



# Gender and countering violent extremism (CVE) in the Kenya-Mozambique region

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## Question

*What is the evidence on:*

- *The diverse roles that women/girls can play in the context of violent extremism and the contributions that women/girls can make in countering violent extremism (differentiating between combatants, ex-combatants and non-combatant returnees)*
- *Current approaches to gender and CVE*
- *Potential entry points for programming on gender and CVE.*

*The geographic focus is on north-east Kenya, north-east Mozambique and the Mozambique-Tanzania cross-border region.*

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# 1. Summary

Women can play a range of very diverse roles in relation to violent extremism (VE), and can also make important contributions to efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE). Kenya, one of the countries in which Al-Shabaab is active, illustrates this diversity: women are involved in the group as wives/victims, in supporting roles such as intelligence-gathering and recruitment, and as perpetrators of violence. However, this diversity is not reflected in policy and programming on CVE in Kenya, which is largely gender-blind or based on narrow gender stereotypes. It also takes a heavy-handed securitised approach to CVE, and is focused only on Islamic extremism (as opposed to other forms, e.g. political violence). Both these factors have undermined effectiveness, as seen in ongoing Al-Shabaab attacks. Nonetheless, driven to a large extent by donors, many civil society organizations (CSOs) have shifted focus to CVE, with negative effects (among others) on wider development projects, and specifically on women-led/women's rights CSOs. CVE programming needs to: be based on gendered analysis of violent extremism; mainstream gender into all activities; and ensure participation of women/women's organizations.

This evidence synthesis drew on a mixture of academic and grey literature. While literature on Kenyan women and Al-Shabaab was quite extensive (albeit with gaps, e.g. on returnees), nothing was found on women and Ansar al-Sunnah/violent extremist groups operating in north-eastern Mozambique and the Mozambique-Tanzania cross-border region. This report should be read in conjunction with two earlier reviews of gender and CVE (Idris & Abdelaziz, 2017; Idris, 2019). This report builds on those - focusing on literature on gender and CVE published since then, and on recent guidance on CVE programming – rather than reproducing their findings.

This report covers three main themes: the role of women in violent extremism and in CVE (drawing on global evidence); Kenyan women's involvement in Al-Shabaab and approaches to CVE and gender in that country; and recommendations/guidance for gender and CVE programming. Key findings for each are as follows:

## Role of women in violent extremism and CVE

- Women and girls can play diverse roles in relation to violent extremism:
  - a) victims – women and girls are increasingly being deliberately targeted by VE groups for multiple reasons, e.g. to intimidate the target population, incentivise recruitment (offering wives), sexual slavery, financial gain (trafficking), forced labour;
  - b) perpetrators – most violent extremist acts are carried out by men, but evidence exists that women have been involved in violent acts as well. Women's participation in combat roles varies by group;
  - c) supporting roles – including radicalization and recruitment to the group, mobilising funds and carrying out financial transactions, transporting weapons/goods, medical treatment, domestic chores, producing children (future generations) for the group.
- There is gender differentiation in factors driving support for violent extremism – drivers for men (e.g. anger at socio-political conditions, fanatical commitment to religious/ideological beliefs) also apply to women, but additional factors such as a reaction against gender-based inequality, and search for sisterhood and camaraderie, are women-specific.
- It is important to take a gendered approach to CVE – gender stereotypes portray women solely as victims of violent extremist groups, or as incapable of violent acts, or as being manipulated by men to carry out such acts. Such stereotypes deny women agency, and –

critically – lead to significant shortcomings in CVE policies and programming, which are exploited by violent extremist groups. Gendered analysis of VE would allow for effective responses, enhanced by women’s perspectives and contributions.

- Women can play many roles in CVE – Women (as mothers, sisters, etc.) can help counter violent extremism within their family circle and neighbourhood/community, especially when they speak as victims/survivors of extremism. Their integral position in families/communities makes them ideally suited to detect and report on signs of violent extremism, especially because women themselves are often the first targets. Women can be critical interlocutors with government/security agencies, helping shape CVE policies and programmes. It is particularly important that women are represented in security agencies: this builds trust with communities and allows access that would be difficult for men.

### **Women and violent extremism-CVE in Kenya**

- Kenya is a target country for Al-Shabaab – despite being based in Somalia, since 2011 Al-Shabaab has increasingly carried out attacks in Kenya, and also actively recruits there. Between 2011 and 2019 there were 265 Al-Shabaab led attacks in the country; an estimated 10% of the group’s militants are thought to be Kenyan nationals.
- Al-Shabaab appears to actively (and forcibly) recruit women in Kenya – methods include social media, outreach through mosques, religious indoctrination in schools, marriage, employment incentives, and abduction. Factors driving women’s support for the group largely reflect those of men: ideology, grievances over socio-political and economic circumstances, etc. Economic pressures are an especially strong motive for women. Groups like Al-Shabaab are adept at exploiting vulnerabilities due to lack of economic opportunities, lack of access to justice, insecurity and gender-based violence.
- Women play diverse roles in Al-Shabaab – there is limited evidence of women carrying out acts of violence for the group; there have been a few incidents of female suicide bombers but Al-Shabaab uses these far less than Boko Haram. However, women play many supporting roles: intelligence gathering, recruitment, fund-raising and financial transactions, transporting goods, and domestic chores. Al-Shabaab treats Kenyan women differently to Somali women: moral codes are enforced more strictly for the latter, meaning they are more likely to be wives while Kenyan women are used as sex slaves and for domestic labour.
- Women returnees from Al-Shabaab face many challenges – women who have been with the group (either voluntarily or involuntarily) who leave (because of harsh living conditions, disillusionment, to escape abuse, etc.) will often return to their families/go to IDP camps. There are negligible rehabilitation and reintegration services for women returnees. Such women face stigma from their communities (and even from their own families), they will often have health and trauma issues due to their experiences, they fear both arrest by the authorities and reprisal attacks by Al-Shabaab, and face economic hardship as they have few livelihood opportunities or support – all of which make them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.
- Women are largely missing from Kenya’s CVE efforts – despite the diversity of roles of women in Al-Shabaab, gender stereotypes persist: women are typically viewed as victims, or as mothers, wives, etc. who can steer their men away from extremism. As a result they have been left out of the CVE agenda in Kenya.
- Kenya has taken a heavy-handed securitised approach to CVE, focused on Islamic extremism – despite arguments from CSOs that political, economic and social

marginalization drive VE (which therefore needs to be addressed through development) and that citizens are more concerned about other forms of extremist violence (e.g. political, criminal) than Al-Shabaab, the government insists the cause is Islamist ideology and deploys the security forces to combat the group. But mass arrests, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings are causing further marginalization and stigmatization of Muslim communities, and thus fuelling extremism.

- Donor pressure is shaping Kenya's CVE approach – (Western) donors are concerned about extremism in the region and therefore fund CVE efforts. The CVE agenda has become 'an industry'. This is a factor in the Kenyan government and security forces focusing on Al-Shabaab, and is also pushing CSOs to shift to CVE in order to secure funding. Not all are suited for this, and it is detracting attention from other vital development areas.
- Women-led and women's rights CSOs are particularly suffering – such CSOs are being squeezed between the heavy-handedness of the security forces, and the funding pressure (prioritising CVE over other issues) by donors.

### **Recommendations/guidance for gender and CVE programming**

Previous recommendations on gender and CVE programming highlight three aspects: the need to carry out gendered analysis of violent extremism, to understand drivers and roles of women in relation to VE; the need to mainstream gender into all CVE activities; and the need to ensure participation of women and women's organizations. In 2019 the Global Counterterrorism Forum issued an update on its 2015 good practices on women and CVE, with the following recommendations:

- Mainstream gender in CVE, including promoting policy coherence with women, peace and security (WPS) frameworks.
- Build a stronger evidence base on gender and violent extremism, including gendered aspects of men's, women's, boys' and girls' radicalization to violent extremism and terrorism.
- Ensure that CVE policies and programmes recognize and involve women and girls as critical stakeholders.
- Risk assessment tools for violent extremism including combatants and returning combatants should routinely consider gender norms and avoid stereotyping women as victims.
- Ensure that CVE, including reintegration policies, are based on gender-sensitive analysis of the conditions conducive to women and girls' involvement in violent extremism.
- Develop a gender-sensitive approach to the handling of former combatants (and their families).
- Design and support gender-responsive reintegration and rehabilitation processes and measures.

With regard to areas for further research, the complete dearth of information on women and violent extremism in Mozambique and the Mozambique-Tanzania cross-border region clearly points to the need for research on these. More research is also needed to fill the 'gaps' in the evidence base on women and violent extremism in Kenya, notably the respective situations of female non-combatant, combatant and former combatant returnees.

## 2. Women and violent extremism

### Gender differentiation in roles in violent extremism

The first two sections of this report – women and violent extremism, and women and CVE – draw on global evidence. This shows that women and girls can play a range of very diverse roles in relation to violent extremism, with victims of sexual slavery/forced marriage at one end of the spectrum and women actively involved in acts of violent extremism such as combat and suicide bombing at the other.

#### *Victims*

Women and girls are increasingly being deliberately targeted by violent extremist groups, notably through human trafficking. Many extremist groups benefit both strategically and financially from the subjugation of women (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 10). This is articulated in UN Security Council Resolution 2331 (2016) (cited in OSCE, 2019: 48):

acts of sexual and gender-based violence, including when associated to trafficking in persons, are known to be part of the strategic objectives and ideology of certain terrorist groups, used as a tactic of terrorism and an instrument to increase their finances and their power through recruitment and the destruction of communities.

Women and girls are used by such groups in multiple ways (UNODC, 2018; Jespersen, 2019):

- To increase their income and financial resources (e.g. through forced labour in illicit activities, kidnapping for ransom)
- To intimidate/humiliate the target population, instil fear and strengthen their control in the communities in which they operate (e.g. through sexual exploitation and forced marriage)
- To provide labour to support their operations
- To provide a source of combatants to take part in military operations (e.g. suicide bombings)
- To provide 'rewards' for their fighters (e.g. sex slaves) and thereby encourage recruitment.

Sexual slavery and forced marriage have been notable features of the activities of contemporary extremist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)/Daesh and Boko Haram. Sexual slavery entails people being held against their will and forced into sexual acts, and possibly sold onto others for the same purpose. ISIS/Daesh used captured Yazidi women and girls as sex slaves, sometimes transporting them to different regions, distributing them among its fighters, and openly selling them in 'slave markets' (Jespersen, 2019: 6). The group attracted thousands of male recruits by offering kidnapped women and girls as 'wives' and generated significant revenue through sex trafficking, sexual slavery, and extortion through ransom (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 10).

Similarly, Boko Haram has become notorious for forced abduction of girls and women – including of 276 girls from a school in Nigeria's Borno State in May 2014, and 110 girls from a school in Yobe State in 2018 – for forced marriage, sexual slavery, domestic servitude and even suicide bombings (Nwadinobi, 2019). It is also a deliberate tactic to force prisoner exchanges or lure security forces to an ambush (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 10). 'Sexual violence is also a tactical

tool to enforce population compliance, socialize combatants and encourage unit cohesion, displace civilians from strategic areas, and drive instability' (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 10).

Bigio and Vogelstein (2019: 6) note that some victims become sympathetic to extremist groups, either after being exposed to their ideology, or through development of relationships with members of such groups, or out of concerns for children they have, or on finding themselves with access to resources and power unavailable to them in their home communities. Nonetheless, the deliberate targeting of women and girls by violent extremist groups is a worrying trend.

### ***Perpetrators of violence***

The majority of acts of violent extremism are perpetrated by men, but there is a long history of women as perpetrators of violence. Women have been involved in terrorist attacks carried out by groups across the world, including: Peru's Shining Path, both republican and loyalist groups in Northern Ireland, al-Qaeda, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, Hamas in Palestine, the Zapatistas in Mexico, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, as well as ISIS and Boko Haram (McFarland, 2018: 2).

Women perpetrated about 15% of suicide attacks between 1985 and 2006 (McFarland, 2018: 6). Attacks by women have been growing in number as well as in severity. In 2017, the Global Extremism Monitor registered 100 distinct suicide attacks conducted by 181 female militants, amounting to 11% of all incidents that year, while in 2016 women constituted 26% of those arrested on terrorism charges in Europe, up from 18% the year before (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 1). In Nigeria the most deadly incident in 2018 involved three women bombers who killed 20 people in a crowded marketplace, while in Indonesia the deadliest attacks in decades were carried out by two family units that included both women and children (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 4). Female suicide attacks are more lethal on average than those conducted by men: according to one study of five different terrorist groups, attacks carried out by women had an average of 8.4 victims—compared to 5.3 for attacks carried out by men—and were less likely to fail (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 4).

Women's participation in combat roles varies by group (Sahgal & Zeuthen, 2018). While some, e.g. FARC in Colombia and LTTE in Sri Lanka, have allowed women to serve in direct combat roles, others, notably ISIS/Daesh consider this undesirable, although it is permitted in exceptional circumstances (OSCE, 2019: 46). Thus women were active in the Levant battlefields in the months leading to ISIS/Daesh's military defeat, and have also been featured in more recent propaganda distributed by the group, including images of them in combat positions (OSCE, 2019: 46).

### ***Recruitment, operational support and enforcement***

Women can play important roles in violent extremist organisations, helping to recruit others, raising funds, providing operational support in carrying out various activities, and being responsible for enforcement. Operational support can include feeding and clothing combatants, transporting weapons and other goods, and providing medical treatment. In groups like ISIS which was trying to create a 'caliphate' (i.e. state-building) women were responsible for various functions, e.g. the Al-Khanssa Brigade was an all-female unit which enforced the group's strict moral code (Alexandra, 2017: 3). Moreover, it has been found that significant levels of brutality were perpetrated by women against women who did not comply with the strict moral code

imposed by the group (OSCE, 2019: 45). In the case of ISIS/Daesh, women were also tasked with giving birth to and raising children to grow the caliphate (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019). In many such groups, women encourage indoctrination and radicalisation within their own families and communities, e.g. encouraging male family members to join such groups and carry out violent extremist acts.

Women can be especially effective in recruitment. One study of online pro-ISIS/Daesh groups found that female recruiters had higher network connectivity than men, making them more effective at spreading the group's message than their male counterparts - an important finding given that an increasing number of extremists are radicalized online (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 5). Women's participation also improved the survival rate of online pro-ISIS/Daesh groups, extending the time before technology companies shut them down. Despite the military defeats suffered by ISIS/Daesh, Bigio and Vogelstein (2019: 1) highlight the continued role played by women online in advancing its ideology: 'New technology allows for more sophisticated outreach, directly targeting messages to radicalize and recruit women. It also provides a platform on which female extremists thrive by expanding their recruitment reach and taking on greater operational roles in the virtual sphere'.

## **Gender differentiation in factors driving support for VEOs**

Just as there is gender differentiation in the roles men and women play in violent extremist groups, so there is some gender differentiation in motives for joining such groups. To some extent, the reasons for women supporting or participating in terrorist groups are largely the same as those driving men, e.g. grievance about socio-political conditions, fanatical commitment to religious or ideological beliefs, grief about the death of a loved one (Fink et al, 2013: 3, cited in Idris & Abdelaziz, 2017: 6).

However, the literature also identifies women's participation in violent extremism and terrorism as a reaction against gender-based inequality and discrimination, violence, and denial of rights and opportunities (OSCE, 2019). Involvement in violent extremism allows women to break out of traditional roles – which in patriarchal societies will often be limited to the household, with a far lower social status than that of men – and forge a different path. Oudraat (in Fink et al, 2016: 21, cited in Idris & Abdelaziz, 2017: 7) cites a study into the relationship between gender inequalities and terrorist groups: it found that 'gender inequality provides fertile ground for terrorist groups' who 'readily exploit to their advantage the victimization of women in patriarchal societies'.

Violent extremist organizations (VEOs) are cognizant of the constraints and limitations that women in traditional societies/households face and exploit these to win recruits. 'VEO groups understand gender dynamics well and manipulate gender norms and stereotypes to their advantage in their recruitment and propaganda messages' (OSCE, 2019: 46). A recent Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF, 2019: 2) publication echoes this:

Terrorist organizations demonstrate a nuanced understanding of gender norms and stereotypes and exploit social constructions of masculinity and femininity to tap into different vulnerabilities among diverse groups of men and women in different local contexts, as a means to attract, recruit and maintain adherents.

Bigio and Vogelstein (2019: 5) highlight the use of social media by modern extremist groups 'to actively enlist women into supportive roles, reaching unprecedented numbers through

narrowcasting - creating a targeted message for a specific subgroup'. ISIS/Daesh, for example, conducted a concerted campaign to recruit women in the West which 'emphasised camaraderie, sisterhood, and opportunities to enjoy freedom and adventure as state-builders' (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 5).

McFarland (2018: 3) stresses that women's paths to radicalization and their reasons for joining VEOs will depend on the context: 'women's decisions to join violent groups have been, and will remain, varied and contextually specific'. This points to the need for a thorough understanding of both the diverse roles women play in violent extremist organizations, the contexts in which these play out and the factors driving them.

### **3. Women and countering violent extremism (CVE)**

#### **Gendered approach to CVE**

##### *Importance of taking a gendered approach*

As seen in Section 2, women can play very diverse roles in relation to violent extremism, including actively supporting violent extremist organizations and even perpetrating violence themselves. However, gender stereotypes portray women as victims (particularly of sexual violence). They are seen as less dangerous than men, and incapable of carrying out acts of violence; women are 'passive, victims, helpless, subordinate and concerned family members' (OSCE, 2019: 46). Even when women are perpetrators, this is assumed to be because of manipulation by recruiters or because they were forced to do so - notions which deny seeing women as independent agents, and subordinate and patronise them (Patel & Westermann, 2018; GAPS, 2018, both cited in Idris, 2019: 7).

Another response, seen in the wake of the 2002 Moscow theatre hostage crisis which involved Chechen 'Black Widows', and the 2013 Nairobi Westgate shopping centre attack which was allegedly orchestrated by a Western woman, the 'White Widow', is to describe these as exceptional. The popular convention is to describe extremist women through their relationship to a man (e.g. wife, bride, widow), which 'ironically de facto strips women of their agency to decide on their involvement in terrorism' (OSCE, 2019: 46). Such perceptions are not confined to the media, but extend to security actors and policy makers. Bigio and Vogelstein (2019: 6) note that 'officials in criminal justice systems around the world often assume that women who commit violence are either naive victims of circumstance or dangerous deviants from the natural order'.

Gender stereotypes which only see women as victims, or as having no role in the running of VEOs/acts of violence, or as just manipulated by men, are damaging because they lead to knock-on shortcomings in policies and programmes to counter violent extremism (CVE). A recent OSCE report (2019: 43) stresses:

there is an urgent need to break the stereotyping of why individuals join such groups, particularly stereotypes that portray women as passive and submissive "followers". Authorities as well as civil society need to recognize the agency of each individual who makes a conscious decision to join a VEO, including the gender differences in their motivations to do so. Understanding these gender dimensions will allow for a better understanding of radicalization processes among both men and women, and for



developing responses that are better suited to addressing the gender-based dynamics related to people choosing to join such groups.

Bigio and Vogelstein (2019) echo this: 'Understanding and addressing women's paths to radicalization and the roles they play in violent extremism is crucial to disrupting terrorists' abilities to recruit, deploy, and abuse them'. Ndung'u and Shadung (2017: 2-3) highlight the benefits of taking a gendered approach to P/CVE and counter-terrorism (CT):

A gendered analysis gives equal consideration to the differing experiences of women and men... *(it)* could provide insight on how women and men are likely to be impacted by responses to violent extremism; how PVE and CT efforts may challenge, maintain or reinforce existing gender inequalities; and how more effective PVE and CT responses may be constructed.

True and Eddyono (2017: 7, cited in Idris, 2019: 5) point out that, 'women bring perspectives and experiences to the perception of 'security' that encompass the wellbeing of the family and the community – something distinct from – and frequently absent from – male-dominated conceptions of the purpose and maintenance of security'.

Conversely, the failure to understand the extent of women's roles in VEOs has led to tremendous gaps in CVE efforts, and to gender-blind policies which are inefficient and ineffective (OSCE, 2019). The OSCE (2019: 49) report cites, as an example, 'cases of male VEO members dressing as women to escape crime scenes or gain access to restricted spaces, since they know that guards at security checkpoints are more lenient towards women, or that there are often not enough female personnel at such checkpoints to conduct searches of women'. Lack of proper gender analysis in relation to violent extremism, also risks forfeiting the potential contributions of women in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 1).

### ***Inclusion of gender in policy commitments***

In initial approaches to preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE), gender was conspicuously absent, but in recent years there has been a significant shift towards adopting a gender perspective (GAPS, 2018, cited in Idris, 2019). P/CVE frameworks and strategies now recognise the importance of a gendered approach and the role of women (Ndung'u & Shadung, 2017).

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (SCR 1325)<sup>3</sup>, approved in 2000, calls for equal participation of women in decision-making related to peace processes, protection of women from violence, in particular sexual violence in armed conflict situations, and gender mainstreaming in conflict management and peace building efforts. A series of subsequent Security Council resolutions have reinforced the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda laid out in SCR 1325. Notable among these is UNSCR 2242 (2015) which explicitly addresses the harmful impact of VE on women. It also stresses the need for gender-sensitive research and for increased consultations with women's organisations affected by violent extremism (Ndung'u & Shadung, 2017: 4).

The 2016 UN Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism dedicates significant attention to women and the importance of gender considerations when developing PVE strategies (Ndung'u & Shadung, 2017). It calls on states to place the protection and empowerment of women at the centre of efforts to address terrorism and violent extremism, and to ensure that these do not

impact adversely on women's rights (Ndung'u & Shadung, 2017). In June 2018, the Sixth Review Resolution of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy urged member states and UN entities to integrate a gender analysis on the drivers of radicalisation of women to terrorism into their relevant programmes, and to seek greater consultations with women and women's organisations when developing CVE strategies (True et al, 2019: 7, cited in Idris, 2019: 6).

## **Diverse roles of women in CVE**

Women can make critical contributions to help counter violent extremism. Alexander (2015: 6) argues that, since 'violent extremists give women a role in their ranks and a voice in their communities', the CVE community must do the same and integrate women fully into their efforts. The 'traditional' role assigned to women in this regard is in relation to family members – as mothers, wives, etc. women can help turn their sons/brothers/husbands away from extremism. However, as seen below, women can also play other roles in CVE. It is important to understand the context and position of women in order to identify if and how they can contribute to CVE.

### ***Countering violent extremism within the family circle***

This is the role most commonly assigned to women in the literature: women can use their influence over male family members to deter them from violent extremism. Ndung'u and Shadung (2017: 7, cited in Idris, 2019: 8) note:

As mothers, wives, caregivers, partners and sisters, women are thought to be in a position to be the first to detect and influence extremist thinking and behaviour in their families and communities. They are considered to have a unique position in 'early warning' and 'early response' as they are perceived as 'non-polarising' in families and communities, and as potentially helpful in developing young people's self-esteem and social cohesion.

Alexander (2017: 5) echoes this perception of women as being able to influence their families to counter violent extremism:

Mothers' keen understanding of their children's motives and the substantial weight their voices carry in their children's lives present tremendous potential. Mothers have reduced violence in the context of gang involvement, a form of organized violence that shares similarities with violent extremism. Moreover, case studies of mothers' and sisters' contributions to CVE efforts in Yemen, Pakistan, and Afghanistan underscore the efficacy of women in CVE projects.

However, there are a number of questionable assumptions made in this role for women: one, the assumption that women will want to speak *against* violent extremism – as seen, women can play a leading role in radicalisation and recruitment to violent extremist groups, and even in carrying out violent acts; two, that women actually have that clout within their families, and will be able to influence the thinking and actions of family members; and three, conversely, that the primary role of women is in the family and they cannot exert influence in the wider public sphere. These assumptions have been challenged by various writers (Idris, 2019).

Nonetheless, there is recognition of the influence of women in their families and wider communities when they present counter-narratives challenging violent extremism - 'their voices may be especially compelling when they speak out as victims or survivors of terrorist attacks'

(Fink et al, 2013: 4, cited in Idris, 2019: 8). Bigio and Vogelstein (2019: 9) highlight the advantages women have in countering the extremist message: ‘Women are well positioned to challenge extremist narratives in homes, schools, and social environments.... In more conservative societies—where communicating with women is limited to other women or their male relatives— women have unique access to intervene with women and girls at risk of radicalization’. They cite the example of a programme in Morocco which deploys women religious scholars around the country to counter radical interpretations of Islam – ‘they were better able to reach community members than their male counterparts because of their social ties and ability to build trust’ (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 9).

### ***Informants, providing support for security actors***

The integral position of women within their families and communities makes them ideally situated to detect signs of, or activities related to, violent extremism, and they can provide this information to security actors (OSCE, 2019; Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019). Women from CSOs and in different professions (e.g. teachers, psychologists) can be part of referral mechanisms - formal or informal mechanisms involving practitioners and professionals from different disciplines/agencies aimed at identifying and helping those at risk of being drawn into violent extremism – and can provide a valuable perspective (OSCE, 2019: 54). Another factor that makes women better suited than men to pick up moves towards extremism is that women themselves are frequently the targets:

attacks on their rights and physical autonomy are often the first indication of a rise in fundamentalism. Women are substantially more likely than men to be early victims of extremism, through harassment in public spaces, forced segregation, dress requirements, attacks on girls’ schooling, and other violations (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 8)

Restrictions on women’s rights have accompanied the rise of religious extremist groups including the Taliban, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda and ISIS/Daesh (OSCE, 2019).

### ***Helping shape policies and programmes***

The involvement of women in consultations, design and implementation of policies and programmes to combat violent extremism can ensure that all aspects are addressed – including gender differences in drivers, impact and roles in relation to violent extremism. This in turn means that policies and programmes were be more effective. Women can be critical interlocutors with government institutions, in particular between communities and law enforcement agencies, helping to identify security concerns and needs of communities (OSCE, 2019: 54). If women are included in citizen advisory groups or municipal security councils they can alert security actors of gendered safety issues, and women’s participation in community safety commissions and other law enforcement oversight entities can strengthen accountability (OSCE, 2019: 54).

### ***Security actors***

The literature stresses the importance of women being represented in security agencies. This carries a number of benefits. One, it enhances trust in the security forces: ‘Women are uniquely skilled in building trust with local communities and networks, leading to a more collaborative environment between locals and officials’ (Alexander, 2017: 3). Moreover, women ‘are more likely to detect and deter the occurrence of human rights abuses, to restrain from using

excessive force, and to de-escalate tension effectively' (OSCE, 2019: 53). 'Women's participation in the military and police has been shown to improve how a local community perceives law enforcement, which, in turn, improves their ability to provide security' (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 8) – including their ability to counter violent extremism. Women are more likely to report cases of sexual and gender-based violence to female officers, which again can build the trust communities have in the police, with implications for CVE (Alexander, 2017; OSCE, 2019).

Specifically in relation to CVE, women security actors can be more effective in collecting vital information about security threats in contexts where gender differences and religious-cultural norms restrict men's access to certain groups (OSCE, 2019: 53). Also, women law enforcement personnel are able to conduct searches of female fighters in ways that men might not – making it harder for extremists to evade screening (Alexander, 2017; Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 8). Conversely, the 'underrepresentation of women in security roles...creates a vulnerability that terrorist groups exploit to their advantage...Female combatants can hide suicide devices under their clothing knowing that they are unlikely to encounter a female security official and therefore will not be searched' (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 8). Bigio and Vogelstein (2019: 8) note that women comprise just 15% of police forces globally; in South Asia, they make up less than 2% of the force in Pakistan, less than 7% in Bangladesh, and less than 8% in India – 'Without efforts to improve gender gaps in national security roles, female extremists will retain an advantage in eluding suspicion and arrest'.

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Sections 2 and 3 drew on global evidence to highlight the diversity of roles women can play in relation to both violent extremism and countering violent extremism. The specific roles will obviously vary from one context to another and from one violent extremist organization to another. Section 4 therefore looks at the role women have played in violent extremism in Kenya, and in CVE efforts. Section 5 looks at Mozambique, and the Mozambique-Tanzania cross-border region – note that, while there is evidence on violent extremism in the region, none was found on the role of women there.

## 4. Kenya

### Context: Al-Shabaab and violent extremism

The first major terrorist attack in Kenya took place in 1980, when an extremist Palestinian group bombed a Nairobi hotel in response to the Kenyan government's support for Operation Entebbe by Israel; 20 people were killed (Princeton, 2020: 19). The next major attack was on the US embassy, bombed by Al-Qaeda in 1998 killing over 200 and injuring 4,000 (Princeton, 2020: 19). Another Al-Qaeda attack on a Mombasa hotel followed in 2002, killing 13, but at this stage violent extremism was not seen as endemic to the region – rather as perpetrated by foreign fighters and motivated by events external to Kenya.

This perception changed with the emergence of Al-Shabaab ('the youth') in 2004, an Al-Qaeda affiliate based in Somalia and seeking to create an Islamic state there. However, Al-Shabaab also 'harboured aspirations to create a regional presence..... (and) inspired the creation of several affiliated jihadist groups and autonomous networks, which have also organized attacks' (Rift Valley, 2010, cited in Ndung'u et al, 2017: 3). Kenya has been one of the major countries

targeted by Al-Shabaab and other such extremist groups. Al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya stepped up after the 2011 deployment of Kenyan troops in Somalia to combat Al-Shabaab; Kenyan troops were later assimilated in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to help the Somali government suppress Al-Shabaab and restore stability (Ndung'u et al, 2017). Al-Shabaab attacks have often been specifically in response to Kenyan government/security forces measures in support of the Somali government (CEP, 2020).

Between October 2011 and December 2019, there were 265 Al-Shabaab led attacks in Kenya resulting in 967 fatalities (Princeton, 2020: 20). These include the September 2013 attack on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, killing 72 people; an attack in Mpeketoni on the Kenyan coast killing 48 people; the April 2015 attack on Christian students and staff at the Garissa University College in north-east Kenya in which 147 people were killed (Ndung'u et al, 2017: 3); and the January 2019 assault on the Dusit2D hotel and office complex in Nairobi, killing 21 people (CEP, 2020). In addition to the direct attacks, Al-Shabaab has been actively recruiting in Kenya, with increasing numbers of radicalised Kenyan nationals leaving the country to join the group, as well as supporting it within Kenya. A 2014 UN investigation found that Al-Shabaab had 'created extensive funding, recruiting and training networks in Kenya', and it has been estimated that 10% of Al-Shabaab's militants are Kenyan nationals (Ndung'u et al, 2017: 3).

## **Diverse roles of women in relation to violent extremism in Kenya**

### ***Recruitment of women and factors driving their support for Al-Shabaab***

Al-Shabaab appears to actively recruit women, including through social media and mosque outreach (Ndung'u et al, 2017). A Human Rights Watch report details recruitment methods used by Al-Shabaab to conscript females in their teens; they include abduction (from schools, playgrounds, markets and homes), the use of propaganda and religious indoctrination in schools, the offer of cash or other material incentives, as well as a combination of force and persuasion (cited in Ndung'u et al, 2017: 20-21). Many women are forcibly recruited (Stern, 2019). Badurdeen (2020) highlights the fact that women can join Al-Shabaab voluntarily or involuntarily (depending on motives and recruitment approaches), but can switch between these, as they form a continuum or spectrum rather than binary features. 'Women and girls may shift their positioning on the continuum based on allegiance, social interactions, ideological resonance, and changing circumstances within and beyond the Al-Shabaab network' (Badurdeen, 2020: 1).

With regard to factors driving women's support for Al-Shabaab, the literature indicates these largely reflect those for men: a combination of radicalisation and commitment to ideological or religious beliefs; grievances over socio-political and economic circumstances; relationship ties (family, kinship, romantic) such as wives following their husbands who have joined the group; to seek revenge (e.g. for a loved one killed by the security forces); and for economic reasons (Ndung'u et al, 2017; Stern, 2019). Economic pressures appear to be an especially strong motive. A study by Ndung'u et al (2017: 32) found that in the communities researched, economic reasons were cited far more often than ideological reasons as the motivation for women in Kenya to become involved with Al-Shabaab.

Various aspects are relevant in this regard (Ndung'u et al, 2017: 33): husbands and sons who have left their homes to join Al-Shabaab often leave their homes and/or families without breadwinners so women are forced to take over as the heads of these households; the burden of providing for their immediate (and often extended) families is often exacerbated by the lack of a

regular income so many find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty; women's lack of formal education may limit the choice of employment or livelihood available to them; the loss of a breadwinner may result in forced displacement and the loss or destruction of family assets, such as a house. Ndung'u et al (2017) stress that poverty and violent extremism are mutually reinforcing: poverty drives people to join violent extremist groups, but violent extremism exacerbates poverty. However, Badurdeen (2020: 5) emphasises that 'motivations cannot be restricted to one single factor; rather, a combination of factors and triggers prompted women to join the Al-Shabaab voluntarily'.

A recent policy brief by UN Women looking at gendered vulnerabilities to violent extremism in the Kenyan town of Dadaab, Garissa County, near the border with Somalia which has both local (host) and refugee populations, stressed the ability of violent extremist groups like Al-Shabaab to exploit vulnerabilities due to insecurity and gender-based violence, lack of economic opportunities, lack of access to justice and so on. 'Violent extremist organisations are innovative and agile in the way in which they use and disseminate information, create narratives and offer incentives to support their ideology.... (the) plethora of different vulnerabilities people are subjected to ... (create) potential openings for violent extremists and their narratives' (UN Women, 2020: 4).

### ***Perpetrators of violence***

There is limited evidence that women have been involved in carrying out acts of violence for Al-Shabaab. There have been a few incidents in which women were deployed as suicide bombers: an incident in August 2010, in which 33 people were killed; one in April 2012, killing six; and one in 2015, killing 28 (Ndung'u et al, 2017: 20). The appeal of women as suicide bombers for Al-Shabaab lies in the fact that they are less likely to be detected at security checkpoints, and they are more likely to attract media attention (Ndung'u et al, 2017). They can also access places that men might not be able to (Stern, 2019). However, numbers of women used in such attacks is still low: one study found that less than 5% of Al-Shabaab suicide bombings were perpetrated by women (Stern, 2019: 5). Another reported that of 155 suicide bombing attacks by 216 individuals carried out by the group since 2007, less than ten were committed by women; this compares to 238 attacks involving 434 attackers conducted by Boko Haram between 2007 and 2017, in which over half (288) of the bombers were female (Petrich & Donnelly, 2019: 1178-9).

### ***Supporting roles***

Despite their limited role in combat operations, women are very important for Al-Shabaab in a range of other roles. Petrich and Donnelly (2019: 1178) note that, 'Al-Shabaab may be hesitant to engage with women, especially Somali women, in public roles, yet still relies on women for the group's operations'. Women play a significant part in gathering intelligence for the group, e.g. on military movements and checkpoints, providing real-time information. 'A network of women living across different parts of cities communicate with each other, calling on other women when they need support in differing locations' (Stern, 2019: 5). Again, the fact that women are viewed with less suspicion than men makes them useful for surveillance and collecting information (Ndung'u et al, 2017).

Petrich and Donnelly (2019) detail the partnership between Al-Shabaab and sex workers in Nairobi: the latter (mostly Tanzanian or Kenyan) provide intelligence gathered from clients (e.g. police officers) in return for payment from the former. The authors point out that ideological

beliefs (e.g. about morality, role of women) do not prevent the group being pragmatic and taking advantage of such opportunities. They further assert that Al-Shabaab treats Somali women differently to Kenyan and other East African women: being a primarily ethno-nationalist movement, Al-Shabaab prioritises enforcement of purity and moral codes of behaviour on Somali women. '(P)rotecting Kenyan women is seen as less essential given Al-Shabaab's focus on promoting a new Islamic Somalia (focused on ethnic Somalis)' (Petrich & Donnelly, 2019: 1183).

Women also have key roles in fund-raising and in recruitment, especially of other women (Ndung'u et al, 2017; Stern, 2019). Petrich and Donnelly (2019: 1179) describe this:

In the eastern coastal regions, most recruiters seem to be women, targeting both young men and women via social media, WhatsApp groups, and in person. These recruiters offer jobs overseas, opportunities for violence, or romantic relationships to either trick or convince their targets to travel to Somalia.

A baseline assessment of responses to violent extremism in Kenya's Garissa and Tana River counties found that in the past women had been arrested in Garissa on charges of recruiting for Al-Shabaab, and that there was intelligence of women in refugee camps actively recruiting as well as participating in the logistics of recruitment (SFCG, 2019: 10). Women were said to use their influence at the family level being the 'custodians of cultural, social and religious values' to lure the youth into radicalization (Chowdhury, Barakat & Shetret 2013, cited in SFCG, 2019: 10).

Women also carry out domestic roles: cooking, washing, cleaning and so on. Ndung'u and Salifu (2017: 4) list the various supporting activities carried out by women:

- Providing shelter to and hiding terrorists or family members involved with extremist groups;
- Taking food to family members who have been arrested on terror-related charges, or preparing food for violent extremists;
- Facilitating financial transactions to fund violent extremist organisations;
- Providing medical care in the Dadaab refugee camp to extremist fighters who have been injured in Somalia;
- Cooking and cleaning in al-Shabaab training camps;
- Radicalising their own children;
- Providing 'company' to or 'comforting' terrorists, usually through marriage among the networks of extremists' own relatives and friends.

So important is the contribution of women, that Ndung'u et al (2017: 30) characterise them as providing 'the invisible infrastructure for Al-Shabaab by enabling, supporting and facilitating violent extremism through a number of roles and activities'.

### ***Victims***

As noted above, Al-Shabaab differentiates between the treatment of Somali and non-Somali women and girls. Thus the former are more likely to be taken in forced marriage with fighters and be 'legitimate wives'. The latter, especially Kenyan women, are typically used as sex slaves as well as for domestic labour (Petrich & Donnelly, 2019: 1183):

Kenyan women have been victims and participants in al-Shabaab's human trafficking scheme to bring women to al-Shabaab camps on the border of Kenya and Somalia. Members of al-Shabaab have used different forms of deception, including promising women jobs overseas to drugging them, to bring them to an al-Shabaab camp in the Boni Forest on the border of Somalia and Kenya. The women affected lived in Kenyan's coastal communities and range in age and religious affiliation (both Christian and Muslim). Once the women reached the camp they faced sexual abuse by members of al-Shabaab.

.... The Kenyan women from the coast were tasked with cooking for al-Shabaab fighters or cleaning weapons. The Kenyan women in the camp were also repeatedly sexually abused by al-Shabaab fighters with some describing being raped by one specific member of al-Shabaab and others sharing experience of gang rape by multiple members of al-Shabaab.

Consistent with Al-Shabaab's 'prioritisation' of Somali women, not only are hardly any sex slaves, but the provision of Kenyan women in such camps 'could be seen as a way to prevent them (*male members of Al-Shabaab*) from raping Somali women' (Petrich & Donnelly, 2019: 1184).

### **Returnees**

Women who have been with Al-Shabaab (either voluntarily or involuntarily) could decide to leave for a number of reasons, including: the harsh living conditions in the camps; disillusionment with the group's ideology and practices; to escape abusive husbands/avoid wife inheritance (being married off to another Al-Shabaab fighter in the event of a husband's death/defection); fear for their (and their children's) safety; pressure from their families (Stern, 2019; Stern, 2020). 'Leaving' can entail different things depending on the women's situation: for those living in Al-Shabaab camps it will often mean physically escaping; it can mean leaving their husbands; or moving into non-Al-Shabaab territory; but for those supporting the group from their homes, it can just mean ending that support (Stern, 2019).

Support services (rehabilitation and reintegration) for women are extremely limited (see below). Hence women fleeing/defecting from Al-Shabaab seek help from their families, or, where this is not possible, go to camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Such women are often in a very difficult situation. The literature provides evidence mostly in relation to former Al-Shabaab women in Somalia, but women in Kenya appear to face similar challenges. These include:

Stigma – Stern (2019 and 2020) reports a definite stigma faced by women leaving Al-Shabaab. They can be viewed by the communities in which they settle with fear, treated with hostility or even forced to move to other areas. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) ran a programme for former Al-Shabaab women in Somalia between 2015-16, but it closed, reportedly due to 'security concerns; community rejection of the facility due to rumours that it housed high-risk al Shabaab agents' as well as lack of funding (Stern, 2019: 34). Women – especially those married to Al-Shabaab fighters - can even be rejected by their own families, who see them as disgraced (Felbab-Brown, cited in Stern, 2019: 35). In Kenya, Roble (cited in ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 43) reports that some girls are returning from Somalia or involvement with Al-Shabaab with HIV or with children, and relocate because of the stigma they feel in their former communities (as well as fear of the state's reactions – see below). However, women who have left Al-Shabaab,



especially those who supported the group from their homes, can be helped by the fact that most people would not actually know they had been involved with Al-Shabaab (Stern, 2019).

Fear of authorities and of Al-Shabaab – Women who have left Al-Shabaab face fear of arrest and imprisonment by the authorities, who in Kenya have largely taken a securitised approach to Al-Shabaab, and fear of reprisal attacks or recapture by Al-Shabaab. With regard to the former: ‘If and when women and girls return to Kenya, they are afraid of their communities and the police. In fact, many have been arrested and remain in jail, even for speaking on the phone with friends in Syria or Somalia. Security forces view all returnees as criminals’ (ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 73). This can hamper women from seeking support (ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 43).

The risks of reprisal attacks by Al-Shabaab are very real, even in Kenya. In 2015 the Kenyan government initiated an amnesty programme to encourage youth to quit Al-Shabaab and participate in a disengagement, demobilization and reintegration programme. But the amnesty provisions lacked adequate legal protection such as ensuring confidentiality for those who came forward, leading to a spike in revenge killings by Al-Shabaab affiliates against those who had left or ‘betrayed’ the group (ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 39).

Poverty - Many women leave Al-Shabaab alone or with their children and struggle to find housing or secure livelihoods. Many will lack education and skills that could help them to find jobs. This, along with possible rejection by their families and fear of the authorities, can make them highly vulnerable to exploitation by others, including sexual exploitation.

Trauma and health issues - Women who have been with Al-Shabaab, especially in situations of forced marriage or sexual slavery, will typically have experienced significant trauma and will need medical treatment and counselling/other support. ‘Returnees report exploitation and abuse, and have physical and psychological scars’ (ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 73). However, for all the above reasons, as well as the dearth of programmes to help women returnees, the necessary support is rarely provided.

## **Women and CVE in Kenya**

### ***Approach and challenges***

As seen above, women in Kenya play diverse roles in Al-Shabaab: while most join/are forced into the group as brides and carry out domestic chores, many carry out supportive tasks such as intelligence-gathering, arranging financial transactions, and recruitment, and some are deployed as suicide bombers/in violent attacks. Despite this diversity of roles, in Kenya women are not seen as perpetrators of violence. At national level discussion of gender and violent extremism has been dominated by gender stereotypes based on the idea of women as wives, mothers and victims of extremism (Aroussi, 2020). As a result, women have been left out of the CVE agenda, which anyway is security-dominated (Aroussi, 2020: 16). Thus:

The text of Kenya’s 2016 National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism does not pay sufficient attention to gender or women’s participation in its policies and programs to counter violent extremism, nor did the process of adopting Kenya’s National Counterterrorism Strategy involve consultation with women’s organizations or women in affected communities. Beyond a brief reference to the threat of extremism in its introduction, the 2016 Kenyan National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security

does not refer to terrorism or violent extremism in its text, nor in the matrix specifying the plan's actions and indicators (Aroussi, 2020: 14).

The study by Ndung'u et al (2017: v) highlights the same issue: 'the findings show that limited attention has been given to women's roles, issues and needs in relation to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kenya. Current responses are therefore neither sufficiently gender-specific nor gender-sensitive, despite good practices such as the use of female police officers to deal with female suspects'.

This largely 'gender blind' approach to CVE in Kenya, combined with the generally securitised approach, has led to a number of problems and challenges, both for the effectiveness of CVE as a whole in Kenya, and specifically for women and women-led/women's rights groups.

A 2019 study conducted in Kenya drew feedback from civil society organizations on women, gender, violence and the P/CVE agenda (Mesok, 2019). It focused on regions with a large number of organizations working on P/CVE, as well as with a large number working on integrating a gender perspective into P/CVE. The study addressed a wide range of issues, key findings on which are as follows (Mesok, 2019: 6 & 12):

- Tensions and issues with P/CVE language and discourse – CSOs felt the language of 'violent extremism' risks contributing to creating and exacerbating the violence it claims to prevent. The lack of definitional clarity and the tendency to conflate 'violent extremism' with 'terrorism' enables the expansion of the scope of counterterrorism (CT) measures, resulting in human rights violations including restrictions on freedom of expression. In addition, the language of 'violent extremism' risks further marginalizing and stigmatizing ethnic and religious minorities.
- Issues faced by CSOs when P/CVE programming is driven by donor interests - Overall, the P/CVE agenda is largely perceived by CSOs in Kenya as 'an industry' that prioritizes the needs of donors, the international community, and the state over the needs of communities. Donor-driven P/CVE agendas risk imposing externally devised rather than context-specific solutions. Moreover, the vast financial resources now available within the P/CVE agenda means that organizations with little or no qualifications are designing and implementing P/CVE programming, posing great harm to communities, discrediting the work of P/CVE, and damaging the reputations of local community-based organisations (CBOs) who partner with larger international organizations. Women-led and women's rights organizations are particularly vulnerable to the influences of the P/CVE industry, as they face greater funding challenges that are exacerbated by donor preference for funding larger, international organizations.
- Role that the P/CVE and CT agendas play in the shrinking of civil society - restrictive security measures such as countering terrorism financing (CTF) laws decrease donor risk appetite. CT measures, including CTF laws, have significantly curtailed the work of CSOs and disproportionately impacted women's organizations. In addition, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are increasingly targeted by repressive governments and women-led and women's rights organizations are increasingly 'squeezed' between the violence perpetrated by non-state armed actors, state security forces, and increasingly restrictive security measures.
- Continuation of hard security approaches - measures such as military interventions and police violence violate human rights and impede the work of conflict transformation and

violence prevention. P/CVE has not replaced CT measures and arguably adds greater legitimacy to the expansion of states' political and legal powers. Enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings perpetrated in the name of 'anti-terror' fuel anger and resentment among communities.

- The P/CVE agenda's disproportionate targeting of Muslims and the related rise of Islamophobia – P/CVE, like CT, is perceived by many of the communities in which it is implemented as unfairly targeting Muslim communities and as driven by Islamophobia, with particularly negative consequences for Muslim women.

The findings above clearly show that women's CSOs and women are being disproportionately negatively impacted by the issues with P/CVE approaches in Kenya. The study stresses the need for thorough gender analysis in CVE efforts: 'Gendered assumptions regarding women's inherent passivity or lack of agency result in gender-blind security policy and practice, causing additional harm to women and girls, and especially to returnees' (Mesok, 2019: 6). It also warns that gendered assumptions about women's unique capacity to influence their children and family members 'risks tasking women with the burden of acting as security agents in their homes and communities without the necessary resources and protection' (Mesok, 2019: 6). Citing the example of a local woman leader in Isiolo taking in three young girls left without care after their brother allegedly orchestrated the January 2019 Dusit attack, and their mother and elder sister were arrested, Mesok (2019: 29) argues this 'demonstrates the importance of attending to the small, social relationships that are broken in the wake of violence, of providing protection for those left behind, and of the community healing necessary to interrupt cycles of violence'.

Aroussi's 2020 study looks at gender and CVE efforts in Kenya, and the integration of CVE and the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. It is also based on field research, in this case in Nairobi, largely with civil society organisations, researchers and security experts working on violent extremism and/or gender issues with a focus on WPS. Many of the findings echo those of Mesok's 2019 study (Aroussi, 2020):

- Violent extremism in Kenya is primarily defined as Islamic extremism. However, CSOs argued that, while combatting Al-Shabaab was a priority for the government and security forces, for ordinary citizens addressing the other sources of insecurity that they experience every day, particularly police brutality, gang-related violence, and gender-based violence, is far more important than defeating Al-Shabaab. The focus on Al-Shabaab as the source of violent extremism epitomizes the public-private dichotomy reflecting a male perspective on violence that prioritizes the public over the private realm. Kenya is a deeply patriarchal society with very high gender inequality and violence against women. Yet gender-based violence is not defined as violent extremism in Kenya.
- Driver of violent extremism is not ideology - Similarly, while the Kenyan government sees ideology as the driver of violent extremism, CSOs argued that it is intrinsically linked to economic, political, and social marginalization. Hence, in their view, the local priorities should be development, gender equality, peace, and human rights, rather than tackling Al-Shabaab.
- The use of a heavy-handed securitized approach to violent extremism, and the focus on Islamic extremism, has further alienated Muslim, and particularly ethnic Somali, communities in Kenya. Hence, rather than curbing Al-Shabaab's violence, the approach to CVE and CT in Kenya has led to an increase in the number of attacks in the country.

- It has also fuelled Islamophobia. Muslims feel stigmatized by the wider population, and come under pressure whenever an Al-Shabaab attack takes place. Muslim women, readily identifiable through their covered-up dress, are especially vulnerable. Muslims in Kenya were already noticeably more economically, socially and politically marginalized than other communities; the focus on Al-Shabaab and Islamic extremism has increased the marginalization and stigmatization of the Muslim minority, especially women.
- People are afraid of the police/security forces and hence reluctant to cooperate with them. Disappearances and extrajudicial killings have instilled fear, making it unlikely, for example, that women will report signs of radicalization in their families/neighbourhoods. As one respondent explained: ‘The security officers in Kenya take the hard approach. So if you go to them and say “I have these returnees and they need rehabilitation,” the next thing is “Okay, let me take them to get information,” and then two or three days later this boy or this girl will be found dead’. Local people also fear reprisal attacks by Al-Shabaab if they are seen as being police informers.
- The danger of abuse of power by the anti-terror police is also problematic for civil society organizations who work in the local communities. Any organization working on CVE has to register with the Counterterrorism Centre and share information about their activities. As one CSO member explained, ‘This is a security risk for the parents, the community, and all the people involved. It’s also problematic even in terms of our engagement with the communities that we’re working with’.
- CSOs felt that the focus in Kenya on Islamic extremism only was the result of donor-led Western agendas. In the words of one member of a peacebuilding NGO, ‘Who is funding the countering violent extremism programs? It is the Western countries. They are funding it because as the years progress this has become a migration concern....This is about Western governments being terrified of migration and the idea that all these extremists are going to go there and threaten their populations’. Countering violence by groups like Al-Shabaab has thus become a priority for the Kenyan government because it is a source of funding and foreign aid.
- Donor interest in violent extremism creates tensions for CSOs. They feel pressured to develop CVE projects and apply for funding, leading to a proliferation of VE related projects in Kenya. This has come at the expense of programming in other areas, e.g. land-based or cattle-based conflicts, as well as development projects. CSOs that don’t shift their focus to CVE risk not being able to continue their work. Many have refused to engage in any way with actors and funding involving the CVE agenda for ideological, as well as safety and security reasons, and as a result their access to funding has suffered considerably.

An earlier (2018) study of CVE initiatives in the coastal region of Kenya also stressed the importance of reflecting gender issues in all CVE activities: ‘Inclusion of women in the design and implementation of the programmes is currently an unmet need in coastal CVE programmes. The government and other stakeholders need to increase the involvement of women in CVE-related activities while recognizing their prominent role in families as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters and girlfriends (Badurdeen & Goldsmith, 2018: 87). The authors list a number of ways in which women can be involved in CVE programmes: identifying early signs of radicalization, community policing, and peer-to-peer training that supports women at risk of recruitment or suffering from the impacts of violent extremism (Badurdeen & Goldsmith, 2018: 87).

The literature highlights significant issues with the provision of rehabilitation and reintegration services for women. These appear to stem from a combination of factors: lack of gendered analysis in CVE policy and programming, and gender stereotypes which see women as incapable of perpetrating violent attacks. In the case of Somalia, while an organised defection process has been put in place for men, as of 2019 (Stern, 2019: 30) there were no defection and rehabilitation facilities and programmes for women. Thus, unlike male defectors who are screened and categorised as 'high risk' or 'low risk' – which determines whether they are referred for prosecution, or for amnesty and rehabilitation – very few women are screened, and most reintegrate into communities themselves (Stern, 2019). Even for the small proportion of women who are screened, this is problematic: the screening process cannot readily distinguish between women forced to join Al-Shabaab and those who volunteered to do so, or between wives (simply living with their Al-Shabaab husbands) and female members (who actively served the group) (Stern, 2019). There are also very few female screeners. Once screened, women are mostly sent back to their families, as there are no facilities for female defectors. As of 2019 IOM were in the early stages of implementing a community-based rehabilitation and reintegration programme for 'women associated with armed forces and groups' in Somalia with target beneficiaries including women forced into Al-Shabaab through marriage, slavery or kidnapping, or who followed their husbands into the groups, but not including female fighters or active participants in the group (Stern, 2019: 34).

Badurdeen and Goldsmith (2018: 87) stress the need for CVE programmes to provide psychological and social support for families of victims affected by violent extremism. 'This includes curative measures where the spouses and children, other family members, and friends who have joined violent extremist groups are provided assistance such as mentoring, counselling, and peer-to-peer support'. In their study of CVE initiatives in coastal regions of Kenya, they note that community support groups for rehabilitated women involved in violent extremist activities such as women returnees from Somalia, or Al-Shabaab defectors have provided a positive space for discussions and support towards rehabilitation, recovery and integration into their communities (Badurdeen & Goldsmith, 2018: 87). The support includes capacity building, life skills, microfinance training, livelihood options, entrepreneurial skills 'that assist those affected to change their lives instead of sinking into a state of poverty and stigmatization'.

### ***Examples of CVE and women programmes***

This review identified some examples of CVE initiatives in Kenya focused on women.

#### **Sisters without Borders (SwB)**

Sisters without Borders (SwB) is a grassroots initiative which emerged in Kenya, in the wake of the 2014 Westgate mall attack by Al-Shabaab. Some 20 women's groups in Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa – all hotspots of extremist activity - joined to create the Sisters without Borders network (Barbera, 2020). Coming from diverse ethnic and political backgrounds, the women use their local knowledge to prevent radicalization and bring about better collaboration with the authorities. Sisters without Borders is supported (e.g. with training) by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

According to USIP, over the past five years the network has had 'an outsized impact' in the cities in which it began (Barbera, 2020). In Garissa, it helped convene community leaders and officials

to ease local tensions and build a consensus on ways to improve security. In the Eastleigh and adjacent Majengo areas of Nairobi, where Al-Shabaab had recruited youth for years, and the government's aggressive response had fuelled public resentment, Sisters without Borders took a different approach, using arts programmes, support groups for mothers, and soccer friendlies between youth and police, to divert young people away from extremist ideas. 'As a result, women and youth now engage more freely with the police....Community members better understand the local police and legal systems, reducing the misunderstandings that can fuel grievances and ease extremist recruitment' (SwB chair Fauziya Ali, cited in Barbera, 2020).

Since 2019, Sisters without Borders has become a more national network, expanding into new regions of the country that have been hotspots of radicalization, including Isiolo, Kisumu and Nakuru (Barbera, 2020). It is also playing a role in shaping national policies: the Kenyan government's 2016 national strategy on CVE did not include women, so Sisters without Borders reached out to senior government officials and women parliamentarians to stress the need to include women. Officials have committed to revising the national strategy to include the role of women as one of its pillars (Barbera, 2020). Finally, Sisters without Borders has expanded into neighbouring countries in the region: Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Djibouti.

### **Advocacy for Women in Peace and Security Africa (AWAPSA)**

Established in Kenya in 2016, AWAPSA is a national organization with almost four million members that aims to empower women politically, economically, and socially, and advocate for women in leadership positions so that they can work on crucial issues like security. AWAPSA works with the authorities, notably the National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) (the coordinating body for all CVE work in the country) in order to incorporate civil society, and particularly women's, perspectives into national policies (ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 72).

AWAPSA's work on CVE has two main objectives: a) build trust between communities, the police and other security actors; and b) rehabilitate and reintegrate returnees from violent extremist groups, especially women and girls. With regard to the latter, AWAPSA works with women and youth affected by violent extremist groups by offering (ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 74):

- Help with returning to school or referrals to vocational training
- Help with opening their own businesses. Women can be referred to a microfinance initiative by the Ministry of Gender, which gives seed money and technical support to groups of 40 women.
- AWAPSA also collaborates with private sector entities to provide financial assistance to returnees.
- Informal peer support counselling groups for returnees, helping prevent a return to extremist groups.
- Training on the signs of radicalization.

Since 2016, more than 100 women and girl returnees have been assisted by AWAPSA through mentorship and help with relocation, returning to school, and starting businesses (ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 72). The organization also facilitates engagement and information exchange between the police and women community members (including returnees), thereby fostering trust and promoting effective reintegration and prevention of further radicalization or recruitment to violent extremism (ICAN & UNDP, 2019). Again since 2016, 268 women and girl returnees have shared

their stories with police through twice-monthly meetings in police stations; these dialogues have revealed important information on recruitment, messaging, channels of communication, etc. which can be used in P/CVE efforts (ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 74).

The case study of AWAPSA highlights the importance of civil society-led initiatives due to their greater accessibility and flexibility, but adds that 'such initiatives face an incredibly challenging and precarious operational environment that often leaves women practitioners and other civil society actors at risk of legal prosecution for their engagement of returnees potentially affiliated with terrorism' (ICAN & UNDP, 2019: 76).

## 5. Mozambique

### Context

#### *Islamist insurgency*

The northern provinces of Mozambique – notably Cabo Delgado as well as Niassa and Nampula – have seen an Islamist insurgency since 2017. The group involved is known by a number of names: Ahl-al Sunna wa al-Jamaa, Ansar al-Sunnah, Swahili Sunnah, and Al-Shabaab (though it is distinct from the Al-Shabaab operating in Somalia, Kenya, etc.) (Pirio et al, 2019: 1; Bukarte & Munasinghe, 2020). In October 2017 it attacked police stations, government officials and residents in a town in Cabo Delgado (Pirio et al, 2018: 1). The group emerged a few years earlier, inspired by the teachings of a radical Kenyan cleric. It espouses a fundamentalist (Salafi interpretation) of Islam. This fundamentalist ideology was rejected by the established Muslim Council in the region, and hence the group set up its own mosques and madrassas and drew recruits from local youth.

Ansar al-Sunnah was facilitated in this by underlying tensions and grievances in the region: land disputes between locals and powerful politically-connected actors; economic marginalization; appropriation of land by multinational companies, including for mining rubies; hire of external workers in infrastructure projects rather than locals; organized criminal gangs, corruption and human rights abuses (Pirio et al, 2019). Despite being one of the richest provinces in the country in terms of natural resources, Cabo Delgado ranks bottom in most social and economic indicators (Matsinhe & Valoi, 2019: 12). 'Insurgent groups have leveraged local grievances and placed themselves as an alternative to the current government, which has prioritized economic gain' (CEP, 2020b: 1). Bukarte and Munasinghe (2020: 5) echo this:

Ansar al-Sunna's message has resonated with disgruntled youth in Mozambique. The group's hard-line narrative positioned its idea of puritanical Islamic government as a panacea for decades of political exclusion, unemployment and poverty, which are more prevalent in the Muslim-majority areas of the north.

Financial incentives also contribute to recruitment to Ansar al-Sunnah. The group is able to offer 'wages' to members and other forms of compensation (Bukarte & Munasinghe, 2020). 'Ansar al-Sunna is recruiting members at scale, establishing robust financial networks across the country and leveraging local grievances to build legitimacy within communities' (Bukarte & Munasinghe, 2020: 3).

Both before, but especially after, the October 2017 the security forces responded with mass arrests and other heavy-handed measures (see below), which only served to fuel public anger and thus radicalization. Since May 2018 Ansar al-Sunnah's attacks have become more indiscriminate and violent, with numerous villages attacked, over 1,000 homes burned or destroyed, beheadings and kidnapping of women and girls (Pirio et al, 2019; Matsinhe & Valoi, 2019). In February 2019 it also attacked a convoy taking workers and goods for a multinational oil and gas company, leading to temporary suspension of construction on its liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant in Cabo Delgado (CEP, 2020b: 4). By mid-2019 Ansar al-Sunnah was carrying out 16 attacks per month; as of June 2020 this had increased to over 20 attacks every month in an insurgency that covered nine major towns and districts along the Cabo Delgado coast (Bukarte & Munasinghe, 2020: 4).

The group appears to be following a similar strategy to others in the region, such as Boko Haram and ISIS, of trying to seize and control larger and larger swathes of territory (Bukarte & Munasinghe, 2020: 3).

Several groups in the Sahel aligned to al-Qaeda or ISIS... have successfully established territory and created an environment where national, regional and international governments are finding it increasingly difficult to reinstate themselves. Ansar alSunna is following a similar trajectory as these groups (Bukarte & Munasinghe, 2020: 3)

New towns and villages also become a source of revenue for the group (Bukarte & Munasinghe, 2020). Since March 2020, Ansar al-Sunnah has sporadically taken control of the key port town of Mocimboa da Praia, which hosts multiple foreign energy companies taking on lucrative gas projects in the area (CEP, 2020b: 2). As of 24 September 2020 it had held the strategic port for six weeks (Meldrum, 2020). The increased frequency and scale of attacks and the sustained seizure of territory clearly indicate growing organization and capacity on the part of Ansar al-Sunnah.

### ***Regional links***

Ansar al-Sunnah has links with other extremist groups operating in the region and is not confined to citizens of Mozambique. As well as being inspired by the teachings of a radical Kenyan cleric, Sheikh Rogo, its ultra-conservative message was spread by preachers from Tanzania, as well as imams from Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, and the Congo, who from 2014-2015 began proselytizing in northern Mozambique (CEP, 2020b: 1). The group is reported to be led by a Gambian and a Mozambican. The insurgency includes local Mozambicans as well as militants from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania (CEP, 2020: 1). Ties with neighbouring Tanzania are particularly strong: Ansar al-Sunnah is believed to have training camps in northern Tanzania, the Kibiti district of Tanzania and the African Great Lakes Region (Bukarte & Munasinghe, 2020: 6). Moreover, there are signs that the jihadist violence in Cabo Delgado is spreading across the border into Tanzania (CEP, 2020b: 1).

Regional links are also important for Ansar al-Sunnah's financing. 'Preliminary findings of a study by Mozambican academics reveal that the extremist group is financed from illicit activities such as trade in wood, charcoal, ivory and rubber, involving partners in Tanzania, the Great Lakes, China and Vietnam' (Bukarte & Munasinghe, 2020: 6). The group also receives domestic and foreign donations from supporters. While it is unclear if the group receives funding or other direct support from ISIS, Ansar al-Sunnah has moved markedly closer to the group in the past two



years. In May 2018 Ansar al-Sunnah it allegedly pledged allegiance to ISIS, and in 2019 it was incorporated into Islamic State Central African Province (ISCAP).

### ***Government response***

The Mozambican government initially ignored warnings from local Muslim leaders about the emergence of a new radical group, and dismissed the violence in the north as being carried out by criminal elements, unaffiliated to any larger network (Matsinhe & Valoi, 2019; CEP, 2020b). But the escalating attacks forced it to quickly change its approach. The Cabo Delgado region is vitally important to Mozambique's economy, and the government has opted for a heavily securitised approach in tackling the insurgency:

The government has responded with a heavy military presence, including an intelligence service that has penetrated communities, creating an atmosphere of fear. Hundreds of people, including women and their children, have been arrested and can be found in jails in Pemba. Researchers and journalists are not allowed into the conflict zone, and when found in these areas they are arrested and detained. Human rights organisations have pointed to human rights violations by security forces. Soldiers alluded to the violent treatment meted out to suspects (Matsinhe & Valoi, 2019: 17)

Others also report widespread human rights abuses by the military. 'Security forces have been credibly accused of serious human rights abuses, including torture and illegal detentions, in their counterinsurgency operations' (Matfess & Noye, 2020). This has fuelled anger and distrust among the local population, and contributed to further Ansar al-Sunnah recruitment in the region. Another feature of the government's response has been hiring of foreign security contractors ('mercenaries') from countries such as Russia, the United States and South Africa (Matfess & Noye, 2020). Their lack of understanding of the local context has added to the human rights and local anger issues. Matfess and Noye (2020) urge the government to 'tackle the local causes of the conflict by emphasising economic and social development, while taking more care to avoid loss of civilian life during its military operations and holding human rights abusers to account'.

### ***Impact of insurgency***

The insurgency in northern Mozambique has had a massively detrimental impact on the local population. As of September 2020, 1,700 had been killed in the violence (since 2017) (Meldrum, 2020). One analysis warned in 2019: 'This insecurity and displacement are negatively impacting the local community and economic development within the region. This includes disrupting farming activities, which could further compound the crisis by impacting food security' (Pirio et al, 2019: 1). That has proved to be the case: some 300,000 people have been displaced leading to a very serious humanitarian situation (Meldrum, 2020). The World Food Programme (WFP) warned in September that the threat of hunger had grown in the north of Mozambique as entire communities had lost access to food and income (Meldrum, 2020).

As well as impacting local livelihoods, the insurgency is having an impact nationally. The Cabo Delgado provinces has large gas reserves and other natural resources, which are vital to Mozambique's economy. The three largest liquefied natural gas projects in Africa, worth a combined US\$ 55 billion, are in Cabo Delgado (Matfess & Noye, 2020). In February 2020, foreign firms that have invested in those projects requested the Mozambican government to send an additional 300 troops to the region to maintain security. 'Now, the rising insecurity there,

coupled with the global collapse of oil prices amid the coronavirus pandemic, have caused those foreign firms to rethink their investment plans' (Matfess & Noye, 2020).

## Role of women

With the exception of detailing beheadings of women carried out by Ansar al-Sunnah, the literature reviewed makes no mention of the role of women in violent extremism in Mozambique. Similarly, there is no mention of women playing a role in CVE efforts.

Given the many similarities between Ansar al-Sunnah and other Islamic extremist groups in Africa, notably Boko Haram and ISIS – fundamentalist ideology, violent attacks on government and civilians creating mass terror, attempts to seize and hold territory – it is reasonable to assume that its treatment of women would be similar. However, it is vital to look at each individual context – since drivers, factors, issues and roles will vary – and hence research is needed on women and violent extremism/CVE in Mozambique (-Tanzania).

## 6. Programming recommendations

Section 3 of this report explained the importance of taking a gendered approach to countering violent extremism (CVE) and outlined the diverse roles that women can play in CVE. This section focuses on programming, and makes recommendations to ensure that programmes do take a gendered approach to CVE.

As noted in the Summary, this evidence synthesis builds on two previous reviews by Idris and Abdelaziz (2017) and Idris (2019). Key recommendations for women and (P)/CVE programming made in those fell into three broad themes: promoting research and analysis; mainstreaming gender in CVE work; and involving women and women's organizations. Recommendations under each theme are as follows (Idris, 2019: 10-11):

### Research and analysis

- Invest in gathering data and information about women and girls
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the diverse roles women, girls, men and boys may take in conflict, of pre-existing gender norms, and of the specific gendered impacts of conflict.
- Use this information to inform gender-sensitive P/CVE policy and programming

### Mainstream gender

- Integrate a gender dimension in all P/CVE work
- In contexts where gender dynamics play an important role in recruitment and radicalisation to violent extremism, introduce CVE programmes specifically focused on women.
- Monitor CVE programmes from a gender perspective, looking at the extent of women's participation and their roles in such initiatives, and the impact on women. Include specific gender benchmarks.

- Promote gender equality in its own right: empowerment of women is an important goal in the context of promoting human rights and sustainable development, irrespective of P/CVE.

#### Participation by women and women's organisations

- Promote dialogue and participation of women and women's organisations in discussions about CVE policies and strategies, and seek their input in the design of CVE programmes.
- Promote partnerships with and between local women's organisations and build local ownership – this is key to effective programme implementation. Support community outreach programmes that raise awareness and inform women on identifying and responding to violent extremism and terrorism.
- Build capacity of local women's organisations and of women to promote CVE and implement CVE programmes. This includes capacity building for mediation, community engagement, communication, monitoring and evaluation, administration and programme management.
- Avoid using women and women's groups solely for P/CVE purposes, as this can lead to negative consequences for those groups, e.g. facing threats from extremist groups, undermining efforts to promote gender equality (if these become equated with a security agenda).
- Increase recruitment and training of women in the security services, including as police, investigators and interrogators, and remove obstacles to their retention and career advancement; carry out gender sensitisation of all security sector personnel.

The above recommendations were collated from a number of different sources, including guidelines or good practices issued by the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) in 2015. In 2019 GCTF issued an addendum to those good practices, 'to include a focus on mainstreaming gender, inter alia, based on new insights on gender-specific motivations and pathways of radicalization to violence and CVE responses that aim to counter women and girls' recruitment specifically, while also addressing men and boys' recruitment' (GCTF, 2019: 1).

Good practices on women and countering violent extremism, with a focus on mainstreaming gender, recommended by GCTF (2019: 4-9) are as follows:

#### 1. Mainstream gender in CVE, including promoting policy coherence with WPS frameworks.

The CVE and women, peace and security (WPS) frameworks are complementary: both are concerned with preventing women and girls' involvement in violent extremism, the use of sexual violence as a terrorist tactic, and highlight the importance of women's roles and participation in policies and programmes. Countries should aim to promote the alignment of their policies and programmes on CVE with those on WPS, while ensuring that women's rights are not undermined by security sector agencies that improperly prioritize CVE/security outcomes at the expense of the protection of women's human rights. Gender-sensitive CVE policies and practices, together with WPS frameworks, can facilitate gender-responsive approaches to disengagement, reintegration and rehabilitation of members of violent extremist and terrorist organizations.

2. Build a stronger evidence base on gender and violent extremism, including gendered aspects of men's, women's, boys' and girls' radicalization to violent extremism and terrorism.

Building a stronger evidence base, and understanding the gendered differences in relation to the involvement of women and girls compared with men and boys in violent extremist groups and activities, is necessary for devising gender informed responses and interventions that are tailored, more effective and sustainable. Identifying the gender-specific factors leading to violent extremist radicalization and recruitment requires systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data.

3. Ensure that CVE policies and programmes recognize and involve women and girls as critical stakeholders.

Women and girls have diverse roles to play in P/CVE in their families, communities, religious and civic associations, workplaces, and local and national governments. They should be integrally involved in developing more localized, inclusive and effective CVE approaches. Governments can enable women and girls to participate in CVE by mandating efforts to consult and engage with women participants in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of CVE policies and programmes; by facilitating dialogues among women and women leaders at the community and national level; by coordinating networks of women-led organizations involved in CVE; and by supporting women's and girls' leadership on CVE. Economic empowerment initiatives and support for girls to access education can also help in countering violent extremism.

4. Risk assessment tools for violent extremism including foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and returning FTFs should routinely consider gender norms and avoid stereotyping women as victims.

States should develop and implement gender-sensitive risk assessment tools to identify individuals demonstrating signs of radicalization to violence and evaluate the impact of rehabilitation programmes on FTFs and their families. Risk assessments should be sensitive to the complexity of individual profiles that may involve victimisation as well as perpetration of violence. Professional staff involved in risk assessments should have the relevant gender-sensitive expertise.

5. Ensure that CVE, including reintegration policies, are based on gender-sensitive analysis of the conditions conducive to women and girls' involvement in violent extremism.

It is essential that responses to the threats and challenges posed by violent extremism are based on gender-sensitive, context-specific evidence on the varying roles of women and men, boys and girls in violent extremist organizations, rather than on gender stereotypes. The specific needs and risk factors of women and girls and their often distinct radicalization to violence pathways need to be taken into account in tailored CVE policies and programmes. This is the case also with respect to FTFs and their families and policies on return and reintegration. Approaches to facilitating return and reintegration of female violent extremists should also recognize some common conditions affecting women and girls: their care of children, their relative marginalization and lack of resources, and their possible experience of sexual and gender-based violence within the violent extremist or terrorist group.

6. Develop a gender-sensitive approach to the handling of former FTFs (and their families).

While women and men may be equally likely to have committed violence, their recruitment, roles, treatment and experiences are frequently different within violent extremist and terrorist groups. Prosecution and remedial measures should take into account gender differences and gender

dynamics where appropriate and within the context of equal treatment under international law and national systems of justice. Gender-differentiated imprisonment and detention of FTFs should be provided so that specific needs and rights are addressed where appropriate. For instance, there should be provisions made for women who are pregnant, nursing or have dependent children. Female FTFs should be screened for possible sexual or gender-based victimization and receive appropriate protection, support, assistance and treatment as well as accountability and justice for crimes suffered when possible.

#### 7. Design and Support Gender-Responsive Reintegration and Rehabilitation Processes and Measures.

Gender and age-sensitive considerations need to be incorporated into all aspects of rehabilitation and reintegration. Dedicated programmes and a tailored approach for the rehabilitation and reintegration of women and girls are important because women are still not always recognized as (former) terrorists, due to prevailing gender norms, and hence may be excluded from reintegration programmes from which men benefit due to expectations around gender roles. Responses need to acknowledge the complex roles women play in an extremist group and the impact of possible trauma, as well as recognize their agency. The different return pathways of women and girls need to be recognized and gender-based trauma and stigma addressed. Rehabilitation programmes should be led by professional staff who draw on gender-sensitive understanding of pathways of violent extremist radicalization and return, including gendered trauma, stigma and shame. Gender-sensitivity suggests that female officials should be considered for direct involvement in the treatment of women suspected of violent extremism and FTF acts: that includes law enforcement, medical officials, psychologists, religious counsellors and social workers.

A referral pathway between and across law enforcement/security agencies and health and social services is important, but it should not be overly securitized. Collaboration between governments, civil society organizations and the community is necessary for the successful delivery of reintegration programmes. A whole of community approach that ensures the safety and protection of the community and of the returnee, and promotes resilience in the community is needed. CSOs, in particular women-led CSOs therefore play an important role. States should appropriately engage and empower women's organizations to respond to FTF-related challenges and dynamics without instrumentalizing and securitizing their engagement.

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## Key websites

- Institute for Security Studies (ISS): [www.issafrica.org](http://www.issafrica.org)

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