Role of Women in Countering Violent Extremism– The Case of Kwale County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Involvement and participation of women in social development has been a core- focus among practioners globally partly because of their innate potential in influencing change but also the significant multi-dimensional roles they undertake from the family to community spheres. In this recognition, there have been a lot of efforts towards setting enabling policies as well as granting them the relevant space. The foregone notwithstanding, significant barriers come their way inhibiting profusely the role they are expected to play. Like any other social-development fields, Preventing/ Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) is affected by the above on an equal measure. When women are provided with the enabling environment to participate in P/CVE initiatives, the achievements can be enormous. This paper cross examines the global, regional, national and specific (Kwale) county in Kenya VE perspective in terms of policy availability and functionality, religion and culture as well as civil society organizations (CSO) community and their influence for or against women involvement in P/CVE.

Keywords: Women in countering violent extremism, effect of radicalization

A global view on violent extremism (VE) and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT) note this as transnational challenges which are not restricted to any nationality, ethnicity, religion, ideology or gender. The unpredictable and evolving nature of these threats make them difficult to prevent and counter. The United Nations notes that VE continues to undermine peace and security, human rights and sustainable development throughout the world (UN, 2016). In the past twenty years, the acts of violent extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Boko Haram and Al-Shaabab have threatened lives and livelihoods in various countries (ICG, 2016). For a long time, countries worldwide depended on security-led counterterrorism interventions to address VE. Such interventions often included traditional military measures, law enforcement means, and sharing of intelligence (ICG, 2016). However, these conventional approaches are repressive and often lead to serious violation of human rights and freedom, and subsequently pushing those affected towards VE. Additionally, these interventions have been reported to be short-term and reactive, whose main objective is to curb some of the outward manifestations of VE (UN, 2016).

Regionally, radicalization attempts have been engineered by the ongoing insurgency of the Somalia-based militant group, Al Shabaab and the Islamic State of Iran and Syria (ISIS), (David *et al.* 2015). Accordingly, this has necessitated integrated regional responses to prevent and Counter Violent Extremism (CVE). These Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) have been very dynamic in their mobilization, recruitment and operations, to also include gender as a consideration (Sjoberg, 2013). In East Africa, unlike in Nigeria, where Boko haram has recruited many young women (ICG, 2016), Al-shabaab are targeting vulnerable young men with the allure of employment and good life (Bombshell *et al.* 2006).

Kenya's CVE initiatives emerged in response to the homegrown violent extremism supported by Al-Shabaab, although it was rooted in the historical landscapes of violent extremism across the Middle East, North Africa, the western Sahel, and the Horn of Africa (Davis 2010; Ridley 2014). Terrorism in Kenya has resulted in not only the loss of lives, personal suffering, and pain, but also in growing instability of the economy especially the tourism sector and a heightened sense of insecurity. Some of the largest and most significant terrorist attacks of the last several decades are the Garissa University attack, the Westgate attack, Dusit2, the 1998 bomb attack on US embassy and the Mandera attack on civil servants. Drivers to VE in Kenya include the high unemployment rate of the youth in (World Bank, 2016), and unresolved historical injustices (Mwaruvie, 2011).

Empirical studies indicate that radicalisation is fundamentally an individual process, young people, seek a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO) are aware of young people's quest for meaning and construct worldviews that satisfy youth desires for self-actualization and fulfilment (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

Terrorist groups routinely use political and geo-political reasons as part of the ideology justifying their actions. A major grievance underlying bin Laden's 1996 fatwa was the close military relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US (Hoffman, 2006).

Many young Muslims in Kenya have been indoctrinated into the belief that the wars in Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Israel-Palestine conflict are part of a broader global campaign against Islam as a religion. By promoting the "Umma ideology" the universal Muslim Brotherhood, the Hanbali School started to oppose the Shafi's school in Kenya, resulting in local youths starting to regard the situations in Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine as problems affecting all Muslims across the world and therefore, worthy of their involvement. (Navanti Group, 2013).

Some school of thoughts reject to fully adopt poverty as a causal factor of radicalisation, their argument is; many recent terrorist attacks have been committed by well-educated, middle class offenders (Porter & Kebbell, 2011). There is therefore no necessary connection between low socio-economic status and a risk of terrorism. However, socio-economic disadvantage can play a causal role in radicalisation by aggravating perceptions of injustice. This is captured in the theory of 'relative deprivation', meaning that a person is aware that others have better material conditions or higher social status in comparison to them, and the person perceives these differences to be unjust.(Christmann, 2012).

There is no recognised pathology, medical condition or single psychological profile that explains why some people become terrorists (Horgan, 2008,). However, psychological factors still contribute to radicalisation. The strongest among these are a lack of self-esteem and sense of identity, which result in the need to join a cause and feel valued by others. These needs have been described as a 'quest for significance' (Kruglanski *et al.* 2014) and a 'search for identity contributing to a sense of belonging, worth and purpose' (Dalgaard 2008).

Another consistent finding is that social relationships are crucial to understanding radicalisation (Christmann *et al.* 2012). Radicalisation is a 'group phenomenon' in which friends, relatives and top down recruitment processes encourage new members to internalise a group's common mindset (Christmann, 2012).

Despite its increased use, the causal link between

viewing extremist material on the Internet and radicalisation remains unclear. It is more common for individuals to view extremist material online while being radicalised through group networks and social relationships. It is less common for them to 'self-radicalise' purely through exposure to extremist material online, without any human connection (Stevens *et al.* 2009).

What influences the participation of Kwale Women in P/CVE

Policy Factor

Findings of this research on available policies matter revealed that like in the rest of the world the cry for women involvement and participation at Global, Regional levels has been attempted in Kenya too. The documents include the now famous Affirmative Action and Third rule Majority are such attempts to ensure women are given preferential treatment to be at par if not close to their male counterparts. Aside of the third majority rule and the affirmative action, Kenya has in place the NAP 1325 (2016-2018) which is to be a road map for addressing VE. Further to the said is the Community-based policing. CBP is an approach to policing that brings together the police, civil society and local communities to develop local solutions to safety and security concerns Kwale joins a number of County governments and have put in place elaborate plans to strengthen the Community based policing initiative well known as "Nyumba Kumi".

Despite the foregone, the research has established the lack of a gendered analysis of drivers of VE has left gaps in current CVE strategies. Mujahid 2017 notes that despite growing awareness of women and girls' participation in VE, there has been limited attention paid to women's diverse roles in either supporting or countering VEOs in Kenya.

In a Structural Impact Study (on widows) Shauri *et al.* (2018), informs thatparticipants reported several negative impacts bordering on politics and touching on the security infrastructure around mitigation of radicalization, recruitment and violent extremism. Ranstorp and Hyllengren (2013) observe that

women are the most likely affected by violence and extremism. More precisely, some interviewed VE widows said that they were treated as suspects on something they had no knowledge or idea about; some were arbitrarily arrested, others were beaten and harassed allegedly by security agencies, hence having their rights and fundamental freedoms violated.. This can probably be attributed to the fear by such institutions to be associated with VE activities and groups, especially the consequences that come with such associations.

Study subjects reported feelings of insecurity and were fearful of the repercussions of their husbands' involvement with VEOs. Consequently, therefore participants were caught up in double jeopardy situations pitying them against security forces on one hand and Al-shabaab on the other.

According Shauri *et al.* (2018), ex-combatants come along with lots of experiences and could be used as change agents, however they are often not trusted. The policies related to protection of these persons are yet to be operationalized. (Badurdeen 2018 *et al.* 2018) is in agreement with the above noting that he space for civil society to safely engage with returnees and work toward their rehabilitation and reintegration is deeply constrained by many issues including CTF laws, state-perpetrated violence, Islamophobia, and the stigmatization and marginalization of both returnees and their families.

Religion and Culture

According to CHRIPS 2018, the role of religious ideology distracts from the fact that the agenda of Muslim resistance has in many ways remained unchanged. The argument above is further agreed by (Oudraat in Fink *et al.* 2016) who notes that a number of writers question the widespread idea 'that in many cultures women may not be very visible in the public sphere.

Shauri *et al.* (2018) asserts that under the traditional and cultural perspective, women have been viewed as domestic workers (Risteska and Raleva, 2012).

Close to the above is marriage: According to Fatma Ali 2018 recruiters often take advantage of young women's lower level of religious literacy and use

patriarchal constructs in their recruitment narrative by manipulating marriage as a Utopian promise to lure young women.

Ahmed F.A. (2018). findings are in conformity with Ayindo 2018 who observes that the discourse of "*jihadi* brides," such women as sexually-deviant, lured or seduced by men.

The researcher argues that Kwale County forming part the larger coastal strip which has a significant population professing Islamic faith may not be far away from this misconception/belief. It could be this misconception that has greatly influenced women's participation in P/CVE. In a strict Islamic code, women are not allowed/encouraged to speak openly before men. In Christianity for instance, they are not allowed to lead preach or practice religious ministry in the midst of men.

Religious teachings on the above include 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:12 and Titus 2:4 . The famous ''verse of the veil' in Quran 33:53 conforms to these (Christian) teachings.

Despite the limited space for women participation, when give opportunity, women are able to share transformative ideas in the field of P/CVE, Babu Ayindo 2018 suggests that feminist approaches to peace and security can transform the design and implementation of security measures: "Feminist research and women's research on those issues [on P/CVE] will bring perspectives that ordinarily governments don't want to consider when they are tackling issues of violence."

> *Anything that talks on behalf of women, we need to uphold it, and fight for it. Because men will never give us a space…………..Woman leader in Isiolo*

Ayindo further "pointsoutson male domination as an impediment to women participation, he argues that effective violence prevention programming must be developed based on what communities need and yet the majority of CBOs are led by men"

According to Nthamburi 2018, despite the active roles they (women) have taken in violent extremist groups, perceptions of women as passive victims and meek actors are often reflected in the attitudes and practices of the security agencies, including the military and police, and limited their scope for participation in CVE processes.

Shauri *et al.* (2018), established that inferiority of women position and assignment of specific tasks for them were the important factors hindering their participation in decision making as they are considered to be ruled by men who mostly make all the decisions. Women task perception means that the fact that being a woman in itself denies a woman a chance to participate in decision making position.

Shauri further observed significant correlations between religion and inferiority view of women against leadership. Inferiority position of women is a factor that symbolizes patriarchal nature of the society, therefore, denies women to take up honored and utilitarian roles such as leadership (Hora, 2014).

This research has established that awareness/familiarity and to a greater extent Education is a key determinant to women participation. However, for some (cultural) reasons women habitually miss opportunities to be made aware of (prevailing) key issues affecting their lives.

Laylah 2018 asserts that, *Not so many people know that 2242 is inside 1325, even the women leaders. We really do not know. There has been no popularization, no sensitization.*

From the researcher's perspective, this situation could be a result of structural abuse, deliberately denying women the access to information and thus limit their participation. With regards to education on the other hand, Fauzia 2018, claims that the participation of women (in P/CVE) is partly attributed to their levels of Education. She argues that women having formal education are considered at the forefront while their counterparts shy away because of illiteracy.

Reviewing the Kwale CIDP (2017-2022) the researcher notes with concern the literacy levels and education trends in the County: apparently the County's Secondary School Age (14 - 17 Years) population in this age group is estimated at 77,665 with only 34% of which is enrolled in 54 secondary schools. The low transition rate from primary to secondary school is as a result of a combination

of factors including poverty, cultural and religious factors. The most affected in this transition challenge are women/girls.

Shauri, H. *et al.* (2018) notes that Kasemeni Ward in Kwale County, is characterized by high number of women with elementary level of education. Majority of them are working age groups who could be productive in development. However, their participation in developmental activities is limited due to several challenges including low level of education, negative cultural traditions, inferiority view of women.

Civil Society Organizations (CSO) related influence & CSO Best practises

CSOs mapped hot spots in Kwale - Msambweni, Matuga, and Lunga while Kinango Sub County is considered a 'safe haven' for VE. Kwale CVE Action Plan (KCVE) was developed through consultations. FBOs collaborated with partners in CVE. Kwale County Peace Committee (CPC) partners with County CVE Steering Committee. CSOs use social media intervention.

Parents/community/CSOs collective action for prevention: CSOs train women on children behavioural changes associated with deviant behavior as a result of radicalization and drug abuse.

Violent Extremism is rampant, and recruitment is still going on but it has relatively gone down due to many government interventions. The coastal political grievances and their violent expressions have mutated over time since the politically instigated Likoni ethnic clashes/Sheikh Balala's Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) multi-party political mobilization, 1991/2, Kaya Bombo violence associated with politicized attempts to evict non-coastal people, 1997 to present day MRC and Al Shabaab violent extremism. (KII Interviewee, July 20, 2017, Diani, Kwale)

CSO shortfalls

Despite the said best practises, the engagement of CSO has not been without some struggles/gaps.

Joseph *et al.* (2017) presents some of them as follows:

Of the nine CVE strategic pillars, many actors overlap on few pillars such as training and capacity building. There is over concentration on a few areas in Kwale such as Ukunda – Gombato. CSOs are not well coordinated. CSOs seems to be cooperating but steeply competing at the same time for donor funding and other resources.

Kwale County is large and therefore the CVE message has not percolated to the grassroots level and training in CVE is inadequate. Elders/Balozi, CP, NK Committees activities are not harmonized.

There is disharmony in CVE coordination between the national and county government. This was observed with CVE actors at the local level where the NCTC's whole of government approach is not visible.

There is no information on the nature and dynamics of VE or how CVE is impacting on drivers of the conflict due to inadequate research-based knowledge and inadequate trickle-down effect of CVE awareness.

According to Fathima *et al.* (2018), Very few community organizations are involved or have capacity to be involved at the project conception stages, which are often controlled by donors influenced by their domestic CVE models. Fathima *et al.* (2018) further notes evidence of duplication in may programs which does not only minimize their effectiveness but result in poor resource utilization.

These observations are in conformity with Haynie and Oudraat, 2017 who notes that *No one-size-fits-all solution:* Local context, drivers/factors of recruitment and radicalization to violent extremism and the situation of women can vary hugely from one country/area/community to another and thus need to be considered.

Haynie and Oudraat, 2017 further adds that same design of women program that is implemented in Kwale will be implemented in Kilifi, Lamu Garissa, sometimes it is done out of convenience of the donor not taking into consideration contextual issues.

CONCLUSION

Having noted the lack of community-sensitive projects among most CSOs, this research recommends for urgent need to coordinate the work of CSOs, especially those working for the same community. Such coordination will check against the tendencies of direct endorsement of donor strategies (so called template or copy paste projects), project duplication and unnecessary competition, to ensure projects are more effective and efficient.

The county leadership has a lot of untapped opportunities in resources and structures which if well utilized can go a long way in ensuring effective P/CVE programming. The research recommends CSO mapping, coordination and Embracing women participation.

There is need to pursue a gendered approach to understanding VE and mainstream the role and place of women and girls in relevant CVE laws, policies and programs.

This research had access to very limited literature on the study area. A follow up study that would incorporate myriad of strategies including interaction with respondents is therefore recommended.

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