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Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Kwale County: Vulnerabilities, Risks and Strategies

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Research Report

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List of Abbreviations

CAP	County Action Plan
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CEF	County Engagement Forum
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HURIA	Human Rights Agenda
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JISRA	Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action
KII	Key Informant Interview
MRC	Mombasa Republican Council
NSCVE	National Strategy to Countering Violent Extremism
PCVE	Preventing and Countering violent extremism
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
VE	Violent Extremism

Executive Summary

This research report delves into the multifaceted issue of violent extremism (VE) in Kwale County, Kenya. It underscores the county's vulnerability due to its unique geographical location, socioeconomic challenges, and historical grievances. The report identifies various extremist groups, including separatist movements, Al-Shabaab, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), as significant threats. It also highlights the rise of juvenile gangs, driven by frustration, drug use, mental health issues, and the allure of quick money and power, which contribute to the escalating violence and insecurity in the County. The report emphasises the complex interplay between local gangs and violent extremism, with concerns about potential recruitment and support from extremist elements. The broader context of juvenile crime reveals a concerning trend of external influences and the exploitation of vulnerable youth. The consequences of this crisis are evident in the heightened insecurity, drug abuse, and fear that have permeated daily life in Kwale.

Peer pressure, personal grievances, and exposure to extremist narratives, contribute to young people's involvement in VE. Peer pressure is particularly influential during adolescence, as youth seek acceptance and belonging within social groups.¹ In the context of Kwale, other factors, such as gang affiliations and ethnic tensions, can exacerbate peer pressure, making young men and women susceptible to radicalisation.² At the same time, young people play a pivotal role in preventing violent extremism. Understanding and supporting a youth-centric approach is essential for effective Preventing and Countering violent extremism (PCVE) interventions. During the field research, critical perspectives emerged on how youth are engaged in different ways to create and sustain resilience to VE.

Exposure to extremist ideologies through online platforms, social media and other media channels is a growing concern in Kwale County.³ The availability of smartphones and internet access has facilitated the spread of extremist propaganda, particularly among young people.

The analysis highlights lessons learned in undertaking PCVE in Kwale. It underscores the importance of a multi-pronged approach to countering violent extremism, encompassing youth empowerment, education, community engagement, and robust governance. It highlights the Kwale County Action Plan (CAP) as a crucial roadmap, emphasising the need for collaboration among various stakeholders. It also recognises the pivotal role of County Engagement Forums (CEF), including women and youth in PCVE activities, active participation in peace committees, community-based organisations, and various initiatives to counter extremist narratives and promote peaceful coexistence.

The research findings emphasise the importance of addressing the root cause of extremism, including socioeconomic marginalisation, inequality, conflict, and discrimination. It calls for sustained efforts to

¹ Richard, M. O. (2024). Policy Paper on Addressing Juvenile and Communal Gangs in Mombasa and Kwale Counties. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381691280_Policy_Paper_on_Addressing_Juvenile_and_Communal_Gangs_in_Mombasa_and_Kwale_Counties

² Kollmorgen, J.-C., Ogada, M., Korir, S., & Dena, E. (2019). *STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AGAINST EXTREMISM (SCORE) MID-TERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION FINAL REPORT*. USAID. Retrieved from https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TRDD.pdf

³ Chitembwe, S. J., Okoth, P. G., & Matanga, F. K. (2021). The Nature, Extent and Impact of Youth Radicalization in Mombasa and Kwale Counties, Kenya. *Open Access Library Journal*, 8(6). doi:<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1107386>

foster strong partnerships between communities, civil society organisations, and state actors, ensuring that PCVE initiatives are grounded in local knowledge, address the community's specific needs, and foster trust between citizens and authorities. The report concludes by advocating for a comprehensive approach that prioritises collaboration and youth engagement while addressing the underlying drivers of radicalisation, ultimately aiming to create a more secure, just, and peaceful world for all.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-method approach for collecting qualitative data, including:

- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Sixteen (16) interviews were conducted with a diverse group of individuals, including male and female Community-Based Organisation (CBO) representatives, CEF members, Kaya elders, and Youth. These KIIs provided in-depth insights into the lived experiences, perspectives, and knowledge of individuals involved in or affected by PCVE efforts in Kwale County.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Three FGDs were held with separate groups of men, women, and youth to gather diverse perspectives and insights. FGDs fostered interactive discussions and allowed participants to share their views and experiences in a group setting, generating rich qualitative data.
- **County Workshops and Capacity Building Workshops:** These workshops provided opportunities to engage with a broader range of stakeholders and gather information on PCVE initiatives and challenges. The workshops facilitated collaborative discussions and knowledge sharing among participants, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of PCVE efforts in Kwale County.
- **Secondary Sources:** Secondary sources, such as reports, documents, and online resources, were reviewed to supplement primary data collection and provide additional context to the study. Secondary sources helped to triangulate findings from primary data collection and provided a broader understanding of the PCVE landscape in Kwale County.

The study was conducted in Kwale County, Kenya. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. This sampling method ensured that the study included individuals with relevant knowledge and experiences related to PCVE in Kwale County.

Context

Kwale County, situated on Kenya's southeastern coast, has emerged as a focal point of concern related to violent extremism (VE). Its unique geographical location, coupled with its diverse population and socio-economic challenges, has made it particularly vulnerable to the influence of extremist ideologies.

As mentioned by participants in workshops, key informant interviews and FGD in Kwale, one major concern has been the presence of separatist movements, such as the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), which advocated for a divided Kenya⁴. Additionally, extremist ideologies pushed by terror groups like Al-Shabaab have infiltrated the county.

"Us as kaya elders.... When we first heard about it was targeted towards religion. Especially in the mosques where the youths that it was discovered they were easily manipulated and convinced to join the extremist group."⁵

These groups exploit local grievances and vulnerabilities to promote their extremist agendas⁶, often targeting marginalised communities⁷ and exploiting underlying social and economic inequalities.⁸ The manifestation of violent extremism in Kwale is deeply intertwined with its socioeconomic and historical realities. A lack of adequate job opportunities and viable livelihoods, coupled with a historical legacy of marginalisation and unequal access to resources, has fostered a deep sense of frustration and disenfranchisement among some of the communities, creating fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root⁹. These socioeconomic challenges, including poverty and inequality, have led to some individuals being lured by extremists with false promises of economic opportunities.

"Economic status. Those are the ones that I told you we prevent. Yeah. Socio economic marginalisation. Mhm., Discrimination. Widowhood as well because I work with them directly. Widowhood. Someone will just come to my office and tell me that I have a daughter, and I want you to give them work. The girl is young and even the work, you don't know what you can give them and what I do because I know of various places or opportunities in development areas so I advise them that for this one, she needs to go back to school then I give referrals so that they can be able to be assisted. But what would happen if she found someone who does not have good intentions like me? they will be manipulated and used in a bad way."¹⁰

Marginalisation and discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status also contribute to feelings of resentment and alienation, making individuals more susceptible to extremist narratives.

⁴ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁵ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁶ Botha, A. (2014). Radicalisation in Kenya: Recruitment to al-Shabaab and the Mombasa Republican Council. *ISS Occasional Paper*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273126089_Radicalisation_in_Kenya_Recruitment_to_al-Shabaab_and_the_Mombasa_Republican_Council

⁷ OSSREA. (2019). *YOUTH-INCLUSIVE MECHANISMS FOR PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE IGAD REGION - A Case Study of Kenya*. OSSREA. Retrieved from <https://ossrea.net/images/kenya-youth-inclusive-mechanisms-pcve-final.pdf>

⁸ Shauri, H. (2017). *Kwale County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism: The first of its kind in Kenya by Human Rights Agenda*. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.18809.06248>

⁹ Key informant interview with Government official, Kilifi, 9 August 2019

¹⁰ Widows Network Kwale, 2024

"Injustice by the government on land or civil rights brought families to pledge revenge to square out with the Govt by joining the Al Shabaab." ¹¹

Understanding Kwale's complex tapestry is crucial in unravelling the roots of VE and formulating effective, sustainable solutions that address the immediate triggers and the underlying causes¹².

Radicalisation is identified as a significant threat to Kwale County, particularly among young people facing unemployment and vulnerability¹³. These individuals are more susceptible to extremist ideologies and potentially violent actions, making them prime targets for recruitment by terrorist organisations like Al-Shabaab. The perception of radicalisation and recruitment in Kwale County is a complex issue, with the county residents offering varying perspectives on the extent of the threat and the factors contributing to it.

"A lot of youths have been radicalised. They have been radicalised and that is why they are going in the direction of drugs to do the work they are supposed to do. All the previous kids from last time, were radicalised, in matters of Islamic ideologies, and that is why they saw us as infidels, hence why they shoot us. You understand? So, recruitment is still..."¹⁴

While there is consensus that extremist groups pose a significant risk to the county, there is a difference of opinion on the prevalence of radicalisation and recruitment and the identity of the perpetrators.

"I have also heard that al Shaabab exists too. But from the youth being recruited, we have also heard of the same, but we do not know where this happens because there are youths who have been recruited, some have even gone to join the group and others as well have happened to come back after going to join the extremist group. Now looking at peace and security because the government focus is that and the need to address the issue of returnees then it looks like the issue that was once there has reduced significantly." ¹⁵

"They are being cooked. So that they can have that anger, so that they can have something in them that can push them." ¹⁶

"The youth who have big dreams of changing their lives and try out in government recruitment and end up failing due to lack of influence or connection. This offers Al Shabaab as the easy option." ¹⁷

The 1997 Kaya Bombo clashes, while not directly linked to contemporary extremist groups, serve as a historical example of the potential for violent conflict in the County¹⁸.

¹¹ Youth FGD Kwale, 2024

¹² Chitembwe, S. J., Okoth, P. G., & Matanga, F. K. (2021). The Nature, Extent and Impact of Youth Radicalization in Mombasa and Kwale Counties, Kenya. *Open Access Library Journal*, 8(6). doi:<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1107386>

¹³ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

¹⁴ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

¹⁵ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

¹⁶ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

¹⁷ Youth FGD Kwale, 2024

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch. (2002). *PLAYING WITH FIRE: Weapons Proliferation, Political Violence, and Human Rights in Kenya*. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from Human Rights Watch:

Land disputes and perceived government neglect led to this violence and highlighting the deep-seated tensions and vulnerabilities that extremist ideologies can exploit.

Since the Kaya Bombo clashes, the nature of extremist threats in Kwale County has evolved. While the underlying factors of poverty, inequality, and marginalisation persist, the tactics and strategies employed by extremist groups have become more sophisticated. Contemporary threats posed by juvenile gangs and the potential linkages with the Al-Shabaab and other transnational terrorist organisations have been raised by the research respondents as points of concern¹⁹.

The emergence of juvenile gangs in Kwale County according to the residents is fuelled by frustration, mental health issues²⁰, and the allure of quick money and power.²¹ The gangs have become a breeding ground for violence and extortion. They offer a sense of belonging and identity to young people.

"My worry is... though they have been pushed a lot by the issue of drug substance, because if we can look at how most drug substance, depending on how it affects us, it has made them to be motivated to what they wanted to do, that is to attack. But according to me, I think there is also recruitment going on, in that side, its only that they have not gotten an appropriate way of going about it, because a lot of youths have been radicalised. They have been radicalised and that is why they are going in the direction of drugs to do the work they are supposed to do."²²

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) posits that there is a complex interplay between local gangs and violent extremism in Kwale County, which further complicates the security situation²³. Drug use, radicalisation, and potential manipulation by extremist elements paint a disturbing picture of calculated efforts to exploit vulnerable youth and channel them towards extremist ideologies.

"...though they have been pushed a lot by the issue of drug substance, because if we can look at how most drug substance, depending on how it affects us, it has made them to be motivated to what they wanted to do, that is to ... They have been radicalised and that is why they are going in the direction of drugs to do the work they are supposed to do..."²⁴

Drug abuse, fuelled by easy access, further exacerbates the problem, contributing to the youth's involvement in crime and violence²⁵.

The field data shows a growing concern about the potential transition of vulnerable individuals from local gangs to transnational terrorist organisations. While Al-Shabaab remains a threat, the data also points to some people being recruited to the ISIS operating in Mozambique.²⁶

<https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/kenya/index.htm#TopOfPage>

¹⁹ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

²⁰ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

²¹ NCRC. (2012). *A STUDY OF ORGANIZED CRIMINAL GANGS IN KENYA*. National Crime Research Center (NCRC). Retrieved from <https://www.crimeresearch.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Organized-Criminal-Gangs-in-Kenya-Report.pdf>

²² Women FGD Kwale, 2024

²³ SFCG,2024

²⁴ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

²⁵ Women FGD Kwale,2024

²⁶ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

"So, and ISIS and the Shabab, according to, to reports coming back from people who have gone, the feedback is the way they are being treated in Mozambique is much better compared to the way they are treated in Al-Shabaab. So that should be worrying us. And Mozambique came with the ideology of redeeming oneself. In that if you will be able to go to Mozambique and you were a customer, you were an adulterer, you go to redeem yourself."²⁷

Kwale County also shares a border with Tanzania, a regular pathway to Mozambique for many people.

"We have recruiters who are coming from *Shimoni*, from other countries like Mozambique or Ethiopia. They are coming through our borders, and those people living in our bordering country, they are very much at risk. This people who are there at the bordering."²⁸

The threat of Al-Shabaab's influence in Kwale County casts a long shadow, despite apparent successes in curbing overt recruitment, as revealed through KIIs and FGDs conducted in the region. The government's focus on security and disruption of the group's activities has led to a decline in visible radicalisation, particularly within mosques²⁹. However, this tactical shift by Al-Shabaab, gleaned from insights shared by interviewees, underscores their adaptability and resilience. The exploitation of religious narratives, twisting the concept of "jihad" to appeal to the region's devout population, remains a potent tool for luring vulnerable youth³⁰.

"Jihad recruiters are usually paid well; they pry a lot on the poverty-stricken lads by luring them with good pay. I don't know the warmongers or those who fund them, but if given such a deal wouldn't you take the chance and join?"³¹

"Because they use the idea of going to fight jihad and all that and so because people of Kwale are very religious they easily get into that and also most of them that have been taken in, these are young people of age 9 and they are easily convinced and changed so by the time they are grownup it's all about war it's all about violence it's all about killing and all that so I feel like their target is the young people."³²

The alarming trend of targeting children for indoctrination speaks to the group's long-term strategy of cultivating a generation steeped in their extremist ideology³³.

Recent observations also highlight a concerning trend in the methods employed by extremist groups to radicalise individuals in Kwale. These groups have begun to exploit the very same counter-narratives and community engagement strategies used to prevent violent extremism, twisting them to serve their radicalisation agenda. For instance, sports, music, and even vulnerable individuals like prostitutes are being used to spread extremist ideologies and gather intelligence³⁴.

"According to the engagement that I have had, the things that I have observed, um, the

²⁷ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

²⁸ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

²⁹ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

³⁰ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

³¹ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

³² KII Female CBO Representative Kwale, 2024

³³ KII Female CBO Representative Kwale, 2024

³⁴ KII Male CBO Representative

perpetrators of violence are, uh, are using the counter-narratives... to change them or to twist them so that they can radicalise people. For instance, uh, um, we used to use sports when dealing with preventing and countering and now they are using the same sports to radicalise.... they had their trainers or coaches who were radical, and they would instil these ideologies to the coaches and now they end up radicalising the youth or children slowly.³⁵

Al-Shabaab's increasing reliance on social media as a recruitment tool, is trend another that was clearly identified³⁶. It represents a concerning evolution in their tactics³⁷. It's not just the ease with which they spread their propaganda, but the captivating nature of their messaging that makes online radicalisation such a pervasive threat. This fear was repeatedly expressed by research participants.

"The fact that people also generate income through viewership, it has made social media influencers to even post VE related videos exposing terror activities which in some way promotes violence and recruitment."³⁸

This illustrates how the financial incentives of social media can be exploited to further radicalisation efforts. Furthermore, the enduring presence of extremist content online, like the videos of the late Kenyan Islamic radical Abud Rogo, ensures that the potential for radicalisation remains strong³⁹. The clandestine nature of their online activities, including using platforms to share tactics and techniques for carrying out attacks, as observed by interviewees, adds another layer of complexity to counter-terrorism efforts⁴⁰.

This adaptability poses a significant challenge to counter-extremism efforts, as it requires a constant reassessment of strategies, and a deeper understanding of the evolving tactics employed by these groups.

"As PCVE actors, we need to learn and change our strategies in addressing violent extremism due to the changing trends."⁴¹

The heavy-handed tactics of security agencies in Kwale County are inadvertently propelling youth towards Al-Shabaab, according to a community policing member. These tactics, including harassment and unlawful killings under the guise of counterterrorism, have driven some young people to seek revenge by joining extremist groups. This "counter-productive" approach, as the community member describes it, widens the gap between security forces and the local population, hindering vital intelligence-gathering efforts.⁴²

Kenya's efforts to reintegrate individuals disengaged from violent extremist groups, particularly Al-Shabaab, have been fraught with challenges. While amnesty programs offer a potential pathway out of violence, their success hinges on a comprehensive approach that addresses the complex needs of

³⁵ KII Male CBO Representative Kwale, 2-24

³⁶ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

³⁷ Youth FGD Kwale, 2024

³⁸ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Youth FGD Kwale, 2024

⁴¹ Government Official Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁴² Key informant interview with member of community policing in Kwale, 9 August 2019

returnees and fosters trust among all stakeholders⁴³.

One of the primary obstacles has been the lack of a clear legal and policy framework for rehabilitation. This ambiguity creates uncertainty and mistrust among returnees, who fear the program may be a trap, and communities, who are apprehensive about potential security risks. This lack of trust is further exacerbated by reports of violence against returnees and their families, particularly in Kwale County, which has eroded public confidence in the government's ability to ensure their safety.

“ During March, there was a rumour that was spreading that youth from the age of eleven up to eighteen have been taken.... in Likoni up to Kombani, not less than eighteen youth have already been taken, and there are youth not less than eleven have been taken by the Anti-Terror police.”⁴⁴

Furthermore, the government's emphasis on security over trust-building has alienated returnees and communities. Heavy-handed tactics and surveillance breed fear and hinder reintegration efforts. A one-size-fits-all approach fails to address the diverse needs of returnees, leading to resentment and an uneven distribution of resources. The lack of engagement with local religious leaders and community figures further hinders the creation of a welcoming environment for returnees⁴⁵.

The challenges in Kwale County highlight the need for a more nuanced and community-centred approach. Returnees in Kwale face significant trauma and social stigma, requiring increased psychosocial support and community sensitisation. The erosion of trust and ongoing violence against returnees underscore the urgent need to prioritise their safety and address community concerns.⁴⁶

The situation in Kwale County, as revealed through this research, serves as a stark reminder that the fight against extremism requires constant vigilance, adaptability, and a deep understanding of the evolving tactics employed by groups like Al-Shabaab. The Kwale County Action, launched in 2017⁴⁷, outlines multi-stakeholder strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism (PCVE) through youth empowerment, education, and community engagement. These are discussed in the next section and lessons for programming extrapolated thereafter.

⁴³ Ogada, M. (2017). *Emerging Developments in Countering Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism in Kenya*. Nairobi: CHRIPS. Retrieved from <https://www.chrips.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Emerging-Developments-in-Countering-Violent-Extremism-and-Counterterrorism-in-Kenya.pdf>

⁴⁴ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

⁴⁵ Akoth, S. O. (2018). *Returnees and Justice: Alternative Justice System as a Mechanism for Amnesty in kwale County of Kenya*. Retrieved from <https://chrips.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Confronting-Violent-Extremism-in-Kenya.pdf>

⁴⁶ Key informant interview with a Kwale community policing official, 9 August 2019

⁴⁷ Kwale County. (2017). *The Kwale County Plan to Counter Violent Extremism*. Kwale County. Retrieved from https://kecosce.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/KCPCVE_Report.pdf

Multi-stakeholder Approaches to prevent violent extremism

As outlined in the Kwale CAP and the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (NSCVE), tackling violent extremism requires a multi-pronged approach that goes beyond traditional security measures. It necessitates addressing the deep-rooted historical, political, religious, and economic grievances that can fuel radicalisation. Collaboration across government agencies, civil society organisations, religious leaders, and community members is crucial in developing comprehensive counter-extremism strategies. Moreover, investing in research and data collection is paramount to inform these efforts and ensure they are evidence-based and targeted.

CSO – Community collaborations

Non-state actors are making notable strides in a multi-stakeholder approach towards addressing PCVE. For instance, the Kaya elders are actively working with Human Rights Agenda (HURIA) and SFCG to engage youth and women and promote peace, security, and countering extremism within the community⁴⁸. HURIA has facilitated these activities, providing crucial financial assistance and logistical support for youth and other community groups to participate fully⁴⁹. SFCG's Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA) Project is working to strengthen cohesion and communication between Kaya elders and women, promoting collaboration on PCVE issues⁵⁰. Samba Sports is using football tournaments' unifying power to mobilise community members and promote positive social engagement⁵¹.

Furthermore, organisations such as Smart Move, Hope, Early Focus, Human Rights Agenda, and We World have recognised the influential role of social media. They have implemented programmes that recruit and empower social influencers to spread messages of peace and counter-narratives of extremism. These efforts harness the reach and impact of social media platforms to foster positive social change and promote peaceful coexistence⁵².

These multifaceted efforts demonstrate the need for a comprehensive approach encompassing young people, community, and civil society partners in countering violent extremism.

Governance and addressing structural vulnerabilities

County governments are critical in addressing violent extremism (VE) due to their direct engagement with communities and their influence on local development. Through various departments and programs, counties can implement targeted interventions that mitigate the risk factors contributing to VE. For instance, education departments can integrate peace-building and critical thinking curricula to counter radical narratives, while social service programs can provide support to vulnerable individuals and families, reducing their susceptibility to extremist recruitment. By allocating resources to PCVE initiatives within their County Integrated Development Plans and Annual Development Plans, counties demonstrate

⁴⁸ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁴⁹ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁵⁰ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁵¹ KII Female CBO Representative, 2024

⁵² Women FGD Kwale, 2024

a commitment to fostering resilience and creating an environment where extremism cannot thrive⁵³.

Furthermore, the county government is uniquely positioned to address the local dynamics of violent extremism. It can promote social cohesion through interfaith dialogues and community engagement initiatives. By supporting youth programs, vocational training, and economic empowerment projects, counties can address unemployment and marginalisation, which are often exploited by extremist groups. Collaboration with community leaders, religious institutions, and civil society organisations is essential for developing culturally sensitive and effective strategies to counter violent extremism and build community resilience⁵⁴.

The Kwale CAP, developed together with the National Counter Terrorism Centre, is a testament to the vital role that county governments play in tackling violent extremism. This Kwale CAP, tailored to the local context, provides a strategic blueprint for implementation, ensuring that counter-extremism efforts are both targeted and effective. The impact of the Kwale CAP is attested to by the following wing statement from Kaya Elder:

“It’s not how it used to be before. They have been affected, they have seen how it can affect them and therefore the situation has been controlled.... in Kwale we have the CEF and in the CEF we have the Kwale CAP where it has 5 pillars...The ideological pillar brings together religious leaders that is Muslims, Christians and the Kaya. The reason why I am saying this issue has reduced because the ideological pillar has had numerous meetings, and we have discussed a lot about with various organizations and the government.”⁵⁵

This underscores the effectiveness of the ideological pillar activities, which foster interfaith dialogue and collaboration. This grassroots engagement, coupled with proactive government measures, has fostered a climate of peace and resilience in Kwale, illustrating the positive impact of the CAP and offering hope for continued progress in combating violent extremism⁵⁶.

Furthermore, Kwale County's commitment to addressing the structural underpinnings of extremism is manifest in its enacted legislation. Statutes such as the Kwale Municipal Act, the Kwale County Climate Change Act 2022, and the Kwale County Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Protection Act collectively contribute to shaping an environment where extremist ideologies struggle to flourish⁵⁷. The Kwale County Climate Change Act 2022 addresses climate change, a driver of conflict and extremism, by mitigating its effects. While the Kwale County Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Protection Act 2023 protects women and girls from violence, creating a more inclusive and equitable society less susceptible to extremist ideologies.

Respondents lauded Kwale’s County Commissioner for being proactive and involved in PCVE efforts. They note the office is involved in PCVE planning and interventions. It offers secretariat support for most meetings, ensuring smooth logistics, including venues, refreshments, and active engagement in diverse initiatives⁵⁸. The County government supplements these efforts by providing bursaries and funding for

⁵³ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁵⁴ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁵⁵ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁵⁶ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁵⁷ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁵⁸ Women FGD Kwale,2024

vulnerable populations, supporting orphans, and actively promoting the growth of youth groups, women's funds, and similar endeavours.⁵⁹

However, most respondents felt the County government should put in more efforts. For instance, Kaya elders and community leaders called for more outreach involving them⁶⁰. Perceptions about bureaucratic hurdles by County officials in implementing school-based programmes underscore the need for streamlined processes and effective collaboration between government agencies and PCVE actors. Moreover, the call for greater involvement of family decision-makers in PCVE efforts emphasises the importance of addressing the root causes of extremism at the household level⁶¹.

Perceptions about bureaucratic hurdles by County officials in implementing school-based programmes underscore the need for streamlined processes and effective collaboration between government agencies and PCVE actors⁶².

This disconnect is observed by a CBO representative who noted a "gap" in engagement between the county government and the community on PCVE issues, stems from a misunderstanding of the county's role in security.⁶³

"...the county government and the community. There's still a gap let me just be honest and say there is still a gap... everyone is busy trying to find funds for their county but still they are not taking it as a priority yeah they want to give bursary they're doing so well at giving that but they're not looking at other problems so I'd say there's still a gap and they're not, they've not taken this as a priority until when they will ...tourism is the main whatever here until tourism will be affected now is when they wake up and be like oh we need to have this done you know so there is still that big gap."⁶⁴

This disconnect is further supported by another participant who notes, "barriers are there since county government says things to do with security are the docket of national government. They do not support fully...they (County government) do not have a disbursement and docket that has money for peace and security"⁶⁵. However, this perception needs to be challenged.

Indeed, as a participant during the Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors aptly stated,

"Security is not just about police officers holding guns, but it is about the wellbeing of an individual, that's why we also say that security is also a county's responsibility in terms of empowering the communities which will build their resilience. There are several opportunities that the County government can take advantage of to support PCVE work through the annual budgets."⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Ramadhan, R., Ouma, L., Kimari, B., & Mutahi, P. (2023). *Assesing the role of County Engagement Forums in PCVE in Kenya*. CHRIPS. Retrieved from <https://chrips.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Assessing-County-Engagement-Forums.pdf>

⁶⁰ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁶¹ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁶² Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁶³ Female CBO Representative, 2024

⁶⁴ Female CBO Representative, 2024

⁶⁵ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

⁶⁶ Government Official Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

This broader understanding of security opens avenues for the county government to actively engage in PCVE initiatives.

The PCVE Model Bill offers a potential solution for funding PCVE programmes in Kwale County, addressing the critical challenge faced by non-state actors in Kwale County, where inadequate resources have hampered the full implementation of the County Action Plan (CAP) on PCVE but its success hinges on clear communication and sustained engagement with county officials. Developed by the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), this bill provides a framework for counties to dedicate resources towards PCVE initiatives⁶⁷. However, concerns have arisen regarding the County Government's commitment to PCVE and the perceived limitations because security is not a devolved function. To alleviate these concerns, it's vital to emphasize the model bill's adaptability, as demonstrated by a leading county's successful implementation.

The example of Nairobi County highlights how counties can utilise the bill to fund activities such as community empowerment and awareness, which indirectly contribute to PCVE by addressing the root causes of radicalisation. Furthermore, active participation of key county officials like the County Attorney and County Assembly Secretary in the CEF will be crucial in ensuring the bill is understood and championed within the county government. The technical working group's commitment to analysing all relevant regulations, including those related to devolved functions, will further strengthen the Kwale County model bill and ensure its alignment with the county's specific needs.⁶⁸

It is therefore clear that the CEF is a crucial mechanism for preventing and countering violent extremism in Kwale County ⁶⁹ through its multi-sectoral approach, bringing together government agencies, community leaders, and civil society organisations. It has been instrumental in implementing the County Action Plans (CAPs), which are developed in line with the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) to provide a framework for PCVE interventions at the county level, ensuring that efforts are coordinated and aligned with national priorities⁷⁰.

"Yes, it has because us we have the program with the CEF. Us as a pillar member, we need to have a meeting on peace and security, and we need to be able to speak about other issues including peace and security.... It does not matter what the venue or event is about what for example a wedding, you can talk about anything then add something to do with peace and security."⁷¹

"I am at the PSS pillar, and we have had meetings with the National Counter Terrorism Centre, and they have contributed by providing awareness when it comes to peace. We also work together to bring about awareness, to link partners for example the NCTC, we did not know about them, but you find that we are called to a meeting with the County Commissioner, and we get to engage with other partners, there is also reporting for us who are doing PVE work."⁷²

⁶⁷ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁶⁸ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁶⁹ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

⁷⁰ Capacity Building Workshop for Non-State Actors Kwale, 2024

⁷¹ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁷² Widows Network Kwale, 2024

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The five pillars of the Kwale CEF are⁷⁵:

- Psycho-social pillar: This pillar provides support to victims of violent extremism and their families. It also works to promote mental health and well-being in the community.
- Education pillar: This pillar works to prevent violent extremism through education. It provides training to teachers and students on PCVE topics. It also works to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding.
- Media pillar: This pillar works to counter violent extremism through the media. It produces and disseminates counter-narratives to challenge extremist ideologies. It also works to promote media literacy and critical thinking skills.
- Ideological pillar: This pillar works to counter violent extremism through the promotion of positive values and ideologies. It works with religious leaders and community leaders to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. It also works to counter extremist ideologies through the production and dissemination of counter-narratives.
- Law enforcement pillar: This pillar works to counter violent extremism through law enforcement. It works with the police and other security agencies to prevent and investigate terrorist attacks. It also works to promote community policing and trust between the community and law enforcement.

The CEF has been able to leverage the strengths of different organisations and individuals to achieve its goals. For example, the CEF has been able to use the expertise of religious leaders to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding.

"...in Kwale we have the CEF and in the CEF we have the Kwale CAP where it has 5 pillars such as the ideological pillar, law enforcement pillar, psychosocial pillar, education pillar and the other one which I have forgotten. The ideological pillar brings together religious leaders that is Muslims, Christians and the Kaya."⁷⁶

⁷³ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁷⁴ Widows Network Kwale, 2024

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

The CEF has been instrumental in raising awareness of PCVE issues within the community by fostering knowledge sharing and building capacity among PCVE actors. Furthermore, it has successfully promoted collaboration and coordination among these actors. As one participant in a women's focus group discussion in Kwale eloquently stated, "Big part of CEF is knowledge and information sharing between the PCVE and NCTC. All organisations that are registered, everything must be done through county engagement."⁷⁷

However, the Kwale County government is not active in the CEF. This can be attributed to various reasons. One significant barrier is the absence of a specific budget and docket dedicated to peace and security, including PCVE efforts. This lack of funding restricts the county government's ability to actively participate in and support CEF activities.

"They do not support fully, and if there is an issue, they give support in kindness. They don't have a disbursement and docket that has money for peace and security."⁷⁸

The perception that security matters fall under the purview of the national government is another factor hindering the county's involvement. Male CBO representative in a KII quipped that, "First of all, I think, uh, the policy issues, uh, county government are not mandated to directly fund security matters. Um, so they fear that if you budget for an expenditure for security issues, the control of budget will reject."⁷⁹ This notion creates a sense of detachment and limits the county's proactive engagement in PCVE initiatives.

Political influences and the prioritisation of other county matters was also identified to overshadow the importance of PCVE and the CEF. This has led to the selection of incompetent representatives or the neglect of security concerns in favour of other pressing issues.

"The County Government seems to be politicising and ignoring security matters where appointments are made incompetently. Again, there are poor structures and planning sometimes due to lack of funds."

The absence of well-defined structures and comprehensive planning within the county government further impedes its involvement in PCVE and the CEF. This lack of organisation has hindered effective collaboration and support for PCVE activities, with one youth FGD participant stating: "The County Government seems to be politicising and ignoring security matters where appointments are made incompetently. Again, there are poor structures and planning sometimes due to lack of funds."⁸⁰

"To ensure the sustained success of PCVE initiatives, it is imperative that the county government actively participates in the CEF and maintains open communication with all stakeholders."⁸¹

Views from Women FGD shed light on the intricate workings of the CEF, showcasing its role in facilitating information sharing, coordinating activities, and ensuring accountability in funding allocation. From their perspective,

"...the County Engagement Forum (CEF) is a vital part of Kwale County's efforts to counter violent

⁷⁷ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

⁷⁸ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

⁷⁹ KII Male CBO Representative Kwale, 2024

⁸⁰ Youth FGD Kwale, 2024

⁸¹ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

extremism. It acts as a central hub for sharing knowledge and information between community groups like ours and the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC). This ensures local efforts are in line with national strategies.”⁸²

The CEF also coordinates various PCVE activities within the county. It requires all registered organisations to work through it, which helps streamline activities, avoid duplication, and promotes a more unified approach.

“Big part of CEF is knowledge and information sharing between the PCVE and NCTC. All organisations that are registered, everything must be done through county engagement.”⁸³

Finally, the CEF helps ensure transparency and accountability in funding allocation. All programs and funding requests must go through the CEF, which helps track expenditures and assess the impact of PCVE initiatives. This ensures funds are used effectively and reach the intended beneficiaries⁸⁴.

The respondents proposed including the private sector in the CEF pillars. Their active support for PCVE work can add to efforts of shared responsibility in building a resilient community. Integrating them into the CEF would formalise their involvement and open avenues for additional funding, resources and expertise that can directly contribute to a more peaceful future⁸⁵.

The private sector can demonstrate an active role by participating in capacity building – supporting the training of security and non-security personnel, supporting the government and non-state actors in their P/CVE-related initiatives, offering expertise technologically on modern technologies for implementing related tasks (digital forensic techniques, effective intelligence collection, analysis, use, and management, digital equipment and infrastructure; developing algorithms that can help identify, manage, and moderate extremist contents online). In connection with the CSR approaches, the private sector can integrate P/CVE objectives and efforts within their CSR policies⁸⁶.

Community-Centred Interventions and Programming

The heart of any successful PCVE strategy lies in community-centred interventions and programming. Community-centred interventions recognise that the people possess a unique understanding of their challenges and are thus essential partners in PCVE⁸⁷. These initiatives empower communities to resist extremist ideologies and take ownership of their security. In Kwale County, Kenya, various programmes have demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach, particularly highlighting the pivotal roles of women and youth in PVE.

Women in Kwale play a vital role in PCVE in Kwale. Their influence within families and communities enables them to identify early signs of radicalisation and intervene effectively⁸⁸.

“Our Kwale women, ahh to not even 90%, 70% they do play some roles... One, influences yeah, cause in as much as we feel like they're not doing 100% of the job but it's so easy when I tell a

⁸² Women FGD Kwale, 2024

⁸³ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

⁸⁴ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

⁸⁵ Capacity Building Workshop For Non-State Actors,2024

⁸⁶ Capacity Building Workshop For Non-State Actors,2024

⁸⁷ Capacity Building Workshop For Non-State Actors,2024

⁸⁸ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

woman hey, please would you talk to your son, the son will easily be influenced by whatever the mother says yeah so, the work they play a role of influencing, supporting because they will show up, they will show up."⁸⁹

They actively participate in peace committees, lead community-based organisations, and contribute significantly to PCVE initiatives⁹⁰. For instance, one woman shared how they intervened in a conflict between villages through a football tournament organised by their CBO⁹¹. They used the tournament as a platform for dialogue and peacebuilding, bringing together the police and the youth who had previously been in conflict. This initiative led to a significant improvement in the relationship between the two groups and contributed to a reduction in violence in the area⁹².

Another example is the establishment of the *Tuwajali Wajane* Initiative (Let's Care for Widows Initiative), which focuses on empowering widows through socio-economic activities and provides them with a platform to discuss their issues and actively participate in community development⁹³. This initiative not only empowers women but also contributes to building resilience against radicalisation and violent extremism by addressing the socio-economic factors that can make individuals vulnerable to recruitment⁹⁴.

Women's participation in PCVE initiatives in Kwale is further illustrated by their involvement in various peace committees and community-based organisations. They provide conflict resolution and management training, establish peace movements, and actively engage in awareness-raising and advocacy efforts⁹⁵.

"Yes. For example, in the ideological pillar, I have 3 or 4 women, and we have meetings every month. We take a woman kaya, and we put her in the ideological pillar and in her area, she speaks about issues to do with PCVE and reports back about her findings and what she has been able to do in the community or area that she resides in. There is also another organisation *sauti ya wamama* (women's voices). They have a chair, and they are also in the ideological pillar, and they also do the reporting just as we do."⁹⁶

While women have played a significant role in shaping the PCVE landscape in Kwale, the youth are increasingly recognised as crucial partners in building resilience against extremism. Their involvement in community-centred programs not only help build their resilience but also provides them with opportunities to contribute positively to their communities.

"So now the engagement of young people at the design level of their programs vis-a-vis impact. The program that has engaged the youth has had a greater impact, for example, CREATE."⁹⁷

Initiatives such as sports tournaments, peace clubs, and online campaigns have proven effective in mobilising young people and fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment. For instance, the Samba

⁸⁹ Female CBO rep interview, 2024

⁹⁰ Female CBO rep interview, 2024

⁹¹ Female CBO rep interview, 2024

⁹² Female CBO rep interview, 2024

⁹³ Widows Network Kwale, 2024

⁹⁴ Widows Network Kwale, 2024

⁹⁵ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁹⁶ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

⁹⁷ Male CBO Representative Kwale, 2024

Sports Youth Agenda has effectively utilised sports, particularly football tournaments, as a powerful tool for community engagement and PCVE⁹⁸. These tournaments serve as a platform to mobilise youth, bringing them together in a positive and inclusive environment. These initiatives not only promote peace and counter extremist narratives but also provide opportunities for personal growth and development.

As one participant in the youth focus group discussion noted,

"The youth who have big dreams of changing their lives and try out in government recruitment and end up failing due to lack of influence or connection. This offers Al Shabaab as the easy option."⁹⁹

By providing alternative avenues for engagement and empowerment, these initiatives help steer young people away from the risks of radicalisation.

Moreover, they facilitate dialogues between youth, community leaders, and police officers, fostering trust and understanding. These initiatives challenge extremist narratives and promote peaceful conflict resolution by creating a space for open communication and interaction. The shared experience of sportsmanship and teamwork helps to bridge divides and build a sense of community, contributing to a more resilient social fabric¹⁰⁰. Woman FGD participant highlighted, "Youth are speaking out their minds through mentorship and vocational training. And there is growth and change"¹⁰¹.

The role of religious leaders in countering extremist ideologies cannot be overstated. Respondents' concerns about inadequate recognition and support for their efforts highlight the need for greater collaboration and resource allocation. Understanding religious and cultural sensitivities is essential in designing effective PCVE interventions¹⁰².

Awareness campaigns and inter-faith dialogues are crucial in educating communities about the dangers of violent extremism and promoting peaceful coexistence. These initiatives utilise various platforms, including community meetings, workshops, and media campaigns, to disseminate information, challenge extremist narratives, and foster critical thinking. Facilitating open discussions and encouraging community members to share their experiences and perspectives creates spaces for dialogue and understanding, contributing to a more informed and resilient society¹⁰³.

Several challenges persist in fully harnessing the potential of community-centred interventions in preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) in Kwale. These include financial constraints are a significant barrier to the sustainability of PCVE efforts. Local community-based organisations (CBOs) often lack the necessary funding to implement and maintain their programs. The issue of limited resources was emphasized in the PCVE stakeholders' capacity building workshop, where it was noted that non-state actors are experiencing a decline in funding for peace-building activities due to shifting global priorities. This makes it difficult for organisations to effectively address the root causes of violent extremism and

⁹⁸ Widows Network Kwale, 2024

⁹⁹ Youth FGD Kwale, 2024

¹⁰⁰ Female CBO Representative, 2024

¹⁰¹ Women FGD Kwale, 2024

¹⁰² Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

¹⁰³ Kaya Elder Interview Kwale, 2024

build community resilience.

“PCVE is a long-term process that requires sustained funding and support. Without adequate resources, local organisations may struggle to implement effective programs and sustain their efforts over time.”¹⁰⁴

The lack of full engagement from the Kwale County government in PCVE initiatives poses a challenge to community-centred interventions. While the national government has shown commitment to PCVE through strategies like the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) and County Action Plans (CAPs), the county government's involvement has been limited. This is partly due to the perception that security is solely the domain of the national government.

“The county government’s involvement in PCVE has been limited due to the perception that security is solely the domain of the national government.”¹⁰⁵

Cultural norms and gender stereotypes can hinder women's participation in PCVE initiatives. Women often face restrictions on their movement and decision-making power, limiting their ability to fully engage in community-based programs. Additionally, there is a lack of recognition of the unique roles’ women play in preventing and countering violent extremism.

“Women are often not given enough opportunities to participate in PCVE programs due to cultural norms and gender stereotypes.”¹⁰⁶

Finally, young people in Kwale, who are particularly vulnerable to radicalisation, are often excluded from decision-making processes regarding PCVE initiatives. Their voices and perspectives are not always adequately considered in program design and implementation. This can lead to a lack of ownership and engagement from the youth, making them more susceptible to extremist ideologies.

“Young people are often excluded from decision-making processes regarding PCVE initiatives, which can lead to a lack of ownership and engagement from them.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Capacity Building Workshop For Non-State Actors,2024

¹⁰⁵ Capacity Building Workshop For Non-State Actors,2024

¹⁰⁶ Widows Network Kwale, 2024

¹⁰⁷ Capacity Building Workshop For Non-State Actors,2024

Lessons

An analysis of the research findings has yielded several lessons in PCVE, valuable for programming:

- **Context-Specific Strategies.** The varying implementation of County Action Plans (CAPs) highlights the need for strategies tailored to specific county contexts. Each county has unique challenges and opportunities, and PCVE interventions should be designed to address these specificities.
- **County Government Engagement.** The minimal engagement of county governments in implementing CAPs suggests a potential lack of prioritisation or interest in the County Engagement Forums (CEFs) and CAPs. This lack of engagement can hinder the effectiveness of PCVE efforts, as county governments play a crucial role in addressing local drivers of extremism.
- **Women's Leadership.** The increase in women joining Kaya Elders signifies a positive shift towards gender inclusion within traditionally patriarchal leadership structures. Women bring valuable skills, knowledge, and experience to addressing violent extremism, and their inclusion in decision-making processes is essential for developing and implementing effective PCVE strategies.
- **Youth Engagement.** Young people, particularly young men, often feel isolated and marginalised from PCVE activities. It is crucial to ensure that PCVE interventions are inclusive and address the specific needs and concerns of both young men and women.
- **Localisation of PCVE Programming.** PCVE activities should be brought closer to communities at the grassroots level to increase local ownership and sustainability. Domiciling PCVE programming in town centres can marginalise communities most vulnerable to violent extremism, while working solely with established CSOs at the expense of local CBOs risks reinforcing the perception of PCVE programming as an elitist endeavour.
- **Meaningful Youth Participation.** While young people may participate in PCVE program design and implementation processes, their opinions are often not considered, and they have limited power to make decisions. Ensuring that young people are meaningfully engaged and have the power to inform the design and implementation of PCVE programs is crucial for the effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives.

Conclusion

PCVE in Kwale County necessitates a collaborative approach that addresses the immediate triggers and the underlying root causes. The research findings underscore the importance of fostering strong partnerships between communities, civil society organisations, and state actors. This collaborative approach, as exemplified by the Kwale CAP, ensures that efforts are grounded in local knowledge, address the community's specific needs, and foster trust between citizens and authorities. It is equally imperative to prioritise youth engagement, ensuring that young men and women have a meaningful voice in decision-making processes related to PCVE. Empowering youth and addressing their concerns makes it easier to build resilience against extremist ideologies and foster a sense of ownership in creating a more secure future.

Furthermore, the research highlights the critical need to address the socioeconomic marginalisation and inequality that often serve as fertile ground for extremist ideologies. Investing in education, creating economic opportunities, and promoting social inclusion are essential steps in building a more equitable and resilient society. Addressing conflict, discrimination, and interrelated forms of violence is also crucial in fostering a peaceful and inclusive environment where extremism struggles to take root. This involves promoting dialogue, fostering understanding between different groups, and addressing the underlying grievances that can fuel extremism.

The lessons learned from Kwale County's experience offer valuable insights into dealing with the threat of violent extremism. The research also sheds light on the evolving nature of violent extremism, emphasising the need for adaptable and innovative strategies. This reinforces the imperative of county-level support for PCVE efforts, ensuring that they are adequately resourced and integrated into broader development strategies. By adopting a comprehensive approach that prioritises collaboration through CEFs', youth engagement, and addressing the root causes of extremism, communities can build resilience and create a more secure and inclusive future for all. PCVE is an ongoing challenge. Still, peace and security prevail through sustained effort, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to addressing the underlying drivers of radicalisation.

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