

# HORN OF AFRICA BULLETIN

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## Between co-option and autonomy: Grassroots CVE initiatives as the alternative?

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The Horn of Africa Bulletin is a regional policy periodical, monitoring and analysing key peace and security issues in the Horn with a view to inform and provide alternative analysis on on-going debates and generate policy dialogue around matters of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. The material published in HAB represents a variety of sources and does not necessarily express the views of the LPI.

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## About Life & Peace Institute

Since its formation, LPI has carried out programmes for conflict transformation in a variety of countries, conducted research, and produced numerous publications on nonviolent conflict transformation and the role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding. The main focus of our work has been on Africa, with the Horn of Africa Programme being established and well-known in the 1990s, not least our work in Somalia. Other initiatives have been carried out in Congo-Brazzaville, Croatia, Sri Lanka and East Timor. We have strengthened the capacity of our civil society partners to address the conflicts in their own context, in some of the most difficult and war-torn countries.

Currently, we run conflict transformation programmes in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions in partnership with local civil society organisations and universities in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and the DRC. There is also a common programme including publications, policy work and methodology design based in Sweden.

This issue of the Horn of Africa Bulletin (HAB) follows from the January-February 2016 issue of the HAB that also focused on countering violent extremism (CVE). In contrast to the emphasis of the earlier issue which concentrated on CVE policies and strategies in the Horn of Africa (Horn), this issue of the HAB focuses on grassroots, community led CVE initiatives. This issue of the HAB also converges with programmatic focus of LPI programmes both regionally and at the country level in terms of understanding CVE initiatives as they are implemented and assessing their impact.

A striking similarity between the previous HAB issue and the current issue are the elements of continuity reflected in the author's emphasis on the contested nature of CVE both as concept and practice. It is increasingly clear that in spite of the proliferation of CVE strategies and programmatic interventions globally and in the Horn, much of the evidentiary basis animating CVE practice is inconclusive at best. It is also evident that evaluation of CVE initiatives in the region is still a critical area that deserves urgent attention.

The four articles in this issue of the HAB reflect the contentions and gaps mentioned above. Most existing CVE initiatives in the Horn are concentrated in Kenya and Somalia. CVE initiatives currently are mostly initiated and driven by civil society actors and/or states, with very few actually qualifying as grassroots, community-led initiatives.

The article by Mr. Sharmarke Farah on Somalia is an interesting and original analysis of CVE initiatives and their current gaps and strengths in Somalia. Farah's article also reveals the vacuity of conventional CVE discourse and practice, especially when he shows how actors and groups who were once classified as 'violent extremists' can change and become important assets in the struggle against 'violent extremism'. The article also suggests a range of critical recommendations in the sphere of CVE practice which could be helpful for CVE practitioners not only in Somalia but also the rest of the Horn.

The article by Dr. Abiy Ahmed is a very interesting and analytical take on an organic, community-led response in the wake of the 2006 inter-religious conflict in Jimma, Ethiopia. The article explains the sequence of events and dynamics that led to the conflict and how religious leaders took the lead in de-escalating the conflict and created a platform, the Religious Forum for Peace, which has played an appreciable role in restoring amicable relations between different religious communities in Jimma. The author points to the potential of grassroots initiatives in conflict transformation and underlines the importance of such initiatives not being co-opted by outside interests if they are to retain their effectiveness. The Religious Forum for Peace is not a CVE initiative in the strict sense of the term, but it suggests the possibility for alternative conceptualizations and practices in the CVE realm.

The third article is a review article of a study produced by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Africa (IJR) in collaboration with Georgetown University and in collaboration with the Kenya Programme of the Life & Peace Institute. The study titled, 'Community Perceptions of Violent Extremism in Kenya' was reviewed by Ms. Flavie Bertouille. The review of the study emphasises the paucity of evidence and research on key aspects of 'violent extremism' and points to the study as a welcome step in the right direction. The review article is an excellent synthesis of the key takeaways from the study. It highlights for instance the challenges in defining CVE and also points to the very important issue of how communities understand and experience the effects of 'violent extremism'. The review article points to the gaps that exist between local understandings and the conventional wisdom regarding the

realities and impact of violent extremism, and warns that this could and would affect CVE programming. The author also points to the difficulty in developing a comprehensive and analytical model that would explain the workings of the supposed drivers of 'violent extremism'. The review essay is a useful summary and introduction to the IJR study.

The final article by Mr. Femi Ayat focuses on the theoretical and practical challenges that beset CVE. The author is critical of CVE theory and practice and argues that there are profound dangers for civil-society actors in being associated with policies and programs whose boundaries with counter-insurgency or counter terrorism are blurred at best or non-existent.

Demessie Fantaye, Editor

SOMALIA

## CVE Strategy in Somalia: the importance of context, coordination and ownership

By Sharmarke Farah

Violent extremism is at the top of the global agenda today. In 2017, the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Donald Trump, made his first foreign trip to Saudi Arabia. On 21<sup>st</sup> May 2017, the President Trump met leaders from more than 50 nations at the Arab Islamic American Summit to discuss ways to cooperate against the threat of global terrorism and violent extremism. During the visit, the Global Counter Extremism Centre was inaugurated in Riyadh.<sup>[1]</sup>

Since the 9/11 attacks, various Counter Violence Extremism (CVE) related initiatives have been undertaken at both global and national level. The earliest practical CVE strategy was the United Kingdom's *Prevent* programme<sup>[2]</sup>, while the 2016 "UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism" is the most comprehensive global initiative. Regionally, in the Horn of Africa, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has also formulated a CVE strategy for the region and a Centre of Excellence. Within the Horn of Africa, Somalia, given its unique and intractable political and security challenges, is expected to have a special focus and context specific CVE strategy.

As the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), with the support of its international partners, moves towards developing and implementing a comprehensive CVE strategy and program, it is imperative to review the context for a successful strategy and outcome. While there is a dearth of robust outcome studies to identify which interventions are most effective at preventing violent extremism, there is sufficient empirical evidence to start learning and understanding about the effective practices in general activities and how specific interventions can be useful in targeted groups and areas. The purpose of this article is to review the context and key actors, highlight the opportunities for effective CVE in Somalia, and given the delicate nature of the subject, avoid the pitfalls.

### Historical Context

In as much as violent extremism is a global and regional issue, particularly in the Horn, its specific context and history in Somalia is extremely essential if it is to be understood, and hopefully addressed by, policy makers and practitioners. This is more so because time and events have changed the perceptions and alliances of different groups with respect to violent extremism.

Somalia is almost 100% Sunni Muslim, which before the civil war has for centuries followed the Ash'ariyah version, Shafi'i jurisprudence, and Sufism.<sup>[3]</sup> With the collapse of the state in 1991, Salafi groups led by the Saudi supported Al-Itihad Al-Islamiyah became very active in the politics, economic, justice and social sectors in Somalia.<sup>[4]</sup> In the '90s, Al-Itihad attempted and failed to maintain control over territories they had seized including Bosaso and Luq. Following the unsuccessful attempts at direct political

activism, Al-Itihad focused on business, justice and social sector (particularly education). In Mogadishu and its surrounding areas, which at the time was under feuding warlords, in a bid to counter lawlessness, the group and its affiliates meted out justice through various independent clan-based Islamic (Sharia) Courts.[5]

Following the formation and sudden advance of the Islamic Courts Union in Southern and Central Somalia in 2006, Al-Shabab, an offshoot group that is related to, but technically autonomous of, the broad-based Courts movement, made their formal emergence. The group's first two leaders stated that their distinct ideology was formed in the early 1990s as a result of Al-Itihad's capitulation and lack of conviction in pursuing unrelenting Jihad—Al-Shabab leaders viewed the Al-Itihad establishment as individuals who had abandoned their convictions and were immersed in concerns such as business, education, family.[6]

Disagreement between the two groups over the call for "Jihad" simmered for years. Until 2010, the Al-Itihad establishment was loath to openly criticise the actions of Al-Shabab. At around the same time, Al-Itihad's name was replaced by Al-Itisam. Before 2011, it was impossible to openly discuss CVE or criticise extremist groups in much of Somalia. Even in areas under government control, authorities were unable to apprehend or detain extremists known to have perpetrated acts of violence because of overwhelming clan, religious and public support.[7] That all changed at the end of 2011 with the killing of a prominent Sheikh in Bosaso.[8] The gradual, and at times sudden, loss of fear and public support was not the result of CVE initiatives or external influence. It was the inadvertent outcome of extremists' groups actions. Extremists moved beyond attacking government officials and soldiers. The infighting between extremists, the killing of prominent Salafi Sheikhs who disagreed with them, and the indiscriminate bombings of civilians in markets and other public places gradually led to the contraction of support for extremists. Moreover, areas and clans that have once sheltered extremist groups have been severely affected by them - when clans reverse their alliance from militants towards the authorities, either because their previous grievances have been resolved or they do not like the policies of the extremists, they face the most ferocious retaliation which in turn intensified the clans' revulsion against extremists.

Following the emergence of Shabaab, the veteran Al-Itihad members, went into reflection. The founders of the group begun to effectively counter the extremist narratives by revoking their fatwas. Sheikh Abdulkadir Nur Farah, one of the key spiritual leaders of Al-Itihad, had not only turned against the senseless violence but also lamented the turn of events and partly blamed themselves for the violent extremism. Because his words carried a great deal of influence and cost the extremists substantial support, the Sheikh was killed whilst praying at a mosque near his home in 2013.[9] This act only further entrenched the opposition to, and alienation from the Al-Shabab, as well as the resolve to counter them by religious groups and the larger public.

At its height, in 2007, Al-Shabab could rely on significant local support from many who saw the Ethiopian incursion as a Christian crusade into a Muslim country and who were outraged at reports of alleged atrocities.[10] The effect of the group's propaganda and



its public support has waned considerably overtime. The eroding support for their ideology of violence and bloodshed is reflected in social media, where compared to a decade ago, there is now little or no gloating over violent attacks perpetrated by extremists on social media.

### **Effective CVE programming**

The design of a CVE strategy must take in to account the above historical and local context for effective and tailored programming. There should be two sets of CVE activities: broad and specific; each addressing the pull and push factors of radicalisation. The first, specific activities, should be target high risk groups, active militants and former combatants. This should only be addressed by specific religious groups. The second, broader set of activities, should be aimed at raising the confidence in the public vis-à-vis the authorities as well as reducing the conditions that foster violent extremist groups. This includes activities such as good governance and socio-economic development—a role more suited to government, civil society and their international partners.

### **Examples of key distinct activities**

#### **Government and Civil Society led activities**

- Economic and livelihood
- State building (local government)
- Youth employment
- Women engagement and awareness
- Justice and the rule of law
- Culture, sports and arts
- Human rights
- Media

#### **Religious groups led activities**

- Mosque related activities
- Reintegration of former combatants
- Specific and high-risk groups
- University students
- Quranic teachers
- Special forums and conventions
- Dialogue with militant groups

Somalis are inherently opposed to a foreign driven agenda. There is a deep distrust of international support, particularly Western support and NGOs, even if it is humanitarian.<sup>[11]</sup> Given this propensity, rivals accuse each other of being foreign agents because it resonates and wins debates. For instance, despite the de facto and pragmatic status of the ‘federal’ system that was adopted by the Somali government, the most effective criticism by its opponents is the fact its origins have international influence and support.<sup>[12]</sup> No topic is more sensitive and off limits to foreigners, particularly the West, than that of religion in Somalia. Religious interference would exasperate suspicions of foreign agenda and would attest to Quranic warnings. This fact should be taken into consideration when initiating CVE efforts including determining an apt Somali reference for CVE itself.

Most of the social norms advanced by Salafi groups, such as Al-Itisam, may not align with international values and norms, particularly in the area individual and groups rights. However, one area the mainstream Salafis and the international community have in common today is on CVE. As the purveyors of Salafi teaching in Somalia, they have

profound writ that extends to across the country and most of its populace. They are simply the most effective force against violence extremism. Only they have the required access and the ability to reach the most vulnerable and high-risk groups. These would include places such as mosques, universities, Quranic schools.

The bid is how to support those already engaged in countering violence without sully religious leaders' efforts with taints of external influence. The most well placed to coordinate with religious leaders is the Ministry of Religious Affairs. They should be linked with other major CVE centres and initiatives currently operating in Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE). The religious leaders' current efforts should be strengthened and extended to support the reintegration of former combatants. Several rehabilitation facilities for defectors and ex-combatants in Somalia have been marred by controversies including over the treatment of minors, the lack of transparency in camp administration and the Camp's rumoured role in intelligence gathering and counterterrorism operations.<sup>[13]</sup> The reported returning of juvenile militants to Shabaab after rehabilitation and the use of them by government security agencies as spies has caused both local and international outrage.<sup>[14]</sup> While defectors and combatants require comprehensive support, the best antidote for the ideology of violence is provided by the non-violent Salafi Sheikhs (this may include the very religious leaders who once advocated for violence but are now facing the full wrath of Shabaab for turning against violence).

The ultimate goal, should be overcoming the governance challenges Somalia faces. Holistic development of the kind the UN is pursuing under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will undoubtedly have a positive impact on CVE indicators. There are many indirect programmes that are conducive to the CVE objectives including good governance, economic growth (including youth employment), education, inequality, justice and rule of law and human rights. In fact, many seemingly livelihood and infrastructure projects have CVE objectives. Stabilization and development projects have significantly contributed to raising public confidence and the economic recovery of the country. Realisation of the plans detailed in the National Development Plan (NDP) and the New Partnership for Somalia (NPS) will make a significant impact on CVE.

Most CVE related projects in Somalia are in the form of stabilisation interventions. These are quick impact projects are focused on winning over local communities in newly recovered territories or areas of high risk.<sup>[15]</sup> The United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union and Norway fund stabilisation projects in south-central Somalia. Key stabilisation projects include the Somali Stability Fund (SSF), jointly funded by the UK, Denmark, the EU, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Arab Emirates. SSF primary focus is conflict resolution, employment creation, institution-building and governance projects in line with the government's stabilisation policy. The United States has its own stabilisation programmes in Somalia under USAID Transition Initiatives for Stabilization (TIS+), which aims to 'increase confidence in all levels of government through targeted, strategic interventions that improve service delivery and government responsiveness'. USAID also funds the Somalia Stabilization Initiatives (SSI) under to Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) to "promote stability and political transition, and



counter violent extremism, in Somalia”. Similarly, with UK Department for International Development (DfID) and EU funding, AMISOM also implements quick impact projects, including the construction of schools, health centres and police stations.[\[16\]](#)

In terms of media, the UN supports AMISOM with Somali language broadcaster, Radio Bar Kulan, in Somalia. The radio’s mission is to “counter the misinformation of violent obstructionist groups and political spoilers, while creating awareness about AMISOM, UN and peace building initiatives”.[\[17\]](#) Similarly, the US State Department’s Global Engagement Centre (GEC) has online presence and engages in Somali to counter extremist propaganda and misinformation.

Internal evaluations of the respective stabilisation projects show these programmes are having the desired effects, such as increase in public confidence in government.[\[18\]](#) However, the absence of coordinated, systematic and independent assessments of these stabilization projects makes it difficult to judge their impact and sustainability.[\[19\]](#) Government leadership and coordination would contribute the effectiveness and the attainment of the political goals of stabilisation projects.

### **Conclusion**

No country in Africa has been faced with the level of extremist violence that Somalia has been subject to since 2005. Violent extremism in Somalia is a national issue which can only be effectively countered by its citizens. Understanding and analysis of violent extremism through thorough research as well as the planning and development of strategies should be led by Somalis. If the message is seen as being countered by the very people whom it is against, i.e. if a western message, not only will it fail but it will be counter-productive.

Extremist are dependent on maintaining a steady follow of new recruits, not least because of their high attrition rate. Despite reports of forced conscription including children, the main source of recruitment is in education institutions, including Qur’anic schools and higher education, and mosques. CVE programs in Somalia should target the most at risk group as well as proponents and sympathisers of violent extremism. The most suited group and best conveyors of the counter-narrative messages are the very group that once led them and turned against violence. Their efforts should be encouraged through government’s Ministry of Religious Affairs and the linkages with CVE initiatives in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Donor funded stabilisation and development projects aligned with CVE are very important, at least in the short term. A more effective and durable outcome will require better coordination, ownership and leadership by the government. A comprehensive and rigorous studies of CVE related projects is needed for effective future programming and policies.

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## Countering Violent Extremism through Social Capital: Anecdote from Jimma, Ethiopia

By Abiy Ahmed

### Abstract

The idea underpinning Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is that violence should not be dealt exclusively with reactive means. Instead, structural causes of extremism such as intolerance, social marginalisation, and economic inequality must all be tackled to prevent transnational violence, regional instability and community tensions.[1] The CVE framework discussed in this paper focuses on the role of social capital in augmenting community resilience derived from people's interactions in Jimma[2], Southwestern Ethiopia. It explains the nexus between social capital and conflict, and examines the roles of social capital and grassroots community dialogue in Jimma during the inter-religious conflicts that erupted since 2006 and continued through 2011.[3] In addition to the damage to property, the violence led to a marked erosion of the social capital fabric of the society as manifested in the erosion of cultural practices such as common greetings, exchanging of household commodities and observing each other's religious holidays. There was a deterioration of social capital that intensified until respected Muslim and Christian religious figures got involved to rebuild a peaceful co-existence between these communities. The establishment of the Religious Forum for Peace in 2011, as an outcome of longtime friendship between these religious figures was the epitome of the survival of the inter-religious social capital in Jimma. This Forum is now making unreserved efforts in promoting cultural practices and other social activities to promote positive interactions between followers of Islam and Christianity and thereby promoting peace and security in Jimma and Ethiopia at large.

### Alternative CVE mechanisms: Social capital in perspective

Customarily, the state has the obligation and primary responsibility to prevent and combat terrorism, and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, countering violent extremism (CVE) is likely to be most effective when characterized by a partnership approach involving law enforcement, intelligence agencies, other statutory organizations, and community-based non-governmental organizations with grassroots credibility.[4]

In recent years the traditional constituents of capital namely, natural, physical, and human have been conceptually broadened to include social capital.[5] This is a result of the realization that any country's development trajectory depends on social capital although other forms of capital remain crucial ingredients of economic growth.[6] Even though the concept of social capital varies, it refers to the networks (real-world links between groups or individuals) together with shared norms (society's unspoken and largely unquestioned rules), values (such as respect for people's safety and security) and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.[7] The origin of organised violence rooted in religious differences is traceable to the coming of

Christianity to Ethiopia in the 4th century when state-backed Orthodox Christianity was pitted against traditional beliefs, and later on against the Jewish and Muslim faiths.[8] In most cases however Muslims and Christians lived in harmony for centuries.

### **CVE from the bottom up - the experience of Jimma**

The relations between Muslims and Christians in Jimma have traditionally been amicable, a situation reflected in the joint social undertakings of the communities including Iddir (traditional burial association), Iqub (traditional saving association) and wedding ceremonies. Members of both communities also have traditions of helping one another in various farming activities which extend from plowing to harvesting. This practice is locally known as “*debo*”. A local conflict resolution practice known as “*jarsummaa*” also involved elderly Muslim and Christian personalities working together. Moreover, members of both communities used to have mutual celebrations of religious holidays. For instance, during the annual Christian holiday of “*buhe*” in August, Christian and Muslim teenagers and youths used to go around villages chanting songs of “*hoya hoye*” and receiving gifts in the form of home-made, special bread and money. A striking feature of the inter-religious harmony between the two communities was reflected in the fact that during the Buhe holidays, the participation of Muslim youth in the festivities outnumbered/eclipsed that of the Christian youth. During the Ramadan fast period Muslims who serve meals to others as part of a religious observance (i.e., *Sedoqa*) included Christians in the preparation of food. Neighbouring Christians were also invited to the feasts by Muslims. All in all, these were the expressions of rich social capital in and around Jimma.

Religious conflicts in Jimma area in recent times have been the results of changes in the politico-religious landscape of the post 1991 Ethiopia and Islamic reform movements after the end of the Cold War in different corners of the world including the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. In this regard, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a major actor in the game, began promoting the doctrines of Islam Wahhabism and Salafism. The change in the role of Islam in the Horn of Africa is also associated with regime change in Sudan in 1989. In a nutshell, these regional and national developments over time all played a role in the shift in Muslim-Christian relations in Ethiopia.

The incident that triggered large-scale violence and destruction in Jimma occurred on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, 2006. On the eve of *Meskel* celebration, (an Orthodox Christian holiday commemorating the finding of the true cross), disagreements arose between Muslims and Christians. The disagreement originated over a dispute concerning the site of the Demera bonfire (a core part of the Mesqel holidays) which Muslims wanted to change as it was situated too close to a Mosque. Yet the demands of the Muslims were not met refused by the Christians. In an attempt to resolve the simmering tension through a traditional way, elders of the area began deliberating on the possible ways out of the potential for a deadlier confrontation. Unfortunately, a stone thrown in the direction of the seated Christian elders hit a Christian elder on the head. His son returning from fieldwork looked at his father’s wound and picked his gun and went to the mosque before beginning to shoot indiscriminately at Muslims coming out of the

mosque after completing their Ramadan prayers. Four people were killed and five wounded. This incident escalated and the Muslims retaliated by burning churches and indiscriminately killed Christians. Several attempts had been made to contain the violence and enable people get back to normal life. The first of the attempts was the deployment of security forces to halt the violence but not permanently. Escalations continued on and off until 2011 and the animosity intensified until it was high time to devise a sustainable resolution.

The need for someone to step in and assume the responsibility of spearheading the way forward was dire. It was at this time that *Kesis Tagay*<sup>[9]</sup> (an Orthodox Christian priest) and *Sheikh Abdulhamid* (a Muslim) decided to use their long-time friendship to help restore harmony in the area. They exerted influence to establish a traditional conflict resolution institution, i.e. the Religious Forum for Peace (The Forum) which successfully addressed several incidents that otherwise might have led to wider conflicts. Firstly, the fact that the conflict was a religious one in itself provided the individuals, who were religious leaders themselves, with the prerogative to frame their initiatives in religious terms. Secondly, their luck in assuming the leading role in the resolution attempts was coupled with their ability to draw in prominent figures in the process. This is actually the use of what scholars such as Nahapiet and Ghoshal refer to as “the structural dimension of social capital”.<sup>[10]</sup> Coleman, underlines that the merit of this dimension is its ability to empower individuals and this is a quintessential description of the nature of the Forum as an outcome of social capital.<sup>[11]</sup>

Once the founders saw the initial successes of the forum, their hope to see it grow into a more organised entity was immense. The founders of the Forum desired not only the blessing of the administration which they felt was necessary for the continuation of the operation of the Forum, but also an acknowledgement of the efforts and objectives from the political authorities. In this context, it is critical to point out that the emergence of the Forum occurred in a context defined by the Ethiopian government’s wider engagement in countering violent extremism. A case in point being the Oromia regional administration which itself had carried out various interventions. Among other initiatives, the celebration of ‘coffee day’ at a regional level is exemplary.

Once the social and religious value of coffee making/drinking celebration was acclaimed on the occasion of the public reconciliation, the Gomma woreda administration had decided to observe the day annually in the area. The decision also maintained that the one-day celebration would be held at the time of the year when coffee is harvested. The practice was then adopted by neighbouring Woreda administrations. Finally, the regional administration of Oromia took the initiative to make it a region-wide occasion on the ground that it would serve not only as a conflict resolution mechanism but also as a socio-cultural tool for promoting communication among members of the communities.

As the Forum becomes popular it has extended its mandate gradually evolving onto an institution of dispute settlement. In so doing, it cooperates with the local government justice institutions. Most of the cases that the Forum dealt with were brought to it by parties in disagreement even before they were dealt with by the formal legal institutions.



Many individuals prefer to bring their cases to the Forum rather than to the formal legal institutions. This is because religious leaders working under the umbrella of the Forum have been able to provide agreeable solutions to disputants in over six hundred cases out of the total seven hundred cases brought to them. According to an informant, the cases ranged from petty thefts to disagreements over farmland demarcations, to inheritance and marriage disputes.

The single most important area of focus has been the work on the attitude of community members. Members of the Forum particularly seemed convinced that working on the attitudes of the youth would be beneficial. One of the platforms is the provision of training schemes around inter-religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. The training sessions are largely interactive where the participants exchanged opinions, and elders and religious leaders shared their religious and cultural wisdom with the youth in various sessions of the training. Undoubtedly, the significance of promoting close cooperation between followers of both religions is enormous. A member of the forum, for instance, mentioned that Christians are now exercising their worship rights more freely than ever. This is attributed to the fact that in the post-conflict period the Forum has been successful in ensuring Orthodox Christians acquired religious sites for their annual epiphany/baptism celebrations in a different area; and Protestant Christians have also been able to get access to land for graveyards. These were privileges hard to come by for both groups in the past as Jimma is a Muslim majority area.

Generally, the Forum evidences its benefits to members of the communities in two ways. Firstly, it tries to address the concerns of each community from the religious conflict point of view. Secondly, it is an actualization of a collective dream, i.e., the dream of creating a peaceful society with the engagement of all actors. The involvement of individuals, governmental and non-governmental entities attests to the recognition the Forum has earned in the society. Above all, it is in its ability to address the concern of the communities and resilience to employ its resources that it substantiates its vitality.

## **Conclusion**

Ethiopia has been the earliest home to the Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. For centuries, the royal class has embraced Christianity as the official religion and set the ground for inter-religious rivalry. The inter-religious violence in Jimma since 2006 has born witness to that fact. It was only in the post 1991 period and the 1995 constitution that formally granted freedom of religion and formally enshrined the equality between all religious faiths. When the first large-scale violence erupted in Jimma, the result was a tumultuous breakdown of social capital that had been built over centuries. While the damage the conflict caused to inter-religious social capital was immense, there were some remnants of it that survived and led to the birth of the most instrumental conflict resolution entity: The Religious Forum for Peace which was established in 2011 with the purpose of promoting inter-religious interactions. The Forum pursues a strategy of enhancing community resilience through social capital through improved social connections and social networks. The scope of CVE should acknowledge and include such bottom-up CVE interventions beyond interventions by governments and

development organizations. To maintain their credibility in the eyes of local communities grassroots CVE interventions should carve out an autonomous space. Support to these interventions should be construed with the spirit of partnership, not co-option.

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[1] Frazer, Owen and Christian Nünlist. *The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism*. CSS Analyses in Security Policy, 2015.

[2] Jimma is one of the Zones in Oromia National Regional State, Ethiopia

[3] This article is based on the Ph.D dissertation by the author titled “*Social Capital and its Role in Traditional Conflict Resolution: The Case of Inter-religious Conflict in Jimma Zone of the Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia*” completed in 2017 at Addis Ababa University. The data is derived from field research using Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions.

[4] White, Stephen & Kieran Mcevoy. “*Countering Violent Extremism: Community Engagement Programs In Europe*”. Phase Ii: Volume I. Qatar International Academy for Security Studies, 2012.

[5] Colletta, N. J. and Cullen, M. L. *Violent Conflict and the Transformation of Social Capital: Lessons from Cambodia, Rwanda, Guatemala, and Somalia*. Washington D.C.: IBRD/World Bank, 2000.

[6] Popova, Z.I. “*The Role of Social Capital for Post-Ethnic-Conflict Reconstruction.*” PhD diss. Submitted to University of Bath, 2009.

[7] Adler, P. S. and Kwon, S. *Social Capital: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. Modified Version of a Paper Presented at the 1999 Academy of Management Meeting, Chicago, IL. 1999. See also, Keeley, B. *Human Capital: How What You Know Shapes Your Life*. Paris: Organisations for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007.

[8] Tamrat, T. *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527*. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972.

[9] *Kesis Tagay, who played a leading role in the foundation of the Religious Forum for Peace had an extraordinary role at the crucial moment during the conflict. He threw himself under the truck that was carrying the corpses of the Christians victims of the conflict. The truck was driving through the town as a planned event, which would have*

surely provoked retaliatory Christian violence.

[10] Nahapiet, M., and Ghoshal, S. 'Social Capital, Intellectual Capital, and the Organizational Advantage', *Academy of Management Review*, 23/2:242-66. (1998). See also,

[11] Coleman, James S. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990.



## Review article: Community Perceptions of Violent Extremism in Kenya

By Flavie Bertouille

**Review article: Buchanan-Clarke S., Humphrey A., Villa-Vicencio C., 2016, *Community Perceptions of Violent Extremism in Kenya*, Occasional Paper 21, Justice and Reconciliation in Africa, Institute for Justice and Reconciliation [\[i\]](#)**

The “*lack of definitional consensus [on violent extremism] often stems from a scarcity of empirical evidence on the assumed root causes and drivers of violent extremism*”.

Indeed, locally-informed empirical research on violent extremism remains thin, although violent extremism is increasingly put as a priority on the decision-makers’ agenda at the national, regional and international levels, and has become a focus of peacebuilding programming in the Horn of Africa under the emerging Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) approach.

This gap was emphasised by the authors of the research report *Community Perceptions of Violent Extremism in Kenya*, the product of a three-month study led by researchers from the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Georgetown University, in consultation with the Life & Peace Institute. The study aimed to inform CVE approaches in Kenya and promote context-sensitive CVE programming in the country, by documenting local perceptions of violent extremism and echoing rarely considered grassroots voices.

The following article provides a summary of the research findings and assessment of its contribution to academic, programmatic and policy conversations on violent extremism in Kenya.

### Research Scope

*Community Perceptions of Violent Extremism in Kenya* articulates key insights on the way diverse communities from urban Kenya understand and experience violent extremism. Local communities from four locations were targeted by the research, namely Majengo and Eastleigh in Nairobi, Garissa Township, and Majengo in Mombasa. All locations were selected based on the criterion that they are all *affected* by violent extremism. Specifically, these areas have allegedly been used as recruitment pools by armed groups labelled as extremist, in particular al-Shabab, and consequently targeted by governmental and civil society CVE initiatives.

Based on data collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews, the report sheds light on local communities’ perceptions on four aspects, namely how the term violent extremism is understood locally; insecurity; local drivers of violent extremism; and dynamics of recruitment by groups like al-Shabab. The report is divided along these aspects.

Although this study is not unusual in terms of its purpose and methodology[\[iii\]](#), it is

significant as it relies on field research and primary data. The analysis of perceptions was contextualised to the four research locations at the time of data collection, thereby allowing comparisons between differently affected locales. This inherent effort of contextualisation throughout the research also prevented it from drawing any generalising conclusion, which would have contradicted the essential study purpose. Indeed, the report demonstrates that the dynamics of violent extremism differ by community, and even among individuals within the same community. Thus, any generalised theory of violent extremism would likely be unfounded.

### **CVE Terminology: A Fundamental Challenge**

*“There exists no universally accepted definition of violent extremism”* (p.4), thus begins the report’s terminology section. Consistently with most studies on violent extremism, the research team emphasizes the lack of semantic consensus on violent extremism. However, instead of offering their own definition of the phenomenon, the authors summarise a myriad of definitions. They notably highlight the fact that *“some definitions emphasise a group’s ideological or religious objectives as foundations for violent extremism, while others place more focus on the particular tactics employed by a group.”* (p.4). This lack of consensus stresses the relativity of the concept of violent extremism and the fact that it *“inevitably means different things to different people”* (p.5), to the extent that some could argue *violent extremism* is devoid of meaning.

The implications of this lack of commonly shared definition are detrimental to any academic, policy or programmatic attempt to address violent extremism in a sensitive and effective manner. The emerging CVE field can be seen as a way to overcome this definitional challenge, by emphasizing a *“more comprehensive and contextualised”* understanding of violent extremism (p.5) and to forward measures to prevent violent extremism based on this more complete understanding. This disparate non-coercive set of measures addressing *“structural drivers (including push and pull factors) that fuel grievances and may entice individuals to support violent extremist groups”* (p.5) would constitute an adequate approach to address the root causes and drivers of violent extremism in a sustainable and context-sensitive manner. Yet, as the authors highlight, *“CVE initiatives in Kenya have almost exclusively focused on Muslim communities”*, thus suggesting an inherent bias and persistent reductionist prism.

### **Violent Extremism: A Snapshot of Local Understandings**

When asking respondents about their understanding of *violent extremism*, the research team realised that this concept, increasingly used in policy-making and Western media, cannot be literally translated in Kiswahili or Somali languages. This illustrates the lack of a *“common understanding [...] within and between the communities interviewed”* (p.6). Interestingly, respondents’ definitions reflected their daily experiences of insecurity and *“immediate security concerns regardless of the actor involved or their motive for violence”* (p.6). In a mainstreamed effort to nuance and contextualise the research findings, the authors provide multiple examples of understandings per location, with respondents from Garissa including *“violence perpetrated as a result of conflict*

*between sub-clans in their definitions of violent extremism”* (p.9) and respondents from Eastleigh differentiating *“between violent extremist actors and local gangs not by ideology, as is common in civil society and academic circles, but by the weapons they use.”* (p.9)

This zooming in on communities’ understanding of violent extremism in diverse communities has implications for CVE initiatives. Findings reveal that communities at the grassroots level understand violent extremism based on their primary security concerns, and do not perceive armed extremist groups’ actions as mainly driven by ideology. This implies an incompatibility between local perceptions and more “conventional” definitions of violent extremism disseminated by higher-level arena (policymakers, media, donors or implementing civil society organisations (CSOs)). This incompatibility may lead to ineffective top-down or non-locally-owned bottom-up initiatives aimed to address the communities’ security challenges.

### **Lived Experiences of Insecurity**

Consistent with the findings mentioned above, the authors re-place violent extremism in a broader *“complex web of drivers of insecurity”* perceived as *“mutually influencing and/or reinforcing”* (p.ix). Interestingly, respondents rarely identified al-Shabab as their main source of insecurity. Instead, the security sector, street gangs and other forms of criminality were identified as key insecurity drivers. Regarding the former (the role of the security actors), *“police harassment, corruption and extortion [...] alleged cases of forced disappearances and extra-judicial killings by security forces.”* (p.10) were reported by respondents across locations, in particular in Nairobi, as a main source of insecurity.

These findings therefore question the dominant narratives and the increasing focus on violent extremism among policy-makers, donors and CSOs. Violent extremism should be analysed along with other obstacles to peace and security in Kenya and the Greater Horn at large. Concealing and overlooking - intentionally or not - other, more localised sources of insecurity will prevent progress towards a sustainable peace and stability in the region.

While the report identifies the mentioned phenomena as *drivers* or *sources* of insecurity, it seems to be critical to acknowledge these dynamics are also *symptoms* of socio-economic and political marginalisation of these areas. The following findings focus on the drivers of violent extremism and start elucidating perceived linkages between insecurity root causes, drivers and symptoms.

### **Perceived Violent Extremism Drivers**

This section maps drivers that trigger, escalate or sustain *“the emergence and spread of violent extremism in Kenya”* by referring to *“the alignment of various structural, socio-cultural and individual ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors”*, a commonly used analytical framework. Push factors are defined as *“the structural and socio-political conditions which favour the rise and spread of armed extremist groups, and those sometimes used by these*



groups to create propaganda narratives”. Pull factors have “a more direct influence on the individual and are associated with the personal rewards an individual may gain through membership in an extremist group”. In order to distinguish further these factors, the authors consider the push and pull factors according to three analytical levels, at the structural/macro level (push factors), meso level and micro level (pull factors). Cross-cutting dynamics and dynamics that are specific to one or more areas are explored.

At the structural/macro level, respondents perceived socio-economic marginalisation as pushing individuals to join armed groups. This entails unemployment and poverty - particularly affecting the youth across locations; underdevelopment - in particular in Majengo, Mombasa and Garissa; and an entrenched sense of alienation. Harassment, extortion and extrajudicial killings by security forces were also seen as a structural factor driving individuals to join al-Shabab, as they nurture a sense of injustice and desire for revenge. While it is not specified in this section, this last cluster of drivers echoes the previously mentioned systemic nature of insecurity, with police brutality and harassment seen both as one of the main direct insecurity sources and as a driver of violent extremism.

At the meso and micro levels, eroding family structures; financial compensation; quest for status and sense of belonging; coercion; and religious messaging (“by offering the individual a sense of empowerment, duty and potential reward”, p.20) were perceived as pull factors. Interestingly, only a few respondents, mostly in Mombasa, identified religious messaging as a driver of VE. They insisted on the need to distance their religion from being associated with non-state armed groups labelled as extremist, and affirmed that al-Shabab’s references to religion are opportunistic and their interpretations fallacious. This purposeful detachment was interpreted by the research team as a reactive attitude to the increasing profiling of Muslim Kenyans as sympathetic to extremism.

Despite an increasing available literature on the drivers of violent extremism, one of the main methodological challenges of the study seems to be the articulation of these factors in a nuanced enough way to inform specific programming. While this multi-factorial analysis provides insights into local perceptions of what drives violent extremism, the push and pull framework remains restrictive. This typology is indeed increasingly questioned: one, push and pull factors tend to overlap making any distinction effort superficial; two, this framework does not help understand why individuals, experiencing similar socio-economic and insecurity issues, do *not* join armed groups labelled as extremist.<sup>[iii]</sup> To strategically inform relevant CVE programming, and peacebuilding programming, other typologies can be applied. A typology developed by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), for instance, focuses on structural motivators (e.g. social marginalisation), individual incentives (e.g. financial compensation) and enabling factors (e.g. eroding family structures).<sup>[iv]</sup>

### **Perceived Recruitment Strategies**

With the aim to understand further the recruitment processes, local perceptions of recruitment strategies, deployed in particular by al-Shabab, were collected across the research collections. False promises (*“promises of a better, more rewarding life”*, p.22) and coercive misguidance were identified by the respondents across all research locations as a leading recruitment tool employed by armed groups labelled as extremist. Respondents also mentioned the rhetoric used by the recruiting groups who capitalise on identity-based feelings of humiliation and oppression (*“the exploitation of corruption in state and society; the incitement of religious or ethnic sentiments and feelings or marginalisation”*, p.22).

Consistently with previous findings, only a few respondents, in particular from Garissa and Mombasa, cited the role of extremist religious discourse as a recruitment strategy. Diverse underground channels used to circulate extreme ideas were identified, including social networks and person-to-person discussions. Respondents insisted on the fact open discussions on al-Shabab are increasingly rare, with communities fearing to be associated with them.

### **“So what?” Conclusions from a Peacebuilding Perspective**

This research builds on and strengthens the evidentiary basis informing CVE programming and policy, thus contributing to sharpening existing knowledge on a highly sensitive and complex phenomenon. While violent extremism is not exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief, this research’s findings suggest that a systematic, locally-owned, context-sensitive and multi-sectoral approach is necessary to effectively address the complex web of drivers and diverse recruitment strategies that lead individuals to join armed groups labelled as extremist.

This research underlines the importance of conceptualizing violent extremism within a broader peacebuilding and human security framework. The gap between dominant narratives, seeing violent extremism as the most pressing issue, and local perceptions of violent extremism, seeing it as one among other security concerns, implies that violent extremism will not be sustainably addressed without tackling communities’ broader security concerns.

While violent extremism is primarily experienced at the individual and local levels, it remains a transnational phenomenon. A comparative analysis of local perceptions of violent extremism in the Greater Horn region would inform CVE approaches further and would contribute to promoting sensitive and effective initiatives at the regional level.

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[i] Accessible [online](#)

[ii] See Shetret L., Schwartz M. and Cotter D., 2013, *Mapping Perceptions of Violent Extremism. Pilot Study of Community Attitudes in Kenya and Somaliland*. Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation. Accessible [online](#).

[iii] Search for Common Ground, 2017, *Transforming Violent Extremism. A Peacebuilders' Guide*. Accessible [online](#).

[iv] Ris L. and Ernstorfer A., March 2017, *Borrowing a Wheel*, Briefing Paper, p.13. Accessible [online](#).



## Ambiguities of CVE Theory & Practice

By Femi Ayat

### Context

Over the past two decades, so-called 'violent extremism' is supposed to have assumed an expanding presence and emerged as a critical threat to states and societies in the Horn. In Somalia, the armed forces of Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and other states are engaged in supporting the Somali Federal Government in its conflict with the Harakat Al-Shabab Mujahideen or Al-Shabab in short. The Al-Shabab in addition to its frequent military attacks in Somalia, has also mounted successive attacks targeting civilians not only in Somalia but also in Kenya which have led to extensive casualties, and also attempted to do so in Ethiopia. The Al-Shabab while the most newsworthy is only the latest incarnation of a number of movements that have emerged over the past two decades and utilized many of the same tactics. What makes the situation in the Horn even more critical is that prevailing socio-economic and political conditions supposedly provide many of the structural pre-conditions for violent extremist movements (Rotberg 2005: 3-5).

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is not only an emerging and topical policy agenda and sphere of programmatic interventions, but also a vast and complex research agenda for academia, civil society and government agencies. CVE programmatic interventions are garnering momentum, support and resources across the world, a state of affairs also reflected in the Horn of Africa (Horn).

CVE emerged as a distinct policy agenda and approach in the context of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). A number of important signposts in this process can be pinpointed. The CVE summit chaired by the then president of the United States, Barack Obama, in February 2015, and held at the White House and attended by officials from nearly seventy countries, was a key event. The White House summit was followed by a high-level United Nations meeting in September 2015 involving government representatives, civil society and business. In February 2016, the United Nations Secretary General presented a plan of action to prevent violent extremism to the UN General Assembly. However, CVE as a policy agenda and CVE policies and programs have antecedents such as the British government's Prevent program, which has undergone several iterations since it was first unveiled in 2003. Prevent is widely understood to be one of the first examples of CVE strategies.

The US government, the European Union and Global CT Forum (GCTF), a group of twenty-nine countries have funded CVE programs with the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and bilaterally with IGAD member states. The EU has its program 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism' in the Horn of Africa (STRIVE), which focuses on capacity building and civil society engagement in Somalia and Kenya. International organizations including USAID, DFID are also actively engaged in CVE-related projects in the Horn. The IGAD has also formulated a regional strategy for

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) and also established an IGAD Center of Excellence for P/CVE. Currently only one member state of the IGAD, Kenya has formulated a national CVE strategy.[1] Several civil-society organizations are also implementing CVE projects and programs in the Horn.

This article does not seek to describe or analyse CVE practice at the state or civil-society level. The focus is to problematize certain aspects of CVE theory and practice and in the process draw conclusions regarding the implications of the expanding focus on CVE in the Horn.

### **Definitional ambiguities**

A key aspect of the theoretical lacunae in relation to CVE is the difficulty in defining CVE and its remit. A common solution is the attempt to define the concept negatively i.e. by what it is not. CVE is often distinguished from Counter Terrorism (CT) and/or Counter Insurgency (COIN) with CVE being understood as encompassing softer approaches. CVE practice emphasizes a focus on root causes such as socio-economic deprivation as a way to tackle both the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors driving ‘violent extremism’. Many critics believe that in practice the lines between CVE, CT and COIN are often blurred. Nonetheless this barely addresses the problem as some of the foundational terms associated with CVE are also contested, a key instance being the concept of ‘violent extremism’.[2]

The tendency on the part of some actors to invariably conflate Islamist extremism or radicalism with terrorism is also fraught with problems. It can and has led many Muslim communities in the West, the Middle East and the Horn to perceive the GWOT as a thinly veiled attack against Islam. As Githens-Mazer (Ibid: 560) so aptly puts it, ‘the contemporary security discourse of radicalization represents the translation of a perception of social risk from Islamically inspired terrorism into the concrete focus of a policy agenda’. A glaring anomaly in this regard is the implicit association of ‘violent extremism’ and therefore the referent/object of CVE with Islamist violence, whilst other forms of violence such as those deployed by militants subscribing to other religious ideologies are not tagged with the ‘violent extremism’ label.

Another puzzling issue is the lack of consensus over the precise relationship between ‘radicalisation’ and violent extremism.[3] Some also doubt the validity of identifying indicators that reflect growing radicalisation and the possibility of establishing a typical profile of a violent extremist.[4] What this suggests is that the repertoire of tools and methodologies associated with CVE and even the theories of change (TOCs) may be less effective and plausible than many think.

### **Lacunae in researching Violent Extremism**

The literature on CVE is vast and expanding at an exponential rate. However this literature is characterised by several limitations such as; limited repertoire of research methodologies, minimal reliance on field research and primary data, focus on certain regions and countries and the dominance by scholars from Western Europe and North

America.[5]

### **‘Voluntarily induced cognitive dissonance’**

Luttwak coined the phrase ‘voluntarily induced cognitive dissonance’ to refer to a widespread tendency in media, government and civil society to avoid engaging the ideological underpinnings of movements such as the Al-Shabab.[6] Luttwak and critics see this as emerging from an expansive sense of political correctness and the hegemony of epistemic-cultural relativism. In a related vein Cottee also argues that what he conceptualizes as the three dominant paradigms in CVE thinking; the ‘terrorism as pathology’, ‘terrorism as political resistance’ and the ‘infantilization of terrorism’, all share the same implicit refusal to engage the ideological-political justifications of violent extremist movements.[7]

The motivations behind avoiding engaging with the ideological foundations of violent extremism may be understandable in terms of avoiding the stigmatization of communities and belief systems; something that is all the more pressing especially at the current moment where Islamophobia in some circles has almost become normalized.

While laudable, this refusal to explore the ideological-political underpinnings of some forms of ‘violent extremism’ comes at a cost. It has led to a situation where the discussion and analysis of the impact of certain strands of extremist Salafi-Wahabi thought on insurgent movements in the Middle East and the Horn has become almost taboo. Analysts and actors in the CVE realm have wilfully and consciously chosen to ignore and side-line what potentially could be a key factor behind the rise and resilience of these movements.[8] The usual defence offered for this is the flawed argument that the religious polemics utilized by movements such as Al-Shabab, Al-Qaeda and Da’esh are ‘wrong’ or ‘distorted’, begging the particularly relevant questions in this context; whether there is a single correct interpretation of religious texts, and who decides which interpretation is authoritative?[9]

As mentioned earlier CVE practice emphasizes a focus on root causes, but this emphasis is accompanied by excluding the role of ideology as if an emphasis on root causes necessarily excludes ideology. This exclusion also leads to contradictory and curious situations because it also by definition excludes some of the tools in the CVE repertoire such as counter-messaging and intra-religious dialogues. The desire to shy away from the issue of ideology has also affected CVE programming itself in that CVE programs and projects in several countries of the Horn avoid the term ‘extremism’ and instead utilize terms such as ‘resilience’, ‘livelihoods’ etc.

### **De-politicizing what is inherently political?**

The refusal to confront the ideological component of movements tagged as ‘violent extremists’ coupled with the emphasis on root causes has the effect of avoiding the inherently political nature of the challenge posed by these movements. Discounting the ideological aspect either leads one to regard these movements and their supporters as either ‘deluded’ or ‘psychologically impaired’ and leads to avoiding key issues such as



political power and socio-economic relations which should be the crux. The focus on root causes intentionally or otherwise reduces political conflict and violence which may be rooted in structural inequalities to the technical issues of vocational skills training, education, employment etc. The paradox here is that the de-politicization of what are by definition political issues inevitably postpones raising questions about, and, doing something to tackle the structural foundations of socio-political conflict. CVE discourse also suffers from the drawback of ideologically interpreting and deploying terms such as political violence and terrorism. And of course, the term, terrorism has always been instrumentally deployed by governments to delegitimize political opponents and challenges to the status-quo, a phenomenon that also exists in the Horn.

### **Reinventing the Wheel: CVE and COIN complementary or distinct?**

As alluded to earlier, the consensus has been to draw a distinction between CVE on the one hand, and CT or COIN on the other. In fact, CVE has been commended for its emphasis on socio-economic drivers, re-education and dialogue instead of the legal-military centric emphasis of CT/COIN. But the distinction is a fuzzy one at best, not least because actors engaged in CVE realize and accept the reality that their activities complement the policies and actions of states and their agencies in confronting the threat posed by insurgents, defined as ‘violent extremists’. Actors in the CVE realm are also disingenuously ignoring history in choosing to forget that COIN strategies and tactics since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have always pushed for a holistic approach in combatting insurgencies combining military-police actions with tokenistic socio-economic initiatives. But what is also perplexing here is the role and positionality of civil-society. Civil-society actors by engaging in CVE programs and projects risk imperilling their neutrality and impartiality by partnering with governments to participate in (if one is absolutely honest) in state driven COIN policies. The ethical questions posed by such a partnership are vexing and should be a matter of debate and reflexivity.

### **CVE Competing with Development & Peace-building?**

There is growing concern amongst civil society organizations engaged in the spheres of development and peace-building at the growing priority assigned to CVE and the concern that it could lead to a diversion of resources to projects and programs working on CVE. The evidence for this concern is inconclusive. Several studies have argued that a key impediment facing current CVE efforts is the lack of funding.<sup>[10]</sup> However many studies also suggest that donor approaches are increasingly shifting to a perspective that sees investing in security and stability i.e. CVE, as tantamount to investing in poverty reduction and development. What this has led to in some cases and contexts is the diversion of funding and resources to fund CVE projects and programs.<sup>[11]</sup> This has led to a situation where mainstream development and peace-building interventions are increasingly facing a crunch and civil-society actors have been forced to rebrand their proposed or actual interventions as CVE actions. CVE in terms of its emphasis on structural variables such as poverty etc. can easily be instrumentalized to draw away resources from other spheres. It is also a testament to the increasingly precarious erosion of civil-society neutrality and impartiality due to their probably inevitable

entanglement in the CVE sphere.

## Conclusion

The earlier very schematic overview of the gaps in CVE theory and practice raises several questions and also points to areas where actions may need to be taken. The central and most pressing issue is the necessity for civil-society actors to engage in deep debate and reflection on the question of engaging in CVE and the modalities of this engagement. Civil-society actors who choose to engage in CVE should also seek to ensure that their engagement does not converge with state driven and led COIN strategies. The research agenda on CVE is also critical and behoves the greater involvement of researchers not only drawn from the Global South but also adhering to different perspectives. As discussed earlier some of the political cum ideological taboos that still constrain analysis and actions in the CVE realm should be questioned. Finally, research on CVE and the assessment of the impact of CVE interventions should be a top priority. Currently, CVE programs and projects are mostly confined to Somalia and Kenya in the Horn, so research and impact assessment on actually existing CVE programs could also inform future CVE programs in the other countries of the Horn.

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[1]

<http://www.mfa.go.ke/president-kenyatta-launches-strategy-counterering-violent-extremism/>.

[2] (USAID 2011) defines violent extremism as, ‘...advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives.’ The government of the UK defines it as, ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of

law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’, while the government of the Netherlands deploys the terms ‘violent extremism’ and ‘violent jihadism’ interchangeably. Schomerus, M. & El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, S. with Sandhar, J. 2017. *Countering violent extremism (Topic Guide)*. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham). Pg. 7.

[3] See for instance, McCauley, Clark & Moskalenko. 2008. ‘Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism’ in *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Vol:20, Issue No. 3.

[4] Patel, Faiza & Koushik, Meghan. 2017. ‘Countering Violent Extremism’. Brennan Centre for Justice at New York University School of Law. Pgs. 9-13. See also, Nabulsi, Karma. 18, May, 2017. ‘Don’t Go to the Doctor’ in *the London Review of Books*. Vol. 39:

No. 10. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n10/karma-nabulsi/dont-go-to-the-doctor>.

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## Resources

### Community perceptions of violent extremism in Kenya

This report is based on a collaboration between the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town, Georgetown University in Washington DC, in consultation with the Life & Peace Institute. The research sought to give preference to local voices that, to date, are under-represented in extremism research, and contributes to further the evidence base around the need for more inclusive peacebuilding and human security frameworks in the Horn of Africa.