

# Effects of National Government Administration Soft Approaches on Countering Violent Extremism in Garissa County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** The threat of violent extremist groups across the globe cannot be ignored as it is a multi-national problem. Appropriate response strategies need to be put in place by governments and regional economic blocks to mitigate the potential threats within the framework of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). Research findings have revealed that, there is limited documented research done on the effectiveness of the CVE strategies being employed by these parties in countering the terrorism menace. Further, it reveals lack of a single consensus pathway to violent extremism, which in turn has proven complex especially in designing best practices for CVE in Kenya. Kenya is continuously under the threat of Al-Shabaab terrorist organization which has claimed attacks within the Kenyan boundaries. This study, therefore, sought to explore the success of national government use of soft approaches and the mitigation measures to make it achieve its objectives of ensuring a secure environment to her citizens. The study used class theory of terrorism and the rational choice theory to provide the necessary theoretical background. Descriptive research methodology was employed for this study and the respondents were drawn from the national government officers in Garissa County. The research reached out to 44 respondents from the national government, Garissa County. Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was used to acquire required data. Collected information underwent thorough cleaning, editing, and thematic grouping for qualitative analysis. Key finding from the study showed that Life skill trainings enhance CVE programmes and are very important interventions for reducing repetition and radicalization to violent extremism among children and youth offenders in Kenya to improve safety and security. Community engagement initiatives have created safe, mentored spaces for individuals to freely express themselves and challenge one another's beliefs. The study also underlined the greater role played by media in the fight against radicalization and VE. The study concludes that government should embrace partnership across board, put in place soft approaches, conduct threat analysis so as to adopt right strategies and also, address root causes of VE. Key recommendations include: Partnership for VE mitigation, Strengthening the capacity of institutions involved in CVE, Identification and addressing the local pull and push factors and addressing grievances that may lead to radicalization and recruitment.

**Keywords:** Soft Approaches, Extremism, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), Radicalisation, Community Engagement

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## 1. Introduction

Terrorism remains a major factor posing direct threats to the national security, stability, and democracies across many nations around the world [25, 24, 47]. Prevention and mitigation of both domestic and international terrorism require a multifaceted approach especially in managing CVE

initiatives [6, 8, 48]. The ever-increasing threat and emergence of violent extremist groups across the globe including the West Africa and Horn of Africa regions had led to increase in response strategies put in place by governments and regional economic blocs to mitigate terrorism threats, by adopting soft power initiatives [7, 42]. Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) today continues to be the center stage in

the global politics especially now, that modern technology presents the opportunity for more deadly weapons that can be used against humanity [15]. Magogo stressed on the importance of CVE initiatives terming them fundamental necessities for both human and national security, and in a time that nations were still struggling with other already existing runaway crimes such as robbery, criminal gangs amongst others which tend to be mutually reinforcing [27].

The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) report of 2020 indicated that terrorism activities across the world have been on the rise and termed this as a global concern [14, 17]. Terrorism footprints can be seen across all continents with groups such as Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS) spreading to more than 15 countries [13, 27, 40]. Further, Boko Haram, a group originally from Nigeria have continued to spread to more countries including Chad, Cameroon, and Niger [36, 46]. The report by UNHCR further states that countries in Europe such as Türkiye, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States of America (USA) were also feeling the heat from the extremist groups [37, 46]. In the Asia region, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, India, and Pakistan have played host to groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda that are based on jihadist ideologies. That had brought a misjudged narrative against the whole of Islamic religion [51].

Africa had also been at the receiving end of terror attacks by the radical groups with registered increased attacks, documented in the last few decades [9, 27]. While ISIS and al-Qaeda have been in existence for long, there have been emergence of local militia groups such as Boko Haram and Al Shabaab in the West African region and the Horn of Africa respectively. Mbiyozo in a policy brief for the institute of security studies, noted that Boko Haram had claimed responsibilities for about 20,000 deaths and displaced about 2.6 million people in the Chad basin countries [29]. In the East African region likewise, Al-Shabaab have claimed responsibilities on terror attacks in Kenya including the Garissa university attack that claimed 148 students' lives, the Dusit hotel suicidal bombing that killed 14 people and the Westgate mall attack that saw 67 lives taken [11, 33]. Additionally, Al-Shabab continue to reign havoc on the Kenyan counties near the international border between Kenya and Somalia.

The great horn of Africa, an area with rich culture and religious diversity, had in the past decade encountered low human security and rising social-economic inequalities [19]. This provided good grounds for radicalization. Al-Shabaab originated from Somalia following its political instabilities [20]. Since its emergence in 2005 as a small insurgent group, Al-Shabaab has grown to become a transnational actor responsible for terror attacks across the wider Eastern-African region with numerous attacks in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda [11].

The rise in extremism cases in the region has led governments heighten their CVE initiatives [2, 3]. Kenya for instance, had been in the forefront in adopting and initiating CVE programmes with the intention of slowing and probably

reversing the spread of armed extremist groups [35]. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in collaboration with Georgetown University conducted a community perception of violent extremism in four urban areas of Eastleigh, Garissa, Majengo and Mombasa in Kenya. According to the IJR study, the community felt that they were the direct targets for recruitments by the Al-Shabaab, and equally by the CVE programmes initiated by the Kenyan government and its partners. The residents of Garissa went further and confirmed that, they perceived the Al-Shabaab as the main security threat in their region [20].

Terrorism presents serious threat to security within the Northeastern part of the country especially in Garissa County. GoK and partners had put a lot of efforts in responding to terrorism threat but still a lot more is needed [16]. There was still no documented research that had been done on the effectiveness of the CVE strategies being employed by those parties in countering the terrorism menace in Garissa County [43]. Holmer, et al., confirms that there was a shortage of counter-terrorism literature [18]. Research findings revealed lack of a single consensus path to violent extremism, which in turn had proven complex especially in designing best practices in CVE in Kenya.

Organizations like Al-Shabaab evidently exploit professed historic, social, and political injustices and hold on misinterpretations of Islamic writings to base their propaganda. Kenya have embraced softer, community-driven approaches of countering violent extremism to complement the hard-core security measures that characterize Counterterrorism. In order to combat structural marginalization, the breakdown of family and community structures, the growth of criminal gangs, youth unemployment and corruption, violations of human rights, individual and collective trauma, and other factors that combine in various ways to foster the spread of extreme ideologies, Kenya is adopting soft and community-driven approaches. This was and still is prominent among the susceptible youth population [27].

Several research on terrorists' activities have been carried out and available data revealed that previous studies focused on aspects such as the geographies of terror and on topics such as social cohesion, tourism, foreign policy, investment, and economic cost. However, there appears to be a lack of documented research on the soft approaches adopted by national government and security agencies in countering violent extremism particularly in Kenya. More specifically, there isn't much research focusing on the effects of soft approaches in countering violent extremism in Garissa County. The question then begs for an evaluation of the approaches applied in CVE in the region and their effectiveness. This study, therefore, sought to determine the national government soft approaches and Countering Violent Extremism initiatives effectiveness in deterring not only the spread but also the influence of violent extremist ideologies towards terrorist activities within Garissa County.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

Over years terrorism has been studied based on a variety of theoretical understandings. Popular theories that guide empirical research on terrorism include rational choice, psychological, mainstream, and critical approaches [4, 6]. This study was guided by Personal Construct Theory of terrorism and the Rational Choice Theory. Kelly looked at individual construct system as way of people developing personal constructs about how the world works and then using such constructs to interpret their observations and experiences [23]. According to Kelly, suppose one does not know what troubles a person, he may ask the person and he may respond [23]. Spinzak et al., further build on this theory by discovering violent extremism and supposedly remarked that, to find out what leads a person on the path of extremism the best way is to ask them [40].

According to Personal Construct Theory (PCT), the core of interpersonal connections is sociality, which involves comprehending the other person's construction processes and essentially seeking to see the world through his or her eyes lenses. In a similar vein, Kelly agreed with the psychologist that it was important to avoid having a "critical attitude" toward other people and to accept their point of view as true, even if one does not agree with it [23]. Even the most self-destructive decisions could be seen as an individual's attempts to predict the future or to avoid having their conceptions of reality invalidated, which would result in anxiety and a sense of threat [49]. For example, some people decide to commit suicide because their lives were so chaotic that there was no other way out [34]. The notions of PCT had been applied in the creation of examples of severe violence, including killing, albeit that do not suggest that such choices and actions were to be justified [50]. According to Personal Construct Theory (PCT), the core of interpersonal connections is sociality, which involves comprehending the other person's construction processes and essentially seeking to see the world through his or her eyes lenses.

The second theory that informed this study was the Rational Choice Theory. Dictates that, an individual makes decisions consciously and rationally and thus, makes calculated moves towards a strategic course of action and for the attainment of a sociopolitical objective [31, 39, 38]. The theory claims that to be a terrorist, an individual makes analysis on the cost vs benefit and as such make decisions based on expected returns [31, 38]. The mental picture painted in a terrorist is, therefore, very strong as to have the will to risk life and commit an act of terrorism. Further, this theory suggests that, for a terrorist you have very few choices. Hence, terrorists exhibit their behaviors based on the analysis of benefits, costs, and expectations that perpetrators may embrace [38].

### 2.2. Empirical Review

A UN counter terrorism strategy (A/RES/60/288), listed four pillars of counter terrorism which included issues

pertaining to addressing conditions promoting the spread of terrorism, enhancing measures of prevention, and combating terrorism, capacity building and strengthening of the UN role on CVE [45]. The strategy called for measures that ensures respecting of human rights for all and the rule of law as key ingredients of fighting terrorism. The UN strategy, however, failed to address the issue of ideological change especially the development of a positive attitude change to the subjects and the community and yet that is the engine that drives terrorism [45]. These pillars informed the backing for use of soft power instead of coercive actions in the fight against terrorism.

Lindekilde in the study 'assessing the effectiveness of counter radicalization policies in the Northwestern Europe', highlighted that, identification of the perfect terrorist profile was difficult. Further, the social and demographic factors played a critical role in studying exactly how somebody or group migrates from non-violent to extremely violent individuals [26]. The study further highlighted community engagement initiatives should have a clear distinction of the people considered at risk from turning to violent extremism themselves or might be targeted as they could play a role in influencing others' choices. That was critical in the design of the initiatives in line with the respective targeted group and desired outcome. Additionally, initiatives reaching out to the wider community to include people living in the endangered areas, people in neighboring areas and people at risk of violent extremist activities either locally, nationally, or abroad was important [26]. The study further called for integrating CVE strategies both nationally and internationally. Lindekilde underlined the importance of engaging civil society organizations, private sector, non-governmental operatives, and faith-based institutions on the CVE engagement [26]. The study by Lindekilde was however, limited by fact that, it didn't present an analysis on how community engagement prevents violent extremism. This study, therefore, provided a correlation on community engagement approach and countering violent extremism.

Clutterbuck investigated the concept of radicalization in the perspective of challenges and benefits [10]. The study highlighted that, since 9/11, United States (US) had enhanced its counterterrorism efforts especially with the arrest and imprisonment of the offenders [10]. The 9/11 presented a special case of how best to manage the jihadists in their period of imprisonment and after. According to Clutterbuck, de-radicalization programs in the prison were designed with a strong backing of behavioral and theological interventions to encourage disengagement and diversion from extremist views [10]. Post-prison programs needed multi-sectoral participation of new organizational alliances, frequently among the same agencies, authorities, and community leaders, such as police, social workers, and educational providers, who were also engaged in counter-radicalization initiatives [10]. Further, Clutterbuck reviews the integrated de-radicalization program in Amsterdam, Netherlands that saw division of responsibilities between the police and the municipal council [10]. The Amsterdam case study brought together the use of anti-radicalization and counter-

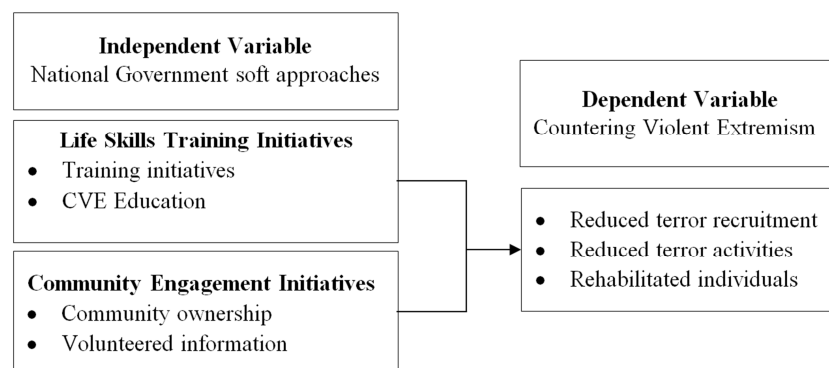
radicalization approaches with the objective being to address the gap in coverage between general prevention and the case level counterterrorism monitoring and policing measures. The study was limited in that, the findings could not be generalized to other countries since it was focused on countries with big economies and mature system. To address that gap, we focused on Garissa County, a marginalized area in a developing country and as such presented an aspect unique to third world countries.

Holmer, Bauman & Aryaiejad, in a report on 'Evaluating the impact of post CVE programs' established that, defined set of principles, approaches and methodology necessary for evaluating impact of CVE programs are still inexistent [18]. The study highlighted that VE field was diverse and emerging [18]. Major obstacles lie within the impossibility of measuring and proving that certain interventions prevented radicalization and/or absence of a given intervention contributed to violent activities [18]. Further, the study underlined the need for the peace building and policy makers in the development sector to borrow the best practices from the past and related programmes. Holmer, et al., continued to state that there was a shortage of counterterrorism literature and currently CVE literature has failed to include program evaluation data [18]. We proposed more investment in understanding the correlational relationship between CVE variables and called for establishment of globally acknowledged indicators. To build on the study by Holmer, et al., this study endeavoured to further find the effects of soft approaches initiatives on CVE in Kenya, through a focus on the countering Al-Shabaab existence in the North-Eastern County of Garissa.

Tella in research on the soft power context, the case of Boko haram terrorism and counterterrorism discusses soft power approach as the process under which state and non-state actors adopt non-violent measures to address insurgencies and extremism [44]. The study showed that terrorists have for a long time been accustomed to use of ideologies that appeal to individuals in their recruitments [44]. For instance, for a multitude whose faith in government was very low, finding solace and comfort in literal interpretation

of Quran provided a strong basis for extremists to interest and recruit new members. Therefore, exploiting the same methodology could ensure the use of soft power approaches being embraced to include rehabilitation, de-radicalization, counter-radicalization, and welfare services [44]. Tella, therefore, proposed the use of soft power as more successful counter terrorism initiative as opposed to the use of brutal and military powers [44]. Tella highlights the case of Hezbollah's footpath to peace in Lebanon that led to peaceful demilitarization and commitment with the politics of the state through political engagement and capacity building [44]. In addition, use of hard power in extreme could result to state terrorism i.e., unleashing violent actions on a subject of a country and even fuel more insurgency. The government, therefore, cannot be more careful. Based on the study, we further, implored whether the government of Kenya had adopted soft power in its CVE efforts and whether it had been effective.

In a study, countering terrorism in maritime Southeast Asia: soft and hard power approaches, Aljunied highlighted the importance of community engagement as a form of soft power in fighting terrorism [1]. The article focused on religious fueled terrorism, Aljunied found that, extremist groups have diluted and corrupted the rich heritage and independence of Islam. The study proposed a strong and deliberate effort to engage all stakeholders as a government's counterterrorism efforts [1]. This might include, among other things, increasing economic development and creating a compelling story that counters the terrorists' ideas and narratives. This also entails a concerted effort to educate the public, organization leaders and religious groups to counter the ideology and brutality promoted by terrorist organizations and offering counseling [1]. According to Aljunied, making use of the upright Islamic clerics in countering the misinterpretation of the Quran had been successful in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore [1]. This study sought to establish whether there had been the involvement of the religious front as a form of community engagement and what effects had been attained.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework. Source Author (2023).

Mastroe, Caitlin & Szmania, classified CVE programs as preventive, disengagement, and de-radicalization programs [28]. Mastroe et al., defined preventive programs as those that

seek to educate and tackle VE beforehand by preventing radicalization, disengagement as those that seek to have the already radicalized people abandon and give up their

involvement while de-radicalization as those that try altering the extremist beliefs that one may possess [28]. Mastroe et al., further highlighted that, while preventive programs may target wide and beyond, there was need for individually tailored programs for the disengagement and de-radicalization programs. Similarly, there might be realization of long-term impact or short-term results depending on how the various programs are designed [28]. Preventive programs for instance are better suited for large groups while de-radicalization should be designed to have a personal touch and as such lead to rehabilitation of the individuals. Guided by that, this study strived to investigate the types of CVE programs that were in place in Garissa County and tried to establish their effects and result areas in countering violent extremism.

### 2.3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 establishes linkage between national government soft approaches as the independent variable with the countering violent extremism as the dependent variable. One government soft approach under study was Life Skills Training Initiatives which was measured by number of training initiatives and CVE education. Second government soft approach was the community engagement initiatives which was studied based on the percentage of community ownership and volunteered information. The dependent variable was Countering Violent Extremism which was informed by number of reduced terror engagement, number of reduced terror activities and the number of individuals rehabilitated.

## 3. Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive research design method that enabled the researcher respond to the question on government soft approaches in countering violent extremism in Garissa County through responding to the how, who, where, what and when aspects of the study problem [5, 12]. The population of study was derived from the government administrative offices of Garissa County. This included the Regional Commissioner, County Commissioner, 9 Deputy County Commissioners and 24 Assistant County Commissioners. Additionally, the population also comprised of 9 members of community elders. Total population under study was, therefore, 44 within the national government administration in Garissa County. This study employed probability sampling, where the researcher had a complete sampling frame of all eligible respondents from which a sample may be drawn [22, 32]. The study used the census sampling method that was ideal since the target population was not huge to present difficulties in data collection logistics and resources [30, 32]. Data was acquired through the use of Key Informant Interviews (KII) guide for the senior government officers and Focused Group Discussion for the community elders in Garissa County which allowed for deep diving into issues and seeking clarifications [41]. Qualitative data acquired from KII and FGD was cleaned and,

classified based on identified thematic categories, coded, and subjected to analysis and interpretation to determine the effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The qualitative data was analyzed through both thematic and narrative analysis and closely examined for the common themes including topics, ideas, and their pattern. This involved transcription, reading and familiarization, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and finalizing the analysis.

## 4. Results

The study targeted a sample size of 44 respondents of which 42 of them or 95.45% were accessed by the researcher which was adequate for statistical analysis [5]. The key informant interviews represented 75% (33) of the respondents and the focused group discussion were at 20.5% (9).

### 4.1. Life Skills Training Initiatives for CVE

This subsection sought to establish the effects of life skills training on countering violent extremism in Garissa County. To address this objective, the researcher enquired on whether there are adequate Life Skills Training Initiatives initiated and implemented in Garissa County. From the responses garnered from the 33 KII respondents, 13 of them pointed out that there weren't enough life skills training initiatives implemented. The 20 of the respondents however, disagreed with their counter parts and responded that there have been adequate life skills training initiatives in Garissa County. Figure 2 gives an illustration of whether there were adequate life skills training initiatives in Garissa County.

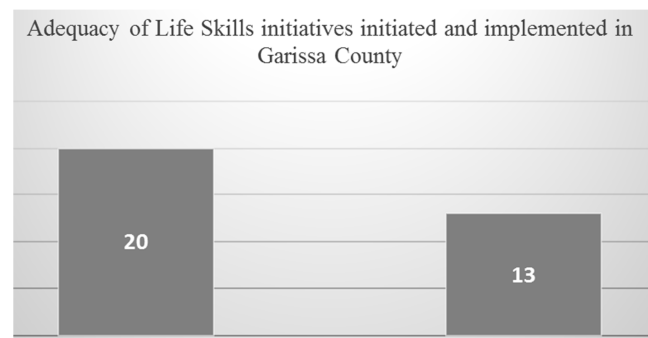


Figure 2. Adequacy of Life Skill Initiatives in Garissa County.

The life skills training initiatives are hailed as social reintegration programmes that enhance the victims and past and potential offenders in acquiring skills that will enhance their socio-economic independence. Programmes that were mentioned to have been implemented in Garissa County in the present and recent times included training on counter violent extremisms, County action plans, holding stakeholders' forums to sensitize citizens, community barazas for peace building and Nyumba Kumi initiatives. Civil groups, religion and education centers have been involved in driving peace and skill building initiatives.

According to one of the senior officers interviewed,

*A popular programme was the football tournaments between the Kenya defense forces and the local university students. This programme went a long way in building trust and goodwill between the institutions, more so the Garissa university that is still healing from the 2015 terror attack that left 148 students dead. This is a good example of soft approaches that can be emulated as best practice.*

Further, the study gathered that, there was several NGOs and CBOs that have been in the forefront in offering life skills development. One programme mentioned strived to have the residents move from the pastoralism way of life and trained the CBO members on drought resistant farming methods and irrigation mechanisms along Tana River as well as poultry farming. The FGD elaborated on that, *among the benefits of the programme was the ability for the member to have more than one source of livelihood through the planting of drought resistant crops and poultry farming.*

The study endeavored to find out what are the challenges that affect the life skills training initiatives for the enforcement and implementation of the CVE measures in Garissa County. Over focus on some stakeholders while sidelining the community members who are key was flagged out as a common practice that have affected the process. Elaborating on this, was a KII and a senior officer in the county who stated that:

*Most programmes implemented by the government and its partners have at times been rushed without proper understanding of the community's needs, or their main concerns and as such only respond to the secondary problems and not the root causes. Most NGOs and international organisations have also capitalized on the situation in the county to fund raise and spend donor fundings without much thought on the actual needed interventions best suited for the beneficiaries, victims, and community members at large.*

Further, the study established that, the vastness of the county, some areas being insecure or largely dominated by the militants was a factor that kept affecting the reigning process. A KII said that *its always a risk traversing on some routes as you might land on an explosive and mines planted on the road which is a fatal experience.* Over emphasis on trainings which aren't matched with opportunities or follow-up mechanisms to register impacts made was also noted as a challenge. Insufficient funding to have continuous trainings, high levels of ignorance among the community members and the big porous borders affect the seamlessness and efficiency of the training programme. Additionally, the pastoralism way of life makes it difficult to track, monitor progress and maintain necessary statistics to measure impact.

The study further explored how the life skills training enhance CVE programmes and established that they are very important interventions for reducing repetition and radicalization to violent extremism among child and youth offenders in Kenya to improve safety and security. Most respondents believed that life skills training not only build emotional endurance by way of resilience and way of coping

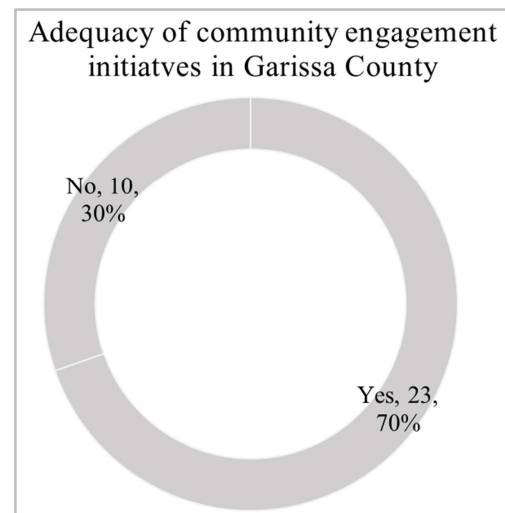
with extreme situations but also enhance self-identity and skills that beneficiary can maximize on, towards building stable income jobs. The respondents from the FGD that comprised of community elders agreed that life skills trainings not only build awareness but also inform residents on ways to prevent and counter VE. In addition, life skills training initiatives provide the ideal platforms in the rehabilitations of the reformed individuals and forms bases for their integration back to the society. To emphasize on the issue, a senior officer stated that:

*Life skills training education allows beneficiaries to embrace other means of economic activities and self-improvements hence, dealing with poverty which act as push factor to terrorism. It also discourages Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriages which has helped prevent many girls from marrying terrorist and embracing education and thus, preventing radicalization.*

Other benefits registered included the ability to enhance change of attitude towards government policies and ensuring early detection and reporting of terror activities. Life skills training has promoted culture of tolerance and ensured embracing of persons from different religious, political and geographical backgrounds.

#### 4.2. Community Engagement Initiatives for CVE

The second study objective sought to determine the effects of community engagement initiatives on countering violent extremism in Garissa County. The researcher enquired on whether community engagement initiatives have been adequately provided to the community of Garissa County and 23 KII responded to the affirmative and 10 to the negative. Figure 3 depicts the responses on whether there have been adequate community engagements initiatives initiated and implemented in Garissa County.



**Figure 3.** Adequacy of Community Engagement Initiatives for CVE in Garissa County.

One KII and senior officer who responded felt that while there has been some civic and community engagement initiative, majority of the community members were still



unaware of such forums. He stated that:

*There has always been some engagement with leaders and groups, but majority of the community members especially those highly susceptible to radicalization aren't reached by such initiatives.*

Further, the FGD established that community engagement initiatives may not always yield the expected results especially where the community members are struggling with other issues such as drought, hunger, and desperations. One KII recommended the need to have community engagement initiatives not just with focus on the terror and radicalization issues but geared towards poverty alleviation and building opportunities for the youth. He noted that, *kazi kwa vijana* initiatives was a programme that involved the youth in tackling issues that they could resonate well with and within the same communities they live in and still was paying them some money for their personal and family use. He regretted that the programme has since been halted.

The study noted that, the conception and conceptualization of community engagement initiatives need to be people centered. Another programme that was hailed as to have been resourceful was the national government programme through National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), that has always been at the forefront in drought management issues. The respondent agreed that if the community engagement programmes were geared towards improving the quality of life of the community members, then there would be lower cases of youth being lured into terrorism due to their poor background.

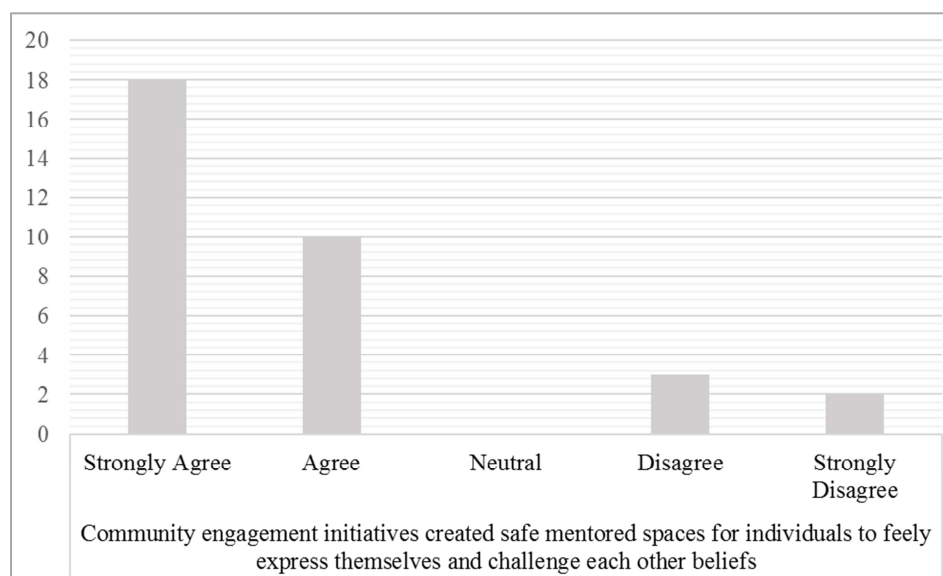
Most respondents also agreed that community engagement have provided the best avenues of forging partnership and collaborations among diverse stakeholders for a common

purpose. The UN including UNHCR, UNDP and FAO in addition to other international NGOs have collaborated with the GoK to ensure countering CVE sensitization among other community empowerment programmes. The study established that, water catchment facilities, watering points and energy efficient facilities for water sourcing and provision have been made possible through such partnerships. One senior officer confirmed that:

*There has been a paradigm shift in the approaches used, where the government security officers are taking modern approaches to change the narrative and build trust between them and the community. Instead of just making arrest and threats, the security agencies were now in the forefront of holding public barazas and promoting community policing and engaging on social activities through sports, water tanking and participating in food distribution to drought-stricken areas. This had facilitated the community by being open to providing information on security threats way in advance.*

The study further gathered that, community engagement initiatives were quite helpful in bringing together diverse groups within the community including youths, women, disabled, elders and both Muslim and Christian communities and as such, promoted peaceful coexistent.

When the researcher explored whether community engagement initiatives have created safe, mentored spaces for individuals to freely express themselves and challenge one another's beliefs, majority of the respondents agreed it had and continues to do. Figure 4 indicates the respondents feel on whether community engagement initiatives have created safe mentored spaces for individuals to freely express themselves and challenge each other's beliefs.



**Figure 4.** Community Engagement initiatives in creating safe spaces for CVE.

Through the initiative, the individuals were more welcoming to embrace differences between them, discern different situations and embraced peace. The efforts have also educated people on letting go of archaic practices such as early marriages and instead promoted school enrolment

among the community members in the county.

#### 4.3. Discussion

This study sought to explore the success of national government administration use of soft approaches and the

mitigation measures to make it achieve its objectives of ensuring a secure environment for her citizens. Life skills training initiatives were hailed as very important social reintegration programmes that enhance the victims, past and potential offenders in acquiring skills that will enhance their socio-economic independence. Programmes that have been implemented in Garissa County in the present and recent times include training on counter violent extremism, County action plans, holding stakeholders' forums to sensitize citizens, community barazas for peace building and Nyumba Kumi Initiatives. Life skills training builds capacity of the community members to identify and respond to dangers, and also, build necessary skills to break the chains of poverty and let go of some outdated traditional practices such as early marriages, all of which may lead to VE. Over focus on some stakeholders while sidelining the community members, the vastness of the county, some areas being very insecure, over emphasis on trainings which aren't matched with opportunities, insufficient funding to have continuous trainings, high levels of ignorance among the community members and the big porous borders affect the seamlessness and efficiency of the training programme. The pastoralism way of life makes it difficult to track, monitor progress and maintain necessary statistics to measure impact of the trainings.

The findings also established that, community engagements have provided the best avenues of forging partnership and collaborations among diverse stakeholders for a common purpose of ending VE. In Garissa County for instance, the UN and other international NGOs have collaborated with the GoK to ensure CVE sensitization among other community empowerment programme. This finding collaborates with the findings from Ishaku, Aksit & Maza, who underlined the important role that CBOs and Faith Based Organization have in CVE [21].

The study further identified that, community engagement act makes use of a catch-all strategy and most effective on creating capacity and empowerment especially in an environment where the profiles of the offenders was not known.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings discussed in the previous sub section, this study concludes the following:

Violent extremism and radicalization were among contemporary issues being felt across the globe currently. It was a growing global concern since terror groups keep growing and revolutionizing their methods by day. Globalization has enhanced radicalization process and eased the process of recruitment to terror activities. Violent extremism will continue to thrive unless adequate and solid measures were put in place at all levels starting from the grass roots to the international stage. Effectiveness of CVE measures required strengthening of institutional framework that were involved in the process. Partnership and collaborations should be enhanced to ensure transfer of knowledge and capacity build up for the eradication of VE.

Life skills development initiatives have been hailed as important processes in CVE. There was need however, to ensure clear mapping of the stakeholders and their responsibilities and thus, ensure effective coordination and communication mechanisms. The life skills training should be tailored to target different clusters of the community and ensure that, they were people centered and driven.

Conducting threat analysis was very important to determine the push and pull variables at the local level, that are connected to radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism, as well as, to determine the level of threat posed by VE. This entails assessing the current perception(s) of CVE and its enabling aspects in the nation by various stakeholders, including the government (both local and foreign), civil society, academia, the media, and international/regional/sub-regional organizations.

Poverty and outdated traditional practices were among some key contribution to VE and radicalization. Life skills trainings and CVE initiatives need not only focus on security issues but also, address root causes to terrorism in depth. CVE efforts were geared towards keeping vulnerable people from being enlisted or joining extremist organizations. However, determining who was at danger and who poses a threat was a challenging task. The CVE process should be guided by strategies that promote early detection and identification of radicalization and recruitment processes which require review of existing research work and establishment of clear guidelines for the process.

The effectiveness of life skills training in countering violent extremism is not guaranteed. The success of the training depends on several factors, including the quality of the training, the context in which it is implemented, and the motivations of the participants. Additionally, life skills training is just one component of a comprehensive approach to countering violent extremism and should be used in conjunction with other interventions, such as community engagement and economic development programs.

The CVE programme should be designed, therefore, to ensure they enhance broader activities that improve the development of technical and vocational skills; community or county associations and gatherings; after-school and family-oriented programs; official and informal education programs; sports, arts, and cultural programs. If well implemented, these interventions could help to advance pluralism, tolerance, and critical thinking, which would question and combat the message of violent extremism.

In a nutshell, there should be in place, partnership for VE mitigation, strengthening the capacity of institutions involved in CVE, identification and addressing the local pull and push factors and addressing grievances that might lead to radicalization and recruitment.

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