



Women, Peace and Security and the Prevention of Violence:

Reflections from Civil Society in the Context of the Fourth Swiss National Action Plan 1325



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Dedication

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Acronyms

ATPU	Anti-Terror Police Unit
CBO	Community Based Organization
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CT	Counterterrorism
CTF	Countering Terrorism Financing
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
EJK	Extra-Judicial Killing
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
HSD	Human Security Division
HURIA	Human Rights Agenda
ICAN	International Civil Society Action Network
IDAG	Interdepartmental Working Group
KNCHR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
MUHURI	Muslims for Human Rights
NAP	National Action Plan
NCTC	National Counter-Terrorism Centre
NSCVE	National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SAVE	Sisters Against Violent Extremism
SUPKEM	Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WG 1325	Working Group 1325
WHRDs	Women Human Rights Defenders
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YADEN	Youth, Arts, Development and Entrepreneurship Network

Executive Summary

This report is the result of extensive desk-based research, interviews, and continuous discussions with civil society organizations (CSOs) and experts on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE).¹ The genesis for this report emerged in 2016, when the Swiss civil society Working Group (WG) 1325 raised the need to critically assess the linking of the WPS and P/CVE agendas in the independent alternative report *Women, Peace and Security: Reloaded*.² In the context of the fourth Swiss National Action Plan (NAP) 1325, which names Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) as a key priority within its “prevention pillar,” Swiss civil society seeks to better understand the potential ramifications of integrating the WPS and P/CVE agendas. As such, the project, “Civil Society Contribution to the Implementation of the Swiss NAP 1325,” has consulted with civil society experts within Switzerland and beyond to determine how the WPS agenda can promote a concept of violence prevention that is grounded in the principles of peacebuilding and human rights and which contributes to WPS objectives of women’s empowerment and gender equality.

Since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, there is growing global recognition that women should participate in all realms of peace and security including the development of security policies and approaches and further, that such policies and approaches should account for the gendered dynamics of violent conflict. Since the adoption of UNSCR 2242 in 2015, which calls for the integration of the WPS and the counter-terrorism (CT) and P/CVE agendas, there has been heightened attention on the gender dimensions of violence labelled “terrorism” and “violent extremism” and increased calls for women’s participation in the CT and P/CVE agenda.³

Such calls have been applauded by those who see gender-blind security strategies as harmful to women and women’s rights. However, some WPS actors and feminist activists and scholars have expressed a number of concerns regarding the integration of the WPS and the CT and P/CVE agendas. For instance, there is concern that the integration of these agendas merely instrumentalizes the discourse of women’s rights and gender equality, subsuming the goals of the WPS agenda within the P/CVE agenda. In this respect, WPS becomes a “way of doing” P/CVE wherein states might rhetorically promote women’s empowerment and gender equality but only insofar as it serves a state security agenda and without the sustained, material support actually needed to improve women’s lives.⁴ Such an instrumentalization poses the risk of securitizing and militarizing the WPS agenda. In addition, there are concerns that the P/CVE agenda might actually endanger and harm women and women’s rights, much as the CT agenda has.⁵ Such harms occur through the shrinking of civil society space, the restriction of women’s rights and freedoms, the increased surveillance and targeting of Muslim communities, and direct violence by security forces. In addition, the promotion of gendered stereotypes and assumptions about women’s agency risk further relegating women’s influence to the domestic sphere, where they are assumed to have greater influence over their children and can act as embedded security agents within their homes and communities. Such assumptions might overly burden women with the responsibilities of violence prevention without addressing underlying structural issues such as gender inequality. In addition, such assumptions entrench stereotypes of women’s inherent passivity and neglect a wider understanding of the gendered dynamics of violent conflict, including a recognition that women can act as agents of violence just as men can act as agents of peace.

As WPS actors and as representatives of Swiss civil society, we are invested in understanding the impact of the integration of the P/CVE and the WPS agendas on civil society, and on women and women’s rights in particular. Given that research on the impacts of this integration is still in its infancy, our project—jointly led by PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG), the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding (KOFF) at swisspeace, and cfd: The Feminist Peace Organization—draws on the experience and knowledge of CSOs impacted by the P/CVE agenda and working at the intersection of the P/CVE and WPS agendas. Based on extensive desk-based research, field research with CSOs in Kenya, as well as discussion with partner organizations in other geographical contexts, the report offers critical reflections on the P/CVE agenda from a WPS perspective.

¹ Although Switzerland uses the language of PVE, in this report we use “P/CVE” to denote the broader field of policy and practice developed to “prevent and counter violent extremism.” The specific terms “CVE” or “PVE” are used when an agency, policy, project, or interviewee uses that specific language. Further, there are no universally agreed upon definitions of “terrorism” or “violent extremism” and the range of existing definitions are contested and deeply political (Nasser-Eddine, et al. 2011). The lack of definitional clarity enables the expansion of states’ legal and political powers to the detriment of human rights. In addition, the negative association of “terrorism” and “violent extremism” with the “global war on terror,” military interventions, and Islamophobia make these terms undesirable from a peacebuilding perspective. Further, there is evidence to suggest that proscription—the naming of certain groups as “terrorist” organizations—negatively impacts conflict resolution and peace processes (Schwartz 2010; Haspelagh 2013). Given these concerns, in this report we avoid using the terms “terrorism” and “violent extremism” where possible, unless referring to a specific policy or quoting an interviewee.

² Working Group 1325 2016.

³ United Nations Security Council 2015. See Ní Aoláin and Huckerby 2018a.

⁴ Gender Action for Peace and Security 2018; Ní Aoláin 2016; Brown 2013; Giscard d’Estaing 2017; Winterbotham and Pearson 2017; LSE Centre for Peace and Security 2017; Coomaraswamy 2015.

⁵ See GAPS 2018; Center for Human Rights and Global Justice 2011; Ní Aoláin 2013; Satterthwaite and Huckerby 2013; Coomaraswamy 2015; United Nations Human Rights Council 2016; United Nations Human Rights Council 2019.

Overall, the findings from our research reveal that CSOs working on violence prevention are extremely critical of the P/CVE agenda for a number of reasons. First, the language of “violent extremism” risks contributing to creating and exacerbating the violence it claims to prevent. The lack of definitional clarity and the tendency to conflate “violent extremism” with “terrorism” enables the expansion of the scope of CT measures, resulting in human rights violations including restrictions on freedom of expression. In addition, the language of “violent extremism” and “radicalization” risks further marginalizing and stigmatizing ethnic and religious minorities. Community-based organizations (CBOs) prefer to use language in their violence prevention programming that is context-specific, resonates with their communities, and contributes to conflict transformation.

However, donor-driven P/CVE agendas risk imposing externally devised rather than context-specific solutions. The vast financial resources now available within the P/CVE agenda means that organizations with little or no qualifications are designing and implementing P/CVE programming, posing great harm to communities, discrediting the work of P/CVE, and damaging the reputations of local CBOs who partner with larger international organizations. Community-based actors in Kenya discussed the “transactional relationship” that communities have developed with the P/CVE agenda, and the ways in which the P/CVE agenda is co-opting and depleting local energy and passion for peacebuilding. Overall, the P/CVE agenda is largely perceived by CSOs in Kenya as “an industry” that prioritizes the needs of donors, the international community, and the state over the needs of communities.

Women-led and women’s rights organizations are particularly vulnerable to the influences of the P/CVE industry, as they face greater funding challenges that are exacerbated by donor preference for funding larger, international organizations. In addition, restrictive security measures such as countering terrorism financing (CTF) laws decrease donor risk appetite and make it more difficult for women’s organizations to secure funding. CT measures, including CTF laws, have significantly curtailed the work of CSOs and disproportionately impacted women’s organizations. In addition, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are increasingly targeted by repressive governments and women-led and women’s rights organizations are increasingly “squeezed” between the violence perpetrated by non-state armed actors, state security forces, and increasingly restrictive security measures.

Globally, the expansion of security architecture in the name of “fighting terror” has contributed to the narrowing of civic space and to increasing violations of human rights. The continuation of “hard security” measures such as military interventions and police violence violate human rights and impede the work of conflict transformation and violence prevention. P/CVE has not replaced CT measures and arguably adds greater legitimacy to the expansion of states’ political and legal powers. Enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings (EJKs) perpetrated in the name of “anti-terror” fuels anger and resentment among communities. Further, 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.

Given the significant critiques and challenges of the P/CVE agenda, interventions from the WPS agenda are necessary in order to promote the inclusion of gender perspectives and women’s participation in the development and implementation of security measures that are in line with the principles of peacebuilding and human rights. Women’s meaningful participation in all levels of decision-making related to peace and security policy and programming is essential for the prevention of violence and UNSCR 2242 provides women a policy instrument with which to argue for their inclusion in developing security approaches. However, ensuring that women’s participation is meaningful requires more than the rhetorical inclusion of women and gender in CT and P/CVE policy.

Further, we found that women’s diverse involvement in “violent extremism” is shaped by political, economic, and social factors including grievances related to state-perpetrated violence and gender-based violence. Effective prevention therefore necessarily requires thorough gender analysis of organized violence and the context in which such violence emerges. Gendered assumptions regarding women’s inherent passivity or lack of agency result in gender-blind security policy and practice, causing additional harm to women and girls, and especially to returnees. In addition, gendered assumptions about women’s unique capacity to influence their children and family members risks tasking women with the burden of acting as security agents in their homes and communities without the necessary resources and protection.

In conclusion, we offer closing remarks on what role the WPS can and should play in relationship to the P/CVE agenda. We wish to move beyond calls for integration, which might result in superficial or rhetorical promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality and which might endorse a system of militarism that is antithetical to the ultimate objectives to WPS. However, if left unaddressed by WPS actors and feminist perspectives, the P/CVE agenda stands to do further harm to women and women's rights. Thus, WPS can play a positive role in regards to P/CVE: it can require, or demand, that the P/CVE agenda adheres to the principles of peacebuilding and human rights and that it actually contributes to gender equality and women's empowerment. WPS actors can insist on oversight of the P/CVE agenda in order to ensure that such security measures are not contributing to women's insecurity or harming women's rights. WPS actors can also insist on the continued funding of the WPS agenda in its own right, and not only when it contributes to a state security agenda.

We draw on the perspectives offered by women leaders and CSOs in Kenya who are asking for greater access to security agendas such as P/CVE in order to shape the design and enactment of security. We believe that the experience and expertise of CSOs—and women-led or women's rights organizations in particular—are crucial to closing the gap between security policy and practice. We must listen to what is actually needed by those engaged in daily violence prevention and create policies which reflect this reality.

At the end of the report we offer policy recommendations to Swiss state actors. With these recommendations, we hope to contribute to the continuous and constructive policy dialogue between state and non-state actors, thereby enhancing Switzerland's role as the implementer of the Swiss NAP 1325, as a donor agency in international cooperation and funder of strategic partners, and as an influencer of like-minded countries.



Introduction

Project Background and Rationale

In the nineteen years since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the role of women and gender within all realms of international peace and security has steadily gained prominence. Indeed, UNSCR 1325 and the subsequent resolutions which comprise the WPS agenda have called for the greater protection of women from sexual and gender-based violence in conflict settings; the promotion of women's participation in peace processes; the prevention of violence against women through the promotion of women's rights and gender equality; and the mainstreaming of gender throughout all areas related to peace and security.⁶

In order to implement the WPS agenda at the national level, UN Member States can create National Action Plans (NAPs) to communicate their commitment to the promotion of women's participation and the integration of a gender perspective in all realms of peace and security. As of August 2019, 81 UN member states have adopted NAPs to implement UNSCR 1325. Switzerland, one of the very first countries to ever endorse a NAP on WPS, has recently launched its fourth NAP, active for five years (2018-2022). Previously, the implementation of the Swiss NAPs 1325 was led by Human Security Division (HSD) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and coordinated with the Interdepartmental Working Group (IDAG) 1325. The IDAG 1325 generates reports which are then submitted to the Swiss Parliament.⁷ In addition, Swiss civil society has conducted its own monitoring via the Working Group (WG) 1325. In 2016, the WG 1325 published the independent alternative report *Women, Peace and Security: Reloaded*, which offered a critical and comprehensive reflection of Switzerland's implementation of the WPS agenda, including recommendations for future action.



Responding to the reflections and recommendations proposed by WG 1325 in the alternative report, the project "Civil Society Contribution to the Implementation of the Swiss NAP 1325" was developed. This project—jointly led by PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG), KOFF-swisspeace, and cfd: The Feminist Peace Organization—takes up thematic topics identified in *Reloaded*. For instance, the *Reloaded* report raised concerns regarding the call to link the WPS agenda with the broader global security agenda to "counter terrorism" and "prevent violent extremism." Two years after the *Reloaded* report was published, Switzerland's fourth NAP 1325 identified PVE as a key priority of Switzerland's WPS agenda. The naming of PVE as a priority in the fourth NAP 1325 was, in part, a response to recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in their observations of Switzerland's third NAP 1325 (2013-2016). The Committee expressed concern that there were "insufficient efforts to include a gender perspective in strategies to prevent violent extremism and counter terrorism" and recommended Switzerland "strengthen its efforts to include a gender perspective in strategies to prevent violent extremism and build the capacity of women and girls, including women civil society groups, to engage in efforts to counter terrorism."⁸ Given the move to integrate the WPS and P/CVE agendas, as well as the increasing prioritization of PVE in Swiss foreign and domestic policy, Swiss civil society is particularly invested in better understanding the relationship of the P/CVE and the WPS agendas in both policy and practice.

⁶In addition to UNSCR 1325 (2000), there are eight other resolutions which make up the WPS agenda: 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015), and 2467 (2019). The adoption of the most recent resolution, UNSCR 2467, which calls for a survivor-centered approach to conflict-related sexual violence, was marked by debate over the inclusion of language regarding the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of survivors of sexual violence, echoing the larger context of pushback on SRHR around the world (see Hamid and Werner 2019).

⁷IDAG 2015; IDAG 2017.

⁸CEDAW 2016, 5.

Integrating the WPS and P/CVE Agendas: An Overview

As the “global war on terror” nears the end of its second decade, the “hard” strategies of CT, such as military interventions and law enforcement, have been increasingly supplemented with the supposedly “soft” strategies of P/CVE. Broadly defined, P/CVE includes “policy, programs, and interventions designed to prevent individuals from engaging in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups.”⁹ In many regards, P/CVE is considered a new security paradigm comprised of old approaches borrowed from the fields of governance, development, and peacebuilding. These soft approaches seek to identify and address the drivers or root causes of “terrorism” and “violent extremism” such as social, political, and economic marginalization, weak state-society relations, lack of rule of law, and human rights violations.¹⁰

Initially, the P/CVE agenda, like the CT agenda, was absent any mention of the WPS agenda.¹¹ However, as the P/CVE agenda has grown and evolved over the last decade, there has been an increasing focus on the role of women’s empowerment and gender equality within P/CVE policy and practice. Since the adoption of UNSCR 2242 in 2015, there has been a surge in P/CVE policy and programming with a “gender perspective” and an increase in calls to link the WPS and P/CVE agendas.¹² Supported by Switzerland, UNSCR 2242 is the eighth resolution within the WPS framework and calls for Member States and the UN to integrate their agendas on WPS, CT and countering violent extremism which can be conducive to terrorism.”¹³ Switzerland has responded to this call and is considering how best to integrate a gender perspective in its PVE agenda. For instance, Switzerland’s *Foreign Policy Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism* (2016) specifically encourages gender mainstreaming in PVE policy and practice, including a gender analysis of the causes of “violent extremism.”¹⁴ This action plan also makes explicit reference to UNSCR 1325 and the Swiss NAP 1325, calling attention to the need to promote women’s participation in political and decision-making processes related to PVE. Domestically, Switzerland’s *National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism* (2017) also calls for the integration of a gender perspective in the implementation of PVE approaches.¹⁵

In addition, the fourth Swiss NAP 1325 moves to strengthen the integration of the WPS and the PVE agendas as it encourages the inclusion of women in prevention efforts, as well as the recognition that women can be both victims and agents of violence. Indeed, the Swiss NAP 1325 asks that the “rights, needs and different roles of women in efforts to prevent violent extremism and to address terrorism are taken into account, with linkage to local initiatives.”¹⁶ To achieve this requires integrating a gender analysis into prevention efforts, collecting and evaluating the wide range of women’s experiences in violence prevention, and drawing on the knowledge of women and women’s organizations. In this regard, the “prevention pillar” of the fourth Swiss NAP 1325 is informed by the P/CVE agenda.

Globally, calls to integrate the WPS and P/CVE agendas have been promoted as necessary to prevent the harms caused by CT and other “gender-blind security strategies,” which fail to take gender, women, and women’s rights into account. Indeed, since the beginning of the “global war on terror,” there has been a great deal of attention on and concern for the negative impact of CT measures on civil society, women’s rights, and human rights. For instance in 2009, the adverse impacts of CT on women and human rights were comprehensively documented and presented to the UN General Assembly.¹⁷ A few years later, a ground-breaking report revealed the gendered impacts of the United States’ CT policies in the decade since the September 11th attacks.¹⁸ Other studies have demonstrated how CT measures, including financial regulations, shrink the space for women’s civil society activism.¹⁹ These studies call for the integration of gender analysis and the promotion of women’s rights and gender equality within CT policy and practice in order to mitigate potential harm.

⁹ Holmer 2018.

¹⁰ GCERF 2017.

¹¹ See Center for Human Rights and Global Justice 2011; Gender Action for Peace and Security 2018.

¹² Fink, Barakat and Shetret 2013; Bhulai, Peters and Nemr 2016; Fink, Zeiger and Bhulai 2016; Peters 2015; United States Institute of Peace 2015.

¹³ Other UNSCRs calling for the integration of the WPS and the P/CVE agenda include UNSCR 2122 (2013) and UNSCR 2195 (2014). In addition, calls for the increased participation of women in P/CVE can be found in UNSCR 2178 (2014); UNSCR 2242 (2015); UNSCR 2250 (2015); United Nations General Assembly 2015. Lastly, calls for greater recognition of the relationship between gender inequality, terrorism, and violent extremism can be found in United Nations Security Council 2014; United Nations General Assembly 2015.

¹⁴ Switzerland 2016.

¹⁵ Switzerland 2017.

¹⁶ Switzerland 2018, 13.

¹⁷ United Nations General Assembly 2009.

¹⁸ Center for Human Rights and Global Justice 2011.

¹⁹ Geuskens et al. 2015; Wassholm 2018.

However, there remains a great deal of concern regarding the potential impact of integrating the WPS and P/CVE agendas. These concerns, which will be explored throughout the report, include:

- The negative impact of the CT and P/CVE agendas on human rights
- The negative impact of CT and P/CVE policy and practice on CSOs, and on women-led and women's rights organizations in particular
- The superficial promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality as tools for state security rather than ends in themselves
- The reductive treatment of gender as synonymous with women and the promotion of gendered stereotypes which constrain rather than broaden women's political agency
- The militarization of the WPS agenda and the endorsement of security agendas designed to perpetrate rather than prevent violence

The "prevention pillar" of the WPS agenda, which has historically focused on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, must integrate the needs and concerns of women, women-led and women's rights organizations invested in violence prevention.²⁰ In this regard, it makes sense to have any security agenda related to the prevention of violence integrated with the WPS agenda. However, questions remain: Does the violence prevention promoted by the P/CVE agenda contribute to or impede WPS objectives of women's empowerment and gender equality? Does the promotion of the P/CVE agenda tacitly endorse a global security architecture with devastating impacts on women, women's rights, human rights, and civil society more broadly? How can the goals and objectives of WPS challenge and inform the P/CVE security agenda? Grounded in the discussions with civil society organizations in Kenya and reflected in discussions with CSOs across the world, these questions will be taken up throughout this report before making recommendations to Switzerland on how best to support violence prevention within the framework of the Swiss NAP 1325. Ultimately, this study contributes to furthering the conversation about the role of the WPS agenda in interrupting cycles of violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.



²⁰ Shepherd and Ceccon, n.d., 3.

Objectives, Context, and Methodology

Broadly speaking, this project seeks to increase awareness of the Swiss NAP 1325 as an important policy instrument that can have tangible, concrete effects in the realm of gender, peace, and security. The Swiss NAP 1325 and WPS agenda are important platforms for critical evaluation of whether national and global security agendas compromise or promote women's rights and gender equality. Further, as the transnational feminist advocacy which culminated in the adoption of UNSCR 1325 made clear, the WPS agenda "should not legitimise or normalise war, but rather the agenda should support the demilitarisation of society and facilitate the development of anti-militarist politics of peace."²¹ As such, Swiss civil society recognizes the need to critically investigate the P/CVE agenda and its compatibility with the goals and objectives of the WPS agenda.

To this end, this project was designed to capitalize on the already existing knowledge and expertise within civil society regarding women, gender, violence prevention, and the P/CVE agenda. Importantly, we recognize that as WPS actors writing from Switzerland about linking WPS and the P/CVE agendas, we are removed from the daily violence experienced in other parts of the world. The critiques regarding the integration of WPS and P/CVE are important, but any reflection on the integration of these agendas must be informed by women who are experiencing violence and working in violence prevention, taking into account what they actually want and need, and asking how they define peace and security. By grounding the Swiss NAP 1325 in experiences of individuals living in areas affected by extreme violence, we hope to increase the relevance and shape the implementation of the Swiss NAP 1325 in a way that is more aware of, and responsive to, realities on the ground.

To do this, we conducted a one-month research study in Kenya, designed in close consultation with an advisory group comprised of Swiss CSOs.²² In Kenya, CSOs—and CBOs in particular—face significant challenges due to violence perpetrated by both state and non-state armed actors.²³ In addition, CSOs face pressures from the P/CVE agenda, which has increasingly shaped the landscape of peacebuilding and human rights work. Through consultation with Kenyan CSOs, three regions were identified for the field research: the coastal regions of Kwale, Likoni, and Mombasa counties; the Eastern region of Isiolo; and the Nairobi region including the informal settlements of Eastleigh, Majengo, and Mathare. These regions were chosen due to the high number of organizations working to implement P/CVE activities, as well as the presence of organizations working to integrate a gender perspective into P/CVE. In these three areas, personal interviews and focus group discussions were held with a wide range of CSOs and actors including: CBOs; social justice and human rights organizations; peacebuilding organizations; youth organizations; religious organizations and religious leaders; women's organizations and networks; independent consultants working on women, gender, and P/CVE; and international organizations and think tanks. In total, 82 individuals were interviewed, with 43 percent being women.²⁴

Along with the field research in Kenya, extensive desk-based research was conducted on the intersection of WPS and P/CVE, both in Switzerland and globally. The findings of the Kenya study were then analyzed in relationship to the primary and secondary literature on WPS and P/CVE, and then further refined in cooperation with the project steering committee and advisory group. In addition, the findings from Kenya were reflected in other contexts—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, India, Philippines, Palestine, and the United Kingdom—where members of the advisory group and the steering committee have partners. These "global reflections" contributed to fostering greater dialogue with our partners on this topic as well as provided additional insights into the ways that CSOs and women's rights advocates deal with the P/CVE agenda, as well as violence perpetrated by non-state armed actors and state security forces. These reflections are communicated throughout this report in inset boxes. Taken together, these findings—including the desk-based research, the in-depth field research in Kenya, and the global reflections—informed the policy recommendations listed at the end of the report, which were collaboratively developed by the project's advisory group and steering committee.

²¹ Shepherd 2016, 332.

²² The members of the advisory group are listed on page two of this report.

²³ Whereas civil society broadly includes the "aggregate of individuals, non-government organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens," community-based organizations refer to organizations which represent the specific needs of a community or a particular population within a community, including indigenous peoples, minorities, or marginalized populations (Arutyunova and Clark 2013, 138).

²⁴ These individuals and organizations were identified through a method known as "snowball sampling," whereby interviewees were asked to recommend other interviewees. The intention was to speak to as many actors working in the field of P/CVE and particularly those working at the intersection of P/CVE and WPS. The fact that less than half of interviewees were women suggests that women are underrepresented in positions of leadership within community-based and civil society organizations.

Part I: Critical Reflections on the P/CVE Agenda

On January 15, 2019, just two days prior to the commencement of the field research in Kenya, al-Shabaab—the non-state armed group based in East Africa—attacked a hotel and office complex called the DusitD2 in the Westlands area of Nairobi, Kenya, killing 21 civilians. Eight of the nine suspected combatants, including the alleged “mastermind” of the attack, originated from Isiolo County. During the month-long research phase, nearly every interviewee reflected on this most recent attack and expressed frustration and concern over the continuation of violence despite the immense resources being poured into the P/CVE agenda. As is the case in many other global contexts, even as the P/CVE and CT security architecture continues to grow, so does the violence it seeks to address.

Part I of this report addresses a wide range of issues raised by CSOs regarding the P/CVE agenda including the tensions and issues with P/CVE language and discourse; the disconnect between P/CVE in policy and practice and the ways in which this impedes the work of violence prevention and conflict transformation; the issues that CSOs face when P/CVE programming is driven by donor interests; the role that the P/CVE and the CT agendas play in the shrinking of civil society and the particular impact this has on women’s rights and women-led organizations; the continuation of hard security approaches and the devastating impact such approaches have on women and human rights, and the P/CVE agenda’s disproportionate targeting of Muslim communities and the related rise of Islamophobia.

Box 1: Global Reflection | Philippines

Philippines has experienced protracted armed conflict with ideology-based insurgencies waged both by Communist rebels and Islamic separatist fronts. The main Bangsamoro struggle for self-determination has gained substantial success with a Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2014 and the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was recently established. However, there are still a few small groups claiming Islamic belief that continue violent operations in parts of Mindanao. On the other hand, fighting between the Communist forces and state security forces continues to erupt in various parts of the country.

The peacebuilding organization, Gaston Z. Ortega Peace Institute (GZOPI), based in Manila, facilitates networking and learning exchange among peacebuilding organizations, working closely with women and youth peacebuilders. The Executive Director of GZOPI, Karen Tañada, explains that it is only recently that the language of “PVE” has emerged in Philippines, likely owing to the increase of donor funding in this area. People are uncomfortable with the term “violent extremism,” Tañada explains, because the term seems to be identified with Islam. “The main public and the government tend to associate it with religion,” she explained. “But the government also accuses the communists of terrorism, but somehow they don’t call it VE [violent extremism].”

In addition, CSOs in Philippines question how the framing of P/CVE ignores violence perpetrated by the government. As Tañada explains, “Sometimes [the government’s] actions could also be a form of extremism. That’s why the definition is quite difficult. I wouldn’t define state violence as terrorism, but in many cases real human rights violations are done by the government, nationally and in the Mindanao context.” Tañada explains that CSOs and human rights organizations are fearful that more laws on security and terrorism will expand the powers of the state and allow security forces to act with impunity.

GZOPI does not call their work “PVE,” preferring to use the framework of peacebuilding and conflict transformation due to the discomfort with the term “PVE” and the way the framework of PVE obscures the broader context of violent conflict. “When the government uses the term, they are not referring to the whole conflict,” Tañada explains. “They are referring to a particular group involved in concrete incidents like kidnappings and bombings. Which are not the issues the Bangsamoro conflict or the Communist struggle is about. Our work is with people affected by conflict not so much by VE.”

Based on phone interview with Karen Tañada (GZOPI) by Mithra Akhbari June 2019

1. The Issue of Language

Key Messages

- The lack of definitional clarity on what constitutes “violent extremism” and “terrorism” results in expanded state military and legal power which can have negative impacts on human rights and civil society.
- Exclusionary language can negatively impact violence prevention and conflict transformation.

Language is of central importance to both the perpetration and the prevention of violence. The lack of definitional clarity in CT and P/CVE legislation has led to expansive security measures which pose risks to human rights and contribute to the narrowing of civil society space.²⁵ The UN's *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* recognizes that “violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition” and that it encompasses a “wider category of manifestations” than the term “terrorism.”²⁶ There is concern that the broadening of security architecture to address “violent extremism” in addition to “terrorism” might result in a “conflation of the two terms” and “may lead to the justification of an overly broad application of counter-terrorism measures, including against forms of conduct that should not qualify as terrorist acts.”²⁷ As such, the P/CVE agenda arguably contributes to enlarging the scope of CT measures. While both “terrorism” and “violent extremism” are undefined and contested concepts, “violent extremism” is generally conceived of as broader than “terrorism” to include speech, ideas, and beliefs.²⁸ In this way, the adoption of the P/CVE agenda expands the potential for CT measures to be used against a wider spectrum of action and belief, posing risks to human rights including freedom of expression.²⁹

In practice, P/CVE language and discourse, including “counter-messaging” campaigns, risk stigmatizing and marginalizing individuals and entire communities, fueling discontent. Recent research suggests that “counter-messaging”—which attempts to discredit the narratives used by non-state armed groups or violent organizations, or warn about the dangers and consequences of joining such organizations—is generally ineffective and can be counterproductive.³⁰ As Kloé Tricot O'Farrell, a Regional Conflict and Security Adviser at Saferworld writes, “By focusing on telling people what they should or shouldn't do, or what they should or shouldn't believe in, counter-messaging campaigns may actually lead people to dig their heels in and defend their positions. Similarly, banning content and limiting freedom of expression can create anger among those who feel they are being unjustly targeted.”³¹ For instance, individuals might be afraid to speak about their grievances, such as marginalization, historical injustices, unemployment, and poverty for fear of being labeled a “radical.” The failure of the state to create space for, acknowledge, and address these grievances is precisely what non-state armed groups such as al-Shabaab capitalize on.

The silencing of dissent out of fear of being labelled as “radical” or an “extremist” results in a repressive culture where conflict transformation is thwarted and where the relationships between the state and civil society remain strained. Indeed, Babu Ayindo, a peacebuilder in Kenya, points to how the term “radical” used to be positive: “It meant someone going to the root causes and interrogating systems and seeking transformation. But if someone right now calls you a ‘young radical’? Then you are a candidate for elimination.” For Ayindo, this stigma means that peacebuilders must be more creative when designing programming that reaches communities, and avoid “using phrases such as ‘violent extremism’ and ‘radicalization’ in the way that governments use them.” Above all else, the language must be inclusive, Ayindo explained: “When we're taking about transformation, don't use language that excludes people and marks them for elimination.”

²⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council 2019: 6, 11.

²⁶ United Nations General Assembly 2015, 2.

²⁷ United Nations General Assembly 2015, 2.

²⁸ For instance, Switzerland defines “violent extremist activities” as “efforts by organisations that reject the principles of democracy and the rule of law and which commit, encourage or endorse acts of violence in order to achieve their goals” (as quoted in Switzerland 2017, 11).

²⁹ The P/CVE agenda expands the scope of manifestations that can come under state surveillance and criminalization, posing risks to human rights such as freedom of expression (e.g. see Callamard 2015).

³⁰ Reed, Ingram and Whittaker 2017.

³¹ Tricot O'Farrell 2019.

In addition to the potential for stigmatization and marginalization, the language of “violent extremism” does not necessarily resonate with communities, as is the case in the coastal region of Kenya. In programming material used by the peacebuilding organization Green String Network (GSN) for instance, Ayindo explains that “you won’t find CVE language. You will find another expression that will invite people to the conversation.” Further, using the language of “violent extremism” in programming might have the unintended consequence of introducing the concept in communities where it did not previously exist. For instance, Sami Gathii, executive director of the Youth, Arts, Development and Entrepreneurship Network (YADEN) is cautious to avoid introducing the language of “violent extremism” into communities. “I always joke and say there is so much saturation of CVE work that most of us are the ones introducing violent extremism to very young people,” Gathii explained. “In a small village you call young people together and say, ‘You are vulnerable, you are going to be recruited, and you are going to get 10,000 dollars.’ And that young person is like, ‘wait a minute. What did he just say? 10,000 dollars!’ That sounds not so bad to them and then in the evening they are on the internet, searching.”

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When we’re taking about transformation, don’t use language
that excludes people and marks them for elimination. //

Babu Ayindo, peacebuilder in Kenya

Further, the lack of definitional clarity has important ramifications for CSOs engaged in violence prevention work. For instance, the expansive category of “violent extremism” makes it difficult for peacebuilders and CBOs to actually address the violence. As a consultant on gender and P/CVE working in the coastal region recalls, “Violent extremism was branded so giant that when it came to us, we feared tackling it. When it came, everything became associated with it. And that fear created a culture of silence.” Indeed, in the coastal region there is a slippage between “violent extremism” and the “extreme violence” of gangs, which are often referred to as “terror groups.” While “gang violence” and “violent extremism” are not wholly separate issues, conflating the two makes it difficult for organizations to design programming which addresses the specificity of violence. As the consultant explained, “We have generalized all the crimes into violent extremism. And it is extreme violence. But it’s very difficult to differentiate.”



The definitional challenges of the P/CVE agenda suggest a need for a rebranding, or perhaps a reclaiming, of the agenda. As Fauziya Abdi, President of Women in International Security (WIIS) Horn of Africa, stated, “One joke I say is just to move the Ps and the Vs and have ‘PEV’ and then focus on extreme violence. Because there’s no escaping it, extreme violence is happening.” Angi Yoder-Mania, the founder of the peacebuilding organization Green String Network (GSN) agrees that, whatever it’s called, programs around violence prevention are absolutely necessary in Kenya. “In places like Majengo,” she explains, “they desperately need it, they need awareness... it’s not just the police, it’s also our own communities that are harming us.” At the end of the day, she states, “I don’t care what it’s called. The work is the same.”

Box 2: Global Reflection | Switzerland

As part of its counterterrorism strategy,ⁱ Switzerland adopted the National Action Plan (NAP) to “Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism” at the domestic level in 2017.ⁱⁱ It contains a set of measures, ranging from increasing knowledge and expertise, enhancing coordination and cooperation, to disengagement and reintegration.

Discussions among Swiss civil society actors have raised particular concern about measures which address “violent extremism” at Swiss schools. In 2016, the UNESCO published the brochure “A Teachers Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism,”ⁱⁱⁱ which aims at building and reinforcing national capacities to address violent extremism through the education sector. This brochure was broadly distributed among teachers and social workers in Switzerland.

However, two interviewees from the education sector in Bern agree that “violent extremism” is not an issue that deserves any kind of special attention at schools in Bern. According to one of the interviewees, in the Canton of Bern, there has been only one incident of “violent extremism” related to a Neo-Nazi group in the past few years. Both interviewees mention that teachers and students face issues related to a much broader spectrum of conflicts and violence, including fights among students, sexual and gender-based violence, (cyber-) mobbing, eating disorders, and self-harm. They emphasize that there are many concepts and capacities in place to prevent and deal with these issues and that there is no need for a special policy on PVE. As one of them puts it: “I prefer to work with and relate to the students, instead of trying to spot and report suspicious behavior.” As recent publications show, the identification and reporting of potentially radicalized students is also problematic from a legal perspective, since it entails judicial action against individuals who have not committed any crime under Swiss criminal law, and thus violates basic civil and political rights.^{iv}

Thus, there is a clear need to critically and carefully assess the relevance of PVE measures in Switzerland, and in the context of Swiss schools in particular, in order to avoid contributing to a climate of suspicion and legal insecurity and potentially creating a problem that did not exist.

Based on interviews with two professionals from the education sector by Sibylle Ganz-Koechlin, June 2019

ⁱ Switzerland 2015.

ⁱⁱ Switzerland 2017.

ⁱⁱⁱ UNESCO 2016.

^{iv} Conte 2018; Todeschini 2019.

2. P/CVE as a Donor Driven Agenda

Key Messages

- P/CVE is perceived by CBOs as an industry which prioritizes the needs of donors, the international community, and the state over communities.
- P/CVE at the ground level is considered to be the “real,” day-to-day work of violence prevention, which takes place in small social interactions and relationships.
- Donors should not fund P/CVE programming that contributes to violence or increases the insecurity of communities.

The lack of definitional clarity around “violent extremism” and what is needed for its prevention results in significant discrepancies in the understanding and enactment of P/CVE between policymakers, donors, and grassroots actors. In Kenya, community-based actors understand P/CVE as consisting of the day-to-day work of violence prevention which takes place in small social interactions and relationships. These community-based actors refer to the P/CVE agenda as enacted by the state or international organizations as being out of touch with the needs of communities, as imposing “top-down” approaches rather than organic solutions generated from the communities themselves. During our field research in Kenya, the P/CVE agenda was overwhelmingly criticized as “a business,” “an industry,” a “brand,” and a “commercialized agenda” run by “briefcase NGOs” which prioritized the needs of the donors, the international community, and the state.

The emergence of the P/CVE agenda in Kenya has had serious implications for peacebuilding and human rights organizations who have long been involved in the work of violence prevention and conflict transformation. For instance, Ayindo has been working in the field of peacebuilding in Kenya for over thirty years and has witnessed the shift that has accompanied the emergence of the P/CVE agenda. “You cannot even be considered to be doing peacebuilding anymore if you aren’t doing CVE,” Ayindo explained.³² While this study was not able to assess the full impact of the P/CVE agenda on peacebuilding organizations, it is clear that in Kenya, the donor-driven P/CVE agenda is shaping the work of peacebuilding organizations and the work of violence prevention.

For instance, many community-based actors argued that international organizations “parachute in” and run P/CVE programming without the proper expertise and without attending to the specificity of the context. As a consultant on gender and P/CVE in Kenya states, “You can’t import [a program]. Situations are very organic and you have to have the patience to know your context—that’s what most development organizations don’t have.” A peacebuilder who works on gender and violence prevention in Mombasa, cautions against imposing agendas on local communities without understanding the context and without listening to people. “Don’t go there with projects and just assume that you’re helping them. You’re not!” she insisted.

The vast amount of financial resources now available within the P/CVE framework has led to organizations with no qualifications implementing P/CVE programming. As Gathii insists, this kind of violence prevention work is “a life and death issue. Before you do it, you try to make sure you can get it right otherwise you create a bigger problem than you had. And development agencies don’t understand that. A lot of people just wake up and mainstream CVE and it goes very bad.” Furthermore, Al-Hajj Hassan Ole Naado, the Deputy Chairman and Head of Strategy and Partnerships at the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), expressed concern that true violence prevention and conflict transformation will not be achieved as long as the needs of communities remain secondary to a donor-driven agenda. “To me it’s more of a window dressing than addressing real, real issues,” he explained. “An impact can only be achieved in this field by having the community at the center of the implementation of the activities. And without that, honestly, it’s public relations.” Michael Opondo, a peacebuilder and expert on violent extremism in Kenya, argues that communities

³² All quotes attributed to civil society actors in Kenya are the result of interviews conducted between 17 January and 14 February 2019. The names of individuals and organizations are only used if permission was explicitly granted. Otherwise, the interview has been anonymized.

have developed a “transactional relationship” with P/CVE. If an international organization comes into a community with a large amount of funds to run a P/CVE program, the community will participate because they need the resources, but not necessarily because they believe in the work. Opondo explains that this leads to international organizations co-opting local energy and passion for peacebuilding, and then leaving without a proper exit strategy or plan to ensure sustainability. This dynamic ultimately discredits the work of P/CVE and damages the reputation of the local organizations partnered with the larger international organizations.

The donor-driven P/CVE industry has particular impact on women-led and women’s rights organizations. The majority of women’s organizations around the world remain quite small due to challenges in securing necessary funding. The already difficult funding climate is exacerbated by “donor funding policies that have created an overall preference for giving grants to large projects or NGOs, including international NGOs in donor countries, in ways that subsequently cut off funding to smaller and grassroots women’s rights organizing and organizations.”³³ Women leaders in Isiolo reported that their ability to implement sustainable programming for women’s rights, gender equality, and violence prevention is hampered by their reliance on the donor industry and their short-term funding cycles. As one woman said, “If we had choice, we would have rejected the small tokens and short-term interventions, because it leaves us with a lot of burden on how we can really continue without the support.” Yet, as a small organization they are not in a position to turn down any funding because, as she explained, “a weak person has no choice.” As women leaders in Isiolo explained, “women-led organizations are getting stuck. A program goes on for a few months and then all of the sudden discontinues and this brings a lot of distrust.”

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An impact can only be achieved in this field
by having the community at the center of the
implementation of the activities.

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Ole Naado, SUPKEM

Ultimately, truly eradicating cycles of violence requires daily work by people committed to the communities in which they act. Given the emergence of the P/CVE agenda within the peacebuilding space, organizations are forced to negotiate with the P/CVE agenda in order to secure necessary funding. Many recognize the P/CVE agenda as another trend in donor funding that may, or may not last; their work will continue regardless. As Ayindo passionately states: “I will be here. And we have to make sure we break the cycle of violence. And if that means subverting the donor agenda here or there than we will do that. And you can quote me on that. Because at the end of the day, it’s about breaking cycles of violence... What we are aiming at is that these cycles of violence stop. This is not the world you want to pass onto the next generation.”



³³ Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program 2017, 15. Also see Arutyunova and Clark 2013.

Box 3: Global Reflection | Afghanistan

Since the United States' invasion in 2001, Afghanistan has experienced protracted conflict. Military occupation and the presence of foreign powers with competing interests leave the country in a precarious position, caught between the interests of international donors, the Taliban and the Afghan government. Nearly 18 years later, peace remains elusive for Afghans.

Violent conflict between U.S.-led military operations, insurgent groups, criminal organizations, and systemic police and political violence has taken a devastating toll on Afghanistan's civilian population.ⁱ Dr. Sima Samar, head of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), finds that the rush of donor funding into the P/CVE agenda in the midst of a precarious security situation has resulted in poorly planned programs absent a clear strategy for prevention. For instance, some P/CVE donor funding unwittingly financed madrassas which were then used by the Taliban and other organizations to radicalize and recruit youth.

In a context where foreign influence is resented and identified as the source of conflict, organic and context-based violence prevention programming is essential.ⁱⁱ Dr. Samar believes that such programming must be grounded in the principles of human rights, emphasizing the right to food, clear water, health care, and education. Otherwise, Dr. Samar explained, such programming will be seen as part of a "Western agenda" with no bearing for the context.

For Dr. Samar, peace begins at home, in changing social relationships and disrupting gendered divisions of labor. Young boys must be taught to question why their sisters and mothers do all of the domestic work and to challenge their fathers' aggression. Increasing the quality of education for boys and girls and teaching them about gender equality will have a great impact in the next generations' progress toward peace. Empowering women will greatly impact social norms and lead to sustainable peace, in Afghanistan and in all countries. And yet, Dr. Samar laments, this is exactly the kind of programming that donors will not fund.

Based on phone interview with Dr. Sima Samar conducted by Elizabeth Mesok, May 2019

ⁱ Harvard Humanitarian Initiative 2018.

ⁱⁱ Fazli, Johnson and Cooke 2015.

3. The Shrinking of Civil Society Space

Key Messages

- The expansion of CT and P/CVE security measures has contributed to the narrowing of civil society space.
- The shrinking of civil society space has particularly negative impacts for women-led and women's rights organizations and on women human rights defenders (WHRDs).

Since the beginning of the “global war on terror,” civil society space has been shrinking across the world.³⁴ Between 2001 and 2018, CT legislation has been adopted by at least 140 states,³⁵ with a significant rise of legislation between 2013 and 2017 regarding “foreign fighters” or returnees.³⁶ As Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, writes: “It is no coincidence that the proliferation of security measures to counter terrorism and to prevent and counter violent extremism, on the one hand, and the adoption of measures that restrict civic space, on the other, are happening simultaneously. The ramping up of security space, leading to the narrowing of civic space, can be directly traced back to the international security-focused dynamic that emerged in 2001, and the embedding of international matrices in the global counter-terrorism architecture in order to authorize and sustain security measures.”³⁷ The concept of “shrinking civic space” refers to the increased criminalization and bureaucratization of the work of human rights defenders, activists, and organizations. Methods to restrict the actions of civil society include legislation regulating the activities of CSOs; policies which restrict the freedom of assembly, the freedom of association, and the freedom of expression; direct acts of intimidation and violence either by state or non-state actors; and laws which limit CSOs’ ability to receive international funding.³⁸

For instance, Kenyan CSOs have experienced the curtailing of their operations due to countering terrorism financing (CTF) laws, anti-money laundering laws, and anti-terror legislation which constrains their ability to independently design and implement violence prevention programming. In July 2019, the Kenya government signed into law an amendment to the Prevention of Terrorism Act which empowered the NCTC to “act as an approving and reporting institution for all civil society organizations and international non-governmental organizations in prevent and countering violence extremism and radicalisation.”³⁹ This amendment was critiqued by CSOs, particularly in the coastal region, as they feel that having their P/CVE work approved and supervised by the NCTC amounts to a securitization of their violence prevention and peacebuilding efforts.⁴⁰ As Ayindo explains, when CSOs are used as an extension of the state’s intelligence gathering and surveillance, they weaken peacebuilding and P/CVE efforts from the ground up.

In 2015, the Kenyan government attempted to deregister the human rights organizations Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) and HAKI Africa based on suspicion that they were sympathizers and supporters of al-Shabaab. With their funds frozen and their medical insurance suspended, the two organizations spent 18 months fighting the charges in court. It was only with their donors’ continued financial and legal support that they were able to successfully defend themselves and clear their name. Both MUHURI and HAKI Africa are critical of the government’s perpetration of human rights violations through their employment of hard security approaches in the name of CT and P/CVE. The legal action taken against these organizations can be seen as an example of how anti-terror legislation is used to suppress CSOs which governments perceive as a threat. As a consultant on gender and P/CVE explained, “the government actually started blocking accounts of many civil society groups and non-governmental organizations, to the extent that the space for operation for CSOs became so limited, and only those that were friendly to government bureaucrats were able to operate. Anybody working on human rights was suspect.”

³⁴ United Nations Human Rights Council 2019.

³⁵ Baydas and Green 2018.

³⁶ Tayler 2017.

³⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council 2019, 3.

³⁸ Wassholm 2018, 11.

³⁹ Capital News 2019b.

⁴⁰ Capital News 2019a.

CT measures, including CTF laws, have come under scrutiny worldwide for the ways in which they curtail the work of CSOs and contribute to the violation of human rights. CTF laws, which are designed to prevent funds from reaching non-state armed groups designated as “terrorist organisations,” have been shown to have disproportionate impact on the work of women’s organizations.⁴¹ For instance, a study by Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program found that 90 percent of women’s organizations surveyed across 61 countries reported CT measures as negatively impacting their ability to work for women’s rights and gender equality and 60 percent fear prosecution or harassment under counterterrorism financing measures.⁴² This study finds that the impact of CTF laws “has been to circumscribe how, where, and in some cases, even if, women’s rights organizations can undertake their core work on mobilizing human rights, gender equality, and advancing the women, peace and security agenda.”⁴³



Women-led CSOs are increasingly “squeezed” between the violence perpetrated by non-state armed actors, state security forces, and the restrictions of CT and P/CVE security measures.⁴⁴ There are growing reports of WHRDs targeted by repressive governments in the name of countering terrorism.⁴⁵ A 2017 study found WHRDs are affected differently than men by the narrowing of civil society space that is a result of both the “global war on terror” and increasingly repressive governments, with 85 percent of surveyed WHRDs reporting the curtailing of women’s engagement in political life and a decrease in funding options for women’s organizations.⁴⁶ As mentioned above, the expansive security architecture designed to combat “violent extremism” and “terrorism” poses serious threats to human rights and contributes to the narrowing of civic space where activists can operate freely and without government oversight.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Since September 11, 2001, CTF measures have been prioritized by the international community “through domestic criminalization, expanded legal powers to sanction proscribed individuals and entities, mandatory counter-terrorism clauses in donor funding and partnership agreements, and new reporting requirements for financial institutions that in turn led banks to develop their own increasingly risk-averse controls” (Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program 2017, 8).

⁴² Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program 2017.

⁴³ Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program 2017, 12.

⁴⁴ See Coomaraswamy 2015, 220-233; Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program 2017; Wassholm 2018.

⁴⁵ For example, counterterrorism efforts in Egypt have restricted the efforts of women activists promoting gender equality and women’s rights. See Saferworld 2017.

⁴⁶ Wassholm 2018, 6.

⁴⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council 2016; United Nations General Assembly 2018.

Box 4: Global Reflection | Kyrgyzstan

International attention has recently focused on P/CVE efforts in Kyrgyzstan, as the Central Asian country is perceived to be a potential “danger zone” for “violent extremism.” Although there are cases of individuals of Kyrgyzstani origin joining non-state armed groups abroad, recent research questions whether the emergence of the P/CVE agenda in Kyrgyzstan serves international donor interests and narrowly focuses on “violent extremism” at the expense of a broader range of peacebuilding, governance, and development priorities.ⁱ Nevertheless, there remains concern that lack of employment opportunities and public services, inequality, and poor levels of secular and religious education lead to increased vulnerability for radicalisation and recruitment to non-state armed groups.ⁱⁱ

Since 2013 nearly 600 Kyrgyzstani citizens, including women and children, joined the Islamic State (IS), with more than 70 percent originating from Osh Region in southwestern Kyrgyzstan. The youth organisation, Youth of Osh (YoO), started working on the topic of radicalisation after recognizing the need in their communities and that youth in particular were vulnerable, as they lack the critical skills necessary to question and challenge extremist narratives. YoO runs a range of programming devoted to developing young people’s capacity for civic activism, including increasing youth awareness about recruitment to violent organizations and addressing the communication gap between youths and adults.

YoO observes that while community organizations and education institutions are best positioned to address radicalization, “they lack knowledge and resources to implement PVE measures that foster inclusiveness and reflect the needs of marginalized members of their communities.” YoO believes that addressing local causes of radicalization requires adopting “demand-driven tailored preventative approaches,” a perspective echoed by the organization Public Foundation Progress Aravan, who also works on PVE in Osh Region. Public Foundation Progress finds that PVE programming generated by international organizations, who lack “knowledge of local triggers and problems,” do not fit into the local content and context.

Public Foundation Progress identifies a number of other challenges posed by the PVE agenda, including the risks that come with accepting PVE funding. Radical community members might label and target the project staff as the “enemy,” putting the lives of staff and their families at risk. In addition, if radical community members know that PVE donor funding is being accepted, they might reject the proposed projects as invalid. YoO experiences pressure from international donors to frame their activities and program through the language of PVE and believes it is better “not to position projects directly as PVE to the community.”

Both YoO and Public Foundation Progress find linking the WPS and P/CVE agendas important in Kyrgyzstan. YoO acknowledges the important role that women play in violence prevention, including violence arising from ethnic clashes. They also recognize that while the role of mothers is considered important in preventing their children from engaging in violence, YoO’s experience has demonstrated that young people who join IS are not informing their parents of their decision or are not respecting their parents’ advice regarding their decision. YoO also believes that linking the WPS and P/CVE agendas will increase women’s opportunities and decrease domestic violence against women, allowing women to participate more freely in public life. However, the risk of backlash by radical men in the community must also be considered.

Based on written interviews with YoO and Public Foundation Progress Aravan by Regula Gattiker June 2019

ⁱ Tricot O’Farrell and Street 2019.

ⁱⁱ Zenn and Kuehnast 2014.

4. CT, P/CVE, and Human Rights Violations

Key Messages

- Security measures employed in the “global war on terror” have violated human rights and contributed to the greater perpetration of violence.
- P/CVE has not replaced CT and arguably adds greater legitimacy to CT security measures.
- Human rights violations impede the work of violence prevention and conflict transformation.

Security measures employed in the “global war on terror” threaten human rights and contribute to the rise of violence worldwide.⁴⁸ While the P/CVE agenda theoretically signals a shift away from the hard security tactics of CT, in practice such hard security tactics are not only not abating, they are increasing.⁴⁹ Furthermore, as Larry Attree, the Head of Global Policy and Advocacy at Saferworld writes, “CVE efforts can’t work if they merely go *alongside* problematic military and rule of law approaches. CVE will only work if it actually stands to *change* the tactics used by military and criminal justice actors... At present, CVE is doing little to transform the hard security approaches that drive many into the arms of violent groups.”⁵⁰ Indeed, states continue to employ coercive and violent security approaches, such as extra-judicial killings (EJKs) and enforced disappearances, which contribute to the shrinking of civil society space and the violation of human rights around the world.⁵¹

The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) has documented widespread and systematic human rights violations and unlawful activities perpetrated against members of the Muslim and ethnic Somali communities during CT operations, including “arbitrary arrests, extortion, theft and looting of businesses and homesteads, sexual harassments, arbitrary detention, illegal deportations, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment.”⁵² A more recent evaluation of Kenya’s National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE)⁵³ revealed that “policing, intelligence and military officials have been consistently accused of violating the rights of terrorist suspects, alleged terrorist sympathizers and entire communities they have profiled as sources of violent extremism.”⁵⁴

Human rights violations and abuses are perpetrated against ethnic Somali and Muslim populations throughout Kenya. In the coastal regions of Likoni, Kwale, and Mombasa counties, for example, young men are subjected to security measures such as curfews and routine ID checks, and also experience near-constant harassment and violence at the hands of military and police. Similarly, Isiolo has been labelled a “breeding ground for violent extremism” and experiences high rates of surveillance and police violence. CBOs in Isiolo report that this stigmatization of their community—and their youth in particular—deters business investment, increases economic depression, and contributes to a sense of hopelessness among youth. Such tactics interrupt grassroots efforts to prevent violence, as increased marginalization and stigmatization often lead youth to joining non-state armed groups. As one youth leader explained, “These ATPU [Anti-Terror Police Unit] harass our youth, saying ‘you are al-Shabaab.’ They set their mind so that our youth say ‘these police are calling us al-Shabaab. Let us just go and join al-Shabaab.’”

⁴⁸ See United Nations Human Rights Council 2019; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2008.

⁴⁹ Attree 2017. For instance, the US military’s use of drone strikes is increasing (Ackerman 2018). In addition, President Trump has also lowered the standards of who can be targeted for a drone strike (Donnenfeld 2019). Further, Trump recently revoked a policy that would require US intelligence official to publish the number of civilians killed by drone strikes in regions outside of war zones (Savage 2019; see also Amnesty International 2019).

⁵⁰ Attree 2017.

⁵¹ The US’s practice of secret detention, for instance, has unlawfully apprehended and detained individuals suspected of terrorism in “black sites” (Human Rights Watch 2007). Enforced disappearances under expanded CT laws are also occurring in Pakistan (Shafiq 2013; Hussain 2019a) and Egypt (Saferworld 2017).

⁵² Kenya National Commission on Human Rights 2015. See also Amnesty International 2017; Privacy International 2017; Gitau 2017; Mutahi 2017.

⁵³ Kenya’s National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) launched the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) in September 2016. The NSCVE outlines nine key pillars through which the “soft” approaches to minimizing violent extremism can be actualized—including psychosocial; educational; political; security; faith based and ideological; training and capacity building; arts and culture legal and political, and media and online. Importantly, while the first draft of the NSCVE contained a “women and gender pillar,” this pillar was deleted in the final version.

⁵⁴ Ogada 2017, 3. For more on the violation of human rights by state implementation of P/CVE, see Nyagah, Mwangi and Attree 2017; Kenya National Commission on Human Rights 2015.

Indeed, unlawful detention, racial and religious profiling, and stigmatizing entire communities makes the work of violence prevention and conflict transformation extremely difficult. Salma Hemed, the Deputy Executive Director of HAKI Africa in Mombasa explained the profoundly negative impact the police can have on the work of human rights and peacebuilding organizations. Young people are less inclined to seek peaceful solutions to resolve conflict when they constantly feel under threat, leading them to form gangs or join other non-state armed groups. “They say ‘there is no need to reform when we are being killed,’” Hemed explains. “We are being killed—let us kill.” A youth leader in Isiolo offered an example of the unlawful and violent detainment of a Somali Muslim youth in Marsabit, a town in Northern Kenya. The outcome of this, he explained, is that “they arrest one, but they radicalize a thousand.” Hemed agrees with the negative impact that police violence has on the work of human rights and peacebuilding: “Every time a police officer goes and kills, it makes our process go back to square one.”

In addition to racial and religious profiling, surveillance and harassment, instances of enforced disappearances and EJKs are rampant across Kenya.⁵⁵ Enforced disappearances, which by definition are perpetrated by the state or agents acting on behalf of the state, and EJKs are perpetrated in Kenya by the ATPU, part of Kenya’s National Police Service established in 2003 with a mandate to enact CT security measures. The ATPU regularly perpetrates human rights abuses in its extra-legal approach to fighting terror, including “use of excessive force during house raids; torture and ill-treatment of detainees; arbitrary detentions, including disappearances; and rendering terrorist suspects to countries where they face a real risk of torture.”⁵⁶ The issues of EJKs and enforced disappearances were raised in all three regions of Kenya where interviews were conducted for this study—Nairobi, Isiolo, and the coastal regions.⁵⁷ For example, in Nairobi’s informal settlement of Majengo, which is considered an “epicenter of radicalization,” EJKs are estimated to happen at the rate of one a week. In Mathare, another informal settlement in Nairobi, police are estimated to have executed 800 young people between 2013 and 2016.⁵⁸ In April 2019, MUHURI reported that they have recorded 73 cases of enforced disappearances and EJKs in the Coast region since 2017.⁵⁹

“ At present, CVE is doing little to transform the hard security approaches that drive many into the arms of violent groups. ”

Larry Attree, Head of Global Policy and Advocacy at Saferworld

Enforced disappearances and EJKs are largely perpetrated under the guise of P/CVE. Hemed explains that law enforcement will either deny involvement in instances where a person has disappeared or will claim it was justified for national security if a body is found or an execution witnessed. In the case of disappearances, the police will merely tell the family that the individual crossed the border to Somalia to join al-Shabaab. However, as Hemed reasons, “The fact that you are not investigating means that you are part of it. If someone has disappeared and you are saying you are not behind it, then why don’t you investigate?” Naado from SUPKEM agrees that when an individual disappears the community believes that the state is responsible: “It’s the belief because there is no contrary opinion. In the absence of alternative information by the state, the criminal remains the state.”

⁵⁵ Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) 2015. For more information on enforced disappearances and EJKs, see International Commission of Jurists 2015.

⁵⁶ Horowitz 2013, 19. See also Human Rights Watch 2012.

⁵⁷ These human rights violations by security agencies against individuals suspected of terrorism are present in other regions as well, with the most affected counties being Nairobi, Wajir, Mandera, Garissa, Lamu, Tana River, Kwale, Kilifi, and Mombasa and targeting ethnic Somalis (Human Rights Watch 2016). The KNCHR has documented more than 150 cases of EJKs or enforced disappearances by security agencies (Omilo 2019).

⁵⁸ Nyabola 2018. These killings are documented by the Mathare Social Justice Centre, an initiative set up by youths to promote social justice and document human rights violations. In Mathare, EJKs are usually perpetrated against young men suspected of criminality. Stephen Mwangi, a human rights activist in Mathare, understands these executions as similar to those perpetrated against those suspected of “violent extremism”—they are both functions of the criminalization of poverty and the treatment of people as disposable.

⁵⁹ Omilo 2019.

5. P/CVE and Islamophobia

Key Messages

- P/CVE, like CT, is viewed by communities as unfairly targeting Muslim communities and fostering Islamophobia.
- Islamophobia manifests in gendered ways and has gendered impacts.

Islamophobia—a form of anti-Muslim racism—has been on the rise since the beginning of the “global war on terror.”⁶⁰ In Switzerland and elsewhere, domestic P/CVE agendas have come under scrutiny for the ways in which they conflate Islam with “violent extremism” and for their disproportionate focus on Muslim communities.⁶¹ Even as violence enacted by right wing nationalists and white supremacists is on the rise, the P/CVE agenda remains overwhelmingly focused on violence perpetrated by Islamic extremists.⁶² In Kenya and elsewhere, Muslims and ethnic minorities assumed to be Muslim face racial profiling and violence from security agents and civilians.

In addition, Muslim communities who face increased surveillance, profiling, and violence question the intentions of the P/CVE agenda given that it evolved directly out of the “war on terror,” a war which has had devastating impacts on Muslim populations. For instance, Patrick Ochieng, the founder of Ujamaa Center, a peacebuilding organization located in Mombasa, criticizes the P/CVE agenda as contributing to the proliferation of the “security industry” which promotes the narratives that “Islam has a certain potential for terror.” For Ochieng, the violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups in Kenya must be understood within the broader context of global CT, and in particular, Kenya’s alignment with the US in the “war on terror” beginning with Kenya’s military intervention in Somalia in 2011. The skepticism regarding the P/CVE agenda is directly related to fears that the “war on terror” is in essence a war on Islam. Indeed, women leaders in Isiolo expressed frustration that despite the daily efforts in violence prevention in their communities, Islamophobic narratives are continuously promoted by the media and politicians. As one woman stated, “We believe that the issue of radicalization is bigger than what we see. We believe it’s an issue of government and the United Nations—they want to demonize Islam.”

Grassroots women’s organizations are particularly wary at their inclusion in the P/CVE agenda given its association with national and international security agendas that are specifically targeting Muslim communities or which violate human rights.⁶³ In addition, Islamophobia has gendered impacts which negatively impact women and women’s rights. In Western nations, Muslim women are disproportionately victims of hate crimes and discrimination, owing in part to the fact that the hijab publicly identifies them as Muslim.⁶⁴ In addition, Islamophobic narratives promote the assumption that Muslim women who veil are inherently oppressed and in need of “saving.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ In this report, we define “Islamophobia” as “a form of racialization of Muslims where the Muslim identity is reduced to stereotypes of violence and oppression. It is a socio-psychological phenomenon that ranges from distrust to fear and hatred of the Muslim identity and Islam; the ‘phobia’ is far from an irrational fear, it is informed by a social and political context that rationalizes such fear and hatred of Muslims” (Saeed 2018). It is additionally important to recognize that the roots of 21st century Islamophobia can be traced back to Orientalism (see Beydoun 2018; Saeed 2007; Saeed 2016). For broad discussions of modern-day Islamophobia see Allen 2011; Kundnani 2014; Bayrakli and Enes 2016; Bayrakli and Enes 2018.

⁶¹ For discussion of Switzerland, see Orakzai 2016, 535-538. In the United States, for example, the domestic CVE agenda is critiqued for focusing almost exclusively on American Muslim communities (Patel and Koushik 2017) and fostering Islamophobia (Michel 2015; Aziz 2017). Further, the Trump administration’s announcement to rebrand CVE as “Countering Radical Islam” or “Countering Violent Jihad,” the ‘Muslim Bans,’ and the continual use racist rhetoric, has stoked the flames of Islamophobia worldwide (Kundnani and Hayes 2018; Beydoun 2017; Shane, Rosenberg and Lipton 2017). The UK’s Prevent program is also criticized for its targeting of Muslim population, increasing stigmatization and marginalization (see Abbas 2018; Alam and Husband 2013; Cohen and Tufail 2017; Sabir 2016; Carlile 2011; Lakhani 2011). For broad critiques of the relationship between counterterrorism, including the P/CVE agenda, and anti-Muslim sentiment see Bertran 2018; Kundnani and Hayes 2018.

⁶² Hussain 2019b; Chalfant 2019; Levin 2019.

⁶³ Ni Aoláin and Huckerby 2018b; Center for Human Rights and Global Justice 2011, 75.

⁶⁴ Allen, Isakjee and Ögtem Young 2013; Perry 2012

⁶⁵ Abu-Lughod 2002; Jilani 2016.

For Abdi, the ban on veiling is a “really practical example of why if you don’t have PVE discussions in WPS you will have more women’s rights taken away in the name of combatting violent extremism.” Abdi continued:

Think about it. The first thing that normally happens in any place where there’s war or conflict, the people who suffer first are the women. Someone takes away a right. Clothing. WPS is also there to protect women during these times. Whether there’s peace or whether there’s democracy they’re supposed to protect women, because women’s rights are human rights. But if you don’t engage on extreme violence discussions, you give room for those who are mostly predominantly men to come up with ridiculous laws like this one. If we don’t say anything, it will be worse. It will start off with the hijab, and before long it will be worse because of Islamophobia and the like... This how things are taken away, slowly with time in the name of protection.

The security architecture built up in the name of CT and P/CVE has undoubtedly had a negative impact on Muslim communities around the world. Violence cannot be successfully prevented if the approaches used are oppressive to women or to particular ethnic and religious groups. For Abdi, concerns about the gendered harms of P/CVE security policies and the encroachment on women’s rights are precisely the reasons why WPS actors must engage with P/CVE. “If we don’t engage, there will be more challenges,” she insists. “We have to engage.”

Box 5: Global Reflection | India

India experiences a range of violence classified as or associated with “terrorism” or “violent extremism,” including violent conflict in the India-administered Kashmir region; Hindu extremism; left-wing extremism; insurgency in the north-eastern states; and other “terror” attacks throughout the country.

Aditi,* an NGO leader in India working with youth across northern India, criticizes the discourse around PVE, which conflates “violent extremism” with “Islam.” This conflation contributes to anti-Muslim racism: “If a white boy gets into this, he is an aberration,” Aditi explained. “There is a very obvious distinction—it’s kind of racist.” The association of PVE with Islamic extremism also misrepresents the complexity of violence India faces. “Political radicalization towards the right is the real problem here,” she stated. “The biggest problem in India is not Islamic radicalization as much as it is Hindu radicalization.” And yet, funding to work on Hindu radicalization is nearly impossible to obtain in India because international donors fear retribution from the government, which is primarily Hindu.

Aditi has faced other difficulties with donor requirements, including unreasonable expectations and outcomes for PVE programming. “Funders ask us to do the impossible,” Aditi explained.

“Specifically when you are looking at violent extremism, which is really not straightforward. We need a large margin of error. Currently there is no space for experimentations.” Further, peacebuilding organizations need support for long-term interventions: “de-radicalization cannot be a one-off workshop. Which is what we end up doing.”

Because of the challenges with PVE funding, Aditi tries to not accept funds labeled “PVE” or, even worse, “CVE,” and to work with donors that understand the complexity of the problems. Ultimately, Aditi and her team find the PVE agenda problematic, because “it makes the people the problem, rather than making the system the problem.” The focus should be on the underlying structural issues which give rise to violence, rather than on individuals.

Based on phone interview with Aditi, June 2019

*Pseudonym

Part II: WPS and the Prevention of Violence

Following the endorsement of UNSCR 2242 in 2015, there has been increased attention on the gender dimensions of violence labelled “terrorism” and “violent extremism” and increased calls for women’s participation in the prevention of violent conflict and for a better understanding of the gender dynamics of such violence. CEDAW’s observations of Switzerland’s third NAP 1325 support the call for building the capacity of women, including women’s CSOs, in CT and for the inclusion of a gender perspective in P/CVE strategies.⁶⁶ The recently endorsed fourth Swiss NAP 1325 emphasizes the need to integrate the WPS and P/CVE agendas and to recognize the various roles women play in the context of violence labelled “violent extremism” and “terrorism,” including as agents of prevention, as victims, and as perpetrators. However, as detailed above, the P/CVE and CT agendas may have unintended negative consequences for the work of human rights and CSOs, and in particular for women-led and women’s rights organizations. While the negative impact of CT is well documented, there are no existing comprehensive studies which examine the impact of the P/CVE agenda on women, women-led and women’s rights organizations.⁶⁷

Drawing on existing feminist critiques of integrating the WPS and P/CVE agendas as well as the experiences and perspectives of women leaders and women’s rights activists in Kenya, this chapter explores how the WPS agenda can promote violence prevention which accounts for the gendered dynamics of both state and non-state violence perpetrated in the context of “violent extremism.” Importantly, our study in Kenya found that it is precisely because of the critiques of the P/CVE agenda that women-led CSOs in Kenya see the need for the WPS agenda to inform the P/CVE agenda. Women play diverse roles in relationship to the enactment and prevention of violence and yet gendered assumptions about women’s agency—such as the belief that women are inherently peaceful, apolitical, or vulnerable—often result in gender-blind approaches to understanding women’s roles in systems of militarism and organized violence. To counteract gender-blind security strategies, women-led CSOs and women community leaders in Kenya and elsewhere are advocating for the inclusion of women leaders and a gender perspective in the development of security policy and programming. Taking the perspectives from women-led and women’s rights organizations seriously, Part II will discuss some of the key issues occurring at the intersection of WPS and P/CVE including: 1) the importance of women’s leadership and participation in decision-making regarding security measures; 2) gendered assumptions regarding women’s role as security agents within their homes and communities; and 3) women’s agency and gendered harms in the context of the perpetration of “violent extremism.”

Box 6: Global Reflection | United Kingdom

The United Kingdom’s (UK’s) Prevent strategy, part of the country’s broader counterterrorism agenda, is regarded as the first practical example of P/CVE. Expanded after the 2005 London bombings, Prevent is designed to combat domestic “radicalization” and “violent extremism” through community education and intervention. The program has come under intense scrutiny by human rights advocates for discriminatory surveillance practices of Muslim communities which increases stigmatization and marginalization and are counter-productive to the aims of violence prevention.

Organizations working in the UK within the context of P/CVE and the Prevent strategy are challenged by the negative associations of P/CVE with Islamophobia. For instance, a practitioner who works on violence prevention training in classrooms, focusing on both right-wing extremism and Islamist extremism, experiences skepticism by students and teachers who fear the conflation of Islam with “terrorism.” These negative connotations make it difficult to engage in effective violence prevention under the umbrella term of P/CVE. There is also a perception that the UK government responds differently to far-right extremism than it does to Islamic extremism and that the media contributes to the conflation of “Islam” and “violent extremism.” This conflation will lead to increased isolation and marginalization of Muslim communities as well as potentially increased radicalization. Overall, the understanding and representation of the violent extremism is the key to violence prevention and the negative associations with the P/CVE agenda make this work difficult.

Based on phone interview conducted with a UK-based practitioner, May 2019

⁶⁶ CEDAW 2016, 5.

⁶⁷ Satterthwaite and Huckerby 2013; Ni Aoláin 2015; United Nations General Assembly 2009; Center for Human Rights and Global Justice 2011.

6. Women's Access to Decision-Making in Peace and Security

Key Messages

- Women's meaningful participation in all levels of decision-making related to peace and security policy and programming is essential for the prevention of violence.
- UNSCR 2242 provides women a policy instrument with which to argue for their inclusion in developing P/CVE policy and approaches that are in line with the objectives of WPS.
- Ensuring that women's participation is meaningful and contributes to women's empowerment and gender equality requires more than the rhetorical inclusion of women and gender in CT and P/CVE policy.

Women's participation in decision-making on issues related to peace and security is essential for challenging patriarchal and male-dominated structures. While there has been a great deal of emphasis on promoting women's participation in P/CVE and CT since the endorsement of UNSCR 2242, there remains a disconnect between such policy commitments and the actual practice of women's participation. Further, WPS actors and feminist scholars argue that the rhetorical promotion of women's inclusion in P/CVE largely happens without addressing structural gender inequality which constrains women's political participation in the first place.⁶⁸ UNSCR 2242, which calls for the increased participation and leadership of women and women's organizations in the development of CT and P/CVE strategies, gives women a tool with which to argue for their inclusion in decision-making processes for security policy and approaches. Given the critiques of the P/CVE agenda, women in Kenya insist on their inclusion in its evolution and implementation in order to ensure that security policies are reflective of the gendered realities on the ground and account for the specific gendered harms that women face.

In Kenya, women's rights activists and women-led organizations have been effective in peacebuilding long before the P/CVE agenda emerged.⁶⁹ In response to the violence perpetrated by both al-Shabaab and security forces, women-led CBOs and networks are increasingly engaged in a broad range of violence prevention and conflict transformation work, including promoting dialogue between police and civilians; providing psychosocial support for women who have lost a family member either to joining a non-state armed group or to enforced disappearance or EJK; creating space for women to meet and discuss their experiences; and raising women's awareness regarding early indicators of their children wanting to join or being recruited by a non-state armed group.

Despite the clear recognition that violence identified as "violent extremism" or "terrorism" has a direct impact on women and girls, in Kenya the WPS and the P/CVE agendas are not integrated at the national policy level. Kenya's NAP 1325 (2016-2018) only very briefly mentions the relationship of WPS to CT and P/CVE and the Kenya NSCVE does not mention women or gender at all.⁷⁰ However, peacebuilding organizations and women's rights activists in Kenya have been advocating for the integration of the WPS and P/CVE agendas, advocacy which has resulted in the majority of the County Action Plans on P/CVE containing explicit reference to the role of women and gender. At the national level, however, conversations have stalled regarding how to best integrate the WPS and P/CVE agendas. In late 2018, a two-day meeting with key stakeholders was held to discuss how the two policy instruments should inform each other. Abdi explained that despite two full days of meeting, no conclusion was reached: "As of now it's not happening," she explained. "The NAP 1325 does not inform CVE and the CVE strategy does not inform the NAP [1325]."

⁶⁸ Ní Aoláin and Huckerby 2018b.

⁶⁹ For example, Wajir Women for Peace, who operate in north-eastern Kenya, is one of the foremost peace initiatives in the country, run entirely by women and held up as a global model of the importance of women for peace. Given their proximity to the Kenya-Somalia border, this organization has long been working to address the violence and conflict produced by both non-state armed groups and state security forces in their region (Juma 2000; Abdi and Jenner 1996). Also see Kabongah 2011.

⁷⁰ Kenya 2016. The Kenya NSCVE is not available online; see Ogada 2017 for analysis.

The lack of a coherent strategy to address the gendered dimensions of violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors in the context of “violent extremism” is frustrating to WPS actors in Kenya. In Isiolo, women leaders pointed out that if it weren’t for women, there would be no progress on preventing their children from joining al-Shabaab, or addressing the violence perpetrated by security forces. Yet despite their daily violence prevention work, they are largely excluded from decision-making both within their own communities and at the national level. “We need women to be part of this discussion,” a woman leader said. “Because when discussion is being done, when men are coming with the resolutions, women are not aware of what they have discussed. We need to ask women so that they can come with what they have learned.” UNSCR 2242 provides a tool with which women can advocate for their participation in the design and implementation of security measures. As a woman leader in Isiolo stated in reference to UNSCR 2242, “Anything that talks on behalf of women, we need to uphold it, and fight for it. Because men will never give us a space.”

In Kenya, women-led and women’s rights organizations are working relentlessly to bridge the gap between communities and national policymakers on P/CVE. For instance, Abdi holds workshops to foster dialogue between women directly affected by violence perpetrated in the context of “violent extremism” and women parliamentarians who hold policy positions in order to get the parliamentarians “to understand the plight on what is happening on the ground.” In Isiolo, women leaders expressed frustration that the issues of P/CVE had not been addressed by the Kenya NAP 1325 in a way that tangibly impacted local women’s organizations. “1325 is good, it’s something we have interacted with, but it has also eclipsed 2242,” a woman leader explained. “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.” Further, effective violence prevention programming must be developed based on what communities need and yet the majority of CBOs are led by men. Abdi argues that while the Kenyan NAP 1325 has been successful in promoting women’s greater participation at the national level and increasing women’s representation in parliament, “there is not enough of a push to have women leading [CBOs] and those are the institutions that make more sense than the political level. Where do you have the PVE leaders? At the community level.”

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Anything that talks on behalf of women, we need to uphold it, and fight for it. Because men will never give us a space.

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Woman leader in Isiolo

While UNSCR 2242 provides women an opportunity to argue for their inclusion in development and implementation of P/CVE security approaches, merely having women part of decision-making processes is not in and of itself transformative. Indeed, one of the largest critiques of linking the WPS and the P/CVE agendas concerns 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 actually needed to improve women’s lives.⁷¹ As Ní Aoláin argues, “The expansion of WPS to include women in the counterterrorism domain does not mean that women will be included in defining what constitutes terrorism and what counterterrorism strategies are compliant with human rights and equality, or that all the harms on women as a result of terrorism and counterterrorism strategies will be addressed even-handedly.”⁷² Ensuring that women’s participation is meaningful and contributes to transforming security approaches in line with WPS objectives of women’s empowerment and gender equality requires more than the rhetorical inclusion of women and gender in CT and P/CVE policy. National policy must reflect the needs of communities and promote security as defined by local women peacebuilders, and having both women participate and promote feminist objectives can contribute to this goal. As Ayindo states, “CVE is still very typical patriarchal, male response to issues. We need to do more violence. If you give us violence, we’ll do double, triple violence.” Ayindo 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.”

⁷¹ See Ní Aoláin 2016; Brown 2013; Giscard d’Estaing 2017; Winterbotham and Pearson 2017; LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security 2017; Coomaraswamy 2015; Gender Action for Peace and Security 2018.

⁷² Ní Aoláin 2016, 276.

Women leaders in Isiolo illustrate the importance of women’s perspectives on P/CVE. In the aftermath of the Dusit attack, which was allegedly orchestrated by a young man from Isiolo, women leaders stepped into help their fractured community. After the mother and older sister of the attacker were detained, his three younger sisters were left without care. One of the women leaders present in our focus group discussion opened her home to the young girls. “This is what we are faced with,” a woman leader explained. “The children have school fees and these are girls who really want safety and that’s why she has taken them in her house.” This small example of the work these women leaders are doing in their community in the face of extreme violence demonstrates the importance of attending to the small, social relationships that are broken in the wake of violence, of providing protection for those left behind, and of the community healing necessary to interrupt cycles of violence. Indeed, these young girls would have been shunned and isolated if it were not for these women leaders. As a woman leader put it: “I think this is how we should do P/CVE. Give it a human face. As women, we want to put a human face to what we are doing.”

Box 7: Global Reflection | Palestine

The militarized occupation of Palestine has had devastating impact on the mental, emotional, physical, and economic well-being of Palestinians, with disproportionate effect on women and children. Restrictions on movement, alteration of demographic composition, expansion of illegal settlements, house demolitions, and residency revocation and many policies of apartheid breach human rights of Palestinians on a daily basis. Moreover, persistent aggression on Gaza has contributed to a growing humanitarian crisis and an increase in gender-based violence. Israel’s military violence and breaches of international law often receive lack of action by the international community, and Israel continues to enjoy a culture of impunity. However women’s and human rights defenders are targeted by both the occupation’s violence and often by state violence during many peaceful demonstrations, which violates the right to non-violent assembly and freedom of expression. The security of Palestinian women, and women in Gaza in particular, is imperative in light of escalating colonial violence.

Sandie Hanna, Communications and Advocacy manager at the grassroots and women’s rights organization Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD) believes that women must be actively included in all levels of decision-making in order to promote just and durable peace and counter violence. For instance, women’s active engagement in designing policies, drafting amendments to laws, participating in local governance, in legal and education reform, and in peacebuilding negotiations is essential to the prevention of further violence. Regarding gender-based violence, Hanna believes that “when women and girls are protected during militarization and colonial oppression; they become less likely to be systematically targeted by violence, mainly sexual violence, during wars and conflicts.” Moreover “when educational curricula are made gender-sensitive and tolerant to differences and accepting of diversity, they become more likely to mitigate religious fundamentalism and obedience, which tend to encourage radicalization.” PWWSD works toward this aim by combatting violence against women and girls, empowering women, offering psycho-social support, encouraging their political participation, and promoting women’s rights as human rights based on equality and full citizenship.

Further, while the WPS agenda in Palestine addresses the need to counter the extreme violence of the occupation, its key challenge remains the lack of clear, legally-binding or universally accepted definitions of “violent extremism” or “PVE.” As Hanna explains, the WPS agenda “should ideally be the result of a mutual collaboration between the government and civil society, anywhere across the globe. But governments usually adopt a ‘war on terror’ [approach] which undermines human rights and the rule of law. Within that approach, heavy investments are undertaken in militarized security responses on behalf of development. Yet when priority is given to preventing and combating extremism (again, regardless the means) while disregarding human rights and the rule of law, the WPS agenda fails to address root causes of violence.”

Based on phone interview with Sandie Hanna (PWWSD) by Virginie Poyetton, June 2019

7. Gender Stereotypes in the P/CVE Agenda

Key Messages

- Programming on women’s participation in P/CVE risks reproducing gender stereotypes.
- Promoting women’s participation as security agents within their homes and communities potentially endangers women and burdens them with the responsibility of security without the necessary resources and protection.

Programming on women’s participation in P/CVE can reaffirm gender stereotypes which constrain rather than expand women’s political agency. Without women’s full participation in all levels of decision-making, gendered assumptions will continue to shape the development of both policy and programming around P/CVE. For instance, assumptions about women’s inherent passivity lead to the belief that women, and mothers in particular, are better suited to participate in prevention activities within their homes and communities.⁷³ Indeed, women are viewed as naturally pre-disposed to act as agents of “de-radicalization” within their homes and communities or as key informants in “early warning systems.”⁷⁴ Women are considered uniquely suited to detect and disrupt early signs of violence given their strategic location within the home and their emotional connection to their children. These gendered assumptions have led to the development of P/CVE policy and programming which identifies civilian women—and mothers in particular—as “essential participants in an effective security paradigm.”⁷⁵ For instance, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Women Without Borders and Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) developed a program called “Mothers’ Schools,” which trains mothers in P/CVE approaches. The program is based on the idea that “mothers contain valuable data on what renders individuals vulnerable to radical influences” and “can shed light on the behavior and decisions that are incomprehensible to those on the outside.” In addition, the program believes that with the proper training, empowerment and capacity building, mothers have the potential to “serve as a buffer between radical influences and those who are next to be targeted.”⁷⁶

In Kenya, the CSOs and consultants on gender and P/CVE interviewed for this study largely agreed that women’s influential role in the family and in society makes them a key component to violence prevention. For instance, a woman peacebuilder in Mombasa stated that not including local, grassroots women in P/CVE is a mistake: “Women naturally could detect anything. Be they learned or not learned. They know a lot about their kids, a lot about their sons—these women are not being included.” Male peacebuilders were also in agreement that women had a greater role to play in violence prevention. Stephen Kadenyo, the executive director of the peacebuilding organization Pamoja for Transformation, understands women as possessing “soft power”—such as emotional intelligence, empathy and social influence—which are essential tools for violence prevention. “The bottom line is that women are the primary social agents so that has a lot of connection on how women will be able to influence other young people,” he explained. “Whether her children, her relatives, or just any young people in the community... [women] even take certain risks we would not expect of them to take because they say, ‘how about if it was my child?’”

⁷³ This notion of mothers as uniquely suited for violence prevention is not particular to the P/CVE agenda, but has a long history of being mobilized for feminist anti-war activism. In short, the belief is that given women’s biological capacity to produce life, they have a unique standpoint from which to argue against war and violence. The conflation of women, mothering, and peace has been widely critiqued by feminists for the ways in which it reduces women to their reproductive capacity, reaffirms oppressive gendered arrangements, and stands to negate women’s capacity for wider political agency.

⁷⁴ d’Estaing 2017: 106-108.

⁷⁵ Schlaffer and Kropiunigg 2016: 55.

⁷⁶ Schlaffer and Kropiunigg 2016: 55.

There are a number of critiques of programs designed to build the capacity of mothers as agents of prevention within their homes and communities. Insisting that women are naturally suited to detect and prevent their children from engaging in violence risks placing sole responsibility on the mother if her child does join a non-state armed group or perpetrate violence. As peace and security analyst Sophie Giscard d'Estaing writes, programs such as Mothers' Schools "have a narrow, instrumentalist focus on women as mothers and wives in the private sphere of the home, and in some cases actually shifts responsibility in discourses around extremism from states to civil society—and in particular to mothers, who are assigned responsibility for the potential radicalization of their children."⁷⁷

Women leaders in Isiolo discussed the retribution women can experience when their children join or are suspected of joining a non-state armed group. "We are actually seeing mothers being victimized," a woman leader stated. "When a child disappears or grows up and is not of good character, then it is the mother's child. If the child is good, it is the father's child. It's important that both parents have an equal role in bring up the child." Programs designed to instrumentalize women's capacity as mothers stand to reinforce the idea that not only do women have a greater responsibility in the rearing of children than men, but that women have an innate ability to detect signs of potential violent behavior in their children—and the failure to do this means the failure to be a "good mother." This assumption drastically oversimplifies the diverse social and familial structures within which women live and potentially puts women at risk for exclusion from their communities or even retribution from non-state armed groups.⁷⁸ As a consultant on gender and P/CVE in Nairobi cautioned, "Empower women, yes, but don't burden them with the whole responsibility."

// Empower women, yes, but don't burden
them with the whole responsibility. //

Consultant on gender and P/CVE in Nairobi

Programs designed to train mothers as P/CVE agents risk instrumentalizing the discourse of "women's empowerment" without ensuring the structural changes necessary to address gendered power dynamics and underlying gender inequalities. Ní Aoláin argues that UNSCR 2242 promotes this "rather naïve view of women's capacity, in highly fraught communities and societies, where as a practical matter their status is limited, and their equality is not guaranteed."⁷⁹ Promoting women's role as P/CVE agents in their homes and communities further relegates their participation to the private, domestic sphere rather than incorporating women in broader political processes which determine the design and implementation of security measures. For Ayindo, this tension is at the heart of women's role in violence prevention and conflict transformation. "They influence the young people a lot, so it just makes sense that women should be involved," he said. "The danger is, I think, that we've not gone far enough in the manner in which we articulate women's role in peacebuilding without all those typical elements of tokenism."⁸⁰ Ultimately, arguments for women's participation in political processes and security structures should not reduce women to their utility, but should instead be grounded in their rights as political subjects and human beings, resulting in a widening rather than a narrowing of their political agency.

⁷⁷ Giscard d'Estaing 2017: 107.

⁷⁸ Giscard d'Estaing 2017: 107.

⁷⁹ Ní Aoláin 2016: 286.

⁸⁰ This tension is seen in other fields of peacebuilding as well, particularly meditation.

Box 8: Global Reflection | Bangladesh

Violent extremist attacks against academics, bloggers, journalists, foreigners, and religious leaders have led to increased national and international attention on the P/CVE agenda in Bangladesh. Although the Bangladesh government has taken measures to improve the situation and to include CSOs in peace processes, greater attention must be paid to secular ideas and ideologies as division among religious and minority groups continues to grow. Women in particular must be the focus of comprehensive peace programs as they are the primary victims of violence, including domestic violence and violence perpetrated by non-state armed actors.

Fawzia Khondker of PRAGROSHOR, a peacebuilding, human rights, and women's rights organization, explains that the language of "violent extremism" does not necessarily resonate with communities. "In Bangladesh people do not know that much about violent extremism. Definitions or objectives are not clear to them. I think it is better to not directly talk about violent extremism, but look at injustices in the families and in the society and then you can link to the violent extremism." Not only do communities not identify the issues they are facing as related to violent extremism, but they are reluctant and even fearful to speak about it: "People are afraid to talk about the issue. The term already sounds very negative; it's better to use positive words. When we say we are working for peace, then it's positive and the communities are more open. Talking about peacebuilding is more attractive and more accepted by society." Given this, PRAGROSHOR does not name their work "PVE" even as they believe it contributes to the prevention of violent extremism.

Further, for women in Bangladesh, the primary issue they face in their day-to-day lives is domestic violence, not "violent extremism." According to Khondker, more than 50 percent of women in Bangladesh experience domestic violence, which negatively impacts women's ability to participate in decision-making processes. PRAGROSHOR believes that gender equality and women's empowerment are key tools to prevent the spread of radicalization and that gender should be mainstream in security institutions, but also that security institutions should be rethought and informed by the needs and perspectives of communities and women in particular. "We should involve women in peacebuilding processes," Khondker insists. "Because women are subjects and not objects."

Based on phone interview with Fawzia Khondker (PRAGROSHOR) by Mithra Akhbari, June 2019

8. Women’s Agency and Gendered Harms in the Context of “Violent Extremism”

Key Messages

- The full spectrum of women’s agency is often unaccounted for in P/CVE policy and programming.
- Women’s participation in “violent extremism” is shaped by political, economic, and social factors.
- The failure to account for gendered differences in returnees poses serious risks to women and girls including economic consequences, lack of adequate reproductive and mental health care, increased stigmatization from communities and lack of opportunities, and re-recruitment.

Women play diverse roles and have a range of experiences, including as perpetrators, victims, agents of prevention, and peacebuilders. However, this broad range of agency is often not sufficiently accounted for in P/CVE policy and programming, leading to additional gendered harms. This section will discuss the gendered assumptions regarding women’s involvement in non-state armed groups and the harms associated with such assumptions, including the failure to account for women’s return from violent organizations.

Violence deemed “terrorism” or “violent extremism” remains overwhelmingly perpetrated by men. However, even as women comprise a small fraction of perpetrators, they are increasingly participating as direct perpetrators and combatants, sympathizers, and mobilizers of non-state armed violence.⁸¹ Recently, there has been an increase in attention to women as perpetrators, largely due to the rise of young Western women traveling to Iraq and Syria.⁸² Yet, women’s participation in non-state armed groups is largely understood to be aberrant, resulting in security approaches that are absent an understanding of the gender dynamics of non-state armed groups. Indeed, the motivations behind individuals’ participation in non-state armed groups are diverse and studies show that there is no single profile of who is likely to join.⁸³ While some findings suggest that women are more likely than men to be physically or psychologically coerced, greater research is needed to understand the gendered dynamics which drive both men and women to participate in non-state armed groups.⁸⁴

Women, like men, might be driven by grievances about socio-economic political conditions; grief about the death of a loved one; political or social marginalization; or as a transformative act, to gain power and agency over a feeling or state of victimhood. In addition, women also join non-state armed groups due to insecurity and in order to gain protection from violence and gendered harm, including sexual violence, perpetrated by other civilians or security forces.⁸⁵ However, given the lack of gender analysis of both men and women’s recruitment to and participation in non-state armed groups, policies tend to ignore women altogether or reproduce gender stereotypes that deny women’s agency.⁸⁶ For instance, women who commit violence are often considered to be easily manipulated, duped, or victims of “false consciousness.” Unlike men, their involvement is usually explained through recourse to their emotional or mental state.⁸⁷ The discourse of “jihadi brides,” for instance, represents such women as sexually-deviant, lured or seduced by men. Failure to analyze women’s participation in non-state armed groups within a wider social, political, and economic context contributes to gendered stereotypes of women as apolitical and passive and men as inherently violent.

⁸¹ Bloom 2011; Gentry and Sjoberg 2011; Carter 2013; Bigio and Vogelstein 2019.

⁸² Ní Aoláin and Huckerby 2018a. In Kenya, donor interest has increased attention to research on the issue of women joining al-Shabaab and other non-state armed groups (see Badurdeen 2016 and 2018).

⁸³ See, for instance: Mercy Corps 2016; UNDP 2017.

⁸⁴ Fink, Barakat and Shetret, 2013: 3.

⁸⁵ See Mazurana 2013.

⁸⁶ See Huckerby 2015.

⁸⁷ Ní Aoláin and Huckerby 2018a. It is also important to note that these gendered stereotypes are also deeply racialized. “Violent extremism” as perpetrated by white men is often problematically explained through a mental health framework rather than a political or ideological one.

In Kenya, for instance, women are reported to join al-Shabaab for a wide range of reasons, including grievance against the state after the disappearance or EJK of their husband or sons. In addition, women who have lost their husbands or sons face increased economic precarity and social marginalization. As Hemed explains, “If a man is killed and leaves behind a wife with kids, the government does not put in place any measures to see how best to handle this woman. She is left with kids that need to be taken care of, she cannot go out and seek any employment because nobody wants to hire her, she is rejected by society. Nobody wants to associate with her. That woman is traumatized because of the loss of her husband. What do you expect from that woman? And that’s why we see that women are now crossing the border.” In Isiolo, women leaders expressed difficulty to truly understand why the young girls in their community were joining non-state armed groups. They hypothesized that the girls felt marginalized by the police; that they felt hopeless to secure employment despite being well educated; that they were lured by the promises of material goods and kind husbands; or that they saw a way out of the oppressive gender relations they saw at home and in their communities.⁸⁸

In addition to women’s recruitment to and participation in non-state armed groups, women also experience a wide range of harm as returnees from such groups.⁸⁹ While there is increasing attention to the issue of sexual slavery and the trafficking of women and girls by non-state armed groups such as ISIL, Boko Haram, and al-Shabaab, the challenges facing women returnees are largely unaccounted for in P/CVE policy and programming.⁹⁰ A recent report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) finds that there is a “lack of coherent national and international policies pertaining to the treatment of those returning from transnational violent extremism and terrorist groups” and further, that for women and children returnees “there is an even wider chasm between on-the-ground realities and global policies.”⁹¹ The failure to account for gendered differences in returnees poses serious risks to women and girls including economic consequences, lack of adequate reproductive and mental health care, increased stigmatization from communities and lack of opportunities, and re-recruitment.⁹² The gaps and challenges related to the disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and girls returned from non-state armed groups must be addressed to prevent further harm.⁹³ The knowledge, experience and practice of CSOs—and women-led CSOs in particular—is crucial in this context.

During our field research in Kenya, the issue of returnees was brought up in nearly every interview, albeit sometimes with great caution. Given that there is no comprehensive legal and security framework for returnees, many organizations balance fear of reprisal from the government or security forces with the need to be transparent about their work. The Mombasa-based organization Human Rights Agenda (HURIA), informs the NCTC about their work with returnees in order to protect their staff and to link returnees with the services the NCTC provides. However, as Hassan Abdille, the Executive Director of MUHURI explains, many organizations fear working with returnees due to the risk of being labelled as a “terrorist sympathizer.” The space for civil society to safely engage with returnees and work toward their rehabilitation and reintegration is deeply constrained by many of the issues discussed through this report—including CTF laws, state-perpetrated violence, Islamophobia, and the stigmatization and marginalization of both returnees and their families.

Despite these challenges, HURIA has been able to work with over 130 “women victims of terror” across Kwale, Mombasa, and Kilifi counties, which includes women who have experienced a broad range of harm in relationship to “violent extremism,” including women who have gone to Somalia and returned, and children whose parents or siblings had joined al-Shabaab. Regarding mothers who had gone to Somalia to try and find their children, Abdille explains that “when they come back the government arrests them and accuses them of linking of with al-Shabaab. But because they have that pain, they want to go find their son or daughter. It has been a major problem. We have no proper

⁸⁸ Badurdeen’s research supports many of these hypotheses (2016) and also provides additional context on the broad spectrum of reasons that women might voluntarily or involuntarily participate in al-Shabaab.

⁸⁹ In this report we follow the definition of returnees used by Anderlini and Holmes: “all individuals returning from association with violent extremism groups” which allows for discussion of return whether across national borders or within a community (2019, 24).

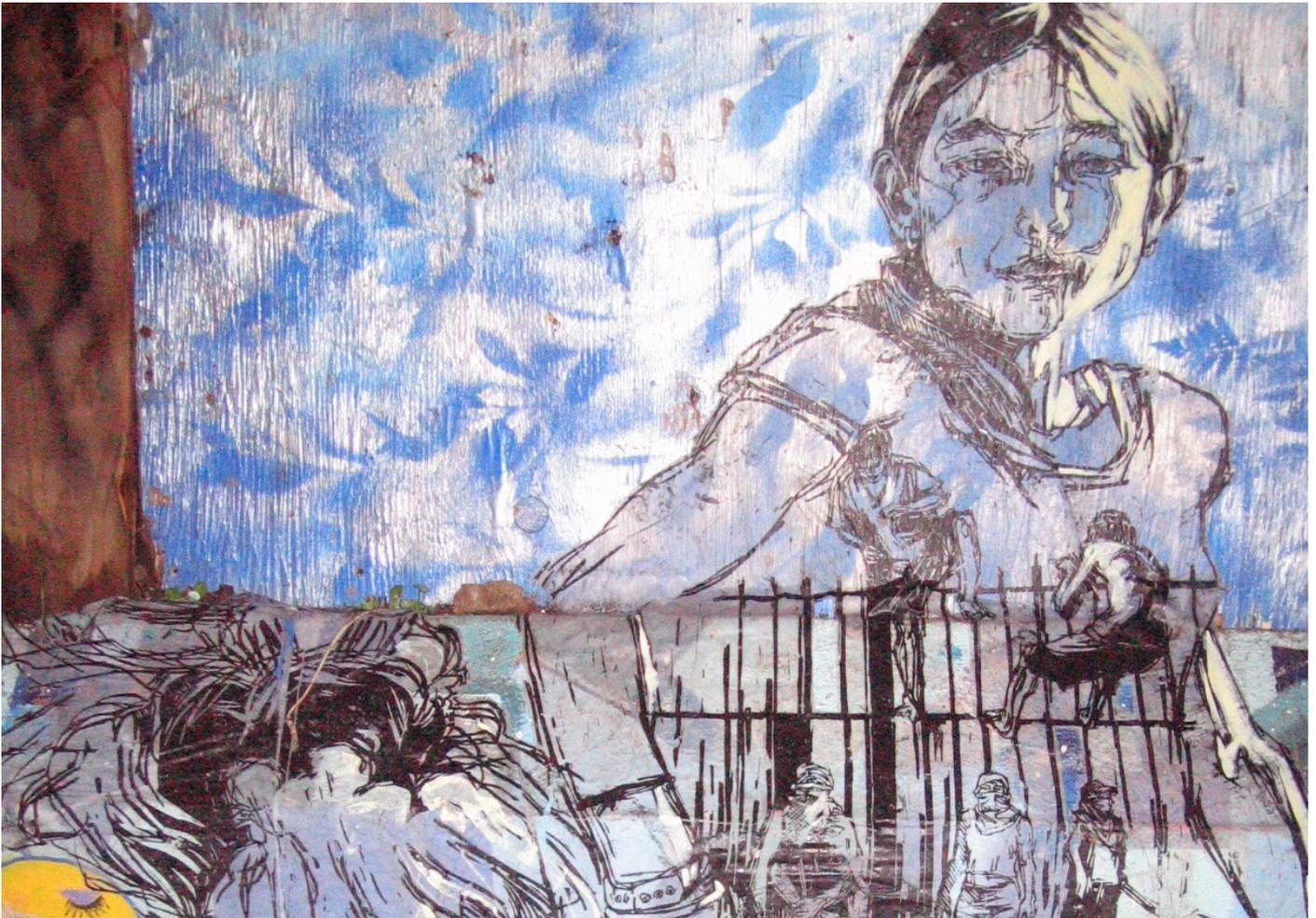
⁹⁰ Recent data estimates that approximately 4,761 (or 13 per cent) of individuals who travelled to Iraq or Syria were women (UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate 2019, 6).

⁹¹ Anderlini and Holmes 2019, 10. Globally, the issue of returnees and foreign fighters (individuals who travel from their country of origin to conflict-affected areas to participate in organized violence) has received increased recent attention due to the diversity of individuals traveling to regions such as Syria and Iraq. Foreign fighters and returnees raise questions regarding the relationship of nationality and the application of international humanitarian law; the legality of citizenship revocation; and the competing security interests of states (see Malet 2013; Krähenmann forthcoming). Recent instances of European states revoking the citizenship of foreign fighters have come under scrutiny by human rights experts (e.g. see United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2019).

⁹² Anderlini and Holmes 2019, 9.

⁹³ Practitioners experienced in demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) processes have conceptualized disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration to mean “disengagement from the group; rehabilitation of the individual, family and community; and reintegration into society” (Anderlini and Holmes 2019, 10).

framework in place.” It is within this murky context—where the motivations of women and girls who join non-state armed groups are exceedingly difficult to differentiate—that the work of CBOs is essential. For instance, HURIA’s programming fosters community trust and solidarity, builds women’s capacity as peacebuilders, breaks the isolation that women feel, links women with economic opportunities, and helps them to get access to psychological support for trauma and medical assistance for conditions such as HIV.



Overall, women face a wide range of issues related to their participation in or proximity to non-state armed groups and state security actors. Such issues—including threats to physical safety, emotional and psychological impacts such as living in near constant fear of violence; sexual violence; stigmatization from their communities; profiling and harassment by security forces; the disruption of families, and economic deprivation—are widely unaddressed by security policy and programming. Given the complexity surrounding women’s involvement in non-state armed groups, CBOs— and women-led organizations in particular—must be consulted and their perspectives must be integrated into security measures.

Box 9: Global Reflection | Mali

Mali faces extraordinary levels of violence and insecurity driven by poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, and poor governance. Civilian populations are caught in between national and international security forces, community militias, and non-state armed groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), with reports of egregious human rights violations perpetrated by all parties.ⁱ Violent organizations capitalize on and contribute to a growing humanitarian crisis, including food insecurity and internally displaced people.ⁱⁱ

While counterterrorism operations in Mali remain ongoing, the government has also recently adopted a national P/CVE strategy to work with local CSOs to try and address the “root causes” of the crisis.ⁱⁱⁱ For instance, the Association Malienne pour La Survie au Sahel (AMSS) has been working with local communities in Mali’s northern region for more than 20 years to address humanitarian needs, including development, food security, and community protection with a special emphasis on the role of women. Their most recent work has focused on peacebuilding and P/CVE to build community resilience through dialogue and community awareness raising. In their programming, AMSS intentionally uses the terms “violent extremism” and “radicalization” in order to provide information to local communities on how these organizations operate and what will happen to them and their families if they are recruited. In addition, AMSS provides religious education and uses radio messaging to counter the ways that violent extremist organisations “deform” Islam in their recruitment strategies. In order to counter the narratives being spread by violent organizations, AMSS’s language and approach is explicitly framed as P/CVE, because, as they explain, this was an issue that came to them: “Our organization was focused on humanitarian responses to drought or social issues like schooling, notably for young girls. But our zone of activities became the preferred target zone of the terrorists. They descended upon us and we had to react quickly to these changes because their first priority was to influence our young people...”

Another organisation, Réseau des Jeunes Femmes Leaders des Partis Politiques et des Organisations de la société Civile (REJEFPO), has been implementing P/CVE programming for two years. REJEFPO also uses the language of “violent extremism” but works to translate the concept to communities: “People don’t understand when it starts, when something is extremist—it’s a language problem because it’s not our language. When we talk about it we have to translate the concept. We use exchanges, debates, dialogues to help them understand... The perception is different. Even though we try to make them understand, this is foreign to our culture... International media is the reason that such behaviour is now called ‘terrorist.’”

Both REJEFPO and AMSS run programming specifically designed to increase women’s awareness of P/CVE and to build women’s capacity as peacebuilders. Women, particularly those seeking ways to provide for young children, are targeted for recruitment by violent organizations. For REJEFPO, this work is essential because “Young women are the first affected—assaults on their dignity, rape—and they’re the most vulnerable so every aspect of capacity building for them becomes a focal point for mobilizing against these forces. It allows them to take charge of their own security, to move from passivity to action.” However, REJEFPO also recognizes that the attention to P/CVE can distract from the other forms of violence women face, including domestic abuse and even murder: “These cases are not followed by prison time because violence against women is normalized and not taken seriously, while violence that is equally barbarous practiced by terrorists attracts so much attention.”

Based on interviews with Loda Coulibaly and Habibatou Nagnouma Traoré (REJEFPO) and Mohamed Abdoulaye Modibo Diakite (AMSS) by Fairlie Chappuis and Moussa Sanogo, June 2019

ⁱ Carayol, Geel and Rabecq 2017.

ⁱⁱ OCHA 2019.

ⁱⁱⁱ United States Department of State 2018.

Conclusion: Resistance and Transformation

The P/CVE agenda faces serious challenges. The lack of definitional clarity on what constitutes “violent extremism” risks conflating a broader range of activities and beliefs with “terrorism” and legitimizing the “global war on terror,” including military interventions. The donor-driven P/CVE agenda risks promoting the needs and interests of the state and international security agenda to the detriment of communities. The P/CVE agenda also contributes to the expansion of legal and political power, posing serious threats to human rights and curtailing civic space. Lastly, the association of P/CVE with the “global war on terror,” the targeting and surveillance of Muslim communities, and the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim violence worldwide, renders P/CVE as an approach to violence prevention that is undesirable from a peacebuilding and human rights perspective.

The global reflections offered throughout the report demonstrate that security policy and practice under the security paradigm of “P/CVE” do not adequately address—and in some cases, exacerbate—the daily violence communities face. Women’s organizations are faced with increasing challenges regarding their ability to secure funding to support their work in violence prevention, which includes a range of violence not fully captured by the narrow focus on “violent extremism.” As explored in Part II, the challenges associated with the P/CVE agenda are precisely why WPS actors find it necessary to engage in the development and implementation of security approaches. Given the large amount of resources channeled into P/CVE and the recent calls to integrate the WPS and P/CVE agendas, WPS actors must act to ensure that the rhetoric of women’s empowerment and gender equality is not being promoted in the service of state and international security agendas to the detriment of women’s rights and security. While UNSCR 2242 provides a tool with which women can advocate for the inclusion of both women’s voices and gender perspectives in security measures, P/CVE programming which emphasizes women’s capacity as agents of prevention within their homes and communities risks promoting gender essentialisms which constrain rather than broaden women’s political agency. Indeed, while many P/CVE programs which focus on women and gender use the language of “women’s empowerment,” it is unclear to what extent those programs result in shifting power dynamics which enable women greater choice and control and which contribute to the structural changes needed to ensure gender equality.

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To be honest, I think the fear of instrumentalizing women has taken such a huge chunk of thinking that is has taken away from the benefit of having the [WPS and P/CVE agendas] working together. //

Fauziya Abdi, President of Women in International Security (WIIS)

Nevertheless, for women activists in Kenya, the need to influence the P/CVE agenda from a WPS perspective is clear. Abdi finds that the expression of concern from Western feminists and WPS actors regarding appropriating women and women’s rights for a security agenda to be distracting from the real issues: “To be honest, I think the fear of instrumentalizing women has taken such a huge chunk of thinking that is has taken away from the benefit of having the [WPS and P/CVE agendas] working together.” Indeed, to assume that women are being instrumentalized without listening to what they want denies women agency and enacts another form of violence. Women must be empowered to define security in their own terms, to participate in the development and implementation of security approaches that best reflect their needs and the needs of their communities. It is the job of WPS actors to ensure that all women have access to this conversation, whether it is to challenge it, shape it, or resist it.

Feminists have always been challenged with determining the best way enact change within male-dominated, patriarchal structures, including security and military institutions. Do you fight for access and then attempt transformation from within? Or do you resist and attempt transformation from outside? As Ayindo states, “If you can get one foot in, then let’s get the conversation going. But sometimes we need to take a position where we’ve got to be on our own as feminists, and then engage.” The decision on how to best influence or challenge the design and implementation of P/CVE measures should be left up to women’s rights activists and women-led CSOs within a given context. For women leaders in Kenya, abstaining from the conversation is not even an option—they have no choice. To not engage would mean that security agendas continues to develop without the influence of women, without gender analysis, without the attempts of feminist activists to steer the development and implementation of security strategies back to the principles of women and women’s rights.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the research, the project steering committee, together with the advisory group, formulated the following policy recommendations. Switzerland, as the implementer of the Swiss National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, as a donor agency in international cooperation and funder of strategic partners, and as an influencer of like-minded countries, should:

Increase Funding and Promotion of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

- Switzerland should continue funding the NAP 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and invest in flexible, long-term funding of programs to address underlying drivers of violent conflict, including gender inequality.
- Within WPS funding streams, Switzerland should fund violence prevention programming that reflects the needs of communities and is grounded in the principles of peacebuilding and human rights beyond a narrow P/CVE agenda.
- Switzerland should fund violence prevention programming which recognizes that “violent extremism” is embedded within a longer continuum of violence which requires holistic peacebuilding approaches to transform conflict and break cycles of violence.
- In line with the fourth Swiss National Action Plan 1325, Switzerland should continue supporting women’s meaningful participation in decision-making processes in all levels of peace and security, and expand its support to include promoting women’s leadership in community-based organizations working on violence prevention as well as women’s leadership in the development and implementation of security policy and programming.
- Switzerland should counteract gender-blind security strategies by supporting women defining security in their own terms, and ensuring the participation of women leaders as well as the inclusion of a gender perspective in the development and implementation of security approaches.
- Switzerland should ensure that the goals and implementation strategies of the NAP 1325 are anchored in CEDAW and other human rights conventions.
- Actors in the Swiss administration, civil society, and Parliament should continue engaging in continuous and constructive dialogue to ensure a gender perspective and promote the WPS agenda in the realms of peace and security.

Promote and Require Gender Analysis

- Switzerland should require that gender analysis is conducted prior to the design and implementation of any programming related to violence prevention.
- Gender analysis must include understanding the specific gendered impacts of violent conflict; understanding the diverse roles men, women, boys, and girls play in violent conflict; and understanding the gender power dynamics and norms which shape the context.
- Switzerland should invest in research to better understand the gendered dynamics of organized violence and militarism, including the role of masculinity in the perpetration of violence.
- Switzerland should invest in research to better understand the differentiated effects of CT and P/CVE policy and practice on women, women human right defenders, women’s rights organizations and civil society more broadly.
- When promoting women’s roles in violence prevention, Switzerland should be cautious to not unduly burden women or mothers with the sole responsibility of preventing her child from engaging in violence. Policy and programming informed by gender analysis should contribute to the broadening of women’s political agency rather than the reinforcement of gender stereotypes.

Enhance Responsible Donor Behavior

- If funding P/CVE programs, Switzerland should ensure that the funding is flexible and long-term and that the program design is based on comprehensive and holistic country-needs assessments and community-needs assessments.
- Switzerland should fund violence prevention programming which allows for language organic to the context and does not require the language of “violent extremism”.
- Switzerland should ensure that any P/CVE programs it funds have carefully designed exit strategies and plans for sustainability.
- Programs should promote qualitative and participative methodologies and build on existing knowledge from community-based organizations and contribute to security as defined by the community.
- Switzerland should invest in the development of relevant Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks which do not pose harm to communities, include qualitative methods and require external, independent evaluations while remaining aware that some qualitative measures of success are intangible.

Promote Community-led Definitions of Security

- In the creation of policy and the funding of programming, Switzerland should prioritize community-led definitions of security, particularly as defined by women and other discriminated or marginalized groups.
- Switzerland should not fund programming which prioritizes state security or the protection of transnational industries at the expense of community security, paying special attention to the protection of indigenous peoples and women’s human rights defenders.
- Switzerland, as an influencer of like-minded countries, should promote the importance of community-led definitions of security that are informed by a gender analysis in discussion on peace and security at the international level.

Address Negative Connotations and Impacts of the P/CVE Agenda

- Switzerland should acknowledge and address the negative connotations of the P/CVE agenda and be mindful of the risks that civil society organizations might face when associating with the P/CVE agenda.
- Switzerland should include women and men engaged in the prevention of violence in the support and protection framework offered to human rights defenders, and to women human rights defenders in particular.
- Switzerland should address the issues of shrinking civil society space and human rights violations caused by CT and P/CVE legislation and practice by funding and supporting civil society organizations advocating for human rights and working on violence prevention that reflects the needs of communities and that is grounded in the principles of peacebuilding and human rights.
- Switzerland should avoid using the vague and incoherent language of “terrorism” and “violent extremism” and instead promote language which contributes to violence prevention and conflict transformation.
- Switzerland should ensure that domestic policies on PVE are informed by a gender analysis and are reflective of Swiss civil society organizations’ peacebuilding experience in violence prevention. Switzerland should be mindful of the risk of endorsing a P/CVE agenda domestically, which implicitly or explicitly contributes to Islamophobia.

Invest in Research on Returnees

- Switzerland should invest in research to better understand the process of disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration for returnees, with particular attention to the gendered harms that women face in the process of returning from associated with non-state armed groups.
- Switzerland should promote a holistic approach to disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration efforts to include those who were abducted children who were kidnapped or born in captivity and internally displaced persons.
- Switzerland should include civil society organizations, and particularly women's organizations working with returnees in the support and protection framework offered to human rights defenders, and support them in developing effective measures to reintegrate returnees and assist their families.

Critically Assess Participation in Arms Industry

- Switzerland should acknowledge that the P/CVE agenda risks contributing to the growth of the security industry, including the small arms and light weapons industry, which produces greater instability and violent conflict.
- Switzerland should not engage in the sale of any weapons which are used, at any point after the purchase, to perpetrate human rights violations or contribute to the insecurity of communities.
- Switzerland should fund research on the impact of Swiss small arms and lights weapons, and the sale of parts used in the manufacturing of weapons, on women.



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This report is the result of extensive desk-based research, interviews, and continuous discussions with civil society organizations (CSOs) and experts on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE). The genesis for this report emerged in 2016, when the Swiss civil society Working Group (WG) 1325 raised the need to critically assess the linking of the WPS and P/CVE agendas in the independent alternative report *Women, Peace and Security: Reloaded*. Thus, in the context of the fourth Swiss National Action Plan (NAP) 1325, which names Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) as a key priority within its “prevention pillar,” Swiss civil society seeks to better understand the potential ramifications of integrating the WPS and P/CVE agendas. As such, the project, “Civil Society Contribution to the Implementation of the Swiss NAP 1325,” has consulted with civil society experts within Switzerland and beyond to determine how the WPS agenda can promote a concept of violence prevention that is grounded in the principles of peacebuilding and human rights and which contributes to WPS objectives of women’s empowerment and gender equality.

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