ADI
ALFRED DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBALISATION

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Violent and Hateful Extremism in Kenya:

Expert context analysis, local community perceptions, and development NGO responses

A/Prof Anthony Ware, Dr Leanne Kelly, Prof Greg Barton and Dr Dave Husy

May 2025 - Prepared for Plan International Australia and Plan International Kenya

Published by Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation

Deakin University
221 Burwood Highway
Burwood VIC 3125
Email: adi-admin@deakin.edu.au
Free download: adi.deakin.edu.au/project/addressing-violent-and-hateful-extremism

ISBN (online): 978-0-7300-0289-5

Cover design and layout by Ciara Barker
Photographs by Leanne Kelly, used by permission

Research completed and published under funding provided by the Australian Research Council grant LP200100433.

Suggested citation:

Ware, A., Kelly, L.M., Barton, G., and Husy, D. (2025) *Violent and Hateful Extremism in Kenya: Expert context analysis, local community perceptions, and development NGO responses*, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University: Melbourne.

ADI
ALFRED DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBALISATION

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Executive Summary

This report offers both a detailed high-level context analysis of the violent and hateful extremism (VHE) situation in Kenya informed by expert opinion, focussed primarily on the Coast Region, and analysis of on-the-ground perspectives from the lived experience of ordinary local community members of VHE dynamics in the region. From these, we propose some potential NGO responses to the situation, a mixture of insights proposed by the experts, community members, or our own observations.

This report is the result of a multi-year collaborative project between Deakin University (Deakin) and Plan International Australia (PIA) entitled *Appropriate International Development Responses to Address Violent and Hateful Extremism*. This report presents analysis of the VHE situation in Kenya, particularly the Coast Region of Kenya, and potential development NGO responses, prepared for Plan International Kenya (PIK). It is based on two sets of data. The first is interviews conducted with 48 expert informants in Kenya, held online in May 2023, then in-person in June 2023 and May 2024.

The experts include key leaders from various civil society organisations (CSO) or development agencies involved in P/CVE work in Kenya, academics, people from the government/security apparatus, and senior PIK team members. The second data set is from 29 focus group discussions (FGD) (total 330 participants, 178 male, 152 female) conducted in Kwale county in May 2024, in villages which had or were nearby PIK program sites, in conjunction with Prof Hassan Mwakimako, of Pwani University, Kilifi county. Kwale county has one of the highest rates of recruitment by extremist groups, and the highest number of returnees from those groups of any county in Kenya. Some additional insights have been incorporated from discussions held during two 1-day symposia run in Mombasa and Nairobi in May 2024.

It is hoped ideas in this report might be relevant to the work of PIK, and be useful in planning decisions and new project development, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of existing projects.

Recommendations

This report outlines 11 key recommendations to help Plan International Kenya build on its existing programming to more deliberately and effectively respond to VHE. These recommendations are grounded in our field research and can support donor engagement, strategic partnerships, and internal program refinement.

1. **Mainstream VHE sensitivity** across all programming in conflict-affected areas by integrating analysis tools such as the Conflict & Extremism Do No Harm framework into project design and monitoring.

2. **Address structural drivers of vulnerability** by strengthening education and employment pathways for marginalised youth and advocating for increased government and private sector investment in underserved regions.

3. **Promote gender equality and social inclusion**, including engaging men and boys as allies in peacebuilding and positive fatherhood, and applying an intersectional lens to all programming.

4. **Invest in community-led resilience and peace structures**, building on local traditions like harambee to foster self-reliance and social cohesion.

5. **Foster youth belonging and purpose** through support for arts, sports, and cultural programs that build leadership, reduce idleness, and provide safe spaces for expression.

6. **Support the reintegration of returnees and high-risk individuals** through inclusive livelihoods and social cohesion programs, with support from religious and community leaders.

7. **Raise awareness and expand safe reporting mechanisms** for VHE, GBV, and substance abuse, especially for out-of-school youth.

8. **Partner with local peacebuilding actors**, including faith-based and interfaith groups, to strengthen traditional mediation systems and elevate youth and women as community leaders.

9. **Promote inclusive and accountable governance** by supporting civic education, anti-corruption efforts, and dialogue between communities and government.

10. **Tackle hateful extremism and online radicalisation** by building digital literacy, countering toxic narratives, and promoting inclusive values through schools and media.

11. **Advance research, monitoring, and adaptive learning** through piloting VHE indicators, embedding reflection spaces in programs, and fostering collaboration between researchers, NGOs, and communities.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Plan International Kenya for their strong support with this data collection. Special thanks to Caleb Too for arranging logistics for our visit, Phanuel Owiti for accompanying us throughout our first visit to Mombasa/the coast region and actively participating in interviews, and to George Kamau for accompanying us and actively participating in interviews around Nairobi. And a very special thanks to Prof Hassan Mwakimako, of Pwani University, for overseeing the recruitment of facilitators and FGD data collection in Kwale, in 2024. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the 48 interviewees and 330 focus group discussants for generously sharing their insights and wisdom.

Over-Arching 4-Country Research Project

This is a report on Kenya, part of a larger 4-year, 4-country collaborative research project between Deakin University and Plan International Australia exploring violent and hateful extremism in Philippines, Indonesia, Mozambique and Kenya.

Details of that over-arching project:

Formal Title: Appropriate International Development Responses to Address Violent and Hateful Extremism
Lead Agency: Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia
Partner Agency: Plan International Australia
Research Team: A/Prof Anthony Ware, Deakin University – lead Chief Investigator, Prof Greg Barton, Deakin University – Chief Investigator, Dr Dave Husy, Plan International Australia – Partner Investigator, Dr Leanne Kelly, Deakin University – Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Case Study Countries: Philippines, Indonesia, Mozambique and Kenya
Funder: Australian Research Council Linkage Program, Department of Education, Skills & Employment, Government of Australia
Funded Period: 1 September 2021 to 31 December 2025

This project is investigating how violent and hateful extremism (VHE) can be best addressed at the community level, through development and humanitarian activities. It is funded through an Australian Research Council Linkage Project Grant ($540,377) with substantial additional funding and in-kind support from Plan International Australia ($620,940) and Deakin University ($546,242).

Project Aims

1. Understand VHE dynamics in the communities in which Plan International works in the 4 countries, specifically its impact on those communities and on Plan's programs and projects,
2. Examine the efficacy of various existing non-Plan programs in the country which are already in addressing VHE.
3. Develop and test VHE context analysis tools suitable for mainstreaming into all project planning and baseline data collection.
4. Develop and test indicators for measuring effectiveness in addressing VHE.
5. Develop recommendations for Plan country offices, including new project ideas specific to each country context.

Relation of the Research Project to Plan's Triple Nexus and Conflict Sensitivity work

Conflict-sensitivity is a perspective by which to plan, monitor and evaluate projects. There are numerous toolkits available. It is premised on the recognition that the design and implementation of interventions has the potential to reduce, sustain, amplify or even trigger conflict, thus that careful analysis and adaptation of project design can minimise harm and maximise positive impact. The most common conflict-sensitivity approach is 'Do No Harm', which focusses conflict analysis on seeking to identify social cleavages, 'dividers' and 'connectors' (or bridges), and through these, the pre-existing connections, counter-narratives and norms. It proposes that new projects could be re-orientated to strengthen these local connectors, initiatives or positive attributes. Plan International is conducting a global project to mainstream conflict-sensitivity into all project planning, monitoring and evaluation in conflict affected situations and contexts.

The idea of the Triple Nexus grew out of debates about a development–humanitarian continuum in the 1990s – what was known at the time as the 'relief-development continuum'. This sought to identify complementary objectives and strategies, built on the idea that humanitarian aid can provide a foundation for recovery, development and the creation of sustainable livelihoods. There was a lot of talk of the need to bridge funding and operational gaps. The third element, of peace and peacebuilding, was added during the 2000s, with international policy-makers calling for closer integration of the three practices. This was made explicit in the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit's Grand Bargain which included a call for joining up humanitarian action, development programming, and peacebuilding. Many crises are interdependent and mutually reinforcing – conflict, underdevelopment and humanitarian issues negatively reinforce to produce complex emergencies. The Triple Nexus idea argues solutions thus need to be just as interdependent – a combination of peace, development and humanitarian efforts that can mutually reinforce positive outcomes.

Both these ideas are relevant in all four case study countries. In Kenya, Mozambique, and the Philippines, however, in contrast with Indonesia, VHE is largely linked to ethno-religious minority marginalisation and grievance, and complicated by armed insurgencies. Because of societal recognition that armed and violent conflict exists, as well as VHE, it may be easiest to locate this project within Plan International's global push for conflict-sensitive programming. In Indonesia, the most profound social divide leading to VHE stems more from an extremist Islamist struggle against the legitimacy of the Republic of Indonesia. Salafi jihadi groups inspired by al-Qaeda, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, or by Islamic State, frame their mission as a long-term struggle to achieve an Islamic state in Indonesia. They assert that this end justifies the means of violent jihad, even if they choose, for reasons of expediency, to refrain from violent struggle for the time being and instead focus on building religiously pure, exclusivist, communities. VHE in Indonesia is predominately ideological rather than ethnoreligious in nature. As such, integrating VHE work into Nexus and/or gender and/or resilience work might be more strategic in Indonesia.

Research Project Detail

Awareness of the need for more holistic approaches to Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) has grown steadily over

the past decade. Authorities now increasingly seek to engage the problem both upstream to prevent radicalisation into violent behaviour, and downstream to disengage individuals from violent extremist social networks and reintegrate them into healthy social relationships. Both approaches recognise that underlying grievances and conflict drivers can crush legitimate aspirations and contribute to some people/groups radicalising. Both require working in partnership with communities and civil society agencies, to build resilience and engage young people, in particular. At the same time, many international development actors have come to recognise that violent extremism (VE) is a widespread problem in many communities in which they work, and that development programs can influence the dynamics of extremism (positively or negatively). This recognition has led to recent moves to integrate P/CVE into foreign aid strategies and funding. Many P/CVE interventions, if conducted with sensitivity, could theoretically be a natural fit for international development/humanitarian NGOs. NGOs already implement programs aimed at addressing inequality, deprivation, marginalisation and human rights violations, and seek to enhance social cohesion, community resilience, freedoms and capabilities. Nevertheless, being seen to be working in P/CVE is often problematic. The environments within which extremism flourishes, characterised by violence and fragility, already present many challenges to building trust and providing assistance. Because public attention has focussed primarily on the security aspects of P/CVE, together with counter-terrorism (where most funding has gone), NGO engagement in P/CVE risks them being perceived as aligning closely with securitisation. Thus, aligning with P/CVE agendas risks eroding the independence at the heart of NGO strategies. Moreover, perceptions of such alignment increase direct risk to staff and recipients, and complicate their commitment to 'do no harm' principles.

The project will focus on developing knowledge, tools and elements of interventions, to enable the planning and implementation of appropriate programs at individual, household and community levels, and ways to wisely and effectively engage government agencies, security forces or religious leaders that either implicitly support VHE, or directly propagate narratives or violence themselves. Of particular need are tools to enable NGOs like Plan to conduct robust, context-specific VHE situation analysis, and then integrate this analysis into their project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A central contribution of this project will be the development of such analytical tools for NGO programming, more along the lines of the 'do no harm'/conflict-sensitivity and gender analysis tools widely adopted across the sector.

This project defines a new concept, violent and hateful extremism (VHE), as: the incitement of hatred, hate speech and hate acts, and the use or threat of violence by extremist social movements seeking to bring about political and societal change in the name of certain ideological ends, sometimes framed in terms of religion and/or identity, by means that dehumanise and bring harm to others. In the vast majority of cases, this involves significant elements of misogyny. Around the globe, both local and international VHE movements tend to frame their justifying grievances in terms that focus not just on perceived general threats to group rights and status, but also on specific threats to male authority and status. Using this justifying narrative VHE movements are characterised by the channelling of toxic masculinity towards hatred and violence.

Our project thus expands the conceptual and theoretical understandings of P/CVE, to also incorporate responses to 'hateful extremism' (HE). Importantly, this conceptual expansion came from Plan local field staff, through our initial collaboration (Barton et al., 2019; Sonrexa et al., 2023), and is thus the result of incorporating bottom-up voices and co-design into the conceptual framework. VHE represents an important theoretical development, in that it also better aligns with the immediate daily needs of most people around the world. Whilst the manifestation of VE in forms such as international terrorism remains a global threat, outside conflict zones it does not generally constitute an existential threat. Nonetheless, violent extremism continues to receive a disproportionate investment in intelligence and policing, often resulting in perverse outcomes—such as high levels of securitisation and the targeting of certain communities in ways that undermine social cohesion, trust and respect. By contrast, hateful extremism is a day-to-day issue. For the majority of people, HE, including misogyny, race hate and the enabling environment of hyper-nationalist political actors, all constituting a more immediate threat and greater problem than VE. As a result, there exists both great need and great opportunity to partner with such communities, and civil society actors serving them, in countering HE. Framing P/CVE more broadly as countering VHE presents a better foundation for cooperation based on trust and mutual interest. Finally, and most importantly, while by definition VE excludes the state and state actors as perpetrators, HE explicitly includes the possibility the state and state actors may be perpetrators of hate acts or speech, and threats of violence against minorities. This is a significant theoretical expansion, with important policy and practice implications to be explored in this project.

This project will contribute significant conceptual innovation to Plan's work in these contexts, to improve project planning. The new analytical tools and planning processes that it will develop, as well as contextual indicators of effectiveness, will facilitate significantly improved program outcomes. This has significant potential to benefit not only the individuals and families/communities participating in the programs, but also the societies in those countries, by extension, regional stability. The project will develop concrete recommendations for interventions by Plan in contexts affected by VHE in the Philippines, Indonesia, Mozambique, and Kenya. Beyond PIA, these findings have the potential to benefit the entire sector.

Table of Contents

Introduction

This report is the result of a multi-year collaborative project between Deakin University (Deakin) and Plan International Australia (PIA), as detailed above. The report presents analysis of the VHE situation in Kenya, particularly the coast region of Kenya, and potential development NGO responses to VHE, prepared for and in close collaboration with Plan International Kenya (PIK).

This research adopts the conceptual framing of violent and hateful extremism (VHE), rather than the more common focus on violent extremism alone. This is not to deny violent extremism is a significant threat. The risk of major terrorist attacks remains high, globally as well as in many parts of Kenya, highlighting the very real dangers of violent extremism. Nonetheless, for a majority of people sectarian sentiment, hate speech, the incitement of hatred, and the threat of violence by extremists presents a more immediate day-to-day threat that the risk of violence itself. This often presents in the form of misogyny, racism, political mobilisation, land disputes, toxic hyper-nationalism, or extreme religious conservatism. When perpetrated in an organised fashion by extremist groups, hateful extremism is deeply interrelated with violent extremism, yet it represents a more insidious and pervasive problem than violent extremism alone. Although not all hateful extremism leads to physical violence, it invariably promotes discrimination and structural violence, and all forms of violent extremism generate and are underpinned by related expressions of hateful extremism. Violent and hateful extremism is thus a broad term, describing social movements seeking to bring about political and societal change in the name of ideology, sometimes framed in terms of religion and/or identity, by means that dehumanise and threaten to harm to others, coercing or subordinating other groups and occasionally perpetrating actual physical violence to reinforce that fear (Barton et al. 2022; Ware et al. 2023b).

This report is based on two sets of data, collected during two visits to Kenya by the project team:

Visit 1: 20-30 June 2023, Key Informant Expert Interviews—Three members of the Deakin-PIA team travelled to Nairobi and Mombasa (A/Prof Anthony Ware, Prof Greg Barton, and Dr Dave Husy). Interviews were conducted with 48 expert informants, including key leaders from various civil society organisations (CSO) or development agencies involved in P/CVE work in Kenya, plus academics, people from the government/security apparatus, and senior PIK team members. Most of the interviews were conducted during this first visit although some were conducted online and 4 others were done during the second visit in May 2024 with Dr Leanne Kelly. Detail of the methodology is given below. The PIK team arranged all meetings and discussions, to include a mix of organisations PIK have or would consider partnering with, and other organisations with a reputation for excellence in work related to P/CVE and countering hate in Kenya. George Kamau (Nairobi) and Phanuel Owiti (Mombasa) arranged all interviews for the team, accompanied the team, and actively participated in all discussions for the June 2023 visit.

Visit 2: 16-31 May 2024, Focus Group Discussions, ordinary villagers, Kwale—The whole Deakin team travelled to Nairobi and Mombasa (AProf Anthony Ware, Dr Leanne Kelly and Prof Greg Barton). During this visit the team oversaw data collection in Kwale county, comprising a total 29 focus group discussion (FGD) (total 330 participants, 178 male, 152 female), in villages which had or were nearby PIK program sites, in conjunction with Prof Hassan Mwakimako of Pwani University. Kwale County was chosen as it is a site of significant programming by Plan International Kenya, and because it has one of the highest rates of recruitment by extremist groups. Kwale has the highest number of returnees of any county in Kenya.

Participants in the FGDs shared their understandings, experiences and insights about extremism, outlining the direct and indirect influences of violent and hateful extremism on their local village context. They discussed how violent and hateful extremism is perceived and defined in their communities, and factors that contribute to the problem, their concerns, and so on. Furthermore, the FGDs offered a platform for local people to come together, discuss difficult topics, and develop practical solutions that provide them with ownership and agency over their peacebuilding pathways. Engaging with those voices helps us to think about community-level approaches and solutions. We also hosted two 1-day symposia on civil society organisation responses to addressing VHE, which were run in Mombasa and Nairobi in May 2024. Some insights from these symposia have been incorporated into report's analysis.

The data obtained in the expert interviews has informed our detailed, high-level context analysis of the VHE situation in Kenya, focussed primarily on the Coast Region, which is presented in Part A of this report. The findings cover the nature of conflict and VHE dynamics, key issues-drivers-grievances, recruitment pathways, gender dynamics and what other CSOs are doing that offer good examples for Plan International. The FGD data informs Part B of this report, an analysis of on-the-ground perspectives of VHE dynamics from the lived experience of ordinary local community members in Kwale. Part C then documents the recommendations of both the expert key informants and the ordinary Kwale local villagers, as to the sort of programming responses a development NGO like Plan International Kenya might support or undertake, to address the VHE situation within the context of their development programming. We conclude Part C by listing our view of the most relevant recommendations for PIK to consider: a mixture of insights proposed by the experts, community members, and our own observations. This analysis covers their definitions of VHE, perspectives on conditions that contribute to vulnerability and recruitment, their concerns and observations about the challenges it presents, as well as thoughts on approaches to address the issue at the community level.

This report thus offers both a detailed high-level context analysis of the violent and hateful extremism (VHE) situation in Kenya, informed by expert opinion, focussed primarily on the Coast Region, and on-the-ground perspectives from the lived experience of ordinary local community members. From these two data sources, we propose some potential NGO responses to the situation.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews and focus group data collection. In-country fieldwork was conducted 20-30 June 2023, and 16-31 May 2024.

Semi-Structured Key Informant Expert Interviews

A total of 44 key informants gave interviews between 20-30 June, 2023, or via videoconference call prior to arrival, with a final 4 interviews conducted during the second trip in May 2024. These represent a diverse range of organisations with expertise in the VHE context or actively involved in P/CVE work in Kenya. Interviews were conducted in Nairobi, Mombasa, and elsewhere in the Coast Region. Of these 48 interviews, 26 expert key informants were key leaders from various civil society organisations (CSO) or development agencies other than PIK, 2 were academics, 4 were from the government/security apparatus, and 1 was a village chief—plus we had extended debrief, discussion and planning meetings with 15 key PIK team members from around the country. The non-PIK agencies included: ACT!, HAKI Africa, Human Rights Agenda (HURIA), Angaza, Agents of Peace Integrated Initiatives for Community Empowerment (IICEP), Tana Delta Child Protection Network, Safe Community, Trace Kenya, Peace Insight, Transparency International, Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics Trust (CICC), Wajir Peace and Development Agency (WPDA), and Juhudi Community Support Centre. The interviewees were virtually all Kenyan nationals, with a majority from (or working in) Mombasa and the coast region. There were 15 female (31%) and 33 male (69%) informants. Face-to-face interviews were largely held in the offices of the people being interviewed, in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kilifi, etc, but at their request other venues included Pwani University (Malindi) and restaurants/cafés chosen by the informants.

All interviews were conducted by two or more of: Associate Professor Anthony Ware, Professor Greg Barton, Dr Dave Husy and/or Dr Leanne Kelly. During the first visit, Phanuel Owiti from PIK accompanied us to all in-person interviews in Mombasa/ the coast region and actively participated in all discussions, as did George Kamau from PIK for all in-person interviews in and around Nairobi. The PIK team arranged all meetings and discussions, to include a mix of organisations PIK have or would consider partnering with, and other organisations with a reputation for excellence in work related to P/CVE and countering hate in Kenya. Interview data has all been fully anonymised. Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically. However, for ease of reporting and to provide anonymity, we have not attributed comments to particular informants. The expert informant interview data is presented in Part A of this report, our detailed, high-level context analysis of the VHE situation in Kenya, focussed primarily on the Coast Region.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

A total of 29 FDGs were conducted in Kwale county, with youth, women and household heads in villages which had or were nearby to PIK program sites. The FGD data informs Part B of this report, an analysis of on-the-ground perspectives of VHE dynamics from the lived experience of ordinary local community members in Kwale. From these, as well as from insights in Part A and our own observations, in Part C we propose some potential NGO responses to the situation.

A total of 330 people participated in 29 village-level FGDs, all gender segregated to encourage greater openness and discussion. Most groups comprised 12 individuals, and none less than 9. In total 152 women and 178 men participated. The FGD data is coded by village name, plus age and gender markers: W for women, M for men, WY for female youth, and MY for male youth (e.g. KalalaniWY).

PIK and the Deakin team worked closely with Prof Hassan Mwakimako, of Pwani University, who helped organize the team of FGD facilitators from former and current students, many of whom were from Kwale themselves. The Deakin team provided a full day of training for the facilitators in Diani, Kwale, aided by Prof Mwakimako and Phanuel Owiti (PIK). Prof Mwakimako then supervised the facilitators data collection in the villages, before the Deakin team debriefed them and collected notes from the FGDs at the PIK office in Kwale. PIK paid the facilitators and Prof Mwakimako from funding provided by PIA.

This methodology will be expanded in a future paper and so will only be laid out briefly here. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that this approach builds on the authors' histories of trial and error with remote fieldwork and offers a novel and useful way of collecting data with a multitude of pros and cons (Ware & Laoutides, 2021; Kelly & Htwe, 2024). Important pros include that FGD facilitators were local and thus understand the context and language. A con was that the notes were not exactly how we would do them, although they were still high quality. Another consideration is that perhaps participants were less likely to speak openly to a local in case their information was shared; however, this was a risk for all participants despite assurance given that we would uphold the Chatham House Rule of confidentiality. It is more likely that participants would have spoken less openly to an outsider, as they commonly mentioned their fear of outsiders and mistrust of strangers' intentions throughout the FGDs.

The Australian team was based in Mombasa and met the team of young researchers in Kwale for a full day of training the day before the FGDs were due to begin. The training day provided an overview of the project and support for how to run a focus group and take good notes. Young researchers had all facilitated FGDs previously, so our training was more a refresher and ensured mutually agreed expectations. There was a strong emphasis on ethics and guidance around recourse for certain disclosures. Consent forms, plain language statements, and verbal ethics explanations were overviewed. Training was consolidated through gamification and role play. Part of the role play, which doubled as research data, involved splitting the group in two, with one group of young researchers being asked the questions by the Deakin and Pwani academics while the other group practiced notetaking, then the groups switching roles. As well as providing us with useful data

from residents who live in Kwale, this gave participants experience of being members of a FGD and in taking comprehensive notes. The purpose of these FGDs as research data was explicitly explained and participants had the option of redacting their comments from the transcripts.

Prof Mwakimako supervised and accompanied the youths on the data collection, as closely as possible. The Deakin team and Prof Mwakimako met the young researchers again for a debriefing the day after they finished data collection. As well as other activities, the Australian research team ran a large focus group with them, which gave them the opportunity to discuss and analyse the things they had heard, based on both the notes they took during their fieldwork as well as other recollections. This added nuance, highlighting in particular instances where they were surprised by or disagreed with villagers.

The qualitative data from the FGDs was conducted through thematic analysis, adhering to the guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019). This inductive approach facilitated the direct extraction of themes from the data, thereby emphasising the authentic voices of the community. Such a methodological choice underscores the study's commitment to basing its conclusions on the genuine experiences and perceptions of the participants. While the FGD questions structured the discussions, some topics—such as the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals and the impact of social media—were specifically introduced as prompts by facilitators to enrich the dialogue and ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant issues.

The study adhered to ethical guidelines ensuring fully informed consent of all participants. The interviewees were briefed on the purpose of the study and how their data will be utilised. As previously mentioned, this field research is part of an Australian Research Council project and has ethics approval from Deakin University (HAE-2022-069). All interviewees were offered anonymity, and none requested this. However, for the purposes of this report, statements and findings have been generalised or anonymised to represent what we, the foreign research team, have learned from the informants about the VHE situation in Kenya. Comprehensive notes were taken during interviews, which were later typed and interviewers' observations added. This interview data underwent manual thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights related to countering or preventing VHE in Kenya.

As with any qualitative research, this study has limitations. The sample size is unlikely to be representative of all stakeholders involved in countering or preventing VHE efforts in Kenya. Additionally, the perspectives shared by interviewees are products of their personal experiences and influenced by their organisational affiliations. The gender disparity amongst informants, while broadly reflecting the gender breakdown of senior leaders in this space in Kenya, is also not representative of the wider population. No details on tribal/ethnic or religious background of key informants was collected although this information was collected for FGDs. In the FGDs, 75% were Digo, 25% Duruma, and a small representation of Somali and Rabai, and Kamba. The vast majority of FGD participants were Muslim, while Christians were represented in 8 of the 29 focus groups.

Definition of Key Terms

Our interviews and focus groups did not define key terms for participants, nor seek to impose a definition on them. We simply used terms and engaged in discussions with informants, allowing them to respond according to their own definitions and fill the terms with meaning.

For the purposes of this report, however, to clarify our own starting use of key terms as they arise throughout the report, we define terms as follows:

Extremism

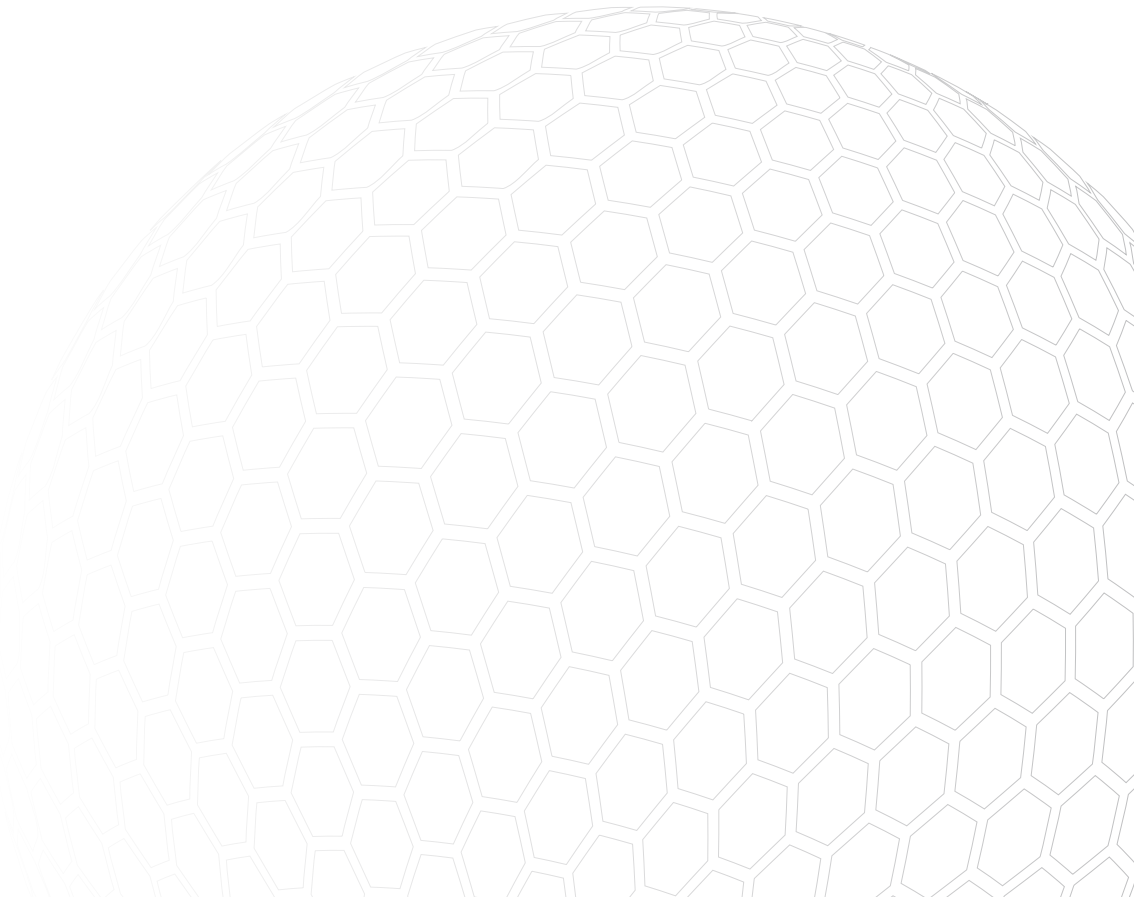
Systemic verbal or active opposition to basic values in a society, such as democracy, equality, liberty, rule of law, and tolerance for the faiths and beliefs of others (Jugl et al. 2021)

Violent extremism (VE)

The use, or threat, of physical violence by non-state actors to bring about political change. Violent extremism is widely used as a synonymous with terrorism, which is defined as: "fear-generating, coercive political violence... a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral constraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties" (Schmid, 2011)

Hateful extremism (HE)

The use of hate speech and hateful behaviour to instil fear and perceived threat of extremist violence. Often associated with toxic nationalism and misogyny, it relies on non-physical forms of violence (Ware et al., 2023).



PART A: VIOLENT AND HATEFUL EXTREMISM EXPERT CONTEXT ANALYSIS

This section is informed primarily by the 48 formal interviews we conducted with expert key informants in Kenya, transcribed and analysed in detail, together with our own research and reflection on a range of other discussions and experiences we had during our visits to the country and beyond. The next section, Part B, will detail the perceptions of ordinary people in the village-level focus groups, and this section does not draw on that data. The interview data used in this section has all been fully anonymised, meaning while we cite from the transcripts, we present the information we have learned without attributing it to any particular expert informant.

Background: Violent Extremism in Kenya

Kenya has been confronted by violent extremist threats for decades, since the attacks on the Norfolk Hotel, Nairobi in 1980, the US embassy in Nairobi in 1998, and the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa in 2002. These early terror attacks, however, all had an external dimension and were conducted in Kenya more because it was a lower security 'soft' target for global terror, than because of any home-grown extremist groups or issues.

The 31 December 1980 Norfolk Hotel, Nairobi attack, for example, targeted a Jewish-owned hotel and was attributed to pro-Palestinian forces seeking revenge for Kenya's role in Operation Entebbe (the July 1976 Israeli rescue of passengers on the hijacked Air France flight from Tel Aviv to Paris, diverted to Uganda). The attack partially destroyed the Norfolk Hotel, killed 20 people and wounded 87 more. Similarly, the massive 7 August 1998 truck bomb attack on the US Embassy, Nairobi which killed 213 and left around 4,000 others injured, was attributed to al-Qaeda and clearly directed at US interests. It was timed to occur simultaneously with a near identical bomb attack on the US Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, highlighting the fact Kenya was a convenient location but not a primary target. The 28 November 2002 bombing of the Paradise Hotel in Kilifi by al-Qaeda targeted a Jewish tour group at a Israeli-owned hotel on the eve of Hanukah. Again, almost simultaneously, al-Qaeda operatives fired two surface-to-air shoulder-launched missiles at an Israel-based Arkia Airlines flight out of Mombasa Airport.

None of these terror attacks appear to have had any home-grown extremist connections. All were conducted by external actors, targeting external interests, to promote external causes. However, it is possible that the attacks had some impact locally, creating a perceived history of violent extremism in the country, a trajectory that perhaps help legitimise the idea of terror as an effective means of fighting for a cause, in the minds of a marginal fringe.

Extremism became more local and virulent in Kenya after the rise of al-Shabaab across the border in Somalia, from 2006. A series of large, high-profile terror attacks commenced with the 21 September 2013 rampage at the Westgate Shopping Mall, Nairobi, which involved a televised 80-hour siege that left 67 dead and over 200 people wounded. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility, as retribution for Kenya's military deployment in Somalia in 2011-2012. This was rapidly followed by a series of high profile and terrifying attacks, all claimed by or attributed to al-Shabaab. On 4 May 2014 two IEDs exploded on buses in Nairobi. Two weeks later, 16 May 2014, two more IEDs exploded in Gikomba market, Kenya's largest. During 15-17 June 2014, 50 masked gunmen hijacked a van in the Christian enclave of Mpeketoni, took control of a police station, and then shot people at random, killing more than 60 victims. On 5 July 2014, 12 men opened fire in a trading centre in the town of Hindi, in Lamu County near the Somali border. On 22 November 2014 al-Shabaab gunmen hijacked a bus with 60 passengers, travelling in Madera region near the Somali border, and killed 28 non-Muslims, 17 of whom were school teachers. The violence perhaps culminated in the Garissa University College attack, 20 April 2015, during which gunmen took 700+ students hostage, freed Muslims and killed Christians, resulting in 148 students killed and a further 79 injured.

This is not an exhaustive list of attacks, intended more to highlight the most high-profile examples. Many suggest the extremist violence peaked around 2016, but there have been more recent attacks. On 15-16 January 2019, a suicide bomber plus 4 other masked men attacked and laid siege to the Dusit2 Hotel in Nairobi for 22 hours, resulting in the deaths of 21 civilians and 1 security officer. On 5 January 2020, al-Shabaab militants attacked the Camp Simba military base in Lamu County, on the coast near the Somali border. The base had around 100 US personnel stationed there, and attackers destroyed five aircraft, killed 5 people, of whom 3 were American. Since then, many lower-key attacks have continued in counties along the Somali border, as al-Shabaab move seamlessly cross-border.

Recruitment by al-Shabaab, ISIS, and other groups is an ongoing challenge for the Kenyan authorities and civil society, particularly in the Coast Region, something of which most of the population seem acutely aware and deeply afraid. Most recruits travel to Somalia and join al-Shabaab, or the new ISIS-affiliated Ansar al-Sunna enclave in Mozambique, but the risk of violence within Kenya remains high. A great deal of counterterrorism (CT) and preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) work has been done in Kenya, and it has been several years without any high-profile terror attacks in major population centres. Nonetheless, recruitment clearly continues. Based on arrest data, authorities estimate that currently recruitment to al-Shabaab and ISIS is still around 30% of its peak, highlighting the stickiness of the problem, and the ongoing dangers. The CT and P/CVE work done to date has made a good difference, but appears to have driven the remaining recruitment underground and online, where it is less visible, rather than brought it to an end. The rate of recruitment thus remains stubbornly high, and the threat remains very real.

The significance of the international and historical context cannot be understated. Kenya's border with Somalia is an ongoing risk, with al-Shabaab acting with impunity in regions that border the country and making significant incursions into Kenya. This is a major factor, and something difficult to address without a solution in Somalia. Continued progress in Kenya is unlikely in isolation; regional peace and coordinated P/CVE campaigns are essential. As one local academic commented during the interviews, 'If Kenya was an island, probably you can solve the problem of Shabaab in Kenya'. (Although we would add that, thinking of Indonesia for example, that might be an overly simplistic view if taken literally.) This international dimension is further compounded by many deeply historical geopolitical and post-colonial factors that continue to plague the region, as well as historical ties of the coastal region to Zanzibar and (going far enough back) Oman.

The challenges are made more complex by the way violent extremism interplays with, or is overlaid by, many other conflicts within Kenya. Sectarian, ethnic/clan, pastoralists/farmers, land/resource, etcetera conflicts, plus political mobilisation connected to election cycles, youth gangs and criminal enterprise, leave some groups and individuals feeling particularly threatened, vulnerable, isolated and/or marginalised. Most of these conflicts have deep historical roots, yet are also highly political and grounded squarely in contemporary socioeconomic reality. All of these have become intertwined with extremist recruitment, making it difficult to clearly define or identify extremism in isolation, or respond to it without addressing a wide range of grievances, conflicts and issues. Central, however, are identity-based perceptions of marginalisation.

A large number of grievances act as push factors. These including overly harsh security responses directed at particular communities in the past, other historical injustices, land and resource disputes, ongoing discrimination and deprivation including high rates of unemployment and poverty affecting the groups most at risk of recruitment, and so on. Most of the concerns are largely legitimate and difficult to address. Extremist recruitment propaganda plays on these issues, which are discussed in more detail throughout this report.

This is all compounded by the deeply religious nature of Kenyan society. Not only does this facilitate misrepresentation of conflicts that are fundamentally about resources or discrimination, for example, as being religiously motivated, but it also allows opportunity for VE recruiters and other unscrupulous people to prey on people's religious devotion and values. As one interviewee pointed out, 'all religions have their extremists'. There is certainly a mushrooming of newer, more fundamentalist groups within all religions in Kenya, and with that significant portions of each religion are now not well educated in the traditional orthodox teachings of their religion—teachings that have been protective factors against extremism in those traditions in the past. This can leave vulnerable people open to deception by those with malintent—whether by the likes of Pastor Mackenzie and the Good News International Church's messianic death cult, or recruiters and preachers promising violent extremist jihad as short-cut to paradise.

This overview outlines the complexity of VHE in Kenya. Before exploring these themes in more detail in the sections below, two final significant observations are worth noting from our interviews.

The first is that while global research and our similar work in other countries has indicated that the terms 'violent extremism', 'countering violent extremism', and so on, are often problematic, none of our interviewees mentioned a problem with such terminology in Kenya. This surprises us. In many other parts of the world there are extreme sensitivities around use of these terms in community program contexts. Thus, while one respondent mentions that working in P/CVE was sometimes scary, none expressed discomfort with phrases such as violent extremism, countering violent extremism, preventing violent extremism, or terrorism. This is atypical in our experience. As we spoke to a broad range of people, it seems likely that this acceptance of the terminology may be that a lot of hard work by Kenyan governments at all levels, partnering with diverse civil society groups, has socialised the terminology and dispelled many of the stereotypes and misapplication, for example through the collaborative production of national and county CVE Action Plans. It is perhaps indicative of a new willingness and openness on the part of the Kenyan government, security forces and civil society to recognise the underlying tensions, and the need to work together, proactively, towards solutions. If we are correct on this, and we hope we are, this observation bodes very well for further work strengthening the protective factors against recruitment into violent extremism, and suggests that the pathway is more straightforward for development agencies like Plan International Kenya to also begin to engage in P/CVE work, and perhaps take up some of the recommendations we suggest in Part C of this report.

Our second observation is that despite the complexity, ongoing threat, and difficult challenges, most of those we interviewed present as empowered and optimistic about the future. While they recognise the difficulties facing their country, they speak as if they felt Kenyan civil society, together with new government and security service policies and practice, are ready to address the fundamental issues, together. Overall, their attitude might be summed us as: defiant, proud, and future-focussed. Again, this bodes extremely well for collaborative engagement by Plan International Kenya and other development agencies, tackling some of the issues further upstream (to address deprivations and grievances, to help prevent radicalisation into violent behaviour) and downstream (to disengage individuals from violent extremist social networks and reintegrate them into healthy social relationships). A word of caution though, is that the same level of optimism and defiant, future-focussed resolve was not as evident in the village-level focus group discussions, highlighting that a great deal more work is still required.

Significance of International and Historical Context

The impact of the international and historical context on Kenya's struggle against VHE should not be under-estimated, particularly the shared border with Somalia. Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin, commonly known as al-Shabaab, took control of most of southern Somalia including Mogadishu and the regions bordering Kenya

in 2006. After being driven back by Somali and Ethiopian forces in 2007, the clan-based Islamist insurgent and violent extremist group has used guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics to project power or exert control across much of southern and central Somalia. Somalis and other groups live on both sides of the border, which is extremely porous. It is not surprising, therefore, that for almost two decades al-Shabaab activities have regularly spilled over into northeastern Kenya, and that al-Shabaab have long sought to recruit fighters from amongst the Somali—and other Muslim populations—including along the coast, nomadic pastoralists in the northeast, and elsewhere across the country.

Kenya sent a large force into Somalia to fight al-Shabaab in 2011, precipitated by frequent kidnappings—including of tourists—along the coast region. The purpose of this force as to secure the borderlands between the two countries. These troops were later integrated into the regional peacekeeping force African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In response, the al-Shabaab leader declared war on Kenya in 2012. That same year, al-Shabaab affiliated with al-Qaeda, developing their Islamist ideology and going on to commit the high profile terror attacks in Kenya outlined in the introduction: Westgate Shopping Mall in 2013, Garissa University College in 2015, Dusit2 Hotel Nairobi in 2019, and so on.

These major terrorist attacks therefore cannot be divorced from Kenyan intervention in Somalia, which was initially a unilateral action. AMISOM transitioned to African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022, and is now drawing down its troops, with the last of Kenya's troops leaving Somalia by the end of 2024. It is possible this withdrawal will reduce the VHE risk in Kenya—although this is far from a certainty. For example, it has long been noted that, depending on its fortunes in Somalia, al-Shabaab's forces often spill over into northern Kenya to escape counter-insurgency actions targeting them. Local informants advise that in the last few years, as al-Shabaab have lost ground in central Somalia, many have migrated with nomadic herders into Mandera, Wajir and Garissa Counties of Kenya. One local expert informant spoke of, 'daily killings, maimings and attacks' in parts of the northeast, and such attacks on non-local government employees have resulted in many teachers, medical professionals and others fleeing the insecurity, leaving education, healthcare, and government services and local economy crippled in many areas of the north. He noted an attack just two day earlier on a road construction crew, and noted that they tend to attack or target the non-locals. There is a danger therefore of a creeping withdrawal of the Kenyan state, as teachers, medical workers, bureaucrats, construction crews and the like leave, and others refuse posts in these regions due to security risks, resulting in a growing influence of al-Shabaab. In this context, where the state, security and local opportunities withdraw, that youth become more easily recruited, particularly when al-Shabaab pay recruits. Others join al-Shabaab seeing it as the most viable way to local stability, others again are coerced.

Al-Shabaab is thus not only a problem in terms of being a non-state actor in a neighbouring country that recruits and occasionally plans attacks in Kenya, but the porous nature of the border and international dimension of the conflict directly involve Kenya and place al-Shabaab inside Kenya as well as Somalia. Al-Shabaab are implicated in the miraa (khat) drug trade, an addictive local narcotic, and tax or control significant cross-border contraband trade. In areas on the frontiers of their operations, including northeastern Kenya, they exchange information with local traders in exchange for licensing those people's ability to continue and expand their trade, whether legal or contraband.

Reports of Kenyan young people being recruited and trained by al-Shabab began to emerge from about 2010, but the government was initially slow to act. It was not until about 2016 that there was a widespread realisation this was becoming a national problem, and the government began to commit serious resources and develop national CVE strategy.

Al-Shabaab are the wealthiest militia in East Africa, paying their soldiers (we are advised) around USD2,200 a month. This is well above the wages of most other workers in coastal or northeast Kenya, creating an economic incentive for some unemployed Muslims to join al-Shabaab, especially unemployed young people. Some apparently join al-Shabaab for economic motives, regardless of or before any conversion to their Islamist ideology. Thus, while most recruits may be radicalised first, and willingly join, some young people have apparently been tricked by the lure of jobs, migrating for work opportunities etc only to find themselves unwittingly trafficked into al-Shabaab operations. In such cases, radicalisation, if it occurs at all, comes later, after recruitment. One informant expressed the view that, "al-Shabab is very successful because they have the money". Another that, "This is an enemy who has money. This is an enemy that has weapons. They are charismatic. They have knowledge. They know what they want. They're 10 steps ahead of us". Yet another noted that it not only a Somali problem, because they recruit all along the coast as well as in Tanzania, and many people involved in the attacks in Somalia and northeast Kenya are not Somali.

A second international dimension to Kenya's VHE context lies to the south. What is now the coast region of Kenya was, for almost a century during the colonial era, part of the Sultanate of Zanzibar. The Sultanate was based on the island of Zanzibar, now part of Tanzania. The entire coast, from the Tanzanian to Somali border, and encompassing land up to 10 miles inland from the ocean, was at least nominally under this Muslim sultanate's rule from 1856 until 1964, just after Kenya's Independence. It is still predominantly populated by Muslim people, and there continue to be groups actively perpetuating calls for the restoration of previous independence—for example, the Republican Council of Mombasa in 1960s, and the Mombasa Republican Council of the 1990s and 2000s. While originally more a political movement, it has resulted in violent clashes and the cause is taken up in recruitment propaganda.

Willis and Mwakimako (2020) highlight the fact that the idea of Muslims having had self-rule along the coast is a 'contested imaginary'. The first, obvious note is that Zanzibar's control was only partial, at best, and the British and then Kenyan state have always had good access and at least some governance control over some or all of the region. The second is that the level of rule

Zanzibar exerted was not a rule by local Muslim ethnic groups anyway. It was not autonomy, or local rule, but still involved external powers. Thirdly, the area defined as 'the coast' and spoken if in these terms, implying or demanding a return of independence, is usually poorly defined and often applied to land much further inland than the first 10-miles of the coast. And finally, while Islam has a much longer history on the coast and retains a degree of cultural pre-eminence, the Mijikenda people, often presented as the indigenous population of the coast, include ethnic groups who are Muslim, Christian and traditional in terms of religious belief. While Kwale and Kilifi counties remain majority Muslim, Mombasa is relatively cosmopolitan and is now more non-Muslims than Muslim, population-wise.

Nonetheless, extremist recruiters often play on grievance narratives of historical injustice, particularly the loss of Muslim rule following Christians moving into, dominating and taking control of Muslim land along the coast. Extremists commonly portray their cause as being a fight for the re-establishment of Muslim rule, citing Zanzibar history. Indeed, we are told there was a surge of recruitment effort after the 2016 al-Shabaab attacks on Kenyan forces in El Adde, Somalia, the largest defeat of the Kenya Defence Forces since independence. Our interviewees say that al-Shabaab recruiters were telling coastal Muslims at that time, 'we are going to help you Muslims get your land back, like us.' What started as a legitimate and perhaps non-violent fight against injustices has, for some, morphed into extremism.

Another international dimension arose after the extremely violent Ansar al-Sunna insurgent group in northern Mozambique affiliated with ISIS in 2019. Since then, we are advised, much of the VE recruitment in the south of the coast region has been to send fighters to Mozambique, not Somalia. Mozambique has become the new recruitment problem for Kenya. Making this even more dangerous, Kwale, the southern-most coastal county, bordering Tanzania, has the highest number of returnees from Somalia, many of whom have experienced rejection by communities since their return, and felt targeted by security forces. The porous border makes not only this movement of fighters possible, but also allows returnees from Somalia to slip backwards and forwards across the Tanzania border when they feel the need to evade Kenyan authorities, making them potentially attractive recruits for the ISIS-backed Ansar al-Sunna group in Mozambique.

Beyond this, of course, the Kenyan context cannot be divorced from the global geopolitical context. For instance, as happens with VE globally, recruiters in Kenya use things like US attacks on a Muslim country or the Israel-Palestine situation, encouraging prospective recruits to 'look at what's happening to your brothers overseas'. And while some extremist attacks are clearly aimed at spreading local messages of fear, such as the attack on a Christian religious meeting in 2002 and a locally-owned hotel in 2016, it is not accidental that the earliest major terror attacks were on the US Embassy in Nairobi (1998), and the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel (2002). Even more recently, the 2019 attack on the Dusit2 Hotel Nairobi was directed at an Israeli-owned hotel, and al-Shabaab declared it was in response to developments in the Israel-Palestine conflict at the time. The impact of the current war in Gaza is not yet clear, but it definitely presents a very real danger of an upsurge in recruitment in a country like Kenya.

The international political messaging in many these attacks cannot be minimised. Neither can CVE/PVE in Kenya be fully divorced from global fund and donor agendas. For example, USAID-funding was pivotal to developing programs for returnees from al-Shabaab in 2014, which did not always go smoothly. International and historical factors thus provide significant complexity to the VHE situation in Kenya, and mean that external violent extremist groups like al-Shabaab and ISIS are likely to continue to recruit and attempt operations in Kenya for the foreseeable future. While inequalities and sociopolitical divisions remain in Kenya, it will be near impossible to fully curtail this without regional peace and the defeat of both al-Shabaab in Somalia and the ISIS-backed Ansar al-Sunna in Mozambique, at very least.

Overlay of other conflicts

Extremism in Kenya is grounded in cultural, religious, and political factors that are deeply interconnected with other intercommunal, sectarian, and political conflicts. This means VHE issues cannot be seen or addressed in isolation, but are part of a set of much larger sociopolitical issues requiring broad policy and program responses by a wide variety of state and civil society actors. It also means that these policy and program responses need to be holistic, and not solely (or primarily) seen to be driven by P/CVE priorities. They need to be genuine efforts to resolve the grievances underlying the conflicts, not merely a cynical attempt to control violence by submerging issues. For example, policies and mechanisms for conflict resolution, justice and equity are just as important for addressing extremism as are security and effective counter-terrorism measures. This is effectively the most central point our informants told us, and aligns closely with what we know about P/CVE globally in situations in which extremism exists within an ecosystem rife with other conflict. The fact that recruitment continues, despite very real advances made by state and civil society actors, shows the narratives based on underlying grievances still find significant traction with some marginalised community members, and there is therefore more work to be done.

One informant quipped: "Extremism has always been with us. It has always been there, it only came to light after the bombings"—suggesting that to some extent the violent extremism label is just new terminology and a new framework applied to older conflicts and struggles. This is probably not entirely true, when we consider the escalation of non-state attacks targeting civilians that clearly aim to instil terror—this is something new in the last 25 years or so. Nonetheless, the sentiment is clear, that the underlying social conflicts and grievances are very historical, and some things have not yet changed significantly. One local civil society organisation leader noted that when they formed over thirty years ago, they were focussed on addressing clan conflicts, particularly in northern Kenya—now these are made worse by al-Shabaab, but almost all

are also now assumed to be related to extremism, despite clan disputes often being central. Another mulled, not distinguishing between extremist violence and other conflict issues: "We compare it to a smouldering fire: it just requires a little spark for it to blow out of out of proportion."

Extremism in Kenya, particularly recruitment narratives and dynamics, are deeply intertwined with the many other post-colonial, sectarian, ethnic/clan, pastoralists/farmers, land/resource, etcetera conflicts within Kenya, plus the instability and violence connected with political mobilisation (especially election-related), youth and boda-boda gangs, and criminal activities. These other conflicts leave some groups and individuals feeling particularly threatened, isolated and/or marginalised, and thus more vulnerable to recruitment narratives, and socialise individuals to violence as a means of gaining or projecting power. Most of these conflicts have deep historical roots, yet are also highly political and grounded squarely in current socioeconomic realities and grievances. All have become intertwined with extremist recruitment. The central issue to be addressed, through policy and programs, is identity-based perceptions of marginalisation.

Land and resource conflicts

A majority of intercommunal conflicts in the Coast Region, and probably across most of Kenya, relate to land and resources. Often taking the guise of religious, sectarian, or ethnic conflict, most conflicts in Kenya are really about land or other resources. This takes a variety of forms. Perhaps the most historic of these are the conflicts that have long emerged between pastoralists and farmers, particularly in arid areas where resources are scarce. The additional strain on land, water and other resources when pastoralists appear can deeply impact local host communities. Interviewees note that the recent drought is almost unprecedented, certainly the worst drought in 40 years, and has thus seen many pastoralists abandon their livelihoods, particularly in the north and northeast of Kenya. In some cases, this has created new settlements of largely jobless people on the margins of other communities. This not only makes the challenge on resources permanent, in areas already suffering scarcity, but a new community with no livelihood is also potentially vulnerable to recruitment as a means of survival—particularly where monthly salaries are offered by al-Shabaab. If you have no livelihood, then perhaps many feel that the only way to survive is to join them. Climate change is only going to exacerbate these issues, creating the danger of increased land and resource competition on clan and racial lines, of pastoralists driving their herds into new areas for survival, and increased impoverishment and marginalisation of vulnerable groups like the pastoralists who drop out. Indeed, we were advised that al-Shabaab are already using narratives of government inaction on climate crisis in their recruitment, meaning there already is a direct connection between the climate crisis and extremist recruitment.

The Tana River violence of 2012-13 is a clear instance of this connection between climate and extremism, offered as an example by multiple key informants. Preceding the Westgate Mall massacre in 2013, and in the border region with Somalia, this violent conflict resulted in 118 dead and over 13,500 people displaced. It was framed as Christian-Muslim sectarian violence in some analyses, but it was primarily about competition over water and land. Pastoralists, who happened to be Muslim, migrated due to drought, with their stock, into an area of largely Christian farmers. The key issue for the pastoralists was rights of access to water; for the farmers, it was protecting crops from being consumed by stock. The issue is a common one, occurring frequently across Kenya, but this was a fairly extreme and high-profile case. In this instance, it was resolved through dialogue, by Muslim and Christian clerics who brought elders together from both communities to discuss and devise a solution. Wise leadership encouraged them to see opportunity for cooperation and coexistence, and even look for new business opportunities that could enhance livelihoods for both groups. Resolution included nominating defined corridors for pastoralists to take livestock to water without destroying the crops of farmers, but the examples show the potential for simmering conflict feeding new rounds of violence, and violent extremism recruitment, in these sorts of disputes.

A second significant form of land/resource dispute centres around land titling and ownership. Multiple interviewees raised concerns about wealthy, well-connected people from other parts of the country (with different ethnoreligious identities) buying up or otherwise acquiring titles to coastal land. Many people, primarily but not only pastoralists, do not have deeds to the land their families have used for generations, and do not necessarily understand land titles or eligibility. As one informant put it, "this used to be our traditional land; now people coming in have land titles, and communal land people used to use is now being titled to others". Most land is not titled, or has not been titled until very recently, and many citizens do not (or did not until recently) even have national identification cards. In many cases there is a valid argument that the practice of titling, if not state law itself, is problematic. Given the disparate tribal and ethnic impacts, one informant suggests state law is "part of an ethnic apartheid regime with religious dimensions."

In many parts of the world this is described as 'land grabbing'—it is interesting to us that none of our interviewees adopted this sort of language, despite most being key civil society leaders or otherwise local elite with good understandings of international practice and issues. This would suggest perhaps a desire to avoid the loaded connotations of 'land grabbing' terminology, but either way the issue does cry out for clear government land ownership and land reform policies, that recognise the rights of traditional use of land by peoples who may never have had titles but can demonstrate a long history of communal use and connection to country. It also suggests need for civil society and development organisations to support communities' claims to land, by documenting traditional

use and navigating complex official processes. Violent extremist groups feed on such land dispute grievances, the feeling that natural justice is being denied by systemic structural biases that disenfranchise and marginalise coastal Muslims. In this way, violent extremism, resource conflicts and political contestation are deeply interrelated, and amplify one another. And climate change, of course, will only make resource conflicts more frequent and intense, and exacerbates conflict risk, tensions and grievances given those already more marginalised are usually the most vulnerable to the impact of the climate crisis.

Many of the land/resource disputes take on racial and religious overtones, as in the Tana River case. Many along the coast resent what they describe as Kikuyu Christians coming in and buying up coastal property, restricting the access to the coast which is perceived as integral to their identity. Because of religious affiliations, resulting clashes have often been mischaracterised as religious conflict; however, it is perhaps more accurately classified as conflict over access to and control of resources between clan/tribe/ethnic groups, often based in wider political contestation. This does not, however, deter recruiters playing these notions. The perception that outsiders are coming in and using the law against people to take away their land only amplifies the post-colonial narratives about Zanzibar and loss of autonomous local Muslim rule what the Mombasa Republican Council and al-Shabaab have used in recruitment.

In recent years, these land/resource disputes have grown to include other high value minerals and resources in or under the ground: oil discovered along Ethiopian border, sites for good geothermal power, and titanium in Kwale, for example. These will likely increasingly become sites of contention, and require very careful policy development or run substantial risk of exacerbating conflict and providing new grievances to fuel extremist recruitment.

Another outsider group of local concern is Somalis, a small minority but growing in number, with some of the wealthy buying up coastal land and developing hotels and major complexes. Many locals link this to ill-gotten al-Shabaab-related economic gains, or the drug trade, and express concern. Linking this with al-Shabaab money, rightly or otherwise, the changing coastal land use is impacting intercommunal relations in complex ways. Concerns were expressed to us that a number of very wealthy Somali businesspeople on the coast have moved very aggressively economically, perhaps corruptly, and that there is resentment against their fast-growing socioeconomic power and population size—meaning anger at outsiders coming in an taking land is not only directed towards Christians.

Political conflict

Political contestation and mobilisation, particularly around elections, has also been a serious issue in Kenya for decades. Surprisingly to us, our elite interview informants said very little directly about this significant issue, probably in large part due to the narrower focus of our questions on extremism. Nonetheless, political mobilisation and conflict clearly do have several key points of overlap with political violence, at times helping fuel violent extremism, hate speech that intersects with hateful extremism, and the marginalisation of minorities, particularly Muslims minorities. One of our research visits to Kenya had to be deferred due to election campaigning and concerns about potential electoral political violence. Fortunately, the 2022 general election turned out to be much less volatile than previous elections, but it highlights a point.

One clear intersection with violent and hateful extremism, as noted by several interviewees, is that, "Voting in Kenya is very largely split along ethnic lines … [and parties dominated by] the two largest ethnic groups always seem to be in power". It is partly regional, partly ethnic, partly religious, but as a result some other ethnic and religious groups feel permanently marginalised politically because of their identity. Despite the inclusion of Muslims in most Kenyan governments, there is a perception that Muslim interests in particular are under-represented politically. Moreover, there is a widespread belief that politicians and government tend to fund electorates that voted for them more than those who did not, on infrastructure, services, and so on, contributing to this relative underfunding. Moreover, some perceive election campaigning veers into "almost threating electorates and groups in the process of election campaigning", with repercussions for expressing a dissenting political voice.

Violent extremist recruitment in Kenya is deeply related to narratives around marginalisation based on ethnicity and religion, as already discussed. Both are deeply ingrained in Kenya's sense of political identity and the identity of others. One interviewee quipped, "People ask for my second name only to ascertain what tribe I'm from." It is therefore quite significant that electoral politics in Kenya is heavily dominated by ethnicity, or at least perceived in those terms. In theory, Kenya has multi-religious, multi-ethnic political parties, but two of our expert interviewees pointed to the case of the Mombasa-based Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) in the 1990s to highlight common perceptions of political marginalisation of Muslims. The IPK was formed in the hope that,

> …if Muslims could be mobilized to vote en bloc in the constituencies then they could affect the outcome of elections in predictable ways and could thus enhance the bargaining power of Muslims as a group (Bakari 2007, *A Place at the Table*, cited in Saalfeld and Mwakimako 2023).

The political elite refused registration of the party, on the grounds that it was too dangerous to use religion as the basis for political mobilisation. Informants expressed concern not only that it was refused registration, but that "some of the people who were key figures in that party later had major problems with government".

Khalid Balala, the unregistered IPK's de facto leader by mid-1992, is often characterised as a Salafi-inspired Saudi-educated cleric, and

the movement has therefore been labelled extremist or jihadist by many. Nonetheless, Saalfeld and Mwakimako (2023) point out he and the party were far more concerned about enabling Muslims to defend themselves against Christian proselytism and promoting Muslim interests. Balala and others did, however, lace speeches with provocative political commentary alleging anti-Muslim by the ruling parties, and did declare they were willing to announce that the IPK would use violence if necessary to defend themselves against ruling party efforts to disrupt their activities. Saalfeld and Mwakimako reject the extremist label for him, and the other leaders, seeing Balala and the IPK as simply rather aggressively engaging in political contestation on behalf of Muslim communities, and strongly defending Islam from the onslaught of Christianity. The state resorted to largescale and violent repression of the movement, which is still clearly remembered on the coast, three decades later, contributing to recruitment narratives.

Certainly, one of our interviewees reflected, "Even in our recent elections, you ask people, '*Why would you want to vote for this person?*' – they don't have a good reason. It's just because of the ethnic background .... They keep electing people who have cases before the international court ... We know they won't deliver, but we elect them because they are ours."

Another noted, "After the recent elections there was such unrest where people were feeling concerned about their second name, and how that identifies them, and if it would affect their ability to get jobs, etc." With violent extremism tightly connected to ideas of ethno-religious identity, the injection of ethnicity onto electoral politics highlights the fact addressing extremism and norms of political conflict are deeply intertwined.

Corruption is another political concern with regards the link between violent extremism and political contestation. One interviewee claimed (without clear evidence) that up to forty percent of those seeking public office are involved in 'wash-wash', meaning money laundering the proceeds of corruption, expressing concern that funding for violent extremist activities goes through the same channels these politicians keep open. Two of our interviewees made quips along the lines of, "The root of the problem is that our government system is corrupt."

Crime, gangs, and drugs

A final element of the connection between political violence and violent extremism, is the youth and boda-boda motorbike gangs which are often at the centre of political mobilisation. Youth and boda-boda gangs are often formed along ethnic lines. Political leaders and parties mobilise these groups at will, particularly around post-election protest and posturing. Many of the gangs are otherwise involved in drugs and crime, and as below, but important for our discussions, our expert interviewees repeatedly referenced the fact that these gangs are targeted by violent extremist recruiters—perhaps largely because they are already socialised to coercion and violence as a means of political change.

Drug and substance abuse are rampant in many parts of Kenya, and many youth gangs form either to get money for their addictions, or as part of drug distribution networks. The main drug is *miraa* (khat), a stimulant from the khat plant (*Catha edulis*) traditionally used for medicinal purposes and in social traditions in parts of the Middle East, and Eastern Africa. *Miraa* is big business: a Kenyan government survey (NACADA 2022) found almost a million miraa users in the country, with the rate amongst adult males as high as 1 in every 14 people using. Most is shipped into Kenya through Somalia, and trafficking is either controlled by or taxed by al-Shabaab units. As highlighted by an interviewee: "It is a big income generating business for the terror groups", one of al-Shabaab's lucrative money streams.

al-Shabaab derives significant income from taxation of gangs and networks smuggling other black market or illicit items across the border, as well as using these traders for information. Smuggling of all manner of black market or illicit items across the border, is big business, not just drugs. The border between Kenya and Somalia is nominally closed for trade. Most of the cross-border trade is thus, as would be expected, either conducted by al-Shabaab, or by smuggling networks taxed by al-Shabaab and mined by them for information. Either way, al-Shabaab profits. Even informal cross-border trade of sugar, we are advised, sees a 50% markup, and business is booming along the border apparently.

The key point of these several pages on the overlay and interrelationship of violent extremism with other conflicts, is that once recourse of hatred and violence is normalised, the objections to violent extremism recruitment are lessened. Recruiters play on the grievances expressed and exacerbated by these conflicts, and target those already angry and socialised to the idea of violence as a means of political change. Sectarian, ethnic/clan, pastoralists/farmers, land/resource, etcetera conflicts, and political mobilisation, youth gangs and criminal enterprise, all leave some groups and individuals feeling particularly threatened, vulnerable, isolated and/or marginalised, and others empowered by engaging in threats or violence. One interviewee simply put it, "Violence begets violence, so [in addressing violent extremism] we talk about what we need to do to stop the (wider) cycle of violence."

The key point, and a major conclusion of the wider 4-country study, is that for development and humanitarian organisations, addressing VHE should be seen is a part of conflict sensitivity/Do No Harm. VHE dynamics and risks should be systematically analysed in project/program planning, and local capacities that counter or prevent extremism identified. The potential impacts of the proposed project/program on VHE dynamics should be analysed in detail, as well as potential impacts of VHE on the proposed project/program. Every step possible must be made to minimise the risk of inadvertently making VHE worse, through project/program design and implementation, and every opportunity to do good, to reduce the likelihood or impact of VHE in the community, should be built into development and humanitarian project/program design, from the outset—then monitored throughout.

Recruitment Push and Pull Factors

Poverty, poor education, unemployment, lack of opportunity

There are a wide range of push and pull factors at play, which contribute to people being more vulnerable to or more attracted to the recruitment narratives of violent extremist groups.

The key grievances, as already discussed, are the perceived deep structural inequalities and injustice faced by Muslim minorities on the coast, including specifically the history of brutal security responses which have at least in the past been directed towards anyone perceived of as being or supporting violent extremists, therefore including families of those recruited. Deep concern was expressed at inequality and injustice manifesting across everything from respect for human rights, economic opportunity, political voice, governance and access to services and opportunities, as well as the deeply structural nature of these biases. The perception is that marginalisation and discrimination based on religious, ethnic and clan identities is systemic, firmly embedded in both policy and bureaucratic practices, not simply the behaviour of some individuals—and that this is the underlying driver of recruitment.

At the individual and community level, these are felt most tangibly as poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, and a lack of opportunity. These factors were very commonly raised by our interviewees: "People commonly talk about VE, but ignore the structural barriers." Youth unemployment is high right across Kenya, but particularly high along the coast. While we struggled to find accurate official figures for this report, numbers reported to us were a national youth unemployment rate of 22.7% in 2022, with the figure being as high as 67% in Kwale for the same age group. Not completing school, and low educational attainment, "people half-literate" as one interviewee said, makes youth vulnerable. A lack of investment and underdevelopment result in a dearth of employment opportunities. Also "stigma of being from a poor neighbourhood, that they cannot do abcd, and political marginalisation of their communities. These are the main push factors."

As one expert interviewee expressed,

> Poverty has been criminalised … a drug dealer driving a Merc will be saluted by police, but a poor worker from an informal network finishing at midnight [will be] arrested for no reason and forced to pay a bribe.

Another commented,

> Poverty is the one of the things which make children join al-Shabaab … Lack of food, lack of jobs, the [same] things which makes young boys learn to join other unfavorable groups.
>
> Lack of education, illiteracy. If the heads of the families are not well educated they aren't able to give their children good opportunities and these issues cascade from one generation to the next.

Many claim that there is a clear correlation between a lack of education, lack of employment opportunities, and recruitment into youth gangs or militia groups, and from there sometimes into extremist groups. The same types of vulnerable youth join gangs or al-Shabaab, largely for the same financial opportunity reasons, suggesting that addressing the underlying drivers leaving youth vulnerable to recruitment by one will also address recruitment to the other.

There is a narrative that suggests al-Shabaab primarily recruits people from vulnerable groups, particularly out of school and work youth, with reports of children under the age of 15 being recruited. This can include targeting youth with limited knowledge of their religion, as well as new converts to Islam. Many suggest that children without parents, or absentee parents because of work or other issues, perhaps being raised by elderly grandparents are the most vulnerable, particularly as they fall behind and drop out of school. It is youth whose parents do not know what they are up to who are most at risk.

Al-Shabaab is also said to have a high level of recruitment amongst nomadic pastoralists in northeast Kenya, at rates equal to their recruitment in the Coast Region. Many interviewees suggest that Kenyans joining ISIS Mozambique are better educated, and the al-Shabaab recruits tend to be less so, but this is not well substantiated. Others point out that middle class educated families are also seeing their children being recruited. For some of these, it appears radicalisation occurs first, recruitment second, so it does not appear to all be simply economically motivated recruitment. The leader of al-Shabaab in Kenya was a charismatic engineering student, studied in Nairobi, and is second in command of al-Shabaab. Thus, some radicalised or recruited are dropouts, but even the most literate are recruited. For example, a law student and a former government official joined and participated in one of the major attacks. So, extremist organisations also recruit literate

minds, who have planning and leadership ability, and recruits are assigned roles according to their ability: "The bright minds are given more strategic roles, while the dropouts become manual workers, soldiers."

Labour migration and human trafficking

High rates of poverty and unemployment can amplify the lure of work and business opportunities, as a pull factor. Several interviewees indicated that "youth looking naively at 'job opportunities' abroad or in other parts of the country, have resulted in many being lured into extremism." Many informants argue that most new recruits to al-Shabaab and other VE groups in Kenya are attracted by the promise of a monthly salary, and the ability to send money back to support the family, rather than ideology. Al-Shabaab recruiters offer employment with relatively high wages or lucrative business opportunities, so while some Kenyans are attracted to al-Shabaab's portrayal of religious duty and values, it is believed that most recruits turn to VE groups for employment and money, at least initially, rather than or before ideology or grievance.

This lure of employment also makes some people vulnerable to being trafficked into al-Shabaab territory. Some, apparently, apply for work opportunities ignorant of the location of their employment until too late, or are otherwise coerced into joining the group. While there is a question over the number of recruits who have been trafficked by al-Shabaab, rather than radicalised or lured of their own accord, interviewees argue that it is unquestionably true that some are trafficked. One interviewee explained that, "A significant proportion of recruitment is via trafficking. Many are trafficked, then radicalised as they are moved." Another explained that, "[youth are] promised a job in Dubai, they tell them they will take them to Mombasa to get all the paperwork in order, but they are then taken to Shabaab-controlled areas near Somalia and forced into labour. If they radicalise, then maybe they become a fighter." Another argued that,

> I think this is minimal – I think most people are radicalised first, know they are joining terrorists, and join willingly. Maybe 20-30 percent are tricked and trafficked. The rest are radicalised, and join willingly. Although promises of money, the ability to earn and send money back to support family, and ignorance are also a factor [for these ones].

Nonetheless, if 20-30 percent of recruits are trafficking victims, that is a huge proportion in our estimation! We were told a story of some people offered jobs as conductors on long distance buses, and they do work for several months but then on a trip, they are taken off the bus somewhere and kept there. Women are believed to be especially vulnerable, with some subsequently forced into sex slavery or the drug trade.

"They [al-Shabaab] are not half as religious as they claim to be", one interviewee commented. Human trafficking, we are advised, is a resilient threat that continues to evolve, not well recognised, but one factor in the recruitment dynamics of al-Shabaab.

Security Responses and Engaging with Authorities

Many of our informants, including key leaders of prominent human rights organisations, point to rights violations by state actors and agencies, and the stereotyping and targeting of unemployed males of particular religious and ethnic identities, as another very significant push factor. Poverty is a persistent driver of VE radicalisation in Kenya. "Deprivation of human rights is [another]: harsh security responses, extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, abductions, [and] people forced into programs." Heavy-handed policing of suspects, at least in the past, and harsh interrogation methods of family members of those who have crossed over the border to join al-Shabaab, have left wounds that continue to provoke distrust and fear. Likewise, the treatment of returnees, including those who have returned under past amnesties is another factor: some have been brutalised, imprisoned and sometimes disappeared upon returning home. Thus, while by all accounts Kenyan security forces have significantly improved their practices in response to the VE threat, both admitting many of their past excesses and developing new ways of engaging suspects and their families, rumours, narratives and fears about excessive and discriminatory security responses remain a push factor for some.

The way security forces and authorities engage with civil society and with the families of recruits remains problematic. As one interviewee put it,

> We've had people who have who have lost their husbands to the extremist groups. And these families are normally left very traumatised by the fact that they do not know where their loved ones are, and also traumatised by the fact that the government does not find them. They are victims, but they are made to feel like they too are perpetrators.

Another noted,

> Around 2010 reports of young people being trained by al-Shabaab began, but the government was slow to act. When I went to communities, people raised the issues of extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances by security, as key concerns … We know some people are being recruited because they are angry at earlier counter-terrorism responses, especially extrajudicial killings and abductions. There is a lot of criticism online of the way the government treats Muslim community, their CT responses, [and] killings including of Muslim teachers/leaders.

This civil society leader interviewee went on to express the perceived inequality by asking what if Pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie of the Shakahola forest massacre (over 1,000 confirmed dead or missing) had been Muslim? Or Pastor Ezekiel Odero? Despite Pastor Mackenzie being charged under terrorism laws, they pointed out that there is a strong feeling in the Muslim community that counter-terrorism operations per se are reserved for Muslims, that counter-terrorism measures all target Muslims only.
Many interviewees justifiably criticised the Kenyan authorities' sometimes brutal approach to countering VE. One interviewee was

unambiguous in comparing the government's traditional approach to terrorism, criticising it as "terror against terror." Another said, "people feel the security forces terrorists themselves, or worse than the terrorists." Things are clearly improving, yet as recently as two or three years ago, those who reported someone missing, believed recruited, were themselves immediately suspected.

Until recently, civil society were reluctant to engage with the government. Although most recognised the necessity of working with security forces, they knew that doing so would cause criticism. Indeed, one interviewee said that the community viewed them as 'traitors' for engaging with security forces. The government, for its part, was slow to accept the need to work with NGOs. "It took a lot of courage, a lot of pushing, a lot of activism" on behalf of NGOs to convince the government of the need to work together to address VHE.

There has definitely a lot of improvement, but there are still clearly tensions and struggles. One key civil society leader in Mombasa expressed,

> I can know an al-Shabaab. But those times, even just about two three years back, I could not go to a police station and tell them there is an al-Shabaab living near my village. They will question me, they will always tell me I'm part and parcel of it, and I'm complicit. How else did I know? But now things have changed. They are ready. We sit, we dialogue. We talk and when somebody's son has gone, we go with the mother to the police station to record 'my son has disappeared'. And the police cooperate, and the women are no longer victimised.

Women have previously been victimised and beaten. As one informant said, when the husband has gone and the mother is left with four or five children, what is the woman going to do? And if the security (and social) response to the family is overly targeted or suspected, what does that do to the children? What do they grow up thinking of Kenyan security and the Kenyan state, if they feel they are victimised for the crimes of their father. "They grow up wanting to revenge but we are slowly moving in."

Another said,

> In 2011-ish it was very hard to even sit in same room as security. Now, they call to chat. In 2012 we began work on a national CVE action plan. In 2017 we launched the Kwale plan. At that time the community criticised us saying we are traitors because we engage with security – so we are challenged by both security and community. We argue that the security actors must be involved – but we still struggle with them, wanting information from them too. Information only seems to flows one way, we struggle to get any information from them.

Rather than punishing entire villages, an interviewee noted that "now, if security comes in, the rest of the community is often not even aware of their involvement." So there has clearly been a strengthening trust, relationships and information sharing between state actors and civil society agencies, a proliferation of programmatic responses, and a recognition that policing and counter-terrorism alone cannot address this problem.

However, another, more systemic and ongoing rights abuse issue is around lack of national identification papers. "Often it's not physical violence, there is other violence when people are being denied their rights and marginalised and not given opportunities. Some Muslims are denied their national identity cards which means that they are denied access to formal work and a lot of other opportunities." The law and state process is that people get identity papers when they turn 18, so, "How are you even going to convince the government if you're 24 years old, and do not have ID papers. What if you do not have an idea if you're a Kenyan? … When you push it farther than that, there are a lot of questions that the government raises, and you really have to convince them in order to get an ID."

Hate and Hate Speech

Globally, there is a correlation between violent extremism and hate. Hate speech as a growing problem in Kenya, particularly on social media. We have already noted that Kenya has many significant ethnic, religious and sociopolitical fault lines. These are easily exploited by political actors and others, who use hate and hate speech to further their own agendas. This has at times been particularly bad in election campaigns.

Social media is blamed as a place people regularly use hate speech: "Hatefulness is rampant in social media because people can hide their identity." Some are concerned, saying for example, "We are fighting against online platforms because that is where radicalisation and violent extremism tends to be moving [globally]." But most suggest that the online hate speech in Kenya is largely personal or connected to party politics and elections, not strongly connected to the violent extremist narratives and not seemingly hateful extremism, in the sense of hate propagated by extremists as part of their sociopolitical agenda of coercive control through fear and violence: "Violent hate is more personal, about the person."

Hate speech is sometimes targeted at specific demographics, generally along ethnic lines: "Most hate speech is around ethnic lines. People listen to our leaders, and our leaders are extremely ethnic." Somalis and Somali Kenyans are commonly at the receiving end of hate speech. Somalis "feel they are hated, victimised, because of their culture, they feel victimised as a community." "The hatefulness! It's just buried under the sand, and it is going to come out." This further marginalises already vulnerable communities, driving them towards VHE. But they are far from the only target of hate speech. In Kenya, there is a strong correlation between ethnicity and political power. "Our leaders are extremely ethnic and can be saying intolerant things", said one interviewee, who stressed that even the vice-president of Kenya has often used hateful language directed at other ethnicities.

Sometimes, hate speech is delineated along religious lines. Some interviewees suggested that this was more prevalent in Muslim mosques than in Christian churches. However, one pointed out, "There are extremes in all religions, pastors and imams who won't

sit in the same room." Another noted that sometimes, "Religious leaders speak badly about other religions and spread hateful rhetoric", The challenge is to learn to co-exist peacefully, and we observed some very strong interfaith collaboration on the Coast, resulting in coordinated efforts to minimise the use of religion to marginalise, divide and spread hate.

Some interviewees felt that none of this plays heavily into recruitment to extremism. Indeed, one key Mombasa-based Muslim civil society leader suggested that, "Hate and hate speech are not a specific, significant driver of radicalisation." Another said they did not believe that hate speech was an issue contributing to violent extremism and recruitment in Kenya. However, most felt that that hate speech had the potential to drive VHE into the future. Regardless, Kenyans are well-aware of the threats of hatefulness, and many civil society organisations are actively engaged in fighting hate speech in real life and online.

Gender

The link between misogyny and VHE is well-established. This is a global phenomenon; across the world, almost every violent extremist group promote dominant, aggressive male behaviour and seek to control female bodies and public engagement. Gender is also a factor in VHE in the Kenyan context.

As in many countries, systemic patriarchy in the domestic, civil and religious contexts lends an air of legitimacy to extremist gender stereotyping. For example, although the 2010 Constitution require at least a third of all parliamentary seats go to women, at present, only 97 of the 416 members of parliament (23 percent) are female. Likewise, although Kenyan law requires that women-led businesses receive at least 30 percent of government tenders, this does not happen. Similarly, as several male interfaith leaders on the coast pointed out, "religions are all very patriarchal, their leadership, hierarchies and boards are all male ... [Male religious leaders] target women with training and support, looking for women to influence peace structures and to address women-specific vulnerabilities ... [but they] don't have the language to speak to women." Sometimes, places of worship and interfaith religious groups try to combat this with women-specific organisations; however, these are generally subservient to the all-male hierarchy of the formalised religious structures. These are global trends, and Kenya is not particularly better or worse than anywhere else in the world, but our interviewees pointed to these trends to highlight the way patriarchal social structures lay a foundation that aids extremists presenting misogyny as simply conservative Kenyan values.

Violent extremist recruitment of men relies heavily on stereotypes of males as breadwinners, providers for the family, and strong defenders of the community and religion. It portrays men as strong and muscular, leaders, strategic, capable, and unable to be tamed or controlled. It legitimises and glorifies anger and violence in the face of injustice, offering a narrative that directs that anger and violence towards particular targets. Women are also recruited by extremist groups in Kenya, although typically not for militant roles or for planning or strategic roles—rather, they are recruited into the drug trade, domestic labour, or sometimes trafficked into the sex trade.

One piece of research in Kenya apparently suggested that most violent extremist perpetrators were children of single mothers, or from homes where the father was violent. Children brought up in peaceful homes with two parents may be more resilient, those with absentee parents, from single homes and from homes with domestic abuse may be more vulnerable.

As with men, some women who struggle to find gainful employment in Kenya are lured by al-Shabaab's attractive wages. Cooks and other domestic labourers are said to sometimes be offered as much as twice the going rate in Kenya. Some women travel to Somalia to join their husbands, who have already joined, or go in search of a new husband. Expectations rarely live up to their promise. One interviewee related an account of a woman who followed her husband to an al-Shabaab training camp. He was killed shortly after she arrived, and she was then raped repeatedly. Eventually she managed to escape – although in doing so she had to kill three men. She managed to make her way back to Kenya, but by then she was deeply traumatised and HIV+. Her story is not unique.

As with men, some women willingly join al-Shabaab, while others are coerced or trafficked. Women sometimes willingly join al-Shabaab. Women, like men, can be driven by ideology. Some women even actively recruit for al-Shabaab. Female recruiters are, in the words of one interviewee, "more effective, less suspected." Historically, security forces have not considered that women might pose a security risk. Unlike their male counterparts, women have been able to freely cross the border without being searched. This is exploited; women, either willingly or unwillingly, carry weapons, money, or drugs across the border. More recently, the Kenyan security forces have started training female security officers to combat this loophole. While there are cultural barriers to men searching women, these barriers do not exist between women. This has proven to be an effective tactic, curtailing the movement of illicit goods across the border, while also providing gainful employment for women.

Although some women are willing participants in VHE, others are victimised – sometimes repeatedly, and often by their own government. There is a generalised expectation that women will know when their sons or husbands are radicalised and will willingly report it to the authorities. However, with Kenya's history of a heavy-handed security response, many women are understandably reluctant to turn their loved ones over to security. Regardless, women whose husbands or sons are involved with al-Shabaab are often viewed with misgiving by their communities and by police.

Indeed, far from raising concern, many women are pleased when their husbands or children become more religious. Many women do not recognise the signs of radicalisation until their loved ones have already crossed the border. Once they are gone, they rarely know where their children and husbands are living. Yet, at least in the past, they have been pressured and harassed by security forces. As one civil society leader related:

> I have over 300 women whose children or husbands have crossed over and they don't even know where the children or husbands are. And these women were in conflict with the law. The authorities, the government, thinks the women knew about the movement, while as a mother, when my child becomes religious, to me, it's a relief, especially in the world we're living in. My child is no longer going to smoke drugs. Or to drink alcohol. My child is going to the mosque and coming back home … When my children cross over to al-Shabaab, the government was compelling us to tell her to tell them where our children are, where have they gone? I myself don't know where my child is

Finally, a word of caution from one of our interviewees: increasingly P/CVE programs target women and youth. However, there are very few programs available for adult men. This risks stigmatising P/CVE work as something that is only for young people and women.

PART B: PERSPECTIVES OF LOCAL KWALE VILLAGERS ABOUT VHE

The preceding section, Part A, offers a detailed context analysis of the violent and hateful extremism situation in Kenya, as seen through the eyes of elite key informants, all of whom are leaders from various civil society organisations and development agencies (including PIK), academics, and government/security apparatus. This section, Part B, augments this, presenting the data from the 29 focus group discussions with 330 villagers from Kwale. This section thus extends and contrasts the elite perspectives with the more on-the-ground perspectives of VHE dynamics from the lived experience of ordinary local community members, covering many of the same topics again through their eyes—although the section headings below emerged from a grounded theory analysis of the FGD data itself. We present the data this way, to highlight these different local elite and ordinary villager perceptions, which are often quite similar yet have very significant differences of priority or key concerns. After this section, in Part C, drawing on and integrating both, we propose some potential NGO responses to the situation.

To provide the context for answers regarding definitions, drivers, and solutions to prevent extremism, this section begins by unpacking FGD participants concerns about extremism, followed by their perceptions around barriers and challenges that would prevent or hinder efforts to build peace and counter extremism. Noting the cultural and traumatic foundation for these discussions, this results section then goes on to present participants' ideas and perspectives about extremism, what it is and how it spreads and grows, and what can be done to aid its prevention.

Local concerns regarding extremism

The analysis of the concerns about violent and hateful extremism from the focus groups offers insights into the community perceptions and issues surrounding this topic. It is interesting that none of the respondents mention violence committed by a clearly extremist group, such as al-Shabaab, especially as al-Shabaab were mentioned regularly throughout the focus groups, and their presence in the region is clear from the other questions. It was also curious that there was no mention of the existence and operation of the Mombasa Republican Council from Mtakuja participants, where the MRC president still resides. While clearly highlighting "that violent extremists are living in our village" (BowaWY), and "there is an increase in the extremist groups" (MwashangaW, also BofuM; ShamuWY), respondents seemed more concerned about extremist groups attacking them if they speak out against them, rather than being concerned about being targets or caught in the crossfire. Men in Bofu were worried about the embarrassment of having a family member in one of these extremist groups (BofuM). The main concerns about VHE surrounded election violence, youth gang and drug violence, and "rampant" (DebriefFGD) hatefulness between various groups within and between the villages.

A prevalent theme across many villages was the impact of drug use (notably *bhang-cannabis*, but also *muguka* and *miraa-khat*) on youth, leading to disruptive behaviour and potential for extremism (MadibwaniW; MagutuM; BowaWY). One of the FGD facilitators reported that an FGD participant was under the influence of drugs and "he was so hostile and getting angry when people voiced their opinion" so that other members of the research party needed to intervene to diffuse the situation (DebriefFGD). Unemployment was linked as a facilitator in drug use and subsequent criminal activity, with a view that this has strong links with extremist recruitment (MagutuM; MtakujaMY). Participants noted a trend that drugs lead to youth being socialised into gangs, "who sit in their base, with hidden agenda making the parents worried", which results in violent actions and intensifies susceptibility to recruitment to violent extremist groups (MadibwaniW). The incidence of drug use and young people joining gangs was noted to have increased over recent years (BowaWY; DenyenyeW; MagutuM; MwaroniW; SokoniMY; VuagaWY). This change has meant that,

> There's no security and safety, the youth gangs have increased in numbers in the area and right now even the kids from seven years are being recruited to the gangs. The children are sent by the youth to attack someone, by maybe stoning them, just to trigger them and when the person retaliates and decides to punish the child, the youth attack the person and steal everything from him/her. (BowaWY)

Young women in Kiuzini mentioned that they were worried about "the young violent gents that walk around with their machetes" who often belong to the well-known youth gang in their area: "*Vijana wa Pori*" (KiuziniWY). In Bowa, participants said that gang members threaten villagers "with scary and frightening words" and fight each other in the streets (BowaWY). Participants across the FGDs commented that the "the men enter the gangs for protection... the gangs protect their own village, but they can go to other places and cause crimes. They're not hostile in their own areas" (DebriefFGD).

It was implied in m any groups that all young men in the region are at risk of committing or experiencing violence, whether or not they are gang members, as there is a high ownership of "firearms that are not from the village" (MkwakwaniWY). Participants in MkwakwaniWY and MagutuM voiced concern that young men from their villages cannot visit other places without being attacked. They mentioned that many people hold "bifu" (grudges) against each other, which can result in violence (MkwakwaniWY; MabokoniMY). One young woman had recent experience of this as "not long ago, I lost a cousin who was murdered due to community fights" (MkwakwaniWY). Relatedly, there was mention of vendetta crimes and that if someone hurts someone else, whose family or friends have the means to avenge the crime, this initiates an "expected cycle of violence" (TiwiMY).

Many groups reported that they were concerned about conflicts stemming from ethnic and religious differences (MvindeniMY; ShamuWY; SokoniMY; TiwiMY). For example, in Gasi, significant tension was noted among different ethnic groups such as the Makonde, Pemba, and Digo communities, which often escalates violently during political periods (GasiMY). They noted that "Pemba people and Digo people all claim that Gasi area is their hometown but just a few days ago the Pemba youth were denied their national identification cards and were told to go back to Pemba to get their National Identity Cards" (GasiMY). This was seen as legitimising Digo claims to the land, which will serve to exacerbate disputes and conflicts between tribes (GasiMY). A young man explained that "there's no progress or development in this area because hatred has increased, the locals are divided and there's no love among the Gasi people" (GasiMY). Another respondent in the group disagreed and said that "the hatred is not that much" but he was opposed by a third respondent in the Gasi FGD who reported that

> hatred is the norm in the Gasi area. It is normal and part of our lives. For instance, the Pemba people are charged when they want to fish and the money is used for the operations of BMUs [Beach Management Units] but the Pemba think that the money is just used by the Gasi youth recklessly, thus creating misunderstandings and hatred. (GasiMY)

Concerns around ethnic tension and hatred between groups was raised elsewhere too (e.g., ShamuWY). Participants from Kiuzini village said that Digos project elitist "hate speech" and see themselves as "superior to the other present tribes, like Duruma", calling the Duruma "barbaric" (KiuziniWY). A Digo participant reinforced this notion, saying "tribalism exists, but it is exacerbated by individuals like us from the Digo community" (TiwiMY). On the other hand, the young men of Mvendeni felt that the Digo were victims of a hate campaign and that other groups slandered them as uneducated and useless (MvindeniMY). There was a strong vein of "ethnic favouritism between members of your own group" (GasiMY) voiced across the FGDs.

Religious tensions between Christians and Muslims (MabirikaniW; MwashangaW; SawasawaM; TiwiMY), as well as between sects of Islam (BowaWY; MwaembeW) were also mentioned as concerning. Participants from one village provided an example of how these tensions can degenerate: "A certain guy who was a Shia used to condemn Sunni people and one day he just disappeared—after several warnings that he should stop condemning the Sunni. Till date the Bowa people do not know where he is, he just vanished" (BowaWY). In Sokoni, participants said that most of the time different religious groups live in harmony, but that tensions arise during certain times of year, such as Ramadan where Muslims receiving donations of food can be considered unfair by Christians (SokoniMY).

Participants highlighted concerns about how people not originating from their village are treated. They noted that outsiders contend with hate speech, intolerance, discrimination, and violence and are told "This is not your hometown, you do not belong here!" (GasiMY); and "they came to take our jobs!" (SokoniMY). Participants in Magutu recounted that discontent in being overlooked for hotel jobs in their village led to "our young men tak[ing] extremist action such as attacking the guests and non-local workers in the hotel" (MagutuM). One young woman provided another example: "Maybe for instance when a shop owned by someone who is not from Bowa has been broken in and everything was stolen from the shop, people from Bowa won't pay any attention to the pleas of the owner but when the shop that was stolen from is owned by a local from Bowa then people are bothered and they take action" (BowaWY). As well as facing discrimination, participants note that outsiders are at high risk of attack in their region, citing an example from a nearby village: "the youth at Kombani always sit near the roads [that enter the village]. When the local identifies you then you are safe, they will not attack, but when the local does not identify you as a resident of Bowa then they attack and steal anything/everything from you" (BowaWY). Conversely, some participants were worried about outsiders infiltrating their community with extremist ideas (MagutuM).

Politics were commonly cited as catalysts for violence and hate speech, particularly during elections: "During political season where politicians use incitement, that can bring out hate speech. For example, they might say "*Hatutaki wabara hapa kwetu*" (we do not want foreigners or immigrants here)" (MagutuM). A young woman expressed that: "Politics makes me worry. especially during election period; it brews lots of violence in the area" (KiuziniWY). Men in another village observed that: "VHE has increased over the years though it is seasonal especially during election due to political incitement. VHE has led to insecurity, physical injuries, loss of property, and loss of trust amongst the villagers (MagutuM, also GasiMY; KinondoMY; SawasawaM). Respondents highlighted how politics exacerbate violence is additional ways, such as politicians conspiring with parents to free their children caught in criminal activities, reflecting deep-rooted issues in political and social structures (KiuziniWY; MwaroniW). In some villages, there were comments from respondents who were worried that outside influences changing young people's cultural norms may lead to susceptibility to extremism. Others felt that the strict rules around maintaining conservative practices were a form of extremism in themselves. For instance, in Vuga, strict rules about dressing, especially among the Muslim community, were mentioned as potentially extremist (VugaWY). Others were worried "that violent extremists are living in our village, and we fear that their community values and culture will perish [as a result of extremist infiltration" (BowaWY). Conversely, some participants felt that aspects of their culture or forms of traditional spiritualism, such as witchcraft, concerned participants, who feared being hexed (TiwiMY) or forced into marriage (MabirikaniW).

Some participants said they were worried about conflict between communities due to historical grievances and competition over resources such as land and jobs (GolinWY; MwashangaW; SawasawaM; TiwiMY).

Across many villages, there was a palpable fear of reprisal for reporting or intervening in cases of suspected extremism, which often prevents community cooperation and prevention of criminal activity. Individuals expressed fear about the consequences of labelling someone as involved in VHE, which could lead to personal and communal repercussions perpetrated by community members or security forces themselves (MagutuM; SokoniMY). They noted that "when one reports a gang or anyone practicing violent extremism to the police...then the person is considered as a sell out in the village and that causes conflicts and disputes in the area" (SokoniMY). Participants accused the police of selling information to criminals regarding the details of who reported them, "putting our lives at risk" (MagutuM). While this is a very real concern, it is also a challenge that thwarts efforts to prevent VHE (as is discussed in the section on challenges, below). A concerning trend across several discussions was a sort of resignation or desensitisation towards the growing acceptability of extremist behaviours, often influenced by failures in law enforcement, corruption, and lack of resources. "Everyone knows, but fears – even local ward administrators have been robbed but do nothing" said one young local (DebriefFGD). "The police are useless" said another young man in Sokoni—a sentiment echoed elsewhere (e.g., KalalaniWY; TiwiMY). The fear of reprisal violence is likely key in this sense of resignation; respondents noted a feeling of intractability around these issues, as addressing concerns could lead to their death or injury (MagutuM; SokoniMY).

Linked to people's evident lack of trust in the effectiveness of security forces, specifically police, there was mention of rising insecurity in the region and a fear of police attacking or killing innocent people due to erroneously thinking they are involved in criminal or extremist activity (BofuM). Of mounting insecurity, participants mentioned the recent rise in extremist activity and police killing extremist group members (BofuM; ShamuWY). In Gasi, participants said that "cases of people being hanged to death have started rising in the village. Just the other day a body was found in the forest" (GasiMY). Similarly, in Mvindeni, participants said that "a few months ago people used to disappear and they were...found dead" (MvindeniMY). Citing rising burglary and mugging in Vuga (also mentioned in BofuM; KalalaniWY; KingwedeM; MagutuM; MwaroniW; YejeMY), participants said that "just a few days ago there's a woman who was going to the church, she was attacked and her handbag was snatched. Also, when we hang our clothes outside to dry, they are stolen too" (VugaWY). Additionally, they mentioned recent theft of shoes from outside of mosques and large quantities of maize (and coconuts in KingwedeM and livestock in BofuM etcetera) stolen from farmers' fields (VugaWY). Noting back to the discrimination against outsiders discussed earlier, participants in the Kombani FGD stated that "when visitors arrive, they will be robbed of their previous ornaments" (KombaniM). There was also acknowledgement that tourists are often robbed (MwaembeW).

While the majority of focus group participants highlighted rising insecurity in their region, one participant in Mabokoni said that the situation was improving.

> I can stroll until 12pm unlike before when reaching 8pm was risky especially in places like Tiwi where safety was compromised after a young person was fatally attacked during daylight. However, in Mabokoni there has been a noticeable change for the better. The security is somewhat stable but there is concern about those adolescents aged 12-28 getting involved with these negative groups. (MabokoniMY)

This was directly refuted by the young men in Yeje who felt the opposite was the case in their village: "nowadays there is no night entertainment attendance due to insecurity around the village"

Overall, there was a sense of rising insecurity across the villages, with increasing petty and serious crimes, an increase in organised gangs, and a notable extremist presence. A FGD facilitator noted that "where the problem is strongest no one wants to talk about it, but neighbouring villages wanted to talk about it" (DebriefFGD). Participants remarked that "hate speech is everywhere" (YejeMY) and there were concerns that this hate speech escalates into physical violence, especially among young men who were often idle and drug affected.

Defining violent extremism

The focus groups across different villages contributed diverse perspectives on what constitutes VHE. These definitions often reflect local socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts. This analysis explores the dominant themes as defined by the community members themselves, illustrating how cultural, personal, and external factors converge to influence individual and collective understanding of extremism. While some participants were unfamiliar with the concept of violent extremism, despite having focus group moderators explaining this in their local language, most were able to highlight what they considered to be violently and hatefully extreme. Some of these ideas simplistically identify VHE as terrorism (KombaniM; MabirikaniW), al-Shabaab (KombaniM; MvindeniMY), or even witchcraft (MabirikaniW) while others diverge from traditional definitions of extremism; however, they are helpful in situating extremism within ordinary peoples' lives in the Kenyan context.

Many focus group participants associated VHE with specific religious and cultural practices that are deemed extreme by community standards. Thus, VHE is "going beyond boundaries of what is deemed as acceptable" (MagutuM). "It brings about hate", destroys peace, causes physical harm, ignores human rights, and coerces action (MagutuM, also MbwekaW). Participants identified that following strict cultural norms that cause bodily harm such as female genital mutilation could be seen as a form of violent and misogynistic extremism (BowaWY; MwashangaW). In some villages, the men said that strict observers of Islam, *answar*, are probably al-Shabaab and are a threat to the community's peace and security (MagutuM; MvendeniMY). Rather interestingly, one respondent associated the word *takbir* (a common Islamic word meaning God is the greatest) with violent extremism (MvindeniMY).

The young men in Gasi village defined extremism as causing "chaos" by "someone doing activities or anything that harms someone else" (GasiMY). Similary, in other villages violent extremism was defined as divisive political opinions, tribalism, and anti-social words or activities that seek to cause harm to others and recruit innocent young people (MwaembeW; MwaroniW): "It is a belief that brings negative impacts and affects other people" (KinondoMY). Another participant explained:

> When I try to understand what extremism or violent extremism means, it is crossing boundaries, which brings about fujo [violence, disruption] and hence lack of peace. It is the actions that an individual or group brings about [to disrupt] peace for the general public, community, or a lot of people. (MagutuM)

The idea of violent extremism as "a lack of peace" was commonly mentioned, as a feeling of community tension, insecurity, and apprehension (KuiziniWY; MagutuM; MkwakwaniWY). With these ideas in mind, participants identified that youth gangs are acting out a form of violent and hateful extremism because they use their power to act violently and harm people with knives or *pangas* (machetes) (BowaWY; GasiMY; KuiziniWY; SokoniMY).

Understandings about violent extremist actors, likely fuelled by misinformation or stereotypes, were also common in the focus groups. This included (mis)labelling based on appearance, such as assumptions related to religious attire (MvindeniMY; MagutuM). For instance, in Mvindeni, participants identified that individuals wearing short *kanzu* (white robes) and long beards are possible extremists, probably members al-Shabaab (DebriefFGD; MkwakwaniWY; MvindeniMY). Participants associated people wearing particularly conservative religious garments such as *niqab* and *jalbab*, or acting overly conservatively, with extremist leanings (MadibwaniW; MagutuM). They also noted that people dressed in this way tended to group together and talk and walk together, in a way that seemed suspicious or secretive (MkwakwaniWY).

VHE was frequently linked to political and economic grievances, and the feelings of injustice, betrayal, and oppression that these grievances can foment (GasiMY; MkwakwaniWY; MwaroniW; ShamuWY; TiwiMY). The women in Denyenye village defined VHE as: "something that arises as a result of hate due to differences in economic statuses within the village" (DenyenyeW). They suggested that extremist violence and hatefulness in Kenya fluctuates with election cycles, which "is incited by people from different political parties who have conflicting interests" (DenyenyeW, also SawasawaM; ShamuWY). It was also noted that the words and actions of people involved in land disputes can be extremist (GolinWY; MtakujaM; MvindeniMY; MwaembeW; ShamuWY). Young men in Mvindeni village associated violent extremism with the "Kaya Bombo" attacks in 1997, whereby raiders from the coast murdered people from "upcountry" (namely Kikuyu, Luo, and Luyha). The motivation for the attacks was highlighted as liberating marginalised coastal Muslims from the oppression of upcountry tribes who were taking coastal lands and resources. Participants suggested that these are forms of VHE as they are hateful and extreme and can culminate in physical violence.

Several groups highlighted that extremist individuals can be recognised by their strong, uncompromising beliefs or decisions, which may seem bewildering, incorrect, and harmful to others in the village, and which are unshakeable—even in the presence of robust evidence to the contrary (BofuM; BowaWY; GasiMY; MagutuM; MbwekaW; MvindeniMY; SokoniMY; TiwiMY; VugaWY; YejeMY). "Violent extremism is where one has strong beliefs or ideas and decisions that he/she wants everyone to agree, accept and embrace his or her beliefs" (VugaWY). Women in Mbweka village noted that these strong beliefs were specifically tied to some form of religious ideology (MbwekaW). This can include situations: "when one holds religious beliefs that are not right, like when young men join al-Shabaab since he believes that he is fighting for *jihad*" (SawasawaM). The young women in Bowa mentioned that this manifests "when someone has too much temper and hatred, that it becomes impossible to talk to them" (BowaWY, also GasiMY; MbwekaW). Some respondents took this a step further, noting that extremists not only hold these unshakeable beliefs, they also enforce their ideologies on others through coercion or violence, reflecting a broader pattern of radicalisation based on personal convictions (GasiMY; KalalaniWY; MwaembeW; SokoniMY).

In Mtakuja village, when asked about the first thing that comes to their mind when they hear the words *itikadi kali ama msimamo mkali* (two ways of saying 'extremism' in Swahili), two of the men responded by shouting "die hard!" The reactions of others in this focus group indicated that there has been frequent use of the term in this village in relation to extremists (MtakujaM). As such, one of the identifiers of a violent extremist in this context is that they are expected to "die hard".

Respondents in other focus groups highlighted the actions that define violent extremism. These centred on breaking laws (KingwedeM), harming innocent others (MagutuM), using machetes (KalalaniWY; KingwedeM), and acting violently in response to people they believe oppose their strong convictions (SokoniMY). A young woman in Vuga village mentioned: "I relate [violent extremism] to the youth who are in groups like al-Shabaab who are doing things that are not acceptable according to the constitution and government laws or against the values and culture of the village" (VugaWY). Other respondents in Vuga highlighted that violent extremists are those who follow through on violent plans: "for instance they agree to destroy the village, and they make sure to destroy it" (VugaWY). "They are bad groups making bad decisions" said young men in Mabokoni.

Participants were asked what they noticed that made them think someone had been influenced by extremist rhetoric. Changes in behaviour, such as withdrawal from community activities or sudden disinterest in previously held practices, were viewed as indicators that an individual may be an extremist or that they are being radicalised. Examples include disengagement from religious practices and social isolation (BowaWY; GasiMY). For instance, "when someone who used to go to the mosque just stops going to the mosque, [or] when someone used to like specific things then

suddenly changes [and] secludes oneself from others" (BowaWY). Young men in Gasi highlighted that transformations can include "changes in style of talking, tone, or appearance of a person" (GasiMY). It was also noted that this transformation sometimes takes place when a community member returns after being away somewhere mysterious (MbwekaW).

Young men in Sokoni village noted that they would know someone had been influenced when they hear them sharing extremist narratives: "The tipping point that makes someone an extremist is when a [radicalised] person teaches others about terrorism" (SokoniMY). Other respondents thought they might know that violent extremism was spreading in their region if they were hearing a lot of hateful or violent misinformation (MabirikaniW; MbwekaW; TiwiMY).

The use of hard drugs by young people was identified as a tipping point towards violent extremism, with respondents noting that young people turned to drugs because of peer pressure, poor parenting, inequality, and unemployment leaving them unfulfilled and bored (MabokoniMY; MvindeniMY; VugaWY). Revenge was noted as another tipping point towards violent extremism: "If one's dad was killed for being associated with al-Shabaab then when their children grew up they need to revenge back. Panga kwa panga [panga for panga/knife for knife]" (MvindeniMY, also GolinWY; MbwekaW; MwaembeW; ShamuWY; YejeMY).

These varied definitions and understandings of VHE reflect cultural, economic, and social factors that influence community perceptions of violent and hateful extremism in Kenya. Each village's context contributes uniquely to the broader understanding of what constitutes VHE. The diverse perspectives on VHE offered across the FGDs highlight the local socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts that shape the communities' ideas around identifying extremist behaviours and actors.

Recruitment, push and pull factors

This section captures participants' comments around recruitment to extremist groups. This includes the mechanisms of recruitment, although little to nothing was known about the specific actors involved in recruitment. While firm evidence of recruitment was sparse, participants shared information based on local anecdotes and suspicions: "they are mostly stories we hear from other villages in Ukunda and Ngombeni, in the past" (DenyenyeW). However, participants raised that local people, especially young men (even as young as seven years old - BowaWY), are at high risk of recruitment, particularly to either youth gangs and/or al-Shabaab (BowaWY; DebriefFGD; GasiMY; MwaroniW; SokoniMY; VugaWY). When speaking of specific groups, al-Shabaab was mentioned the most regularly (DebriefFGD; MvindeniMY). The names of some local youth gangs were also mentioned such as *vijana wa vipanga* and *vijana wa pori* (DenyenyeW; KiuziniWY).

Participants noted that the reason for their lack of concrete evidence around recruitment is that these activities are highly confidential and well hidden, and that young people are naturally somewhat secretive (VugaWY). They see people talking quietly and suspiciously to outsiders, sometimes people go missing mysteriously, other times families start living well for no apparent reason (DebriefFGD; KiuziniWY). Participants explained that this subterfuge means it is easy to be fooled into joining an extremist group: "you will find a special interest group, you will think they have a good mission [and it's] unlikely they have a secretive agenda" (MvindeniMY). One participant mentioned that it is very difficult to confirm whether someone has been recruited. He recounted that he only knew that a family member had been recruited after they were killed (MvindeniMY). Another said they only knew someone was in al-Shabaab when they were arrested (DebriefFGD). Participants highlighted, however, that there are indicators, such as young men disappearing, perhaps after talking excitedly about *jihad*, or families receiving unusual amounts of financial support (DebriefFGD; KiuziniWY).

In many areas, peer influence is a significant mechanism through which individuals are drawn into extremist groups (DenyenyeW: MagutuM; MkwakwaniWY). Participants noted that youth are often lured into gangs by friends who appeal to notions of masculinity and financial gain (KiuziniWY), with an implicit inference that extremist recruitment from gangs was not uncommon. Similarly, there is concern about social media's role in facilitating recruitment by linking young people with extremist networks through peer connections (BowaWY).

Extremist groups are believed to us religious speeches and seminars to recruit individuals (TiwiMY). Young men in the Mabokoni village FGD explained that "online sermons may promote more radical interpretations leading to feeling of isolation and a distorted understanding of religious teachings." Participants raised that Islamic speeches can both positively change individuals or potentially make them susceptible to extremism (DebriefFGD; MadibwaniW; TiwiMY). There was mention of the Kenyan Muslim cleric Aboud Rogo Mohammed as a continuing influence, even in death (DebriefFGD). Rogo was known for his alleged extremist activities, including financing and recruiting for al-Shabaab. He was shot dead in Mombasa, Kenya, on August 27, 2012, while driving with his family. His assassination sparked violent protests in Mombasa, characterised by the rioting and attacks on churches by his supporters, which led to multiple casualties and further heightened tensions between religious communities in the region. The nature of his death and the ensuing violence highlight significant social and sectarian divides within Kenya. Mentioning the ongoing influence of Rogo in inciting division and hatred, and thus priming people for recruitment into extremist groups, presents participants' mental link between hate and violent extremism.

As well as exploiting religious beliefs, the exploitation of economic hardship was identified as a significant recruitment facilitator for extremist groups (BowaWY; DebriefFGD; GasiMY; KinandoMY). "When you have problems, that's when you become vulnerable" explained one of the focus group moderators (DebriefFGD). Participants spoke about how recruiters capitalise on unemployment and poverty, promising financial rewards in return for their loyalty. The lack of job opportunities in the fieldwork villages was noted as making the youth particularly vulnerable

to recruitment (KiuziniWY; MagutuM; SokoniMY). "The issue of unemployment is being overlooked but that's the main issue we need to solve" explained women in Mwaroni village FGD. As mentioned by one of the focus group moderators in the debrief session: "The money aspect is a huge part of recruitment. Without it, recruitment wouldn't be successful" (DebriefFGD). "The risk [of extremist recruitment] is high because of the lust for money" said another participant (VugaWY). Another noted that the appeal of extremist recruitment is clear and understandable as "if [you were] given a salary package of 300,000 [Ksh] for the job of cleaning a gun you won't reject the offer" (MvindeniMY). Interestingly though, direct payment of soldiers by al-Shabaab was not specifically mentioned.

This desperate need for funds can also be seasonal (DebriefFGD; MvindeniMY), for instance:

> During low job season due to bad weather, very few people use boda-boda [motorbikes with drivers, usually young men] as their means of transport, most prefer other means of transport to protect themselves from the rain. [Then the boda-boda drivers] can easily be influenced due to idleness [and lack of income], but during high season the youth are always busy with their boda-boda jobs. (GasiMY)

Some focus groups mentioned that young women become involved with extremist groups because it gives them access to expensive frivolous items that they would not otherwise be able to afford (DebriefFGD). While it was suggested that some young men are attracted to extremist groups due to the allure of adventure or a perceived heroic struggle against perceived injustices (MvindeniMY; TiwiMY), female recruits were assumed to have been enticed more by material possessions. However, a participant in one focus group noted that this desire for nice things is more universal as "one can have desires to have better things but due to the financial problems he/she cannot afford so if he/she finds that joining that kind of group can give him/her money then he/she joins" (ShamuWY). Empathy was evident among participants who emphasised the low standard of living and the desire to flourish and live lavishly makes extremist recruiters' promises attractive (GasiM; SokoniMY). Participants in one focus group highlighted that gift-giving is a recruiter tactic, whereby recruiters provide "treats" (*fadhila* – favours) to entice membership (KombaniM).

Recruiters were also noted as capitalising on limited educational opportunities and awareness about the risks associated with extremism. This ignorance contributes to higher susceptibility, especially among the youth. While lack of education in general is problematic, lack of prosocial religious education was noted as providing space for corrupt influences: "People are illiterate when it comes to their religion, hence can be easily influenced" (MagutuM). Participants felt that susceptibility to extremist rhetoric was particularly acute locally due to the regions' high levels of drug and substance abuse amongst young Kenyans (KalalaniWY; MadibwaniW; MagutuM; MkwakwaniWY; SokoniMY).

Extremist groups often provide a sense of identity and belonging that is appealing to youth, especially in contexts where traditional social structures are weak or absent (MbwekaWY). Participants identified that this is a facilitating factor that extremists in their region use to spread extremist ideologies by creating on- and offline 'friendships' and social groups (MwaroniW). Women in the Mwaroni village FGD explained that: "These youth groups meet in different gardens or buildings, that's where so many evil ideas are shared, weed and cocaine is also used, recruiters and youths who are already in extremist groups might influence the rest" (MwaroniW).

These findings point to the interconnections between individual vulnerabilities and broader socio-economic and ideological dynamics. The insights suggest that interventions to prevent and counter extremism need to address both the immediate social networks and broader economic and educational deficiencies that create fertile ground for extremist recruitment.

Challenges addressing violent and hateful extremism

By far the main challenging factor in addressing VHE, as noted across the FGDs, was their inability to address anti-social and criminal behaviour at the village level, on their own or in conjunction with civil society or authorities. The reasons for this inability were multi-fold. People feared reprisals for reporting. They also felt that the authorities would not take matters seriously, would not bring perpetrators to justice, and may sell their information to the people they reported to support a revenge attack (e.g., MabokoniMY; MagutuM; MbwekaW; MwashangaW; ShamuWY). It was evident throughout the FGDs that participants' feel police are ineffective in the region, either because they are thwarted by internal rot, and/or because "relevant authorities like the police face hardship due to non-cooperation from people" in the community (BowaWY). Similarly, other participants suggested that "local police and watchmen need to get support from the county and the national government in terms of more incentives because mostly the local watchmen just do voluntary work" (VugaWY). While some participants highlighted that police do not receive sufficient support from the government, others pointed to corruption and deeper systemic challenges that hinder civil society P/CVE actions collaborating with security personnel (ShamuWY; YejeMY):

> The law is corrupted, our children won't change, especially considering the fact that these youth gangs walk away freely even after being detained at the police station, it seems someone with authority is sponsoring the weapons used for attack. (MwaroniW)

Similarly, women in Golin said that "you need to bribe [police] for them to act" (GolinWY).

Many participants across different villages highlighted the reluctance of parents and communities to correct or report the youth, often due to fear or societal pressures. Participants raised that they are hesitant to report due to the "fear of risking one's life" (KinondoMY) and "repercussions like physical assault"

(MabokoniMY), which shows the personal danger involved in confronting extremist behaviour (also BofuM; GolinWY; KinondoMY; MagutuM; MwaembeW; MwaroniW; ShamuWY). Similarly, another participant reflected, "People trying to tackle issues on violent extremism are threatened or even attacked hence causing fear" (MwaroniW). A young woman in Shamu noted that people are too scared to address issues despite clear knowledge that violence is taking place (ShamuWY). In Vuga, it was mentioned that "when the neighbours' children are in the youth gangs they will not report him/her because of fear of revenge" (VugaWY). In Magutu, the men noted that corruption and fear are rife, "as informants are threatened and at times physically harmed—or worse, killed" (MagutuM). This severely impedes community efforts at addressing the issues. Addressing youth gangs is difficult, as gangs across villages have alliances and support each other to outmanoeuvre attempts to stop them (MbwekaW).

This culture against reporting and holding people to account for bad behaviour was noted as starting early, when children are school aged. In several villages, a common challenge highlighted is the societal response to attempts at correcting youth behaviour, which often leads to conflict. For instance, a participant noted, "when someone is found with *bhang* in school and the child is reported to the teacher for investigation, then when the teacher follows up on the case then hatred begins and violent starts" (MadibwaniW). The women in this FGD explained that when teachers or community members intervene, they face backlash instead of support: "People will start speaking badly of the one who tries to correct the children" (MadibwaniW). Young women in the FGDs said that this is because parents do not want to admit to poor parenting and try to protect their children from being accountable for their actions (BowaWY; DenyenyeWY; KinondoMY; MkwakwaniWY; VugaWY). As well as parents blocking their children from facing consequences, it was noted that children are becoming increasingly rude and unresponsible to their elders and parents, which was seen as a challenge for addressing small problems before they grow (MbwekaW; MwaembeW; VugaWY). This challenge was linked to poor parenting and people moving away from cultural practices such as respect for elders (MwaroniW). Participants mentioned that children as young as 10 are willing to attack adults who seek to discipline them, and that this has resulted in adults shying away from holding children to account because they fear for their own safety (KalalaniWY; VugaWY).

As well as fearing conventional methods of attack, cultural beliefs and superstitions also impact the community's response to VHE. The influence of external factors such as witchcraft, complicates community policing, with one respondent explaining, "if you report a child to police because of using bhang then you will be bewitched" (MadibwaniW). Young men in Tiwi explained that "people fear being hexed" and that this adds to people reluctance to report criminal or anti-social behaviour (TiwiMY).

Interestingly, while most FGD participants remarked on the fear of reporting, the young men in Gasi spoke out against reporters as "sell outs", highlighting their dislike for those who report crimes to the authorities and claiming that "village elders reporting the youth involved in gangs to the police causes intolerance among the youth gangs leading to revenge" (GasiMY). As well as a generational divide, this may signify the changing dynamics of community involvement in child-rearing and discipline that was discussed in the section below, which presents the findings regarding conditions to cultivate the environment conducive to violent and hateful extremism. While FGD participants in Bowa reinforced the sentiments of the other FGDs, noting that reporters "receive so many threats and are silenced", they still used the terminology "sell outs" for people reporting crimes to the authorities (also SokoniMY), which may point to a broader problem with how people in Kwale County view informal community policing.

Participants mentioned that another barrier to addressing VHE is encouraging people to engage with P/CVE initiatives. Young people often expect to receive financial incentives for their participation, even though the initiatives are intended for their benefit (BowaWY; MvindeniMY). "The youth always want money, even when they are called for sensitisation programs or guidance and counselling they ask for money" (BowaWY). This transactional approach undermines the genuine engagement necessary for addressing the root causes of extremism.

Several groups discussed ignorance of VHE and lack of proper education and information as a fundamental challenge (MbwekaW; MwaroniW; SawasawaM; ShamuWY). The "lack of knowledge among youths" was pointed out as a critical gap that needs addressing for more effective interventions (KingwedeM).

Participants noted challenges such as extensive and embedded drug use, easy access to firearms, poor policing and justice processes, and restricted capacity to solve key drivers such as unemployment linked to a lack of available job opportunities (MabokoniMY; MagutuM; MwaembeW; SawasawaM). Participants voiced frustration around what they considered to be government ineffectiveness in addressing these obvious concerns that would hinder the success of P/CVE initiatives (MabokoniMY; MagutuM). "We are looking at the consequences of action or its domino effect instead of its root" said one participant (MagutuM). This issue of drug addiction was particularly strongly raised as a challenge to addressing VHE.

A challenge for supporting young people to disengage from violent extremist groups is consequences facing those who leave. Women in Mwaroni said that this is also the case in youth gangs. They had heard that initiation consisted of new members taking an "oath", which involves "*ulawiti*—sodomy—and once this process is done, there is a video recording and the videos are saved for future use so that once you even think of quitting, your videos are posted on the Internet. Most can't take this humiliation so choose to be loyal" (MwaroniW).

One of the young male locals who facilitated some of the focus groups said that a challenge to addressing VHE in Kwale County is residents' reluctance to be proactive about problems and take responsibility for their lives. He said that it is common to hear people complain about being hard done by rather than putting in the effort to better themselves and their community. When we ran

the debriefing FGDs with these young local facilitators, we asked them what they had wanted to say to participants. This young man commented:

> I wanted to say 'come on guys we are still young and we can do something'. We have to take the initiative and stop complaining. We Digos are people who have been blessed, we have so many opportunities but we need to acquire the skills to get jobs. [We need to] change the mindset of the people, that we are able to do it. (DebriefFGD)

Other young people in the debriefing FGD agreed with this sentiment, noting the challenge of getting people to stop blaming everyone else and victimising themselves, instead looking at the possibilities around them and making the best of the situation.

Conditions that cultivate violent and hateful extremism

The focus groups discussed multiple conditions that contribute to violent and hateful extremism. However, unemployment was the predominant recurring theme across all FGDs, consistently linked to enabling conditions for VHE due to the idleness and frustration it breeds among the youth. "Lack of job opportunities that leads to lack of money results to the engagement in crime and joining extremist groups. It's the idleness that pushes one into such activities" (BofuM; but similar stated in all groups). The women of Mwaroni reinforced that: "the issue of unemployment is being overlooked but that's the main issue we need to solve." Alongside this, some respondents noted that "the challenges of life can make a person get involved with radical ideology" (MabokoniMY). These challenges were noted as including stress and poverty (GasiMY; KalalaniWY; KinondoMY; KombaniM; MtakujaM; MwashangaW; SawasawaM; VugaWY), limited opportunities for work (DenyenyeW), and a "lack of resource centres" that can help people find jobs and support (MagutuM). Unemployment was strongly linked, with the notion that idleness is an important precondition for radicalisation, cited across all FGDs. Many respondents discussed how young people not in education or work are at high risk, but they also mentioned that VHE activity is heightened during quiet times such as during rainy season when *boda-boda* drivers do not have as many fares (GasiMY) and school holidays when young people have nothing constructive to occupy them (MabokoniMY).

Specific parenting practices and family dynamics were noted as fostering conditions for extremism in Kwale (GasiMY; KingwedeM; MkwakwaniWY; MwaroniW; VugaWY). Respondents discussed that families are not effectively disciplining their teenagers and that they are blocking others from reporting or otherwise holding their children to account for anti-social behaviour (BofuM; KombaniM; MabokoniMY; MadibwaniW; MagutuM; MkwakwaniWY). This was seen as encouraging bad behaviour and failing to stop young people from spiralling into peer groups that negatively influence them (BofuM). Thus, dysfunctional home lives, poor parenting, and other familial problems were raised as providing conditions that contribute to VHE (GolinWY; MabokoniMY; MkwakwaniWY; MwaroniW; MwashangaW; TiwiMY). The women in Madibwani explained that there is a disconnect between parents and community systems that could support them to raise well-adjusted adults that contribute positively to the community.

The women lamented that there has been a cultural shift in parenting practices in Kwale: "in the past children belonged to the community but now they belong to the parents or family alone" (MadibwaniW). There were several mentions of similar disciplining problems across the focus groups. Many of these discussions highlighted the accusation that: "men no longer perform their roles as fathers in the family, they have left all the roles to the women" (MadibwaniW); "most parents are single mothers and they provide for the family because the fathers have neglected their responsibilities" (MabirikaniW); and "fathers have neglected their responsibility and mothers have to take care of family things" (MbwekaW). The "absent fathers" were noted as leaving young people without positive male role models, which meant that young people were susceptible to influence from outsiders and peer groups who may not have their best interests at heart (DebriefFGD). Young male respondents also raised that there are no official mentoring, counselling, or guidance programs to support this void of paternal role models (GasiMY).

Peer influence is particularly noted among the youth, leading to negative behaviours and increased susceptibility to extremist ideologies (BowaWY; GasiMY; GolinWY; DenyenyeW; KiuziniWY; MabokoniMY; MagutuM; MwaembeW; VugaWY). In Bowa, the young women reported that this peer pressure also extends to feelings of commitment towards a love interest that can pull them into anti-social ways of thinking and acting. Respondents extended this to highlight that peer pressure can include a wish to have their "worldly desires" fulfilled (YejeMY; also BofuM; VugaWY). This desire to have what others have might come from peers in their community, or from social media (KingwedeM; MabokoniMY; VugaWY). Some respondents simply explained that peer pressure cultivates conditions for VHE by offering a platform for young people to come together and encourage one another to commit violent or hateful crimes (MagutuM; MwaroniW; MwashangaW). Living in poverty, without means for legitimate employment, and having this desire for the 'good life' that they see others around them (online or offline) enjoying, can make young people susceptible to recruitment, "where one is ensnared in the illusion of quick fixes [and] shortcuts in pursuit of a better life" (TiwiMY).

Perpetuated through peer influence, drug abuse (particularly bhang) is a widespread concern seen as conditioning people towards VHE. Multiple focus groups mentioned its prevalence and influence on youth behaviour, leading to increased vulnerability to extremism (BowaWY; DenyenyeW; GolinWY; KalalaniWY; KinondoMY; KiuziniWY; MabokoniMY; MadibwaniW;

MagutuM; MkwakwaniWY; MvindeniMY; MwashangaW). Respondents linked drug taking to extremism, noting that drugs disrupt opportunities for addicts to make legitimate income, thus entrenching poverty, and that drugs remove addicts' ability to empathise and reason meaning they are more likely to commit violent and hateful acts with little care about the consequences for themselves or others (DebriefFGD).

While not as widely reported, some FGD respondents explained that religious and ethnic tensions exacerbate VHE conditions (KingwedeM; KinondoMY; KiuziniWY; MagutuM; SokoniMY). They explained that tribalism, between Digo and Duruma—but also other minority groups, and lower levels of religious intolerance (such as Muslims complaining about noisy Christian churches in BowaWY; KinondoMY; VugaWY) contribute to the community strife. The ethnic and tribal tensions were noted as being particularly fractious during election seasons (MkwakwaniWY; SokoniMY).

Grievances and grudges were recognised as ripening conditions to VHE (GasiMY; MvindeniMY; MwaembeW; TiwiMY). In one village, the construction of the Mwache dam has brought significant social and economic disruption, which locals perceive as a catalyst for VHE due to displacement and dissatisfaction with compensation (MwacheM; MwashangaW). In areas affected by large-scale projects or economic shifts, such as in Mwache, displacement has led to social fragmentation, which in turn feeds into the cycle of violence and extremism (MwacheM).

In other FGDs, they mentioned that historical and current grievances condition people to be more receptive to extremist propaganda. This included grievances such as feeling that one group is being favoured over another in terms of job opportunities and other supports (KingwedeM; KiuziniWY; MagutuM; MvindeniMY; ShamuWY; TiwiMY). FGD respondents said that this includes "unfair treatment between the villages where the distribution of resources is not fair an example is the food reliefs and job opportunities" (MkwakwaniWY). The young women in Kiuzini explained that this "upendeleo" (favouritism) leaves them feeling betrayed, ignored, and frustrated. Young men in Gasi, Mvendeni, and Tiwi raised that youth (specifically male youth) are being marginalised and maligned by their communities (and government/non-profits), and that this only serves to deepen their sense of grievance and push them towards people who accept them and give them a sense of belonging and security (GasiMY; MabokoniMY; MkwakwaniWY; MvindeniMY; TiwiMY). They also noted that many other groups, such as migrants (internal or external), people in poverty, and people with disabilities, are discriminated against and pushed to the fringes of their society. This breeds anger and discontent that might "make them react violently" (GasiMY, also MabokoniMY; MwashangaW; VugaWY). As voiced in one FGD: "when people's rights are not defended people might take extremist action as the last [resort]" (MagutuM).

Low literacy levels and limited access to education were repeatedly mentioned as factors that hinder effective community interventions against VHE (DenyenyeW; GasiMY; KiuziniWY; MwashangaW; YejeMY). Some focus groups specifically highlighted the lack of quality religious education as a key factor, facilitating extremist recruitment (KingwedeM; MadibwaniW; MagutuM; TiwiMY).

The young men of Gasi also mentioned "easy access to weapons" as a relevant condition to VHE in their region (GasiMY). Combined with the other conditions such as idleness, poverty, ineffective parenting, peer pressure, prolific drugs, grievances, and poor education, the easy access to weapons can take discontent and anger to violence. Attached to this is respondents' accusation of improper policing, corruption, police brutality, and failure to protect people who report criminal activity (MagutuM; MtakujaM; MwashangaW). Respondents explained that this leads to a culture where people know that they can commit anti-social acts with impunity.

These findings highlight the diverse set of conditions that ordinary villagers see as contributing to the conditions that allow VHE to persist as a problem in Kenyan villages. The repeated mention of issues like unemployment, drug abuse, absent fathers, and grievances across multiple locations highlights the significance of these factors, as key vulnerabilities in the context of extremism.

Role of social media

When asked whether social media plays any role in the fomentation of extremist ideologies or the recruitment of individuals to extremist groups, FGD participants spoke broadly about the potential for social media to positively and negatively influence the community, particularly the youth. Positive aspects of social media include educational content, such as cooking, prayer, and makeup tutorials, and exposure to broader cultural practices, which can be enriching. Thus, participants noted that while children can learn bad habits, they also gain useful skills from online platforms (MadibwaniW). Conversely, social media was frequently cited as a source of harmful content, including exposure to extremist ideologies, inappropriate behaviour, and early sexualisation (BofuM; KingwedeM; KinondoMY; MabokoniMY; MwaroniW; SawasawaM; SokoniMY; YejeMY). Concerns were raised about children mimicking dangerous behaviours seen on platforms like TikTok, which distract them from schoolwork and expose them to vulgar language and ideas (DenyenyeW; SawasawaMY; YejeMY).

Social media also influences general behaviour and cultural norms. Participants worried about the impact of Western culture contradicting local religious teachings, with social media seen as a conduit for negative foreign influences that could lead to extremist behaviours (KingwedeM; TiwiMY). Women in Mabirikani village noted that they use social media to list to Islamic speeches, *mawaidaha*, but their children used it to listen to music and for other purposes. Other online Islamic speeches, khutba, were raised as potentially inciting violence and hatred through discussing global situations where Muslims are being poorly treated (MvindeniMY).

Many discussions highlighted the role of social media in extremist recruitment. Limited direct contact with recruiters in the area shifts the focus to online recruitment (MagutuM). Additionally, the ease of recruitment through social media using financial incentives is a significant concern (BowaWY). Several villages expressed concern over the difficulty in monitoring and controlling children's exposure to potentially harmful content (MagutuM). Participants noted that parents struggle to oversee the online activities of their children, which often includes exposure to violence (MwaroniW; MwaembeW; SokoniMY). Children and young people were identified as easy targets for extremist recruitment (GasiMY; SawasawaM; TiwiMY), with easy and open access to largely unlimited online content via ubiquitous smartphones (MwaroniW; TiwiMY). Participants in one FGD raised the role of online gaming in priming young people towards violent and hateful narratives and possibly action. They used the example of games that announce 'You are ready to join the war' once all levels are completed. Participants suggested that this provides gamers with a sense of achievement and readiness for more challenging endeavours, perhaps including transition from virtual conquests to potential real-world engagements (TiwiMY)

The specifics of social media influence vary by platform. TikTok was mentioned for its rapid dissemination of flashy, enticing, and sometimes risky behaviours (DenyenyeW; GolinWY; KinondoMY; SawasawaM); such as videos of "young men with machetes" (DenyenyeW). In contrast, WhatsApp and Facebook are noted for their role in personal communication, which can also be a pathway for spreading extremist ideologies (DebriefFGD; KinondoMY; MabokoniMY; VugaWY). While most FGDs centred around the concern that social media could be used for extremist recruitment, and some participants suggested that maybe it was occurring (MabokoniMY), there were no concrete examples of it actually happening in any of the fieldwork villages. So the concerns are more speculative societal concerns than based on clear evidence.

The findings highlight that social media's impact on rural communities in Kenya is a dual edged sword. It has potential benefits in terms of knowledge and skill development. It also has risks, particularly regarding the exposure of youth to harmful content and extremist recruitment. The discussions suggest a need for better oversight and educational programs about staying safe online and verifying reliable sources to help children, parents, and communities manage the influence of digital platforms. Participants in two focus groups highlighted that the government could support this by collaborating with social media companies and strengthening policies to prevent the proliferation of violent and hateful material online (MabokoniMY; TiwiMY).

Role of electoral politics and violence

The discussions about elections and political mobilisation across the Kwale villages illustrate the connection between politics and community tensions, which often exacerbated during electoral periods. Many participants noted that violence, general community tensions and hate, have a seasonal pattern, peaking during elections due to political incitement and heightened emotions. Participants explained that the weeks, and sometimes months, before and after elections are a period characterised by increased hostility and conflicts over political affiliations (DenyenyeW; KiuzuniWY; MagutuM).

Incitement by political leaders was a recurrent theme raised in the focus groups, noting this leading to hate speech and actions that disturb the peace. Participants highlighted how politicians' rhetoric often inflames existing divisions, leading to physical confrontations and perpetuating cycles of violence (MagutuM; ShamuWY). The men in Magutu village gave an example that leaders will say: "*Hatutaki wabara hapa kwetu*", which translates as something like, "We do not want other ethnic groups/outsiders here".

The failure of politicians to fulfill promises or the perception of unfair electoral practices was also noted as a trigger for violent responses. Participants expressed that broken promises and disputed election results have led to disillusionment and frustration among the electorate (KiuziniWY; MkwakwaniWY; ShamuWY).

Tribal affiliations and party loyalties often underpin electoral voting, and then violence when outcomes are disputed. Conflicts escalate when tribal or party lines dictate voting behaviours, leading to violent confrontations when the preferred candidates do not win (MtakujaM; MwaroniW; SawasawaM). This is especially the case if there is suspicion of electoral fraud (MkwakwaniWY). Additionally, if a person votes against their tribal candidate, this results in conflict if it becomes known (MwaroniW). The young women in Shamu mentioned that people are essentially pressured into voting along tribal lines.

The broader economic and social repercussions of election-related violence include insecurity, physical injuries, and loss of property. These were particularly highlighted in Magutu village, where the male participants discussed how the tension throughout election periods can cause physical violence and hatefulness towards certain groups, particularly "outsiders", but also causes economic damage to communities as fear and loss of trust reduces residents' willingness to interact in the marketplace (MagutuM). Allegations of favouritism in employment and resource distribution during elections were discussed in the FGDs, where participants claimed that political affiliations can influence hiring practices and the distribution of resources, further fuelling tensions and perceptions of injustice (ShamuWY).

These insights into the dynamics of elections reveal how deeply intertwined political activities are with societal stability and community relations in Kwale County.

Discrimination towards LGBTQIA+ people and those with disabilities

To probe communities' levels of tolerance of people with differences to them, we asked questions about LGBTQIA+ people, in particular. Passing mention was also made those with disabilities.

There was concern noted that people living with disabilities were discriminated against and left out to similar extents as visitors and people who do not originate from the area.

The FGDs reveal a range of responses to LGBTQIA+ people, from lack of awareness to active intolerance, and everything in between. In a minority of FGDs there was a significant lack of awareness about what LGBTQIA+ entails and conviction that no LGBTQIA+ people live in their village (MadibwaniW; MbwekaW). Even after focus group facilitators explained the acronym using local terminology, respondents only showed a basic understanding of LGBTQIA+ relating to same-sex relationships (DenyenyeW; MabirikaniW), which is evidently not necessarily at all accurate for BTQIA+ people. This focus on same-sex relationships was also clear in Bofu village where the men associated LGBTQIA+ with "Qaum Lut", whereby those partaking in same-sex relationships in Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God's wrath after not heeding the warnings from the Prophet Lot (Lut). It is important to note that while some participants suggested that no LGBTQIA+ people lived in their village, a majority acknowledged the existence of LGBTQIA+ people in their communities (GasiMY; MbwakwaniWY).

There were claims in two FGDs that TikTok and other social media platforms have made people gay and lesbian (SawasawaM; YeyeMY).

In many areas, LGBTQIA+ identities are viewed negatively, often framed as against religious and cultural norms. For instance, while there is acknowledgment of the existence of LGBTQIA+ individuals, there is also a strong belief that they should be counselled and "fixed" due to the perceived dangers their existence poses to religious and societal norms: "They should be taught and explained about the dangers and consequences of LGBTQIA to God and in religion" (GasiMY). Similarly, young women in Bowa said: "there are no such cases of LGBTQIA [in our village] but if we identify anyone from such a group, we will approach the person to talk and educate them on the rules and values of Bowa village."
In some village FGDs, the stance was explicitly intolerant, with LGBTQIA+ people described in opposition to local religious and cultural values (GolinWY; KombaniM; MvindeniMY; SawasawaM; TiwiMY; YeyeMY). This hostility extends to proposals for active exclusion or corrective actions against LGBTQIA+ individuals with the men in Kombani village calling for community solidarity against LGBTQIA+ people. Women in Mwaembe village suggested that LGBTQIA+ people are in the high schools and should be expelled (MwaembeW). Young women in Shamu village were visibly angered when asked about whether tolerance should be extended to LGBTQIA+ people (ShamuWY).

While most respondents pushed thoughts of LGBTQIA+ people to the sidelines, some noted that these people exist but are marginalised in their communities and must keep their identities secret due to fear of backlash and the prevailing conservative values: "In Gasi, definitely there are gays and other members of LGBTQIA but they do their things secretly because of the values and culture of Gasi and because of fear too (GasiMY).

Some groups express a conditional tolerance where LGBTQIA+ individuals are tolerated as long as they conform to the broader community's norms or keep their identities private. This was noted in discussions where communities acknowledge the presence of LGBTQIA+ people but prefer them to express their identities away from the community (GolinWY).

There was a small but notable willingness in some groups to discuss and potentially accept LGBTQIA+ individuals. For instance, some respondents believe that "sexuality is something personal" and that acceptance has grown over time (KiuziniWY). Other respondents recollected positive interactions they had with LGBTQIA+ people who were generous and welcoming (MbwakwaniWY). In Denyenye, the women actually discussed transgender people, which we have found throughout our fieldwork to be very rare, with a strong focus on gay and lesbian people to the exclusion of BTQIA+ people. The women mentioned that transgender people are "created" and "natural" [maumbile], with the unstated suggestion that they are created by God. They said that "since it is an issue of creation, [they] rarely have a say on such a case" (DenyenyeW). Throughout our fieldwork with Muslim communities in Kenya, Indonesia, and the Philippines, we have never had a participant say something like this that naturalises diverse genders and sexualities. It is a small comment, and a definite outlier, but still an interesting argument that may support inclusive programming.

These findings show a spectrum of attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ issues, from ignorance and hostility to cautious acceptance, but with relatively low overall levels of tolerance and acceptance. The data points to a need for increased dialogue to address misunderstandings and foster a more inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals in these communities. And as an indicator of wider tolerance of difference and diversity, these discussions highlight some of the deeply conservative, homogenising and essentialising tendances of rural communities in Kenya, ready to exclude people of difference.

Gender

Throughout the FGDs, participants discussed how gender roles, societal norms, and structural inequalities intersect with violent and hateful extremism. Themes of empowerment, blame, gender-based violence (GBV), and clothing/social norms were regularly raised.

Some FGD participants suggested that women's empowerment has led to shifts in traditional gender roles (MagutuM; ShamuWY; VugaWY). In some villages, women now occupy roles once reserved for men, such as becoming breadwinners and engaging in formal employment (GasiMY; MagutuM; SawasawaM). "What a man can do, a woman can do better" said one young woman who explained that in her village women can own businesses and go to work freely (BowaWY). However, it was noted that the reason for this 'empowerment' is due to men's neglect of traditional responsibilities, including parenting, which has pushed women to take on dual roles as caregivers and providers (DenyenyeW;

KuiziniWY; MadibwaniW; MbwekaW; MvindeniMY; VugaWY). As emphasised by one young woman, "the majority of men are neglecting their roles making women be responsible for everything" (KuiziniWY). Similarly, another FGD participant said that "most parents are single mothers and they provide for the family because the fathers have neglected their responsibilities" (MabirikaniW).

While many women have embraced increased economic and social freedoms, men in multiple FGDs expressed frustration, feeling excluded from empowerment programs and blaming these initiatives for undermining their societal roles (BofuM; DebriefFGD). This imbalance has fuelled tensions, with men perceiving women's empowerment as a threat to traditional family dynamics (MbwekaW; DebriefFGD). Despite this, women remain highly subservient to men in these still strongly patriarchal villages, with women explaining that the belief that "it is the duty of a wife to listen to the husband and do what the husband says" is prevalent in their communities (BowaWY). Men agreed with this saying: "Here in this community women are entitled to specific duties and roles and they have to show respect for their men. Even when the husband coughs the wife responds" (MtakujaM). Despite this objectification and subjugation of women, men are also disadvantaged by the continuation of fixed gender roles that force a certain type of masculinity. One group of men said incredulously that some "men are performing duties or tasks that are considered feminine" (MagutuM), which highlights how men who do not conform to strict notions of masculinity are undermined and marginalised.

Participants spoke of how GBV is pervasive in Kwale County, taking forms such as physical violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, and economic exploitation, including sexual exploitation (BowaWY; DenyenyeW; KuiziniWY; MkwakwaniWY; VugaWY). Examples include widows evicted from their matrimonial home, women ostracised because of infertility, and women beaten or coerced into providing sexual favours for seeking employment or payment for their work (BowaWY; KinondoMY; KiuziniWY; MadibwaniW; MvindeniMY). Marital rape and intimate partner violence were also reported as common, with participants noting cultural taboos around discussing these issues openly (BowaWY; KiuziniWY; MagutuM; MtakujaM; SokoniMY; VugaWY). "For a wife to be beaten in the marriage it is a normal thing" remarked one young woman (KalalaniWY). Female participants in the FGDs said that "women [are] not being respected in their marriages by their husbands having 'mchepuko' [concubines/mistresses]. [We feel] bullied as wives in our homes and fear contracting sexually transmitted diseases due to our husbands' behaviours" (KiuziniWY). Other forms of misogynist disrespect were regularly voiced, with participants noting that women are often slandered as being "cheap" or "easy" (MadibwaniW), that their opinions are disregarded and their ambitions belittled (MbwekaW; MwashangaW), and that they feel fearful of attack and harassment if they are not meek and obedient (MvindeniMY). Female participants raised that women cannot report or address GBV as they will be stigmatised, ostracised, and disbelieved, and that this will have ongoing repercussions on their lives and their families' lives (GolinWY). Conversely, male participants felt that women over-report and inflate their experiences, falsifying violence to extract blackmail money and slander innocent men (DebriefFGD; TiwiMY). For example, remembering that the FGD facilitators are also local Kwale residents, one of these young male facilitators agreed with the comments raised by men in the FGDs:

> I'm defending the males of society. Women can just go to the police and report me for beating them but there is no evidence. The women are taking too much advantage. They [male FGD participants] said women have been empowered so much that they are leaving their marriages and bullying their husbands. (DebriefFGD)

Men occasionally experience sexual and intimate partner victimisation, although a minority of participants suggested that these cases are less recognised (BofuM). For instance, in one village, a young boy's report of sexual assault was initially dismissed until evidence confirmed the abuse (DebriefFGD). Some participants claimed that this underreporting reflects societal biases that prioritise women's experiences while marginalising male victims.

Participants largely agreed that blame disproportionately falls on women for societal problems, particularly regarding child behaviour (KuiziniWY; MadibwaniW). Female participants in particular stated that mothers are often held responsible for their children's perceived misbehaviour, reflecting entrenched gender biases: "the mother is to blame for all the bad things" (MadibwaniW). Female participants said that women are also blamed for their own abuse (MwaembeW); unfortunately, male participants confirmed this by suggesting that harassment and rape is the women's fault for dressing or behaving indecently (KinondoMY; TiwiMY). One young man stated that: "Personally I'll always be sceptical about the idea of boda-boda riders exploiting young girls because these young girls are naturally drawn to nice things" (MabokoniMY). While not suggesting that he had committed this crime, another concerningly admitted: "I feel pressure and temptation when I see a lady who is not well dressed; and this can lead to raping" (YejeMY). Conversely, or perhaps paradoxically, men in some FGDs expressed frustration over being stereotyped as irresponsible or abusive, which they felt disempowered their voices in community discussions (BofuM; DebriefFGD). These grievances highlight the need to address stereotypes affecting both genders.

Clothing norms emerged as a divisive issue, which served as an interesting marker of gendered power and control. Across the most of the FGD villages, women's choices of clothing are scrutinised, and women are expected to adhere to strict dress codes. Deviations often attract harassment or moral judgment, or even beatings (KuiziniWY; MkwakwaniWY; MwaembeW; VugaWY), with some (male) participants justifying this behaviour as a response to perceived immodesty (BofuM; KingwedeM; KinondoMY; MabokoniMY; TiwiMY). Participants in many FGDs highlighted the slogan: "My dress, my choice", which was a hashtag from a popular campaign started in 2014 in Nairobi by a middle-aged male Kenyan

activist (DenyenyeW; KalalaniWY; SokoniMY; VugaWY). The popularity of the campaign, still regularly mentioned in faraway Kwale villages, ten years after the campaign was launched, is testament to the importance of this subject and reflects changing attitudes toward women's autonomy. While younger generations support this sentiment, traditionalists often resist it, (for example, "we don't tolerate indecent dressing in women" (KingwedeM)) leading to intergenerational tensions (TiwiMY; MabokoniMY). It was common to hear some variation of: "Women can wear whatever they want as long as is not provocative" (MagutuM), highlighting the hidden coercion that permeates gendered expectations. For example, the young men from Gasi village all stated that their women "dress respectfully". While trying to show their progressiveness, they reinforced their demands over women's bodies by saying: "We do not put pressure on our women regarding their clothing or roles. ...Alhamdulillah, there are no cases of anyone dressing indecently" (GasiMY). Further, participants in one FGD said that they were told that ensuring women dress modestly is important for preventing violent extremism (KuiziniWY). While the vast majority of behaviour expectations centred on women's clothing, the young women in Vuga also explained that the male elders prevent them from engaging in healthy activities such as sports (VugaWY).

Economic vulnerabilities make women and girls susceptible to exploitation by extremist groups. In Bowa, participants described women recruited into gangs through promises of financial support or romantic relationships. Some women even facilitated theft by distracting victims at social events (BowaWY). Women are denied inheritance rights, for example, "a woman is not given her inheritance when the parent have died, their brothers inherit everything" (MadibwaniW). Poverty and lack of education further exacerbate these risks. Many families prioritise boys' education over girls', pushing young women into early marriages or precarious working situations to support their families (BowaWY; MabirikaniW; MwashangaW): "As a female my father told me, 'it is better for me to educate the male child'" (MkwakwaniWY).

Patriarchal norms continue to marginalise women in Kwale County and press men into conforming to fixed ideals of masculinity and manhood. For example, women face barriers to inheritance and education, which leave them dependent on male relatives and vulnerable to exploitation (KiuziniWY; MwashangaW). Structural violence, such as unequal access to employment, further entrenches gender disparities (MvindeniMY; DebriefFGD). Men, meanwhile, feel neglected by common narratives that seem to demonise men as abusers and addicts and unfairly indulge and acknowledge women, as well as feeling excluded from social programs that primarily target women (KinondoMY; TiwiMY; YejeMY).

This exclusion has driven some young men toward gangs or extremist groups as a means of reclaiming agency and a sense of empowered masculinity (BofuM; DebriefFGD).

Several focus groups emphasised the need for more community dialogues and initiatives involving both men and women to address gender issues comprehensively (TiwiMY). In Madibwani village, the female participants felt that involving men in discussions about GBV could lead to better understanding and support (MadibwaniW). The role of education and awareness in changing perceptions about GBV and gender roles is critical, and men in the FGDs noted that this information could prevent misogynistic violence (MagutuM; SokoniMY). Other men mentioned that working with men to solve male-dominated problems around drug use, idleness, and unemployment would also benefit women (YejeMY). Absentee fathers were noted as leaving a gap that could be filled by mentoring programs. The women participants said, "I can teach my daughters how to be a woman but there comes a point with the boys when the father needs to step in and teach them to be a man" (DebriefFGD). Many discussions pointed to the need for ongoing education to shift entrenched cultural and social norms that underpin gender inequality. Additionally, participants noted the need to support girls completing school, highlighting that this is often an economic issue where families prioritise schooling their sons (MkwakwaniWY).

The FGDs in Kwale County illustrate the interconnections between gender, societal norms, and VHE. Addressing these dynamics requires inclusive approaches that empower women while engaging men in meaningful ways. Through tackling structural inequalities, creating safe spaces, and promoting dialogue, communities can start to unravel patriarchal and misogynistic structures that harm male, female, and non-binary genders; thus, building resilience against the hateful and violent narratives that foment extremism.


DUKANI KWET

PART C: POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT NGO RESPONSES TO VHE IN KENYA

We have now presented data documenting the detailed context analysis civil society and other local experts offer on the violent and hateful context in Kenya. This was examined in depth in *Part A: Violent and Hateful Extremism Expert Context Analysis*. The second major section of this report, *Part B: Perspectives of Ordinary Local Kwale Villagers About VHE*, presented the detailed data from our focus groups, offering perspectives from the lived experience of ordinary local community members of VHE dynamics on-the-ground, in their villages. This final section, *Part C: Potential Development NGO Responses to VHE in Kenya* lays out the recommendations of both the expert key informants and the ordinary Kwale local villagers, about the sort of programming responses a development NGO like Plan International Kenya might support or run, to address the VHE situation in communities in Kenya within the context of their development programming. We conclude Part C by listing our view of the most relevant recommendations for PIK to consider, a mixture of insights proposed by the experts, community members, or our own observations.

1. Expert informants' analysis of NGO P/CVE programming: what works, challenges, and opportunities

Existing CSOs/NGOs and their programs

During the research for this project, the Deakin-PIA team engaged with a large number of civil society organisations running programs either specifically designated as P/CVE work, or which they identified as achieving P/CVE aims even if the program description did not focus on these outcomes. We encountered many exciting initiatives designed to encourage peacebuilding, dialogue and create economic activities, and much more. The following are the main organisations we engaged with, who already conduct P/CVE work. It is not a comprehensive list of CSOs/NGOs working on P/CVE in Kenya, merely a list of example organisations PIK teams helped us identify, who may be organisations PIK have engaged with in the past and might consider partnering with in future work.

ACT! is a local NGO which contributes to peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and P/CVE work. (Formerly PACT Kenya, they have been totally independent of the US-based international development NGO PACT since 2011). Together with international partners and smaller, more local CSOs, they are currently working on three projects they describe as P/CVE: a) a USAID-funded project on mitigation of electoral conflict; b) a project with DANIDA that centres around preventing and countering VE and mitigating natural resource-based and political conflicts; and c) a GCERF-funded project, Accelerated Response Initiative against VE (ARIVE), in which they collaborate with the National Counter-Terrorism Centre to help NGOs contribute to the Kenya's National Action Plan.

ANGAZA Empowerment Network was formed in 2016 to respond to VE and youth empowerment. They say they address VE by providing economic opportunities for their community, particularly disenfranchised youth. They advocate for youth and provide training and capacity building for religious leaders. ANGAZA, is a Swahili verb meaning 'to brighten.' They promote inter-faith and inter-generational dialogue, with the aim of ensuring that every person's voice is heard. They work with youth returnees, providing counselling and job training to help with reintegration. And they also help develop P/CVE action plans at a county level.

Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC) brings clerics from Islam, Christian/Catholic, Hindu and African traditional religious faiths together to collaborate on peacebuilding and interfaith activities. Originating in 1997 in the wake of land/resource disputes that were being framed as religious, CICC has been registered since 2008. Board members come from key peak religious bodies of each faith. They have set up CICC groups at every county, every ward level, each with conflict resolution mechanisms, as well as an online tool allowing clerics to notify hate speech and incidents for early intervention. They work closely with leaders from each faith, organising cleric exchanges, interfaith dialogue, and interfaith cooperation to work together to meet the needs of their communities. They work with villages and towns to carry out conflict analysis mapping and provide the tools that civic and religious leaders need for P/CVE at a local level. They provide training, education, and grants to youth, primarily those without adequate family support, and help young people identify the signs of recruitment and radicalisation. And they promote economic activity for women and engage women to address women-specific vulnerabilities that might lead to radicalisation.

Wajir Peace and Development Agency was founded in 2002, primarily to work with pastoralists in Wajir County. They thus work on everything from governance, social cohesion, integration, and access to justice and human rights, with an emphasis on livelihoods and sustainable peace. They promote nonviolent conflict resolution and peacebuilding mechanisms such as community dialogue programs. They participated in development of the Wajir County Action Plan on CVE, translating the National Action Plan into local practice. Wajir Peace and Development Agency also has a number of programs that promote youth employment and provide economic opportunities, as a counter to VHE.

HAKI Africa is a leading human rights agency in Kenya. Founded in 2012 and headquartered in Mombasa, they work at the national level, in all 7 counties as well as other parts of Africa. They adopt what they describe as a "human rights-based approach to CVE". *Haki* is Swahili for Justice, and they are very concerned about issues of police brutality, discrimination, forced disappearances, and political extremism. They see that violations of fundamental human rights fuel violent extremism. The organisation thus tackles VHE from a human rights perspective, working to ensure

counterterrorism activities and security responses are appropriate, not punitive, and P/CVE work addresses underlying human rights issue. They consider it their role to take advocacy risks for the entire community by speaking out against human rights abuses and agitating for a more free and just society.

HURIA (Human Rights Agenda) is another Mombasa-based, regional human rights organisation. Founded immediately after the 2010 constitution referendum, to hold authorities to account against the Bill of Rights in the new Constitution. They also tackle VHE from a human rights perspective, raising awareness of the risks of VHE. They describe themselves as the first NGO in the country working on translating the national CVE action plan into county action plan, noting there was initial resistance to having county action plans as well as the national plan. They led the work on the Kwale plan, the first county-level plan. Among other tools, they use theatre and sports to educate the community and provide opportunities for disparate people to unite. Today, they support the tailoring of plans specifically for the needs of each county, targeting those who drive and fund VHE at a more localised level.

Integrated Initiatives for Community Empowerment (IICE) seeks to addresses key issues facing young people, women and children in the informal settlements in urban centres and rural areas around Kenya, to help them build resilient communities. With a focus on creating opportunities for women, youth and children, in particular, through rights, empowerment, and policy, they provide peace and conflict resolution programs, and work with women, youth, and religious leaders to help implement county action plans. They are particularly interested in empowering women to speak out against VHE, and in engaging youth through arts.

JUHUDI Community Support Centre works closely with county and district governments in their P/CVE efforts. JUHUDI is a Swahili word meaning effort as well as an acronym for JUstice HUmanity and DIgnity. Formed in 2010, their focus is on empowering sustainable peace development for vulnerable groups, particularly those living in arid and semi-arid areas. None of their programs are formally P/CVE programs, but they work on human rights, reconciliation forums and dialogue, governance, gender and gender-based violence. Among many other activities, they provide counselling, support, and job training to women whose husbands and sons have crossed over to fight for al-Shabaab, and to youth who have returned from extremist training camps.

Peace@Heart Initiatives Network (PHIN) is based in Nairobi, but also works in neighbouring regions. The NGO started as a response against election-related violence, and civic education remains a key pillar. They describe themselves as working on local justice, human rights, peace and development. PHIN supports P/CVE efforts at a local level through dialogue, hospitality exchanges and sports activities. They also help communities set up call alert centres to monitor and report extremist concerns.

Safe Community Youth Initiative primarily works with youth who are at risk of being recruited into an extremist organisation. Their youth empowerment program engages with young people, training them to use their talents and interests to generate income. Funding in 2016 from Search for Common Ground helped them establish networks to connect youth with industry leaders and helped with the provision of training. Many graduates of the program now own their own businesses. In addition to providing technical and entrepreneurship training, the Safe Community Youth Initiative teaches young people the basic life skills they need to survive. The organisation has a strong focus on education, and especially on ensuring that young mothers can return to and remain in school. Other programs focus on creating dialogue between religious and cultural leaders, and between security officers, women, and religious leaders. Finally, the organisation contributes to the development of peace policies and at a local and national level.

Tana Delta Child Protection Network also works closely with youth, particularly with girls and young women who are at risk of female genital mutilation and child marriage. They are also heavily involved in educating the community about the dangers of domestic violence. They use interfaith dialogue to encourage religious leaders to speak out against these issues. As youth are particularly vulnerable to extremist recruitment, and as there is a strong and undeniable link between VHE and gendered violence, their work helps insulate those in the Tana Delta against VHE.

Trace Kenya works on the periphery of P/CVE by fighting human trafficking and modern-day slavery. Based in Mombasa, this counter-trafficking NGO aims to safeguard children from violence and child labour, protect women from forced migration, prevent violence against women, and educate migrants on their rights. Trace Kenya works with vulnerable individuals to prevent trafficking and trace victims.

Transparency International Kenya (TIK) is an anti-corruption NGO. They campaign for transparency in government and business, particularly around natural resources. They focus on governance, empowering citizens to hold governments and corporations to account. As a large component of VHE in a Kenyan context revolves around land and resource allocation, TIK is on the front line of P/CVE work.

Successes

NGOs throughout Kenya claim to be finding success in countering VHE. Indeed, almost every organisation we engaged with reported an improvement in the security situation in Kenya, and success of their programs. One even went as far as saying, "Programs we have engaged in have all been effective." Another, "If the government is going to work with small grassroots community organisations, they'd be surprised at how effective we can be."

The Tana Delta Child Protection Network note that over the last 20 years, the time they have been operating, the average age of marriage for girls in the region has risen to 17 years, from as low as nine. Higher marital age is strongly correlated with a range of benefits for girls and women, including increased education and greater financial independence, both of which help in the battle against VHE.

Interfaith dialogue and support networks on the Coast appear to have significantly helped promote tolerance in Kenyan

communities. In Kenya, faith leaders are often amongst the most respected members of the community. When leaders from various faiths work together, they send a strong message of unity and peace to their congregations. As well, through developing a greater understanding of the religious teachings of other faiths, religious leaders and their congregations find commonality. People from different religious backgrounds become partners in building strong and resilient communities. Finally, by working cooperatively together, clerics can identify extremist pastors or congregants, help in the process of deradicalisation, and isolate extremist pastors, limiting their influence in the community.

Likewise, bringing leaders from different communities together has proven to be a successful P/CVE strategy, as have youth exchange visits with groups from other faiths. Dialoguing together around issues pertaining to land or water resources has helped community leaders deepen their understanding and perspective, circumventing conflicts at an early stage.

Programs which target economic activities, including for women and youth, claim to have been particularly successful. Some organisations have helped hundreds of individuals find gainful employment or start their own businesses. Many of the people who have been helped are returnees, who are now successfully reintegrated back into their communities.

Of course, counselling plays a key role in reintegration, too. Returnees are often deeply traumatised by their experiences working with Al-Shabaab. Appropriate counselling has helped them rebuild their lives and rediscover their place in society.

There is a special role for arts and sports in the P/CVE sector. Team sports bring youth together in constructive ways, teaching them that they can rely on each other, while arts-based P/CVE work helps individuals and communities interpret their environments and find creative ways to work together to face their challenges. Both arts and sports work to bring people from different backgrounds together. One interviewee spoke of her experiences running ballroom dancing classes for women. Initially Muslim women attended, but did not participate. Soon, however, Muslim women joined the dance floor, leading to greater interactions between their peers from other religious backgrounds and finding support and friendship with them.

Human rights organisations are also reporting success. People feel more comfortable confronting mismanagement, reporting corruption, and demanding transparency and accountability from their government.

In part because of these dedicated efforts, levels of recruitment to al-Shabaab are falling. Individuals and communities are stronger and more resilient, and human rights are improving throughout Kenya.

Challenges and opportunities

Many challenges still exist. These include a lack of funding, generalised misunderstandings around radicalisation, and problems in engaging specific communities. Many small organisations struggle to find adequate funding. International donors tend to work directly with the government or with large organisations, and smaller, local CSOs/NGOs are often overlooked, or simply engaged as implementing partners. This can be challenging for smaller players with specific networks, skills and clear ideas about effective programming, who argue that their lack of complex administration means that they can make the money go further.

Then, too, there is a perceived lack of understanding around the reasons people in Kenya turn to VHE. "Many do not really understand the motivational factors … for why people are radicalised", said one interviewee who felt that more effort was needed in educating NGOs about the complicated motivations for involvement with violent extremist groups, as well as more awareness raising in the wider community. "Many people are very careful, fearful, about violent extremism, so the only way to hear them is to go slow, unpack slowly, don't impose, have options, involve them in deciding how to have discussions and what to discuss."

Some NGOs have struggled to reach specific groups. One indicated most P/CVE programs are not inclusive enough. Often, programs are developed that are too broad in scope, without considering the specific and localised factors that need to be addressed. Another stated that it was particularly difficult to engage adult men.

Reintegration of returnees is a major challenge, including for victims of trafficking who have returned from al-Shabaab. Often harassed by authorities, ostracised by family and communities, and struggling to find ways to support themselves, many easily become dependent on any agency offering support. One interviewee worried about a developing a culture of dependency, "Even giving goods, we have found they simply sell them." The NGO she works for is now focusing on building skills around financial management and training participant to identify economic opportunities that do not require large start-up costs. Encouragingly, only one interviewee suggested that engaging in the P/CVE sector was frightening. Most seemed to indicate that their efforts are well enough received by authorities and communities. However, the inherent dangers of P/CVE work have been identified as a global issue and should be more closely examined in a Kenyan context. P/CVE work is never easy, and in Kenya, it can be complicated indeed. But the people who were interviewed seemed undaunted by these challenges, and confident in their ability to overcome them.

The people who were interviewed were keen to speak about the future and about the opportunities that exist in Kenya for P/CVE work. Several organisations suggested that more work needs to be done in educating entire communities about VHE. At present, there are many programs which focus on empowering and educating the youth; however, the opportunity exists for programs which educate and empower the parents. In addition to providing general training around VHE, one respondent felt that parents in Kenya could benefit from broad-based support in the form of positive parenting programs.

Some interviewees suggested that there is scope for more work in the religious sphere. One questioned, "When are we going to standardise madrassa curriculum?" Emphasising the peaceful nature of Islam in the Madrassa system would undermine and neutralise more extreme, radical clerics. As well, working closely with progressive religious leaders would help identify and isolate extremists. One respondent suggested bringing security forces into the mix by building stronger ties between churches, mosques, and police.

There is also work to be done in addressing land use and resources, particularly around climate change. Currently, al-Shabaab is using the climate crisis, and in particular Kenya's harsh drought, as a recruitment tool. Addressing this would thwart their recruitment efforts.

As well, there remains important and valuable work to be done in the human rights sphere. Without access to their national identity cards, many Muslims (and other marginalised individuals) will continue to operate in a grey area of incomplete citizenship, with fewer rights than their peers. Kenya still struggles with corruption and a lack of transparency, which complicates P/CVE efforts in the country.

Finally, one interviewee gave the following advice:

> Don't promise solutions - that loses authenticity. Explore the challenges the community are facing, that drive some to extremism. You gain trust slowly. Many people are very careful, fearful, about VE – so the only way to hear them is to go slow, unpack slowly, don't impose, have options, involve them in deciding how to have discussions and what to discuss. [And learn from them.] People from the west come, present themselves as experts, and don't learn much.

2. Proposals from villagers: community-led solutions

Each of the 29 focus groups we conducted across villages in Kwale concluded with questions asking the local residents' thoughts about what community-led solutions there might be, and asking for their ideas, suggestions or recommendations about programs a development NGO like Plan International might support or implement. Remembering that these focus groups were with ordinary people in rural villages, the ideas and solutions offered are wonderfully diverse, and largely quite practical. FGDs were segregated into make and female, with some of the groups being youth under 25 years of age and some adults over 25. Solutions offered include both potential and actual programs, that could be either totally community-driven or institutional interventions. They range from local initiatives to more structured, formal programs.

By far the largest problem and solution voiced by participants and the young researchers who facilitated the FGDs was around the issue of unemployment, and thus the need for meaningful employment as a means of reducing push factors to VHE. In addition, during the debriefing session, the young researchers who are also locals to this region of Kenya, highlighted that other young people need more self-motivation, and that they should take responsibility for their lives and actively participate to improve their communities:

> We have so many opportunities... The only think is to [seek out] the opportunities and change the mindset of the people, that we are able to do it. So, it's more about learning independence, self-employment, and motivation. We have to take the initiative and stop complaining (DebriefFGD).

This sentiment was echoed by the men in Magutu village who said: "we do not need to wait for the government to sort out our local issues. Some of the issues we can sort ourselves" (MagutuM). Further, participants raised the importance of cultivating "personal responsibility" (TiwiMY), celebrating "the beauty of our differences" (MagutuM), "accepting the lifestyles of different groups" (MtakujaM), and "stop holding grudges because they can lead to hate and violence" (MwaembeW).

A prominent solution that stood out in many of the villages is the need to enhance education and awareness about violent and hateful extremism, including subjects such as gender-based violence and tolerance (BofuM; GolinWY; KalalaniWY; KingwedeM; KinondoMY; KiuziniWY; MabirikaniW; MwashangaW; SokoniMY: TiwiMY; VugaWY; YejeMY). Participants suggested that this awareness raising could be conducted through seminars (mihadhara) and community sensitisation programs (GoliniWY; KombaniM; MagutuM; MvindeniMY; TiwiMY). In Bofu village, the men encouraged their fellow villagers to attend: "If you ever get to hear of such meetings organise yourself to go and learn. Do not just attend those that give payments to you. These meetings have a lot of knowledge" (BofuM). In Bowa, the young women mentioned that they had been visited by Haki Africa and remembered that as a useful intervention. Male participants suggested that religious leaders are in a good position to provide this information and embed positive messaging and ethical values that spread ideas around peace and tolerance (GasiMY, KingwedeM; KombaniM, MabokoniMY; MtakujaM; SawasawaM; SokoniMY; YejeMY). In Vuga, the young women suggested that these sessions could be facilitated by local mothers. In Kinondo and Sawasawa, the men said that it would be good to embed these tolerance and acceptance awareness raising ideas into school curriculum, noting the importance of shaping children's ideology and sense of values from a young age (TiwiMY). In Shamu village, the young women suggested these programs could be supported through a billboard campaign (ShamuWY).

Participants highlighted that knowing people in the community and having strong social bonds with those around you significantly improves village peace and harmony (GasiMY; TiwiMY). The young men in Gasi village also noted that these local linkages reduce the ability for outsiders to influence people with violent and hateful narratives, as everyone already feels a sense of belonging and connection and is not seeking that fulfilment elsewhere. In Sawasawa, the men highlighted that these should strive to include everyone in the community, including those sometimes identified as outsiders and people from different tribal groups. Many of their solutions surrounded ways that they could grow this social capital through local forums, events, and groups. These ideas were linked to the notion of *harambee* (YejeMY), which has become a guiding principle for development initiatives and community projects

across Kenya, Swahili for "all pull together". Deeply ingrained in Kenyan culture, the concept and tradition of harambee emphasises community self-help, mutual assistance, and collective effort to achieve a common goal. As such, it is a way to foster community resilience and unity.

Utilising local governance forums like *barazas* (public meetings) to discuss community issues and solutions was a common theme (BofuM; BowaWY; KinondoMY; MagutuM; MtakujaM; VugaWY). These forums are organised by local leaders and seen as platforms for open dialogue, idea sharing, and community bonding (GasiMY; SokoniMY). *Barazas* play a significant role in participatory governance and community cohesion, offering a forum for transparency, accountability, and inclusive dialogue. While barazas were highlighted as a forum that is open to all, male participants in Magutu village called them "meetings for men".

Encouraging interfaith dialogues, intermarriage, and other forms of cross-cultural engagement to foster mutual respect and understanding was recommended (BowaWY; KinondoMY; SawasawaM; ShamuWY; TiwiMY; VugaWY). In Mvindeni village, the young men explained that once they "had dialogues between Muslims and Christians and after that the Muslims were taken to the church to be shown how the Christians pray and also Christians were taken to the mosque to be shown how Muslims take ablution, so as a way of dealing with our differences."

Participants discussed other ways of getting people to interact, such as holding discussions between young people and elders to help build trusting and respectful relationships where youth follow the advice of their elders (BowaWY; MagutuM; TiwiMY). Several FGDs mentioned that common community events such as weddings and funerals are useful places for people of different ages, genders, and backgrounds to meet and mingle (BofuM; BowaWY; KalalaniWY; KinondoMY; MabokoniMY; MabirikaniW; MagutuM; MtakujaM; MwashangaW; SawasawaM; ShamuWY; TiwiMY; YejeMY). Additionally, organising sports events, cultural festivals, and other community activities that bring people together is seen as a vital strategy for promoting unity and diverting youth from negative influences (GasiMY; KombaniM; MabirikaniW; MadibwaniW; MagutuM; MtakujaM; MvindeniMY; MwaroniW; SawasawaM; YejeMY). Examples include football tournaments (BofuM; KiuziniWY; KingwedeM; KinondoMY; MabokoniMY; TiwiMY)—potentially between two boda-boda groups (MvindeniMY)—and cultural projects (MagutuM). These events and activities were suggested with the intended outcome of "reduced idleness" (BowaWY; KinondoMY; SokoniMY) whereby young people in particular "stay busy" (BofuM; MadibwaniW; MvindeniMY; KiuziniWY) and "occupied" (KingwedeM). "Let's find something constructive for these young people to engage in" said the young men in Tiwi village (TiwiMY).

Several villages highlighted the role of women and youth groups in fostering community engagement and providing support networks, which help bridge cultural and religious divides (BowaWY; KinondoMY; MagutuM). In Vuga village, the young women discussed groups that have been useful in their community including women's groups (*chamas* and *miche*), youth groups (Youth Generation Talent Nurture), cultural groups (*zigidigi*), and business cooperatives such as Zamzam that hires out chairs and tents, Bidee that supports water sellers, and *Tupendane* that supports dairy farmers (VugaWY). *Chamas* were mentioned in many FGDs (MagutuM; VuagaWY).

Establishing counselling centres and offering guidance to vulnerable populations were proposed to directly address the roots of extremism and provide support networks (KalalaniWY; KombaniM; MagutuM; MkwakwaniWY). In Magutu and Mabokoni, the men suggested that these programs should include support to recover from substance abuse addiction. Participants highlighted that people in their region need and want this support, but there are limited places to go, especially for free (DebriefFGD; MabokoniMY; MagutuM).

The creation of job opportunities and skill development programs were frequently suggested to combat idleness and provide alternatives to involvement in extremist activities (BofuM; BowaWY; KinondoMY; KiuziniWY; MabirikaniW; MadibwaniW; MkwakwaniWY; MvindeniMY; MwaroniW; SawasawaM; SokoniMY). Participants voiced a direct link between this and the prevention of violent extremism, with unemployment seen as the number one problem and employment seen as the number one solution to VHE: "creation of employment will make people busy with no time to venture into such [extremist] groups" (BofuM; also DebriefFGD; GolinWY; MagutuM), "they won't have time for violence and hate (KalalaniWY). This includes supporting children to stay in school (KalalaniWY; KingwedeM; KiuziniWY; MabirikaniW; MadibwaniW; MwaembeW; YejeMY) as well as offering pathways for vocational training (GolinWY; KingwedeM: MwaroniW; MwacheM; MwaroniW), zero-interest micro-finance loans for business start-ups (DenyenyeW), and programs for young people who are not in school or work (KingwedeM: MagutuM; MwaembeW). The young women in Kiuzini village suggested that these programs should focus on finding gainful employment for boys/men, and specifically for members of youth gangs (also MvindeniMY; YejeMY). The young female participants in Vuga village offered a tangible solution. Their village is well-known for its abundant coconut and cashew nut production. Participants suggested that the government could start and oil factory to utilise these local resources and provide employment opportunities for local people (VugaWY). Similarly, others suggested that companies or government should invest in the area to create jobs (DenyenyeW) or that the government or NGOs could start livelihood projects that would, for instance, help people secure fishing boats (KingwedeM) grow agricultural products (MwashangaW), or revive neglected/abandoned hotels and resorts (DebriefFGD). Participants also suggested that financial support for business start-ups should be accompanied by skills training to enable sustainable business enterprises for those serious about entrepreneurial success (DebriefFGD; GolinWY).

Several responses call for more robust involvement from both government and NGOs in creating and funding programs that tackle extremism directly, such as youth engagement initiatives (GolinWY; KinondoMY; MwaroniW; VugaWY), poverty reduction projects (YejeMY), peace programs (MagutuM), collaboration with social media companies (TiwiMY), and initiatives that encourage public participation with county governance structures

(KinondoMY; MagutuM; TiwiMY). In Mwache village, the community was reeling from the repercussions of a poorly managed dam project, which the participants felt had breached their human rights and left them without recourse or sufficient compensation. Thus, their suggestions centred on programs that protected human rights and solved the serious land issues that create conflict and hatred in their community (MwacheM). Additionally, it was suggested that NGOs and government could advocate and implement strategies to enable equity and equal opportunity (BofuM; KinondoMY; MvindeniMY; SokoniMY).

The importance of good parenting was stressed, with participants highlighting the value of firm boundaries, consequences for breaches, and ethical values as protection against VHE (KingwedeM; KombaniM; MkwakwaniWY; MtakujaM; MvindeniMY; SawasawaM; TiwiMY; YejeMY). Parenting programs were suggested to help parents keep their children safe online, teach child rights and parent responsibilities, and steer young people towards employment and away from idleness and anti-social peer influences (DebriefFGD; KinondoMY; MvindeniMY; SokoniMY). These programs could link parents with political and traditional leaders to promote wrap-around support for families (KingwedeM; KiuziniWY). These programs could also help teach parents and families ways to reduce youth vulnerability to recruitment, what changes to look for, and how to monitor potential extremist behaviours and connections (DebriefFGD; KalalaniWY; ShamuWY).

An interesting thread through many of the FGDs was the need to focus on boys and men. In Bofu village, the men raised they want "to be recognised since most organisations recognise only the female gender and empower them, leaving the men out of the plan" (BofuM). When speaking of the dire need for more job opportunities, this was usually highlighted as being especially important for men as a way to prevent VHE (DebriefFGD). Young men in Tiwi village extended the importance of including the "knife wielders" (gang members) in community conversations (TiwiMY). Many participants argued that programs focus on girls and women, and that "government and NGOs should also support the boychild" (YejeMY, also MagutuM). They felt that "if [NGOs like] Plan can do more with boys, then maybe crime would go down, and gender-based violence would go down" (DebriefFGD).

Despite enthusiasm for programs, participants highlighted that program facilitators will need to plan carefully, be culturally sensitive, and involve the community to ensure success (MagutuM) as "a lot of initiatives have been put in place but failed" (SokoniMY). The men in Magutu village emphasised that program facilitators need to highlight the benefits of the programs they are running to their intended audience as there is often misunderstandings and people sometimes expect to be paid a *kiinua mgongo* (a gratuity or bonus) for attending a program that intends to help them. In Mwaroni village, the women suggested that organisations should pay this *kiinua mgongo* (MwaroniW), although this idea was opposed elsewhere. In the debriefing session, the young researchers highlighted that local community-based organisations are conducting some promising initiatives and that supporting these would be a good place for government and international NGOs to place their focus.
Improved governance and implementation of laws and regulations was also noted as a clear need, with many calls for an increased police presence in villages with fair and transparent processing of lawbreakers (BowaWY; GasiMY; GolinWY; KalalaniWY; KiuziniWY; KombaniM; MkwakwaniWY; MtakujaM; MwashangaW; MwaroniW; TiwiMY; VugaWY; YejeMY) including a crackdown on drugs like bhang—a form of cannabis and muguka—a form of khat (DenyenyeW, also MabokoniMY; MagutuM; MkwakwaniWY; MtakujaM; MwaroniW). Young women in Shamu village said a solution to VHE could be "politicians fulfilling their promises they made to the people" (ShamuWY).

Other participants suggested that a neighbourhood watch or early warning taskforce could be established in the community to act as an intermediary between the community and police (TiwiMY). They remarked that the traditional idea that the whole village is watching out for one another is dwindling and should be reinvigorated (DebriefFGD; MagutuM). Young women in the Mkwakwani village focus group mentioned that the vigilante *Sungu Sungu* operation helped bring peace to the region in the early 2000s but once that was outlawed, crime and extremist activity began to rise. While the group was formed to combat rampant crime in the region, and was originally sanctioned by the authorities, members were known for their harsh methods, including lynching those they suspected of criminal activities. Despite being officially outlawed, the group has periodically resurfaced, especially during times of heightened insecurity. It was interesting that this FGD remembered them with fond nostalgia, although it seemed that participants were essentially highlighting the need for greater policing and consequences for anti-social behaviour.

These solutions reflect a community-centric approach to preventing VHE and promoting social cohesion, emphasising the importance of local involvement, tailored programs that respect cultural norms, and broad-based community engagement activities. The recommendations span educational initiatives, economic opportunities, and cultural engagements, all aimed at reducing the susceptibility of individuals, especially youth, to VHE. Most could inform the programming of civil society and development organisations, as much as government agencies and departments.

3. Specific recommendations from the Deakin-Plan International Australia team for Plan International Kenya

The following recommendations are grounded in the extensive fieldwork presented throughout this report, including expert interviews and community-level focus groups conducted in Kwale and across Kenya's Coast Region. They are designed to build on and amplify the strong community development work Plan International Kenya is already delivering.

Rather than proposing entirely new directions, these recommendations offer strategic ways to adapt and strengthen existing programming to more deliberately and effectively address violent and hateful extremism. Many of PIK's current activities—such as vocational training, youth engagement, social cohesion, and protection programming—are already tackling the underlying drivers of VHE. With modest adjustments, these programs can be even more impactful in preventing recruitment, supporting returnees, and building community resilience.

Framing this work within the VHE context could help PIK more clearly demonstrate to donors and partners the relevance and added value of its existing approach, while also highlighting opportunities for further investment and strategic collaboration. These recommendations are also designed to help guide internal reflection—supporting teams to consider how everyday programming decisions might either mitigate or inadvertently amplify VHE dynamics. Thus, these recommendations provide practical ideas for enhancing PIK's impact in this space, without compromising its development mission or community trust.

1. Mainstream VHE Sensitivity Across All Programming in Areas Affected by Conflict and Extremism

- Integrate VHE context analysis into project planning, implementation, and monitoring using tools such as the Conflict & Extremism Do No Harm Tool developed by Plan International Kenya and Philippines team with the Deakin University team.
- Ensure all projects are assessed for their potential to exacerbate or mitigate VHE dynamics, especially in fragile or divided communities.

2. Target the Structural Drivers of Vulnerability

- Strengthen livelihood and vocational training programs by including those most vulnerable to VHE recruitment (e.g. returnees, out-of-school youth, marginalised men).
- Advocate for greater government and private sector investment in youth education and employment, especially in underserved counties like Kwale.
- Reinforce education retention and future employment planning as key goals in child protection and youth programs.

3. Strengthen Gender and Social Inclusion Including Empowering Men and Boys as Champions for Gender Equality and Peace

- Engage men and boys in gender-transformative programming, including through positive fatherhood, mentoring, and anti-violence initiatives (e.g., challenge toxic masculinities linked to extremist narratives).
- Promote positive masculinities and gender-equitable norms as part of community resilience strategies.
- Include men in parenting and role-modelling interventions to support children's well-being and community cohesion.
- Apply an intersectional lens to all programming, ensuring the inclusion and safety of girls, women, men, boys, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

4. Invest in Community-Led Resilience and Peace Structures

- Support local peace committees or resilience groups led by community members, with NGO support focused on facilitation and coordination.
- Encourage these groups to address not only VHE, but also disaster resilience, drug prevention, and other relevant local concerns that can have mutually reinforcing outcomes such as improved social connection.
- Build on Kenya's *harambee* tradition of mutual aid to promote self-responsibility and collective action.

5. Promote Youth Belonging and Purpose Through Arts, Sports, and Culture

- Expand support for creative, cultural, and recreational initiatives that reduce youth idleness (which was commonly identified by participants in this research as problematic) and offer safe spaces for self-expression.
- Use these platforms to build leadership, belonging, and critical thinking—protective factors against extremist ideologies.

6. Support the Reintegration of Returnees and At-Risk Individuals

- Integrate returnees and at-risk individuals into livelihoods, peacebuilding, and social cohesion programs to reduce stigma and isolation.
- Engage religious leaders, community elders, and influencers to support acceptance and healing at the community level.
- Ensure programming considers the gendered experiences of returnees, including women and children affected by conflict.

7. Raise Awareness and Improve Access to Safe Reporting Mechanisms

- Support awareness campaigns on VHE, GBV, and drug abuse tailored for in-school and out-of-school youth.
- Create or strengthen safe, anonymous, and trusted pathways for reporting suspicious activity or protection concerns.
- Ensure reporting mechanisms are inclusive, confidential, and well-linked to support services.

8. Support Community-Led Peacebuilding Initiatives

- Expand partnerships with local CSOs already engaged in peacebuilding and P/CVE, including faith-based and interfaith networks.
- Build and fund local connectors and positive social norms, such as traditional mediation mechanisms and inclusive community forums.
- Empower women and youth to play leadership roles in community-based conflict resolution and violence prevention.

9. Promote Inclusive and Accountable Governance

- Support civic education initiatives that promote inclusive political participation and reduce ethnic/religious marginalisation.
- Work with civil society and media to promote transparency, anti-corruption, and peaceful electoral engagement.
- Facilitate safe and inclusive spaces for dialogue between citizens and government actors to (re)build trust and social cohesion.

10. Tackle Hateful Extremism and Online Radicalisation

- Collaborate with media and tech actors to monitor and counter hate speech and online recruitment, especially on social media platforms.
- Support community-led campaigns to challenge toxic narratives and promote values of inclusion, respect, and coexistence.
- Partner with schools and youth groups to build digital literacy and critical thinking skills.

11. Advance Research, Monitoring, and Adaptive Learning

- Develop and pilot VHE-specific indicators for program effectiveness, building on this research project's findings and the final step of the Conflict & Extremism Do No Harm tool.
- Embed adaptive learning and reflection spaces in programs to ensure continuous context analysis and responsiveness (e.g. schedule recurrent sessions to review programming using the Conflict & Extremism Do No Harm tool).
- Facilitate ongoing collaboration between academic researchers, NGOs, and communities to co-design effective and ethical VHE responses

References

Barton, G., Husy, D., Kelly, L., Sonrexa, J. & Ware, A. (2019). Violent extremism and the work of Plan International in Myanmar, Indonesia, and the Philippines, Plan International & Deakin University.

ICG (2012) The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia. Report 184/Africa, 15 February 2012. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/kenyan-military-intervention-somalia.

Jugl, I., Lösel, F., Bender, D., & King, S. (2021). Psychosocial prevention programs against radicalization and extremism: A meta-analysis of outcome evaluations, The European Journal of Psychology Applied to Legal Context, 13(1), 37-46.

NACADA (2022) National Survey on the Status of Drugs and Substance Use in Kenya. National Agency for the Campaign Against Drug Abuse, Government of Kenya.

Saalfeld, J., & Mwakimako, H. A. (2023). Integrationism vs. rejectionism: revisiting the history of Islamist activism in coastal Kenya. Journal of Eastern African Studies, 17(1–2), 40–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2023.2237372.

Schmid, A. (2011) 'The definition of terrorism'. In Handbook of Terrorism Research, ed. A. Schmid, Routledge.

Sonrexa, J., Kelly, L., Barton, G. & Ware, A. (2023). Perspectives on violent extremism from development–humanitarian NGO staff in Southeast Asia, Third World Quarterly, 44(1), 170-189.

Ware, A., Kelly, L. M., & Barton, G. (2023) Development NGO responses to countering violent extremism and hate. Conflict, Security & Development, 23(5), 367–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2023.2283335

Willis, J. & H. Mwakimako. (2024) Islam, Politics, and Violence on the Kenya Coast. Research Report 4, Sciences Po Bordeaux; IFRA - Nairobi, Kenya; Observatoire des Enjeux Politiques et Sécuritaires dans la Corne de l'Afrique - Les Afriques dans le monde / Sciences po Bordeaux.

ADI
ALFRED DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBALISATION

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY