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Strengthening Locally-led Resilience to Violent Extremism in Mombasa

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List of Acronyms

AMISOM	African Mission in Somalia
ATPU	Anti-Terrorism Police Unit
CAP	County Action Plan
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CEF	County Engagement Forum
CHRIPS	Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies
CIPK	Council of Imams and Preachers in Kenya
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
EJK	Extrajudicial Killings
FORD-K	Forum for the Restoration of Democracy in Kenya
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoK	Government of Kenya
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IPK	Islamic Party of Kenya
KADU	Kenya African Democratic Union
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KDF	Kenya Defence Forces
KYEOP	Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project
M-CAP	Mombasa County Action Plan
MCG	Mombasa County Government
MUHURI	Muslims for Human Rights
MRC	Mombasa Republican Council
NACADA	National Authority for the Campaign Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse
NAMLEF	National Muslim Leaders Forum
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NCTC	National Counter Terrorism Centre
NGAO	National Government Administration Officer
NSCVE	National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism
NYS	National Youth Service
PCVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PRM	Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque
PSS	Psychosocial support
SUPKEM	Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims
TJRC	Truth and Justice Reconciliation Commission
UMA	United Muslims of Africa
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VE	Violent Extremism
VEOs	Violent Extremist Organisations
WoG	Whole of Government
WoS	Whole of Society

Executive Summary

Violent extremism (VE) is an existential threat to Kenya's national security. The Somalia-based terrorist group *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahdeen* commonly known as *Al-Shabaab*, remains the gravest danger to Kenya and its neighbours. Having begun as a small terrorist group, it has transformed into a dominant force with wide networks that have enabled it to undertake violent operations across a wide arc from northern Somalia to East Africa.¹ In 2023, there were 72 VE-related attacks in Kenya, resulting in the deaths of 178 people and occurring mainly in the North Eastern and Coastal regions.² Kenya's first terrorist attack occurred in 1980 at the Norfolk Hotel, Nairobi, followed by the USA Embassy bombings in 1998 and twin attacks in Mombasa in 2002.³ Thereafter, there was a lull in terrorist activities until 2011 when the scale and frequency of terrorist attacks peaked exponentially.

Scholars have adduced several possible reasons for this unprecedented increase, including Kenya's allied diplomatic relations with Israel and the United States, the vibrancy of the tourism industry that threatens the local Islamic culture, and the perception that the Christian population in the country is a hindrance to the Islamisation of the East African region.⁴ Increasingly, Kenya's entry into Somalia under the auspices of Operation *Linda Nchi* (Protect the County) is regarded as the most probable explanation for the increase in attacks. The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) entered Somalia on 14 October 2011 in response to a series of attacks by Al-Shabaab along the Kenya-Somalia border and in Lamu.⁵ The KDF was subsequently integrated into the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in 2012 and mandated to establish presence in Juba and Lower Juba regions to counter *Al-Shabaab*.⁶ Following the 21 September 2013 terrorist attack at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, *Al-Shabaab* leader Ahmed Godane, release a statement claiming the attack was a retribution against Western states that supported the Kenyan mission in Somalia.⁷

The Government of Kenya (GoK) has made concerted efforts to address VE. Kenya did not have a national framework to guide PCVE interventions until 2016. The State's *modus operandi* was security-focused, relying on hard approaches drawn from provisions in several laws including the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012) and the Security Laws (Amendment) Act (2014). Interventions by the State revolved around policing, money laundering controls, intelligence gathering, and prosecution.⁸ This approach engendered a hostile operating environment characterised by an antagonistic binary pitting the State against non-State actors. During this period, cases of arbitrary arrests, profiling, harassment, surveillance, enforced

¹ Ruteere, M. and Mutahi, P. (eds). (2018) *Confronting violent extremism in Kenya: Debates, ideas and challenges*, Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies: Nairobi.

² CHRIPS' Terrorism Observatory (2024) available at, <https://www.cve-kenya.org/observatory/attacks> (Accessed on 6 October 2024)

³ Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations (2017) 'Negative Effects of Terrorism on the Enjoyment of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,' *Ref No KMUNG/PROT/NV/VOL.VI/(168)* available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/AdvisoryCom/Terrorism/Kenya.pdf> (Accessed on 6 October 2024)

⁴ Muna, W (2017) 'The Cost of Terrorism in Kenya,' in *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Volume 42

⁵ Ministry of Defense, 'Kenya in AMISOM,' available at <https://mod.go.ke/kenya-in-amisom/> (Accessed on October 6 2024)

⁶ Ministry of Defense, 'Kenya in AMISOM,' available at <https://mod.go.ke/kenya-in-amisom/> (Accessed on October 6 2024)

⁷ Mazrui, A., Njogu, K., and Goldsmith, P. (eds). (2018) *Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya: Between the Rule of Law and the Quest for Security*, Twaweza Communications: Nairobi

⁸ Ogada, M (2017) *A Policy Content Evaluation of Kenya's National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism*, Policy Brief No. 9. November 2017. Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies: Nairobi

disappearances and extrajudicial killings were alarmingly high.⁹ In 2016, President Uhuru Kenyatta launched the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) as an articulation of Kenya's prevention efforts against VE. The NSCVE advocated for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach signalling a paradigm policy shift in the State's response towards VE. For starters, the NSCVE acknowledged VE as not solely a security challenge, but also a social and political challenge. To this end, it established nine pillars (psychosocial, education, political, security, faith-based and ideological, training and capacity building, arts and culture, legal and policy, and the media and online pillars) within which PCVE initiatives would be structured.¹⁰

It cascaded PCVE interventions to the local level opening a vista for the deliberate engagement and participation of diverse stakeholders through a whole-of-government (WoG) and whole-of-society (WoS) approach to tackling VE. This multi-stakeholder approach is given life through the implementation of county action plans (CAPs). This is designed to foster collaboration among CSOs, county governments, the National Government, private sector, academia, religious leaders, the media, development partners and other stakeholders. The NSCVE provides an array of entry points for CSOs that include conducting empirical research on the impact of various stakeholders on PCVE and challenging extremist speech and VE ideologies. Others include providing livelihood support to unemployed and under-employed youth through education, training and internship/apprenticeships, and liaising with community policing mechanisms to enhance human security at the local level.

CSOs have contributed immensely to PCVE by complementing GoK's efforts in addressing socio-economic and political challenges. They have done so through employing a wide array of strategies encompassing capacity building, resource mobilisation, advocacy, technical support, social accountability, research, economic empowerment, service delivery, infrastructure development, grant making and management, education, training, sensitization, and awareness creation.¹¹ However, despite these positive contributions by CSOs, the true impact of PCVE interventions is seldom accurately measured. This is often due to the strict time-bound nature of most CSO-driven interventions and the ever-evolving context of VE.¹²

The complex nature of VE demands that all actors build on lessons from past programming. USAID *Sauti Yako, Amani Yako* (your voice, your peace) programme is a localised, system strengthening approach to PCVE in Kenya. The goal of USAID Sauti is that, locally driven resilience to VE is strengthened in targeted communities by establishing an inclusive, responsive and self-sustaining PCVE system in Kenya. To achieve this goal, CHRIPS conducted action research to assess how PCVE programmes in Mombasa County have responded to the needs and interests identified within communities.

Mombasa County has experienced a spate of VE-related incidents. The earliest terrorist attacks in Mombasa occurred in 2002 when the Paradise Hotel owned by Israeli nationals was bombed resulting in 13 deaths and more than 80 casualties.¹³ This attack coincided with the failed attempt to down an Israeli charter plane with surface-to-air missiles.¹⁴ Sheikh Muhammed Aboud Rogo was charged alongside 20 others with several counts of murder related to the attack. He was acquitted and became a prominent feature in the VE landscape in Mombasa. The following decade witnessed the penetration of radical extremism in Mombasa domiciled mainly in mosques where radical preachers like Rogo and Ahmed Sharif

⁹ Haki Africa (2024) *Perception Survey on the Impact of Prevention and Violent Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and National Security on Civic Space in Kenya*. Haki Africa: Mombasa

¹⁰ National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) (2016) *National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism*, Government Printer: Nairobi

¹¹ Muraya, K (2023) 'Exploring Eastern Africa's Landscape: A Scoping Study on an Independent Civil Society-UN Counter-Terrorism Engagement Mechanism,' in *African Journal of Empirical Research*, Vol. 4 (Iss. 2)

¹² Kimari, B (2024) *A Holistic Approach to Defend Civic Space and Overhaul the Security Playbook in Kenya*. Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies: Nairobi.

¹³ Mazrui, A., Njogu, K., and Goldsmith, P. (eds). (2018) *Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya: Between the Rule of Law and the Quest for Security*, Twaweza Communications: Nairobi

¹⁴ *ibid*

alias *Makaburi* openly preached radical sermons.¹⁵ Rogo who was known to have contacts with Al-Qaeda and openly declared support for Al-Shabaab, grew and radicalised a dedicated following from his Masjid Musa base and these included Samir Khan and Ali Bahero.¹⁶

The proliferation of criminal gangs complicates the security situation in Mombasa. Most of these gangs are comprised of young boys ranging between the ages of 9 to 25. Many of them are pushed into crime due to high poverty levels, lack of employment opportunities and peer pressure. Drugs and substance abuse is rampant among members of criminal gangs posing a significant security risk to the VE context. This is because most criminal gang members are susceptible to similar push-pull factors associated with those who join VEOs and are therefore easy targets for recruitment.¹⁷

Perceptions of historical marginalisation and economic discrimination of Mombasa by the State are still rife and provide fertile grounds for incitement of young people into violence. Groups like the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) have exploited these sentiments to incite violence by misrepresenting sensitive issue like land into a 'coastal vs non-coastal' people duel.

Consequently, stakeholders in Mombasa have implemented numerous PCVE interventions to arrest and remedy this situation. GoK clamped down on radical preachers leading ultimately to the unresolved killings of Rogo and Makaburi by what many believe to be at the hands of the Anti-Terror Police Unit (ATPU). This coincided with raids and arrests by security officials to mosques believed to be epicentres of radical extremist teachings. MCG came up with the Mombasa County Action Plan (MCAP) to provide a multisectoral framework to fight VE. In addition, it adopted the Mombasa County Resilience and Prevention of Violent Extremism Policy to enhance participatory decision-making and increase civic space for the residents concerning extremism matters. CSOs have implemented numerous PCVE programmes speaking to various pillars of the MCAP. These interventions have had varying outcomes on the VE context in Mombasa.

Key findings from this research highlights that the Mombasa residents perceive their current County Government to be less engaged on PCVE matters. This could potentially undo the gains made to fight VE. The rise of criminal gangs poses a significant security threat and complicates the fight against VE. Moreover, the landscape of VE in Mombasa is consistently evolving from traditional recruitment avenues like mosques to social media sites like TikTok making it easier for extremists to reach larger masses with less risk and fewer resources. It emerged that many PCVE programmes by CSOs don't meaningfully address the most pressing needs of communities thereby impeding maximum impact. This is further compounded by a cut-throat operating environment among CSOs leading to siloed implementation. Furthermore, psychosocial support (PSS) whereas integral to building resilience against VE, is largely overlooked and underfunded with very few active practitioners. High poverty levels persist in Mombasa leaving many residents vulnerable to extremists.

This study makes a number of recommendations in light of the foregoing. For starters it is crucial to mainstream PCVE into various sectors such as education and health and sports. Leveraging on the expertise of local assets such as CBOs and religious leaders has the potential of increasing impact and sustainability. Moreover, women PCVE actors require dedicated support in their PCVE interventions. In addition, it is vital to create more safe spaces for young people to raise their most pressing issues to their

¹⁵ Ruteere, M. and Mutahi, P. (eds). (2018) *Confronting violent extremism in Kenya: Debates, ideas and challenges*, Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies: Nairobi.

¹⁶ Chome, N (2020) *Eastern Africa's Regional Extremist Threat: Origins, Nature and Policy Options*, Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies: Nairobi

¹⁷ Shauri, H., Mohamed, H., and Musa, T. (2020) 'Perception of Peace Actors on the Nexus between Criminal Gangs and Violent Extremism in the Coast of Kenya,' in *The African Review* 47 (1) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340868586_Perception_of_Peace_Actors_on_the_Nexus_between_Criminal_Gangs_and_Violent_Extremism_in_the_Coast_of_Kenya/dx.doi.org/10.1163/1821889X-12340017

respective leaders and hold them to account.

In conclusion this study acknowledges the complexity of addressing VE and calls for stronger multistakeholder collaboration towards strengthening locally-led resilience to VE in Mombasa.

Methodology

This study applied a qualitative methodological approach for data collection and analysis, using a mixed-method design for collecting qualitative data. Data was drawn from three focus group discussions (men only, women only, and mixed youth group), and 22 key informant interviews (KIIs) with both State and non-State actors. This target population was identified through purposive and snowballing techniques. The data was corroborated and triangulated in the analysis. Moreover, this study draws from data derived from desktop reviews, the USAID *Sauti Yako*, *Amani Yako* baseline survey, National Conference, PCVE policy, reflection and capacity building workshops.

Context of Violent Extremism in Mombasa County

To understand the complexity of VE in Mombasa one must first understand its history. VE often thrives in environments of localised conflict which violent extremist organisations (VEOs) manipulate to gain position and traction.¹⁸ Community perceptions that ownership and control of resources such as land by *wabara* (non-locals) and the associated notions of economic disempowerment of locals remains a major point of conflict. This has bred deep sentiments of marginalisation and discrimination among the locals.¹⁹ As one State actor observed,
“VE is foremost a governance issue.”²⁰

Investigations reveal that presidents Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Moi perpetuated land-related injustices such as forceful evictions and illegal acquisition of community land, for political patronage.²¹ Jomo Kenyatta’s inner circle most of whom were non-locals, were illegally allocated prime beach front properties.²² Such actions reinforced the notions of a deliberate scheme by non-locals to take land belonging to the locals.²³ A study on landlessness found that Mombasa had the highest percentage of landless people in Kenya²⁴ as shown in the figure below.

Figure 1: Distribution of land size (hectares) owned by households by district

District	% who are landless	District	% owning 0.1-0.99ha	District	% owning >3ha
Mombasa	98.5	Vihiga	80.1	Makueni	34.7
Nairobi	96.2	Murang’a	67.1	Narok	34.4
Garissa	92.5	Meru	65.5	West Pokot	28.7
Turkana	89.7	Samburu	61.3	Uasin Gishu	27.8
Isiolo	87.7	Kirinyaga	59.6	Kericho	26.8
Wajir	81.7	Nyeri	58.2	Bomet	24.9
Kajiado	72.8	Kiambu	56.4	Lamu	24.0
Tana River	70.2	Keiyo	55.3	Homa Bay	23.8
Lamu	53.1	Embu	48.0	Machakos	19.5
Marsabit	51.5	Tharaka Nithi	45.5	Kwale	19.1

Source: Syagga (2006)

¹⁸ Van Metre, L (2017). *Community Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kenya*. United States Institute of Peace: Washington

¹⁹ Kisiang’ani E and Lewala, M (2012). “Kenya’s Mombasa Republican Council: liberators or nascent radical fanatics?” *International Security Studies Today*, 27 June, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/kenyas-mombasa-republican-council-liberators-or-nascent-radical-fanatics> (Accessed 25 September 2024)

²⁰ Interview with a State actor

²¹ Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) (2013) *Report of the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission: Volume IV* TJRC: Nairobi

²² Syagga, P (2011). *Public land, historical land injustices and the new Constitution*, Constitution Working Paper Series No. 9. Society for International Development: Nairobi

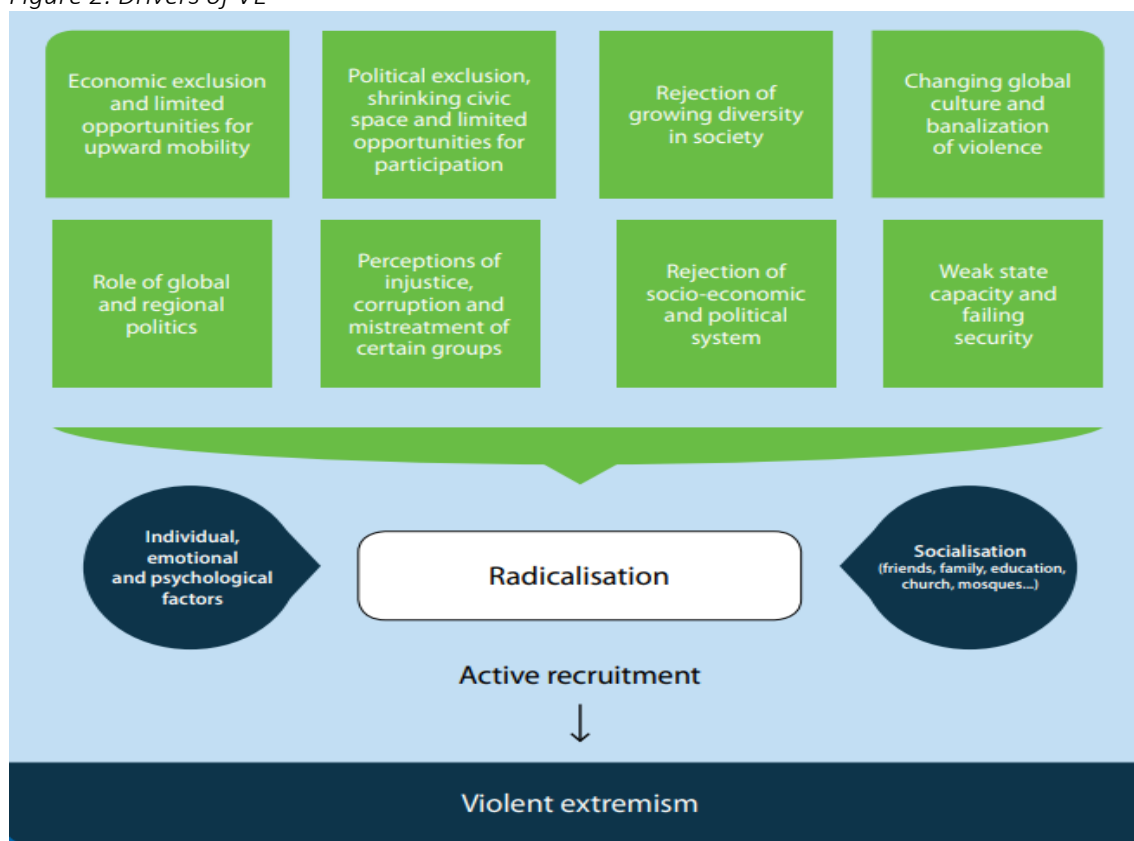
²³ Kameri-Mbote, P (2009) ‘The Land Question in Kenya: Legal and Ethical Considerations’ in *Strathmore University and Law Africa*

²⁴ Syagga, P (2006). ‘Land Ownership and Use in Kenya: Policy Prescriptions from an Inequality Perspective,’ in *Readings on Inequality in Kenya: Sectoral Dynamics and Perspectives, Volume 1*. Society for International Development: Nairobi.

Another study on land at the Kenyan Coast found that 82% of non-local settlers held title deeds compared to only 38% of locals.²⁵ This figure is further corroborated by data from the MCG which shows that by 2013 only 30% of Mombasa residents had title deeds.²⁶

The politicisation of land begot a dangerous and divisive twin binary – locals vs non-locals and Christians vs Muslims. The latter is of particular importance to the VE context in Mombasa. The church and the State have been inextricable in Kenya’s governance largely owing to our colonial history. Ultimately, this has resulted in systematic imbalances that have been biased against Muslims and other religious minorities. These have manifested in various forms and they include systemic discrimination in appointment to public offices, unequal access to educational opportunities, discrimination in matters of citizenship and national belonging and of course, the aforementioned dispossession of land.²⁷ These dynamics created a volatile situation and catalysed conditions that contributed to the rise of VE in Mombasa as shown in the figure below.

Figure 2: Drivers of VE



Source: UNDP (2016)²⁸

²⁵ Development Policy Management Forum (2011). *Land Ownership and the Associated Implications in the Coast Province*. Ford Foundation: Nairobi

²⁶ Mombasa County Government (2018) Second County Integrated Development Plan. Mombasa County Government: Mombasa, available at <https://www.mombasa.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/MSA-FINAL-CIDP-2018-22.pdf> (Accessed on 7 October 2024)

²⁷ Mazrui, A., Njogu, K., and Goldsmith, P. (eds). (2018) *Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya: Between the Rule of Law and the Quest for Security*, Twaweza Communications: Nairobi

²⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2016) *Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity: A development Response to Addressing Radicalisation and Violent Extremism*. UNDP: New York

Muslim politicians and religious leaders established the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) in 1973 to directly articulate the interests of the Muslim community to the State.²⁹ SUPKEM was considered the voice of Muslims until the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1992. With this political shift, the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) emerged attracting strong support bases in Mombasa, Lamu and Malindi.³⁰ Its membership comprised of Omar Mwinyi, Abdulrahman Wandati, Aboud Rogo and Khalid Balala, among others.³¹ One State actor highlighted that, “Terrorists don’t fall from the sky...They are among us...They are a creation of our environment.”³²

IPK rallied the masses around Muslim grievances revolving around the low representation of Muslims in public service, discrimination by public institutions and low socio-economic investment in pre-dominantly Muslim areas.³³ Alarmed at its growing popularity, GoK refused to register IPK claiming that its name signalled a religious bias discriminating against non-Muslim citizens.³⁴ A religious leader noted that, “The State has always treated Muslims like second-class citizens and yet it expects them to be grateful and loyal for this injustice.”³⁵

Several IPK members who had been vocal about the continued discrimination of Muslims by the State were arrested in run up to the 1992 general elections. IPK responded by organising a series of demonstrations that lasted for several days demanding for their release. These demonstrations turned violent and were marked by cries of ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ and ‘*Jihad*’ as clashes ensued between protestors and security officers clashed leading to destruction of properties, injuries and several deaths.³⁶ IPK’s ability to mobilise its supporters piqued the interest of the main opposition party – the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya (FORD-K). This resulted in an electoral quid pro quo where FORD-K nominated some of IPK’s members for various positions in the Coast region in exchange for IPK’s support of Oginga Odinga’s presidential bid.³⁷ Of the four parliamentary seats in Mombasa District, KANU won only one with the rest going to the Democratic Party (DP) which attracted mostly Kikuyu votes and KADU which attracted mostly Luo voters.

A section of the IPK, led by Sheikh Balala grew increasingly militant advocating for violence towards attempts by the State to thwart Muslim political opposition to the ruling party – Kenya African Union (KANU). For example, in 1993, KANU sponsored and used the United Muslims of Africa (UMA), a quasi-gang led by Emanuel Karisa Maitha to violently disrupt IPK’s gatherings and harass its leaders.³⁸ In retaliation, Balala issued *fatwas* (religious edicts) calling for the murder of Maitha and other local KANU representatives resulting into a series of violent clashes between the two parties.³⁹ IPK ultimately dissolved as a section of its leadership left to pursue political careers while many of the religious clerics left to form the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK). Prior to 1992, SUPKEM had been the dominant voice of Muslim interests. However, the emergence of CIPK and other Muslim associations like the National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF) challenged this exclusivity.⁴⁰ However, some former IPK members continued to advocate for violence in the name of Islam and ushered in a new

²⁹ Ndozu, H. (2014) *Muslims in Kenyan Politics*. Northwestern University Press: Illinois

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ Saalfeld, J. (2019) *Before and Beyond Al-Shabaab: National Islamic Councils, Contentious Politics and the Rise of Jihadism in East Africa*. Institute for Development and Peace: Duisburg

³² Reflections from a State actor

³³ Oded, A (2000). *Islam and Politics in Kenya*. Lynne Rienner Publishers: Colorado

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ Interview with a religious leader

³⁶ Oded, A. (1996) ‘Islamic Extremism in Kenya: the Rise and Fall of Sheikh Khalid Balala,’ in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26(4), 406-415. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006696X00181>

³⁷ Saalfeld, J. (2019) *Before and Beyond Al-Shabaab: National Islamic Councils, Contentious Politics and the Rise of Jihadism in East Africa*. Institute for Development and Peace: Duisburg

³⁸ Ndozu, H. (2014) *Muslims in Kenyan Politics*. Northwestern University Press: Illinois

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

chapter of VE in Mombasa. Sheikhs like Aboud Rogo, Abdul Aziz Rimo, and Abubakar Sharif took openly propagated extremist ideologies and regularly hosted meetings of young Islamist militants.⁴¹

The Kaya Bombo clashes are another manifestation of State-sponsored political violence that characterised electioneering periods in Kenya. KANU was on a mission to regain control of Mombasa politics having secured only one out of four parliamentary seats in the 1992 general elections. A judicial inquiry into the clashes found that KANU exploited local grievances of the coastal people against *wabara* (mainly Kikuyu, Luo, and Luhya) by inciting them into violence.⁴² KANU banked on the locals driving out the non-locals and therefore preventing them from voting for opposition parties.⁴³ More than 100 people were killed, at least 133 were injured, and some 100,000 were displaced.⁴⁴

A CBO leader noted that these sentiments are still rife, “You saw even in the last general elections that voting was delayed in Mombasa...Why was this? Why wasn’t it delayed in Nairobi or Eldoret or Nyeri? Politicians take Mombasa for granted. They only show up with many false promises during elections...Here in Mombasa especially during the campaigns, you’ll hear things like ‘*Wabara kwao* (non-locals return to your homes).’ These statements are fuelled by politicians who want to appeal to the masses.”⁴⁵

In 2002 there were two terrorist attacks in Mombasa by al-Ittihad al-Islami, a Somali Islamist and nationalist political group linked to al-Qaeda.⁴⁶ It is reported that former IPK members aided al-Ittihad al-Islami, which is believed to be responsible for the 1998 terrorist attacks on the US Embassy, in setting up its East African cell in Kenya.⁴⁷ The first terrorist attack in Mombasa was a car bomb outside the Paradise Hotel, at *Kikambala* village in which ten Kenyans and three Israelis were killed and about 80 people injured.⁴⁸ The second was a missile attack on a Tel Aviv-bound plane.⁴⁹ Some twenty people including Aboud Rogo were charged with several counts of murder related to the Paradise Hotel attack.⁵⁰ Rogo was cleared of all charges in 2005.

Since the 1990s, mosques have served as avenues for political debate and mobilisation especially for young men disgruntled by unemployment. Radical clerics capitalised on this to spread extremist ideologies teaching that the suffering of Muslims arose from discrimination by the State.⁵¹ For example in 2007, Iman Ali who attended Aboud Rogo’s classes in Mombasa led the eviction of five officials from the Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque (PRM) Committee in Nairobi and installed himself as the Secretary.⁵² By 2009, Iman Ali had established PRM as a centre for jihadist Islamism and would organise for radical clerics

⁴¹ Chome, N (2020) *Eastern Africa’s Regional Extremist Threat: Origins, Nature and Policy Options*, Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies: Nairobi

⁴² Report of the Judicial Commission into the Tribal Clashes that Have Occurred in Various Parts of Kenya Since 1991, available at

<https://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/CommissionReports/ReportoftheJudicialCommissionAppointedtoInquireintoTribalClashesinKenya.pdf> (Accessed on 8 October 2024)

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2002) *Playing with Fire: Weapons Proliferation, Political Violence, and Human Rights in Kenya*. Human Rights Watch: New York

⁴⁵ Interview with CBO representative

⁴⁶ Van Metre, L (2017). *Community Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kenya*. United States Institute of Peace: Washington

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ Woldemichael, W (2006) ‘International Terrorism in East Africa: The Case of Kenya,’ in *Africa Journal Online*

⁴⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁰ Mazrui, A., Njogu, K., and Goldsmith, P. (eds). (2018) *Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya: Between the Rule of Law and the Quest for Security*, Twaweza Communications: Nairobi

⁵¹ Ndlovu, H (2021). ‘Kenyan Muslims’ Minority Status: Theological Divisions, Ethno-Racial Competition and Ambiguous Relations with the State,’ in *Islamic Africa* (12)

⁵² Chome, N (2020) *Eastern Africa’s Regional Extremist Threat: Origins, Nature and Policy Options*, Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies: Nairobi

to preach in mosques in Nairobi, Nyeri, Eldoret and parts of Western Kenya.⁵³ This wave of extremist militancy persisted in Mombasa. In *Masjid Sakina*, radical youths ejected Sheikh Mohammed Idris who had called for investigations into VE activities at the mosque, and thereafter hoisted flags bearing Al-Shabaab signature as a sign of victory.⁵⁴ Sheikh Idris who also served as the chairman of CIPK was later assassinated for what many believe was his opposition to extremist ideology.⁵⁵ Aboud Rogo and Abubakar Shariff perpetuated extremist ideologies from *Masjid Musa* in Mombasa.⁵⁶

In 2011 the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) gained prominence by articulating the long-standing grievances of Coastal people. Chief among these were lack of title deeds, the sense that wealth and jobs at the Coast are largely held by non-locals and that the coast is deprived of educational facilities.⁵⁷ The MRC consistently called for a secession of the coastal strip from Kenya best encapsulated in their infamous tagline – *Pwani Si Kenya* (The Coast is not Kenya). It threatened to evict non-locals, destroyed voter cards, and promoted hateful extremism.⁵⁸ GoK attempted to proscribe MRC on grounds that was it an active arm of the Republican Revolutionary Council (RRC) bent on seceding the Coast from Kenya.⁵⁹ The Court of Appeal declared the proscription to be unconstitutional.⁶⁰

Between 2011 and 2014 there was a spike of VE attacks in the North Eastern and Coast regions as shown in the figure below.⁶¹ In this period, al-Shabaab exploited the historical marginalisation and underdevelopment of these regions and refocused its energy and resources from Nairobi.⁶² Data shows it increasingly targeted civilians perceived as outsiders in the community.⁶³

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Crisis Simulation for Peace (CRISP) (2017) *Violent and Religious Extremism in Kenya*, CRISP: Berlin

⁵⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation (2014) 'Kenya Cleric Sheikh Mohammed Idris Shot Dead in Mombasa,' <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27776743> (Accessed on 8 October 2024)

⁵⁶ Ahmed, M (2020). 'How Benign Mosque Became Face of Radicalisation in Mombasa,' Daily Nation, 26 August, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/mombasa/masjid-musa-face-of-radicalisation-in-mombasa-1920982> (Accessed on 8 October 2024)

⁵⁷ Willis, J., and Gona, G (2013). 'Pwani C Kenya? Memory, Documents and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya,' in *African Affairs*, 112(446)

⁵⁸ National Crime and Research Centre (NCRC) (2012). *A Study of Organised Criminal Gangs in Kenya*. NCRC: Nairobi

⁵⁹ Katiba Institute (KI) (2012) "Was the banning of MRC by the Minister of Internal Security Constitutional and Justified?" Katiba Institute, <https://katibainstitute.org/was-the-banning-of-mrc-by-the-minister-of-internal-security-constitutional-and-justified/> (Accessed on 26 September 2024)

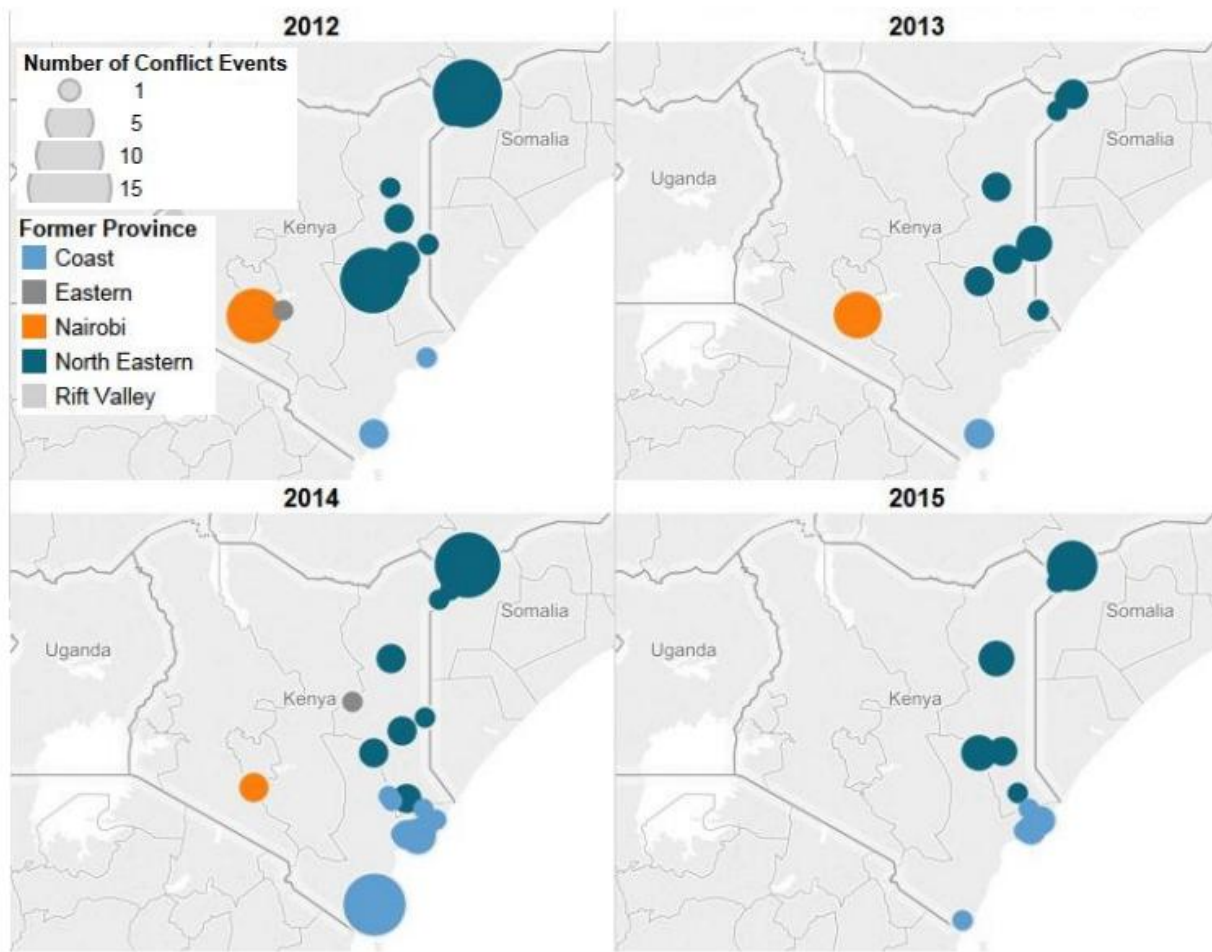
⁶⁰ *ibid*

⁶¹ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) (2015) 'Real-time Analysis of African Political Violence,' Conflict Trends No.40, https://www.acledata.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ACLED_Conflict-Trends-Report-No.40-August-2015_pdf.pdf

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ *ibid*

Figure 3: Location of Al-Shabaab Violence by Former Province in Kenya, January 2012-July 2015



Source: ACLED (2015)

In 2014, police officers arrested Abdiaziz Abdillahi Abdi and Isaak Noor Ibrahim who were in possession of a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (V-BIED). The police also found AK-47, 270 rounds of ammunition, six grenades and five detonators.⁶⁴

GoK has committed horrendous human rights violations ostensibly in the name of counterterrorism efforts. The Senate's Standing Committee on Justice, Legal Affairs and Human Rights found that cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings (EJK) persist despite Kenya's progressive Bill of Rights as well as supporting legal and institutional frameworks.⁶⁵ Various police units have been implicated in the torture, disappearance and unlawful killings of alleged terrorism suspects especially of Muslim men at the Coast.⁶⁶ Mombasa has accounted for some of the highest EJK in recent years as shown in the figure below.⁶⁷

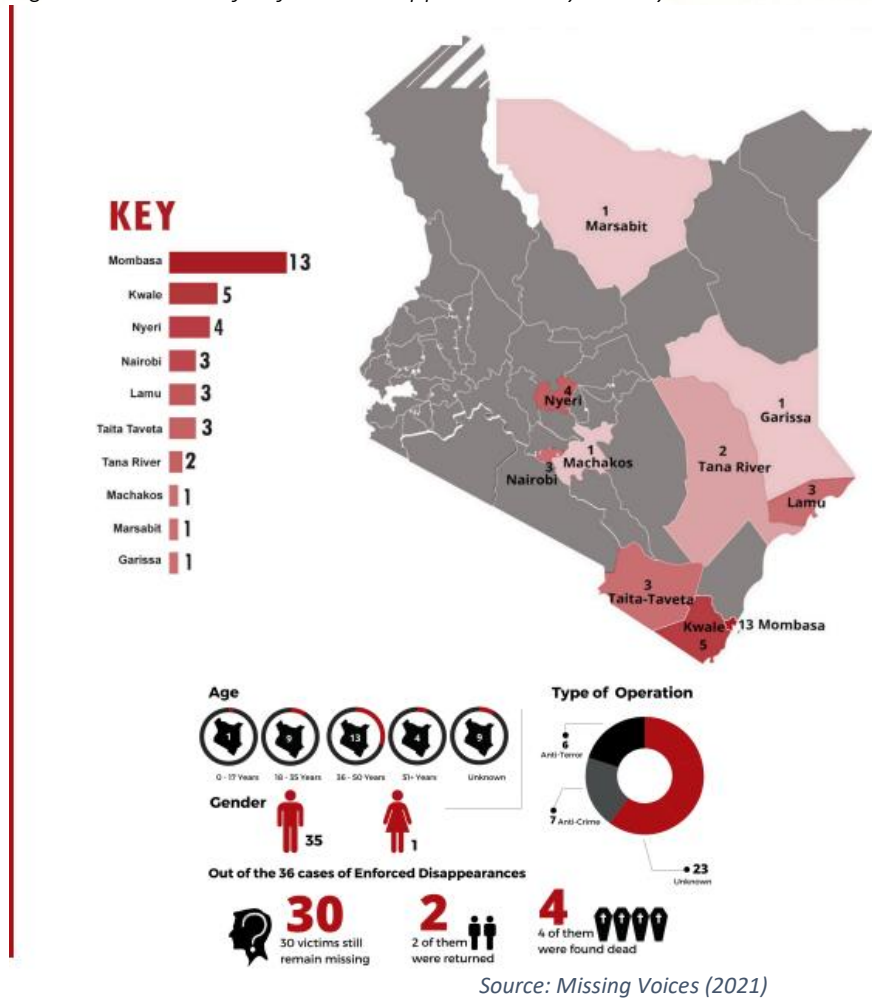
⁶⁴ Pantucci, R (2014) 'Terrorist Campaign Strikes Mombasa as Somali Conflict Spreads South,' Terrorism Monitor Volume: 12 Issue: 8, <https://jamestown.org/program/terrorist-campaign-strikes-mombasa-as-somali-conflict-spreads-south/>

⁶⁵ The Senate (2021) *Report of the Inquiry into Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances in Kenya*, 14 October, available at <http://parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2021-11/Report%20on%20Inquiry%20into%20Extrajudicial%20Killings%20and%20Enforced%20Disappearance%20in%20Kenya.pdf> (Accessed on 18 October 2024)

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch (2015) 'Abuses by Government Security Forces,' 1 January, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/kenya_5.pdf

⁶⁷ Missing Voice (2021) *Delayed Justice: 2021 Annual Report*, https://ke.boell.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/MV-2021-annual-report-digital-2_0.pdf

Figure 4: Number of Enforced Disappearances by County



The failure of GoK to successfully investigate these cases strengthens the notion that the frequent use of lethal force against Muslim men occurs as a result of deliberate policy decisions.⁶⁸ Moreover, rights-based CSOs that call for accountability on matters of human rights violations are often subjected to profiling and harassment by the State. This was the case when GoK suspended the licenses of Haki Africa and Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) both of which had been vocal in calling for accountability following unresolved human rights violations at the Coast.⁶⁹ Participants in a focus group discussion (FGD) highlighted that:

“Nobody wants to be a criminal by birth. We don’t want to beg for food. Nobody finds pleasure in that. Some of us genuinely want to help make our country a better place...However, the Government and especially the police...at times it seems like they provoke us to be their enemies. Our national anthem says ‘justice be our shield and defender’...But there’s no justice for poor people in this country.”⁷⁰

Needless to say, the implementation of some of Kenya’s counter-terrorism measures exacerbate the very conditions that the State seeks to address thereby undermining the broader goals of tackling VE. The proliferation of criminal gangs complicates the fight against VE in Mombasa. Some stakeholders noted, “As far as terrorist attacks are concerned 001 (Mombasa) has been okay. Our biggest security threat in recent years is the issue of *vipanga* (criminal gangs). Just the other day a group of about 15 boys cut

⁶⁸ Haki Africa (2016). *What Do We Tell the Families? Killings and Disappearances in the Coast Region of Kenya, 2012-2016*. Haki Africa: Mombasa

⁶⁹ Kimari, B (2024) *A Holistic Approach to Defend Civic Space and Overhaul the Security Playbook in Kenya*. Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies: Nairobi.

⁷⁰ Interview with youth FGD

campus students and stole their valuables. Things are getting out of hand.”⁷¹

Criminal gangs are linked to some local politicians and are most prominent in the run up to the general elections. They receive support that includes training, upkeep and protection from arrests. Many of the hired criminal gangs hang around the government offices of their benefactors and shower them with platitudes as a means of ingratiating themselves. Some participants described this as,

“There are known criminal gangs pitching camp outside government offices. Every time a particular politician walks by, you’ll hear them bestowing fake praises upon them. You’ll hear them say things like ‘*Mungu akuweke anichukuwe* (May the Lord keep you and take me)’ or ‘*Ukifa huozu na ukioza hunuki* (if you die you will not rot, and if you rot you will not stink).’ These gang members are never arrested.”⁷²

Many of the criminal gangs that are hired during elections are left desperate as their benefactors desert them leading to an increase of muggings and robberies. As a group of young people surmised:

“Those young men have no source of income after elections...They have families to feed...They need food...They don’t have food. Do you think they’ll sit and starve waiting for the Government to come to their aid? No. They will take up machetes and steal from us in the streets. That’s the way it is.”⁷³

Criminal gangs are mainly composed of young men between the ages of 8 and 25. Many respondents identified gang members as being children as espoused by a group of women:

“These gang members are small boys...You’ll find someone as young as 13 years holding a machete to your neck demanding your hard-earned valuables. If you dare resist, they will cut you into pieces. You’d rather lose your phone or handbag but keep your life.”⁷⁴

Another group of respondents alluded to the role of drugs and substance abuse in the rise of criminal gang activities.

They noted:

*“When those young boys are attacking you, they look like they have no souls...Their eyes are so red. Even your son won’t recognise you nor treat you like his mother. In that moment they move like they are possessed. Most of them can’t remember their actions the following day.”*⁷⁵

This corroborates a previous study done by the National Authority for the Campaign Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse (NACADA) that shows that Mombasa had some of highest rates of drug and substance abuse among youths aged 15-24 as shown below.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Interview with CBO representatives

⁷² Reflections from a PCVE policy workshop

⁷³ Interview with youth FGD

⁷⁴ Interview with women FGD

⁷⁵ Interview with men FGD

⁷⁶ National Authority for the Campaign Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse (NACADA) (2016). *Status of Alcohol and Drug Abuse in the Coast Region, Kenya: Baseline Report*, https://nacada.go.ke/sites/default/files/2019-10/Coast%20Baseline%20Survey%20Final%20Report_2016_17.pdf

Figure 5: Current use of alcohol and other drugs among the youth aged 15-24 years in the Coast Region

		Alcohol	Tobacco	Khat	Bhang	Heroin	Cocaine
County	Mombasa	3.9	7.8	10.4	5.2	5.2	2.6
	Kwale	5.6	11.3	15.5	7.0	-	-
	Kilifi	10.1	4.3	4.3	2.9	-	-
	Tana River	2.8	8.5	17.0	2.8	-	-
	Lamu	6.8	13.6	10.2	5.7	-	1.1
	Taita Taveta	6.5	4.3	19.6	4.3	-	-
Coast Region		5.7	8.8	12.7	4.6	0.9	0.7

Source: NACADA (2016)

The aforementioned rates of drug and substance abuse among young people in Mombasa correspond with high dependence rates as shown below.⁷⁷

Figure 6: Level of alcohol and drug dependence in the Coast Region

		Alcohol	Tobacco	Khat	Bhang	Prescription drugs	Heroin	Cocaine	Total (n)
County	Mombasa	15.9	20.1	14.0	16.2	2.2	15.9	5.7	314
	Kwale	4.8	9.2	4.8	2.2	-	-	0.4	273
	Kilifi	9.0	5.5	5.1	1.6	1.6	-	-	256
	Tana River	3.1	4.0	9.7	1.4	0.3	-	-	350
	Lamu	5.7	4.3	5.1	3.7	0.3	1.4	0.6	350
	Taita Taveta	5.8	5.8	2.9	2.9	-	-	-	276
Coast Region		7.3	8.1	7.1	4.8	0.7	3.0	1.2	1819

Source: NACADA (2016)

Many of the gang members are said to be addicted to *Bugizi* (Rohypnol) which they believe gives them courage and confidence to commit various crimes such as extortion and muggings.⁷⁸ A number of gangs were mentioned as being notorious in various parts of Mombasa. Participants highlighted the following: "One-Man Army is emerging as a dangerous gang. It operates in Kisauni and is feared even by the police... *Wakali Wao* and *Wakali Kwanza* continue to terrorise residents in Kisauni too...In Changamwe there is 64 Gang and Vietnam...Buffalo and Crazy Boys operate mostly in Likoni."⁷⁹

The nexus between criminal gangs and VE continues to generate much discussion. One researcher opined

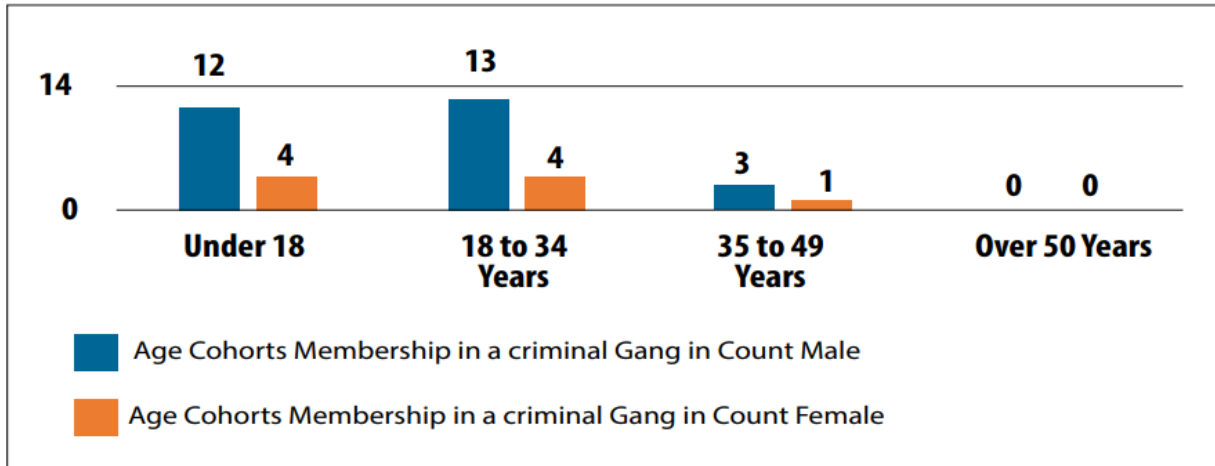
⁷⁷ ibid

⁷⁸ World Bank (2020). *Mombasa County: Crime and Violence Rapid Assessment*, <https://crimeresearch.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Mombasa-County-Crime-And-Violence-Report.pdf> (Accessed on 27 September 2024)

⁷⁹ Reflections from a PCVE Capacity Building workshop of non-State actors

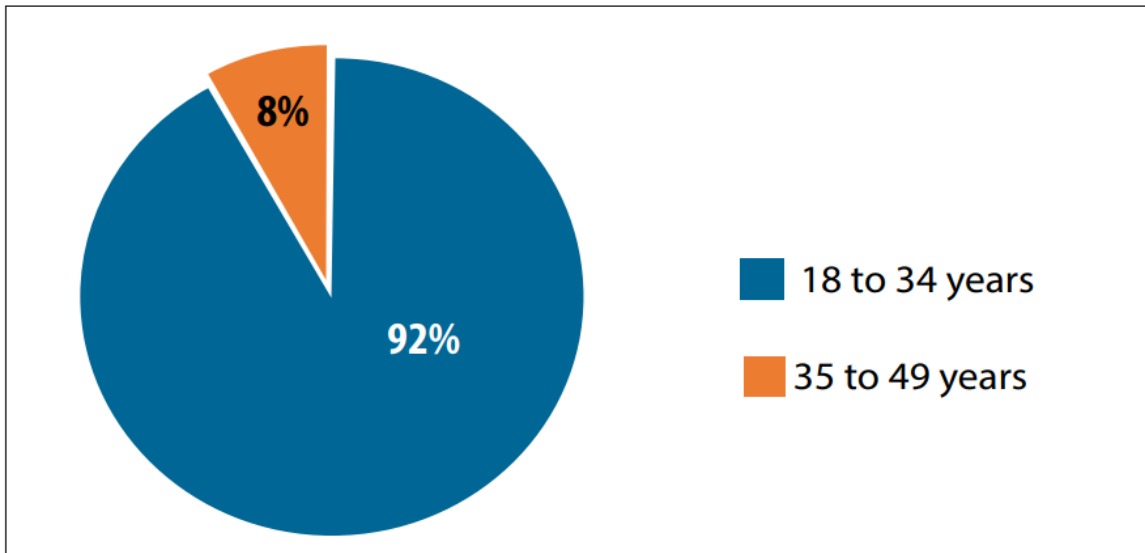
that, “Criminal gangs are fertile grounds for recruitment and radicalisation since their members are bound by similar push and pull factors.”⁸⁰

A study on the intersection of VE and criminal gangs corroborates this assertion. For example, the study found that most members of both groups are typically males between the ages of 7 and 34, have not received a formal education beyond secondary schooling and are mainly unemployed as shown below.⁸¹



Source: IPST (2019)

Figure 8: Membership by Age Cohorts of Majority Members of Terror Groups



Source: IPST (2019)

Moreover, that members of criminal gangs would easily be primed for radicalisation by exploiting their vulnerabilities in form of heightened feeling of marginalisation and poor psychosocial conditions.⁸²

The handling of returnees continues to be a sensitive subject in Mombasa. GoK perceives returnees as a

⁸⁰ Remarks from a participant at a PCVE policy workshop.

⁸¹ Mwachinalo, S (2019). *Nexus between Organized Criminal Gangs and Terrorist Groups: Case of Mombasa County*. International Peace Support Training Centre (IPST): Nairobi

⁸² *ibid*

security threat. This is informed by a number of factors that include the chance that they participated in crimes like those that Al-Shabaab proudly publicise, desensitisation to violence and post-traumatic stress disorders.⁸³ To this end, it has undertaken concerted efforts to streamline the process of reintegration.⁸⁴ However these interventions have been marred by significant challenges. A group of participants pointed out that, “the National Government does not have a clear rehabilitation and reintegration programme...You saw how the Amnesty Programme flopped...You go to volunteer information to a police officer, and then you become the number one suspect...Surely. How am I supposed to trust that police officer again?”⁸⁵

In addition, studies show that security officials often subject entire villages to communal punishment characterised by police brutality on suspicion of harbouring returnees.⁸⁶ The foregoing denotes a volatile and sensitive operating environment. Through this lens, other governance issues could easily exacerbate the situation. For example, GoK’s directive that all port cargo be transported by rail to Nairobi was met with anger as it triggered perceptions of economic discrimination. This was reinforced by some respondents who made the following observation, “Why would *Uhunye* (former president Uhuru Kenyatta) move port operations to Naivasha when there is no ocean there? What does the government stand to gain from that other than impoverishing us?”⁸⁷ Indeed, these directives had dire ramifications on the economy of Mombasa. It led to the loss of thousands of jobs in clearing and forwarding agencies, fuels and lubricants, and transport sectors.⁸⁸ This is in addition to other innumerable losses in informal industries and an anticipated shrinkage of Mombasa’s economy by over 16%.⁸⁹

Community members in Mombasa not only face VE-related trauma but are also dealing with other stressors such as high living costs, climate change impacts, and a tense political environment. While these issues may seem unrelated at first, they intersect and manifest as various forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence (S/GBV), political violence, and gang-related violence. The cumulative effect of these stressors makes it difficult for individuals and communities to build resilience, as the constant exposure to different forms of violence erodes mental and emotional well-being. VEOs can exploit these vulnerabilities, manipulating the existing conflicts and grievances to further their agenda. Programmes addressing VE in Mombasa, therefore, need to adopt an integrated approach that recognises the multifaceted nature of violence in the community. This means tackling not just VE, but also addressing other drivers of violence, such as economic inequality, political instability, and social marginalisation.

The County Government of Mombasa has been implementing the Mombasa County Action Plan (M-CAP) since 2017 to address VE-related challenges. While adopting the nine pillars recommended by the NSCVE, the M-CAP included two additional pillars - economic pillar and the women’s pillar. As aforementioned, perceptions of economic inequities emerged as strong influences for the youth to embrace VE and;

⁸³ Ngachra, M., and Onkware, K (2023). ‘Nature of Reintegration Programmes for Returnee Terrorist Fighters in Mombasa County, Kenya,’ in *African Journal of Empirical Research* Vol. 4 (Iss. 2)

⁸⁴ In April 2015, the National Government launched an Amnesty and Reintegration Program which encouraged repentant Al-Shabaab individuals to return to Kenya. This was further buttressed by the launch of the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE), which aimed to cascade national-level efforts into county-level programming to deradicalise, rehabilitate and reintegrate Al-Shabaab defectors or returnees who were willing to leave the network and denounce its ideology.

⁸⁵ Reflections from a PCVE policy workshop

⁸⁶ Juma, M and Githigaro, J., (2021). ‘Communities’ Perceptions of Reintegration of Al-Shabaab Returnees in Mombasa and Kwale Counties, Kenya,’ in *Journal for Deradicalisation*, ISSN: 2363-9849

⁸⁷ Interview with CBO leaders

⁸⁸ World Bank (2020). *Mombasa County: Crime and Violence Rapid Assessment*, <https://crimeresearch.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Mombasa-County-Crime-And-Violence-Report.pdf> (Accessed on 27 September 2024)

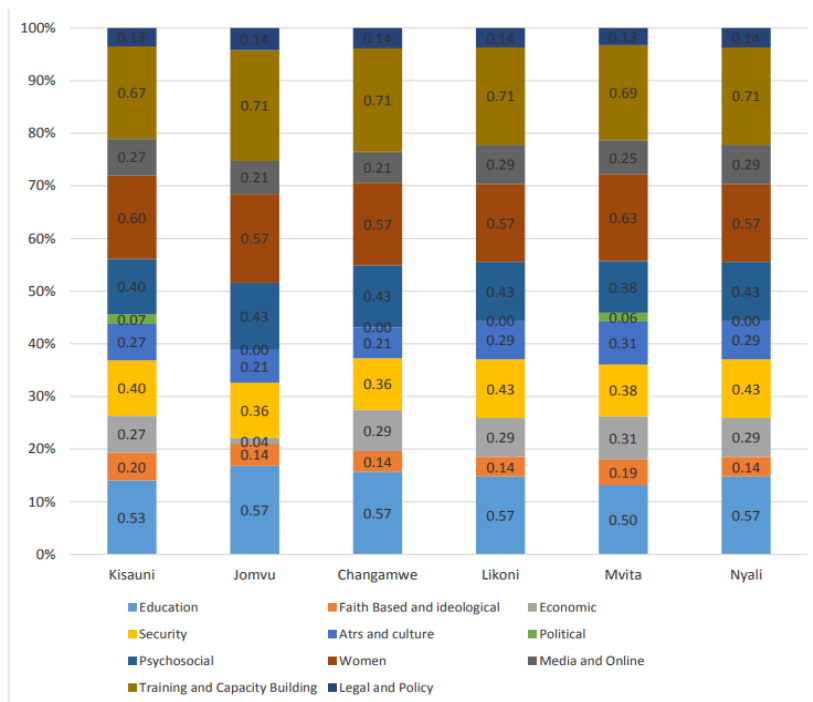
⁸⁹ *ibid*

women were identified as both victims and perpetrators of VE in Mombasa County.⁹⁰ PCVE activities are generally evenly distributed across all six sub-counties with most non-State actors programming around three main pillars – training and capacity building, women and education pillars as illustrated below.

However, the County Engagement Forum (CEF) is not as active as it once was. This came out strongly in our conversations with CSO leaders who highlighted that:

“The CEF is struggling. We no longer feel the presence of the County Government... We have this Kobo platform where we input the data but it’s more cosmetic than functional...CSOs have to pool resources to conduct CEF activities...For example, my organisation will host other pillar heads during one of our activities to save on costs...”⁹¹

Figure 9: Distribution of M-CAP PCVE Pillars based on Sub-counties



Source: Mombasa County Government, 2018

⁹⁰ Mombasa County Government (MCG) (2017) *Mombasa County Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism 2017-2022*. Mombasa County Government: Mombasa

⁹¹ Interview with CSO leaders

Key Findings

1. The Changing Landscape of VE in Mombasa

The VE landscape in Mombasa continues to evolve adding to the complexity of this phenomenon. Radicalisation is rife among the youth who are lured into VEOs through a combination of various elements. Extremists target school dropouts who are considered easy targets for manipulation.

One religious leader observed that:

“There are there are three types of people. One that is not learned, there is one that is partially learned, and there is one that completed school. The most dangerous among the three, is the one who is partially learned because his little education can be used to manipulate him and he will also manipulate others.”⁹²

Extremists misinterpret and weaponize religious concepts such as *jihad* to incite young Muslim men into violence with non-Muslims. Mombasa faces high levels of unemployment, with many young people who are unemployed come from less fortunate backgrounds. Extremists capitalise on this situation to entice them with them money while blaming the State and non-locals for their conditions.

A community leader encapsulated this predicament as follows:

“We know of young people who have gone to Somalia to join *Al-Shabaab*. These young men send money back to their mothers which is used to construct a good house or send their siblings to school. There are parents who see this and encourage their children to go to Somalia. Also, when young people see their peers doing well, they too are moved to join such activities. Many of those who go to Somalia never return. The money just stops coming after some time and their parents are unable to reach them.”⁹³

This reinforces the influence that high poverty and unemployment levels have on predisposing young people into joining criminal gangs. A study on labour productivity in Mombasa found that the unemployment rate is relatively high at 17.65% with the youth (18-34 years) accounting for 11.68%.⁹⁴

A group of respondents shared that:

“Young men are recruited into criminal gangs by their older peers. They are given weapons and trained on which streets to operate on. Everyone is given a particular target. You must achieve that target or you will not get your share for that day...And once you enter a criminal gang...it’s as though you have entered the world after birth...You know that thing the President [William Ruto] said? *Mambo ni matatu* (There are three things) ...You go to jail, go to heaven or leave Kenya. Well once you join criminal gangs *mambo pia ni matatu* (there are also three options) ...You meet your targets, you get caught and go to jail, or you die.”⁹⁵

Criminal gangs are a pervasive security threat especially in Kisauni and Likoni. This led one researcher to challenging the definition of VE.

The researcher postulated that:

“The definition of VE as we know it is very Euro-centric. It was defined by someone in the West and shoved down our throats... CSOs like yourselves are therefore forced to look at VE only through those

⁹² Interview with a religious leader

⁹³ Interview with community leaders

⁹⁴ The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) (2023) ‘Assessing Labour Productivity for Mombasa County,’ Policy Brief No. 70/2023-2024, available at <https://kippra.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Mombasa-County-Labour-Productivity.pdf>

⁹⁵ Interview with youth FGD

lenses because that's what your donors have defined it to be...But who said just because a definition describes something in Europe or America that it must also hold true here? Criminal gangs and the violence they mete out to residents in the Coastal region is VE. We must tell each other the truth."⁹⁶ This proliferation has led to the creation of turfs and gang rivalry which in some instances manifested in vicious attacks including beheadings of perceived rivals.⁹⁷

One respondent described the situation as follows:

"These *vipanga* (criminal gangs) operate like drug cartels...Something like the Godfather (movie). Everyone has their area of operation. If you are found in another area you can be attacked. This creates a very bad situation...Also, there have been instances where the public cornered suspected criminal gangs and took matters into their own hands...*Dawa ya moto si unajua ni moto (the solution to fire is fire)*. So when criminal gangs realise one of their own has been arrested, injured by a rival group or lynched by the public, they revenge. You'll hear them say things like '*Ama sisi, ama wao* (It's either us or them).' You will then hear reports of *vipanga* attacking the public and not stealing anything from them. They just cut whoever they find. There was such a case at the ferry in Likoni not too long ago. Many people lost their fingers."⁹⁸

Young girls and women have become targets for criminal gangs such as *Wakali Kwanza*. One community leader intimated that young girls and women suffer from similar socio-economic factors as men but also have factors that are unique to them. They painted the following picture:

"*Mtoto wa kike anapitia changamoto maalumu* (young women face unique challenges). *Pamoja na mambo ya mlo anapambana na mambo ya hedhi*. (In addition to the challenges of accessing meals they must also deal with their menses)...Many of them cannot afford pads...So what do you think they'll do? They cannot postpone their periods. They must find a way to get those pads. Many of them have sex in exchange for pads. Increasingly, many young women join criminal gangs, aid in crimes such as extortion and pickpocketing and get some coins for themselves. That's the reality of the world we live in. Period poverty is driving young girls in Mombasa to criminal gangs."⁹⁹

These sentiments confirm the findings a study on the nexus of criminal gangs and VE which show that increasingly young girls and women are playing an active role in criminal gangs where they commit crimes such as robbery with violence, forgery and fraud, sex and drug trafficking.¹⁰⁰

Corruption is perceived as a significant contributor to the prevalence of criminal gangs. One respondent decried the following:

"In places like Miritini, there are many known criminal gang members. Even where they are arrested you will soon see them free. Police officers are given 'tea' [bribes] some times of up to KES 50,000 and before you know it, the criminal is back on the street again."¹⁰¹

These sentiments were corroborated by another researcher who posited that:

"The criminal justice system hasn't made much progress on ensuring rehabilitation and reintegration resulting in recidivism... Criminals re-engage in crime and become more hardened... Over time you have parts of Mombasa where these gangs institute their own culture, code and graduation systems, becoming a law unto themselves."¹⁰²

Increasingly, extremists are keen to recruit educated young men.

⁹⁶ Reflections from a PCVE policy workshop

⁹⁷ Interview with a male religious leader

⁹⁸ Interview with a CBO leader

⁹⁹ Interview with a religious leader

¹⁰⁰ Mwachinalo, S (2019). *Nexus between Organized Criminal Gangs and Terrorist Groups: Case of Mombasa County*. International Peace Support Training Centre (IPST): Nairobi

¹⁰¹ Interview with a youth leader

¹⁰² Reflections from a PCVE policy workshop

“These days it is not enough to just have muscles. They are looking for people with brains... People who are good in Math and Biology...Also Physics and Chemistry...Those are the ones they are trying to get. And many of our children go...Can you really blame them when our leaders tell us that this Government is like a company where people have shares? Where will poor people get money to buy shares in government? Will they not have to steal and join ‘bad’ groups?”¹⁰³

VEOs have extended radicalisation and recruitment to social media platforms.

“Parents have relegated their duties to phones. Those smart phones have bad content. When you see a young child glued to TikTok and WhatsApp you should be very careful...About Rogo’s sermons circulate easily on TikTok. And you know the TikTok algorithm is very precise. If you watch just one video it will bring very many similar videos to you... I know of parents who have found videos of beheadings and gang attacks on their phones after use by their children. If these children are consuming such content at that age, what do you think goes through their minds as they grow older?”¹⁰⁴

Events at the national and international levels have a strong influence on the VE context in Mombasa. The handling of Paul Mackenzie by the State over the Shakahola massacre especially when juxtaposed against the handling of radical extremists like Rogo and Makaburi emerged as a contentious issue. A group of young people raised the following concerns:

You have seen how the Government has handled Mackenzie. Is he not being charged with using religion to achieve bad goals? How many people have died because they were following his teachings and sermons? Very many. Yet he was allowed to go through the legal processes. We are told he even refused to take food in jail...He was even allowed bail. Now compare that with how the State handled Makaburi and Rogo...I am not defending their actions. They were truly bad people...But why is it that the Government treats Christian criminals different from Muslim criminals? You guys deal with policy and legal stuff...Doesn’t the law say we are all equal? But are we really equal when some of us are allowed to go through due processes while others are assassinated? And you know the funny thing? Makaburi was killed outside Shanzu Law Courts. What does that tell you?”¹⁰⁵

The conflict between Israel and Palestine and the associated geopolitical alliances also emerged as a contentious issue. Respondents had the following to say:

“I know your programme is funded by the Americans but just allow me to say this...You see the war in Gaza. Israel is killing children and innocent people with support from [President Joe] Biden and the UK... I saw on telly the other day that the Americans were giving billions of dollars to Israel to continue killing Muslim children in Palestine. Where is the UN (United Nations) and US (United States) when all this is happening? If it were a Muslim country bombing a non-Muslim country at rate at which Israel, is I am sure the US would have sent the Navy Seals already. Isn’t that what they did to Gaddafi here in Libya?”¹⁰⁶

Geopolitics is an intriguing phenomenon. Crises like the conflicts between Palestine and Israel or Ukraine and Russia are complex world events. The nuances that emerge from these events have a way of informing and shaping people’s perception.

2. Community Perceptions of National and County Government PCVE Interventions

The presence of GoK on PCVE interventions in Mombasa is prominent. Most PCVE actors have interacted with the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) on at least one occasion. The National

¹⁰³ Interview with youth FGD

¹⁰⁴ Reflections from a State actor during a PCVE workshop

¹⁰⁵ Interview with male FGD

¹⁰⁶ Interview from youth FGD

Government Administration Officers (NGAO) play a significant role in operationalising W-o-G and W-o-S. approaches.

CBO leaders told us that:

“The chiefs, Deputy County Commissioner and Assistant County Commissioner are active in PCVE activities. They always attend our meetings and are involved in many of our events. There was a time when we didn’t relate like this...But after the MCAP was launched we have grown closer with the National Government.”¹⁰⁷

This has fostered a spirit of collaboration among State actors, CBOs and religious leaders which has proved vital in tackling VE. As one CBO leader noted:

“*Sehemu kama Majengo mida za 2014 zilikuwa moto wa kuotea mbali* (Places like Majengo in 2014 were no-go zones. *Ilikuwa ukionekana ukitoka kule umebanduliwa kwa Subaru* (If you were seen emerging from there, you’d be picked by security officers and put in a Subaru). *Ila siku hizi Majengo kumetulia hata Masjid Musa hapana jambo* (These days Majengo is peaceful even *Masjid Musa* does not have issues). *Maimam na machifu na CBOs wamekuwa na shughuli za kuhamasisha jamii na kuleta amani na uwiano baina ya Serikali na jamii* (Imams, chiefs and CBOs have held joint events to sensitise the community on peace and cohesion). *Imesaidia sana* (This has really helped).¹⁰⁸

The National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) has been consistent in running campaigns against drugs and substance abuse as well as collaborating with security officers to arrest those responsible.¹⁰⁹ In addition, GoK programmes have been instrumental in the economic empowerment of many residents thereby building their resilience against VE. For example, the *Kazi Mtaani* programme provided a steady source of income for many young people before its discontinuation.¹¹⁰

A State actor reflected on the impact of The *Vijana Vuka na Afya* (Young People Cross with Health) (VIVA) programme.

“VIVA has been instrumental in equipping young people in Mombasa’s informal settlements with pertinent sexual reproductive health service, life skills and employment opportunities. More than 100 youth leaders have been trained on leadership skills and awarded vocational vouchers for short term trainings. We are partnering with institutions of higher learning like the University of Nairobi and Pwani University. Some have started their own businesses and employed their peers.”¹¹¹

State actors also touted the commitment of the National Government to economically empower young people in Mombasa.

“The National Government is planning to roll out the NYOTA (National Youth Opportunities Towards Advancement) programme which will focus on enhancing employability of our young people through skilling, entrepreneurship development, financing and promoting a culture of saving to de-risk their livelihoods...This will take over from the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP). The Government of Kenya is committed to uplifting our youth because they are the leaders of tomorrow.”¹¹²

However, these programmes are bedevilled by a number of challenges. Young people mentioned that their wages were delayed on a number of occasions perpetuating their vulnerability.

“We showed up to work daily for the *Kazi Mtaani* programme but didn’t get paid as promised. System in *ile ya kazi kwa vijana, pesa kwa wazee* (Work to the young people, money to the old).”¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Interview with CBO leaders

¹⁰⁸ Interview with a CBO leader

¹⁰⁹ Reflections from a PCVE reflection workshop for State actors

¹¹⁰ Interview with a male CBO leader

¹¹¹ Reflections from a PCVE reflection workshop for State actors

¹¹² *ibid*

¹¹³ Interview with FGD

Moreover, the Kazi Mtaani programme was mired with allegations of discrimination in the selection of participants. “*Ikiwa huku pigia mtu fulani kura hutapewa kazi hata uwe na stakabadhi zote* (If you didn’t vote for certain people, you wouldn’t get the opportunity even if you had all the necessary documents).¹¹⁴ The Kazi Mtaani programme has since been replaced by a tree-planting exercise programme apparently as a means to initiate long-term resilience to drought and food insecurity.¹¹⁵

A study by CHRIPS on KYEOP and the National Youth Service (NYS) programmes found that although not explicitly stated, there was always a policy inference that economic opportunities and jobs would potentially steer the youth away from vulnerability to crime and violence.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the NYS programme contributed to crime reduction since many of the people who would have been lured to crime were actively economically engaged.¹¹⁷

How GoK handles returnees remains a controversial topic. A State actor reiterated that: “Returnees must be reported to security officials. However, you find most CSOs engaging with returnees in one form or another in their course of their activities and do not inform us.”¹¹⁸

A participant mentioned that:

“The Government still uses hard security approaches with returnees. We have the numbers of forceful disappearances. How does the Government expect me to volunteer information when this is how they are dealing with this subject? This is why the *simanya* (I don’t know) syndrome will continue.”¹¹⁹

Many participants lamented that the County Government of Mombasa has not been as active on PCVE matters as the National Government.

“The County Government is missing in action on PCVE matters. At least the National Government can be seen as doing something. But this County Administration seems to have deprioritised PCVE.”¹²⁰

This is worrying since the Governor is the co-chair of the CEF. However, County officials opined that MCG is indeed active on PCVE matters. County actors referenced the Mombasa *ni Yangu* (Mombasa is Mine) programme as being a key initiative to meaningfully engage young people in Mombasa.

“It has really helped Mombasa youth and led to reduction in crime. In the first cohort we had 1,500 casuals and trained them as life savers, beach cleaners, and traffic patrols. We assigned casuals to various departments including fire, environment and transport. All one needed to qualify was an identification card for biodata purposes. among many others. There were less *vipanga* cases since the young people were tired by the time they got home. *Mombasa Ni Yangu* is currently in its fifth cohort.”¹²¹

County officials further highlighted another initiative designed to tackle VE:

“MCG launched a pilot programme named *Ugaidi Noma* (Terrorism is bad) in Mvita, Kisauni and Likoni sub counties which had high VE cases. The programme was domiciled in primary and secondary schools and had the following thematic areas – violent extremism and radicalisation, peace and security, juvenile groups, drugs and substance abuse, and career development and selection. The

¹¹⁴ *ibidi*

¹¹⁵ State House (2022). ‘President Ruto: Kazi Mtaani to Be Converted to Tree Planting Programme,’ 11 November, <https://www.president.go.ke/president-ruto-kazi-mtaani-to-be-converted-to-tree-planting-programme/>

¹¹⁶ Ruteere, M., and Mutahi, P (2021). *NYS Cohorts Programme: Emerging Insights and Lessons*. Research Note. Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies: Nairobi

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

¹¹⁸ Interview with a State Actor

¹¹⁹ Reflections from a PCVE workshop

¹²⁰ *ibid*

¹²¹ Reflections from PCVE Reflection Workshop for State Actors

programme is due to officially kick off next year.”¹²²

MCG plans to expand its PCVE mainstreaming measures to the County Inspectorate and Beach Management Unit (BMU).

“County Inspectorate officers are the County’s foot soldiers enforcing by-laws at the grassroots levels. MCG had a training of trainers (ToTs) for County Inspectorate officers in 2021 that proved helpful. USAID *Sauti* should consider reviving this. BMUs are critical in the beach management especially in complementing the work of other authorities like the Kenya Forest Service and Coast Guard. The fisherfolk interact with a lot of people from different parts. Equipping them with PCVE knowledge will go a long way in mainstreaming PCVE in the Blue Economy in Mombasa.”¹²³

State actors proposed for partnerships between MCG and various agencies such as NACADA, the National Counter Terrosim Centre (NCTC), Amani Clubs and the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC). One of them noted that, “I had not heard about some of these programmes until today. We need to communicate the successes of these programmes. We should come up with a monitoring and reporting mechanism to allow stakeholders to keep track of all the progress made towards tackling VE.”¹²⁴

3. Community Perceptions of PCVE Programming

There have been various PCVE programmes implemented in Mombasa with varying results. Wasafiri Consulting and Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) was prominently mentioned. The Mwanaisha Foundation in Kisauni was mentioned as doing exemplary work to support children with disabilities. The Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK) was highlighted for implementing a programme on peace, mental health and mentorship. Akilimali Associates was noted for programming around mental health.

These programmes have had varied results.

“Many CBOs compete among themselves for PCVE funding. There is no unity or collaboration. Everyone is trying to bring the other down.”¹²⁵

These sentiments were corroborated by CBO leaders who affirmed that:

“Funding for PCVE work in Mombasa has drastically declined. Most donors are now keen on funding climate change. Therefore, most CBOs gatekeep the meagre PCVE resources they get.”¹²⁶

In addition, community members felt that many of the PCVE programmes fell short of expectations. One member remarked:

“You people design programmes in boardrooms in Nairobi. You don’t live here. Yet you bring a beautifully worded programme and just expect it to work. It can’t happen. You must first come and understand the needs of this community.”¹²⁷

Furthermore, community-based organisations (CBOs) painted a picture of elitism in PCVE programming.

“Most donors talk a lot about localisation but many of them are truly genuine about it. Small CBOs like us rarely get any PCVE funding despite applying multiple times. The resources usually go to well established CSOs creating a group of elite actors who gatekeep PCVE resources. Donors say they want an organisation with proper systems, policies and audited accounts. These things need money and

¹²² *ibid*

¹²³ *ibid*

¹²⁴ *ibid*

¹²⁵ Interview with youth FGD

¹²⁶ Interview with CBO leaders

¹²⁷ *ibid*

capacity. However, they won't fund small organisations like ours. So how do we ever get to that level?"¹²⁸

Indeed, local CBOs are more proximate to the community and have a better understanding of their needs and solutions. Young people are the prime targets for recruitment and radicalisation. It is no wonder most PCVE interventions are tailored to them. It was therefore worrying to learn that young people in Mombasa do not feel meaningfully involved in PCVE efforts.

"Kwa hizi programmes sisi vijana tunahusishwa lakini hatushirikishwi (In these programmes we are called to participate but not to implement).¹²⁹

This reinforces the perception tokenistic inclusion of young people in programming. It also emerged that despite psychosocial support (PSS) being integral to building resilience against VE it remains underfunded in Mombasa. A respondent noted,

"There are very few PSS practitioners in Mombasa. This is worrying because we have many among us who bear VE-related trauma. This could be because someone close to you was a victim of extremism either directly or indirectly. And VE-related trauma doesn't exist in a vacuum. You have other issues such as stress from high costs of living, climate change and a tense political environment. If these issues are left unresolved, they will find expression through various forms of violence such as gender-based violence, political violence, criminal gang-violence and climate-induced violence."¹³⁰

In the grand scheme of things, all these forms of violence aid opportunistic for VEOs who manipulate existing conflict for terrorism. That notwithstanding, PSS practitioners don't have people who can support them for debriefs.

"Waswahili wanasema mwerevu hajinyoi (*The Swahili say a smart person does not shave themselves*). We too need competent professionals to offer to us the very services we offer to others. These people are called supervisors. We don't have supervisors here. It's only a matter of time before we burnout too.

Women PCVE practitioners painted a picture of systemic discrimination within the sector.

"We are far from true gender inclusion. Many times, we are called just for optics. The opinions of many women leaders in PCVE are rarely considered despite our years of experience and results."¹³¹

Inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) still remains a challenge for PCVE programmes.

"Bado hamtuoni (You still don't see us). PCVE programmes only call us here as an afterthought. Look around, how many PWDs can you see in here? Do you see my point?"¹³²

4. Role of Family in PCVE

Family unit is an integral pillar in strengthening community resilience to VE. As one participant noted, *"Hakuna aliyetoka mitini* (No one fell from a tree). *Mtu ni watu* (A person is people)."¹³³

Parents are the first safeguard against radicalisation and recruitment as they can influence, detect early signs of radicalisation and guide their children.¹³⁴

"Mambo yamebadilika (Things have changed). *Siku hizi utapata familia mbalmbalii kama zile za mzazi mmoja na zile ambazo zinaongozwa na mtoto* (These days there are single-parent families and child-headed families)."¹³⁵

¹²⁸ ibid

¹²⁹ Reflections of youths from a PCVE workshop

¹³⁰ Reflections for PSS practitioners

¹³¹ Interview with women CBO leaders.

¹³² Reflections from a PWD

¹³³ Interview with women FGD

¹³⁴ Interview with a female CBO leader

¹³⁵ ibid

The family structure has evolved and PCVE programmes must be alive to this reality. “Mombasa has many VE-induced widows who carry and pass on trauma to their children. Unresolved killings and forceful disappearances could easily be used by extremists to incite their families into VE on the pretext of vengeance thereby perpetuating a vicious cycle of violence.”¹³⁶

Childcare duties fall largely on women, who must juggle these responsibilities alongside other societal duties such as daily work and schooling. This places a burden on women who are often stretched thin. In families where fathers are absent—either physically or emotionally—children often miss out on the emotional, psychological, and social support that a father figure can provide. “These children, especially the sons, will look for a father figure to fill this void. That’s how extremists take advantage of them recruit them to their terrorist groups.”¹³⁷ This void can also be filled by criminal gangs and negative peer pressure.

Lessons Learned

- i. Sports as medium for peace and reconciliation
Sports serve as a powerful tool for bringing people together to rally for a common cause, reducing tension, and fostering talent development. For example, soccer matches between youth community groups and security officers go a long way in building bridges and networks thereby catalysing a spirit of openness and collaboration. Additionally, they provide an opportunity for talent development which goes a long way in building a critical mass of positive role models especially for young people. This should be cascaded to other avenues and platforms to provide safe spaces for young boys and girls, men and women.
- ii. Alternative and Counternarratives
Extremists manipulate religious texts and take advantage of existing conflict to propagate divisive narratives designed to evoke violence. PCVE stakeholders should push back. Religious leaders are best placed to offer counternarratives since they enjoy legitimacy from the community. Moreover, other stakeholders can use platforms such as social media to disseminate alternative narratives rallying for peace, cohesion and tolerance.
- iii. Mainstream PCVE into various spheres
VE affects everyone and therefore stakeholders should integrate this into all aspects of societal life. This can be done through Amani Clubs, music and drama festivals, and debate clubs in schools and institutions of higher learning. Moreover, it is vital to integrate PCVE into health and religious institutions. Socialising PCVE will go a long way in building resilience to VE.
- iv. Leverage local assets for sustainability and maximum impact
Donor funding is constrained by time and scope. It is thus important for PCVE programming to invest in strengthening the capacities of proximate assets. This encompasses being deliberate in meaningfully engaging local CBOs, community and religious leaders. This should go beyond having them as participants in activities. It should involve leveraging on their experience as points of contact and community experts. Additionally, development partners should promote the consortium model in their funding mechanisms to foster synergy and unity among CSOs.
- v. Invest more in Psychosocial Support to build resilience to VE
Psychosocial support is vital to building resilience against VE. PCVE stakeholders should invest more resources into empowering PSS practitioners. Building a critical mass of local PSS practitioners goes a long way in addressing drivers to VE. This should involve debrief sessions and access to supervisors for PSS practitioners.

¹³⁶ Interview with PSS practitioners

¹³⁷ Interview with PSS practitioners.

Conclusion

Violent extremism is a complex, multi-faceted and affects the entire society. Its dynamic and ever-evolving nature calls for more multi-sectoral and sustainable strategies. Building and strengthening community resilience against violent extremism is a continuous, life-long process that requires dedicated contribution from everyone, in every sector. Effectively addressing violent extremism calls for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that leverages on the strengths and diversity of all Kenyans, development partners and the international community.

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