MAPPING DYNAMICS AND PERCEPTIONS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

A STUDY OF NATURE, DRIVERS AND PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIM WOMEN AND GIRLS TOWARD VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN KENYA

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CSCR CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Executive Summary

To date, research on Violent Extremism (VE) has devoted less attention on the place and role of women in recruitment and radicalization. As a result, strategies and programs aimed at preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) have largely been skewed towards male recruits and the masculine settings. It is against this background that this survey was planned. The aim is to complement efforts by the Kenyan government and other relevant actors in promoting an all-inclusive understanding and better responses to VE. The survey focused on Muslim women and girls in the VE hot-spot areas of Mombasa, Kilifi, Lamu and Kwale at the coast; Mandera, Wajir and Garissa in north eastern; and Isiolo in eastern Kenya.

The methodology used entailed a review of secondary documents published in various forms (media articles, books and reports, among others) and primary data collection techniques including; Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The assessment team used a structured interview guide to conduct interviews, but it was flexible enough to adapt questions to the context of the interviewee and/or when it was necessary to pursue more information. Data analysis was largely qualitative in nature. It involved thinking through the data collected with the aim of looking for meanings and discoveries about attitudes of Muslim women and girls towards extremist groups and VE in the regions surveyed.

This report presents detailed findings of the survey. In sum, the survey found out that women and girls in the coastal counties of Mombasa, Kilifi, Lamu and Kwale as well as those in north eastern such as Mandera, Wajir and Garissa and Isiolo in eastern, generally feel socially and economically excluded by the central government. They conveyed a sense of an existential threat to their community and inferring from this context, most explained that it is this sense of crisis and frustration that has led a number of them to participate in acts of VE. Their perceptions, therefore, towards extremist groups and VE in Kenya is that of victims of circumstances and manipulations and not the unruly, destructive, and dangerous forces needing containment.

From the survey, two categories of women and girls who are more vulnerable to joining or supporting VE groups emerged. First, those aged between 19-35 years, who are well educated, articulate and exposed. This lot often joins VE groups for reasons other than poverty. They do so because of the necessity to define themselves (gain status/recognition or for the alleged thrill).[1] These women and girls are from middle and upper class families where poverty is not an issue. Some from this lot also join VE groups to avenge for the torture, sufferings or death of their relatives (especially their male counterparts).

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[1] See Colonel John M "Matt" Venda, "Why women Join al-Qaeda" USIP, Special Report no. 236, May 2010.

The other lot is that of women and girls aged between 16-35 years who are not highly educated. These are often rebellious and disrespectful to authorities including their parents or neighbors. Majority in this group join VE groups out of structural problems such as unemployment and their aim is to escape from boredom and a gain a sense of belonging. However, the point of departure for the two categories is the 'religiously radicalized' environment they often find themselves.

The survey found an interconnectedness between some of the push and pull factors of VE. There was cross-cutting influences where one factor influences others, that in turn strengthen and catalyze the circumstances that lead to recruitment and radicalization into various forms of VE. For instance, feelings of alienation and inequality often feed into identity conflicts (of Muslims versus Christians) which in turn reinforce positive images of VE groups and support for VE ideology.

The survey suggests two working themes as a basis to the question of women's involvement in VE. The first theme entails negotiating **"*Uislamu* and *Ukenya*"** or the contrasting ideas of citizenship, identity and belonging in the geographic areas surveyed. This should be in the context of Kenya's historical trajectory going as far back as independence. The second theme involves negotiating the question of **"self-image and belonging"** among Muslim women and girls.

Broadly, there are similarities between women and men in terms of their perceptions and motivations to join VE groups but there are important reasons to consider a gendered approach when responding to VE. Indeed, there are clear gender identity issues around VE including gender-specific motivations and recruitment into VE. This then, makes it pertinent to involve women and girls in VE prevention efforts and in CVE.

Acknowledgements

This work will definitely go a long way in contributing towards the prevention and CVE in Kenya.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BRAVE	Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism
CSCR	Centre for Sustainable Conflict Resolution
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism.
ESF	Economic Support Funds
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KII	Key Information Interviews
KNCHR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
MRC	Mombasa Republican Council
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NLC	National Land Commission
PREACT	Partnership for Regional East Africa Counter Terrorism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SOW	Scope of Work.
TJRC	Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission
USIP	United States Institute for Peace
VE	Violent Extremism
VEO	Violent Extremist(s) Organization.

Part 1: Introduction

Violent Extremism (VE) remains a real and current threat to Kenya's nationhood, common security and general well-being. From time to time, media reports and other sources of information including government agencies have highlighted incidences of VE in the country. A distinctive feature of recent reports is the apparent rise in women's active participation in the activities of Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs); both locally and internationally. This includes their deployment in combat operations as active role players (suicide bombers, extremist propagandists, as well as recruiters and mobilizers into various forms of violent extremism). It is imperative to note that out of the 20,000 members of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) also known as *Daesh* in Arabic, 3000 of them are women and girls[2]. Closer home, the Somalia based *al-Shabaab* is known for recruiting female youth (alongside men) in Kenya before sending them to Somalia to enhance the group's extremist agenda. It will be recalled that those who orchestrated the attempted attack on Central Police Station in Mombasa on 11 September 2016 were three young girls,[3] while another group of three young girls were intercepted at the Kenya-Somalia border allegedly on their way to join the ISIS.[4]

While it is difficult to estimate the number and level of women involvement in VE, two things are clear. First, most VEOs have female members recruited to engage in a wide range of roles. Second, the frequency and visibility of female members in VEOs is on the rise. This raises important questions about the place of gender in VE and CVE. It is apparent that the Kenyan environment under which the youth (both male and female) are being radicalised and recruited into VE is changing dramatically. Regrettably, the subject of women and girls in VE has been least explored in Kenya. There is a proclivity to think about them as passive or inactive actors. It is against this backdrop that this survey was conceived. The essence is to delineate women and girls' perceptions and role in VE and possible function in CVE.

1.1 Aims of the Survey

The survey aimed at providing evidence-based findings on the nature, dynamics and perceptions of Muslim women and girls towards VE and CVE in Kenya.

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2 Nick Dorman, Islamic State fanatics kidnap more than 3,000 women and girls in 2 week rampage, http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/islamic-state-fanatics-kidnap-more-4062810
3 See Kenya Police Service, *Attack At Central Police Station-Mombasa*, Available at
 http://www.nationalpolice.go.ke/2015-09-08-17-56-33/news/173-attack-at-central-police-station-mombasa.html
Accessed 24 April 2017.
4 Stanley Mwahaga, *Women nabbed at Kenya-Somalia border en route to join Al-Shabaab*, Available at https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000156552/women-nabbed-at-kenya-somalia-border-en-route-to-join-al-shabaab, Accessed 24 April 2017.

1.2 Objectives of the Survey

This survey sought to achieve the following objectives:

- Examine the nature and dynamics of Muslim women and girls' involvement in VE,
- Assess the perceptions of Muslim women and girls towards Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs),
- Establish risk patterns and dynamics of Muslim women and girls' involvement in VE in selected counties,
- Identify evidence gaps on Muslim women and girls' involvement in VE and CVE in the context of existing studies and the survey for further research.

1.3 Methodology of the Survey

Both primary and secondary research tools were used in this survey. In using both tools, the survey sought information from diverse sources. The findings of the research, however, place more emphasis on primary data particularly Key Informant Interview (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with Muslim women and girls. The survey, also held interviews and FDGs with religious leaders, youth leaders, peace building practitioners and community organizers. Detailed methods employed in data collection are given below.

a) Secondary Data

❏ Documents Reviewed

The survey reviewed a wide range of existing literature on VE and CVE especially on youth, women and girls. Details of the documents reviewed are provided in the reference section. The purpose of the review was to explore what has been written about the subject and spot the inherent gaps. A review of secondary data helped in the design of a more rigorous primary research approach. This exercise was followed by the development of an inception report, work plan, schedule, tools and the list of contacts for the fieldwork.

b) Primary Data

Primary data entailed the following tools.

❏ Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

The survey sought insights and data from various primary sources including representatives of a cross section of Muslim women and girls, and other stakeholders such as civil society groups, government authorities and religious groups. In total, seventy (70) interviews were conducted with key informants in the counties of Mombasa (9 interviews), Lamu (9 interviews), Kwale (9 interviews), Kilifi (13 interviews), Garissa (4 interviews), Wajir (9 interviews), Mandera (12 interviews) and Isiolo (5 interviews). The assessment team used a structured interview guide in conducting the interviews, but exercised flexibility in adapting questions to the context of the interviewee or when necessary to explore an issue in greater depth.

❑ **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

FGDs were undertaken with a target audience of between 10 to 12 representatives of women of different age groups (youth and older women) per session. Thirteen FGDs, in total, were done in Mombasa, Kilifi, Lamu, Kwale, Isiolo, Garissa, Wajir and Mandera. Each FGD session took three hours. Mombasa, Isiolo, Garissa, Lamu and Kilifi had two sessions each while the rest of the counties had one session each.

Part 2: Findings In General

2.1 A Brief Overview of the Context

The survey found out that considerable sections of women in the coastalcounties of Mombasa, Kilifi, Lamu and Kwale and north eastern counties of Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa and the eastern county of Isiolo, believe that they do not enjoy full rights associated with Kenyan citizenship. Their conviction is that the central government has socially and economically excluded them and that there is lack of urgency to address their grievances and problems. Their sense is that of the "deck" permanently stack against them and that their options are limited. The survey found a high level of frustration and anger among women and girls in the counties visited. They repeatedly complained that their grandparents were marginalized, their parents faced a similar fate and that it is currently them and their children facing the specter of marginalization and the associated disadvantages. Several interlocutors felt that their patience was running out. It was difficult to tell whether theirs was empty grandstanding or serious threats, which the conversers were willing to follow up on.

Largely, women in the surveyed counties adhere to the historical narrative of injustices that they trace back to the immediate post independent era. From the tone of discussions, there was a sense of abandonment by the state and their communities living through existential conditions and threats. Even on talk shows, on different radio stations where coastal communities' grievances were discussed, callers often came across as agitated and vehement. This corroborates findings from FGDs where participants scored strongly on various perceived push and pull factors as illustrated in section 2.3.

It is apparent that the sense of crisis and frustration amongst women and girls is what prompts a number of them to participate in VE. They find themselves caught up in cross-cutting environments of victims of circumstances and religious manipulation.

2.2 Profiles of Women Vulnerable to VE

The survey identified two categories of women most susceptible to VE

a) **Well-educated, articulate and exposed, often aged between 19 and 35 years.**

John Venda in his report titled "Why Girls Join *al-Qaeda*," identifies a number of reasons, other than poverty, that drive girls to join VE. They include unfulfilled need to define themselves through acquisition of new status and recognition while others join VE for the thrill of it.[5] A review of the profiles of women who have been arrested in Kenya

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5 Colonel John M "Matt" Venda, "Why women Join al-Qaeda" USIP, Special Report no. 236, May 2010.
6 Ibid, p.5

on suspected involvement in the planning of extremist activities over the last decade, confirms the above findings that majority of Women and girls joining VE are from middle and upper class families where poverty is not an issue. Venda's report maintains that, "although radical Islamic ideologies use the rhetoric of economic oppression to enhance their argument, their subjects are generally not drawn from the ranks of the desperately poor"[6].

The survey found out that women who are susceptible to VE in Mombasa, Lamu, Garissa, Mandera and Wajir, do not live in slums, but reside in elitist neighborhoods. They have a good education and possess analytical abilities to comprehend, articulate and defend a new ideology. They have access to information, possess organizational skills, and sometimes have a good command of English language. This lot is often between 19 and 35 years.

Information from the survey suggests that most of these women are rebellious and reckless. They are frustrated females from urban areas who lack legitimate avenues to find redress. Such Women join VEOs or are supportive of extremist ideologies because of their craving for fame and recognition. The survey also found out that some from this lot often join VEOs because they seek to avenge for the torture, suffering and death of their relatives or males counter parts.

The survey also found out that women and girls in the coast and north eastern regions who support extremism often have certain operational skills desired by VEOs and are well exposed. They become susceptible to VE out of a strong sense of 'religiosity' and admiration for extremist persons considered heroes and role models such as Ahmed Iman. Most claimed that their sense of 'religiosity' and conviction in extremism ideology are strengthened whenever those they consider heroes.

These sophisticated, educated and articulate women are independent/live on their own and can easily engage in VE by suggesting targets to attack or carry out VE missions with little suspicion. In Mombasa, these women live in elitist neighborhoods but congregate in the mosques of Majengo, Kisauni and Likoni where they spend time discussing issues like marginalization of Muslims, and their role in responding to that challenge. In recent times, they have come under the influence of *Hizb ut Tahrir*, a global Islamic political group that works for the re-establishment of the Islamic *Khilafah* (Caliphate or Islamic state). Their objectives include promoting "Islamic solutions", including demands for the Quran to be the basis of constitution making and the establishment of the caliphate. The ideology draws comparisons between western theoretical amplifications of democracy and human rights with the practicalities of what is happening to Muslims globally and encourages the women and girls to be critical of the western conceptions of justice, peace, democracy and human rights. These women are relied upon by VEOs because of their abilities in judgment, motivation, expediency and commitment.

b) Women and girls, not highly educated, often between the age 16 and 35 years

Characteristically these are women, who have completed high school but are unable to continue with higher education either because they did not meet the requirements, are not willing to continue with learning or do not have the financial means to pay their college fees. These women are often jobless or are on temporary jobs. They are susceptible to joining VEOs in order to escape hardships and monotony of life. Such groups provide them with a sense of community and belonging. This lot is often rebellious and disrespectful to authorities including their parents and neighbors. These women and girls are targeted for recruitment into violent activities largely because of personal issues that serve as motivational factors.

2.3 Survey Findings of Perception on Pull and Push Factors

2.3.1 Pull factors.

a) Misinterpretation of Religious Teachings on Jihad

Misinterpretation of the concept of jihad is still prevalent in the counties surveyed. Recently, a new concept of '*Jihad Nikah*' or 'Marriage *Jihad*' has emerged (i.e., Muslim women giving themselves to be married to "*jihadis*" so that they can continue the "*jihad*" to empower Islam). These, among others, are some of the misinterpretations of religious teachings on *jihad* and they persist because groups of *ulama* (body of Muslim scholars recognized as having specialized knowledge of Islamic *sharia* and theology) appear to monopolize the 'correct' interpretations of what constitutes *jihad*. Aboud Rogo and his team were, for instance, among the well-known preachers that advanced violent *jihadist* views by engineering opinions on the war in Somalia.

Fig 1. Countywide risk influences of misinterpretation
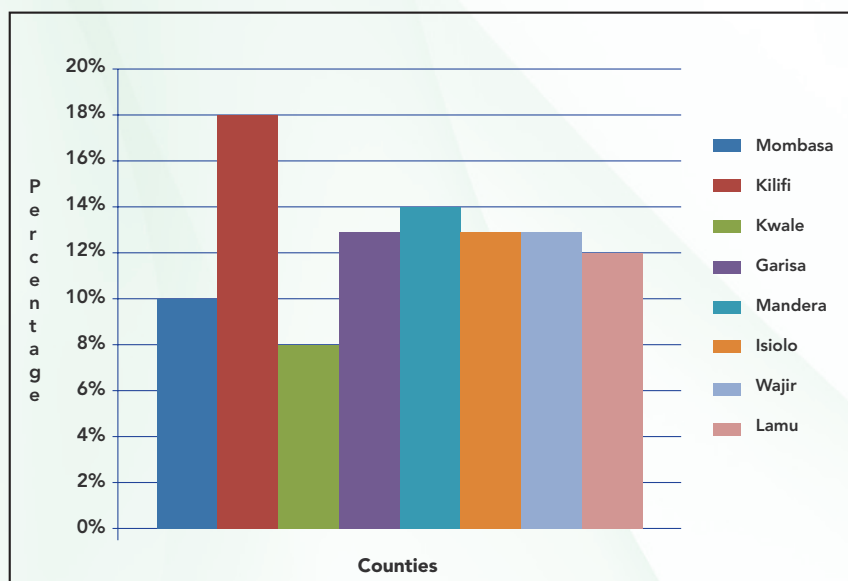
Generally, in terms of influencing women and girls to join VE, 13% of respondents interviewed through FGDs thought that misinterpretation of religious teachings posed a high risk influence, while another 12% were of the view that it remained a risk but ranked it low. Slightly above 10% of the respondents thought it was an insignificant risk factor. In total out of all the respondents 8% of those who rated misrepresentation of religious teachings on *jihad* as high risk were in Kwale county compared with FDGs respondents in Malindi (10%), Mombasa (10%) Garissa (13%) Wajir (13%) Mandera (13%).

The mixed responses can be attributed to the context of the *jihadist* debate, which has shifted. Respondents mentioned that misinterpretation has found new platforms for expressing VE. In 2010, misinterpretations had intensified through sermons, *darsas* (religious teachings often held in mosques) and public preaching. Presently, most extremist preachers have gone underground because of the risk of being identified and arrested. They, instead, produce VCDs and CDs expounding on their extremist ideologies. For women and girls, misinterpretations of religious teachings are often channelled through social media platforms particularly facebook pages. This is strategically possible because it is an open forum for discussion. Facebook is attractive to women because it is interactive and creates a wide audience as women recruit others through inviting them as friends.

b) Radicalized Religious Environment

During the survey, most of the women's discussions focused on recent VE attacks in Kenya. However, violent events that occurred earlier, like the murder of scholars and activists, killing of Samir Khan and the disappearance of some youth especially at the coast were also mentioned. The religious scholars mentioned by the women often took radical positions in their sermons, or during informal engagement on what they regarded as 'unjustified murder' and extrajudicial killings and these provoked pervasive radical sentiments in areas and communities where these scholars worked. The assessment found out that the radicalized environment resulted mostly from activities associated with *al-Shabaab*. During the survey, radicalization of the religious environment was mostly felt in Kwale, Mombasa, Lamu, Mandera and Garissa counties. This was attributed to the activities of *al-Shabab* who often misinterpreted religious teachings to legitimize their violent extremism and undermine existing institutions.

c) Appeal by Charismatic Preachers

The survey was informed that most of the known charismatic violent extremist preachers were either dead, in police custody or on the run. Majority of respondents rated the appeal by charismatic preachers to influence extremism and violence as a low risk factor. However, discussions pointed to Aboud Rogo as the preacher that had a high influence on women (i.e. was more appealing to them during the survey period). Other preachers who were disciples and followers of the Rogo have strategically gone underground fearing arrest by the authorities or assassination by unknown people. The survey team found out that the assassinated charismatic preachers whose deaths remain unresolved, continued to exert more influence on the society through their recorded sermons,

'heroic' narratives and recollections about their personalities, courage and martyr status, as opposed to the preachers who were still alive.

The survey encountered speculation and a sense of anticipation that very soon one charismatic preacher will appear to take over the mantle of leadership from the departed ones. Sympathizers of the dead charismatic preachers were convinced that a successor was being groomed secretively, and would appear at the right time. The survey noted that charismatic preachers have changed strategies in response to the security crackdown by reducing public preaching.

Majority of respondents in all counties surveyed were of the opinion that charismatic preachers posed a low risk towards VE. This score can be attributed to a thinking amongst majority of the respondents that those charismatic preachers depicted by the media and security agents as dangerous, did not actually preach anything that their followers considered to be wrong. That is why they (women) did not score what the preachers were doing as high risk.

Fig 2. Countywide risk prevalance of appeals by charismatic preachers
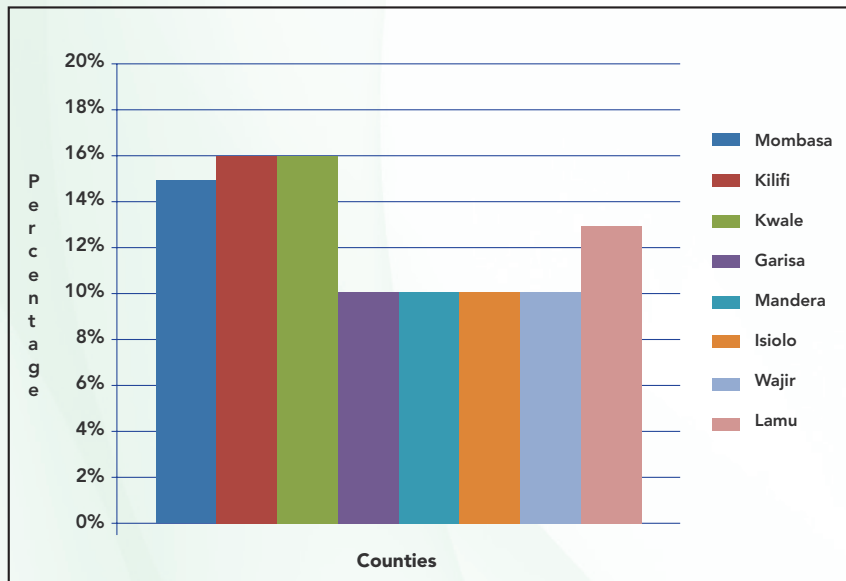
d) Lack of Effective and Organized Mosque Structures

In many writings on the subject of terrorism and VE, mosques are often mentioned as platforms that are used by violent and extremist individuals to propagate radical ideas through their sermons. Some have attributed the use of mosques as platforms to preach VE ideas due to the lack of strong leadership structures in the mosques, which in turn allows any person to speak freely at the mosque. During the survey, the above argument did not feature prominently. In fact, it appears that the question of leadership in mosques in the regions surveyed had been enhanced as respondents thought it was an insignificant risk (45%) or a low risk factor (35%). The respondents suggested that mosques were now getting better organized with attempts made to vet speakers who were unknown to the community. It was also noted that in some mosques, unfamiliar

Fig 3. Countywide score organized mosque committee as insignificant risk
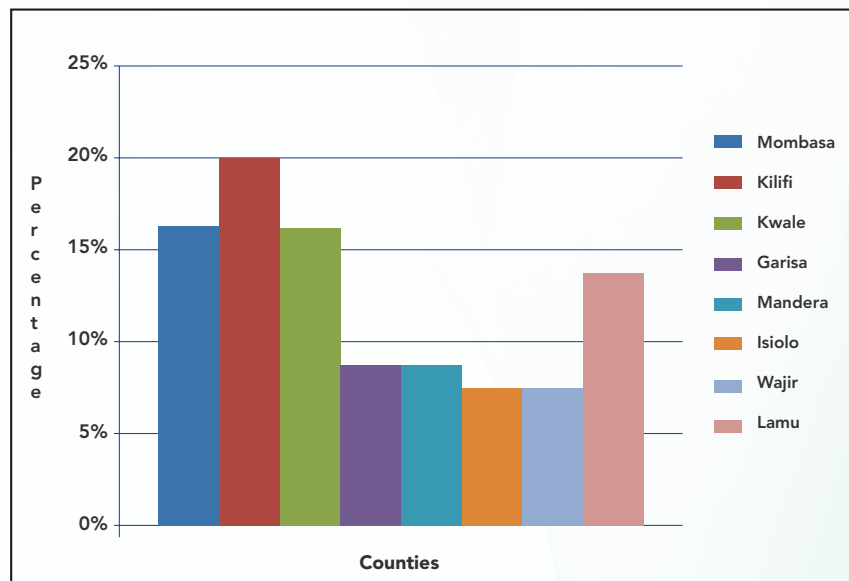
individuals had a habit of speaking to worshippers after prayers, often beginning with general topics and in-between cunningly infusing extremist arguments and ideas. Generally, the perception in the areas surveyed was that mosques were increasingly getting under control especially in Nairobi, Mombasa, Garissa, Wajir, Mandera and Lamu.

In Mombasa and Lamu, a strict protocol is observed and implemented by revamped mosque committees in response to radical individuals attempting to take control of the mosques. In Isiolo, Malindi and Kwale, respondents indicated that there was still a lack of proper mechanisms to exert control over mosques, especially on who can or cannot address people in the mosques. The point is, there is need for mosques in Kwale and Malindi to, similarly, organize their committees to ensure that radical, violent or extremist individuals do not take advantage of congregations attending *salat* (prayer) in their mosques.

2.3.2 Push Factors

a) Poverty and Unemployment

The counties surveyed experience high levels of poverty and youth unemployment. This factor is a major catalyst of other pull and push factors. Women in these areas also complained at length about the high levels of youth unemployment. Poverty and unemployment were rated the highest risk factors by about 13% of respondents. Less than 5% of the respondents scored it as a low risk factor.

It is true that poverty and unemployment are major factors in radicalization leading to youth, both male and female, joining VEOs but it is not always true that the youth who join such groups are always from poor backgrounds. There have been cases of youth from the middle class who for various reasons including easy access to technological platforms, have been susceptible to VE ideology. These youth do not join VEOs because

Fig 4. Countywide risk status of poverty and unemployment
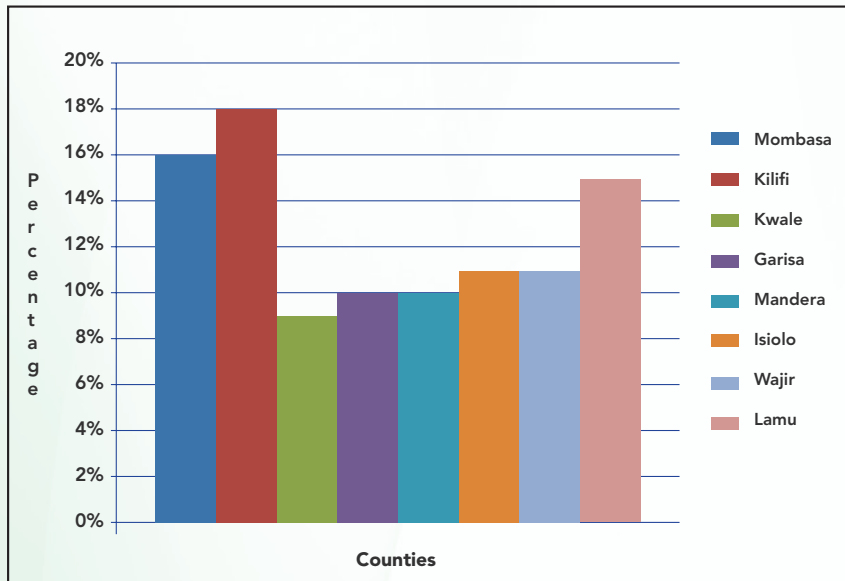
of poverty but because they seek to define themselves (attention and recognition) and VE provides them that opportunity. From the survey, it was apparent that the women from poor backgrounds were more aware and cognizant of the risks of VE narratives.

b) Marginalization

Claims of people being marginalized remain major complaints in all the counties visited. Despite the enactment of Kenya's Constitution 2010 and the establishment of relevant various redress institutions and processes (the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission, the National Land Commission and the devolution process, among others), this survey found out that claims of marginalization were still prevalent and resonated strongly with the thinking of most women in all the counties surveyed. Complaints ranged from discrimination in; employment opportunities, provision of adequate social services, land allocation and inclusion into national leadership. One other prevalent complaint related to the persistent challenges in acquiring national identity cards, which, in turn, limited their access to employment and other rights like free movement.

c) Unattended Historical Injustices

Women in all counties surveyed said that the push to violence and extremism was the outcome of cumulative narratives of unattended historical injustices. Some at the coast for instance said that local communities have waited for long to see themselves in control of their resources such as land and employment opportunities at the port of Mombasa. They also think that the central government has for long, excluded them from political processes and power and because of these historical grievances, they feel condemned to fate. Claims of unattended historical injustices especially at the coast and in the north eastern region over land allocations and marginalisation have contributed to women viewing VEOs favourably. Generally, respondents especially from the FGDs in Lamu, Wajir and Mandera considered historical injustices as a high risk factor. The women were

**Fig 5. County risk rating of unattended historical injustices**
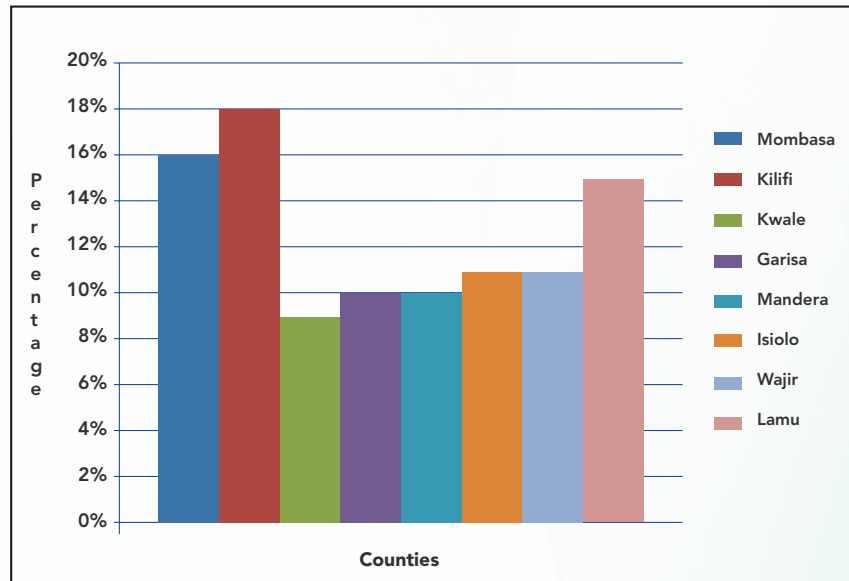
cognizant of the promulgation of Kenya's constitution 2010 but remained particularly unconvinced that it was the panacea for most of their problems. Some, especially at the coast and in north eastern counties attributed their challenges to the central government in Nairobi and believed that secession would probably provide a solution.

### d) Police Harassment and Cultural Profiling

The survey found mixed views on the question of police harassment and cultural profiling. In some interviews, women expressed satisfaction that the police no longer harass them or their communities, but lamented the brutal use of force whenever there were misunderstandings. Women were particularly unhappy with the manner in which police dealt with individuals associated with VE. Generally, respondents felt that police

Fig 6. Low risk rating of police harasment and cultural profiling
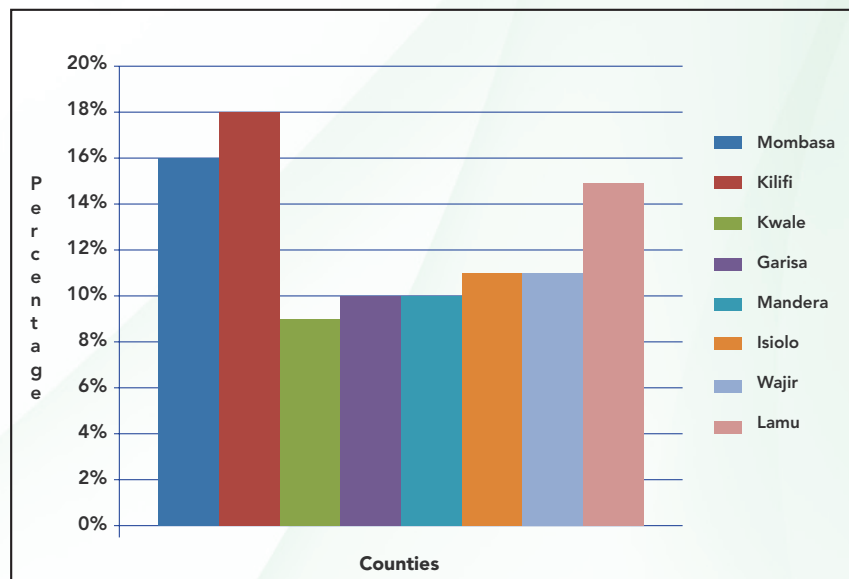
harassment and cultural profiling contributed to the radicalization of women and was a driver to violent extremism ideology.

Fig 7. Significance of pull and push factors
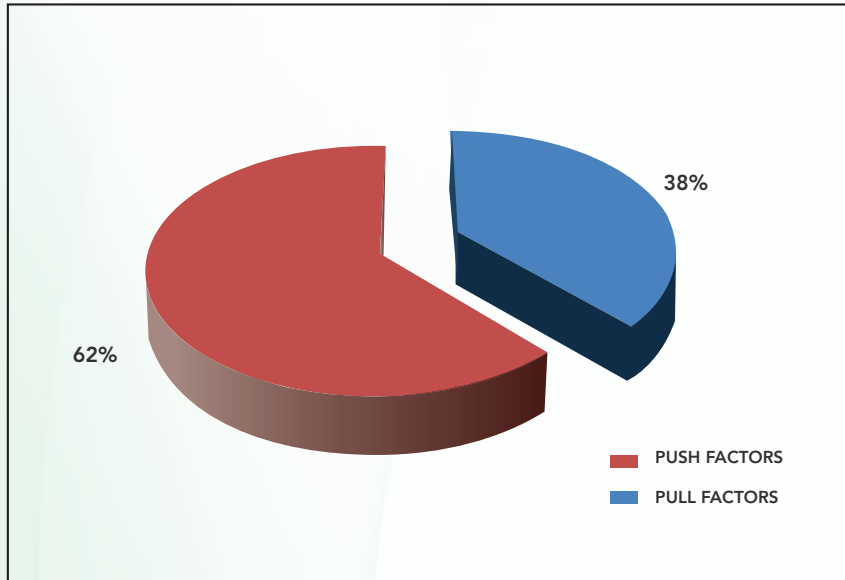
3.6 A Summary of Risk Factors

A leading deduction from the survey is that the push factors had a significant contribution to VE amongst women in all the counties visited compared to pull factors. The influence of the push factors was scored at 62% as compared to pull factors which recorded 38%. Counties at the coast and in north eastern find themselves at the highest risk of VE although the resilience of the risk factors vary from county to county. From the survey, respondents put more emphasis on the push factors based on the logic that push factors are responsible for any heightened significance of the pull factors.

Fig 8. Factors contributing to Violent Extremism (VE)
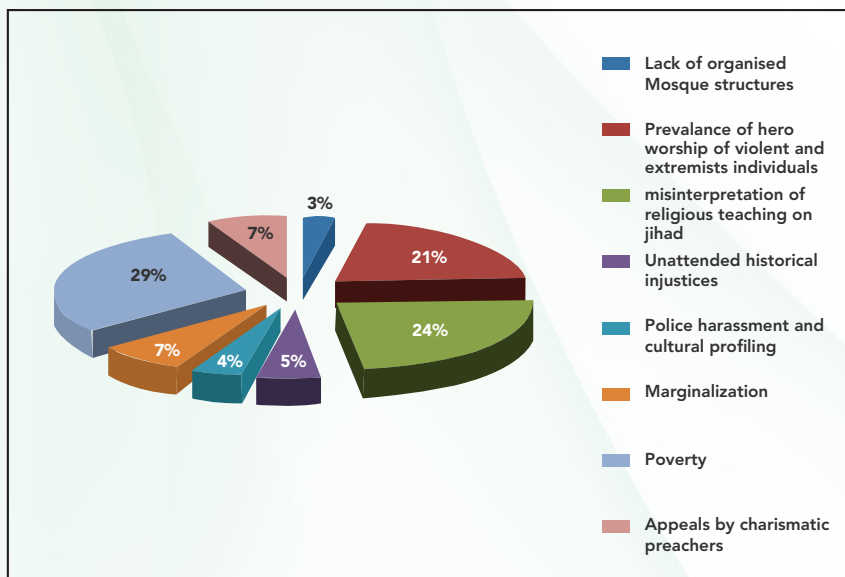
Respondents agreed that push factors like marginalization, poverty and unemployment were more dominant of the overall VE risk factors. The push factors were the determinant triggers. Another inference from the survey is that interviewees and participants in the FGDs were familiar with the pull factors and how they contributed to VE. In many cases, participants rationalized some of the harsh and radical interpretations of Quranic teachings on the basis that they were responding to marginalization, poverty, unemployment, unattended historical injustices and police harassment. The push factors, therefore, created a sense of hopelessness amongst the people driving them to question their Kenyan and local identities by considering the opportunities each of them offers or denies them.

This survey finds that the push factors have become the discussion points on the nexus between local and Kenyan identities. That is to say, discussions about poverty and unemployment, claims of marginalization and unattended historical injustices in Mombasa, Kwale, Lamu, Kilifi, Wajir and Mandera counties contribute more to luring women into VE. Push factors are the triggers that drive the resilience of the pull factors. The dominance of push factors in these counties requires an intervention programming that focuses on the need for a new form of political participation and authority that promotes inclusion and fairness to the youth, both male and female, in novel ways.

Part 3: Insights From Selected Counties

3.1 Mombasa County

The survey found out that in Mombasa, women who are susceptible to VE do not live in slums, but reside in affluent neighborhoods. They often have a good education and possess analytical abilities to comprehend, articulate and defend the VE ideology. They have access to information, possess organizational skills, and sometimes have a good command of the English language. In other words, these women have skills needed by VEOs. They are well exposed and join VEOs out of a strong sense of religiosity and admiration for extremist preachers and scholars. They are motivated by those they consider heroes and role models. Their sense of religiosity is strengthened by heroic death and burial of scholars and preachers who they treat as martyrs.

In all the FGDs in Mombasa, women complained of being marginalized and discriminated in employment opportunities, provision of adequate social services, issuance of national identity cards, land allocation and in national leadership. The survey team was also informed that due to lack of employment, youth formed gangs that were available for hire by politicians to provide security during political campaigns. The youth would mobilize other youth and act as bodyguards for contestants of electoral positions. It was reported that these youth gangs on their own initiative would terrorize neighborhoods for economic reasons. Women were concerned about the economic situation of their male youth because they are 'their sons, brothers and relatives'. They would like to see the youth's negative conditions addressed.

3.2 Kwale County
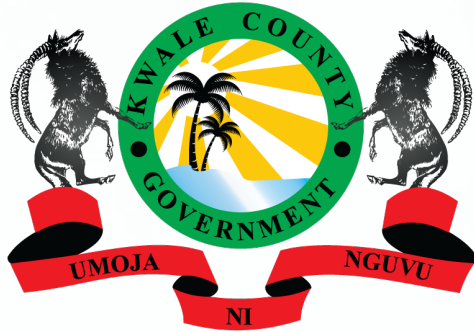
Respondents to the survey in Kwale complained that they were the most marginalized in the already marginalized groups in the country. Kwale's indigenous inhabitants, the Digo, feel that they are treated as second-class people in the eyes of Arab-Swahili Muslims with most of the resources in the region claimed by these Arab-Swahili who live in Mombasa. Locals also believe that the state takes advantage of their lack of education to isolate them. Like other coastal residents, Kwale inhabitants have had difficulties acquiring land titles and have watched as outsiders come in and take over prime beach properties popular with tourism. To make matters worse, they cannot get jobs in the hotel industry because of limited skills.

The levels of grievances and anger in Kwale appear high even by coastal standards, and this has been exploited by VEOs. There was talk that young people, boys and girls, from Kwale particularly in the Diani/Ukunda location have formed sleeper cells of VEOs groups like *al-Shabaab* and Salafist groups. Likewise, the support for the secessionist group, MRC, was quite notable in the area.

There are also radical groups like *Hizb ut-Tahrir* that are becoming active in Kwale. They organize Muslims into an entirely separate community. The agenda is to push for the establishment of a Muslim caliphate. *Hizb ut-Tahrir* does not support Muslims taking part in democratic processes and has had a considerable influence on the MRC youthful sympathizers.

The resilience of risk factors was scored high in Kwale due to growing feelings of disenfranchisement. This explains why Kwale has a history of sporadic violence and witnesses the strongest anti-state mobilization by the MRC. In Kwale, the survey team was told that the Government Officials largely consists of upcountry people. This is a source of grievance compounded by the fact that there has never been a coastal person at the helm of the government administration units.

The dominance of upcountry ethnicities at the coast makes coastal people feel like strangers in their land. However, now, that the county governments are in operation, there is both a sense of hope and fear because of the seeming supremacy battles between the devolved (county) government and the national government. Locals accused the National Government of undermining the devolved government constituting of local elected leaders.

3.3 Lamu County

The survey found out that Lamu residents, too, have historical land grievances that they think have become worse over time. The demographics are changing in Lamu, and the

Bajun (local inhabitants of Lamu) worry that they will lose power even over local affairs to 'outsiders'. There is a growing concern about how the Lamu port will affect locals. Residents fear that there will be a flood of new 'immigrants' seeking and/or acquiring jobs at the port. They also worry about the possible environmental damage, and adverse effect on the marine resources and tourism. Locals told the survey team about 'big-shot' politicians who had acquired huge chunks of land adjacent to the proposed port at the expense of the local community, something the local community was not happy with. The locals said that unfortunately, the National Government has not done enough to address these concerns.

Lamu used to be an exit route for youth heading to Somalia to join *al-Shabab*. The survey team was told that youth from Lamu are no longer interested in going to Somalia to fight in the ranks of *al-Shabab* because prominent sheikhs in the archipelago now speak out vehemently against VE.

3.4 Kilifi County

Kilifi county has been a hotbed of MRC, which has sizable influence amongst the Mijikenda youth. Most MRC's disruptive activities have been reported in Kilifi including attempting to stop a mock election before 2013 general elections, boycotting registration of voters and participation in the elections. Most Muslim leaders in Kilifi are *madrasa* teachers and Imams of mosques. Women interviewed said that they did not consider the issue of leadership structures of mosque committees as a risk factor. They thought the mosque committees are more organized now and do not allow unknown people to speak in the mosques. This, they believed, will lead to the eradication of radicalization and VE associated with the misuse of places of worship.

The Malindi area is, however, more religiously polarized with contestation between the *Ahl Sunna Wal Jamaa* and *Sufi* groups who are seeking to gain dominance of the region's religious landscape. Women in the region felt that there was need to control the flow of speakers into local mosques.

3.5 North Eastern Counties: Garissa, Wajir, Mandera and Isiolo

These counties have been among the most affected by VE. This is attributed to a number of factors, among them proximity of the region to the border with Somalia and that people from both sides of the border speak the same language and belong to the same ethnicity. The porous border also allows al Shabab militia to gain easy access to the region. Women responses from these counties reflected diverse grievances ranging from political and socio-economic marginalization, to cultural profiling, police harassment, historical injustices and identity crises (a feeling of being rejected, real or perceived, as a member of community or

religious group). Women and girls seem to have been affected greatly by these unresolved historical injustices particularly 1984 Wagala Massacre, where members of the ethnic Somali community were summarily executed by Kenyan security forces. This created an enduring feeling of Somalis/Muslims been targeted. The perception is that those who join or support VE, do so because they feel it is part of their duty to defend the community from what they perceive as an unresponsive and insensitive Government.

Most women in the region, however, remain determined to counter radicalization and VE. They do so by collaborating with the relevant authorities largely because VE affects them both socially and economically. Furthermore, women in the region are increasingly becoming aware that VE is, contrary with what extremists say, against the religion of Islam. One of the ladies was quoted during an FGD session in the region saying "We need to be role models and uphold the sanctity of lives. As mothers, let us tell them the truth and condemn killings´ said one of the respondent".

It was also noted that women and girls in the region go through psychological trauma given that their husbands and children often end up in VE or killed as suspects. Unfortunately, these women are left alone to fend for themselves and without any psychosocial support. It is therefore, important that CVE initiatives seek to empower and address the psychosocial needs of such women and girls.

Part 4: Key Highlights on Drivers and Perceptions of Muslim Women and Girls Towards Violent Extremism in Kenya

The survey draws a number of substantial conclusions:

4.1 The drivers of women and girls' participation in VE are similar to those of men albeit with some gender-specific realities

When it comes to motivation, recruitment, and ideological commitments to VE, male and female members in the coastal and north eastern regions of Kenya have more in common than not. Common push factors identified for both groups include dissatisfaction with status quo, political and economic conditions, desire to escape social or economic pressures experienced within one's community, personal experience of abuse or humiliation by state security forces, or the death or abuse of family members at the hands of these forces. The most relevant pull factors include religious ideology, ethno-religious and nationalist goals and aspirations, the rejection of 'western' political and economic systems, the perceived justness of the VE groups' goals, and selective incentives provided by VEOs (for example, stability, security, financial rewards, opportunities for advancement).

However, some push and pull factors are gender and sex-specific. Interviews did not find sufficient evidence to suggest that the lure of violence motivates female recruits, as has been the case with male recruits. Gender subordination or exclusion also pushes many young women to join VEOs, especially those driven by a desire for social and personal agency. Like previous studies, this research found little evidence to support the argument that poverty or lack of economic opportunity is the key push factor for women to join VEOs.

4.2 VEOs are actively recruiting women for a variety of reasons using a wide array of tactics

It was found out that across the coastal and north eastern regions, VEOs recruit women using different tactics and for different reasons. The recruitment of women and girls is a change in policy for most VEOs in the coastal and north eastern regions, driven mostly by a decline in male recruits, and tactical and strategic advantages of using women (e.g., they are less likely to be searched or targeted by authorities). To recruit women from the coastal and north eastern regions, VEOs use family and friend networks, capitalize on gender-specific push and pull factors, recruit in person, and recruit online with targeted messaging.

Though all of the above tools are available to VEOs, most face some challenges in accessing potential female recruits. Among the chief impediments are formal and informal restrictions on women's movement and access to technology. In addition, women who are more settled

and comfortable in their religious identities appear less likely to join VEOs than women who are recent converts or have some experience of religious awakening. Importantly, the severity of these impediments vary across counties, as does their potential to serve as 'protective factors' that could be strengthened as part of PVE strategies.

4.3 The lack of a gendered analysis of drivers of VE has left gaps in current CVE strategies

Despite growing awareness of women and girls' participation in VE, there has been limited attention paid to women's diverse roles in either supporting or countering VEOs in Kenya. The status quo of seeing women only as facilitators or supporters of VEOs ignores their role as participants. This runs the risk of instrumentalizing women—i.e. viewing them as tools through which to address the problem of male radicalization—and ignoring the more direct roles women often play in VE. This prevailing view has left a marked gap in CVE programming in Kenya, which has focused mostly on male participation, without a commensurate reflection on, and response to female-specific drivers and recruitment strategies.

Within the current landscape of CVE strategies, multiple opportunities exist where a gendered understanding of drivers of VE can better accommodate and target women in CVE. For example, given gender subordination as a key driver, empowering women may diminish their support for VEOs by increasing their sense of agency.

DRIVERS OF FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN VEOs IN COAST AND NORTH EASTERN REGIONS

PUSH FACTOR'S
(Situational predispose people to support VEO)

PULL FACTOR'S
(Draw women to VEO)

- Dissatisfaction with regime or political process

- Seeking security amidst instability

- Experience of abuse or humiliation by state security forces

- Death or abuse of family members

- Gender subordination exclusion from mainstream policies

- Support of VE group ideology (e.g. religious)

- Selective incentives (security service, financial gain)

- Romanticism of state building projects

- Group rejection of Western/ American political and economic experiments

ADDITIONAL CONTENT-SPECIFIC FACTORS

- Access to political space

- Freedom of movement

- Access to information

- Previous political engagement / awareness

Part 5: Recommendations

The survey leads to several recommendations that can support the implementation of effective preventative and CVE measures in Kenya.

- **Consider preventative approaches to limit women and girls from radicalization and VE**

    Prevention activities should target the push and pull factors that make girls and women vulnerable to radicalisation and VE. Muslim religious leaders and scholars should contribute to promoting the right teachings and counter-narratives. Programming initiatives that specifically address the needs of women and girls should also be considered.

- **Pursue a gendered approach to understanding VE and mainstream the role and place of women and girls in relevant CVE laws, policies and programs.**

    The aim should be to promote a better understanding of the unique and significant roles that women and girls play in VE and can play in CVE. It is important to pay attention to the social norms and societal expectations associated with belonging to a particular gender. This helps to improve CVE programming by avoiding unintended consequences that undermine social norms and relationships of trust in communities. Where practically possible, involve men and boys in mainstreaming gender as part of the inclusive efforts to respond to VE. This may also help to bridge masculinity and stereotype gaps.

- **Recognize and promote the different roles of women and girls as critical stakeholders in CVE.**

    As a core part of families and communities, women and girls can make vital contributions to CVE given their considerable leverage over radicalised individuals in their roles as sisters, mothers and as wives. They need to be provided with platforms, resources and any other outlets through which their involvement could be meaningful and relevant to CVE.

- **Promote a rights based approach to CVE.**

    This should entail protection of human rights of women and girls, including their equality, non-discrimination and equal participation. CVE efforts should, however, be careful not to stereotype or instrumentalize women and girls. For instance, the use—real or perceived—of government relationships with women and girls for security purposes (e.g., for gathering intelligence) can generate distrust and become counterproductive to CVE. A rather 'too obvious' association of women and girls' human rights with the CVE agenda can also further expose women and girls to VE perpetrators.

- **Prevent and address the direct and indirect impacts of VE and terrorism on women and girls:**

  It is important to have programmes that respond to gender-based violence perpetrated by VEOs. This may entail providing protection for women and girls who are most at risk, developing assistance including livelihood opportunities for women survivors and general efforts to foster social cohesion and resilience in communities affected by VE.

- **Develop gender-sensitive disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes**

  Women and girls within VE environments have different motivations, roles, and experiences than men. The factors that lead to women and girls' involvement also vary along with their roles within VEOs. Effective, disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs should be gender-sensitive and address the varying experiences, as well as the specific obstacles and challenges that women and girls may face. Programs should consider the ways women and girls in particular could exit these groups and develop reintegration options that take into account their specific needs and experiences.

- **Build and use evidence-based approaches to respond to VE.**

  Evidence based research should be a critical component of designing policy and interventions that address VE. Aspects of radicalization, recruitment into VE and VE strategies are dynamic. Engaging researchers, practitioners and policy-makers across disciplines is vital to develop a nuanced understanding and evidence-based responses.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Guide for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Type of group: ………………………………………………………...

Location: ………………………………………...…………………………

Date: ……………………………………………………………...………….

QUESTIONS

1. Which extremists group are you familiar with in your locality?

2. Do you think that the extremist's groups have a justification in what they do?

3. What is your understanding of the reasons for the actions of the extremist's groups on perpetuating violent extremism? How have women and girls been involved in this?

4. Shouldn't the extremists group use a non-violent approach to agitate for their demands?

5. Misinterpretation of religious teachings is identified as a pull factor towards youth involvement in violence and extremist behavior. In the present circumstances do you think this is the same? Explain your response.

6. A radicalized religious environment can contribute to violence and extremist behavior. Do you agree? How are women affected differently from men? Explain your response.

7. Do you think there are charismatic preachers today who influence youth towards extremism and violent behavior? Are women more susceptible? Identify them and discuss how?

8. Do you know any extremist individuals who are considered heroes by women and girls? How and what do they do?

9. Some mosques have been identified to lack organized structures thereby leading to them being susceptible to the influence by violent extremist groups. What is your opinion?

10. Women are not featuring in mosques leadership. Do you think this has contributed to lack of guidance for Muslim women and girls? Explain how.

11. In your opinion does poverty and unemployment contribute to youth engagement in violent and extremist behavior? Explain how.

12. Do you think claims of marginalization have any role in youth involvement in violence and extremist behavior? Explain how.

13. Does harassment by police and cultural profiling still occur? How does this contribute to girls and women involvement in violent and extremist behavior?

14. Please outline other factors that you consider are responsible for Muslim women and girl's involvement in violent and extremist behavior?

15. What other non-traditional actors should be incorporated in CVE programs targeting women and girls?

16. Looking at the new system ushered by the constitution such as the devolved governments as a structural change, does it mean that things will change especially in the area of CVE?

17. What kind of activities, strategies and innovative interventions would you recommend to address risk factors and challenges facing the women and girls in your area?

18. Are parents to be blamed for youth radicalization in your area? Explain the role of father and mother in your response?

Appendix 2

Score Cards (*Validation score cards for women intervention program for coast*)

Instructions: Please provide a score for the following factors responsible for youth radicalization

Factor	Score (1-8)
Misinterpretation of religious teachings on jihad	
Radicalized Religious environment	
Appeals by charismatic preachers	
Lack of effective and organized mosque committee structures	
Poverty and unemployment	
Marginalization	
Unattended historical injustice	
Police harassment and cultural profiling	

Validation score card for women intervention program (Pull Factors)

Pull factors	Score (1-5)
Misinterpretation of religious teaching on jihad	
Radicalized religious environment	
Appeals by charismatic preachers	
Hero worship of violent and extremist individuals	
Lack of effective and organized organized mosque committee structure	

Validation score card for women intervention program (push factors)

Push factors	Score (1-4)
Poverty and unemployment	
Marginalization	
Unattended historical injustices	
Police harassment and cultural profiling	

Notes

HORN INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

The Horn Institute is an applied research and policy think tank established in 2017. It has its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The Institute seeks to mainstream evidence based research in public policy processes. Our key thematic areas include; defense and security; diplomacy and foreign relations; conflict resolution and peacebuilding; governance and statecraft; strategic communication and information; terrorism, radicalization, political and religious extremism.

CSCR CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Centre for Sustainable Conflict Resolution (CSCR) is a non-governmental, non-profit-making organization formed by Muslim professionals and leaders. CSCR is registered in Kenya and it aims to promote peace through mainstream and social media. In execution of its mandate, CSCR will offer trainings to religious leaders and youth leaders on building and sustaining peace in Kenya and the region. CSCR shall support initiatives of other organizations working for peace in Kenya, and will facilitate dialogue, conflict resolution and peace building.

BRAVE Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism

Building Resilience against Violent Extremism (BRAVE) is a CSCR flagship program and it is a strategy whose focus is to counter the rising radicalization and extremism on Kenya. It focuses on violent and non-violent manifestations of extremism through the mobilization of stakeholders to counter the extremists' narrative in an effort to reverse the radicalization trend in Kenya. The BRAVE program has initiated actions on counter-violent extremism, counter-radicalization and de-radicalization in Kenya.

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