



REGIONAL PAPER

# CIVIL SOCIETY'S VOICES ON VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM RESPONSES

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES FROM EASTERN AND  
SOUTHERN AFRICA



UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM  
UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT)



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This report is informed by the contributions received from 80 civil society representatives from 33 countries, who shared their views, challenges and recommendations on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counterterrorism during the [Global Digital Consultation “Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counterterrorism responses”](#) (Global Digital Consultation). The Global Digital Consultation was organized by UN Women on behalf of the Working Group on Adopting a Gender-Sensitive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism (Gender Working Group) of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact between 25 May and 5 July 2020. The Global Digital Consultation is an initiative of the Gender Working Group and funded by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

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The regional paper and feature stories were informed by a collaborative process involving participants in the Global Digital Consultation, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office, UN Women Country Office staff in Kenya and Mozambique, as well as UN Women’s Women, Peace and Security and Communication Teams in headquarters.

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## GLOSSARY

<b>CSO</b>	civil society organization	<b>UNCCT</b>	United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre
<b>CT</b>	counter-terrorism	<b>UNGCTCC</b>	United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact
<b>CT/PVE</b>	counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism	<b>UNOCT</b>	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
<b>EAC</b>	Eastern Africa Community	<b>UNSCR 1325</b>	United Nations Security Council resolution 1325
<b>GBV</b>	gender-based violence	<b>VEO</b>	violent extremism organization
<b>GWG</b>	Gender Working Group	<b>WPS</b>	Women, Peace and Security
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan		
<b>PVE</b>	Preventing Violent Extremism		
<b>SADC</b>	Southern Africa Development Community		
<b>UN</b>	United Nations		

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In the words of Abdinasir Saman: “Women are instrumental in building peace in Wajir”	

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# INTRODUCTION



UN Women, on behalf of the Gender Working Group of the United Nations' Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, organized a [Global Digital Consultation on “Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism responses”](#) between 25 May and 5 July 2020 as a joint project of the Gender Working Group, funded by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in the United Nations Office of Counter-terrorism (UNOCT).

The consultation was open to participants from civil society organizations (CSOs), including independent women's and women-led CSOs, organizations with strong credentials as gender equality advocates, and independent women's human rights and/or gender equality activists. Participants were offered a safe space to discuss their engagement in contexts affected by violent extremism conducive to terrorism. More than 140 civil society representatives from 43 countries worldwide participated. A total of 80 participants from 33 countries posted 393 comments, sharing their views, challenges and recommendations on the gendered dimensions of terrorism and counter-terrorism (CT), and the impact that existing measures to prevent violent extremism (PVE) have had on their work and human rights.

Civil society participants and moderators summarized their views and recommendations in a [Public Statement](#) based on their discussions in the consultation. The views and recommendations expressed were similar across countries and regions. However, as each region had its particularities, UN Women commissioned regional papers to identify and bring to light these more specific views and recommendations, in addition to the overall findings and recommendations captured in the Public Statement. The present paper focuses on the Eastern and Southern Africa region, and the contributions of participants from these countries.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global Digital Consultation participants from Eastern and Southern Africa detailed various conditions that are conducive to violent extremism in their region and how political, social and economic inequalities provide a fertile ground for women and men to join violent extremist groups. Other factors included gender inequalities as well as gender and sexual-based violence, which are driven notably by conservative social-cultural norms. Participants said the shrinking democratic space and human rights violations were identified as a threat to peace; while freedom of expression, including for media and human rights defenders, was deemed critical to preventing violent extremism.

Post-conflict environments should be of particular concern to peacebuilders, participants emphasized. As long as the root causes of a conflict are not addressed, injustices and unanswered grievances can give rise to secondary conflicts and drive some people to violent extremism. For that reason, they said it is critical to protect human rights, provide livelihoods and opportunities for youth, ensure justice and guarantee the dignity of all in conflict-affected contexts. Immediate responses should also include psychosocial support to victims of violence. Climate change, as well as crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, were also flagged as “threat multipliers”, exacerbating existing weaknesses and threats, especially in conflict/post-conflict situations, as well as in contexts affected by violence.

Participants emphasized that the impact of violent extremism is particularly severe for women and girls who have to manage various stressors – social, economic, health and physical insecurity for themselves, their children, husbands and extended families. When violent extremist organizations (VEOs) control a territory, they often target women’s rights and freedoms, including their ability to move freely, engage in public life, access education and employment, enjoy health services, express themselves without fear of repercussions and live as equal citizens. Women also suffer sexual- and gender-based violence by VEOs.

Most countries of the region have enacted counter-terrorism and/or prevention of violent extremism (CT/PVE) legislation and/or policies. However, existing responses raise a number of concerns among civil society. They tend to be “reactive”, favour militarized and criminal justice approaches, and rely on the use of excessive force, including against women. Any strategy/policy aimed at responding to violent extremism should be developed according to a human-rights and human-development-based approach. Participants called for

CT/PVE strategies to be evidence-based, include gender analysis and consider the intersectionality of rights and the political economy of conflicts. Another concern was that responses are often developed behind closed doors, with limited participation from women and insufficient consideration given to gender equality and women’s rights.

Participants highlighted a wide range of issues that prevent women from engaging in the conversation on peace and security issues, particularly on CT/PVE. They noted that a major obstacle to the participation of women in CT/PVE responses are social norms – in particular “conservative” values. Patriarchal norms were said to reinforce gender inequalities, including discrimination and violence against women and other marginalized groups. Another obstacle to women’s participation is their lower economic status, which makes it challenging for them to fully participate in public life. Participants emphasized the need to advocate for women’s participation in security responses, and value their work at the grass-roots level. Participants called for the use of technology to break barriers for women to have their voices heard at national and global levels, and for States to guarantee the security of civil society organizations (CSOs), and women-led CSOs in particular, as well as of local human rights defenders.

Participants said it is time for the gender equality agenda to be prioritized and implemented in its own right, as significant improvements are possible with appropriate support. They said the region requires the implementation of existing national, regional and international frameworks and policies related to gender equality and women’s empowerment, including National Action Plans (NAPs) on UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), which are rarely funded.

# EXISTING CT/PVE LAWS IN THE EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION

It remains challenging to list the PVE/CT laws and policies in the various countries of the region as there is no repository for such documents.<sup>1</sup> The below list is non-exhaustive and covers mainly countries from which there were participants. The information provided was generated through online research and information provided by UN Women.

Most countries of the region have counter-terrorism and/or prevention of violent extremism legislation and/or policies in place. However, existing policies and laws that address CT/PVE have not adequately addressed gender dynamics and women's human rights. In the Eastern and Southern Africa region, the table below shows that South Africa, followed by Kenya and Sudan seem to have a more extensive legislation framework on CT/PVE compared to other countries. However, even these countries pay little attention to gender mainstreaming, except for the National

Strategy to CVE in Kenya, which now includes gender as an important pillar. Kenya has a more comprehensive CT/PVE approach, insofar as gender is concerned, due to the efforts of local women-led CSOs that tirelessly engaged in rallies around the country aimed at collecting recommendations to inform how gender could be integrated into every pillar of the National CVE Strategy. It was through collective advocacy that these CSOs managed to succeed. Kenyan CSOs then supported Uganda in developing its CT/PVE strategy, which also includes gender as a key pillar.



Photo: UN Women/Yulia Panevina

<sup>1</sup> The present document uses UN Women “definition” of Eastern and Southern Africa that includes the following countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Country	Legislation on CT/PVE
Kenya	Kenya uses the Terrorism Prevention Act (amended in 2014) to implement counter-terrorism-related activities and to investigate and prosecute terrorism. It also uses its National Strategy to CVE, launched in 2016.
Mozambique	Legislation on terrorism was passed in 2018, providing for the punishment of anyone who commits, plans, prepares or participates in terrorist acts and for individuals who travel or attempt to travel to join a terrorist organization. Mozambique does not have an up-to-date national CT/PVE action plan.
South Africa	The National Counter-terrorism Strategy implemented from 2013–2019 still prevails. The Constitutional Democracy Protection Act against Terrorism and Related Activities criminalizes acts of terrorism, as well as the financing of terrorism, and establishes specific obligations related to international cooperation. The 1998 Foreign Military Assistance Act Regulation applies to citizens trying to join or who have already joined terrorist organizations such as ISIS.
Sudan	Sudan has an Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism Law.
Tanzania	In 2019, the United Republic of Tanzania amended the Terrorism Prevention Act to specifically prohibit terrorist financing. The Tanzania National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) leads Government coordination on CT issues.
Uganda	The Government is currently drafting a CVE national action plan.
SADC	The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is obliged to assist countries in situations of extreme violence under Article 6 (1) of the SADC Mutual Defense Pact. In addition, SADC has an Anti-Terrorism Strategy and Action Plan since 2015, providing assistance to prevent the radicalization of youth, ensure border security and humanitarian aid, and tackle the root causes of terrorism.

Most countries in the region also have National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security.

Country	NAPs on WPS
Kenya	NAP on WPS 2016–2020 and 2020–2024
Mozambique	NAP on WPS 2018-2022
South Africa	South Africa pledged to finalize its first National Action Plan by end of 2020.
Sudan	NAP 2015–2020
Uganda	Uganda developed a NAP for the national implementation of UNSCR 1325, 1820 and the Goma Declaration on Eradicating Sexual Violence and Ending Impunity in the Great Lakes Region (Goma Declaration) in 2008.
Regional	Nations in Eastern Africa launched a Regional Action Plan (RAP) on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in 2013. However, the RAP expired in 2015.

## Environments conducive to violent extremism

Post-conflict environments (which is the case for many Eastern and Southern African countries) are conducive to violent extremism. When violent conflicts cease, most communities are left on their own with the assumption that the absence of violence equals peace. But dissatisfaction over unanswered grievances can give rise to secondary conflicts, and drive some people to violent extremism, if the impacts of prior conflicts were not properly addressed. Therefore, it is important in contexts affected by conflicts and violence to undertake programmes that will contribute to restoring human rights, dignity for all, and promote a culture shift for those who have lived under adverse situations that do not automatically get resolved. Trauma counselling and healing projects were also deemed necessary in areas affected by VEOs.

Shrinking democratic space was identified as a major challenge to addressing violent extremism and terrorism. Participants said that in some cases, media actors who seek to report rape against women in contexts of violent extremism encounter barriers, notably because of legislation related to so-called “fake news”.<sup>2</sup> Uncertainty about freedom of expression thus tends to silence women and prevent human rights defenders from denouncing violations, including where witnesses fear reprisals. According to participants, silencing and the invisibility of human rights violations, including violations of women’s human rights, tend to be greater if a State has not officially acknowledged situations of violent extremism and/or terrorism (which may be interpreted as non-existent or “false”).

Regarding the factors conducive to violent extremism, all participants agreed that it is a topic that requires further research. Knowledge about the motivations for women, especially, to join VEOs was acknowledged as being very limited. While women seem to have similar motivations as men, better understanding their motivations could help to address how to achieve rehabilitation and reintegration, which should be individually based. CT/PVE laws and practice also need to reflect the multifaceted roles women play – both in perpetrating and preventing violent extremism.

Participants also drew attention to the fact that political, social and economic inequalities significantly contribute to women’s radicalization. They said violent extremism is fueled by a general feeling of helplessness in most communities, coupled with limited awareness and the low capacity of such communities to act/react to fragile situations. Although many researches and even CT/PVE approaches tend to neglect the fact that women also join VEOs, participants stressed that it is important to acknowledge women’s role as protagonists, if not at the front lines of the violence, at least in providing food and other necessities that allow extremists to sustain their fight.

A participant from Tanzania said women face dominant patriarchal systems, worsening gender inequality, oppressive sociocultural norms, increasing levels of poverty, escalating acts of physical and sexual violence, not to mention other types of abuse – all of which have been acting as push-and-pull factors for women to become radicalized. Women’s voices and cries being unheard and/or ignored may push some women to engage in violent extremism.

Climate change was also flagged as a “threat multiplier”, exacerbating existing weaknesses and threats especially in conflict/post-conflict situations, as well as in contexts affected by violence. While the relationship between climate change and violent extremism is not linear, climate change does impose further stress on water and food security, population dynamics and societal institutions, further enforcing gender inequality. These stresses are felt more by women and girls who often have to travel long distances to look for resources or find themselves unable to support their communities when they are left as the heads of household in conflict settings. Food insecurity and the inability to guarantee basic needs create an enabling environment for recruitment into violent extremist groups. Yet, most of the policies on CT/PVE, including NAPs, have been silent on how to build peace in contexts affected by the climate crisis.

Participants flagged that the COVID-19 pandemic may further aggravate situations resulting from violent extremism, such as internally displaced people, particularly in the contexts of multiple emergencies (health, food/nutritional, security, housing, access to water, employment, gender-based violence, etc.) and exacerbate human rights violations, which mainly affect vulnerable groups, including women.

<sup>2</sup> This issue was notably raised by participants from Mozambique



Photo: UN Women/Yulia Panevina

## The impact of violent extremism on women and girls

Eastern and Southern African participants also agreed that the impact of these acts of violent extremism is more severe for women and girls, who in most cases have to deal with physiological impacts together with social and economic stress, worrying about the food and health insecurity affecting their families, not to mention their physical insecurity. Women are frequently the targets of physical, sexual and cultural violence. As violent extremist groups come to influence or control territories, they also often wage targeted, strategic attacks on women's rights and freedoms, including their ability to move freely, engage in public life, access education and employment, enjoy health services, express themselves without fear of repercussions and live as equal citizens.

Supporting populations in contexts affected by VEOs is particularly challenging when national institutions have limited access to the areas, participants noted. As a result, civil society, human rights activists and researchers have limited opportunities to provide support to populations of concern, carry out field research or improve their understanding of the evolving situation on the ground.

## Shortcomings of existing CT/PVE responses

Existing CT/PVE responses raise a number of concerns in the region among civil society. Participants said they tend to be "reactive", favour militarized and criminal justice approaches, and rely on the use of excessive force. Cases of women being raped, battered and physically assaulted by security officials in response to terror attacks were mentioned. "These approaches have proven to be counter-productive, as human rights principles are violated and to some extent [they] alienate the State against aggrieved communities," said one participant. Reiterating that States have the obligation to protect their population, and guarantee fundamental human rights and human development, participants stressed that until national authorities tackle the root causes of violent extremism, it will continue growing.

Another concern related to existing PVE approaches was that they are often developed behind closed doors. A participant said that while efforts had been made to engage with the military and discuss responses to violent extremism, such efforts had yielded very limited results. Participants said "it is key and non-negotiable to formulate laws on PVE with

deeper and genuine consultation with women”. Yet, the participation of women in policies related to peace and security remains low. Kenya was mentioned as a good practice. However, participants emphasized that there was no mention of gender perspectives in the National Strategy until CSOs and rights groups raised the issue. Overall, insufficient consideration has been given to gender equality and women’s-rights-related issues in CT/PVE responses. In Eastern and Southern African societies, women are the backbone of their families and largely responsible for educating children. Yet CT/PVE approaches in the region tend to ignore or neglect this fact.

Participants said CT/PVE strategies should be based on in-depth evidence-based studies produced by experts with sufficient theoretical and practical experience to identify the root causes of problems and provide concrete recommendations regarding policies and the interrelated dynamics of the context, with a gender analysis and consideration of intersectionality. They also flagged that analysing masculinities and the specific impacts of violent extremism for young men and other groups affected by gender inequalities is very relevant for problem analysis and strategy development.

## Challenges to be addressed for women to contribute to CT/PVE responses

Participants highlighted a wide range of issues that prevent women from engaging in the conversation on peace and security issues, particularly on CT/PVE. One major obstacle identified to the participation of women in CT/PVE responses are social norms – in particular “conservative” values. Patriarchal norms were said to reinforce gender inequalities, including discrimination against women and other marginalized groups. Prejudices and biases against women are deep-rooted and start at a very early age, with discriminatory practices affecting girls that are commonly accepted in many countries of the region and which lead to the violation of human rights – such as the practice of marrying off daughters under the age of 18,



Photo: UN Women/Yulia Panevina

limiting education for girls and young women, and other forms of gender-based violence. Another obstacle to the participation of women is their lower economic status, which makes it very hard, and in many cases impossible, for them to fully participate in a variety of processes. In environments shaped by patriarchal norms, women can easily become the targets of attacks, including by other women. Many participants reported that women’s leadership remains challenging, as both formal and informal leaders, including women leaders themselves, are not always ready to be led by women. Participants said the biggest work ahead is to de-stigmatize women, advocate for women’s participation in security responses, and value their work at the grass-roots level.

According to participants, women’s contributions to the peace and security agenda have not been recognized. “While global leaders take time to discuss interventions, women are on the front lines of prevention, with little or no recognition of their work” said one participant. Another critical issue is that women activists are often targeted to silence their voices. For CSOs, including women-led CSOs and local human rights defenders to be integrated in consultations when drafting CT/PVE responses, their security should be guaranteed by the State. In particular, governments and international partners have an obligation to guarantee the protection of women who are on the front lines. Participants emphasized that prevention of violent extremism is a difficult and often dangerous activity, especially in very patriarchal societies.

## Potential responses to violent extremism

Participants said it is time for the gender equality agenda to be prioritized and implemented in its own right. Women's roles in efforts to prevent and resolve conflict are increasingly recognized and should be leveraged. Significant improvements in relation to gender equality are possible with appropriate support. Participants from the region mentioned many cases where women have become change-agents in their communities, challenging discriminatory practices and building peace. Participants said that what is missing in the region is the implementation of the existing national, regional and international frameworks and policies related to gender equality and women empowerment, including NAPs, which are rarely funded. Participants emphasized the need for political will, especially from officials in leadership positions.

Some participants mentioned good practices – notably in Kenya where women organizations advocated across the country to ensure that gender equality is recognized in the Kenya National Strategy on CVE. The domestication of NAPs in several counties offered a further opportunity for women to influence CT/PVE responses. With the support of the United Nations, CSOs have been able to empower women to articulate their needs and roles in peace and security and participate in decision-making processes.

“Violent extremism is a locally-driven problem – and one that requires local solutions and local leaders,” as one participant put it, and as a matter of fact, “real prevention is taking place in local communities”. Participants said there is a need to address “the inequality of voices” and ensure that local voices reach the global stage. They said platforms such as the Global Digital Consultation are critical in this regard, as those working at the local level do not normally have the opportunity to contribute to and influence global conversations. They called for the greater use of technology to break barriers and allow women to have their voices heard at national and global levels. CT/PVE strategies, as well as NAPs,

may not be effective because they do not address the complexity of each context. In local contexts of violent extremism, participants said existing mechanisms can be strengthened – for example, through specialized technical support (including in the areas of social protection, psychosocial care and training of gender officers and defense and security forces) in gender-focused and women's-human-rights-focused CT/PVE responses, while also taking into account the political economy of conflicts.

Participants articulated that violent extremism is most effectively countered through increased education and critical thinking. A Kenyan participant mentioned how peace education programmes and peace clubs in schools targeting youth and teachers have helped cultivate a culture of peace. The peaceful co-existence of students from various ethnic tribes was realized through the promotion of extra-curricular activities, such as sports, drama and music festivals as channels of peaceful social integration.

PVE was also said to be an issue of governance, particularly of partnerships and coordination – an area where women have solid experience: “While the international community, inter-regional entities and donors at large are struggling with coordination, women's groups have organized and set up networks within and across countries of the region”. For example, Women in International Security (WIIS) in Eastern Africa set up Sisters Without Borders – a network of dedicated women who actively engage in the prevention of violent extremism. Appropriate funding for women-led CSOs is also necessary.

Faith-based organizations and religious leaders were also identified as actors who can play an important role in addressing the use of religion by violent extremist organizations. Promoting respect for individual religious beliefs, in line with the Constitutions of most countries of the region, was deemed critical. The role of religious leadership should be channeled through actions and approaches that prioritize the promotion of gender equality and respect for human rights as an essential part of peacebuilding activities.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants drafted, under the guidance and leadership of civil society moderators, a Public Statement that reflects their recommendations. However, due to space issues, not all of the recommendations could be included in the public statement. The recommendations indicated below includes a broader set of views expressed by participants based in Eastern and Southern Africa throughout the consultation. They are clustered below according to thematic area.

## Recommendations:

### **Promote and protect women’s human rights, empower women, and support women’s leadership**

- Prioritize the gender equality agenda and implement it on its own right. Promote fundamental rights, including women’s human rights, and gender equality, particularly in contexts where social norms prevent the participation of women in political, social and economic life.
- Provide women with economic opportunities.
- Address discrimination faced by women, girls and other marginalized groups. Tackle sociocultural norms that deprive women of their rights and reinforce gender inequalities.
- Monitor women’s human rights violations.
- Combat violence against women and girls.
- Support women human rights defenders and women-led CSOs, particularly those based in conflict-affected areas.
- Acknowledge and value the contributions of women to the peace and security agenda, particularly at grass-roots levels, and advocate for women’s participation in security responses. Communicate the various relevant roles of women in PVE to governments and societies.
- Empower women through training on peace and security matters so that they can articulate their needs and exercise their roles in peace and security.
- Revitalize programmes that empower women and amplify gender inclusion in policies and laws on CT/PVE<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> One of the programs mentioned by participants was “Champions for Change” in Kenya



Photo: UN Women/Yulia Panevina

#### Recommendations:

##### **Support young women**

- Train young women on the appropriate use of social media to combat online radicalization.
- Provide entrepreneurship training to equip young women with practical and vocational skills.
- Enhance opportunities for young women to strengthen their voices, leadership and activism at the local and the national level. Develop local and family-based mentorship programmes.
- Promote community dialogues for young women on PVE to foster engagement and awareness.

### Recommendations:

#### **Promote and protect human rights, and support democratic space and principles**

- Promote human rights protection strategies in areas affected by violent extremism.
- Promote freedom of expression, notably to enable open debates on the most appropriate responses to violent extremism. Report human rights violations.
- Move away from securitized approaches. Develop strategies/policies aimed at responding to violent extremism built on a human-rights and human-development-centred approach in order to tackle the root causes of violent extremism. Place the protection of the population from human rights violations at the core of CT/PVE responses.
- Promote respect for individual religious beliefs, in line with national legal frameworks. The role of religious leaders in PVE responses should be channeled through actions and approaches that prioritize the promotion of gender equality and respect for women's human rights/human rights.
- Guarantee freedom of expression, including for media.
- Guarantee fundamental freedoms and support civil society organizations to enhance civic spaces.

### Recommendations:

#### **Address grievances and injustices in conflict-affected contexts and ensure the protection of populations**

- Respond to grievances in and among the victims of conflicts and restore the dignity of all.
- Protect populations living in conflict-affected areas and provide them with basic services.
- Provide socioeconomic opportunities for populations in contexts of violence and violent extremism, particularly for women.
- Introduce trauma counselling and healing projects, as well as programmes to support efforts to restore human rights and dignity, and promote a culture shift for communities who have lived under difficult conditions caused by violent extremist acts and been liberated from these groups.
- Establish foundations for improved constructive relationships between women, policymakers and security-providers in environments where violent extremism takes place.
- Establish specific courts to ensure the protection of victims and witnesses.



Photo: UN Women/Yulia Panevina



Photo: UN Women/Yulia Panevina

### Recommendations:

#### **Invest in high-quality and inclusive education**

- Promote quality education and critical thinking.
- Support the education sector in establishing peace committees in schools so that they can lead initiatives to foster peaceful co-existence among students through the promotion of extra-curricular activities, such as sports, drama and music festivals as channels of peace integration.
- Provide youth (boys and girls) with entrepreneurship training to equip them with practical and vocational skills and all sorts of mentorship programmes that can enhance their opportunities and reduce their vulnerability to recruitment by VEOs.

### Recommendations:

#### **Ensure evidence- and gender-based approaches**

- Place gender dimensions at the core of CT/PVE legislations and efforts.
- Ensure CT/PVE strategies are based on evidence-based studies, including on gender-related issues.
- Produce gender analysis with an in-depth understanding of intersectionalities. Examine masculinities (including the specific impacts of violent extremism on young men), as well as the mechanisms through which women and girls engage in VEOs.
- Conduct more research in order to understand and obtain deeper knowledge on the motivations and membership of women in VEOs. For the most part, women's membership differs from men, and there is a need to understand how they differ.

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**Recommendations:**

**Develop CT/PVE laws and policies along a human rights and gender-based approach**

- Ensure CT/PVE laws and policies are developed through transparent, inclusive and participatory processes that promote women's participation in particular.
- Guarantee the protection of women and women human rights defenders when consulting them on CT/PVE responses.
- Increase the participation of young women in discussions and the development of CT/PVE policies, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as in the implementation of related programmes and practices.
- Work with female governmental representatives to better mainstream gender-sensitivity into government activities around CT/PVE.
- Ensure the adequate localization of CT/PVE programmes by assisting governments in formulating laws and policies on CT/PVE with deeper and genuine consultation with women and communities, as they are the ones doing the real front-line prevention in local communities.
- Ensure that policies on CT/PVE address challenges to peacebuilding in contexts affected by the climate crisis.
- Ensure that CT/PVE efforts do not stereotype or instrumentalize young women.
- Build strong networks with other CSOs and work towards a united advocacy front to ensure that gender is recognized as a key pillar in CT/PVE legislation, strategy and action plans.

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**Recommendations:**

**Implement National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325**

- Implement existing NAPs. Develop the capacities of officials to integrate both the gender dimensions and political economy of conflicts.
- Ensure that governments provide sufficient resources to implement NAPs.
- Ensure that NAPs address challenges in building peace in contexts affected by the climate crisis.

## Recommendations for the next steps

The Public Statement and Outcome Report will be disseminated among Member States, and UN Women recommends that it be further shared in closed discussions, conferences and webinars (given the COVID-19 context), and by working very closely with the following institutions as partners:

- a) The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and Eastern Africa Community (EAC), considering that PVE is not a particular nation's problem and its impact and repercussions are transnational. Intergovernmental and regional organizations need to be aware of their importance in implementing CT/PVE strategies as countries need to assist one another on such matters.
- b) Government institutions, such as gender ministries or any other female government representative institution, ministries of education and Parliaments, considering that mounting any CT/PVE effort without the involvement and engagement of government institutions is doomed to fail.
- c) Academic and research institutions, as many issues around PVE are still far from being understood, therefore more research is needed.
- d) Women-led CSOs, considering that they are key actors in advocating and lobbying for the inclusion of gender dimensions in national policies, laws and strategies. Most importantly, they are the ones who are often on the front lines, doing PVE work in affected communities, and they need to be supported.

# FEATURE STORY

The Public Statement of the Global Digital Consultation highlighted a wide range of issues and recommendations in relation to the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism. UN Women conducted 11 interviews with women human rights defenders and gender equality activists across five different regions (i.e. Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Western and Central Africa, and Eastern and Southern Africa) to illustrate how they work in contexts affected by violent extremism, the challenges they face and the efforts they make to build peace in their respective communities and countries.

## In the words of Abdinasir Saman: “Women are instrumental in building peace in Wajir”

*Abdinasir Saman, 38, has been working for the Wajir Peace and Development Agency (WPDA) for the last 10 years. Founded by female community leaders in Wajir County, north-east Kenya, WPDA was established in the mid-1990s, at a time when the region was engaged in vicious clan conflicts. Since then, Wajir women and WPDA have been at the forefront of localized peace and security efforts and play a key role in tackling the threat of violent extremism in the region.*



*Abdinasir Saman, Wajir Peace and Development Agency, discussing the Wajir County Action Plan on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). Photo: Courtesy of Wajir Peace and Development Agency*

“ Just yesterday a woman’s body was found 700 meters from a local police station, tortured and sexually violated. Today an improvised explosive device went off at the border. Insecurity is part of everyday life in Wajir, and issues of peace and security are therefore very relevant.

Working in this field does not come without risks. Recently in Khorof Harar [a border town over 100 km from the centre of Wajir], we were trying to review a resolution between two communities. Members of the terrorist group infiltrated the meeting and recorded all our discussions. During the meeting, we were informed that it was not safe and told to leave before we could complete our work.



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Violation of rights is an everyday occurrence. But violence against women and girls—particularly sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, including early/child marriage – has increased with the rise of violent extremism

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Violent extremism has created regional conflict in which women are systematically targeted, both by extremist groups and security actors. This situation differs from previous conflicts linked to resources or community disputes. On the one hand, younger girls (20–30 years old) are forced to marry extremists. They are appropriated and expected to help support the cause, including by providing food and shelter for extremists. On the other hand, the disconnect between security actors and the community, caused by violent extremism, also puts women at risk. Security actors that come to Wajir County tend to perceive every individual as a member of a terror group – women are targeted, and sexual violence follows, without accountability.

Cases of sexual violence, as well as other community disputes, are brought before local ‘elders’ and regulated through a patriarchal conflict-resolution system known as ‘*maslaxa*’, an ‘alternative dispute resolution’ mechanism recognized by the State, county government and civil society organizations. Women are excluded from this decision-making process and their rights are often ignored.

Despite WPDA successfully campaigning to remove issues of violence against women from this traditional decision-making system, the rights of women remained ignored in *maslaxa*. The county is large – roughly 52,000 square kilometers – so it is hard to monitor and enforce away from urban centres.

Although their rights are regularly violated, women are instrumental in building peace in Wajir. Historically, they have played a key role in security: in 1994, when the region was engaged in vicious clan conflicts, female community leaders came together to create WPDA.

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The women of Wajir have been at the forefront of localized peace and security efforts and formed the blueprint for regional peace structures.

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*Abdinasir Saman attending a consultative dialogue forum with the Alfatah Council of Elders on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practices. Photo: Courtesy of Wajir Peace and Development Agency*

Community-level peace committees were born in Wajir and have become commonplace throughout Kenya, spreading into Somalia and Ethiopia. I was fortunate enough to be mentored by some of those peace pioneers – Nuria Abdullahi Abdi, Fatuma Mire and the late Dekha Ibrahim Abdi – and it has inspired me to work for the promotion of women’s rights and gender equality.

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Despite these successes, today I still attend meetings where I’m grappling with traditional perspectives.

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Men are expected to handle issues of conflict in community dialogues. They belittle women’s presence or feel that they simply don’t add value.

More recently, in March 2020, there was a meeting between two communities from Kenya and Somalia to address some crucial socioeconomic and security challenges along the border. The conveners of the meeting deliberately excluded women from the delegations, which included roughly 50 people from the Kenyan community and 100 from the Somali community.

We advocated heavily to include women in these talks, and this helped shape the course of the reconciliatory process and probably the subsequent acceptance of the resolutions reached. The women participating emphasized the destruction of war, reminding participants of a Somali saying, that ‘in war or conflict the son is killed, and no son is born.’ Wajir women also demanded that sexual violence perpetrators be subjected to the full force of the law and away from the alternative dispute resolution system.

Until the day-to-day challenges of women and girls are addressed, here in Wajir, violent extremism and conflict will continue to grow and exacerbate the violations experienced. Now more than ever, we need political commitment and sustained action from all stakeholders on the ground to respond to those challenges. ”



Photo: UN Women/Yulia Panevina





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