation and P/CVE over-reach, but they can bolster CSO-led interventions and contribute to a comprehensive 'whole-of-society' approach.

Many interviewees cited the influence of 'bad parenting' in driving recruitment, claiming individuals either lacked the necessary support networks or were actively encouraged to join Al-Shabaab by family members hankering after extra income. While the role of families has become a prominent feature in Kenya's P/CVE strategy, there is a risk that responsibilities may be outsourced to the household level without the commensurate resources or training, creating unfeasible or unethical obligations. Care needs to be taken, therefore, when assessing how these actors can best feed into P/CVE (if at all), and the assistance they require. Parents cannot be left carrying the burden of a 'whole-of-society' approach by proxy.

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137. For conclusions similar to this recommendation, see Crisman et al., 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.

5. CREATE HOLISTIC, MULTI-LEVEL PROGRAMMING TO SECURE SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES

Systematic interventions can boost coverage through economies of scale and strengthen project durability. They create avenues for addressing wider structural factors and conflict systems and can potentially reconcile expectations of financial benefit from those participating with the need for targeted activities that lack the breadth of conventional development work. Creating a multi-vectored approach that not only offers, for example, mentorship and psychosocial support but vocational training and employment prospects is therefore essential.

A corollary is improving links and synergies between P/CVE and development programmes, as local-level interventions are unlikely to have the capacity or resources needed for running multiple activities on their own. This remains a major issue and entails long-term donor commitment as they often define the objectives, timetables and funding cycles of projects, and can therefore incentivise or facilitate synchronicity. Without this coordination, activities will remain reductive or even counterproductive if the aspirations of would-be participants are not satisfied. Where appropriate, development projects should also integrate P/CVE sensitivities – analogous to those of gender or conflict – to expedite this complementarity.

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