

Rebuilding Wajir County's Resilience to Violent Extremism

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About this Workshop Note

This Workshop Note discusses recent developments, challenges, and opportunities in countering violent extremism (CVE) work and counterterrorism (CT) in Wajir County. It incorporates insights and perspectives of practitioners and researchers in Wajir County, who participated in an experts' meeting convened by the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS) and Wajir Peace and Development Agency (WPDA) held on 31 August 2020. It also features data and analysis on violent extremism, which has been generated by the [CVE HUB](#).

Synthesis of workshop proceedings

Violent extremism has had a profound impact in Wajir County. The community faces insecurity from terrorists and recruiters as well as from heavy-handed responses of security agencies. The exodus of experts such as doctors, teachers, Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs) and civil servants as a result of insecurity is among the major socio-economic impacts that continue to deepen inequalities in the county.

The county now has in place the Wajir County Action Plan (WCAP) to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism 2018-2023, which offers interventions that are localised and specific to the local realities and capacities. The WCAP was developed in line with the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE), which sets out national priorities and interventions to prevent and address violent extremism. The WCAP is guided by twelve pillars: psychosocial, educational, political, security,

faith-based and ideological, training and capacity building, arts and culture, legal and policy, media and online, women, access to justice, and the rule of law. The latter three of which are additional to the nine pillars of the NSCVE.

CVE efforts have however not sufficiently taken root in the county due to a number of challenges. Responding to the fast and constantly evolving threat of Violent Extremism (VE) in Wajir county requires appreciation of resilience practices that emphasize community adaptation and collective action. Resilience is the ability of a community, people, state, or region to adopt new processes, norms, and strategies for conducting their lives and new societal relationships in response to a violent shock or uptick in aggression and brutality in order to prevent, mitigate, or recover from violence.¹ This approach appreciates and prioritises the core capacities and successful strategies undertaken by the community to enable the county to tailor implementation of the WCAP to the strengths and abilities of the community.

¹Van Metre, L. (2016) 'Community resilience to violent extremism in Kenya', Peaceworks No.22, United States Institute for Peace, p.8

While Wajir has had a resurgence in terror attacks from 2019,² earlier reports showed that the number of attacks were on a consistent decline.³ Part of the core competences and capacities that enabled Wajir County to remain resilient to terror attacks and activity include the existence of strong community peace structures and efforts, which prevented Al Shabaab proselytizers and recruiters from swiftly embedding in the county.⁴ Women membership and leadership was also critical to the success of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee and other early peacebuilding efforts since 1990s.⁵ The county government also established a directorate for peace and cohesion that works closely with traditional elders (the al-Fatah Council of Elders) that in turn works closely with the office of the county commissioner. This gives a voice to civic and traditional groups normally not usually considered in formal government affairs in other parts of the country.⁶ However, these efforts largely tapered off and the peace structures remain dormant and inactive.

The WCAP, while it captures the context of VE in the County, has not sufficiently captured the core competences and previous successful strategies that can be embraced to strengthen and localise the CVE approach. Despite being developed through a multi-stakeholder process, CVE practitioners in the county also argue that the WCAP lacks community ownership due to

limited participation of the public and non-state actors in its development. Implementation of the strategy has also been affected by challenges of low public awareness and understanding, poor capacity and coordination by practitioners, and inadequate funding and facilitation. Further, CVE efforts are affected by the heavy-handed security response, which have generated public outcry in the past due to excessive use of lethal force, collective punishment, enforced disappearances, and unlawful killings. Qualitative studies show a relationship between heavy-handed counterterrorism operations by security forces and the radicalization of the minority Muslim population in Kenya.⁷

Workshop Recommendations

1. Ensure inclusivity and public participation in developing and implementing CVE policies

Diversifying the actors will enable comprehensive policy and practice that not only has community buy in and ownership but also articulates the needs and realities of the population. It further incorporates public education and awareness that allow community members to increase their own capacities, partner, and devise their own local solutions to CVE challenges in the county.

²Ramadhan, R. and Mungai, M. (2019) Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, January 2019- December 2019, Report No. 3. 2020, Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies.

³Kimari, B. and Ramadhan, R. (2017) Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, January-November 2017, Report No. 1. 2017, Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies;

Mungai, M. (2019) Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, December 2017-December 2018, Report No. 1. 2019, Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies;

⁴Chome, N. (2016) Violent Extremism and Clan Dynamics in the Northeast Region of Kenya, Peaceworks, United States Institute of Peace, p. 19.

⁵Okumu, W. (2013) 'Trans-local peace building among pastoralist communities in Kenya: The case of Laikipia Peace Caravan', Culture, and Environment in Africa Series 3, Cologne African Studies Centre, p.19.

⁶Chome 2016, p.18

⁷Van Metre 2016, p.6

2. Prioritise security rather than securitisation of the community

Acquiring the community partnership necessary to detect and respond to the terrorist threat in the county requires residents to feel safe from reprisals and collective punishment from state agencies. Building on the NSCVE and WCAP, security agencies should focus on protecting the community from the terrorist threat including through differentiation from extremists and understanding community vulnerabilities to VE and insecurity. Security responses ought not to be reactionary but intelligence-led, responsible, and appreciating the need to build legitimacy, credibility, and trust.

3. Leverage community peace structures for P/CVE

The community peace structures in Wajir County are a core competence that are not only useful for early warning and response to violence but would also play a key role in educating and mobilizing the public to be involved in CVE interventions. State and non-state actors should collaborate to support and build the financial and resource capacity of the peace structures being careful to ensure ethnic, clan, age, and gender diversity and considerations in their membership, leadership, and actions.

4. Implement CVE policies and programmes based on strong evidence-basis

The CVE approach in the county needs to be based on the evidence-basis and understandings of local dynamics and realities as spelled out in the WCAP. These need to speak to the root causes of VE specific to Wajir and be informed by data. They need to be complemented by monitoring and evaluation efforts to measure impact, learn, and adapt their interventions to changing realities.

6. County leadership in implementing the WCAP

The Wajir county government through the directorate for peace and cohesion should, in collaboration with development actors as well as civil society and community actors, offer material assistance and leadership necessary to oversee implementation of the WCAP. This will also foster coordination and collaboration in CVE practice. County leaders should also ensure non-bias in implementation of the WCAP and engage regularly with the communities, responding to their specific vulnerabilities and threats.

Acknowledgment

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⁸Organisation and conduct of this joint workshop was in accordance to Kenyan Government COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines. The half-day forum was attended by a limited number of participants observing social distance. To increase participation, organizers also leveraged on technology to include virtual participation from different vital stakeholders

Other Publications on Violent Extremism



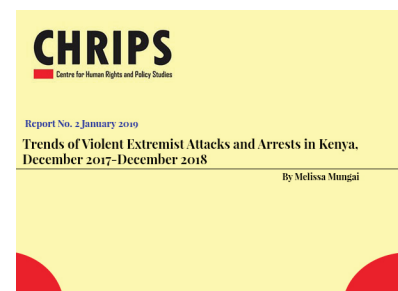
Confronting Violent Extremism in Kenya: Debates, Ideas and Challenges (CHRIPS, 2018)

This pioneering collection brings together critical analyses on a range of issues touching on violent extremism by a multidisciplinary team of scholars and scholar-practitioners with an intimate and long-standing interest on the subject in Kenya, the region and globally. They cover the breadth as well as depth of the complex problem of violent extremism in a manner and language that speaks to both scholars and policy makers.



Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, January 2019 – December 2019

This report draws from the Terror Attacks and Arrests Observatory of the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory). It presents the latest data collected and analysed from 1 January – 31 December 2019. CHRIPS uses verified traditional and new media reports as well as information from local partners to generate the most comprehensive database on terror-related occurrences in Kenya.



Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, December 2017 – December 2018

The data and analysis in this report draws from the Terror Attacks and Arrests Observatory of the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS). It presents the latest data collected and analysed from media reports on terror attacks between 1 December 2017 and 31 December 2018.



Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, January-November 2017

The data and analysis in this report draws from the terror attacks and Arrests Observatory of the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS). It presents and analyses the latest data, collected from media reports, on terror attacks and arrests between January 1, 2017 and November 30, 2017. Data on terror-related attacks will be regularly updated on the observatory and reports published periodically.



A policy Content Evaluation of Kenya's National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism

This policy brief evaluates the content of Kenya's National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE), which was launched in September 2016. It assesses the NSCVE's goals and objectives; its relationship to existing counterterrorism legislation; its evidence base and performance measurement framework; the given institutional and implementation arrangements; the policy implementation context; the role of counties; and security challenges and implementation. It offers a set of recommendations which could inform future policy review and updating.



Preventing Violent Extremism in Kenya: Policy Options

This policy brief discusses some of the drivers of violent extremism in Kenya, and the available policy opportunities that Kenyan and regional policymakers should consider to effectively address the problem of violent extremism.

About CHRIPS

The Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS) is a leading international African research centre based in Kenya that conducts high quality policy relevant research on human rights, security, terrorism and counter-terrorism, violence, crime and

policing. CHRIPS actively engages academics, policy makers and other key stakeholders in the generation and dissemination of new knowledge that facilitates the development of innovative and effective policy solutions to the pertinent security challenges in Africa.



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