



TACKLING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN UGANDA:

LESSONS LEARNT FROM A COMMUNITY RESILIENCE APPROACH



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About the *project partners*



The Kofi Annan Foundation is an independent not-for-profit organisation, established in Switzerland in 2007 by the late former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The mission of the foundation is to help build peaceful, democratic, and resilient societies. It works to create a fairer and more peaceful world, where no one is left behind, democratic principles and the rule of law are upheld, and divides are bridged through dialogue and international cooperation.

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The Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF) is a non-for-profit, Peacebuilding and Development organisation. It was founded in 2011 by Ndugwa Hassan and Ahmed Hadji after surviving the 2010 terrorist attack on the Kyadondo rugby grounds in Kampala, Uganda.

The organisation works both directly and with grassroots peacebuilders and development actors to address root causes and effects of violent conflicts – breaking cycles of conflict, promoting healing, mending broken community relationships, fostering justice, and strengthening community defences against violence.

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RESILIENCE APPROACH



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Lead author: Zulaika Nanfuka

Editing contributor: Maud Roure, Genna Ingold

Editor: Charlotte Davies

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Youth from Makindye Division checkout exhibits at the Seventhday Adventists youth stall during the Kampala Youth Interfaith Exhibition



Key takeaways

Violent extremism is one of the most pressing challenges of our time, bringing terror and instability to all sections of society. Today, there are fewer terrorist groups, but the nature and scale of attacks carried out by groups like the Allied Democratic Forces in Uganda are becoming more lethal.

What drives individuals and communities into violent extremism's formidable orbit? What are the best ways of tackling such drivers in the long-term? As governments, civil society and communities strive to answer these questions, this report shares valuable lessons from eighteen months of the Bridges to Peace project; a collaborative and community-based initiative devised by the Kofi Annan Foundation (KAF) and Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF) and designed to help prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) in Uganda.

The Bridges to Peace project demonstrates there is no single solution that will 'fix' the problem. Progress and the hard-won successes we outline here are the result of a combination of nuanced outreach, training and trust-building programmes deployed by a national team working directly with local communities.

We have aspired to be candid and transparent about gaps and weaknesses in our strategy and implementations and have highlighted those evident more broadly in Uganda's approach to tackling VE. We all know that it is only by critical self-examination that we learn and progress. And it is with this positive spirit that we hope the insights outlined in this report will be understood and assimilated into more effective P/CVE strategies in Uganda and elsewhere in the future.

There are a multitude of lessons learnt during project implementation. Here we present the most important under the main planks of our programme. The first is about outreach and education of the wider public in general to make people more vigilant about the threat of violence. The second is focused on building the capacity of at-risk communities, in this case, the Salafi and former fighters of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) – the insurgent group that terrorises Uganda, to reject VE.



Lessons learnt

Objective 1: Outreach – increasing community awareness of the threat of violent extremism and knowledge of effective P/CVE strategies

▶ COMBAT WIDESPREAD MISUNDERSTANDING OF VE BY REACHING OUT TO CSOS AND COMMUNITY INFLUENCERS

To raise general awareness, we reached out to a broad cross-section of civil society organisations working in areas ranging from education to entrepreneurship training to educate them about the basics of VE and to enable them to incorporate P/CVE into their activities. Through their work, CSOs can reduce risk factors, for example, by being more inclusive of marginalised communities.

In addition, targeting influencers as P/CVE champions has a powerful ripple effect and should be core to outreach strategies. Each community group has its own unique set of influencers considered authentic and free from negative motives, such as religious leaders, teachers, women or youth activists, artists, etc. Their reach and status strengthen the power of the message amongst the groups they influence.

▶ SURVIVOR STORIES ARE HUGELY POWERFUL, BUT ENGAGEMENT REQUIRES COMPASSION AND CARE

Survivors of terrorist attacks lack the structured emotional and financial support to move on from the significant trauma they have experienced. Their stories and testimonies about the havoc wreaked by terrorism are compelling and highly persuasive and the experience of sharing can also be empowering for them, giving

recognition to their struggle. But our teams had to work carefully and diligently to persuade and support those willing to speak on video and constantly kept the 'Do no harm' principle in mind to avoid future emotional damage.

▶ MEDIUMS LIKE RADIO AND DRAMA ARE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE; BUT INVOLVE MEDIA 'BOSSSES' FROM THE START

Our participatory radio drama; 'Mifumbi: the undercover agent;' reached over 1.5 million listeners per episode, underlining the power of radio as a low-cost and efficient medium for outreach. Engagement with radio producers and the media in general should be a cornerstone of effective outreach, be that national, regional, or local media. However, whilst we actively cultivated journalists to understand how their reporting on VE incidents can either undermine or reinforce extremists' narratives, they rightly highlighted that we could have had even more impact by developing relationships with their 'bosses' i.e. the editors and producers who commission and control content.

▶ PARTICIPANTS NEED STRONG MENTORSHIP, COACHING AND EFFECTIVE LEARNING TOOLS TO DRIVE P/CVE ACTION

As engaged participants begin sharing their new knowledge and leading P/CVE actions in their community, they are often hesitant and have a lot of questions. They need regular and on the ground support in the form of mentoring, reassurance, and encouragement. This early stage is crucial in ensuring the longevity of P/CVE programmes, but it requires specific funding and staff-time in planning. Many participants also found existing P/CVE learning materials too lengthy and overwhelming. Well-designed fact sheets and pocket handbooks can improve education and retention, but they need to prioritise the essential facts and skills for a wide range of different users.

▶ **FEAR OF REPRISALS FROM SECURITY FORCES AND FOR PERSONAL SAFETY ARE POWERFUL BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

It became evident from people calling into the live radio shows we organised that many individuals are distrustful and fearful of the security forces. This negative perception undermines the collaboration between civilians and security operatives which is essential to effective prevention of terrorist activities. Security agencies should seek to gain the trust of communities to strengthen the effectiveness of P/CVE operations whereby community members become valued sources of vital information.

Objective 2: Capacity building – strengthening the ability of at-risk communities to reject violent extremism

▶ **SALAFI COMMUNITIES AND ADF RETURNEES FEEL NEGLECTED AND MISUNDERSTOOD; PEACEBUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT-BASED APPROACHES TO P/CVE PROVIDE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR ENGAGEMENT**

Some Salafi consider ADF-related terrorism as a problem manufactured by a government that misunderstands their communities, unjustly targets them with false accusations and sidelines them in terms of civil society and government services. Using a P/CVE label with a community already stigmatised as having a violent ideology would alienate the Salafis and ADF former fighters (called 'returnees'). So, we focused on empowering participants as actors of peace and development thereby making at-risk communities more receptive and interested. We also backed activities related to peace, development, civic participation, youth, or women empowerment with evidence derived

from Islamic doctrines. Our approach was highly appreciated by community leaders and members who welcomed being recognized as prospective partners in advancing peace and development.

▶ **SERIOUS DISTRUST OF SECURITY FORCES IS A BIG CHALLENGE: ADDRESSING SECURITY AND PRIVACY CONCERNS REQUIRES SIGNIFICANT PREPARATION**

Distrust of security forces is much higher amongst the Salafi than the general populace, especially for ADF returnees who live in daily fear of arrest by government operatives. All programme participants need to be reassured by the project teams that their organisations are fully independent of the government. Participants need to be confident there are robust measures in place to protect their identity and confidentiality. The past and new identities of returnees should only be shared on a need-to-know basis in conjunction with the Amnesty Commission responsible for returnees' reintegration. Physical security precautions for participants and project teams and robust risk management planning are also critical due to the risk of attacks from ADF operatives.

▶ **THE STRUCTURE OF SALAFI ORGANISATIONS, COMBINED WITH LOW LEVELS OF RELIGIOUS LITERACY FUEL MARGINALISATION AND RECRUITMENT; P/CVE INITIATIVES CAN AID REFORM**

Unlike other faith groups who have coherent organisational frameworks, Salafi mosques are focused primarily on religious teachings and lack social organising structures that support the community. P/CVE programmes can help instigate reform and improve the representation of women and youths amongst leaders. Programmes can also help to address the low levels of Islamic literacy present in communities which make individuals vulnerable to propaganda based on misinterpreted teachings of Islam.

▶ **SUSTAINED CHANGE REQUIRES A CROSS-COMMUNITY APPROACH: WOMEN, YOUTH, MEN, RETURNEES AND CHILDREN ALL NEED NURTURING**

The needs of women, youths and children are often neglected in Salafi communities which is why our project prioritised women and youths as groups with untapped potential in P/CVE programmes. The capacity of women and youths to embrace positive change following training and empowerment was impressive. However, both groups made it clear to our teams that male Salafi leaders must be brought on board to avoid distrust and ensure sustainable change within their community.

▶ **EXCHANGES BETWEEN SALAFI, OTHER FAITH GROUPS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED BUT APPROACHED WITH CAUTION**

Inter-faith exchanges were beneficial to exposing Salafi to more open attitudes and more active participation of women and youth as well as combating the religious divisiveness pushed by extremists. However, it is essential to persuade the religious leaders of the positive benefits and seek their prior consent. This is how we managed to address participants' reluctance and facilitate lasting inter-faith collaboration between Salafi and other groups. In the same vein, the facilitation of dialogue on topics like peace and development and socio-economic reintegration between returnees, Salafi and local government leaders helped build trust and collaboration, but it needs to be managed with care and diplomacy.

Recommendations

HERE, WE SUMMARISE THE MOST IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS RELEVANT TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT, STATE INSTITUTIONS, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND DONORS.

REFORM SECURITY INSTITUTIONS, OPERATIONS AND CULTURE

Arbitrary arrests and torture by security forces in their fight against terrorism push returnees and Salafi communities to join and support the ADF. Progress requires fast tracking the formulation of a legal policy framework for the operationalisation and financing of the National Counter-terrorism Centre; educating security officers at all levels on the rule of law and human rights in the context of counter terrorism operations; and establishing mechanisms for redress through the Human Rights Commission for individuals arrested arbitrarily, unlawfully detained and tortured.

MARGINALISATION IS A MAJOR RECRUITMENT TOOL: ENSURE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES ARE INCLUSIVE AND REACH OUT TO MINORITIES

Stakeholders such as local government, CSOs and donors should proactively reach out to Salafi communities and returnees and other marginalised groups to ensure they feel included and can benefit from socio-economic investment and support.

USE ART, MEDIA, AND INTERFAITH DISCUSSIONS TO ENGAGE THE PUBLIC IN PVE EFFORTS AND FACILITATE UNDERSTANDING

Using edutainment helps to demystify the complex topic of VE and educate people as to how best to prevent it amongst local communities. Interfaith exchanges are a powerful tool to debunk stereotypes that fuel extremism and promote greater understanding.

PRIORITISE THE LONG-TERM NEEDS OF TERRORISM SURVIVORS

The current anti-terrorism legislation should be amended to recognise and provide for holistic and comprehensive rehabilitation of survivors of terrorism, whose physical and psychological injuries have long-term effects on their social, professional, and economic situation.



ADOPT A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO THE REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE ADF, WITH A SPECIFIC FOCUS ON CHILDREN

The government should ensure assessment tools effectively track the return of former ADF members, differentiating between those who came back with children or left children behind. The Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development should put in place specialised centres to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnee children.

REAWAKEN EFFORTS TO STANDARDISE ISLAMIC THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Such standardisation could include a curriculum development centre, curriculums tolerant of diverse points of view and responsive to the holistic development of a person, a central examinations board, and a teacher training school and curricular. These efforts should also aim to raise Salafi Amirs' awareness about the need to introduce an accreditation system for people and organisations seeking to build new mosques in their areas of jurisdiction.

ENHANCE COORDINATION BETWEEN ALL ACTORS ENGAGED IN P/CVE AND PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Through their regular contacts with the government and civil society, development partners can support the building of trust and collaboration between them for more knowledge and best practice-sharing, leading to more impactful P/CVE efforts. They must also make longer-term funding available for P/CVE action to change entrenched attitudes and systems.

1. Introduction



Young women take a moment to participate in a photo shoot at the Youth Inter-faith Exhibition

One Human Race



PROJECT PARTNERS

1.1 Violent extremism: A major challenge of our time

Violent extremism is a serious and rapidly evolving challenge in Uganda and in other countries around the world. Its complex and varying dynamics makes it challenging to devise effective counter strategies. This means those actively working in preventing and countering violent extremism (hereby referred to as P/CVE) must regularly revisit programming assumptions to learn and adopt new practices that can enhance the impact of their work.

Based on this understanding, the Kofi Annan Foundation and Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF) invested time and resources in documenting and analyzing the impact of their joint **Bridges to Peace Project**; a diverse set of P/CVE interventions implemented in four hotspot districts of Uganda between January 2023 and June 2024. This report captures the key lessons, challenges, and recommendations that have emerged from this process.

It is the partners' hope that the **lessons and recommendations captured herein shall inspire new practice** and contribute to a stronger impact for future P/CVE actions.

This report is produced and disseminated with funding from the European Union.

The violence returns: a surge in terror attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces

The ADF (Allied Democratic Forces, also known as IS Central Africa Province or ISCAP)¹ has been active in Uganda since 1996, with varying levels of violence against the government and civilian population. However, following a period of relative calm from the end of 2015 with no terror attacks, Uganda registered the largest deterioration in the Global Terrorism Index score in 2021². This deterioration was directly attributed to

back-to-back terrorist attacks by the ADF between August and November 2021³.

ADF's recruitment strategy, which targets primarily Salafi communities, is to exploit existing socio-economic inequalities, human rights abuses by security and defence forces⁴, together with perceived and real discriminations against Muslims. The Ugandan government continues to prioritise military responses to the rise of ADF and has failed to deliver the structured and sustained interventions that will directly address the needs and core grievances of those communities most targeted by ADF recruitment.

The lack of comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for former ADF fighters also leads to recidivism. Finally, due to capacity gaps within civil society organisations and their limited access to funding, some of the P/CVE interventions to date have not been well targeted nor comprehensive and have ignored the structural factors leading to new recruitment of ADF fighters.

The problem has been further compounded by limited awareness, low levels of vigilance⁵, and an obvious lack of information and understanding of how violent extremism (VE) takes hold amongst the broader population.

1.2 Our Solution: Bridges to Peace

In response to the intensification of ADF's offensive, UMYDF and the Kofi Annan Foundation, supported by the European Union, devised a strategy and activities to bolster community resilience against extremist violence. We adopted the project name: 'Bridges to Peace'.

UMYDF's track record in preventing and countering violent extremism in Uganda since 2011 and KAF's experience in supporting youth leadership in violence prevention in East Africa and South and Southeast Asia since 2015 served as solid foundations for the design of the Bridges to Peace project. We also incorporated the lessons and networks developed through the joint PVE action led by UMYDF and KAF in Kampala and Bugiri districts in 2020-2021.





What is Salafism?

Salafism is a reform branch movement within Sunni Islam. Salafism is the idea that the most authentic, pure, and true Islam is found in the lived example of the early, righteous generations of Muslims, known as the Salaf, who were closest in both time and proximity to the Prophet Muhammad. Those generations include the prophet Muhammad and his companions (the Sahabah), their successors (the Tabi'un) and the successors of the successors (the Tabi Tabi'in). Although Salafis share a common religious creed, they differ over their assessment of contemporary problems and thus how this creed should be applied.

While data on the exact number of Salafi in Uganda today is difficult to trace, those privy to this subject traced the roots of Salafism in Uganda to the 1970s and 1980s. While Salafism originated in the mid to late 19th Century as an intellectual movement at al-Azhar University in Cairo, its ideals and practices only started to permeate through the Ugandan Muslim community from the 1970s, primarily through Muslim youth that were returning from Middle East and North African countries like Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia where they had gone to advance their studies in Islam.

1 Program on Extremism, George Washington University (2021): The Islamic State in Congo.

2 Institute for Economics & Peace. Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, Sydney, March 2022. Available from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>

3 Further ADF attacks were perpetrated throughout the project period, including the burning of a secondary school in Kasese in June

2023, the murder of tourists and their guide in Queen Elizabeth National Park in October 2023, and the assault against the Kyabandara Parish in Kamwenge District in December 2023.

4 Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPEC) School of Law, Makerere University (2019): Human Rights Violations in Uganda.

5 <https://www.upf.go.ug/public-urged-to-be-more-vigilant-and-security-conscious>

A Masaka Anglican faith leader and a Salafi youth leader share a light moment at the Masaka Youth Inter-faith Exhibition

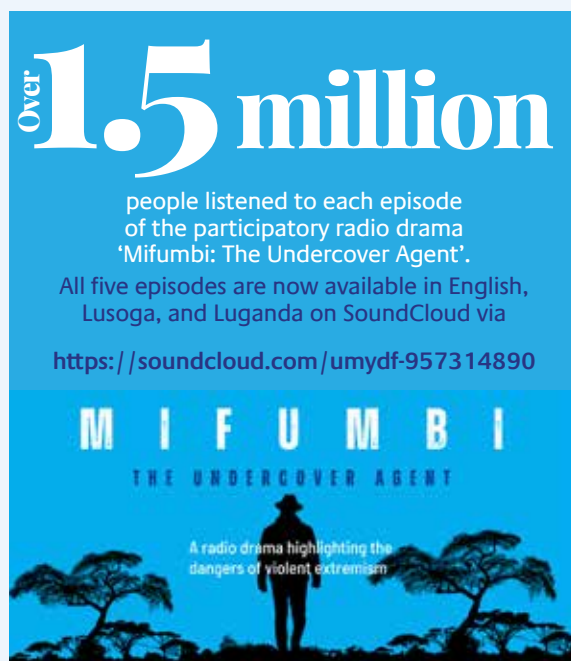
Key achievements

4
local CSOs
received sub-grants
to pilot P/CVE
actions



2,700
community
members
participated in

4 youth
interfaith
exhibitions
aiming at enhancing
inter-faith understanding
and demystifying religious
stereotypes



28
CIVIL SOCIETY
ACTORS
(CSOs) equipped with
knowledge and skills to
design and implement
effective P/CVE
interventions

20

local and national media actors trained on
the role of the media in preventing and
countering violent extremist narratives



Through
8
local screening events,

837
community
members

watched the recorded testimonies of
16 victims of terrorism and 15 returnees⁸
raising awareness about the
risks of joining violent extremist groups⁸

132
members of
at-risk communities
equipped in P/CVE
strategies

to enhance personal and community resilience
to violent extremist narratives, including

60
Salafi women
leaders

60
Salafi youth
leaders

12
association
leaders of
former ADF
members

⁸ The video stories are available for further sensitization via: <https://stories-of-returnees.umydf.org/> and <https://victims-stories.umydf.org/>

We also drew on the various VE studies conducted by UMYDF and other CSO partners; in particular, the BRICS Research on Violent Extremism in Eastern Uganda⁶, and UMYDF's research on Violent Extremism dynamics in Masaka Sub-region⁷. Lastly, UMYDF closely consulted local mobilisers in project localities and local leaders in determining certain elements such as topics and training methods.

Running over eighteen months, the Bridges to Peace project aimed to deliver tangible results against the following two objectives:

- **OUTREACH: INCREASE COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF THE THREAT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND KNOWLEDGE OF EFFECTIVE P/CVE STRATEGIES**

To achieve this, we set out to empower community leaders, media professionals, and civil society organisations through comprehensive training in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

Going beyond conventional approaches, the initiative also strived to raise awareness amongst the wider population. This involved the creation of a participatory radio drama featuring characters grappling with extremist violence and the publication of video testimonies from victims of violent extremism and from former members of the ADF.

Project activities were carried out in the Kampala, Lwengo, Masaka and Bugiri districts, but their impact was felt beyond these communities.

- **CAPACITY BUILDING: STRENGTHEN THE RESILIENCE OF AT-RISK GROUPS AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVES AND RECRUITMENT TACTICS EMPLOYED BY THE ADF.**

This was achieved by empowering Salafi individuals and communities to positively engage with other religious groups, take a leading role in finding creative and non-violent solutions to their challenges, and resist extremist narratives. The project also worked with former ADF combatants to support their peaceful reintegration into society.

1.3 Methodology for identifying lessons learnt

The lessons captured in this report are the result of a three-phase process, as follows:

- **DOCUMENTATION** – The findings of this report are based on the analysis of various project evaluation streams, information and feedback gathered during the first fifteen months of project implementation. They were captured during project inception meetings with state and non-state stakeholders, project activity proceedings, pre and post activity evaluations, pre and post training surveys, semi-structured interviews, quarterly project monitoring activities, field-monitoring visits, and informal reflection meetings with a wide range of project stakeholders and participants.

Training of local and national media actors in P/CVE



- **VALIDATION** – The documented lessons, challenges, and key recommendations that emerged from this process were then presented at a two day 'Lessons Learnt Workshop' between project partners and a section of project participants drawn from the Bridges to Peace project districts of Lwengo, Masaka, Kampala and Bugiri. They discussed the context and origin of each lesson, identified successful strategies, and offered specific recommendations to guide future programming.

- **PUBLISHING AND DISSEMINATING LESSONS LEARNT** – The present report is the result of the documentation and validation processes described above. Its content will be disseminated through bilateral meetings with national and local stakeholders engaged in P/CVE efforts, conferences at the national and regional levels, and via the partners' digital platforms (websites and social media).

A more comprehensive assessment of the project's impact will be provided by the external evaluation of the project that is underway. This will be made available on KAF's and UMYDF's websites.

6 Building Resilience in Civil Society (BRICS) (2019): Violent Extremism in Eastern Uganda. Available at: <https://umydf.org/images/documents/Violent%20Extremism%20in%20Eastern%20Uganda%20-%20Research%20Report.pdf>

7 Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (2021): Violent Extremism in Masaka Sub-region: Examining the Dynamics & Key Resilience Factors for Individuals and Communities.

2. Lessons learnt





A community member intervenes after the screening of victims' and returnees' video testimonies in Masaka City

Here we present and discuss the key lessons learnt by UMYDF and KAF and organised under the two main project objectives:

- 1) How to best increase the vigilance of the wider public towards the threat of violent extremism
- 2) How to make at-risk communities less vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists

We believe that other civil society organisations and state institutions may find these lessons relevant to their own violent extremism prevention efforts.

2.1 Outreach: Increasing community awareness of the threat of violent extremism and knowledge of effective P/CVE strategies

Overview of activities

The public has a limited awareness, low levels of vigilance⁹, and a lack of information and understanding of violent extremism (VE) and its evolving dynamics¹⁰. This undermines people's ability to protect themselves against its influence and fallout.

To increase understanding of the VE threat and build community capacity to curb it, the project worked with individuals and organisations with a clear influence on public opinion, i.e. media professionals, civil society organisations and community influencers. They were trained in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and the civil society organisations that took part in the training workshops were invited to design a project proposal on how they could mainstream P/CVE in their activities. The top four proposals received a seed grant to support their implementation.

The project also used radio drama and video stories to directly engage communities on P/CVE issues. The radio drama was broadcast on major radios in Lusoga and Luganda and aired live/debated during community gatherings organised by UMYDF in the four project districts.

The video stories of victims of violent extremism and of former ADF combatants were screened in local communities and exhibited online with the aim of heightening community awareness of the dangers of engaging in terrorist activities.

“This method [video testimonies] engages the person’s senses; they hear, and they see. It is much better than writing dictated words. The person is able to see what happened to the victims and the victims speak for themselves, so the issue affects you directly. You feel the person speaking to you. It shapes your resolve to fight against such terror acts lest you become like this person.”

– Participant in the video screening session in Lwengo district.

Salafi Youth leaders enjoy a light moment during a training on Youth Participation and Leadership in P/CVE



9 <https://www.upf.go.ug/public-urged-to-be-more-vigilant-and-security-conscious/>

10 Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (2021): Violent Extremism in Masaka Sub-region: Examining the Dynamics & Key Resilience Factors for Individuals and Communities



RESULTS EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS

The results of these activities far exceeded the project expectations¹¹. The project target was that 65 percent of CSOs engaged would have taken some form of action to mainstream P/CVE issues in their work, and that at least 50 percent of engaged media actors and credible influencers would have started utilising their platforms to contribute to efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism by 2024. In fact, 91 percent of the CSO participants engaged have implemented a P/CVE action; and 95 percent of the influencers engaged have used their platforms to contribute to P/CVE. They have also created awareness about VE through their platforms.

Participants create awareness about violent extremism

GOAL: CSOs mainstream P/CVE issues in their work.



GOAL: Influencers and media actors use their platforms to drive P/CVE campaigns.



As for the media professionals engaged in the project, none had ever taken any deliberate P/CVE actions or were aware of how their work could unknowingly end up advancing the agenda of violent extremists. Feedback obtained from seventeen of the twenty media actors through project monitoring activities shows that following the activities 88 percent have engaged in P/CVE work in different ways.

Increasing public vigilance: what did we learn about different audiences and project participants?

INFLUENCERS HAVE A POWERFUL RIPPLE EFFECT

Targeting influencers as P/CVE champions has a powerful ripple effect. The identity and reputation of the person delivering the P/CVE message has a significant impact on the acceptance and understanding of the message among the community groups influenced by that individual. The stronger the influence, the greater the impact of the message, enhancing its ability to transform opinions, behaviour, and overall engagement with P/CVE issues. Partners recognised there is rarely a single influencer whose power and acceptance reaches all community groups. Rather, each community group has its own unique set of influencers considered authentic and free from negative motives.



“When I came here, I realised that as media we have not been given sufficient training on how to cover VET events. I didn’t know that during our course of work, we can actually end up being used to push an agenda of violent extremists! I now understand issues of VE better. When I go out doing my work, I will be mindful of the feelings of the victims and the context behind my work.”

— Senior Multi-media Journalist, New Vision.

¹¹ The results were collected through monitoring and evaluation tools and activities throughout project implementation. A more comprehensive assessment of the project impact will be provided by the external evaluation of the project that is underway and that will be made available on KAF's and UMYDF's websites.



A community influencer poses for a photo following training

As the project targeted different groups – Salafi, former ADF members called “returnees”, and the general community – the partners carefully selected influencers who resonated with each group, educated them about the overall project and trained them to be CVE Champions. The influencers subsequently became powerful project advocates in their communities.

The training enabled them to effectively mobilise those they influence to participate in project activities. This also saved the team time and costs that would have been spent on mobilisation and project visibility within each target group.

Working with influencers also lowered project risks, especially when engaging with at-risk groups such as returnees. The influencers advised on how best to navigate risks and dynamics within each group, ensuring the project implementers were seen as partners in peace and development, rather than an external threat that needed to be neutralised.

► Story of Pastor Mugisha Abby, Community Influencer, Lwengo District:

FROM SPITTING FIRE TO A CHAMPION OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND SOCIAL COHESION

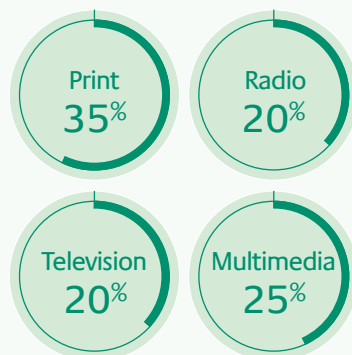
According to recent research on VE in Masaka sub-region, Lwengo has long been a hotbed of inter-religious tensions and sometimes violence. This is usually stirred by extreme elements among different religious sides that preach in an inciteful, disrespectful and divisive manner. Pastor Abby was one of the religious leaders who carried this banner, undermining the community cohesion needed to defeat violent extremist elements. He was so tough that even many people in his Church are still amazed by the change they see in him since participating in the influencer trainings. His approach to preaching has now drastically changed. He shows a respect for other people’s beliefs even if they are different from his own. As head of the Pentecostal Christian community in his region, he has also used this platform to encourage fellow pastors to embrace a similar approach. He has restructured religious organisation at his church school. Before, the school only catered for the Pentecostal Christians giving them space to worship. Inspired by the influencer training, he has appointed elders to lead and guide learners of other faiths in his school.

STORY

► IT IS VITAL TO REACH OUT TO MEDIA LEADERS, NOT ONLY JOURNALISTS

As the ‘controllers’ of media, editors and producers must be included in targeted outreach and programmes. Whilst the project was successful in registering and engaging a wide range of journalists drawn from print, broadcast, and digital media locally and nationally, the journalists’ feedback was that it’s crucial to reach out to the editors and producers. These individuals are ultimately responsible for what is published and decide which stories make it into the media. In the journalists’ view, their efforts to respect the dignity of the victims of terror attacks and to avoid inadvertently reinforcing terrorists’ narratives by instilling fear in their audience are much less effective; even futile, if the editors and producers are not aware of these risks and are not onboard.

Participants in the media actors' training:



▶ EXTEND REACH BY TRAINING GENERAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Training more general civil society organisations (CSOs) to mainstream P/CVE in their activities extends the reach of P/CVE programming. Rather than simply focusing on capacity strengthening for CSOs engaged in P/CVE specific programming, the Bridges to Peace Project extended its focus to general CSOs in hotspot localities whose focus and activities had an impact on vulnerability factors for VE such as education, community development, entrepreneurship training.

These CSOs were already unknowingly contributing to strengthening community resilience and reducing vulnerability to VE but didn't have P/CVE as an explicit stream in their programming. By training and educating them about VE dynamics and how to combat VE through their day-to-day work, the project ensured that even actions which aren't P/CVE specific, can reinforce effective P/CVE efforts. Teams can then also ensure their actions do not fuel the existing drivers and vulnerabilities that fuel violent extremism, e.g. by excluding from their programmes communities that are already marginalised.

Journalists engaged in a brainstorming session during a P/CVE training for media actors



A social media influencer at the influencer training in Kampala

▶ VICTIMS' TESTIMONIES ARE CRITICAL... BUT REQUIRE PROFESSIONAL AND COMPASSIONATE TECHNIQUES

A lack of structured rehabilitation for victims of terrorism negatively impacts their interest and readiness to support P/CVE efforts. Uganda, like many countries, lacks comprehensive legal frameworks and initiatives to care for victims of terrorism. As such, many victims including terror survivors remain traumatised, broken and hopeless. Even those affected as far back as the 2010 bombings by Al Shabaab in Kampala are still struggling to rebuild their lives on their own. The Bridges to Peace project sought their stories as a powerful and credible narrative that could help deter Ugandans tempted to engage in violent extremist activities. However, we found that some were still so broken they couldn't even compose themselves to speak. Others were apathetic and saw little value for their own healing.

By capturing their testimonies on video, the project not only provided them space to share their story and their demands, but it also gave recognition to their struggle. However, inviting the victims to tell their story proved to be a delicate endeavour for the team who was concerned about the risk of re-traumatisation due to the acute stress associated with their trauma. Consequently, the team constantly kept the 'Do no harm' principle in mind when engaging with victims.

▶ COMMUNITY-WIDE ENGAGEMENTS SHOULD BE SUPPLEMENTED WITH TARGETED OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Since the earliest days of Uganda's war against terror, it has been very evident that each community member's eyes and ears are critical weapons in the war against terrorism. For example, a potential terror disaster was averted on the 4th of May 2024, when a joint team of security operatives received a tip off from community

members and recovered four Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in Komamboga Parish, Kawempe Division, in Kampala.

Beyond general outreach through radio programmes and videos, community groups that face higher risks by virtue of their work and prevailing VE dynamics require specialised engagement. For example, when stories of victims of terrorism and returnees were screened in local communities, transporters such as Boda Boda riders and taxi operators in the audience felt they were more exposed to potential attacks and needed more specialised sensitization. Landlords can also be more exposed; explosives captured by security operatives are usually found in houses recently rented out without due diligence by their owners on the background of tenants.

**“I thank you for airing the radio drama in my community!
I resolve not to carry any luggage that I don’t know.”**

– A boda-boda cyclist.

An additional learning was that at-risk communities are not aware of the tactics and traps used by extremists, such as offering bursaries to parents to support their children’s education. This means they end up falling into these traps again and again. Specialised sensitization campaigns amongst at-risk groups are important in reducing this risk.

▶ ONCE EMPOWERED, PARTICIPANTS REQUIRE INITIAL COACHING AND MENTORING FROM PROJECT LEADERS

When different sections of communities are empowered to engage in P/CVE they often lack confidence and have many questions. As they begin their activities, for example, organising events that bring together people from different groups, they need mentoring and encouragement from the project team to reassure, coach and answer questions and address any concerns. The start of this engagement is a critical step and requires additional funding and staff management to ensure project teams can be physically present on the ground. This was something we had not factored in sufficiently.

▶ FEAR OF REPRISALS FROM SECURITY FORCES IS A BIG BARRIER TO COLLABORATION

Distrust between security operatives and communities undermines civilian-security collaboration on P/CVE. During the live radio shows for the Mifumbi radio



A security leader giving closing remarks at the Lwengo Community Story Screenings

drama and the screening of stories of victims and returnees, conversations emerged on what a community member could do when they came across some concerning information or suspicious objects. Many said they would want to inform the police but were fearful of being detained by security operatives for interrogation. Others blamed some security personnel for exposing their names to community members when they report sensitive information.

“The police are not our friends, therefore if you tell them anything, you will be their first suspect. People and police do not trust each other.”

– Young participant in the screening session at Katwe Skills Centre, Kampala.

▶ Increasing public vigilance: what did we learn about different tools and mediums?

▶ LEARNING AIDS ARE IMPORTANT BUT SHOULD BE CONCISE AND MEMORABLE

Learning aids (e.g. fact sheets and pocket handbooks) on P/CVE can improve education and retention for non-traditional P/CVE actors. Training workshops were used as a method of delivery for media practitioners, influencers and CSOs. Reference material like fact sheets were effective with participants as it reinforced their learning and understanding. The facilitators later shared training presentations and reference guides for further self-study¹².

However, all categories of participants found existing P/CVE publications loaded with too much information and lengthy to read. They requested

that in future, this information should be further simplified into key takeaways, frequently asked questions (FAQs) sheets, and pocket handbooks they can refer to easily, with local examples of application.

▶ RADIO IS A GREAT MEDIUM: COMBINE PARTICIPATORY AND LIVE AUDIO DRAMA

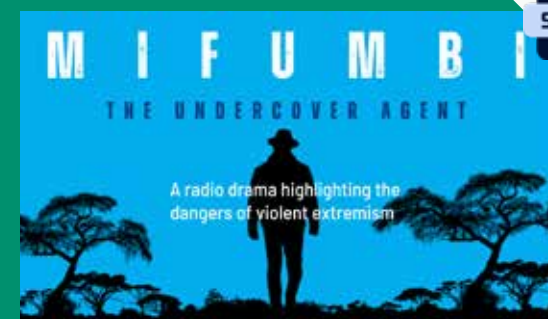
The accessibility, affordability, and far-reaching influence of radio, coupled with the entertaining and captivating power of drama, helps heighten community understanding and vigilance against violent extremism and terrorism. We found that a hybrid method combining participatory radio drama with live audio drama was more effective and easier to measure when using radio as a medium for P/CVE messaging.

Our participatory radio drama titled ‘Mifumbi: the undercover agent’ had five episodes on CBS 89.2 FM targeting central Uganda and on NBS 89.4 FM that targeted eastern Uganda. After each episode, community members could call in to discuss the episode. These discussions on the characters and issues at play, increased their appreciation of the complexities and dynamics of violent extremism.

Each episode had a replay aired in the same week at which time a P/CVE expert in the studio would engage with the audience’s feedback during the first airing and clarify issues when needed. On average, 1.57 million listeners were reached by each episode of the participatory radio drama over twenty days of broadcasting, massively exceeding the 3,200-target set at project inception.

▶ ‘Mifumbi: The Undercover Agent’ radio drama:

‘Mifumbi: The Undercover Agent’ is a 5-episode radio drama series unravelling the stories of relatable characters set in the heart of Uganda as they grapple with the realities of violent extremism. It is the story of Mayumba, a landlady who rented out one of her residential housing units to a man called Mifumbi. Mayumba’s world falls apart as her daughter, Nakato, secretly navigates a forbidden love affair with their mysterious tenant, Mifumbi. Little do they know, Mifumbi and his partner, Mawute, are plotting a terror attack, exploiting the vulnerabilities of an unsuspecting community. With every episode, the drama not only seeks to captivate but also to educate, by shedding light on the ripple effects of radicalisation on an entire community and on the need for collective vigilance and prevention.



¹² For example, the media actors were introduced to the UNDP PVE App and Counter Narratives Toolkit for East and West Africa, “Reporting about VE and P/CVE: Challenges for Journalists & Recommendations from practitioners” by the Radicalisation Awareness Network, and “Reporting on Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Guidelines for Journalists” by the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

CONVERSELY, RADIO IS CHALLENGING TO EVALUATE: BE PROACTIVE

It was challenging to evaluate the radio drama outcomes. The long-term impact on radio listeners is hard to track and there is no certainty that an individual listened to the drama consistently for all episodes. We devised a solution which entailed organizing a live session of the radio drama for a “control group”, comprised of a cross section of community members convened in different localities. The community members would then discuss each episode, carefully exploring the emerging issues and dynamics. UMYDF’s monitoring and evaluation team was then able to assess the effects of the radio drama by comparing people’s understanding of violent extremism and vigilance before and after the session.

THE TIMING OF P/CVE OUTREACH MATTERS

We learnt that timing is an important component regardless of the method. Timing impacts on a community’s level of interest and engagement with activities. We screened the stories of victims of terrorism and returnees towards the Christmas and New Year festive season as these are periods characterised by mass festivities that could potentially be targeted by terrorists. This was very well appreciated by both community and government actors and lauded as timely. It also increased community interest and engagement as relevance was easier to demonstrate. Other timely periods for P/CVE messaging could be a known peak season of recruitment by VE groups, after a government terror alert, or in the immediate aftermath of a terror attack.

SECURITY CONCERNS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED

Overall, programme activities that targeted the wider community presented much lower objective security risks compared to those that targeted returnees, and other at-risk groups. Nevertheless, UMYDF and KAF observed overt and covert security measures for the activities to reassure communities of their safety and awareness of ensuring adequate security and protection measures. There is a risk that P/CVE messaging is undermined if leaders preach vigilance yet deploy zero basic security measures at activity venues to ensure the safety of project participants.

2.2 Capacity building: strengthening the ability of at-risk communities to reject violent extremism

Overview of activities

For this project, we defined at-risk communities as groups and individuals more likely to be lured into violent extremist activities by their family and social networks. For example,

communities where a considerable number of members have family or friends actively engaged in VE activities, or who have taken part in VE activities in the past.

The project therefore engaged two categories of at-risk populations: ADF returnees or former fighters, and Salafi Muslim community members. This is because ADF has predominantly recruited from the Salafi Muslim circles as evidenced from recent studies on violent extremism in Eastern Uganda and Masaka Sub-region, a lot of ADF returnees identify as Salafi Community members, and many national and district level leaders of various Salafi factions are also returnees.

Numerous social, economic, political, and religious factors have merged in unpredictable ways to fuel voluntary and involuntary recruitment of Salafi community members into the ADF ranks. The ADF exploits existing economic inequalities together with the sense of injustice stemming from security force abuses, particularly experienced in state-led counter-terrorism operations, to lure people into violent extremism. The government is accused of excluding Muslims from development programmes and wanting to eliminate Muslims. By contrast, the ADF promise those who engage in Jihad an Islamic education, leadership positions, and an income. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for former ADF fighters leads to recidivism.

Target audience: Salafi women and youth and returnee leaders

To address some of these drivers of violent extremism, the Bridges to Peace project sought to strengthen the capacity of Salafi women and youth leaders, and returnee leaders in faith-based organising and development to find solutions to the challenges facing their communities.

This was carried out via five training workshops on peace and development strategies. The project facilitated eight discussions on faith-based organising and development between the Salafi participants and leaders from other religious groups, as well as four youth inter-faith exhibitions to break stereotypes and suspicions between Salafi and other faith groups and to promote inter-faith collaboration. Lastly, four dialogues between Salafi and local government leaders, and four village dialogues on returnees’ socio-economic reintegration were organised to build trust between local governments and Salafi communities on one hand, and between returnees, the wider community and local authorities on the other hand.

In addition, to further encourage the reintegration of former ADF members into society, a visit of returnees to Northern Uganda is underway, where they will meet with former combatants of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) who have become successful business leaders, civil society activists or political actors.

Results demonstrate attitude changes and empowerment

Story of a Salafi women leader, Lwengo district:

VIGILANCE SAVED TWO SALAFI WOMEN LEADERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM RECRUITERS

A trainee from Lwengo educated the women she leads on being vigilant about people offering scholarships and similar opportunities, warning them that these may be traps intended to get their children and family into terrorist organisations. She implored them to reach out in case they are ever contacted. Armed with this knowledge, the women in her community were not swayed when recruiters showed up offering bursaries in Kinoni.



Gathering of women leaders from different faiths, Bugiri district

The evaluation carried out before and after the activities with Salafi women and youth indicate a positive change in their attitudes, with both Salafi women and youth leaders showing increased support for non-violent approaches towards achieving socio-economic goals (100% of women respondents and 97% of youth respondents) and for addressing political grievances (73% of women leaders and 50% of youth leaders). These percentages met or exceeded the target of at least 50% we had set at the beginning of the project.

Positive changes in participants' attitude towards violence

GOAL: increase support amongst women and youth for non-violent approaches to achieving their economic wellbeing.



Women respondents



Youth respondents

GOAL: increase support amongst women and youth for non-violent ways to address their political grievances



Women respondents



Youth respondents

In addition, the training which focused on peacebuilding, civic participation, and socio-economic empowerment, boosted the women leaders' confidence, and improved their leadership skills:

- ▶ More than twenty women leaders have reported improved bookkeeping and management of their businesses, diversified income sources, and improved saving culture. Some have also been inspired to acquire new skills and explore new markets.
- ▶ Among these, seven have started new income generating projects after the training, such as chicken and goat rearing, crafts, or growing coffee.
- ▶ Fifteen joint cash-round ventures have been re-energised to allow women access to business capital without interest and to fulfil the religious rite of slaughtering on the day of Eid.
- ▶ Three joint investment ventures have been started and two more groups are still doing business research to establish which project to invest in. One group reached out to the faith leader from the Pentecostal church they met during the activity for further consultation on how to make chalk, Vaseline and paper bags.
- ▶ The activities have also reduced the women's fear of local authorities, as demonstrated by the enrolment of a woman leader from Bugiri in the local government development programme, and the initiative taken by the women in Bugiri and Masaka to register their group as associations to benefit from other government opportunities.

A Christian Youth leader in Bugiri District presents to Salafi Youth about her experience in youth development



Highlights amongst Salafi female leaders



- Women engaging with local authorities e.g. female leader engaged in local government development programme

Amongst the youth leaders' cohort, 97 percent of the participants who provided feedback demonstrated increased self-confidence, having understood they have power to bring about change, and have taken steps towards socioeconomic development through peaceful approaches.

- ▶ As a response to the lack of youth leadership structure and programmes within mosques, ten mosque-based youth committees have been formed or strengthened to serve the interests of youths holistically.
- ▶ At a national level, youth leaders from Jamuiyat Daawat Salafiyya have embarked on restructuring the Jamuiyyat Tabligh Daawat Salafiyya (JTDS) National Youth organisation and leadership structure to make it more inclusive and responsive to Salafi youth needs. This was because of inspiration from the youth leaders of other faiths whom they exchanged with.
- ▶ The training created a networking platform for the young leaders who started working together on several income generating projects.

▶ Twenty-nine youth economic development programmes have been initiated, including group saving schemes for joint investment, skills mapping to identify opportunities for apprenticeship, and mosque-savings on income.

▶ The Salafi youths have also demonstrated increased civic engagement. Some have volunteered to safeguard their communities. One young leader advised his mosque committee to undertake participatory action research on the issue of redundant youths and has successfully supported over twenty youths into employment. Others have offered to share not only what they learnt during the project engagements but also their own skills and have reached out to other community members irrespective of their faith to participate in voluntary community service commonly known as 'bulungi bwansi' or 'for the good of the country'.

Highlights amongst Salafi youth leaders



YOUTH LEADERS RESTRUCTURING
the Jamuiyyat Tabligh Daawat Salafiyya (JTDS)
National Youth organisation to make it more
responsive to their needs

INCREASED CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
e.g. youth leader advising mosque committee on
employment initiatives and voluntary community
service from participants

Project activities have helped promote cultural and religious tolerance. The four interfaith exhibitions attracted 2700 people from different faiths, exposed people to other religions and acted as safe spaces where misinformation and disinformation about each religion was addressed. It was estimated that at least 80 percent of exhibitors and visitors had never been to an interfaith exhibition or similar event before. More generally, the project fostered increased interaction between the Salafi leaders engaged in the project with people of other faiths especially through business assistance, mentorship and civic participation.

“As leaders you have helped us unite the people. I have never seen this; to come to a place and find Pentecostals, Muslims, Catholics and all other faiths present under one roof! It is the first time for me!! We have been bothered as leaders about how for instance an Anglican should hate a Muslim. But today has taught us that we can approach each other and welcome everyone no matter the faith they study and practice and not disgrace each other.”

– Kyazanga Town Council’s Speaker and Councillor who participated in the Interfaith Exhibition organised in Lwengo district.

► **Reducing at-risk communities’ vulnerability to recruitment: what did we learn about different audiences and project participants?**

► **SALAFI WOMEN AND YOUTH REQUIRE SUSTAINED AND TAILORED SUPPORT**

Salafi women and youth are critical groups to engage in P/CVE efforts but to maximise their potential, they need to be supported in their transformation process over the long run.

As groups that present specific sets of vulnerabilities and capacities, Salafi women and youth require sustained support to build their competence and confidence as anchors of peace and development within their community. The 2019 BRICS research on Violent Extremism in Eastern Uganda, and insights from documenting returnees’ stories as part of the Bridges to Peace Project both indicate that almost all women who joined the ADF did so because of the influence of a male relative in their life, usually their husband.

Through the Bridges to Peace monitoring of violent extremist activities, several sources pointed to the use by the ADF of marriage and reproduction on an “industrial scale” whereby women are exploited to give birth to a new generation of fighters.

These findings indicate that more women need to be enlisted and empowered as allies in strengthening the Salafi community’s defences for peace, while addressing the factors of vulnerability to VE within their community. These women have already proven themselves by their impressively quick grasp and application of the CVE strategies they learnt during the project, and by their ability to step up and raise children singlehandedly when men are absent due to death during VE activities or incarcerated after being convicted of engagement in VE activities.

“Salafi women have been hidden away in the kitchen, voiceless with no input in decision making. We have been treated as the very lowest people. For me, the training has given me confidence and shown me that I have power.”

– Young Salafi woman, Youth secretary, Gayaza Mosque; Masaka

However, as the Bridges to Peace project comes to a close, those engaged are requesting longer-term support as they don’t yet have the full confidence they need to venture out on their own, even though their interest and passion to effect change is high.

Salafi youth represent another important strategic group. The ADF has long exploited youth energy and discontent through targeted recruitment activities to strengthen their ranks. This has been evidenced by consecutive reports from UN expert groups on the DRC, as well as the stories of returnees documented during the project which showed how many of them were recruited during their youth. Whilst Salafi youths generally face the same challenges as other youth groups, they are more vulnerable for several reasons. Some have been orphaned as a result of their parents joining the ADF, others forced to leave school and head their families after their parents have been incarcerated for engagement in VE activities, whilst others still have parents actively engaged in ADF activities in the DRC.

Looking towards the future and based on the current demographics of the Salafi community i.e. – predominantly youthful- sustained strategic investment needs to be maintained to enable young people to better handle the challenges of today and contribute to reducing VE vulnerability factors in their communities.



STORY

▶ Rebuilding Salafi Youth Structures responsive to youth needs

After a re-awakening from the Salafi Youth Leaders Training for Kampala, the newly elected youth leaders of the Jamuiyyat Daawat Salafiyya – Youth wing under Sheikh Muhammad Yunus Kamoga determined to restructure their leadership and overall organisation country wide.

In light of what had been learnt, the objective was to make the structure more responsive to the needs of the Salafi youth. That this way, the structure would ensure the current leaders take proactive steps to address youth needs rather than wait for solutions without. The revision produced the following additional leadership positions; Information Communication & Civic Affairs Secretary, Social Development Secretary, as well as the Finance & Economic Development Secretary. The new structure is currently being rolled out to Salafi mosques across the country.

“The UMYDF trainers taught us in a way that gave us confidence that we can. Those days back I couldn’t even stand before a group of people with suggestions but now I can rally them to a common good. I can counsel fellow youths in case of community conflicts and misunderstandings with local leaders or the government; and calm them down in case they are reacting violently. I am confident enough to do this even with just a voice.”

– Salafi young leader, Masjid (Mosque) Jamia, Makindye division

▶ ENGAGING SALAFI MALES AND LEADERS IS CRUCIAL IN ACCELERATING WOMEN AND YOUTH P/CVE ACTION

Both women and youth Salafi participants emphasised that before engaging them in projects, government and civil society should first reach out to the men in their community to explain the objectives of their initiatives and seek their approval.

They emphasise that men wield much influence in their community and could frustrate their efforts to lead change if they misunderstand a project or perceive it as a threat to their power. Salafi male leaders were closely engaged at the inception of the project and its objectives were presented and explained to them. They were also involved in mobilizing project participants from their communities. Although this helped secure community buy-in for the project, and minimised resistance, more can be done to involve them directly in activities.





Salafi women leaders in Lwengo District engaged in a focus group discussion to map their community resources and assets

▶ LIMITED AWARENESS OF ADF'S LINKS WITH THEIR COMMUNITY MAKES SALAFI MEMBERS MORE VULNERABLE TO RECRUITMENT

Whilst a section of the Salafi community acknowledges the existence of ADF supporters within their circles, and others know relatives and friends that have engaged with the ADF in the past, another section of the community was genuinely surprised by this. For them, ADF is a manufactured problem created by the government to witch hunt Muslims. It is important for P/CVE actors to be fully aware of this phenomenon and not work under the assumption that all Salafi acknowledge and understand the active presence and challenge of VE within their community.

“I used to buy people’s ideas, but I am now keener; I investigate to validate the news and information. People came recruiting in my community, taking children under the guise of bursaries but I was aware after the skills you empowered us with. I did not fall prey.”

– Salafi women leader, Lwengo district.

▶ THE SALAFI'S UNCOORDINATED AND EXCLUSIVE SOCIAL ORGANISATION STRUCTURES CONTRIBUTE TO MARGINALISATION

Unlike other faith groups such as Anglicans, Roman Catholics, or Seven-day Adventists where churches are organised into formal and solid structures that recognise and cater to the needs of children, women, youth and other special interest groups, Salafi mosques are focused on religious teachings and the community lacks social organizing structures.

Where they exist, these structures are mostly dominated by elderly males with youth and women shut out. Youth and children are rarely represented even though they account for most of the population. Leadership is also fractured with intra-group wrangles and power struggles that sometimes lead to individuals being reported to the police as a way for the leaders to fight one another. There is no clear mechanism for electing or appointing leaders, and no system for accounting for community resources. P/CVE efforts can therefore play a role in strengthening the community’s capacities to deal with such challenges and uproot extremist elements.



Lwengo Salafi Youth Leaders drawing their Community Resilience Tree

“The culture of collective action among the women has not been there; I hope to encourage the women towards organizing so that we raise stronger collective voices. We congregate over 100 women at the mosque twice monthly, but we had no single economic empowerment program for them. Now with the new ideas I have, I am going back to start a saving scheme for them making use of the halal banking services already established in Masaka.”

– Salafi woman, Head of Dawah (Islamic teachings), Masaka District

▶ LOW LEVELS OF RELIGIOUS LITERACY MAKE IT EASY FOR EXTREMISTS TO MANIPULATE SALAFI MEMBERS

The majority of the Salafi and returnee leaders engaged in the project exhibited very low levels of Islamic religious literacy, as well as poor understanding of other religions. This could explain why the larger community can be easily manipulated to buy into mis-interpreted teachings of Islam. During the training workshops organised for Salafi women and youth, the project team made extensive use of the teachings and scriptures of Islam. This helped reinforce the validity and relevance of the social, economic, religious and political strategies presented to participants, demonstrating how their community can address their needs and grievances in a peaceful way.

▶ MANY RETURNEES STILL EXPERIENCE TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES – MAKING THEIR REINTEGRATION MORE CHALLENGING

The lack of a comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programme for returnees is a clear obstacle to their reinsertion into society. Returnees’ children are particularly affected by mental health disorders, because of their exposure to violence or the arrest of their parents. Providing access to mental health support services is critical for addressing these issues and supporting returnees’ overall well-being and successful reintegration.



► **Story of Igulu Manisuri, Community influencer, Bugiri District: GIVING AT-RISK CHILDREN A CHANCE AT FORMAL EDUCATION.**

Manisuri with the support of his father, the District Kadhi of Bugiri enrolled 140 at-risk children in his community school. These are composed of children of returnees, children who are former ADF combatants, and children whose parents disappeared into the ADF and have never resurfaced. He said he was inspired by the whole of society approach presented during the influencer training workshops to also make his small contribution toward safeguarding his community. He however asked UMYDF for support to design a complementary curriculum that he can mainstream in his school activities for the ideological transformation of the children.

► **INDISCRIMINATE ARRESTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES UNDERMINE TRUST BETWEEN SALAFI COMMUNITY, RETURNEES, AND GOVERNMENT AND NEGATIVELY IMPACTS THE PERCEPTION OF P/CVE PROGRAMMES**

The legacy and ongoing impact of indiscriminate arrest and human rights abuses including torture in the context of counter-terrorism operations and the lack of fair trials in many terror-related crimes, have reinforced feelings of social exclusion among the Salafi. In the dialogues organised between Salafi leaders, returnees and local authorities, the former highlighted how indiscriminate arrests, abuses and torture have weakened their sense of belonging and led them to feel like “refugees” in Uganda.

Some see the long detention periods without trial as proof that terrorism is not real, but an excuse used by the government to oppress Muslims. They also complained about the stigmatization that indiscriminate arrests have caused them in the eyes of the wider community where they live. This is compounded by the government not clearing their name even when they are found to be innocent.

The suspicion and mistrust between government authorities, Salafi and returnees was evident throughout the project with Salafi members and returnees displaying constant fear of being arrested. Participants shared how they purposely arrived late for project activities and kept close contact with colleagues arriving early to confirm they hadn’t seen any signs of police. Others would come early for activities and check the workshop premises for possible exit routes or would wait outside the compound for other participants to arrive before they settled in.

Such fear and suspicion significantly hinder the potential of establishing much needed allies for the government and civil society within the Salafi community. Such allies are instrumental in undermining support and sympathy for the ADF.

► **THE SALAFI AND RETURNEES IN GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES ARE SIDELINED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS’ LACK OF UNDERSTANDING, FUELLING THE NARRATIVES OF ADF RECRUITERS.**

In the dialogues organised between Salafi, returnees and local government leaders, a significant majority of

non-security district leaders noted that they had never heard of the existence of Salafi and returnees. As a result, and because their programmes are demand-driven, they had never attempted to reach them and to enrol them into their initiatives. Other local government officials thought that by reaching out through the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, all Muslims would be covered. This assumption is misleading because the Muslim community in Uganda is composed of numerous sects such as the Sunni, Shia Muslims and Ahmadiyyah, with different leadership structures. Lastly, others admitted they had heard of the Salafi but considered them dangerous and so deliberately avoided them.

Government socio-economic development programmes not adapted to the diversity of constituents reinforce the sense of marginalization fanned by the ADF. For instance, government’s loan schemes are insensitive to Muslim beliefs which prohibit the payment of interest. Those practices are perceived by the majority of Salafi and returnees as deliberate attempts to discriminate against them, resulting in their lack of interest in all government programmes.

► **Reducing at-risk communities’ vulnerability to recruitment – what did we learn about different tools and mediums?**

► **PEACEBUILDING & DEVELOPMENT-BASED APPROACHES TO P/CVE PROVIDE A STRATEGIC ENTRY POINT FOR ENGAGING AT-RISK COMMUNITIES ON P/CVE**

Using a “preventing and countering violent extremism” label with a community that is already stigmatised as having a violent ideology would likely alienate the Salafis and returnees. In the context of the Bridges to Peace project, the activities’ focus on empowering participants as actors of peace and development for

their community's resilience made at-risk communities more receptive and interested.

In Masaka, leaders remarked how their community had never been given such attention by an outsider let alone being recognised as prospective partners in advancing peace and socio-economic development. Another Salafi woman explained that she had expected for UMYDF to chastise them and blame them for supporting VE. A group of trainees from Lwengo explained how due to their fears that the training venue would be surrounded by heavy security, they had only garnered the courage to attend because they had been invited by their religious leaders.

▶ Story of a Salafi Women Leader, Bugiri District: LIGHTING THE SALAFI WOMEN'S PATH TO CIVIC PARTICIPATION

The woman reported how immediately after the training she realised that she also had a stake in government development resources, and that these programs didn't discriminate between Muslims and non-Muslims. Emboldened by the training, she decided to attend a session organised in her locality on the Parish Development Model (PDM) – a newly launched government development program. She said she had overheard people saying this money had interest and could not benefit Muslims. When she attended the government training, she had learnt that PDM funds had no interest in the first year someone received it and that if she repaid the money during this period, that was permitted for her as a Muslim. She applied and got a PDM loan of USD530 which she is using to recapitalise her business.



▶ ISLAMIC DOCTRINES ARE INSTRUMENTAL IN DEMYSTIFYING EXTREME RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES AND MOBILIZING AT-RISK GROUPS TO PLAY ACTIVE ROLES IN PEACE- BUILDING, FOSTERING DEVELOPMENT AND CONTRIBUTING TO PUBLIC LIFE

It is fundamental to back activities related to peace, development, civic participation, youth, or women empowerment with evidence derived from the Quran or Hadiths (the words, actions, or silent approvals of the Prophet). The project relied on knowledgeable Muslim scholars to compile and share Islamic evidence for every CVE strategy introduced to the Salafi and returnees. The enthusiastic reception to the strategies and the willingness and excitement to apply and share them is still highly present and expanding throughout the whole community today.

“A woman should also have a voice. For long we have thought that a woman should take a back seat; remain at the sidelines. But the facilitator has given examples of women in the history of Islam like Khadijah (the first wife of the Prophet) who had a significant voice and contribution to the advancement of Islam.”

– Salafi woman, Head of Dawah (Islamic teachings), Nakawa division.

▶ OBSERVING CULTURAL SENSITIVITY IS ESSENTIAL TO BUILDING TRUST WITH THE SALAFI AND RETURNEES

Awareness of the values, norms, and beliefs of Muslims accompanied by a willingness to adapt one's behaviour was another building block for trust, and winning buy-in for project CVE actions. Some of the elements employed by the project team included; setting up activity venues

with men and women sitting on separate sides, doing away with photos where participants observed that they were outside their religious beliefs, scheduling activity agendas in a way that didn't clash with Muslim prayer times, providing a space with the necessary amenities for participants to pray, not providing day meals to Muslim participants for activities that coincided with Ramadan and ensuring activity facilitators dressed modestly.

“We have learnt not to discriminate others; what we expected from the youth leaders of other faiths was different from what they expressed. I will never judge a book by its cover. You may discriminate them because you have not understood what they are about. I have learnt to think critically before acting on what has been brought before me and not to react with disdain towards those that come before me with different faiths, cultures and behaviours.”

– Salafi youth, Secretary, Masjid (Mosque) Kako, Masaka

▶ INTER-FAITH EXCHANGES BETWEEN SALAFI AND OTHER FAITH GROUPS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED BUT APPROACHED WITH CAUTION

Such interaction with individuals of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds is important for increasing awareness and strengthening social cohesion. However, as many Salafi have been socialised to hate non-Muslims, and see them as infidels, opening them to interaction with people of other faiths must be done in a tactful and planned manner to avoid creating conflict. Both sides must also consent to engaging in an activity that brings them together, before the event takes place.



Caesar Achellum, former Major General and 2nd in Command in the LRA addressing ADF returnees about his reintegration journey

The partners perceived inter-faith exchange as beneficial to exposing Salafi to alternative ideas in women and youth led organisation and development and crucial to forging new inter-faith partnerships that combat the divisive religious ideologies pushed by extremists. Some participants viewed this activity with great suspicion, others expressed how they couldn't stand "infidel women" addressing them on any matter. By seeking prior consent about the session from all participants, securing the top Salafi clerics' blessing of the activity, and clarifying the exact intentions of the exchange, the project team managed to address participants' reluctance and facilitate lasting inter-faith collaboration between Salafi and other groups.

▶ **USE THE "NEED TO KNOW RULE" TO AVOID STIGMATIZING RETURNEES**

The facilitation of dialogue between returnees and the wider community can contribute to their social reintegration. However, their past and returnee identity should not be exposed publicly to avoid increasing their isolation. Good practice is to inform key local authorities only, in coordination with the Amnesty Commission that is responsible for returnees' reintegration. For instance, if a child returnee is enrolled in a new school, the sub-county level Internal Security Officer and headteacher should be advised to monitor their progress, to increase the chances of the child staying in school. In the case of adult returnees, practitioners can advocate for their inclusion in socio-economic development programming without exposing their history.

WORKING WITH AT-RISK COMMUNITIES REQUIRES SERIOUS SECURITY PREPARATIONS

Salafi and returnees live in daily fear of arrest by government security operatives. Measures therefore needed to be taken to reassure participants that whilst the government approved the Bridges to Peace initiative the project team was fully independent with no links to the government.

There were also real risks of disruptions by violent extremists. The districts where the project was active are considered by the government as hotspots for ADF cells. Furthermore, because the group predominantly recruits from amongst the Salafi, the project team ran the risk of interacting with ADF sympathisers or even hardline violent extremists in disguise.

The group of returnees presented yet another risk. Some of them have left their children in the DRC and continue communicating with them. The project team was therefore concerned that information about the project could be passed on to ADF commanders and draw attention to the participants and staff. For all these reasons, before engaging with at-risk groups, practitioners need to have a solid risk management plan and revisit it across the project life cycle to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose.

2.3 Project Management

There were several key factors in project management, which were instrumental to the success of the project. We have highlighted the most important and relevant below:

P/CVE PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES MUST HAVE ROBUST MONITORING AND PROJECT FEEDBACK MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS

There is a significant amount of feedback and questions from participants during the project, particularly at the start of activity streams. As we have pointed out, participants who start to take steps to champion P/CVE in their communities, need a lot of encouragement and mentoring. The physical presence of project team members also ensures they aren't misrepresenting what they were taught.

The human and financial resource needs associated with these demands need to be factored into the design of an action. In the context of Bridges to Peace, the project had well financed activities, and quarterly based monitoring and evaluation activities, but lacked funds to engage more deeply when participants needed the team to be in the field to reinforce them during the early days of application, hence missing a great opportunity for learning.

THE NATURE OF VE REQUIRES FLEXIBLE AND DYNAMIC SCOPE MANAGEMENT

VE is a complex challenge with rapidly evolving dynamics. For example, while the team collected data on the project in the districts of Kampala, Lwengo, Masaka, and Bugiri, new information was pointing to the border districts namely Kasese and Kamwenge, emerging as new targets for attacks, and the West Nile increasingly become a region of concern. The team agreed that whilst it kept its sights on trends evolving around the country, it had to stick with its original scope, participant targets, numbers, and objectives. Otherwise, some incidents such as the 2023 attack on the Lhubiriha Secondary School in Kasese could easily tempt one to shift focus.

A government security leader counsels ADF Returnees during their Exchange and Learning Visit to Gulu City, Northern Uganda





► IT'S ESSENTIAL TO FULLY SUPPORT AND TRAIN STAFF IN AMBITIOUS AND COMPLEX PROJECTS

Bridges to Peace was a crisis response to the 2021 back-to-back ADF attacks in Uganda. The team chose to maximise their contribution to efforts to reduce Uganda's risk of attack by working with a broad spectrum of partners; influencers, media professionals, CSOs, victims of terrorism, Salafi community members, and former terrorist fighters. The activities were also ambitious and varied in scope.

To help staff better manage the risks associated with different activities, a safe space was created where sensitive matters would be discussed. Staff had refresher training on physical and digital security. Other covert and security activity had to be deployed to ensure staff had the peace of mind to work on the project. We also organised a number of internal workshops on deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration with experts to better equip staff in these domains.

Working with victims of terrorism and former terrorist fighters was also challenging for staff emotionally and mentally. Partners invested in quarterly group and individual counselling sessions designed to address the possible effects of mental distress amongst staff.

► RISK MANAGEMENT MUST BE ROBUST YET FLEXIBLE AND ADDRESS ISSUES BEYOND PHYSICAL SECURITY

The risks associated with the project and its activities have already been discussed in this report as well as some of the measures the team took to mitigate such risks. Good practice requires devising a detailed risk plan, committing to effective implementation and continual monitoring of the VE environment to ensure the plan remains fit for purpose. It also requires putting aside a realistic budget for risk mitigation.

Any action with a CVE element comes with serious risks to physical security, and the safeguarding of project staff, participants and other stakeholders requires real financial investment beyond verbal assurances. Our project funder appreciated this essential element which enabled us to ensure the partners worked in a safe space.

However, beyond the safety and security risks of a P/CVE action, there are other key risks that need to be considered such as the risk of project funds ending up in the hands of extremists, reputational risks, and environmental risks due to changing weather patterns that can cut off traditional access routes to project districts.

We ensured we had an updated certificate from the Financial Intelligence Authority, strove for transparency in project financial dealings, implemented a clear documentation of financial transactions, and ensured we met statutory financial obligations. This was also very helpful in minimising financial risk.

► THE HIGH-RISK NATURE OF P/CVE ACTIVITY REQUIRES EXTRA VIGILANCE AND WORK ON DATA PROTECTION AND PRIVACY

Other than national and donor requirements for the protection of private data, the unique security risks associated with P/CVE actions requires teams to have clear protocols to prevent security risks linked to data-sharing. Numerous safeguards were put in place such as classification of project information, with different staff categories allocated varied levels of access to sensitive project information, mechanisms for safe disposal of data, non-disclosure agreements with service providers, and data storage safeguards.

► COMMUNICATION AND PROJECT VISIBILITY MUST BE HANDLED CAREFULLY FOR THE SAME REASONS

Communication and visibility for a P/CVE action must be very strategic and secure. The team had to agree which project activities could be communicated externally and which ones to limit to internal circles. This was usually dependent on the risk classification of the project information in question. It is also important to bear in mind that whilst donors may have standard communication and visibility guidelines, some flexibility will be required if it is concluded that such communication and visibility may undermine the greater goals of the project.



3. Gaps and weaknesses *in Uganda's fight against violent extremism*

A community leader in Masaka City reacts to the Community Screening of stories of victims and returnees



Through the Bridges to Peace project and our interactions with different segments of society, we have identified several gaps and weaknesses that can significantly restrict the impact of Uganda's efforts to combat violent extremism.

▶ 3.1 Neglected groups and major mistrust

▶ THE SITUATION AND ROLE OF CHILDREN IN THE ADF IS OVERLOOKED

There is a significant trail of evidence including in the ADF's own propaganda videos indicating a long history of the group's exploitation of children for terrorist purposes. Selected NGOs currently supporting the Ugandan government's efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate returning ADF fighters in the context of the ongoing joint military operation between the Ugandan and Congolese defence forces have also indicated that over 80 percent of the returnees they work with are children under eighteen years. Yet there is no specialised and structured rehabilitation and reintegration programme to prevent child recruitment and exploitation by the ADF.

The neglected situation of children also has an impact on the reintegration of parents. In fact, a significant gap remains in dealing with returnees who left their children behind in ADF battle zones, and those who took their children born in the ADF camps with them. For those who left children in the battlefield, any attempt to communicate with them is seen by the government agencies as evidence of their lack of commitment to completely disengage from VE activities.

As for parents (mainly women) who escaped from the ADF camps with children born there, the ADF continues to send agents demanding they return their children who are considered as belonging to the ADF. This places parents in an impossible situation as they don't want to return to the bush but aren't prepared to give up on their children. This dilemma is a real obstacle to some returnees' disengagement from the ADF.

▶ DEEP MISTRUST AFFECTING SALAFI COMMUNITIES AND THE GOVERNMENT

Human rights violations perpetrated by some security and defence forces against Salafi in the context of counter-terrorism operations have instilled deep fear in this conservative Muslim community and fuelled the ADF's narrative that Muslims are oppressed by the government.

▶ VICTIMS OF TERRORISM LACK THE EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION REQUIRED FOR HEALING AND REBUILDING THEIR LIVES

The sixteen victims of terror attacks interviewed for the Bridges to Peace's "community stories" videos emphasised the lack of long-term support from the government, beyond the immediate medical care given by public hospitals and the cash donation of around USD 5000 some received from the President immediately after the attack. The injuries and trauma they sustained have had lasting effects on their capacity to work, socialise and support their family. As such there is a need for more comprehensive and sustained support to enable their healing, compensation and justice. An annual commemoration of all victims of terrorism could be another way to bring recognition to their sufferings and raise people's awareness about the fact that terrorism affects people from all social, economic and religious backgrounds.

▶ 3.2 Structural, policy and cultural weaknesses

▶ A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT TECHNICAL AND DEVELOPMENT LEADERS OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY LEAD

In the absence of donor aid and civil society action, local government remains the sole actor most capable of helping to change the conditions conducive to violent extremism in communities. Yet whilst extremists continue to prey on vulnerable, underserved, and often despised communities, technical and development leaders at the local government level aren't even aware these communities exist.





Regional and district security leaders of Masaka after attending a village dialogue with ADF returnees

Another challenge – as revealed during the dialogues organised between Salafi and local authorities – is that local government services are demand driven. As a result, if a community does not reach out to them, they would not know this community needs their services. Such a gap reinforces the sense of marginalization by state institutions felt by the Salafi community and could potentially drive other marginalised groups into the hands of ADF recruiters.

LEGAL AND POLICY ISSUES UNDERMINE NATIONAL COORDINATION ON P/CVE

A National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has been established with a strategy in place, but it lacks a completed legal and policy framework that would grant it autonomy. This absence hinders its ability to effectively coordinate and address challenges stemming from implementing P/CVE. For example, in the framework of Bridges to Peace, the project partners needed strategic guidance from government on a mass communication activity they were about to undertake, but it wasn't clear with who to engage with at the NCTC.

LIMITED LEARNING BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CSOS ON P/CVE ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND THE WIDER REGION

Whilst evidence of extremist group compositions, movements and financial trails continue to be trans-national in nature, state and non-state actors working on the subject rarely share their experiences and lessons with one another. Such exchanges would enhance the cooperation between all P/CVE actors and increase the impact of their efforts.

4. Recommendations





A community member in Rubaga Division, Kampala City makes a submission at a sensitization event where videos of victims of terrorism and returnees were screened

Based on the lessons drawn from the Bridges to Peace project, we have identified key recommendations for Uganda's state institutions, civil society organisations and development partners that can help fill existing gaps in the country's P/CVE efforts.

▶ **4.1. To Uganda's state institutions, civil society organisations and development partners:**

▶ **MAKE SURE YOUR SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROGRAMMES DO NOT LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND**

Since real and perceived marginalization is a key driver of violent extremism, it is of utmost importance that such programmes benefit citizens of all ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. We should not wait for groups to take the path of violence before actively including them and ensuring their equal access to opportunities. In that regard, the Annual Report on the State of Equal Opportunities in Uganda could serve all development stakeholders to track where discriminations lie and what it means for P/CVE.

▶ **MAKE SURE YOUR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES ARE P/CVE CONDUCTIVE**

Even programmes that are not focused on violence prevention but aim to improve health, education, job creation, etc. need to be designed and implemented in a way that does not worsen existing vulnerability factors for violent extremism in Uganda. This can be done by selecting participants from among the most VE at-risk communities in an area, targeting locations with persons that perceive themselves to be marginalised, taking affirmative action or by ensuring that long-term goals and benefits of your intervention contribute to changing the climate in which violent extremism flourishes.

▶ **4.2. To Uganda's State Institutions:**

▶ **OPERATIONALISE THE NATIONAL COUNTER-TERRORISM CENTRE**

Fast tracking the formulation of a legal policy framework for the operationalisation and financing of the National Counter-terrorism Centre will improve the coordination between P/CVET actors and make programmes more impactful. Additionally, the National Counter-terrorism Centre should include a representative of the Equal Opportunities Commission. Because it is real and perceived discrimination that continues to play into the ADF's recruitment narratives, the Equal Opportunities Commission should be considered as one of the key actors that can contribute to Uganda's P/CVE efforts.

▶ **PROACTIVELY INFORM MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES ABOUT GOVERNMENT-LED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

To address perceptions of marginalisation that push some communities into VE, government ministries, departments, agencies, and local government actors should adopt sensitization and monitoring mechanisms that ensure returnees, Salafi community, and other marginalised, despised and underserved communities are aware of government programmes and receive adequate support to participate in political, social and economic processes.

▶ **DO NOT OVERLOOK THE LONG-TERM NEEDS OF VICTIMS OF TERRORISM**

The current anti-terrorism legislation needs to be amended to recognise and provide for holistic and comprehensive rehabilitation of victims of terrorism, whose physical and psychological injuries have long-term effects on their social, professional and economic situation. Investing in mental healthcare and victim's economic empowerment is the only solution to addressing the stress, depression and trauma affecting victims and

survivors of terrorism – thus opening channels for meaningful healing and reconciliation.

▶ **ADOPT A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO THE REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE ADF, WITH A SPECIFIC FOCUS ON CHILDREN**

Assessment tools used by the government to track the return of former ADF members need to be reviewed so they can capture the issue of returnees who came back with ADF children and those who left children behind. Mechanisms should then be developed for families to be reunited through proper channels monitored by government, rehabilitated, and reintegrated. In addition, the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development should put in place specialised centres to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnee children. The current situation is not conducive to the reintegration of those children into society as, after having been captured, they are left by security agencies with community members that are not prepared – sometimes unwilling - to receive them.

▶ **CONTROL THE SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO CHILDREN**

The Ministry of Education and Sports should vet and regulate all scholarship opportunities, including theological scholarship opportunities, offered by individuals to Salafi communities. The District Education Officers should also be equipped to guide communities on how to determine a credible scholarship from a fake one that could potentially lead children into extremist traps.

▶ **ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES PERPETRATED DURING COUNTER-TERRORISM OPERATIONS AS A KEY FACTOR THAT DRIVES PEOPLE INTO THE HANDS OF RECRUITERS**

Government should continue to educate security officers at all levels on the rule of law and human rights in the context of counter terrorism (CT) operations. Our engagement with both returnees and Salafi communities

show that no factor has influenced their members to join and support the ADF more than the arbitrary arrests, long detentions without trial, and torture in ungazetted detention facilities where some security officers even abuse symbols of Islam and religious artefacts.

Such practices and behaviours only serve to undermine Uganda's attempts to combat violent extremism. In parallel, mechanisms for redress through the Human Rights Commission should be strengthened for individuals arrested arbitrarily, unlawfully detained and tortured in the context of counter-terrorism operations. Participants in Bridges to Peace who have suffered such abuses recommend redress through rehabilitation, compensation, official acknowledgement of the wrong and of people's innocence, and formal apologies in the presence of community members.

▶ **4.3. To civil society organisations engaged in P/CVE efforts:**

▶ **USE ART AND COMMUNICATION TO ENGAGE THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN PVE EFFORTS**

As part of Bridges to Peace, the participatory radio drama and video testimonies of victims of terrorism and of the former ADF members proved powerful in raising community interest in the topic of violent extremism. Using edutainment can help demystify the complex topic of VE and how to prevent it amongst local communities.

▶ **INVEST IN TRUST BUILDING ACTIVITIES WITH GOVERNMENT ACTORS IN THE FIELD OF P/CVE**

VE remains a sensitive security issue for the government, making it sceptical of any non-state actor that may wish to contribute to P/CVE. Civil society therefore must be intentional about informing relevant government agencies about the objectives and results of their P/CVE initiatives, seek collaboration and build trust with them over time.



Ms. Jolly Okot of Wend Africa addressing returnees outside her premises in Gulu

FACILITATE EXCHANGES BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS FROM DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS

Creating platforms for such exchanges will help demystify stereotypes that fuel extremism and promote greater understanding and social cohesion.

4.4 To civil society organisations working with Salafi communities:

EMPOWER SALAFI COMMUNITIES TO TAKE THE LEAD IN DEVISING THEIR OWN SOLUTIONS

By building new social, economic and governance structures that embed CVE strategies in their day-to-day organisation, and leadership. Key VE drivers within the community such as human rights abuse, dysfunctional family structures, low levels of education, high levels of unemployment, social discrimination, intra-Muslim wrangles, are systemic and have been reinforced by the group's decades-long battles with security actors in the context of CT operations. They will take time to address, and to address them decisively, those most concerned need to own the problem and be in the driving seat of working out solutions.

ENCOURAGE SALAFI RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO SCRUTINISE PROPOSALS FOR THE BUILDING OF NEW MOSQUES

Civil society organisations working with Salafi Amirs should raise their awareness about the need to introduce an accreditation system for people and organisations seeking to build new mosques in their areas of jurisdiction. Since private donors that build mosques often come from Gulf States, Arab diplomatic missions should screen these donors, develop standards that private donors should follow, and ensure their aid does not perpetuate conditions that permit VE to thrive.

REAWAKEN EFFORTS TO STANDARDISE ISLAMIC THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AT BOTH MOSQUE LEVEL AND WITHIN ISLAMIC THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

Such standardization could include a curriculum development centre, standard curriculums that are tolerant towards diverse points of view and respond to the holistic

development of a person, a central examinations board, teacher training school, and teacher training curricular. For example, in the Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh Day Adventist Communities, what should be taught to different religious community members in a bible study group is gazetted and trainers or junior leaders cannot just come up with their own stories.

4.5. To donors and development partners:

FACILITATE DIALOGUE AND COORDINATION BETWEEN ALL ACTORS – FROM STATE INSTITUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS – ENGAGED IN P/CVE

Through their regular contacts with the government and civil society, development partners can support the building of trust and collaboration between them for more impactful P/CVE efforts. They can also encourage the sharing of knowledge and best practices between the various stakeholders working to prevent violence in Uganda, as well as in the wider region.

TARGET MARGINALISED, DESPISED GROUPS THAT ARE VULNERABLE TO VE RECRUITMENT IN ALL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

By making sure that the communities on the margins of society benefit from their development and humanitarian actions, donors' interventions can indirectly contribute to addressing the root causes of violent extremism. This way, even when donor priorities move away from P/CVE, the problem of violent extremism will continue to be addressed.

MAKE DONOR SUPPORT FOR P/CVE LONGER-TERM

P/CVE efforts require changes in attitudes, behaviours and relationships. It is only through long-term investment that we can uphold the positive impact of P/CVE initiatives on at-risk groups. Such long-term changes are hardly compatible with the short duration of the project cycle and funding.





Winners of the pitching competition organized for vulnerable youth by Kisoboka Africa, one of the CSOs trained by the project



5. Appendices

Community members and leaders from Masaka participating in the screening of victims and returnees stories



5.1. Abbreviations



ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRR	Deradicalisation Rehabilitation Reintegration
EU	European Union
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
IEDs	Improvised Explosive Devices
ISCAP	Islamic State Central Africa Province
KAF	Kofi Annan Foundation
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
NCTC	National Counter-Terrorism Center
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
P/CVE	Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism
P/CVET	Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
UHRC	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UPDF	Uganda People's Defense Forces
UMYDF	Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme
VE	Violent Extremism

5.2. Glossary of key concepts

Violent Extremism	Violent extremism refers to advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives. – USAID
Violent Extremist	Someone who promotes, supports, facilitates or commits acts of violence to achieve ideological, religious, political goals or social change.
Terrorism	Activities with the aim of "seriously intimidating a population, or; unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or; seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation." Activities that may be deemed terrorist under this framework include attacks on people resulting in death, kidnapping or hostage taking and extensive destruction to a government or public facility. – EU Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism (2002)
Ideology	A set of beliefs that justify and mandate certain behaviors. Those beliefs are regarded as absolute, and the behaviors are seen as serving a meaningful cause. – Randy Borum, Psychology of Terrorism.
At-risk	At-risk individuals are those who are susceptible to radicalisation and/or recruitment by violent extremist groups due to macro-structural factors, personal situations, and/or social network ties.
Narrative	A spoken, written or visual account of events or experiences, whether fictional or non-fictional.
Radicalization	The process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme and violent political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo, contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice.
Recruitment	An action where a violent extremist recruiter enrolls/enlists an individual or group of persons they have radicalised to participate in violent extremist activities.

Preventing Violent Extremism	<p>Prevention of Violent Extremism is an approach to dealing with violent extremism that encompasses strategies designed to address the underlying causes of Violent Extremism and undermine community attraction to, and support for Violent Extremist Movements.</p> <p>The goal of prevention efforts is to avert the threat of violent extremism by addressing the broad range of political, social, economic, and historical forces or grievances that can create and reinforce the conditions for violent extremism.</p>
Resilience	<p>Resilience may be defined as the ability of an individual or community to adapt and bounce back from traumatic violent extremist activities including but not limited to attacks, or the ability to resist the appeal of violent extremist ideologies.</p>
Countering Violent Extremism	<p>Countering Violent Extremism is an approach to dealing with violent extremism that encompasses policies and actions designed to neutralise existing efforts by violent extremists to radicalise, recruit, and mobilise followers to violence. It is focused on countering existing or ongoing violent extremist activities.</p>
Counter Terrorism	<p>This is used to refer to military operations as well as the adoption of legislative and policing frameworks to control, repress and track terrorist activities.</p>
Disengagement	<p>A social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in violent extremism is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity. Disengagement involves a change in behaviour (renouncing the use of violence) rather than a change in fundamental beliefs. So, it doesn't necessarily involve the abandonment of extremist ideology. – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)</p>
Deradicalization	<p>The process of changing the belief system, rejecting extremist ideology, and embracing mainstream values. Deradicalization refers primarily to a cognitive rejection of certain values, attitudes and views—in other words, a change of mind. It implies a cognitive shift, i.e. a fundamental change in understanding, resulting from activities intended to help individuals to renounce radical or extreme ideas, beliefs and groups. – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)</p>
Rehabilitation	<p>Rehabilitation is a process of assessment, treatment and management by which formerly radicalised individuals, violent extremists, and their families are supported to achieve their maximum potential for physical, cognitive, social and psychological function, participation in society and quality of living.</p>
Reintegration	<p>Reintegration is the process of successfully transitioning formerly radicalised individuals and violent extremists back into the wider community following the end of their rehabilitation out of a prison setting or after serving their prison sentences.</p>

A Catholic leader addresses Salafi Women leaders on her community's experience in women organising and development



TACKLING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN UGANDA:

LESSONS LEARNT FROM A COMMUNITY RESILIENCE APPROACH



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