

Engaging Kwale County youth in PCVE

Workshop Note No. 4

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About this Workshop Note

This note draws from discussions and recommendations of a workshop held on 18th July 2024 reflecting on the impacts of research, policy, and programming responses to violent extremism in Kwale County. Convened by the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS) under the USAID Sauti Yako, Amani Yako programme, the workshop brought together various stakeholders. These include the National Government, County Government representatives, community and religious leaders, kaya elders, County Engagement Forum (CEF) representatives, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), women leaders, youths, academics, and People with Disability (PWD) representatives. This workshop note focuses on youth involvement in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in Kwale County, identifying barriers to their engagement, and suggesting evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice. It is tailored to development actors at both state and non-state levels who have a focus on youth empowerment and P/CVE including designers, policy makers, donors, and practitioners including youth-serving organisations and other actors working to influence change.

Synopsis of the Discussion

Participants noted that Kwale County has been significantly affected by various forms of violent extremism. The region has grappled with challenges posed by separatist movements, such as the Mombasa Republican Council,¹ and the infiltration of extremist ideologies akin to those promoted by *Al-Shabaab* and other violent groups that tap into underlying social and economic disparities, including poverty, joblessness, and land grievances to recruit and radicalise youth. Instances of young

people disappearing, suspected to be linked to recruitment into extremist groups, have been reported in the County. Moreover, the forceful tactics employed by security agencies have contributed to the radicalisation, and form part of extremist narratives.²

Further compounding these issues is the presence of individuals suspected to have returned from Somalia or to be former members of the *Al-Shabaab* in the county. In 2017, police fatally shot Juma Mwamuraji, a suspected *Al-Shabaab* returnee in Kwale County. The operation, conducted based

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

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

on intelligence reports, led to the discovery of explosives in his home. Mwamuraji was under surveillance following his return from Somalia. The authorities intercepted him when he attempted to use a grenade against them, resulting in his death.³ In 2019, police also killed Mohamed Rashid Mwatsumiro alias Msanii, a suspected terrorist, in a shootout in Ng'ombeni, Matuga Sub-county. Msanii was linked to several killings in Mabokoni Village, Msambweni Sub-county, and was suspected of being a returnee.⁴ He was reportedly affiliated with Mahir Khalid Riziki, who was involved in the Dusit attack.

Kwale County, like other parts of Kenya, has struggled with the reintegration of returnees who often grapple with trauma and social stigma.⁵ The government's 2015 amnesty programme, intended to encourage the return of individuals involved in extremist activities, has faced challenges in gaining public trust. There were inadequacies in its design as communities did not take it seriously since it was not backed by a policy framework, gazette notice or legislation. Reports of violence against returnees and their families further undermined the programme's credibility, raising concerns about the government's ability to protect those who seek to reintegrate into society. This also eroded trust in the government's ability to ensure security and protect citizens. This loss of trust can make it difficult for the government to implement effective counter-

extremism programmes and build a sense of community safety.

Workshop participants indicated that *Al-Shabaab* remains a primary threat, referencing trends in radicalisation and recruitment of residents from Kwale. While a significant portion of the attendees believe the overall trend is decreasing, the persistent influence of extremist groups in certain areas, such as Bongwe-Gombato, Kibundani, Waa, and Ng'ombeni, underscores the ongoing challenge.⁶

The Kwale County Action Plan to Counter Violent Extremism (KCPCVE), launched in 2017⁷, outlines strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism (PCVE) through youth empowerment, education, and community engagement. The CAP notes the influence of extremist groups on young people as a significant challenge for addressing VE. Young people play a pivotal role in perpetuating and preventing violent extremism. A youth-centric approach is essential for effective PCVE interventions. During the conference, critical perspectives emerged on how to engage youth in different ways.

What emerges is that the lack of opportunities for personal and professional growth can contribute to feelings of hopelessness and resentment, making individuals susceptible to radicalisation.

3 Xinhua. (2017, February 27). Kenyan police kill suspected Al-Shabaab returnee in Mombasa. Retrieved from Xinhua: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-02/27/c_136086602.htm

4 Fredrick, F., & Ahmed, M. (2019, August 30). Shabaab suspect shot dead by police in Kwale. Retrieved from Nation: <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/kwale/shabaab-suspect-shot-dead-by-police-in-kwale-199008>

5 Pkalya, D. (2016) Reasons why the amnesty for 'reformed' alshabaab returnees is failing security in Kwale," The Standard, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/ureport/story/2000204575/reasons-why-the-amnesty-for-reformed-alshabaab-returnees-is-failing-security-in-kwale>).

6 International State Department (ISD). (2022). Baseline Evaluation Report for PROACT: Community-Based Interventions in Kenya Program. International State Department (ISD). Retrieved from https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PROACT_Evaluation_Report.pdf

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

Young people may feel alienated from mainstream society when they lack pathways to education, employment, and civic engagement. A valuable lesson is that this disengagement can create a vacuum that extremist ideologies can exploit.

Workshop participants acknowledged that some youth in Kwale County are actively involved in violent extremism. A complex interplay of factors, including peer pressure, personal grievances, and exposure to extremist narratives, contribute to their involvement. Peer pressure can be particularly influential during adolescence, as young people seek acceptance and belonging within social groups.⁸ In the context of Kwale, other factors, such as gang affiliations and ethnic tensions, can exacerbate peer pressure, making young people susceptible to radicalisation.⁹

What also emerged is that personal grievances, such as experiences of discrimination, injustice, or loss, can also motivate some youth to engage in violent extremism. The Kwale County's historical and ongoing land disputes and socioeconomic inequalities have created fertile ground for resentment and anger among some youth. These grievances, if left unaddressed, can be exploited by extremist groups.

Exposure to extremist ideologies through online platforms, social media, and other

media channels is a growing concern in Kwale County.¹⁰ The availability of smartphones and internet access has facilitated the spread of extremist propaganda, particularly among young people.

Barriers to Youth Engagement

The effectiveness of Preventative Counter-Violence Extremism (PCVE) programmes hinges on the active participation of youth in Kwale County. However, numerous challenges hinder their engagement.¹¹

1. Unemployment and lack of opportunities: Young people in Kwale County are disproportionately affected by the consequences of violent extremism. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities render them particularly vulnerable to recruitment and radicalisation.¹² The county's economic disparities, with significant portions of the youth population engaged in informal and low-wage work, create fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root. A report on youth radicalisation in Mombasa and Kwale Counties¹³ underlined the correlation between economic marginalisation and vulnerability to radical activities.

The allure of financial gain can be a powerful motivator for some young people. The promise of high salaries,

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

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

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

11 CHRIPS. (2024). Community-centered collaboration to prevent and counter violent extremism. CHRIPS. Retrieved from <https://chrips.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Policy-Brief-USAID-Sauti-National-Conference-1.pdf>

12 Omar, S. (2022, January 20). Majority of Kwale youth trapped in violent extremism—Elungata. Retrieved from The Star: <https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2022-01-20-majority-of-kwale-youth-trapped-in-violent-extremismelungata/>

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

often exaggerated in extremist propaganda, can be particularly enticing to those struggling with poverty and unemployment. For instance, reports of the *Al-Shabaab* offering young men money to join militant groups have emerged in Kwale County.¹⁴

2. **Lack of positive role Models:** The absence of positive role models significantly affects youth involvement in VE. A study in Kwale highlights the importance of positive role models in preventing youth involvement in crime and violence.¹⁵ These findings suggest that youth require guidance and support to navigate the challenges of adolescence and young adulthood. As workshop participants noted, positive role models provide young people with aspirations. They highlighted some examples of successful young individuals from the County who could be role models. Without access to such influences, young people may turn to negative peer groups or seek validation from extremist ideologies.¹⁶
3. **Tokenisation of youth:** Youth in the workshop felt they are often treated as passive beneficiaries rather than active participants in PCVE programmes, leading to disengagement and marginalisation. This tokenisation hinders their trust in PCVE programmes and their willingness to participate meaningfully. Programmes that actively include youth voices in planning and implementation will likely resonate with young people. It is essential to ensure that youth are meaningfully involved in all programme development and implementation stages, from needs assessment to evaluation.

4. **Communication gaps:** Effective counter-messaging in PCVE interventions is often hampered by language and communication barriers. Current efforts frequently fail to resonate with youth due to a disconnect between the messaging and the idioms of expression used by young people. A lack of contextual understanding of the unique dynamics present in urban and rural environments exacerbates this disconnect.
5. **Power imbalances:** Young participants claimed they often lack the power and resources to influence decision-making, which leads to marginalisation and disenfranchisement. The community should create platforms where young people's voices are heard and their concerns addressed, such as youth leadership development programmes and participatory decision-making processes.
6. **Lack of trust in security agencies:** Past experiences with government agencies and security forces can hinder trust and willingness to participate in PCVE programmes. Fear of retaliation from extremist groups can also discourage youth from engaging in these initiatives. Building trust requires transparency, accountability, and community-based approaches.
7. **Misinformation on PCVE efforts:** Extremist groups often spread misinformation about PCVE efforts, portraying them as anti-Islamic or oppressive. This can discourage youth participation and reinforce extremist ideologies. Countering misinformation requires providing accurate and

14 Key informant interview with Youth in Kwale, May 2024

15 Richard, M. O. (2024). Strategic Role of Community-Based Development Bodies in Addressing Youth Radicalization and Criminal Juvenile Gangs for Sustainable Development in Kenya: A Case of Samba Sport in Kwale County. doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.26566.28489

16 Footnote 3: Ibid

culturally sensitive information about PCVE programmes and engaging with community leaders and religious authorities to dispel misconceptions.

- 8. Sustainability:** Short-term PCVE initiatives can demotivate youth from sustained engagement. To foster long-term commitment, it is essential to develop sustainable programmes that address the root causes of extremism and provide ongoing support and opportunities for youth.
- 9. Trauma and mental well-being:** Many Kwale youths have experienced trauma, including the loss of loved ones due to VE or counter-terrorism efforts. Trauma can have a significant impact on mental health and can make individuals vulnerable to extremist ideologies. It is essential to provide trauma-informed care, mental health support, and psychosocial services to help youth cope with their experiences and build resilience.
- 10. Eroded cultural practices.** The decline of cultural traditions can contribute to disconnection and loss of identity. The participants highlighted the significance of storytelling sessions within Kaya communities to transmit crucial information, practices, values, and social norms. These sessions served as a knowledge repository, ensuring the continuity and preservation of traditional values. Individuals may become more susceptible to extremist ideologies when traditional practices are weakened, and there is a loss of cultural identity, a sense

of belonging and a breakdown of social cohesion and trust within communities.

Youth as Agents of Change

Young people are powerful agents of change with immense potential despite their challenges. What emerged from the workshop is that their energy, creativity, and innovative spirit can be harnessed to foster peace and prevent violence. The lessons learnt are that we can unlock their full potential to build more resilient and inclusive communities by implementing effective youth-inclusive mechanisms such as investing in leadership development, amplifying their voices, and empowering their participation in decision-making.¹⁷

Grassroots mobilisation efforts by young people in Kwale County have been instrumental in addressing the root causes of violent extremism. Initiatives such as the K-YES programme have demonstrated the effectiveness of youth-led approaches in creating positive change. By providing economic opportunities, life skills training, and platforms for youth engagement, these programmes have contributed to reducing vulnerability to radicalisation.¹⁸

Young people in Kwale have formed organisations and implement PCVE activities, focusing on religious cohesion, economic empowerment, and counter-narrative development.¹⁹ To enhance effectiveness, these youth-driven initiatives often leverage community-based approaches, effectively utilising platforms such as social media to disseminate positive messages and engage with a broader audience.²⁰

¹⁷ Footnote 3: Ibid

¹⁸ YP2LE. (2019, January 22). K-YES Program Interventions Helping Curb Violent Extremism in Kwale, Kenya. Retrieved from Youth Power: <https://www.youthpower.org/news/k-yes-program-interventions-helping-curb-violent-extremism-kwale-kenya>

¹⁹ Key informant interview with Youth in Kwale, May 2024

²⁰ Ouma, L. (2020). Reviewing Kwale County's Action Plan on PCVE. CHRIPS. Retrieved from <https://www.chrips.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Kwale-Workshop-Note.pdf>

Youth have demonstrated a remarkable capacity for community mobilisation and social activism, as exemplified by the Elimu Shamba program²¹ and the work of the Kwale Youth Governance and Consortium (KYGC).²² Through initiatives like the Elimu Shamba program, KYGC has tried to address the root causes of violent extremism by promoting economic empowerment, community building, and resilience. By improving agricultural practices and fostering a sense of shared purpose among farmers, the programme provides a pathway to financial stability. It strengthens community bonds, making individuals less susceptible to extremist ideologies. These youth-led initiatives and appointing younger individuals to leadership positions within the Kwale County Engagement Forum are crucial in identifying and addressing the push-pull factors contributing to radicalisation and developing targeted prevention strategies.²³

Youth-led community media outlets have proven successful in countering the harmful messages spread by extremist groups. By offering alternative perspectives, these platforms have empowered young people in the county to become peacebuilders through peer mentoring and skill-building programmes. Additionally, social media has been instrumental in highlighting the positive contributions of the county's youth, effectively challenging extremist ideologies.²⁴

Leveraging digital spaces can be a potent strategy for preventing and countering

violent extremism. Social media platforms provide an opportunity to share positive messages, foster critical thinking, and connect with young people on their own terms. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognise the potential risks of online radicalisation and develop countermeasures to combat extremist propaganda.

Workshop Recommendations

1. Strengthen youth-focused programmes

Investing in programmes that equip youth with essential life skills, education, and employment opportunities is crucial for PVE. By providing young people with the tools they need to succeed, these programmes can help to build resilience and reduce vulnerability to radicalisation. Skills training, vocational education, and mentorship programmes can empower youth to make positive life choices and contribute to their communities.²⁵ Initiatives such as sports, art, and cultural competitions build stronger communities and promote positive values. These efforts, combined with other interventions like economic empowerment and youth leadership development, form a comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of violent extremism in the region.²⁶

2. Promote youth leadership

Creating platforms for youth participation in decision-making is essential for fostering a sense of ownership and agency. By

21 Kenya News Agency. (2022, February 9). Kwale youth engage in agriculture. Retrieved from Kenya News Agency: <https://www.kenyanews.go.ke/kwale-youth-engage-in-agriculture/>

22 KYGC. (2024). WHO ARE WE. Retrieved from KYGC: <https://www.kygc.org/>

23 Key informant interview with Youth in Kwale, May 2024

24 Footnote 18: Ibid

25 KNA. (2019, February 27). Economic empowerment tames youth radicalization in Kwale. Retrieved from Kenya News Agency: <https://www.kenyanews.go.ke/economic-empowerment-tames-youth-radicalization-in-kwale/>

26 Omar, S. (2021, April 6). Culture, tradition counter extremism in Kwale. Retrieved from The Star: <https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2021-04-06-culture-tradition-counter-extremism-in-kwale/>

involving young people in developing and implementing PCVE programmes,²⁷ we can ensure that their perspectives and needs are reflected in the strategies and interventions. Youth leadership development programmes can equip young people with the skills and confidence to become effective advocates for peace and social change.²⁸

3. Support mental health and psychosocial well-being

Addressing the mental health and psychosocial well-being of young people is crucial for preventing violent extremism.

Trauma, stress, and other mental health challenges can increase vulnerability to radicalisation. Providing access to mental health services and strengthening local support networks can help individuals cope with adversity and build resilience.

4. Culture as a tool for countering VE

Kwale County has recognised the erosion of cultural values as a contributing factor to the rise of violent extremism among youth. Local authorities and organisations should strategically leverage culture to foster peace, unity, and social cohesion.

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From this series

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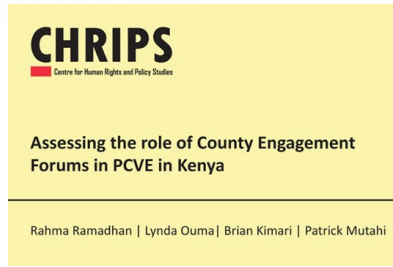
27 Tadesse, M. (2021). Youth and Countering Violent Extremism in Africa. African Security Sector Network (ASSN). Retrieved from <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/ae2a483a-224b-47e6-9b59-bea38d54825f/content>

28 Footnote 3: Ibid

Other Publications

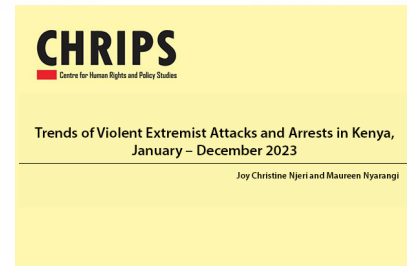


This policy brief draws from discussions during the USAID Sauti National Conference held on 12th and 13th March 2024. It examines the progress and barriers in implementing whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in Kwale, Kilifi, Mombasa, and Lamu counties. Key reflections include addressing trust deficits between communities and security agencies, co-creating intervention programs, ensuring sustainability, including gender and youth, and prioritising mental health.

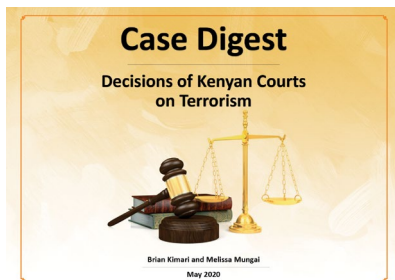


This report examines the extent of citizen engagement in countering violent extremism through County Action Plans in Kenya.

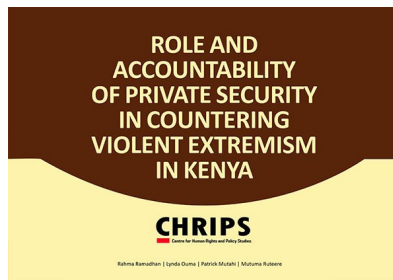
It does this by presenting a thorough analysis of County Engagement Forums focusing on three study sites in Kenya; namely Isiolo, Lamu and Kwale counties.



This report draws from the Terror Attacks and Arrests Observatory of the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory). It presents data collected, disaggregated, and analysed from January 1 to December 31 2023. CHRIPS uses verified traditional and new media reports and information from our CVE research hub partners to generate a database on terror-related occurrences in Kenya.



This case digest draws from the decisions of the High Court, Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court to provide summaries of various judgements from the year 2015 to 2019. Each case lays precedent on a particular question, that is, the central point of the matter before the court. This digest categorises these as follows: standard of proof in terror offences; admissibility of evidence; appropriate charges under the prevention of terrorism Act, and fair trial and sentencing.



This report discusses issues of accountability of private security companies in the context of countering violent extremism in Kenya. The data is drawn from a review of literature, interviews with key informants, and insights from five workshops that CHRIPS held in five counties: Nairobi; Kilifi; Mombasa; Kwale, and Nakuru.



This report presents the results of empirical research examining the Kenya Youth Empowerment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) which aims at increasing youth employability through skills training, internships, as well as skills matching of youth with private sector employers. This study was done by CHRIPS in partnership with the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

About CHRIPS

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