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Missing the 'missing link' in P/CVE: Why rethinking the youth bulge theory is a priority

Mwai W. Eunice

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA International Studies and Diplomacy of the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London)

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the impact of the youth bulge theory on P/CVE policy and practice. The study analyses the suitability and effectiveness of the theory's inspired P/CVE approaches in addressing locally specific drivers of VE in Kenya and Somalia based on youth perceptions and experiences. This analysis found that the prominence of youth bulge theory in the field of youth, peace and security has entrenched gender misconceptions in mainstream P/CVE policy, effectively constraining constructive youth engagement, both as partners and threats. The assessment of local youth realities reveals that policymaker-driven initiatives risk obscuring the locally specific structural factors that breed VE. This leads to approaches that neither address the underlying causes of VE, nor adequately empower the youth to challenge the political, socio-cultural and economic status quo that breeds factors for VE. Further, the demographic 'explanation' for civil unrest provides kleptocratic governments with 'legitimate' excuse for bad governance, shifting the burden of addressing VE to communities. The dissertation finds that frameworks that incorporate critical gender and social constructivism theories in understanding the dynamic and complex youth realities are better suited in informing P/CVE policy and practice.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ATPU	Anti-Terror Police Unit
CSOs	civil society organisations
CT	counterterrorism
CVE	countering violent extremism
EU	European Union
FGD	focus group discussion
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
KDF	Kenya Defence Forces
KNSCVE	Kenya National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE),
SFG	Somali Federal Government
SNS/AP-PCVE	Somali National Strategy & Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NISA	National Intelligence Security Agency
P/CVE	preventing and/or countering violent extremism
SNA	Somali National Army
STRIVE	Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WPS	women, peace and security

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Until recently, the study of terrorist groups and violent extremism (VE) remained male-focused (Stern 2019 p5). The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2242 in 2015 increased global attention on the gender dimensions of terrorism and VE. It increased calls for women's participation in the counterterrorism (CT) and P/CVE agendas (UNSCR 2015). Despite this global recourse, latent misconceptions about gender and violent extremism endure in theory and practice, attributable to the prominence of 'youth bulge' theory in the field of youth, peace and security, on which the Global War and Terror (GWOT) is rooted (Alexander 2019 p5; Pruitt 2020 p1; Sommers 2019 p10). The theory builds on biologically essentialist framings that construct young men as inherently violent, terming them as current and future perpetrators of violence, effectively obscuring women involvement in VE and neglecting non-violent roles of VE (Pruitt 2020 p2). As Hendrixson (2004 p4) notes, post 911, "Most commentary about the youth bulge condemns young men as potential terrorists who are swayed by dogma and rhetoric to form collective reigns of terror".

In line with this mainstream theorising and conceptualisation, the study of al-Shabaab has primarily focused on its men, and so have regional P/CVE policies and practices (Stern 2019; Ndung' u et al. 2017, Ogada, 2016; Schwartz et al. 2013). This one-sided attention has, for a long time, neglected an essential part of addressing VE in Kenya and Somalia – women and girls' involvement- both as threats and P/CVE agents. There remains a dearth of knowledge on women and violent extremism in Kenya and Somalia (Ndungu et al. 2017; RUSI 2015). The lack of evidence-based, nuanced and context-specific data has meant that integration of

women in P/CVE is mainly conceptual, with minimal attention given to locally specific drivers of VE. As such, gender assumptions about women's agency entrenched by the youth bulge framework prevail in policy and practice. This risks to relegate women's influence to the domestic sphere, where they are assumed to have a more significant influence over their children and can act as embedded security agents within their homes and communities (Mesok 2019 p5).

The persistence and growing popularity of youth bulge theory under GWOT era has also resulted in the securitisation of global south youth, particularly young men, which consequently affects their constructive engagement in peace and security (Pruitt 2020 p716; Schwartz and Yalbir 2019). There is a widespread mainstream perception that "Young men are the protagonists of virtually all violent political action as well as political extremism with a potential to threaten democracy" (Weber 2013 p335). As such, Huber (2017 p118) observes that post 911, the concept of youth bulge proliferates US discourse on terrorism, and it is one of the leading foreign policy in relation to global south youth. There is a widespread tendency by governments and international actors to treat youth as a problem to address instead of actors with whom to engage. Sommers (2019 p12) observes that "the current status quo — across virtually all countries and regions where ‘bulging’ youth populations persist — generally is not structured to work with youth, much less serve youthful citizens." The intransigence of governments and international institutions to meaningfully engage the youth and adapt policies and perspectives to match youth realities impacts the effectiveness of current P/CVE approaches. The youth bulge framework offers 'apolitical' statistical justification for policies that actively securitise and politicise young men.

With young men securitised and young women viewed as victims and pawns of men, the youth bulge theory has challenged African youth engagement policy design, rendering them a 'marginalised majority'. Despite youth comprising over 60% of the population in both Kenya and Somalia and notwithstanding the countries' commitment to UNSCR 2250's paradigm shift in recognising the positive role of youth in sustainable peace, youths are just mere subjects of policymaker-driven programmes. Stereotypes lead to security gaps, challenge inclusive peace and contributes to the mutual construction of women's inherent passivity and men's intrinsic aggressiveness. These constructs neglect a broader understanding of the gendered dynamics of violent conflict (Alexander 2019 p6; Mesok 2019 p5). Consequently, the effectiveness of P/CVE initiatives in matching youth realities and addressing underlying VE drivers is questionable.

This dissertation examines the impact of youth bulge theory on P/CVE policy and practice. It places primacy on the voice of the local youth (the primary target of P/CVE) in evaluating the effectiveness of youth bulge inspired P/CVE approaches and programmes in Kenya and Somalia. This is an effort aimed at contributing to the field of P/CVE evaluation which remains underdeveloped. Based on youth interviews, the dissertation highlights the salient of historical, socio-cultural (clan and ethnic identities), political and economic factors in informing P/CVE policy. It shows that policies that incorporate critical gender, intersectionality and social constructivism frameworks are better suited in understanding the dynamic and complex youth realities.

Methodology

The overarching objective of the study is to assess how the prominence of youth bulge theory in the field of youth, peace and security impacts P/CVE effectiveness. Since there remains a dearth of research on P/CVE evaluation, particularly bottom-up evaluations, this study places the primary P/CVE recipients – youth - at the centre of assessment. The study entails analysing 20 field study reports documenting local youth experiences and perceptions on VE, CVE and P/CVE programmes between 2011 and 2019. The analysis also explores available P/CVE evaluation reports on regional programmes to present a holistic view. The sources used in the analysis are mainly secondary: published field reports, case studies, evaluation reports, policy analysis reports, scholarly articles and books. The analysis is mainly qualitative with several statistical representations. The paper is a discourse analysis showing how narratives shape social constructs and how current social constructs mutually construct and reinforce narratives. The literature review analyses theoretical conceptualisations and identifies knowledge gaps which are further analyses in the case studies. The dissertation draws from poststructuralist and feminist critiques that place importance on power and knowledge.

Context

The horn of Africa has gained notoriety as a breeding ground for violent extremism attributable the presence of a wide range of grievances exploitable by extremist groups like al-Shabaab, the Lord's Resistance Army or the Sudan Liberation Movement (Cabrera and Pauwels 2016). Al-Shabaab (meaning The youth in Arabic) is the region's most prominent terrorist group, one that remains a formidable threat and "a force to be reckoned with" despite years of operations against it (Crisis Group 2019 p4). Its resilience stems from

regional states' weaknesses, its tactical flexibility and ability to navigate and instrumentalise clan and ethnic politics (Crisis Group 2016). Recent reports have cast light on al-Shabaab's dynamic and 'unconventional' operational tactics, including working with sex workers in Nairobi as intelligence agents (Petrich and Donnelly 2019 p1169). Despite suffering major tactical and strategic setbacks between 2011 and 2014 under the ongoing military operation, al-Shabaab has maintained its offensive capability, carrying out sophisticated attacks on AMISOM bases, Somalia citizens and intensified cross border attacks in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Djibouti (Mutahi et al. 2017 p119). The group has further managed to increase its appeal beyond Somalia borders recruiting foreign fighters across the region, particularly in Kenya (Williams 2014 p908; Botha and Adbile 2014). While the group had previously mainly recruited Somali ethnic members and Muslims, a growing number of non-ethnic Somalis and new Islam converts are filling the group's ranks. The January 2019 attack on Dusit hotel in Nairobi reflects this, being the first attack to be led by a non-ethnic Somali since the group began cross-border attacks in Kenya in 2010 (Reuters 2019).

Given the persistence of the al-Shabaab threat and the limited results of militarized counterterrorism (CT) in addressing VE, the global paradigm shift to P/CVE was a welcome move. Kenya and Somalia were the first countries in the region to develop and launch their national strategies and action plans for P/CVE in 2016 in line with UN's 2015 Plan of Action for to prevent VE. In recent years, the two states have crafted multi-agency partnerships for preventing and countering violent extremism supported by key western powers to reflect the new paradigm shift. However, the governments' primary approach of stemming violent extremism remains anchored on hard power approaches. A report by regional civil society organisations asserts that P/CVE has not replaced CT and has arguably increased legitimacy

to the expansion of states' political and legal powers to carry out punitive crackdowns on communities deemed 'at risk' of VE. Given that 'at risk' communities are mostly poor Muslim majority neighbourhoods, P/CVE just like CT is perceived by many in the targeted communities as unfairly targeting Muslims (Mesok 2019 p6). This approach has resulted in increased mistrust between affected communities, governments and regional practitioners, with detrimental effects on P/CVE efforts (UNDP 2017).

Evaluation of regional CVE and P/CVE remains underdeveloped, while globally, there is relatively little evidence on what has worked in P/CVE (Kelly 2020 p1). Regional P/CVE evaluation approaches can be classified into: (a) The top-down approach – This is the most prominent approach which places importance on the voice of the political elite repeatedly placing national security at the centre of evaluation. This approach ignores that the state can be a source of insecurity to its citizens; (b) Bottom-up approach which privileges the voice of community elders, clan leaders, area chiefs and Imams who may not necessarily represent the voice of the youth; and (c) The social scientific evaluations based on broad global understanding of push and pull factors of violent extremism (Finn et al. 2016 p165).

Some of the oft-cited challenges facing P/CVE in the region include: Underfunding which leads to programmes being regionally fragmented and mostly implemented in ad hoc manner; lack of coordination given the multiplicity of actors and instruments required to address the complex web of interrelated drivers of radicalisation; lack of baseline data on which to base programmes on; the lack of clear definition of VE leading to inconsistencies in different stakeholders' approaches to violent extremism; lack of gendered approaches; the paucity of research that evaluates the suitability of current and previous P/CVE and lack of proper youth engagement in P/CVE policy (Kelly 2020; Crisman et al. 2020; Stern 2019;

UNDP 2017; Ndung' u et al. 2017; Mbugua and Masiani 2017; Cabrera and Pauwels 2016; Finn et al. 2016; Khalil and Zeuthen 2014).

Significance of research

A range of P/CVE actors has taken up the challenge of addressing root causes of VE using a range of programmes, initiatives and interventions. However, there is a weak evidence base and a lack of agreement on the best or effective response (Kelly 2020 p1). In Kenya and Somalia, there is minimal research to assess the extent to which P/CVE initiatives are suited in addressing the root drivers of VE. The few available programme evaluations (mostly internal evaluations) remain primarily unavailable to the public, making it difficult to carry out cross-programme comparisons and highlight best practices (Cabrera and Pauwels 2016 p4). The situation is compounded by the fact that there is no clear definition of VE included in the countries' National strategies for P/CVE; hence different stakeholders rely on their conceptualisations in designing responses (Mahdi and Zyl 2019). As UNDP study on Africa's VE (2017) asserts, the largest share of existing literature on P/CVE is conceptual as opposed to empirical. Further, the resounding lack of youth voices in theorising, policy designing and assessment despite being the primary target for P/CVE also begs questions.

As such, this paper seeks to contribute to the growing research by assessing youth perceptions and analysing the extent to which P/CVE initiatives match youth realities. This is in recognition that with the prominence of youth bulge theory in the study of youth, peace and security "the lion's share of research on large youth populations does not feature the voices of youth themselves… For the field of CVE, this research gap is especially significant given that youth (especially male youth) are the focus of so much attention and investment" (Sommers 2019 p12).

Chapter outline

Chapter two is a literature review and conceptual analysis of the theoretical frameworks that situates this dissertation within the broader academic discourse. Chapter three is a narrative review that presents the case of Kenya and Somalia within the subject of analysis. Chapter four presents youth realities and youth views on VE, P/CVE and governance and analyse the responsiveness of current programmes, by examining them alongside youth realities. This presents the shortcomings of youth bulge inspired policies in addressing VE in Kenya and Somalia and calls for frameworks that embrace the complexity and dynamism of youth lives.

Chapter 2

A conceptual review of the theoretical frameworks

The youth bulge theory

The term "youth bulge" coined by Gary Fuller in 1985 while working for the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has proven to have a long shelf life (Hendrixson 2004 p2). It refers to a demographic phenomenon where a significantly large proportion of young adults, aged 15 to 29 years, comprise more than 40 per cent of all adults but also signifies a sense of instability and an increased risk of conflict. The theory's central claim is that the presence of 'too many young men' can be expected to lead to violence (Pruitt 2020 p713). The short answer offered by key theorists for the convictive correlation is "too many young men with not enough to do" (Cincotta et al. 2003 p44). The framework links underdevelopment, poverty and high levels of unemployment to civil conflicts. Collier and Hoeffler (2004 p569) assert that young males represent "the group from whom rebels are recruited" while Weber (2013 p335) underscore that "Young men are the protagonists of virtually all violent political action as well as political extremism with a potential to threaten democracy". The correlations between young men and violence are based on unproven biologically essentialist framing that young men are inherently violent. Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner (2009 p10 p16) for example assert that a greater proportion of young men in society is expected to increase the risk of civil war and rebellion, with the likely explanation being "that some young men have both an absolute advantage and a taste for violence". Whereas the assertion that young men are inherently violent has been disputed by biological

research (Rowe et al. 2004), the misguided assumption has inspired the widely held idea that "the proportion of young men in the society is a good proxy for the proportion of the population psychologically predisposed to violence and best-suited for rebel recruitment" (Collier et al. 2009 p22). This "extreme robust" (Urdal 2004) correlation between the high population of youth and civil unrest has been used to label youths in the global south looming threats, with no evaluation of any other reasons that cause youth unrests. Post 911, youth bulge theory became the shorthand explanation for Islamic extremism and became one of the key frameworks on which GWOT is rooted. Huntington's comments post 911 highlight the vindictive assertion :

> "I don't think Islam is any more violent than any other religions [...]. But the key factor is the demographic factor. Generally speaking, the people who go out and kill other people are males between the ages of 16 and 30. During the 1960s, 70s and 80s there were high birth rates in the Muslim world, and this has given rise to a huge youth bulge." Interview with Samuel P. Huntington by Michael Steinberger, The Observer, Sunday, October 21, 2001 quoted in Sommers 2019).

The idea that youth bulge represents a security threat is based on in the argument that population pressure causes competition for scarce resources, and when governments fail to meet the demand, youth resort to violence (Sommers 2006 p3; Hendrixson 2004 p2). The argument has inspired the belief that conflicts arising from a high population of youths in the global south represent a crucial security threat for the developed world. Youth bulge has reinforced the globalisation of security in that "Underdevelopment in peripheral regions of the global economy is thus reconstrued not just as a development problem for those living in these regions, but a security concern for those living in metropolitan centres of global

wealth accumulation" (Tannock and Sukariah 2018 p6). It is on this logic that USAID funds P/CVE programmes in Africa and the Middle East. Such arguments, whereas they highlight a reality of the impact of bad governance and underdevelopment on youth's lives, they problematise the 'symptom rather than the disease'. A study by Mercy Corps has found that drivers of youth violence are tied more directly to issues of poor governance and political exclusion than unemployment (Hummer 2015). This is in line with findings of a 2016 research report by RESOLVE which asserts "a strong link between repressive security tactics and rise of extremism" (RESOLVE Network 2016 p8). Similarly, UNDP (2017 p5) argues that "research makes clear that a sense of grievance towards, and limited confidence in, government is widespread in the regions of Africa associated with the highest incidence of violent extremism".

Rethinking the youth Bulge theory

Despite its questionable arguments, the youth bulge theory has "has become part of public media analyses and mainstream political rhetoric, and is even officially enshrined in the foreign policy of some states" (Pruitt 2020 p711). She adds that rethinking the theory is a matter of urgency "given its persistent and even growing popularity with policymakers" (p716) particularly among American foreign policy officials. Huber (2017 p111, p118) points out that "from the early 2000s onwards ... the concept of "Youth Bulge" proliferates in the US discourse on terrorism in the Arab world" reproducing "gendered images of young Muslim men as terror threats and threats to women, young Muslim women as victims and non-productive". This has resulted in gendered impact, where there has been increased attention on male youths to address the 'inherent threats' while neglecting the role of girls and women in peace and security.

There are increased calls for constructive youth engagement globally. The 2015 UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security represents a demonstrable effort to better understand young people's roles and experiences in conflict-affected settings, making them the centrepiece of peace and stability (United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 2015). The June 2018 adoption of UNSCR 2419 reinforces the importance of youth engagement by calling on "all relevant actors to consider ways for increasing the representation of young people when negotiating and implementing peace agreements" and recognises "that their marginalisation was detrimental to building sustainable peace and countering violent extremism" (United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 2018). Despite the articulated need for a paradigm shift, the theory's dominance remains evident in policy and scholarly work in the field of youth peace and security (Huber 2017; Tannock and Sukariah 2018). Its prominence in mainstream International Relations approach of theorising youth and conflict is highlighted by a review of scholarly publications that found that "the only articles that paid significant attention to youth and conflict published in International Studies Quarterly (ISQ) between 2006 and 2016 adopted a youth bulge framework" (Pruitt 2020 p720). This is despite research in several countries across the Pacific proving that whenever a 'youth problems' lens has been applied in policy-making, it has tended to result in little positive change for young people (Pruitt 2020; Sommers 2019).

There is no question that large concentrations of unemployed youths may contribute to instability at some point. Still, a link between high numbers of youth and instability does not validate a causal relationship. This, of course, does not render the tenets of the youth bulge thesis invalid as data by Urdal, Goldstone and Cincotta has established a link. The link is better suited in guiding research into the issues behind the violence, rather than securitising

youth. What is also striking in youth bulge theory is the limited consideration of other factors related to instability and lack of research into what motivates most youths to resist engagement in conflict and violent extremism despite living in poverty-ridden bad governed states (Sommers 2019 p11). Barker and Ricardo argue that "While the youth bulge argument is compelling, it is important to reaffirm that in any of these settings, only a minority of young men participate in conflicts" (2006 p181).

The concept of youth bulge is vital in attracting attention to states with high youth populations who require support; however, labelling the youths as a source of instability is counterproductive. It renders victims as the protagonists and inspires and mutually constructs gender stereotypes. It also shifts focus from underlying structural factors that drive VE. As Huber critically notes, "the youth bulge theory is a convenient explanation for high unemployment or social conflict for Western actors and their authoritarian partner regimes as it blames for these problems on demographics rather than decades of failing economic policies" (Huber 2017 p117). The youth bulge has inspired fears of growing youth cohorts based on stereotypical assumptions yet failed to engage with gender theory or incorporate feminist IR contributions resulting in the narrow conceptualisation of complex and dynamic youth realities. When young people are identified narrowly as 'threats' and 'victims', their experiences, ideas and needs are marginalised from peace and security as they are deemed a problem to be addressed rather than complex actors with the capacity to contribute to policy and practice (Pruitt 2020; Alexander et al. 2019 p5).

Securitisation theory

The concept of securitisation refers to "the process of presenting an issue in security terms, in other words as an existential threat" (Buzan and Hansen 2009 p214). It refers to the

successful labelling of an issue as a security issue, removing it from the realm of ordinary politics, casting it as an existential threat which justifies extraordinary measures to deal with the threat (Williams 1998). The 'securityness' of an issue is defined by the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat between actor and the audience, which then legitimates the actors to deal with the threat using extraordinary means (Roe, 2008 p615). The core elements of securitisation theory are; the securitising actor (the agent who presents an issue as a threat), the identified threat (the threatening entity) the referent object (the entity that is threatened) and the audience (the agreement of which is necessary to confer an intersubjective status to the threat). The Copenhagen School has been keen to underscore the multiplicity of securitising audiences particularly highlighting the importance of the general public, assumed to play an important role especially in a liberal democracy (Balzacq 2005, 2011; Stritzel 2007). Balzacq (2011 p3) has honed the definition of securitisation, arguing that it is:

> an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilised by a securitising actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions) about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitising actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customised policy must be immediately undertaken to block it.

The Copenhagen School has been keen to underscore the multiplicity of securitising audiences, particularly highlighting the importance of the general public, assumed to play an

important role especially in a liberal democracy (Roe 2008 p616). Balzacq (2005 p185) argues that publics valuably provide their governments with 'moral' support, but not with 'formal' support that 'mandates governments to adopt a specific policy. Roe (2008 p616) argues that securitisation is a two-stage process - 'stage of identification' and the 'stage of mobilisation'. Viewed this way, Roe points out that whereas the general public plays an essential role in providing the actors with the moral support to act on the threat, more crucial is the 'formal' support provided by the parliament or ruling elite. Through an analysis of UK' decision to join the USA in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Roe shows that ultimately, it was parliament's formal support (stage of mobilisation) that mattered in the invasion despite lack of public concurrence in the use of military force against Saddam Hussein. As the UK invasion case reveals, whereas the general public may agree on the securityness of an issue (stage of identification), the same public may disagree on the extraordinariness of measures proposed (stage of mobilisation). The case study highlights the fact that, while the concurrence of the masses is essential, what is crucial is the support of the political elite. Further, even in cases where the threat has been intersubjectively established, the response to the threat might not be intersubjective. Collins (2005) argues that:

> to claim that an issue has become securitised is not only to claim that is has become a security issue but also to make a claim that the elite has responded by adopting emergency powers. . . This means that the term securitised cannot be synonymous with an issue becoming security because it means more than this; it also reveals that the elite want to respond with measures outside of the normal political process (Roe quotes Collins 2005 p573).

From this perspective, framing an issue as a security threat is one thing (rhetoric securitisation) while acting on the threat in terms of putting to use extraordinary measures (active securitisation) is another. According to Buzan et al. (1998), the issue is securitised only if and when the audience accepts it as such. Recent studies have, however, observed that the term audience had been left 'radically underdeveloped' and in need of a better definition and probably differentiation (Wæver, 2009; Stritzel 2007 p362). The question of what constitutes audience acceptance is also vague. Further, in cases of 'institutionalised securitisation', the audience is at best marginalised or at worst excluded (Roe 2008 p618) while in quasi democracies and authoritarian regimes, like most African states, the public is easily marginalised.

The global securitisation of youth

Post 9/11, "The global securitisation of youth has occurred in the context of the securitisation of development and rise of a 'security-development nexus" (Tannock and Sukarieh 2018 p5). The nexus is heavily informed by the youth bulge theory that links underdevelopment to civil unrest (Sommers 2011, 2019; Huber 2017). Stern and Öjendal (2010 p11) define security-development nexus as a political environment in which security concerns and development challenges are claimed to be 'inextricably linked' and an extensive 'network of connections' is constructed to join up security and development policies, practices, actors and institutions. Chander (2007 p268) asserts that the linking up development and security agendas, is not necessarily based on empirical research evidence; and the ubiquitous promotion of security concerns may not actually improve the safety and well-being of individuals and communities. Instead, security under GWOT has taken a priority, such that its invocation warrants state's action, external regulatory or

interventionist initiative without necessarily seeking public concurrence. For example, in Kenya, the 2012 Prevention of Terrorism Act provides a vague definition of terrorism, allowing the state to create lists of suspected terrorists and terrorist organisations without due process (Mazrui, 2018). Such legislations gives room to political elites to exploit youth securitisation. An independent progress study on youth, peace and security commissioned by the UN Secretary-General which shows that young people opposed to government policy have often been labelled 'extremists' or 'terrorists', as the focus on violent extremism has encouraged the suspension of human rights and the restriction of opportunities for hearing youth voices (Simpson 2018 p7). Fisher and Anderson (2015 p135) critically argue that while the GWOT security agenda has imposed a securitised approach upon passive and vulnerable youths in the global south, most African governments have eagerly embraced the agenda and actively promoted its practice in pursuit of aid. Equally important, the securitised agenda has given repressive governments a legitimate framework on which to suppress democracy and to avoid accountability to the youth. Political and social unrests involving the youth are often articulated under the securitised agenda, blaming demographics and underdevelopment. It is a commonplace for African governments to suppress political demonstrations, attack civil society members and suppress rights and freedom – despite these being rights enshrined in many constitutions (Human Rights Watch report 2019; Freedom House report 2019). Indeed, as Pruitt (2020 p719) asserts, the "uncritical adherence to the flawed assumptions of youth bulge theory may even be harmful to prospects for democracy." Security of the 'state' takes importance often at the expense of youth security.

The bolstered link between security and development forms the basis of most P/CVE programmes. Youths from poor Muslim neighbourhoods deemed prone to radicalisation are targeted with a range of programmes aimed at addressing the drivers of violent extremism. Although well intended, security-development nexus programmes mainly focus on addressing development challenges with minimal effort in empowering the youth to challenge structural drivers of VE genuinely. As such, these programmes work as spaces of social control and containment offering little to no opportunity to effect radical or significant social or political change (Shwartz and Yalbir 2019; Tannock and Sukarieh 2018 p17). As Pruitt (2020 p726) puts it, "the youth bulge theory fails to address structural issues of power, including gender hierarchies, and thus, rather than addressing violence and conflict, may instead reinforce it by securitising young men in ways that depoliticise factors leading to participation in violence".

Chapter 3

Narrative review

The case for Kenya and Somalia: An overview

The Horn of Africa is a notorious breeding ground for VE. The Global Centre on Cooperative Security (2015 p2) argues that the persistent threat posed by transnational terrorists and other VE groups in the region is:

> exacerbated by an array of chronic problems, ranging from underdevelopment and weak governance to high unemployment, particularly among youth, potentially making them more vulnerable to empty promises of a better life and financial incentives offered by terrorist organisations… Disproportionate military and other repressive reactions to security threats such as terrorism often end up delegitimising local authorities and undermining efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism through community engagement. Moreover, the underdevelopment and fragility that characterises the sub-region has given rise to a range of grievances that foster an enabling environment for terrorist groups to spread their message and recruit support.

The greatest terror threat in the region comes from al-Shabaab (Ndung' u et al. 2017 p18), with Kenya and Somalia being the most affected, both in numbers of attacks and

radicalisation (Mahdi and Zyl 2019 p3). Somalia ranks 7th on the 2019 Global Terrorism Index while Kenya ranks 21 (Global Terrorism Index report 2019). As such, the two countries were keen to align their national strategies with the UN Plan of Action, being among the first countries to launch their respective national strategies for P/CVE IN 2016 (NSCVE 2016; NSAP-PCVE 2016). The shortcomings of the security-focused counterterrorism approach inform the global recourse towards Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) (Crisman et al. 2020). The new approach, articulated under pillar 1 of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006) and the 2016 UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism recognises that Violent Extremism (VE) cannot be countered by military means alone. Instead, success requires addressing the structural root causes of conflict. The UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism 2016, therefore, called on member states to develop "a national plan of action to prevent violent extremism which sets national priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism and complements national counter-terrorism strategies" (UNCC 2016). Consequently, given the notoriety of Kenya and Somalia a breeding grounds for VE, efforts are increasingly geared towards dissuading 'at-risk' groups and individuals from joining violent armed movements.

While holistic P/CVE continue to be implemented aimed at both CVE and increasing societal and individual resilience against extremism, the main challenge is that little is known about the effectiveness, relevance and impact of policy responses (Kelly 2019 p5). A 2018 RAND report concluded that, despite the volume of CT and PCVE initiatives established in recent years, the evidence base underpinning current approaches remains limited and evaluation practice and investments are underdeveloped compared to the overall fields of CT and PCVE (Bellasio et al., 2018 p1). Indeed, P/CVE programming has been criticised for not being

sufficiently context-specific and for designing interventions based on anecdotal observation, with minimal consultations with the targeted groups (Cabrera and Pauwels, 2016). In Kenya and Somalia, while considerable efforts have been made to understand VE, little research has been done to assess P/CVE measures in place and the extent to which they respond to the diverse socio-cultural, economic and political conditions conducive for VE (Mbugua and Masiani 2017; ICG 2016; Feddes & Gallucci, 2016). Finn et al. (2016) in their study of how P/CVE programming engages the youth show that majority of the approaches are top-down, neglecting the voice of the youth they claim to target.

Note: Recognising that P/CVE is defined differently by different actors (Kelly 2019 p3), the analysis follows the definition of P/CVE as: 'Efforts to reduce push factors' (PVE, e.g. development programmes address the push factors towards radicalisation); and efforts to 'deal with already radicalised individuals or at-risk individuals' (CVE, e.g. rehabilitation, surveillance, counter-narratives) (Kelly 2019 p4; Boutellis & Fink 2016 p.6; Romaniuk 2015 p30).

The al-Shabaab threat

Al-Shabaab originated as the armed faction of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) that was formed in Somalia following state collapse in the 1990s (Mueller 2016). Government forces defeated the Islamic Courts Union in 2006, but al-Shabaab remained, gaining nationalist 'street credibility' in its resistance against the Ethiopian invasion of Somali in 2006 (Finn et al. 2016 p172). The group has then managed to instrumentalise the perceived 'street credibility', presenting itself as the saviour of the Somali people on religious and nationalist grounds, while simultaneously playing witty clan politics by avoiding clan affiliations, hence propping itself up as 'inter-clan mediator' (Chonka 2016; Mueller 2016).

Given the salient of clan politics in Somalia and Kenya and the two states inability and unwillingness to address clan horizontal inequalities (economic, political and social), al-Shabaab resilience despite battlefield setbacks is partly attributable to its ability to tap mainstream political grievances. As Yusuf (2019 p1) points out, widespread injustices and political malfeasances perpetrated by national political leaders and local power brokers have reinforced the group's resilience. Corruption, particularly the complacency and tacit collaboration of the business community with the insurgents, has further strengthened al-Shabaab. Ibid. Reports of Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) (within AMISOM in southern Somalia) involvement in charcoal and sugar trade with al-Shabaab was flagged by nonpartisan watchdog organisation Journalists for Justice and later highlighted by UNMIS IN 2015 (Mccormick 2015).

As for the growth of domestic terrorism in Kenya, regional experts have argued that the growing threat is attributable to Operation Linda Inchi and the subsequent hard power approached employed on Somali and Muslim neighbourhoods after al-Shabaab's retaliatory attacks. Resultant grievances ultimately provided the recruitment fodder for al-Shabaab to drive its operations into Kenyan territory (Mutahi et al. 2017 p119; Muller, 2016). The persistence and expansion of al-Shabaab beyond Somalia borders in the global context of rising violent extremism has over the last ten years made efforts against Violent Extremism a top priority for regional governments and supporting actors (Crisman et al. 2020 p17).

State responses to VE from 2011 to 2019

This section will analyse Kenya's and Somalia's approaches to stemming violent extremism, dividing them into two distinct periods. The first period is from 2011 – 2016, characterised

by hard power securitised responses and the second period from 2016 – 2019, marked by the launch of national strategies and Action Plan for P/CVE.

Kenya

2011 – 2016 – Kenya's approach of stemming VE in this period was mainly security-based, anchored on the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2012; the Security Laws (Amendment) Act, 2014; and the Proceeds of Crime and Anti-Money Laundering (Amendment) Act 2017. Responses under these laws focused on addressing violent extremism through policing, surveillance and intelligence gathering, money laundering controls and prosecution (Ogada, 2017 p3). In October 2011, the government launched operation Linda Inchi, termed as a buffer against Al-Shabaab attacks. The operation also instigated police swoops in majority-Somali neighbourhoods, tightened administrative controls of refugee populations, and gave broad leeway to the Anti-Terrorism Policing Unit (ATPU) that is tasked with identifying and detaining terror suspects (Mutahi 2017 et al. p119). The securitised approach has been marred by human rights abuses, ethnic and religious profiling. It has become best known for its paradoxical effect in increasing domestic terrorism among targeted communities (Freedom House 2018). The primary anti-terrorism legislation - the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2012- has particularly criticised for providing a vague definition of terrorism, greatly expanding the government's power of securitising groups and individuals (Mazrui et al. 2018 p27). Kenyan authorities have numerously been accused of using the hard-power anti-terrorism legislation to crack down silence political opponents, human rights defenders and dissidents (Freedom House report 2018; Cabrera and Pauwels 2016).

Following the 2013 Westgate Mall attack, al-Shabaab's first major attack post-operation Linda Inchi, the Kenyan government launched operation' Usalama Watch' in Nairobi's Somali neighbourhood of Eastleigh. The government deployed over 6000 police officers indiscriminately targeting Somalis and Muslims. Detainees were incarcerated at police stations throughout Nairobi, as well as in the city's Kasarani sports stadium, where officials screened them from the National Registration Bureau and Department of Refugee Affairs (Mutahi et al. p 130 2017). Over 4,000 people, majority male Somali men, were arrested in the first week of the operation (Amnesty International 2014). Usalama watch, just like the 2012 raid in the Suq Mugdi market in Garissa and other operations targeting poor Muslim neighbourhoods dubbed as 'radicalisation hotbeds', have faced criticism a range of human rights abuses ranging from unlawful killings and disappearance of terrorist suspects, illegal detention and harassment of journalists, arbitrary arrest of CSO leaders, rights activists and international aid workers (KNCHR 2014; IPOA 2014; HRW 2016). As Finn et al. (2016 p174) assert, whenever al-Shabaab attacks Kenya, civilian, government, and security personnel responses to the attacks exacerbate many of the already existing structural problems supporting youth radicalisation.

2016 – 2019 - Following the overall ineffective of the security-focused approach in tackling the domestic terrorist threat and at the height of pressure after Garissa University attack, Kenya's worst terror attack, the Kenyatta administration launched Kenya's National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism 2016 (NSCVE). The new strategy aims to complements security-focused counterterrorism measures with a framework for CVE measures, incorporating a multi-stakeholder "whole of society" approach (NSCVE 2016). The NSCVE articulates a clear vision of minimising and eliminating violent extremism by mobilising

individuals and groups at the national and community levels "to reject violent extremist ideologies and aims in order to shrink the pool of individuals whom terrorist groups can radicalise from." Ibid. Although the involvement of non-state actors in CVE work is not new in Kenya, the new strategy has placed their work under an official policy framework that prioritises their partnership with state actors. Critics have however observed that despite the claimed positive step towards working with local partners and youths, there were minimal consultations with grassroots actors or the 'at risk' youth in question during the strategy formulation (Mbugua and Masiani 2017; Ogada 2017). Ogada (2017 p2) particularly points out that one of the major gaps in NSCVE is its lack of quantitative or qualitative data on the extent and nature of the challenge of violent extremism in Kenya, making it hard to design and justify interventions.

The new strategy has also been criticised for being 'gender-neutral and does not address the specific intersection of women and radicalisation or violent extremism' hence failing to respond to the needs of women as either actor in or victims of violent extremism (Salifu and Ndungu 2017 p9). Others have criticised new approaches under the new strategy for focusing on 'preaching peace' and not addressing the real causes of violent extremism (poverty, bad governance, ethnic marginalisation) (Mbugua and Masiani 2017 p4). The argument is in line with assertions that the Kenyan government has focused its efforts on countering rather than preventing violent extremism (Salifu and Ndung' u 2017 p11). Many have observed that "the government has not yet reoriented its actions and existing legislation to adhere to the NSCVE" particularly the continued use of hard security approaches to counterterrorism, which continue to build mistrust between government and communities (Freedom House report 2018).

Somalia

2011 – 2016 - Counterterrorism in Somalia is spearheaded by international efforts, led by the US, UK and EU who have since 2007 provided significant funds to AMISOM and regional actors aimed at militarily defeating al-Shabaab (Suri 2016 p7). An intensified military campaign against al-Shabaab by Somali National Army (SNA) and AMISOM, backed by US airstrikes marked the period between 2011 – 2016. Al-Shabaab suffered heavy territory losses, including major economic hubs and seaports such as Mogadishu and Kismayo that had previously provided crucial economic support to the group (Mastro 2016 p2). Despite the territorial gains against the al-Shabaab, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and supporting powers have failed to underpin their military assertiveness with a coherent long-term peace strategy, meaning structural drivers of terrorism have largely remained unaddressed (Suri 2016 p8; Crouch 2018 p3). Suri (2018 p8) asserts that:

> international actors have too often ignored or even exacerbated the key drivers of conflict in Somalia … the blanket labelling of al-Shabaab as 'terrorist' has simplified Somalia's conflict, and obscured the complex reasons why individuals or groups choose to affiliate with or join the group. With a focus on a narrow set of priorities, international actors have paid insufficient attention to the country's other most significant problems and the actors and behaviours that have created them.

State-building efforts have accompanied the military campaign focused at establishing a monopoly of violence and modelling institutions based on western values with minimal regard of local Somali people concerns (Suri 2016; Chandler et al., 2016). Indeed, despite the military gains against al-Shabaab, a political stalemate caused by clan inequalities ensue with no end in sight. A RAND assessment report (2016) on the success of military

counterterrorism campaign concluded that al-Shabaab 'is by no means defeated and may resurge if urgent steps are not taken to address the political, economic, and governance challenges at the heart of the conflict.' Williams (2014 p914) notes that military success has been hampered by a variety of strategic challenges, including weak political leadership and lack of strategic coordination between its national contingents, with the territorial gains only sustained by the continued presence of AMISOM. As Crouch (2018 p4) points out, the withdrawal of regional troops has the potential to create a security vacuum and revert much of the success achieved under the militarized counterterrorism approach. For example in February 2016, al-Shabaab fighters retook the Somali port of Merka after AMISOM troops pulled out, underscoring the need for constant vigilance and an armed presence to hold reclaimed territories (VoA News 2016).

2016 – 2019 - In 2016, the Federal Government of Somalia launched its National Action Plan for P/CVE with the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) mandated to support the new strategy (Gelot and Hansen 2019). The Federal Government's National Strategy and Action Plan for P/CVE report (2016 p8) articulate a comprehensive approach to countering terrorism that seeks to 'focus on the possible causes of terrorism and the development of remedial strategies' through harnessing the relationship between the government and the public. A 2019 study by the Institute of Security Studies (Zyl and Mahdi 2019 p9) found that there are more than 27 different organisations in Somalia working on P/CVE projects. They engage the youth, religious groups, women, ex-members of al-Shabaab, government agencies and civil society organisations on various tasks including livelihood projects, awareness-raising, capacity building, tolerance promotion, counter-narratives, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Questions of the effectiveness of P/CVE programmes in Somalia have arisen. A study report by Safeworld (2018) asserts that the current preoccupation with addressing the development drivers of recruitment and the theological or rhetorical allure of armed groups will not work for Somalia if the governance wrangles, clan politics and hard power approaches by FGS and AMISOM are not addressed. The report notes that:

> Evidence suggests that some elders have supported al-Shabaab's continued presence, largely because of civilian casualties from Federal Government of Somalia and AMISOM operations …People we interviewed told us that "Clan elders often decide whether or not youth join Al-Shabaab". Such experiences call into question the theory of change underpinning de-radicalisation and counter-narrative projects.

The government approach has also been criticised for its minimal engagement of women in P/CVE (as victims, terrorists or peace and security agents) despite the apparent involvement of women al-Shabaab (Crisis Group report 2019 p14; Stern 2019).

Major multi-agency P/CVE programmes 2011 - 2019

USAID's Somali Youth Livelihoods Program (SYLP) - Branded Shaqodoon (The Job Seeker) the programme trained over 10,900 young people throughout Somaliland, Puntland and South and Central Somalia. The development-oriented programme focused on technical skills training, ranging from traditional vocational and technical training areas (for example plumbing, carpentry and tailoring) to non-traditional market niches (such as market research, water filter production and media/journalism). SYLP forged strong ties with government officials and private sector representatives, and USAID ISSUES a large portion of the grants to private businesses. The initial four-year programme started in 2008, with repeat grants continuing until 2015 (USAID Evaluation report 2013).

UK's Department for International Development (DFID) Sustainable Employment and Economic Development (SEED) - The four-year initiative was a mainstream livelihood programme with a CVE sub-objective launched in Somalia in 2011. The programme extended to SEED II, which adjusted its focus to reducing conflict proneness and fostering stability in and around Mogadishu, notably through creating jobs for youths with an investment of £23 million. Its primary focus on employment and economic development was, per the Theory of Change linking development to stability (SEED Evaluation report 2014). An independent evaluation concluded that the programme's CVE work had limited efficacy because it selected participants based on livelihood vulnerability rather than vulnerability to extremist recruitment (Brett et al. 2015 p38).

UNDP's Youth at Risk in Somalia – the UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organisation and the Japanese government launched the five years programme in 2011. It targeted low- and medium-risk with anger and stress management, peace preaching, conflict resolution, and religious teaching, as well as music and sport (Kelly 2019 p8; Schumicky-Logan 2017).

The Somali government's Defector Rehabilitation Programme (DRP) - Launched in 2012, the programme runs nine rehabilitation centres. Somali security services screen the fighters, and individuals deemed to be low risk are taken to rehabilitation centres where they are offered education and training (Kelly, 2019). The centres are run through partnerships with NGOs and foreign governments.

Serendi rehabilitation centre in Mogadishu - The centre is part of the government's National Programme for the Treatment and Handling of Disengaged Combatants supported by international donors. It provides support and rehabilitation services to fighters who have

voluntarily disengaged and deemed 'low risk'. The centre offers vocational training alongside civic, political and religious education (Khalil et al.,2019: Kelly, 2019 p7). The Centre was heavily criticised by some politicians, local elders, religious leaders, as well as DDR experts for its lack of transparency and human rights violations, with original partners distancing themselves from the day-to-day operations. Human rights actors raised concerns about the treatment of inmates, especially minors (Gelot and Hansen 2019 p569).

Mercy Corps' Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) - The SYLI programme focused on education empowerment, opening 60 secondary schools and training 3,000 teachers. Beneficiaries were taught leadership, civic engagement alongside national curriculum (Mercy Corps, 2018).

Garissa Youth Program (G-Youth) – This was a localised intervention that focuses on a combination of livelihoods/skills training as well as civic engagement in the Garissa, Kenya. After completion of a three-week intensive work readiness program, beneficiaries could then apply for entry into specialised programs, for example, IT training, market research training , journalism and Early Childhood Education (ECD) courses and training (USAID Evaluation report 2013).

USAID's Kenya Transition Initiative – The initial programme was Eastleigh (KTI-E) was launched in 2011, the programme provided grants to a wide range of Eastleigh based actors for programs that fall into one of three primary lines of action: 1) building capacity among youth and community for moderation and non-violence; 2) empowering the local youth; and 3) livelihood support for youth (USAID Evaluation report, 2013). KTI then expanded programming to Lamu, Kilifi, Kwale, Malindi and Mombasa. It gave grants for activities that aimed to 'counter the drivers of VE,' including livelihood training, community debates on

sensitive topics (mainly religion), cultural events, counselling for post-traumatic stress disorder' (Khalil & Zeuthen 2014).

Being Kenyan Being Muslim (BKBM) in Kenya – KTI ran the 24 months programme pilot programme in Eastleigh in 2015 targeting 24 youths, eight of whom were vulnerable to extremism, including six members of Al-Shabaab. It focused on testing the effectiveness of promoting 'value complexity' in individuals to reduce their risk of taking up violent extremism. The programme involved a sixteen-contact-hour course using films and group activities that enable participants to solve problems on extremism (Kelly 2019 p9).

EU'S Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE) – This was a pilot programme launched in 2014 in the Horn of Africa with programmes in Ethiopia, Kenya, Puntland, South Central Somalia, and Somaliland. The project represents the first dedicated effort by the European Commission to implement a project outside of the EU. Main activities included building the regional capacity of the security sector, strengthening women's capacity to identify and counter VE and increasing g understanding of the drivers of radicalisation among youth (RUSI 2017 p2).

Note: Further to the programmes highlighted above, an analysis of P/CVE initiatives in the region reveal a focus on peacebuilding, development and livelihood initiatives and advocacy. The figure below represents data collected from 148 projects implemented by 117 organisations in East Africa (Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and Tanzania), a representation of various P/CVE activities in the region (Mahdi and Salifu, 2019 p7).

Figure 3: General work the organisation does

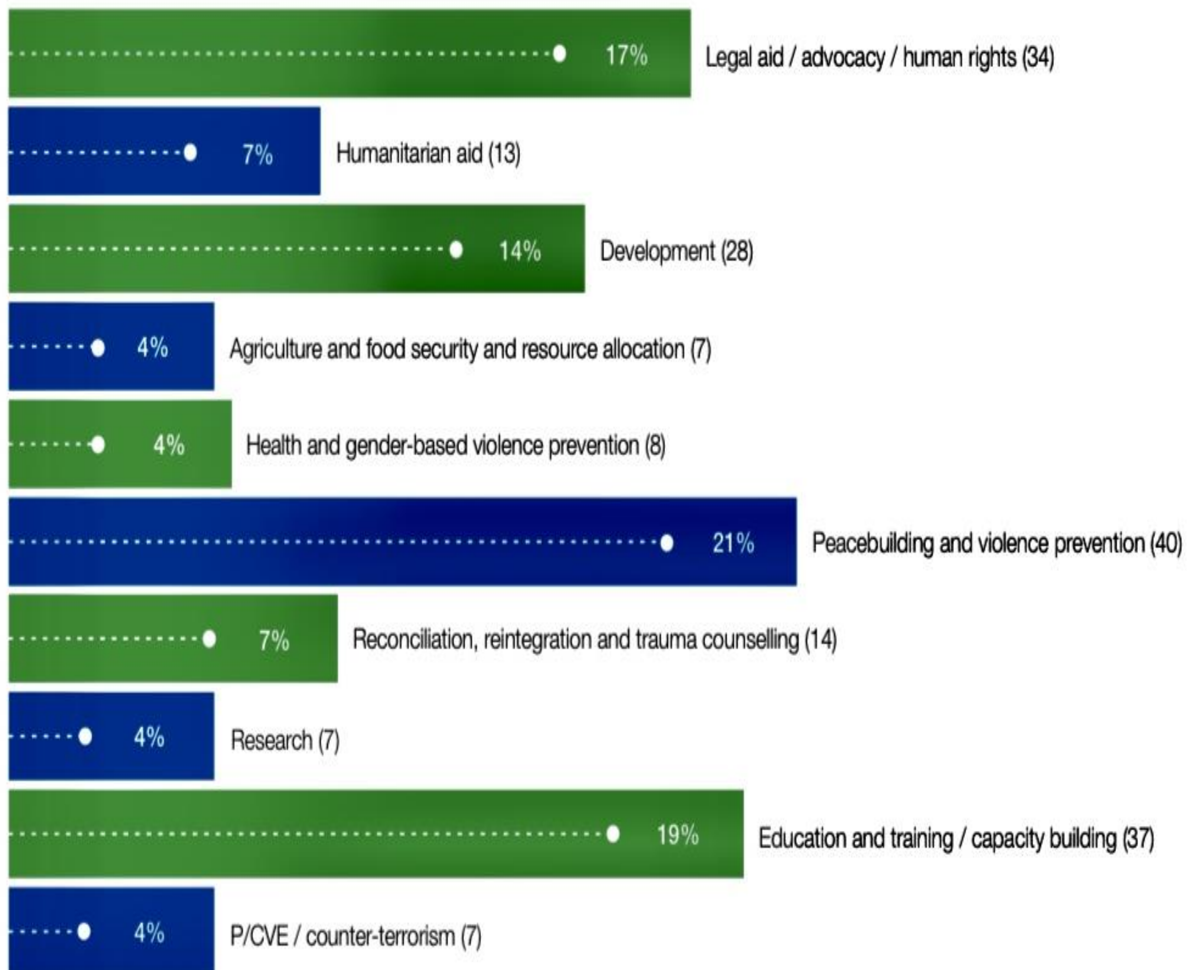
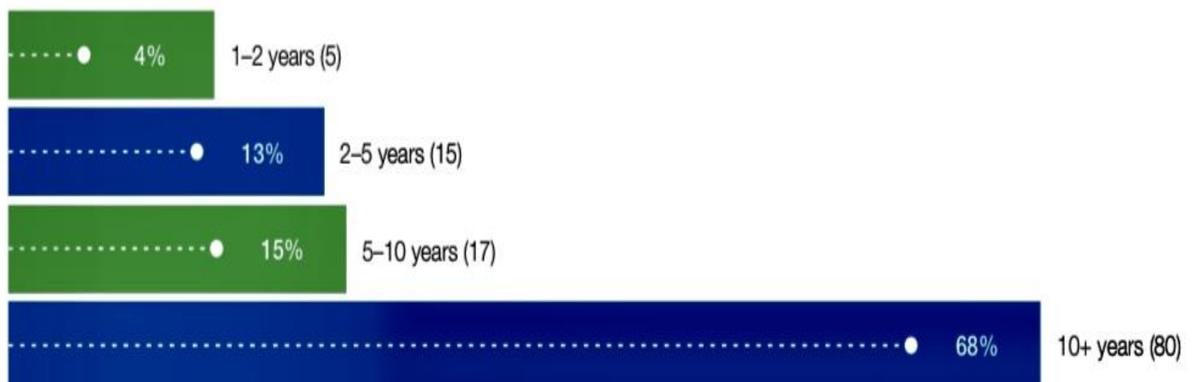


Figure 4: Number of years active



Adapted from Institute of Security Studies study, 2019.

Chapter 4

Locating the voice of the youth: A bottom-up assessment of P/CVE in Kenya and Somalia

Youth views on VE and P/CVE

Interviews with 16 former al-Shabaab members (conducted in prison) between June and October 2018 in the Nairobi and Mombasa sought the al-Shabaab appeal. Asked why he joined al-Shabaab, one interviewee explained that "The root of any crime in any country is corruption… If it was not corrupt, I could not go to Somalia. They are being promised money if they go". A fellow youth added that "It's very hard to get employed in my part of Nairobi. You had to come from one of the clans of the rich businessmen. [Furthermore] I was looking for a formal and regular source of income. As a young man with a widowed mother, the biggest motivation for me was to take care of my mother" (interview by Speckhard and Shajkovci 2019 p17).

Interviewed conducted in Somalia by Mercy Corps in 2015 (as part of World Bank sponsored programme called Youth as Agents of peace Somalia) tell a similar story. A youth worker in central Somalia when asked about the underlying appeal of Al-Shabaab said that "Al-Shabaab became powerful here because they were able to tap into people's frustrations" adding that "Al-Shabaab is just a symptom of larger problems." Another young woman asserted that:

> "Often you will hear people say joblessness is the biggest problem for the youth…and unemployment is a major problem, but underneath that is hopelessness and a belief that there is no [political] fairness. Young people get angry and

> frustrated and look for something to do." (Interviews by World Bank report 2018 p26 p27).

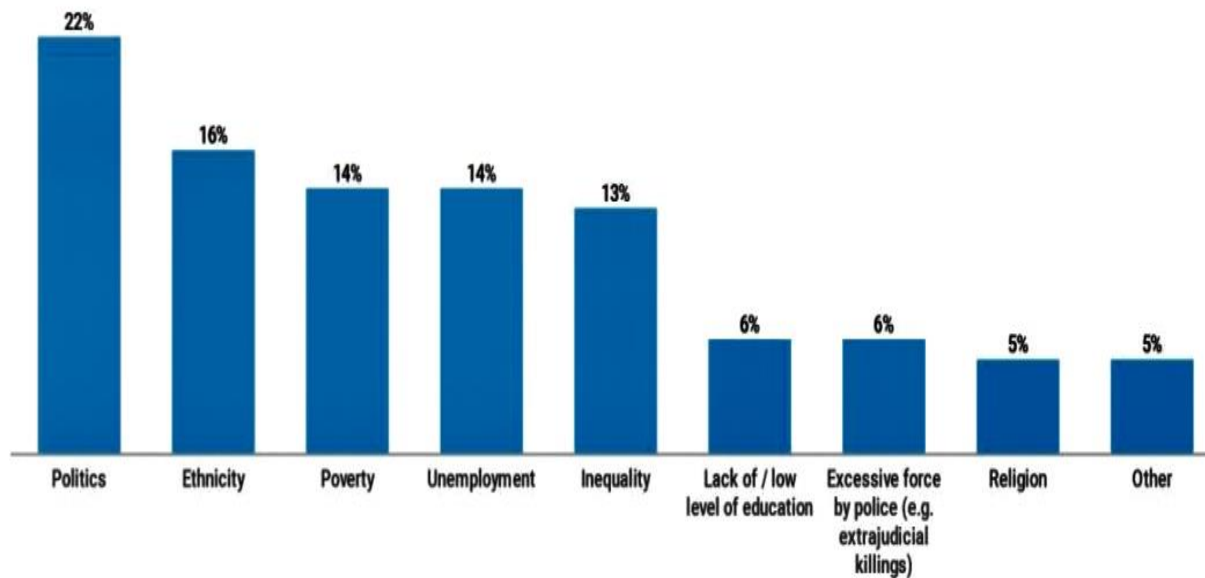
Similarly, while the majority of the youths who participated in a World Bank-UN funded study in 2018 said they had been involved in development and peace projects in their communities, many questioned the effectiveness of the approaches in achieving peace:

> Youth are participating in the development of the country and also in the peacebuilding. They are engaged at every level—district, region, and national. There are youth organisations that support all sorts of activities and initiatives in Mogadishu. I am not sure if any of it makes any difference. [Male, FGD Mogadishu]
>
> Why would youth in 10 years have a better system? Our politics is not getting better, the war is only getting worse, and it feels more dangerous in Mogadishu than ever before [Male, FGD Mogadishu] (Interviews by World Bank report 2018 p41).

A regional practitioner argued that:

> One of the contributing factors to radicalisation is our society's social and economic disparities. To purport to discourage the former without adequately addressing the latter is defeatist in itself. Like the Ugandan proverb goes, 'we cannot mop the floor with the taps running' (SCN report 2020).

Data from a nanosurvey conducted in 2018 (Freedom house p3) featuring opinions of 1,556 Kenyans (76% between 16 and 34 years) proves that youths view politics and ethnicity as the leading causes of VE.



Graph adapted from Freedomhouse report (2018 p3).

Youth interviews conducted as part of a 2019 Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) funded study documents similar sentiments. Most respondents in North-Eastern (Somali majority regions) linked the bad governance and high level of corruption to Violent extremism. Asked about their perception on what pushes youth to VE, FGD members in Garissa said that:

> Corruption is a major driver of radicalisation and violent extremism. In the first place we are marginalised historically, we are poor, our youth have no national identity cards so they can‟t even travel out of Garissa. They cannot own bank accounts let alone MPesa. It means they cannot do any business. We are ethnically and

religiously profiled. The government has ignored our plea. The youth are usually left with no option but migrate to Somalia to join Al-Shabaab to get identity, a source of livelihood and to fight the government that is frustrating them" [A Community ElderGarissa]

Corruption is rife and a reality here. Even these acts of terrorism like what happened here in Garissa University was largely as a result of corruption. The police on guard disappeared. They had been bribed. They knew the plan because the intelligence reports were all over. They received bribes to vacate the university and let the terrorists have an easy time butchering our students" [A Male Respondent-Garissa]

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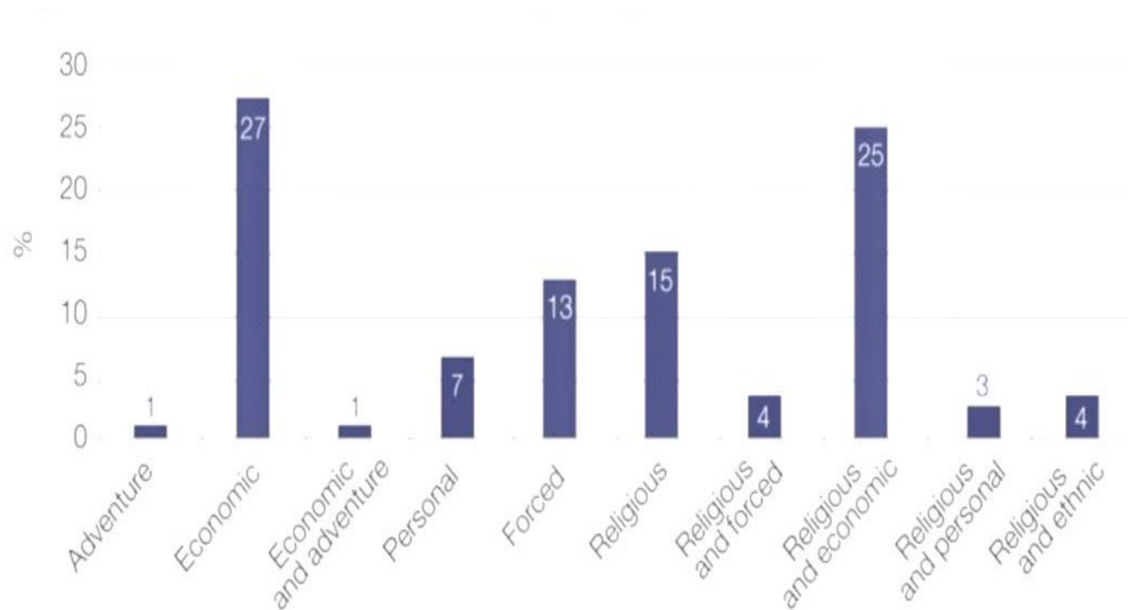
(Interviews by Mukuna 2019 p96).

Analysis: Mopping the floor with the taps running?

Widespread poverty, high rates of youth unemployment and political marginalisation are the oft-cited drivers of violent extremism in Kenya and Somalia (Cabrera and Pauwels 2016 p2; USAID 2011, 2015). Indeed, empirical data proves the economic motivation as a key factor as shown in the graph below based on data collected from 88 former al-Shabaab fighters in Mogadishu in 2014 by the Institute of Security Studies (ISS).



Adapted from Institute of Security study, 2014

Such findings have supported arguments which place development, and economic empowerment approaches at the heart of preventing and countering VE. For example, the USAID Guide to the drivers of violent extremism (2009) asserts that "idleness and under-employment may make youth far more receptive to the salaries and other material benefits which violent extremist organisations often provide". Others argue that poverty can be a powerful motivator for radicalisation into violent extremism, especially in countries where poverty-stricken young [people] have few livelihood options other than that of joining a militant group' (Mesøy 2013 p1). As such, poor Muslim youths are increasingly targeted with a range of P/CVE programmes, many delivered under the guise of development initiatives (Schwartz and Yalbir 2019 p2). Such programmes include the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) SEED programmes and the majority of USAID programmes highlighted above. Kenya's NSCVE has also adopted a similar development approach, through devolved funds (UWEZO, Youth Fund, and Women Fund) but due to

corruption, much of the money has not reached the intended youths (Mbugua and Misiani 2017 p26; Business Daily 2019). A recent analysis of 148 P/CVE programmes in East Africa by ISS concluded that "There is a large emphasis on developmental work" adding that "there is a need to determine if P/CVE projects are entirely different from developmental projects" (Mahdi and Zyl 2019 p33).

Whereas there a link between unemployment, poverty and youth radicalisation, the idea of a simple linear relationship between causes and effects is simplistic and reductionist. Development oriented interventions seek to address youth unemployment with minimal focus on addressing the primary structural or institutional sources of poverty and governance deficits. While potentially contributing to poverty alleviation, these approaches are essentially inadequate in preventing and countering violent extremism. Evaluation of USAID's KTI programme (listed above) observed that:

> while the issue of causal direction is of clear relevance, it should be recognised that it represents no more than the tip of the iceberg in terms of complex effects. The idea of a simple linear relationship between causes (e.g. unemployment) and effects (i.e. VE), gives way to a reality of tipping points, disproportionate feedback loops, interaction effects between multiple variables, and other complexities… causality may flow in multiple directions simultaneously (Khalil and Zethen 2014 p6).

An evaluation report for DFID's SEED programme questioned the efficacy of development projects in dealing dissuading youth from joining al-Shabaab as it focused livelihood vulnerability, with no efforts to understand clan issues that breed inequalities and exploitable grievances (Brett et al. 2015). A focus on 'livelihood' without a proper understanding or focus on social and cultural dynamics risks aggravating divisions and

inequality. It is also vital to recognise that development objective pursued under P/CVE are different from peace and security development projects. As Schwartz and Yalbir (2019 p5) critically note, while peacetime development initiatives tend to concentrate on fostering formal and informal institutions and give people tools to hold governments accountable, P/CVE development agendas focus on building resilience in communities deemed vulnerable to radicalisation. As such, while approaches recognise structural and institutional imperatives in theory, they empower vulnerable communities with tools to reject terrorism with minimal empowerment of youths to challenge political, social and economic factors that cause poverty and marginalisation. The approach also shifts the burden on addressing VE on communities.

Poverty and unemployment are just symptoms of an underlying disease. For meaningful change to take root, there is a need for political leaders to adopt profound changes to address socioeconomic, political and historic injustices based on inclusion and accountability. For example, the social construction of the rocky relationship between the Kenyan government and the Somali ethnic group is best understood by incorporating a historical perspective. The alienation of current-day Mandera, Wajir and Garissa counties (Somali ethnic majority counties) dates to the early years of British colonial rule. The colonial regime enforced a form of military administration, implementing policies that effectively isolated the area from the rest of Kenya (Anderson 2014 p76). Post-colonial regimes further isolated the region. Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta placed the region under a state immediately after assuming power in December 1963 and sent military and paramilitary police units that killed over 4000 Somalis between 1964 to 1967 (to control agitation due to marginalisation). The subsequent Moi government enforced a 'collective

punishment' for Somalis leading to the Wagalla massacre of 1984, which left between 500 and 3000 men from the Degodia clan (Anderson 2002 p3). Subsequent governments have continued to treat the Somali ethnic majority region as 'second class citizens' often subjecting them to surveillance, random checks for national identity cards and widespread ethnic profiling (Mutahi et al. 2017 p123). Years of political social and economic marginalisation have led to deeply seated grievances and evident horizontal inequalities in North Eastern. Hence, targeting Muslim Somali Youth in Eastleigh with economic empowerment, preaching peace and offering counter-narratives without challenging the political environment that continues to marginalise Somalis and Muslim will prove inadequate. The overriding drive to prevent violent extremism through the security-development nexus has also unintentionally contributed to the mutual construction of youths from the targeted neighbourhoods as threats and consequently threatened and undermined human rights and civil liberties. This further marginalises the targeted youths and overshadows the pressing need for economic and governance accountability and reforms that set the stage for social conflicts. While most P/CVE programmes are geared towards economic empowerment and embracing peace, the political and social environment that breeds poverty, unemployment and frustration remain mainly unaddressed.

Assessing the effects of P/CVE on youth lives

There is still no consensus on how to measure the contribution of P/CVE programmes in dissuading at-risk youths from joining VE. In Kenya and Somalia, such assessments are mainly based on views of government officials who often base success or failure on the number of attacks and number of arrests. Researchers have, however, questioned the

suitability of such approaches (Mbugua and Masiani 2017, Finn et al. 2016). Beyond 'national security' concerns, this section seeks to understand how P/CVE programming affects youth's lives.

(a) Human Rights abuses and increased restrictions - A survey of youth perception on P/CVE programming featuring 71 interviews with Kenyan university students conducted in February 2016 documented youths' experiences with government and communities at large under increased attention on VE. Muslim youths highlighted reduced freedom of movement. One interviewee said "Muslims are not free to move because of police disturbance," while many others noted that they diligently carry their national IDs for fear of being arrested. A university student explained that she was "jailed for two hours in detention simply because I did not have the national ID card but I had the University student ID card." Securitisation of Somalis and Muslims, in general, has also heightened the perception of risk in communities, eroding the social fabric and inspiring ethnic and religious divisions. Asked if P/CVE has affected community relations, an interviewee said that "Yes security wise I am more aware of my neighbor." Most youths expressed frustration with Kenyan police regular indiscriminate raids in neighbourhoods deemed at risk. One asserted that "I think police are also terrorists, as youth they terrorise us…it is not only ISIL and Al-Shabaab that are terrorists. The police are terrorists" while another added that "because terrorism comes in different ways." One interviewee summed up the effect of P/CVE on youths from 'at-risk' communities as "personal safety and well-being is reduced." [at the expense of national security] (Finn et al. 2016 p197, p199, p202 ,2p04).

Similar sentiments were shared during the IGAD funded study. A male youth from Majengo (an area marked 'high risk' for VE) lamented that:

> The police provoke the youth. They don‟t even investigate some of the actions of the youth before they arrest them. The government makes it worse with the ‟shoot to kill‟ order. This angers the youth and their families. What do they mean? Aren‟t we Kenyans? Dont we have rights? The only option is to join Alshabab [Male Youth, Majengo].

> Our chests are full. The police use excessive force on us. It is as if our sight disgusts them. We don‟t even want to see the police.” [Female Youth Respondent].

> The police provoke the youth. They don‟t even investigate some of the actions of the youth before they arrest them. The government makes it worse with the ‟shoot to kill‟ order. This angers the youth and their families. What do they mean? Aren‟t we Kenyans? Dont we have rights? The only option is to join Alshabab [Male Youth, Majengo] (interviews by Mukuna 2019 p111).

Male youth in Mogadishu explained that:

> As the youth of Mogadishu, we do not regularly see justice. Many of our fellow youth have issues with the police and other elders because we are the youth or the “shabaab.” Young men in particular are constantly harassed or sent to jail. If you do not have the right clan connections, you are very vulnerable in Mogadishu (Interviews by World Bank report 2018 p34).

The mapping out of ‘at-risk’ communities for P/CVE initiatives also places the intended beneficiaries at heightened risk of scrutiny, abuse by security forces, security surveillance and arbitrary arrests. While on one hand regions like Mogadishu, Baoidoa, Eastleigh, North

Eastern and the Kenyan coast region are significant beneficiaries of P/CVE programmes, data shows they are also the target for brutal security operations and human rights abuses (Cabrera and Pauwels 2016). The negative profiling of Muslims extends to grassroots civil society organisations (CSOs) working in at-risk neighbourhoods. For example, in 2015 the Kenyan government deregister the human rights organisations Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) and HAKI Africa accusing them of terrorism, and they were re-registered after an 18 months legal battle when the Kenyan High Court nullified the accusations. Both MUHURI and HAKI Africa often criticise the government's perpetuation of human rights violations and the deregistration was widely seen as government's efforts to silence human rights activists (Mesok 2020 p19; Capital News 2019).

(b) Islamophobia and social divisions - During Focus Group Discussions conducted by the Institute of Security Studies (ISS) featuring 108 interviews (67 local women) from areas deemed radicalisation 'hotbeds' along the Kenyan coast, women explained that some P/CVE approaches had created perceived injustices against Muslims, creating a feeling of oppression among Muslims, especially among their husbands and sons. Consequently, the study showed that the feeling of persecution has resulted in Muslim women and men from these communities becoming defensive of their faith, and of themselves, given their sense of being under attack (interviews by Ndung'u et al. 2017p37). Similar sentiments were echoed during FGDS in Mombasa:

> the truth is we [Muslims] are mistreated. We don't blame our husbands and sons. What option are they left with if their land has been taken away? We depend on them too. Fighting for our rights is in order. We support them to fight and reclaim our land even if it means getting assistance from outside. As long as we can secure

> the future of our children, we support them [FGD Majengo, Female Elder Responden] (interview by Mukuna 2019 p105).

A recent report by regional civil society organisations pointed out that “P/CVE, like CT, is also 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” (Mesok 2019 p6).

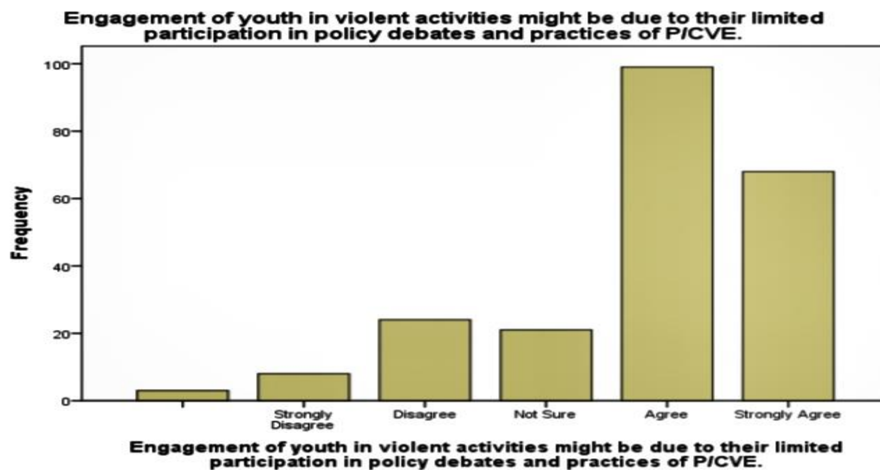
(c) Freedom of expression - When asked if Kenya’s CVE/PVE policies affect political expression, majority of university students said political expression is challenged on the pretext that it incites people into violent extremism, is inflammatory, or that it constitutes terrorism. During interviews, some university students expressed fears regarding social media usage. One explained that “Kenyan government can prosecute you for spreading hate messages [and thus you had] Better watch what you type”. Others remarked that “there is that fear that any post on the internet maybe constructed as pro-terrorism”; “yes, [a] few people have been arrested in the past for giving their political opinions about how the government is responding to terrorist activities” ;“I have to be careful on what I post especially on the topic [of terrorism or CVE/PVE]” (Interviews by Finns et al 2016 p199).

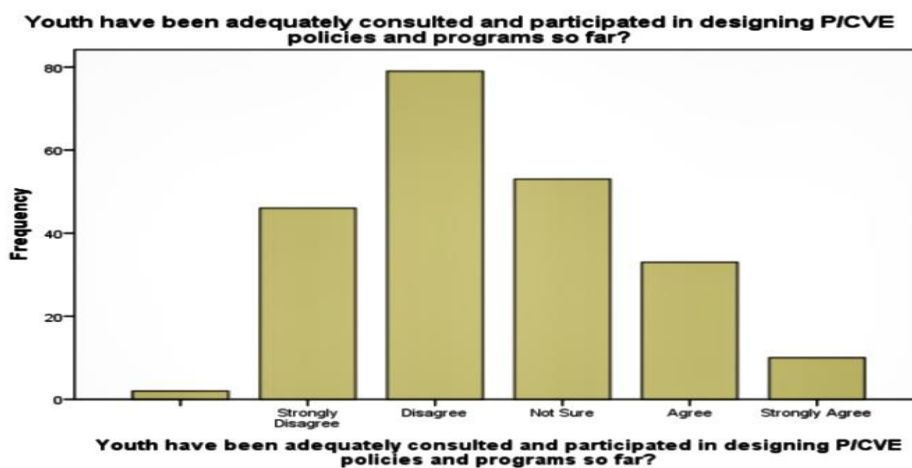
A 2016 UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) report documents state suppression of freedom of expression in the name of national security. The UNMIS report shows numerous violations aimed at journalists and human rights defenders including killings, attacks, arbitrary arrests and detention, intimidation, harassment, closure of media outlets, confiscation of equipment and blocking of websites perpetrated by government officials between 2012 and 2016. It points out that, while:

Al-Shabaab has prohibited all media to operate in areas under its control and has been targeting media workers across the country. But federal and state-level security forces, including the National Army, the Police and the National Intelligence and Security Agency, are main perpetrators of violations against media workers and political activists (UNHRC 2016).

(d) Assessing youth involvement in policy and donor-driven agendas

The graphs below feature data from 270 youth (135 male and 135 female) paint the picture of the limited youth engagement in P/CVE (Mukuna 2019 p163)





Adopted from Mukuna 2019.

Kenyan youths shared their frustration with limited political engagement on key policies during focus group discussions conducted by the Global Center on Cooperative Security in 2018. A Mombasa youth explained that “Leaders came to meetings when they were already decided on what they wanted to achieve, and no amount of opposition could stop them from pushing their agenda.” Another added that “When you oppose an idea by a leader, they see you as a project of the opposition…your voice will never again be heard in those meetings (Schwartz and Yalbir 2019 p7). Similar views were shared during the IGAD funded FDGs:

> Tell the government to pay attention to our cries. It should listen to us and not silence us by killing us or imprisoning us. Let them start by returning our land and sharing resources equitably otherwise we shall continue fighting.” (Male Youth, Frere).
>
> We feel totally neglected by this government. And it is not like they don‟t know we are hurting. They know. They have politicized everything. Our life is in their hands but they don‟t care. Even victims are usually harassed by the police…(Female Elder, Majengo) (Mukuna 2019 p111).

There is also a high level of mistrust between the youth and the government, with negative impacts on P/CVE efforts. A 22 years old woman from Likoni who had just returned from al-Shabaab explained that “I feel afraid about the government and fear I will be ‘disappeared’ if they were to find out about me… I am not aware of the government amnesty programme” (Interview by Ndung’u et al. 2017 p40). A male youth from Majengo shared similar fears explaining that “…Now that even if I surrender, I will be endangering my life, it is better to remain silent after returning. This amnesty is a lie. It is a lie.”A fellow male explained that:

> I doubt if the youth trust anyone else other than fellow youth. You see, we are treated with suspicion everywhere we go…in the community, by police, by the government. In fact they look at us as trouble makers." …If only the government and community realized the great potential in youth, they would partner with us than mistrust us. It seems to be something deep rooted in them and we cannot change that." (Interviews by Mukuna 2019 p112, p140).

Analysis: Missing the 'missing link.'

While youths are often termed the missing link in peace and security, their involvement in peace and security remains minimal. In Kenya and Somalia, youth engagement is further challenged by gerontocracy and neopatrimonialism. As such, youths are marginalised in policy and decision making. Most P/CVE agendas are donor and state-driven (Mesok 2019). Sommers (2019) argues that one of the significant problems with P/CVE is that too often when youth are discussed and analyzed, their perspectives are not part of the mix. Following an analysis of over 400 publications on violent extremism, CVE, and youth, he concluded that an understanding of what it is like to be a youth in areas vulnerable to VE activity is largely missing. The study critically asserts that youths are not the 'consistent centrepiece' of inquiry in the literature on VEOs and VE, rather research is oriented around understanding the drivers of VE and developing resilience, without necessarily understanding what it is to be like youth from the local youth perspective (Sommers 2019 p35). Indeed, the lack of programme contextualisation remains a significant challenge for regional initiatives. As Life & Peace Institute asserts, the "challenge of these initiatives [P/CVE] is that … they [donors] provide the support based on their own specific policies on rather than developing an agreed regional policy and strategy that is contextualized to fit

the specific situations and threats (LPI report 2020 p3). An evaluation of USAID’S KTI concluded that programming decisions would have benefitted from a more comprehensive understanding of VE in the local context rather than following the USAID regional guide. For example, the branding of KTI projects with USAID logos had a detrimental effect on the projects (Khalil and Zeuthen 2014). A better understanding of the local political context in Eastleigh (resentment against US counter-terrorism policy) would have informed the risks associated with donor branding.

Similarly, Kenya’s National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) 2016 which guides P/CVE initiatives has been criticised for minimal consultation and engagement with youths and CSOs in its formulation, despite the Kenyan constitution requirement for broad public consultation in the design of policies. A 2017 NSCVE analysis noted that “ A major gap in the NSCVE is it lacks quantitative or qualitative data on the extent and nature of the challenge of violent extremism in Kenya, the different actors in CVE work and their successes and failures”(Ogada 2017 p2). Yet, the national strategy informs the design of national P/CVE programmes. The limited consultation with youths in designing P/CVE policies is likely to result in ineffective initiatives.

The Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, on which P/CVE is rooted, places youth as the central subjects and actors for international peace and security. The resolution was informed by the overriding concern that youth, and particularly surplus populations of youth excluded from economic opportunity, are at risk of being radicalised and pulled into violent extremism. As highlighted in the assessment of regional P/CVE programmes, there is a focus on peacebuilding initiatives which mainly focus on preaching peace and advocating for nonviolent ways of engagement. Peacebuilding is

indeed one of the central tenets of the youth peace and security agenda. However, while building peace is vital, there is a need for historical analysis, cultural contextualisation and proper youth engagement to assess how best to achieve peace. Whereas such initiatives are well intended, peace should be negotiated not preached. As Tannock and Sukarieh (2018 p17) observe, P/CVE's "favored solution is to put youth through preventative or restorative educational programmes in which they can be taught to value and embrace the 'prevailing ideas, expressions, or institutions' of their home societies." Peace achieved in this way might not be sustainable. Indeed, "When young people are asked to become 'peacebuilders,' we need to consider carefully the exact nature of the peace they are being asked to help build, and whether this 'peace' supports or contests 'the fortification of the existing order and the preservation of the invisibility of hegemonic violence'" (quotes Gur-Ze 2001 p331). The typical response of P/CVE programmes is to increase surveillance and intervention in the lives of 'at-risk' youths to identify and counter the ideas, dispositions, relationships, ideologies and cultures believed to be responsible for triggering terrorist violence.

Assessing women involvement

While the scope of women involvement in al-Shabaab remains unclear (Ndung'u and Salifu 2017 p2), several highly publicised reports, including the involvement of 'White Widow' (Ms Samantha Lewthwaite in the Westgate attack (BBC, 2013), have drawn attention to the broad participation of women in al-Shabaab. Growing research of women and violent extremism in the region continues to document the wide range of women involvement, whether as victims, sympathisers, enablers, perpetrators of violent acts within extremist groups, or as activists in addressing, preventing and countering violent extremism. As such,

P/CVE programmes have increasingly incorporated women in their programming. Kenyan and Somali governments have made efforts to integrate women in their responses to violent extremism such as increasing women policewomen and female government officials in crucial security institutions, a commendable improvement from previously limited involvement of women in security. International actors have similarly increased calls for women's participation in the CT and P/CVE agenda. However, there are some concerns regarding the conceptualisation of women involvement, which in turn affects policy and practice. This section highlights some of these concerns.

Gender stereotypes - Interviews conducted by Adam Smith International (an NGO supporting the Somali government's Serendi Rehabilitation centre) in 2018 featuring over 100 former al-Shabaab defectors and National Intelligence Security Agency (NISA) officials reveals gender stereotypes in the conceptualisation of women roles in VE. Asked how they deal with women defectors, NISA screening officers explained that "Most of the women are taken as being 'victims'. We don't take them as criminals." "Instead of targeting women, we target those who are making them do this job." Another interviewee agreed that "The women were misled by al-Shabaab." A screener said, "What do you do with a woman with children. You have no evidence that she committed a crime, and children did not commit a crime. So we hand her to her family." The laxity with women threat was articulated by a former al-Shabaab male member who said that:

> There are many women who left the group. There are many – I know them. When they leave, they come to cities and live normally. They have no problems. You won't know them. They may still be supporting al-Shabaab. Maybe they are pretending to have defected, but they are still working.

Another defector confirmed, “They are welcomed back. Many in community don’t realise they are members.” (Stern 201 p33, p34).

The study also revealed the effect of clan politic and corruption in releasing suspects. A NISA officer explained that “a lady was arrested in Somaliland – the wife of late Amir. She had a lot of information on al-Shabaab. Her clan came and discussed it with government and she was released” (Stern 2019 p32). Despite pilling evidence of heavy women involvement in al-Shabaab, at the time of wiring this dissertation, there were no facilities for women rehabilitation and disengagement in Somalia. A Mission Report by the International Organisation for Migration (IMO) in 2018 observed that “Baidoa was the only place where a process seemed to be in place for female defectors. They seemed to follow the same procedure as men.” This not only represents the neglect of women as threats but also highlights the alienation of women in peace and inclusion.

Similarly, interviews by ISS conducted in 2017 featuring 108 women from communities affected by violent extremism including returnees, grassroots CSO and local government reveals apparent neglect of the ‘women threat’ and lack of disengagement and rehabilitation frameworks. A former al-Shabaab recruit explained that:

> I escaped after I was sent to the market to buy foodstuff. My journey back home was through Doble. I sold the gun and used the money to return to Kenya. I returned to Garissa because of the amnesty programme, but did not enrol in it due to fear of how the government would treat me and what they would do to me. The reaction from my family was not good and I am currently living with friends, but it has been difficult. I am jobless. I am not doing well mentally and would like counselling but I am afraid of seeking these services. Current initiatives in our community that work

> to counter violent extremism need to be strengthened, including providing leadership programmes (Ndung'u and Salifu 2017 p8).

The effect of high levels mistrust between government and communities on P/CVE efforts is highlighted in an interview with a Kenyan 22 years old returnee who explained that:

> I feel afraid of the government and fear I will be 'disappeared' if they were to find out about me. Government efforts to counter violent extremism are not working and are not visible in the community; they are not targeting the right people. I was not aware of the government amnesty programme (Ndung'u and Salifu 2017 p6).

The marginalisation of women in peace and security - There is also a lack of women programmes or limited women engagement programmes as highlighted during the Word bank- UN study where women stated that "activities provided by CSOs were not available to women" (World bank report 2018 p46). In Kenya, "the government has not established safe houses for women whose husbands have left or for [women] returnees" and "There is a lack of effective screening of returnees to ascertain that they are reformed, which undermines the impact of de-radicalisation efforts" (Ndung'u and Salifu 2017 p10). Interestingly, when male defectors were asked whether they deemed necessary for P/CVE actors to include women in rehabilitation centres, most argued women rehabilitation was not required. One argued that:

> "No, it is not possible. They are not physically involved as combatants. They are not carrying weapons. So there is no way that you can open up rehabilitation for them. They did not carry out any crimes. All of those ladies are wives of al-Shabaab members. No one knows them – if they are members or not. No one knew if they were a member or just a wife."

Another explained that:

> “Women do not have the pressures that men do. Men leave al-Shabaab and must live in government areas. For women, it is easier to slip back into community, because they do not feel pressure like us.” (Stern 2019 p29).

Such views highlight the conceptualisation of VE in terms of fighting and militancy while ignoring the non-violent yet significant roles of conflict. Further, regional P/CVE mainly incorporate women in peacebuilding initiatives (Mahdi and Zyl 2019; World Bank report, 2018; Ndung’u and Salifu, 2017). While on the one hand incorporating women in P/CVE represents the recognition of women as critical partners in preventing and countering violence, on the other hand, such engagements risks entrenching the perception of ‘peaceful women and good mothers’. For example, EU’s programme implemented in 2015 was based on building women capacity to identify and address violent extremism (Strive report 2017 p9), which despite its success in increasing the level of women involvement in security, also mutually constructs women as peaceful. Some regional practitioners have also criticised local P/CVE programmes of merely adding women arguing that mere adding is not in itself transformative. P/CVE agendas risk the instrumentalization of women’s empowerment and gender equality as tools for national security, rather than as ends in themselves and without the sustained material support and structural changes needed to improve women’s lives (Mesok 2019 p28; Ní Aoláin 2016 p276).

Analysis: Hidden threats and forgotten partners

Hidden threats - Despite a long and dynamic history of women involvement in terrorism, violent extremism and insurgencies (Alexander 2019 p4; Bigio and Vogelstein 201 p8), terrorism and violent extremism studies have traditionally focused on men “due to a

longstanding belief that women have assumed passive, inherently less interesting roles in extremist groups" (Jacques and Taylor 2009 p499). Whereas there is a growing global recognition of the intersection of women, gender and terrorism in policy, in practice, governments, local and international P/CVE practitioners are still grappling with what it means to pursue this multifaceted agenda. Increased attention on the role of women in terrorism is a positive step in understanding contemporary conflicts. However, latent gender stereotypes continue to tint contemporary perceptions of women in terrorism and violent extremism (Schmidt 2020 p3; Pearson and Winterbotham 2018 p162). In the case of Kenya and Somalia, gender stereotypes are imbedded in national P/CVE strategies/ action plans which guide P/CVE initiatives.

While it is increasingly becoming clear that women are involved in a wide range of activities in al-Shabaab, governments are yet to adjust policies and practise accordingly. Women continue to be mainly portrayed as victims, pawns of men, unintelligent and driven by personal emotions with no political agency. A wide range of analysis shows that the portrayals of women in terrorism continue to be misleading, reductive, often emphasizing personal reasons for participation (Meredith and Zelenz 2018; Nava, 2018; Mclnerney 2012; Brigittle 2005). The portrayal is despite there being "little to no evidence that male and female terrorists are fundamentally different in terms of their recruitment, motivation, ideological fervor, and brutality" (Brigittle 2005: 436). In Kenya and Somalia, men and women joined for similar reasons (Ndungu et al. 2017; Ndung'u and Salifu 2017). Many authors note that the emphasis on personal reasons plays to depoliticises female violence. The depoliticization not only denies women agency, but it also leads to security gaps, challenges inclusive peace and contributes to the mutual construction of gender stereotypes

(Schmidt 2020 p4; CTED 2019 p11; Jacobs 2017). Alexander and Turkington (2018 p4) observe that:

> terrorism-related offenders who are women are less likely to be arrested, less likely to be convicted, and receive more lenient sentences compared to men …from arrest to sentencing to post-conflict reintegration and disarmament programming, evidence suggests that governments tend to be less responsive to women in terrorism.

The lack of/limited rehabilitation facilities for women in Kenya and Somalia highlights this laxity. The leniency is also in part attributable to the victimhood narrative presented under GWOT, which offers rhetoric of saving 'oppressed Muslim women' from their men and the repeated language of 'empowering Muslim women', constructing women as peaceful (Schmidt 2020 p2 p6). Consequently, this allows some women to use the narrative of victimhood to evade prosecution. However, whereas women generally get lenient sentences for involvement in VE, when their cases gain media publicity, juries and public are likely to support harsher penalties because they see the crime as more "monstrous" contrary to the 'normative perception' of women. Such stereotypes enforce and contribute to the mutual construction of gender stereotypes that further marginalises women involvement in governance.

The persistence of gender stereotypes in theorising youth peace and security leads to oversimplification of complex youth lives into black and white – violent young men and peaceful young women, fighters and jihadi brides. Such binary understandings are attributable to the one-sided attention on the violent roles of terrorism (mostly carried out by men) and the emphasis on combatants and attackers within much of the academic

literature (Mahmood 2019:11; Schmidt 2020:3). The binary conceptualisation of terrorism and violent extremism is even embedded in the UN's description of the term 'foreign terrorist fighter' (FTF) which focuses on 'fighting' and by default omits women if they are not involved in 'fighting' often interpreted in military terms (Schmidt 2020 p3). Evidence shows that official estimates of FTFs inconsistently count women in insurgencies. Yet, it is evident fighting is not the only role in terrorism and fighting does not necessarily mean being in combat. In the case of al-Shabaab, female members seeking disengagement are not taken seriously unless they are involved in combat (Stern 2019).

Indeed, by discrediting the non-violent roles of terrorism, the youth bulge framework inaccurately focuses on young men leaving out the significant role of women in terrorism. Evidence proves that security professionals continue to underestimate the importance of women in the growth and survival of extremist groups, underscored by the fact that women are vastly underrepresented in prevention and disengagement strategies worldwide—both as participants and practitioners (Schmidt 2020 p12; CTED 2019 p20). For example, despite growing research proving heavy involvement of women in Amniyat (al-Shabaab intelligence service) ferrying of arms across security checkpoints and other logistical activities, policewomen make up less than 10% of the police force in Mogadishu with the percentage being much lower in rural areas (Crisis Group report 2019; Stern 2019). The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) 2019 report further observes that there continues to be a limited understanding of best practices and most effective methods in the rehabilitation and reintegration of women FTFs. The report critically notes that socio-economic reintegration and opportunities, which are a vital factor for successful reintegration are more commonly offered to men than to women (CTED 2019 p18). This also

means that factors that drive women to join terrorism are left unaddressed, effectively watering down efforts P/CVE (Mahmood 2019 p16; Alexander and Turkington 2018).

Gender stereotypes have also created strategic, operational, and tactical benefits for terrorist and violent extremist. As Mia (2011 p1) puts it, the contemporary conceptualisation of women in terrorism has allowed terrorist groups to “exploit gender stereotypes and cultural clichés to their advantage”. Scholars have also pointed out how terrorist groups are now embracing the ‘potential of women’ who can better carry out terrorist activities without detection by authorities and enjoy more media attention than male counterparts (Alexander et al. 2018). As Crisis Group report on al-Shabaab and women (2019 p3) asserts, “what seems important is to recognise that the militants [al-Shabaab], notwithstanding their Salafi-inspired doctrine, have a gender strategy of sorts, engage women and, in some cases, meet some of their needs”. In this regard, gendered assumptions embedded in theorising continue to underestimate women’s involvement in terrorism, hinder the effectiveness of P/CVE programs, hampering the implementation of holistic policies that encapsulate women as violent and non-violent actors and ultimately challenge inclusive peace.

Forgotten partners

There is an overriding consensus among scholars, policymakers and practitioners that women are key political actors whose experiences and perspectives are essential for understanding terrorist organizations (Petrich and Donnelly 2019 p172; (GCCS report 2016). Despite the consensus, practical incorporation of gender into P/CVE has proven to be a complicated task (CTED Trends report 2019 P18). While international organizations, governments and implementing partners broadly “know they have to gender their counter-

terrorism and P/CVE approaches, there is very little idea of what this actually means in practice" (Fionnuala and Huckerby 2018 p91). Limited understanding leads to policies that fail to utilise women potential as effective partners in the fight against terrorism (CTED Trends report 2019 p8). This inadequacy is highlighted in an evaluation report on regional P/CVE programmes which concluded that:

> there is a disconnect between the drivers of women's involvement in violent extremism and the nature of the response to violent extremism…Current responses are therefore neither sufficiently gender-specific nor gender-sensitive" (Ndung'u, Salifu and Sigsworth 2017 p9).

A consecutive evaluation further noted that although much of the literature points to the need for increased women involvement as crucial partners in PCVE initiatives and programmes at all levels, "there is very little detail outlining actual initiatives or programmes" (Ndung'u et al. 2017 p22).

Just like in the case of 'hidden threats', analysis of current programmes show that gendered assumptions underlie many PCVE efforts (CTED 019 p19), undermining effective women involvement. As Schmidt (2020 p4) critically observes, while there is a growing literature on the effects of gender stereotypes in terrorism studies, "there is currently very little analysis on whether stereotypes may be affecting CVE". Most programmes' way of 'involving women' is based on the assumption that women are inherently more peaceful than men and that, if empowered to do so, they can stop radicalization to violence. Consequently, many PCVE engage mothers based on the assumption that mothers are 'in a unique position' to detect signs of radicalization in their children, for example, the EU's horn of Africa STRIVE programme. This approach has been criticised by many researchers as there is

no conclusive evidence to support the claim that mothers are best positioned to detect and counteract early signs of radicalization (Mesok 2019 p2; Winterbotham 2018; Brown 2013).

Gender mainstreaming in P/CVE has also resulted in policy measures that synonymise ‘women’ and ‘gender’ and which leads to “oversimplified and instrumental strategy to just ‘add women and stir’”(Fionnuala and Huckerby 2018 p95). Critics of the approach argue that the ‘add women and stir’ approach is a facile approach to gender mainstreaming (Alexandare 2019 p7; Fionnuala and Huckerby 2018 p95). On the other hand, for “most youth bulge theory proponents, ‘youth’ is synonymous with ‘young men’, and this equation is problematically exempt from critical gendered interrogation” (Pruitt 2020 p721). Sommers (2019 p36) analysis of over 400 publication on violent extremism and youth critically observes that “Not one CVE expert interviewed and virtually no documents reviewed for this discussion paper employed the term ‘female youth.’ Implicitly, a ‘youth’ routinely was equated with a male youth”. A PCVE expert is quoted saying “If there are no males in a youth program, it’s not a youth program” (Sommers 2019 p17). Such flawed yet persistent understanding hinders efforts of understanding the complex and dynamic ways in which both young women and young men can be involved in and/or affected by conflict, as perpetrators, victims and agents for peace.

These complexities of achieving meaningful women involvement offer part of the explanation of why women remain hidden partners in PCVE and in the broader fight against terrorism (Bigio and Vogelstein 2019 p7). While women involvement is termed crucial for peace and security, actual engagements are marred by gender stereotypes, often resulting in the securitization of the same women’s lives. Majority of PCVE programmes for women remain sporadic, reactive, unfocused, underfunded, conceptual and bearing gender

stereotypes (CTED 2017 p20). Researchers contend that the formulation of effective gender-sensitive PCVE programmes require a paradigm shift, one that will involve women in decision-making, design and implementation of PCVE policies and programmes, ensuring that women are agents and partners, rather than subjects of P/CVE as it currently is (CTED 2019; Möller-Loswick 2017; Winterbotham 2018).

Conclusion

This dissertation has analysed the impact of youth bulge theory on P/CVE policy and practice. It has explored how gender stereotypes and simplistic explanations for violence in 'bulging' populations has led to the securitization of young men and stripped women of agency. Effectively, these approaches have led to security gaps, challenged inclusive peace and paradoxically even inspired the VE in sought to address. Despite states and regional actors subscribing to the 'global paradigm shift' in recognising the vital role of youth and women in peace and security, regional policies and practices continue to bear latent gender stereotypes reflected in policy and practice.

Further, the demographic 'explanation' for violence provides kleptocratic governments with 'legitimate' explanation for bad governance by shifting the burden of addressing VE to communities. Further, whereas the security-development nexus has potential in addressing poverty, a focus on development without thoroughly understanding the underlying local context that breeds poverty shifts focus from the underlying disease.

Analysis of youth perceptions on CVE and P/CVE efforts in Kenya and Somalia between 2011 to 2019 highlights the salient of historical, socio-cultural (clan and ethnic identities), political and economic factors in shaping current youth realities. As such, current conceptual policymaker-driven initiatives risk obscuring the locally specific structural factors that breed

VE. This leads to approaches that are neither address the underlying causes of VE nor adequately empower the youth to challenge the political status quo breed factors for VE. Further, the demographic 'explanation' for violence provides kleptocratic governments with 'legitimate' excuse for bad governance, shifting the burden of addressing VE to communities.

This dissertation suggests that an understanding of local context is key in formulating effective P/CVE initiatives. The proper mapping out of locally specific grievances that drive VE can be achieved through;- (a) understanding the social construction of current youth realities through an in-depth analysis of historical, socio-cultural, political and economic factors (b) continuous constructive engagement of youth to understand their dynamic and complex lives. For this to be achieved, rethinking the suitability of youth bulge theory in the fields of youth, peace and security and WPS is a matter of urgency. This analysis draws from poststructuralist and feminist critiques which proves that frameworks that embrace the dynamic complex youth lives do exist.

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