



# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

*Using transitional justice lenses*



Prof. Cheryl Hendricks, Patrick Hajayandi and Prof. Tim Murithi



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# Introduction

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*Patrick Hajayandi*

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Violent extremism represents one of the major security threats affecting the African continent, together with the numerous civil unrests and wars stemming from political instability. The scourge of violent extremism is deeply felt across many regions such as the Sahel and West Africa, the Horn of Africa and the southern part of the continent, with a particularly negative impact on Mozambique's Cabo Delgado in the north. The 2025 Global Terrorism Index shows that five out of ten countries under attack by extremist groups are located in sub-Saharan Africa, with the Sahel being at the centre of the storm (IEP 2025). For instance, between 2020 and 2022, there was a surge in violent attacks in Burkina Faso, leading to a 140% increase in activities from extremist and terrorist groups (Shurkin 2022). This trend, which is being witnessed across the Sahel and West Africa, highlights the magnitude of the terrorism threat, and points to the importance of re-evaluating why previous approaches to counter growing insurgencies have not been effective, despite the massive means deployed.

While extremist groups have been ingenious in finding new ways to carry out terrorist attacks, strategies to prevent or counter violent extremism have evolved very little (Haruna 2022). The use of military force, or the kinetic approach in preventing or countering violent extremism,<sup>1</sup> dominated state-led strategies for the period marked by President Bush's doctrine of war on terrorism (Heydemann 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> Kinetic responses involve military or law enforcement actions against violent extremist groups or individuals to neutralise them and directly counter threats. Kinetic responses are often used alongside non-kinetic approaches like deradicalisation programmes and community engagement.

Today, it is imperative to explore and use alternative approaches and new tools to prevent violent extremism. There is a need to build trustworthy partnerships with and within local communities in a way that adds value to the fight against extremist movements and their propaganda. In the same process, communities which are especially at risk should be empowered so that they play a crucial role against radicalisation (Levitt 2017). The strategy adopted in Kenya is a good example of alternative approaches towards preventing violent extremism in a volatile context. The Kenyan strategy involves collaboration between state and non-state actors in the fight against extremism and involves community members in this important process (Lucey et al. 2024).

In 2021, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 48% of global terrorism deaths (IEP 2022), despite years of military operations across the continent. Regions in southern and West Africa that were previously considered to be at less risk of terrorism, such as Tanzania, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Togo, Benin and Ghana, are seeing growing numbers of attacks. Governance challenges and human rights abuses by national governments are often the underlying drivers of violent extremism. Despite policies that concentrate on prevention, the fight against violent extremism has to date been predominantly militarised and has seen an influx of foreign militaries and private security companies. The militarisation of these conflict contexts has in turn increased human rights abuses, providing further impetus for violent extremists.

The global narrative on counterterrorism is dominated by the influence of the global North, as seen in the focus of United Nations counterterrorism resolutions on issues such as the Islamic State, foreign terrorist fighters and terrorist financing (Mohammed 2022). The narrative is often of external influences which promote and support the rise of violent extremism and therefore need to be expunged. These narratives have produced the militarised responses and the incarceration of many in the hope that they can be deradicalised. There is now a growing recognition of the internal challenges that provide an enabling environment for violent extremism, and the need for development initiatives to stem the tide of this scourge.

However, there is a gap between the urgent need for the provision of security (hence kinetic responses) and the extended amount of time it takes for the implementation of development initiatives and for these to yield dividends. Moreover, the atrocities committed during conflict produce wounds and divisions that development initiatives cannot overcome by themselves. Transitional justice, as part of larger peacebuilding processes, remains an effective way to produce increased security

and reconciliation in countries afflicted by armed conflict. Development can also only be implemented in countries that have a degree of stability and security. However, the discourse of transitional justice is rarely promoted within the narratives of countering terrorism – narratives that prefer criminal justice mechanisms that have hitherto produced very mixed results.

The African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have increasingly addressed issues of counterterrorism and violent extremism from human security and restorative justice perspectives (Tar and Ibobo-Eze 2021). The AU's transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction and development policies embed these perspectives and also advocate for the use of more contextually relevant, locally owned and gender-sensitive approaches. They provide useful guidance for societally driven processes for building sustainable peace, supporting community- and African-led traditional justice mechanisms, as well as espousing principles related to security sector reform and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, among others. Narratives, frameworks and practices to prevent violent extremism should increasingly draw on these policies.

There is, however, a need for more advocacy and evidence-based research to promote alternative approaches that include reconciliation and transitional justice interventions that are inclusive and survivor-centred in AU member states and for countries and regions to learn from one another's experiences. Nationally, AU member states require support in developing comprehensive, locally owned and sustainable approaches and implementing transitional justice interventions to address these challenges. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) has established itself in the field of transitional justice, reconciliation, women, peace and security in Africa, and draws upon this expertise in developing evidence-based intervention strategies to prevent violent extremism in Africa. Specifically, IJR draws upon more than twenty years of theoretical, practical and policy development experience to further develop alternative narratives to the current discourse and practice of counterterrorism. It employs a rights-based lens to promote sustainable security and build on its existing networks to deliver on this project.

In response to the growing scourge of violent extremism in Africa, a number of measures have been taken and various approaches have been tested to restore peace, security and stability. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has implemented a comprehensive approach to prevent and mitigate the impact of violent extremism on the continent (UNDP 2016). Individual countries have also tried various ways to address the issue (Ucko 2018).

However, to date, the results have been constrained and violent extremism is instead expanding, reaching new frontiers. While a security-centred approach is necessary, it must be complemented by a development approach that focuses on long-term structural changes:

- Respect for human rights and rule of law: Strengthening respect for human rights and the rule of law is crucial. Upholding these principles contributes to a stable environment that discourages extremism.
- Socio-economic opportunities: Providing socio-economic opportunities is essential. When individuals have access to education, employment and economic stability, they are less likely to be drawn into extremist ideologies.
- Inclusion and participation: Increasing the participation of excluded groups in decision-making processes is vital. Empowering marginalised communities ensures their voices are heard and reduces the appeal of extremist narratives.
- Engagement with media and faith-based organisations: Collaborating with media outlets, faith-based organisations and religious leaders is essential. These entities play a role in promoting inclusion and tolerance and countering extremist propaganda.

At the regional level, the UNDP supports the capacity of the AU and RECs such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Economic Community of West African States (Shulika et al. 2024; Happi 2020). Nationally, the UNDP provides technical and financial support to 21 countries, including Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritania, Niger and Tunisia (Ware et al. 2024).

Shifting away from the sole use of military force in preventing or countering violent extremism in Africa is a complex but necessary approach. The amplifying debate around the need to develop a holistic approach that prioritises community engagement, peacekeeping and economic development, especially for marginalised communities, is a confirmation of these new dynamics that are shaping how violent extremism is dealt with (Botha 2021).

For more effectiveness in countering insurgency, operations to restore peace and stability like the ones in Somalia, Mali, Burkina Faso or elsewhere, will need to address the management of existing conflicts, and the prevention of violent extremism by fostering stability and trust within affected communities (Shurkin 2022). It will be important to establish collaborative avenues where

the state security apparatus, international partners, civil society organisations and vulnerable communities can combine their efforts and coordinate their responses against violent extremism. In addition, there should be an emphasis on education, economic empowerment, and civil society promotion to reduce the appeal of extremist groups. But most importantly, governments are encouraged to build trust with local communities rather than relying only on military responses.

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# **SECTION 1**

## **RESETTING NARRATIVES AND APPROACHES TO COUNTERING AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

# Reimagining policy responses to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism in Africa

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*Tsion Hagos*

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The alarming spread and expansion of terrorism and violent extremism (VE) in Africa has taken centre stage in regional and continental policy discussions over the past few years. Africa has now become the global epicentre for the threat of terrorism and VE and the increased policy attention to this issue is therefore no surprise. Research demonstrates that while global deaths associated with terrorism have significantly declined since 2016, terrorist attacks in Africa have more than doubled in the same period (IEP 2022). In 2021 alone, all terrorism-related deaths took place in Africa, a significant portion of which was concentrated within just four countries – Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Somalia (IEP 2022). Despite the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack in Israel, which allegedly claimed the lives of thousands of people (Jewish Virtual Library n.d.), data demonstrates that the global death toll and impact of terrorism remains highest in Africa. In 2023, Burkina Faso ranked first on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), accounting for nearly a quarter of all terrorism-related deaths in the world (IEP 2024: 2) – the first time a country besides Afghanistan or Iraq has been ranked first in the GTI for being most impacted by terrorism.

Around 2010, the threat of terrorism, VE and radicalisation in Africa started to invoke concern in relevant policy circles, but the prevalence of terrorism was confined to pockets across the continent and had limited regional impact. A 2010 report submitted to the African Union's (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) by the chairperson of the AU Commission outlined that the threat was predominantly

shaped by ‘the activities of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), in North and West Africa, and Al-Shabaab in East Africa’ (African Union 2010: 2). The geographic reach of terrorism and VE has since extended to other regions of the continent, including Central and southern Africa. The number of countries affected within these regions has also increased. Until 2010, West Africa and the Sahel region had only minor Boko Haram associated insurgencies, concentrated in north-eastern Nigeria (Amani Africa 2022). A number of countries in the Sahel have now become major sites for terrorist attacks and the spread of VE, and violence is spilling from this region into coastal West Africa at an alarming rate.

Aside from the proliferation of countries affected by terrorism and VE in Africa and the geographic spread of the threat throughout the continent, a worrying development in recent years has been the concentration of various terrorist groups in the different sub-regions. Historically, AQIM and Al-Shabaab were the main terrorist organisations with large-scale operations in Africa. Now, however, there are multiple sects of terror groups across the various regions. In West Africa, the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin (LCB), for example, terrorist groups such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Boko Haram are known to be active. In Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, Ansar al-Sunna – locally also referred to as ‘Mashababos’, and affiliated to Daesh/Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – constitutes the main terror group in the southern part of the continent. In Central Africa, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) has established links with ISIS and is thus regarded as a terrorist group. Al-Shabaab continues to be a major security threat in the East and Horn regions.

This multiplicity of insurgent and radical groups compounds the already complex security situation in the affected member states and sub-regions. In the LCB, for example, there has been an increasing trend of terrorist in-fighting over the past couple of years. ISWAP and Boko Haram in particular have been battling for control and dominance in the region, especially since the death of Abubakar Shekau, the original leader of Boko Haram (ICG 2023). On the one hand, this affords state security forces and regional counterterrorism operations such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) a strategic advantage in their fight against these groups. Clashes between Boko Haram and ISWAP, for instance, continue to result in the death of a significant number of fighters from both sides,<sup>1</sup> giving the upper hand to counterterrorism efforts deployed in the region. However, the trend of terrorist in-

<sup>1</sup> For example, in mid-November 2023, a clash between the two groups in Borno State of Nigeria resulted in the death of over 60 fighters (Omonobi 2023). In March 2024, 35 terrorist fights were killed in the continuing clashes between the two rival groups (Okoye 2024).

fighting not only further destabilises the region and erodes possibilities for the restoration of peace and order but also entails grave humanitarian consequences for local populations.

## **How effective are current policy responses in Africa?**

Given this context, it has become imperative for Africa to employ a more nuanced policy approach that accounts for the complex and multifaceted nature of terrorism and VE. It is evident from the level and speed at which the threat has spread, multiplied and intensified across the continent that the existing predominant approach at national, regional and continental levels for countering terrorism and VE, which is essentially the deployment of security-centric tools, is not having the desired impact. Counterterrorism and anti-VE strategies are shaped with a military response at their core, informed by the dominant United States (US) narrative that reduces all cases of terrorism and VE to an ideological war, which can be brought to an end and prevented only through deploying military means.

The danger of this narrative is that, while it may have accurately conceptualised a few cases that involved attacks against the US, particularly in the early 2000s, it fails to account for the current realities in Africa, which provide fertile ground for the spread of terrorism and VE. Putting such a narrative at the centre of policy and decision-making in response to the spread of terrorism and VE in Africa therefore leads to the adoption of response mechanisms that are based on a misguided understanding of the issue and that fail to fully appreciate its unique features on the continent.

As some critiques aptly put it, the US approach to the threat of terrorism, or rather, its global war on terrorism, seems only to have aggravated the issue given that over the last two decades ‘it has grown, and spread, and a plethora of new militant groups have emerged’ (Turse 2023). Therefore, not only does this approach lead to a skewed understanding of the issue of terrorism and VE in Africa, counterterrorism operations designed on its basis have also not been effective on the continent or elsewhere.

As the United States was beginning its Forever Wars in 2002 and 2003, the State Department counted a total of just nine terrorist attacks in Africa. This year [2023], militant Islamist groups on that continent have, according to the Pentagon, already conducted 6,756 attacks ... Twenty-two years ago, George W. Bush announced the beginning of a Global War on Terror.

‘The Taliban must act, and act immediately,’ he insisted. ‘They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate.’ (Turse 2023)

Today, the Taliban reigns supreme in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda was never stopped and defeated, and other terror groups have spread across Africa and elsewhere.

In Somalia and the wider Horn region, Al-Shabaab remains a major security threat after it began its insurgency a few decades ago. This is despite the extended operations of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which admittedly played a critical role in weakening Al-Shabaab’s stand. However, it did not eliminate Al-Shabaab or the threat posed by the terror group. In 2022, AMISOM was replaced by the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). In January 2025, ATMIS transitioned to the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). A post-ATMIS AU presence and engagement in Somalia was found necessary to continue supporting the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in its battle against Al-Shabaab. What this tells us is that the threat posed by Al-Shabaab persists and that despite the AU’s past and ongoing counterterrorism operations in Somalia and the efforts deployed by the FGS and its partners, ‘Al-Shabaab has proven resilient, adjusting to counter-insurgency campaigns and entrenching itself deeper in parts of Somali society’ (ICG 2022: i).

In the Sahel region, terrorism and VE continue to disrupt the livelihoods of millions of people. For over a decade, a plethora of external forces have been deployed to this region to battle the spread of terrorism, alongside state and regional security arrangements. Some of the major external deployments include the United Nations (UN) Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); the Takuba Task Force deployed under French command; the earlier Operation Barkhane also led by France; and the European Union’s (EU) military and civilian training missions in Mali and Niger (Wilén and Williams 2022). It is estimated that these constitute over 21 000 uniformed personnel deployed across the Sahel region (Wilén and Williams 2022). The US has also employed a range of security tools to provide assistance to counterterrorism arrangements in the region, including the provision of tactical trainings and military equipment to security forces of partner states and regional missions. According to the database of the Security Assistance Monitor, as of 2023, the US had spent well over US\$3.3 billion in security assistance in the Sahel region over the past two decades (Center for International Policy n.d.).

From within the region, the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) Joint Force has also been deployed for a number of years. Niger, a Sahelian country, is also a

member of the MNJTF and benefits from troops deployed within the framework of this regional security arrangement to battle the expansion of terrorist groups, principally Boko Haram, in the LCB. In addition to these, in 2020, the AU also decided to deploy troops to the Sahel region,<sup>2</sup> although this decision is yet to be implemented. Again, none of these have been able to contain the spread of terrorism in the Sahel and the threat is increasing unabated. The recent resurgence of coups in West Africa and in Sahelian countries and the associated complex political transitions in affected member states are also no doubt further compounding the security challenges faced in the region. While a lot has been said about the impact of unconstitutional changes of government (UCG) on counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel (Center for Preventive Action 2024; Demuyneck and Bohm 2023), not much focus is given to the underlying factors precipitating the occurrence of UCG in this region, among which is governments' failure to effectively eliminate the threat of terrorism.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), too, although the situation is not typically characterised as one of terrorism, the conflict in the eastern part of the country and the nature of response mechanisms deployed mirror the realities faced in the other regions. The full resurgence of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) in 2022, after almost a decade of it being defeated in 2013, is a critical example of the failure of the security-heavy approach used to manage the conflict in the region.

While all the situations discussed have their own unique features, one thing they share in common is the nature of response mechanisms deployed by regional, continental and international actors. In all cases, a military-heavy strategy is employed with the ultimate goal of exterminating the terrorist and extremist groups. Nonetheless, these terror actors seem to grow more resilient, increasingly adapting their operations to the combat tactics of the various counter-insurgency missions and finding ways to embed themselves within the local communities of the respective countries in which they operate.

Using the failure of governments to provide basic needs to communities, particularly populations residing in remote areas where fundamental goods and services are unavailable and inaccessible, terrorist and extremist groups have demonstrated how community grievances can provide them the advantage of gaining local

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2 At the 33rd Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly held on 9–10 February 2020, the decision was adopted to deploy a 3 000-strong force to the Sahel for a period of six months (Assembly/AU/Dec.792(XXXIII)). In addition, the AU Peace and Security Council at its 950th Session convened on 29 September 2020 endorsed the 'Revised Strategic Concept Note on Planning Guidance for the deployment of an additional 3000 troops to the Sahel' (PSC/PR/COMM.(CML) (2020)).

support. In the case of Boko Haram, for example, the offer of financial services that are more accessible than existing state financial structures, and the promise of protection where state security services are ineffective, have been some of the ways through which the group has recruited members and achieved community support (Mercy Corps 2016).

In a context where groups designated as terrorists and extremists are entrenching themselves into society and gaining local community support while also enhancing their capacities to resist military offensives, there is a need to consider a shift from the dominant thinking that shapes policy and decision-making on how to respond to the threat of terrorism and VE in Africa. While the deployment of hard-security measures remains relevant, it needs to be made part of a more comprehensive and holistic approach that consists of a robust prevention pillar that aims to address underlying root causes of terrorism and VE in Africa. Also important would be ensuring that such an approach recognises the importance of political processes and makes room for dialogue and negotiations in all appropriate cases.

## **Holistic policy response to the threat of terrorism and VE in Africa**

If military-centric approaches are proving to be insufficient and ineffective for eliminating terrorism and VE, what alternatives could be explored to put an end to these threats? What could be proposed to key decision- and policymakers at the local, regional and continental levels, as options worthy of consideration in devising mechanisms for preventing and responding to terrorism and VE in Africa?

The importance of hard-security tools to counter terrorism and VE is undisputed and such tools cannot be entirely disposed of. There is, however, a need to adopt a more holistic approach which integrates the deployment of military responses as one component of an all-inclusive strategy that treats the threats of terrorism and VE in Africa as issues primarily rooted in socio-economic grievances. Adopting such contextualised understandings of terrorism and VE would serve as a critical first step in the design of strategies that prioritise addressing socio-economic challenges as the centre of prevention and response to terrorism and VE.

With the overarching goal of preventing radicalisation and VE, which lead to terrorism, through identifying and addressing their socio-economic root causes, a holistic policy approach would further involve utilisation of non-military and non-violent response measures to address prevailing cases of terrorism and VE. Within

this framework, such a holistic approach would comprise the main elements discussed next.

### ***Provision of basic goods and services***

Cases such as Boko Haram's support to communities in the LCB demonstrate the failure of states to provide basic goods and services to their populations. This is one of the main factors used as an entry point and manipulated by terrorist and extremist groups for purposes of radicalisation. Research in that specific context has shown that

there has been serious governance failures over many years, manifesting as acute underinvestment in social services. Most people in the Lake Chad Basin do not have access to schools and hospitals. This neglect and marginalisation has generated a sense of despair that the Boko Haram movement was able to utilise to its advantage. (Alozie and Aniekwe 2022)

Admittedly, most African countries are grappling with poor economic development, which challenges the sufficient provision of goods and services to all parts of society. However, mismanagement of existing resources, corruption and lack of effective administrative structures also form part of the major barriers to populations' access to basic needs and services. Addressing these barriers and creating a conducive environment for the effective and equitable delivery of existing fundamental goods and services is one of the major responsibilities of states. It is therefore critical to inform the design of strategies for prevention of VE and terrorism with the significant role that states should play to avert these threats by assuming and effectively discharging their responsibilities in this respect.

### ***Fair distribution of resources***

The lack of fair distribution of wealth and resources creates imbalances and fosters inequality in societies. Over time, accumulated grievances among discriminated members of society become convenient foundations for radicalisation. Monopolisation of resources and economic opportunities by a minority while the majority lives in poverty not only facilitates the creation of conditions for radicalisation, it could also lead to the formation of extremist ideologies, especially when practised along ethnic or religious lines, which is the case in some African countries. Hence, fair distribution of resources and economic opportunities should form part of the elements constituting strategies for preventing VE and terrorism.

### ***State–citizen relationships***

In the context of most countries on the continent, citizens’ trust in the state is eroded as a result of the latter’s inability to deliver on its intended purposes, including securing peace and order as well as stability and economic development. Without restoring this lost trust, states cannot sustainably resolve challenges such as the threat of terrorism and VE. Enhancing robust local administrations, which strive to ensure inclusivity and avert marginalisation of communities, should be considered important components of preventing VE and terrorism.

### ***State presence in peripheries and border areas***

A central factor that plays a major role in the proliferation of terrorist actors is the absence or weakness of state presence in border areas. Areas in the peripheries of most African countries are usually characterised by a lack of basic state institutions and infrastructure for provision of basic services, including security. States also usually lack the capacity to effectively govern such areas. Violent extremists use this as fertile ground for their radicalisation campaigns, given that citizens in such peripheries already feel disconnected from the state and have little reason to believe in the state’s capacity to effectively resolve their day-to-day challenges. The absence or low presence of state security apparatus in these areas also means that terrorists and violent extremists can operate there with ease. As a critical aspect of prevention and response to terrorism and VE, a holistic approach should thus integrate measures that aim to boost full and effective state presence and governance throughout the entirety of its territory, including border areas.

### ***Identify and adopt suitable state structures***

To ensure proper representation of all parts of society and to meet the aspirations of the people, it is important to mechanise governance and administrative structures that take account of key contexts and issues, including demographics, culture, resources and other relevant factors which determine the cohesion of a given state. Similarly, while democratic principles are crucial, it is important to ensure their contextualisation to the realities of each country and the demands of the society. Adjusting state structures and governance along those lines would curtail the creation and propagation of incompatible and irreconcilable interests among different parts of society, which fester over time and manifest in the form of radical opposition movements, some of which may take a violent orientation. One consideration, therefore, in the fight against terrorism and VE should be taking the

time to reconsider how existing structures of state administration are, either by design or inadvertently, reinforcing oppression, enabling inequitable resource allocation and distribution, and marginalising parts of society, thereby laying the ground for the spread of security threats, including VE and terrorism.

### ***Dialogue and negotiation***

Although still regarded as taboo, it is becoming increasingly obvious that dialogue and negotiation with groups designated as terrorist and violent extremist will ultimately be the only way to resolve some of the conflicts on the continent involving terrorism:

after a more than a decade and half [sic] of counterterrorism focused response to the threat Al Shabaab poses in Somalia and the region through the instrumentality of AMISOM, there is increasing recognition that ultimately the situation in Somalia has to be resolved through negotiation with Al Shabaab. (Amani Africa 2022: 15)

While negotiation may not necessarily be an appropriate tool for addressing all cases of terrorism and VE, it is necessary to acknowledge its relevance for resolving some situations on the continent characterised as terrorism and VE, which are mainly as a result of socio-economic grievances. Accordingly, dialogue and negotiation should be part of mechanisms envisaged within a holistic strategy for the effective elimination of terrorism and VE.

## **Conclusion**

A traditional, military-centred response to terrorism and VE in Africa which is shaped and informed on the basis of a conception similar to the global war on terrorism has not worked so far and will clearly not work going forward. Now is the time to question whether the true nature of the threat on the continent has been properly contextualised and understood in the adoption of response mechanisms. While seeking alternative approaches that can effectively and sustainably curb the threat of VE and terrorism, a critical step should be to re-examine how these threats are conceptualised. Having a proper understanding of these threats as they manifest in Africa and recognising their intricate linkage with socio-economic factors, rather than relying on an entirely ideological explanation, is crucial to shift policy thinking for the adoption of more relevant strategies to respond to terrorism and VE.

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# Preventing violent extremism in Africa:

## *Exploring new approaches and home-grown solutions*

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Violent extremism is on the rise in Africa. In 2023, sub-Saharan Africa alone accounted for 60% of all deaths resulting from terror attacks. At the same time, four of the ten countries most affected by terrorism were in Africa (IEP 2022). This number has increased since, and now more and more countries are being drawn into the spiralling violence caused by terrorist groups that operate in different regions of Africa, with a particularly destructive impact in the Sahel region. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the epicentre of terrorism has now decisively shifted from the Middle East to the Central Sahel region in sub-Saharan Africa (IEP 2024).

The region has been experiencing a dramatic increase in terms of attacks and lethality from extremist groups affiliated to the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). In 2022, the Sahel region accounted for more terrorism deaths than both South Asia and the Middle East regions combined. From 2007 to 2022, the region went from accounting for only 1% to reaching a staggering 43% of the total global terrorism-linked deaths (IEP 2023). Noteworthy is that this increase occurred despite the presence of the multinational forces operating in the region. These include Operation Barkhane, a French-led counter-insurgency operation; the Takuba Task Force, a multinational special force; and the forces operating under the banner of the G5 Sahel, a coalition of five African countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Mauritania) (see Antil and Vircoulon 2024; Doxsee et al. 2022). The expansion of violent extremism is a clear indication that the popular

policy of using lethal forces to combat violence could be a limiting factor in the search for lasting peace.

Drawing from data collected during field research in Nigeria, Kenya and Mozambique (Hendricks et al. 2023; Lucey et al. 2024; Lucey and Zeca 2023), this chapter looks at how the governments in these three countries have reacted and responded to the emergence of violent extremism. Emphasis is put on the approaches they have used, the outcomes of their decisions and choices, and the lessons we can learn from them. The chapter argues that the kinetic approach has shown its limitations and that there is a growing need to explore new and innovative approaches that are developed in close collaboration with the affected communities. An approach centred on human security and community needs allows decision-makers to explore more options and offers more room to manoeuvre. The contribution of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in this debate is to explore and share knowledge on how broad transitional justice mechanisms could increase the effectiveness of alternative approaches, especially those that are inclusive and community-needs oriented.

## **Emergence of violent extremism and its main drivers**

It is generally accepted that in the African context, the drivers of violent extremism are rooted in structural problems of weak, inefficient and corrupt governments, which tend to marginalise some communities at the periphery while being unable or unwilling to meet their basic needs or provide basic services (UNDP 2016). These problems are compounded by political, social and economic factors that create fertile ground for the emergence of violent extremism, both as an ideology and as a resistance movement. For instance, studies have shown that extreme poverty, unemployment and lack of economic opportunities are incentives for local populations to join extremist groups (Makai 2024; Thelma et al. 2024).

According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) research report titled *Journey to Extremism*,

the areas where violent extremism has taken root are typically remote areas, peripheral in development terms, often ‘borderlands’ connecting two or more states, that have experienced generations of neglect and marginalization across political, social and economic spheres. Examples include northern Mali, north-eastern Nigeria and the Kenyan coastal region. Many of the

factors related to insecurity and underdevelopment that have been established as conducive to violent extremism are most pronounced at the geographic fringes of these countries. While violent extremist groups may logistically exploit relatively ‘ungoverned’ terrain, they have also developed compelling narratives that speak to the grievances of communities living in neglected circumstances. (UNDP 2017: 33)

The research work that IJR conducted in Nigeria, Kenya and Mozambique confirms these findings (Hendricks et al. 2023; Lucey et al. 2024; Lucey and Zeca 2023). It also shows that the contexts in which violent extremism emerged in the three countries present some similarities: violent extremism thrives in situations of marginalised communities, which often are located at the periphery with no or limited services from the central government. They lack basic services such as education and health, and tend to be subjected to human rights abuses or extortion practices. These are communities with unresolved socio-economic grievances that can be tracked back to the colonial era. In the three countries, the drivers of extremism include unemployment, poverty, socio-economic disparities, ethnic and religious intolerance, political and economic marginalisation, local and transnational organised crime, as well as forms of human rights violations such as police brutality and an excessive use of force to silence dissenting voices.

## **Responses to violent extremism and the limits of the kinetic approach**

As a consequence of the 9/11 terror attack, a new concept emerged: the war on terrorism (Hetherington and Nelson 2003). It signalled not only the end of the post-Cold War era but also the beginning of a new and uncertain era marked by a confrontation between states and shadow forces with a transnational character. From its inception, the war on terrorism had a strong military connotation despite the unconventional form of the threat it was meant to confront. The war on terrorism was defined by the global military campaign launched by the United States (US) against extremist groups and their hosts in response to the terror attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001 (Congressional Research Services 2021).

Since then, the response to terrorism and violent extremism has been dominated by the use of lethal force, or what is generally described as the kinetic approach. Such an approach was highlighted by the US military intervention against the Taliban in

2001 in what appeared as a new US doctrine. Former President George W. Bush described it as the war on terror (Dunn 2005; Hetherington and Nelson 2003).

On the African continent, responses to violent extremism have been similar to the global trend – the dominance of ‘hard power’ and security-oriented action towards insurgencies. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), deployed in March 2007, is one of the most important military operations under the continental flag. AMISOM was credited with some remarkable successes, including the reduction of the area controlled by Al-Shabaab and the protection of Somalia’s transitional government as well as electoral processes. However, the mission did not achieve a decisive victory over the extremist movement, which still controls swathes of Somalian territory (Mahmood and Ani 2017; Williams 2019).

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was accompanied by several military deployments, including Operation Barkhane, the G5 Sahel and the Takuba Task Force. Addressing security concerns has been at the centre of the interventions in Mali. Moda Dieng (2021) notes that when the G5 Sahel was deployed in 2017, the intervention was considered the most popular initiative in the fight against insecurity in the Sahel as it brought hope in the fight against violent extremism and organised crime. However, it appears that these operations were focused on a state-centric approach to security, which only managed to prevent the collapse of the central government. They did not translate into security for the populations (Dieng 2021). Other missions across the continent have had similar or worse results.

The expansion of violent extremism in Africa and the fact that it is establishing a foothold in some regions point to the failure or the limits of the hard-security policy approach (Amani Africa 2022). The use of the American military machinery did not deter the Taliban from continuing the fight. The same determination can be found with groups such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. For this reason, the idea of changing strategies in the fight against extremist groups is gaining momentum. The current debate is on the need to shift the focus from existing policies towards new approaches that are likely to lead to responses with positive outcomes, while alleviating the suffering endured by civilian populations (see Stephens et al. 2021; Schwoebel 2017; Khalil and Zeuthen 2016). There is an imperative to increase efforts in advocating for the implementation of approaches that take into consideration the involvement of the whole society while dealing with violent extremism.

Suggested approaches emphasise dialogue and conflict prevention as well as restorative justice, together with broad-based community engagement. Such approaches and engagements have historically been lacking in the dominant policies. The United Nations and African Union (AU) policies and positions have invariably espoused those of the US during the war on terror, and reflect this heavy-handedness in addressing the extremist threat.

In Africa, the strategy adopted by the political leadership in the fight against violent extremism seems to have been largely influenced by anti-terror policies developed outside the continent, in particular the American war on terrorism. However, in some cases the response to violent extremism and the route chosen by African incumbent elites seems to have been dictated by internal political dynamics rather than a genuine willingness to address the scourge of violent extremism. Political calculations, such as silencing opposing forces, have determined the choice of particular policies to address this problem. Whether pushed by external or internal influences, the effectiveness of using only the kinetic approach towards violent extremism has not yet been demonstrated.

Extremist groups operating in the Sahel, such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), Boko Haram, Katiba Macina and other lesser-known groups affiliated to ISWAP and Al-Shabaab in East Africa, continue to wreak havoc in different parts of the continent, with much damage to people's livelihoods, economic systems and infrastructures. This has a negative impact on social and political stability and security. For instance, in Kenya there has been a 25% drop in tourism as a result of terrorism or fear of terror attacks from Al-Shabaab, which operates in both Kenya and Somalia. The impact of violent activities from Boko Haram in Nigeria has led to a 21% reduction in direct foreign investments in the country (UNDP 2017). The consequences on employment, revenues and livelihoods are considerable.

These unresolved problems in affected areas explain why the use of force is increasingly being questioned. Although the use of lethal force has a role in a comprehensive strategy at national and regional levels, it should not be considered the ultimate solution to violent extremism.

The findings from IJR research work in Nigeria, Kenya and Mozambique show that the use of lethal force has invariably been associated with governments' initial reactions to dealing with violent extremism (Hendricks et al. 2023; Lucey et al. 2024; Lucey and Zeca 2023). The political leadership in all three countries reacted

in a similar way when they were faced with the threat of violent extremism and when it materialised through deadly attacks, such as the one at Westgate Mall in Nairobi in 2017. In the current struggle against violent extremism, political leaders make the mistake of trying to fight unconventional wars using conventional means, sometimes leading to unexpected results. For instance, in Nigeria the deployment of armed forces against insurgents in the north-east has led to extremist groups splitting into smaller cells that operate independently, thus complicating the task for the troops on the ground.

## **New approaches and home-grown solutions**

On 15 August 2021, when the Taliban captured Kabul and returned to power in Afghanistan, all military efforts deployed to neutralise the group appeared to have been in vain. However, events preceding the Taliban's return indicate that the US kept the door open for different options and strategies to address the violence (ICG 2021). The signing of the US–Taliban agreement in February 2020 before the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan was a watershed moment, leading to the end of almost two decades of military presence in Afghanistan.

In the past, an agreement between the US and the Taliban would not have been imaginable, as the main policy was not to negotiate with terrorists. The decision of the US government to enter into such an agreement is a concrete example of a paradigm shift from the dominant policy of using military force to fight terrorism, towards a new and broader policy allowing for more and varied options in the quest for better and sustainable solutions to terror-related violence (Congressional Research Services 2021). Negotiations, mediation or dialogue with extremist groups should thus not be excluded from the list of tools used to curb violence.

In Africa, the ongoing insurgencies in which extremist groups are involved and the mixed results that have been achieved to counter them confirm that force alone does not allow governments to efficiently oppose or prevent radicalisation or violent extremism. The deployment of AMISOM in 2007 and later the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) was not able to achieve all objectives. According to Paul Williams (2019),

AMISOM made progress on three strategic objectives, which include: reducing the threat posed by al-Shabaab and other armed groups; providing security to enable Somalia's political process and efforts to reconcile; handing

over security responsibilities to Somali security forces. However, AMISOM has not been able to resolve Somalia's fundamental problem, which is the crisis of governance that has spawned al-Shabaab and other forms of opposition to the government.

Many countries facing the scourge of violent extremism have other, more complex problems that need to be addressed in parallel with the threat of radical or extremist groups. Finding solutions to those problems requires understanding the broad issues faced by the victimised society. According to discussions conducted in Mozambique during the IJR data collection process, the best way to do this is to involve members of the society, to allow them to have a say and to include them in decision-making processes (Lucey and Zeca 2023).

IJR research work in Nigeria, Kenya and Mozambique demonstrated that terrorism or violent extremism does not emerge in a vacuum but can be a reaction to deeply rooted problems that the central government or its local representatives have been unable or unwilling to solve. In Mozambique, for example, the disconnection between the central government and the periphery, coupled with the government's inability to provide basic services and to ensure the protection of people's rights, has allowed an extremist group called Ansar al Sunna or Al-Shabaab to step in and attract followers from among those who have lost trust in state institutions (Lucey and Zeca 2023). In this case, negative socio-political conditions have created incentives for radicalisation and for potential recruits to decide to join the extremist movement. According to Amani Africa (2022),

the terrorism menace facing Africa is primarily a product of the interrelated issues of the governance-development deficits and the weakness of the state. Terrorist groups and the threat they pose, while presenting an immediate security problem, are only symptoms of these deeper issues.

When political leaders decide to launch military attacks against extremist insurgencies, they are in reality dealing with symptoms of deep-rooted problems that need to be solved differently, with different approaches. Preventive measures against violent extremism should therefore include addressing the underlying causes that push people to choose violence over other possible means to express frustration or grievances. This is why it has become imperative to recognise and acknowledge the limits of the kinetic approach and to explore other complementary approaches that have the potential to positively alter the status quo on the ground.

In terms of new approaches that could bring new dynamics to preventing and countering violent extremism, a political-development strategy has been suggested (Amani Africa 2022). Such a strategy should focus on addressing the problems that the community affected by terrorism is facing, including marginalisation, exclusion and the grievances they generate. The strategy could include an empowerment programme to tackle unemployment, which is a key reason young people join extremist groups (Africa Renewal 2023; UNDP 2017).

Other approaches could involve the creation of dialogue platforms for regular exchange between community members and local government authorities. This is one way to create inclusive institutions that allow community members to have a say in the decision-making process. This approach has been an essential element in the successes registered in Maiduguri's process of reinserting former members of Boko Haram who decided to reintegrate into their communities (Abdullahi and Onabanjo 2024; Olaogun 2024).

The research carried out by IJR showed that there is an emerging set of home-grown solutions that could play an important role in preventing violent extremism. In Kenya, these solutions involve a whole-of-community approach by creating spaces for members of communities to actively participate in making decisions regarding how to deal with extremism. Initially, Kenya used a strong counterterrorism approach with US support. This did not yield the expected results. Thereafter, Kenya adopted a more comprehensive approach to countering and preventing violent extremism through the development of a national and county action plans. The national action plan has nine pillars: media and online; psychosocial; education; legal and policy; arts and culture; training and capacity-building; political; faith based and ideological; and security. County action plans can adapt these pillars as they choose (Lucey et al. 2024).

The action plans provide clear platforms for knowledge sharing, assign responsibilities for action, promote collaboration, and avoid a duplication of responsibility. They have also developed trust between communities and government stakeholders, such as through community policing efforts, engagement with religious leaders, and the development of educational and vocational training schemes to address issues of unemployment.

A new and important approach in Nigeria has been to create incentives for mass exit from extremist groups, and the establishment in 2016 of what is known as Operation Safe Corridor for high-risk defectors from Boko Haram (Hendricks et al. 2023). This

initiative involves screening, prosecutions, rehabilitation through deradicalisation programmes, psychosocial support, vocational training courses and reintegration into original communities. The mass exit model has had some encouraging results.

Nigeria's Borno State government also instituted a 'cash for guns' strategy to incentivise insurgents to surrender their weapons, while also developing an approach that built on community participation and localisation. The governor of Borno State developed a Community-Based Reconciliation and Reintegration Programme that emphasises the importance of giving non-state armed groups (NSAGs) opportunities to understand alternative narratives to violent extremism and seek change through peaceful means, while also stressing the need for reintegration, transitional justice and reconciliation. Borno policy involves community engagement and dialogue. In a departure from past efforts in Nigeria and globally as well, the policy envisages communities playing a leading role in reconciliation and reintegration, from planning to implementation.

Nigeria's approach to terrorism and extremism has thus shifted towards a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, and more comprehensive multi-stakeholder and community-oriented solutions. However, its main challenge has been to adequately translate from the federal to the state level. There have also been problems related to a lack of willingness to consult stakeholders, especially at the local level, leading to a trust gap between communities and the government.

Borno State uses community engagement and dialogue, reconciliation and transitional justice as organic approaches that have a high degree of legitimacy as they are based on custom, religion and history. This Borno State policy is positive in that it provides incentives and tries to ensure that communities do not feel that NSAGs receive preferential treatment by including both community members and reintegrees (see Hendricks et al. 2023).

Mozambique has not yet adopted any home-grown solution. However, from the discussions IJR's research team had with respondents, a number of suggestions were put forward (Lucey and Zeca 2023). The suggestions could be presented as a new social contract based on trust, dialogue and inclusivity in planning and deciding on matters that concern the affected communities, especially in the marginalised regions of the north, including Cabo Delgado where the insurgency was launched and where it has had a serious impact on people's livelihoods.

If Mozambique were to adopt a new social contract, efforts should be made to develop more effective models of community policing that adhere to human rights

and accountability standards and that are inclusive and participatory. Local forces should be encouraged to develop codes of conduct and to be inclusive and gender-sensitive, with repercussions for those that fail to adhere to them.

A failure to provide basic services was strongly linked to people's frustration and may have led them to choose violent extremism as a means to pressure the government. It is essential for the Mozambican government to place greater emphasis on identifying people's needs for services in a decentralised way, and to communicate this plan for broader buy-in (Lucey and Zeca 2023).

As a short-term solution, the government of Mozambique could consider dialogue with the insurgents, as the US did with the Taliban. As one respondent noted to the IJR research team, 'War does not end with another war' (Lucey and Zeca 2023: 15). At the beginning of the insurgency, the government was quick to label it as 'faceless', blaming the growth in violent extremism on foreign influences and linkages rather than recognising that domestic factors played a role in the violence. According to Lucey and Zeca (2023: 17, 19), 'The Mozambican government could consider a multi-tiered strategy to incentivise defections ... [including] a whole-of-society consultative process to collaboratively develop a common understanding of the structural drivers of violent extremism, and to develop and adapt home-grown DDRR [Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration] programs.' But it should ensure that communities are consulted about the process because sustaining peace in Mozambique will require a common vision from society.

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# Limitations of peace and security institutions in preventing violent extremism

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*Hany Wahila*

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Terrorism in Africa is a complex issue that poses significant challenges to peace, stability and development across the continent. In the past, Africa experienced various forms of violence and conflict, but the emergence of transnational terrorist organisations has added a new layer to the security landscape. The merging of local grievances with global jihadist ideologies has led to the rise of extremist groups that exploit political, social and economic vulnerabilities. The African Union (AU), since its inception as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), has aimed to address the issues of terrorism and violent extremism through various policies, frameworks and mechanisms. Even with the effort exerted by the AU, the continent continues to face a growing and increasing threat of terrorism.

Since 2017, sub-Saharan Africa has recorded the highest number of terrorism-related deaths globally. In 2023, countries in the Sahel were at the top of the Global Terrorism Index (IEP 2024). To understand the dynamics of terrorism in Africa, it is essential to explore the various underlying causes of this phenomenon. Factors such as political instability, socio-economic disparities, ethnic and religious tensions, and external influences all contribute to the spread of terrorism on the continent. Furthermore, weak governance and corruption worsen these issues, providing a fertile environment for extremist ideologies to flourish. However, it remains unclear whether the current policies and frameworks of the AU effectively address these crucial factors.

This chapter first outlines the various policies and frameworks established by the AU to combat terrorism and violent extremism in Africa, as well as their implementation through existing mechanisms. It then highlights the significant theoretical and practical limitations of the policies, frameworks and mechanisms used.

## **Existing AU measures to prevent violent extremism on the continent**

Since the early years of the OAU, efforts have been made to combat terrorism and violent extremism in Africa. With the rise of terrorist activities in African member states, the OAU took measures to ensure that its member states coordinated and strengthened their policies to eliminate terrorism within their borders, including the 1992 Resolution on the Strengthening of Cooperation and Coordination among African States (OAU 1992; see also Mensah 2023). This Resolution was prompted by the increasing presence of Al-Qaeda in Sudan and the activities of Islamist groups like al-Ittihad al-Islamic (AIAI) in Somalia. However, at the time, terrorism was not yet a widespread phenomenon. The Resolution focused primarily on prohibiting the facilitation of potential terrorist activities in the respective countries, and disallowing member states from supporting any actor, including religious, ethnic or social movements, engaging in hostile activities that could impact the stability of the state (OAU 1992).

The Resolution ensured that the principle of non-interference was instilled and stressed the preservation of regime and state security with respect to extremist and/or terrorist activities. This Resolution was supplemented by the 1992 Dakar Resolution, which paved the way for the OAU to adopt the Declaration on a Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations in 1994 (Mensah 2023). Unlike the initial 1992 Resolution, which required member states to cooperate to combat terrorism in Africa, the 1994 Declaration condemned and criminalised all acts of terrorism on the African continent. The Declaration thus shifted the position from one of cooperation against potential terrorist/extremist activities to criminalising any action of that sort. It ensured that member states took measures against acts that sought to undermine human values, particularly fundamental freedoms and tolerance.

Although these legislations were a step in the right direction, the OAU's surface-level engagement regarding terrorism was impacted by several attacks on United States (US) embassies. In 1998, in two consecutive attacks, the operatives of Al-Qaeda attacked the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, killing over 218 people and injuring approximately 4 000 (American Foreign Service Association

2023). These incidents were a signal to the US and to African nations that Africa was the new, emerging battleground for terrorist activities. Since these attacks, terrorist operations have proliferated across the continent.

The OAU took this signal as an opportunity to produce the first major comprehensive legislative approach to addressing the scourge of terrorism in Africa. During the Thirty-Fifth Ordinary Session of Heads of State and Government held in Algiers, Algeria, in 1999, the OAU adopted the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism. This critical piece of legislation spearheaded the conversation on terrorism. It provided an extensive definition of terrorism and outlined mechanisms for controlling terrorism in Africa, including addressing the root causes and structural conditions of terrorism; suppressing financial support to terrorist networks; ensuring effective border security; and promoting the need for information exchange and judicial assistance for investigation and criminal prosecution. Although the initiatives were welcomed, the Convention did not receive buy-in from most states and was ratified only in 2002, three years after its proposal. While subsequent frameworks support the OAU Convention, it still remains as the primary policy document guiding the AU in its counterterrorism efforts.

Since the ratification of the OAU Convention, two additional frameworks have emerged to enhance its effectiveness: the Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa (African Union 2002) and the Protocol to the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism (African Union 2004). Both instruments aim to ensure the implementation of the 1999 Convention. The general objective of the Plan of Action and the Protocol is to ensure that member states ratify both continental and international provisions on terrorism. The Plan goes further by ensuring that specific provisions are made on the following issues:

- police and border control
- legislation and judicial measures
- financing of terrorism
- information exchange
- coordination at the regional, continental and international levels
- roles and responsibilities of AU organs
- establishment of the African Center for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT).

Both the Protocol and the Plan of Action make provision for assigning a responsible party to oversee the counterterrorism framework on the continent, with the implementation role being the responsibility of the AU Commission, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and regional mechanisms (African Union 2002, 2004). Beyond outlining clear roles and responsibilities, the Plan of Action was successful in establishing the ACSRT, in 2004 in Algiers. The ACSRT serves as a structure for centralising information, studies and analyses on terrorism across Africa, as well as developing counterterrorism capacity-building programmes (African Union 2004). This centralised database is useful to develop strategic policy and operational and training mechanisms within the context of international and continental legal instruments to stem the tide of terrorism. However, the ACSRT faces challenges due to insufficient funding and primarily relies on donor support for its operations and resources.

The Plan of Action also emphasises the need for African states to establish national frameworks and laws that criminalise, investigate and prosecute terrorist-related activities at the judicial level, as well as frameworks to eliminate and curb the financing of terrorism and terrorist activities in the country. To enhance cooperation and coordination, the Plan also calls for member states to exchange information.

Although the Protocol and Action Plan were deliberate in identifying pathways for effectively implementing the Convention, they did not get significant buy-in from member states and the Protocol was not ratified until 2014. The lack of implementation of the Action Plan was evidenced in a follow-up framework passed in 2011, to supplement the Plan's implementation: the African Model Anti-Terrorism Law. The Model Law is a legislative blueprint that African countries can use and/or borrow from to facilitate the necessary domestic legislation. The Model Law provides 'a template for African states to implement both the AU and global counterterrorism framework at the national level' (Mensah 2023: 1416; African Union 2011).

With the growing threat of terrorism, the AU has resurfaced the matter of ensuring states scale up their efforts to implement all relevant AU instruments and decisions. As a result, in 2022, the AU passed the Malabo Declaration, which focuses on unconstitutional changes of government (UCGs) but also aims to ensure that member states recommit to their previous commitments to counter terrorism, irrespective of UCGs. The Declaration further calls for the development of a comprehensive Continental Strategic Plan of Action on

countering terrorism in Africa, as well as the establishment and deployment of a Ministerial Committee on Counter-Terrorism and a Counter-Terrorism Unit within the African Standby Force. While it is positive that these recommitments have been made, the fact that previous decisions have not been implemented raises concerns about the likelihood of achieving favourable outcomes with future declarations.

The chapter next examines the different initiatives undertaken by the AU, member states and/or regional bodies to combat the threat of terrorism in their respective contexts. The following sections evaluate whether (and which) elements of the various AU policies and/or frameworks were used in the development of the mechanisms. The mechanisms are demarcated into two sections: coordination and cooperation initiatives, and militarised responses.

## **Coordination and cooperation initiatives**

The Nouakchott Process, the Djibouti Process and the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL) all meet at least one objective outlined in the Plan of Action discussed earlier. The Nouakchott Process, established in 2013, and the Djibouti Process, established in 2015, both aim to create a mechanism to strengthen regional security cooperation and information sharing in the fight against terrorism. The Nouakchott Process focuses on the Sahelo-Saharan region, while the Djibouti Process focuses on the Horn region. Since their launch, neither initiative has had significant momentum in fulfilling its mandate.

For instance, the Djibouti Process held its first Meeting of the Heads of Intelligence and Security Services of its member countries in 2017. However, the process remained dormant and as a result, the 2022 Malabo Summit identified the need to revitalise these counterterrorism mechanisms by merging the Nouakchott and Djibouti processes. The AU Commission was requested to make sustainable funding available for the activities of the two processes, as well as for the 2017 Accra Initiative, which ‘aims to prevent spillover of terrorism from the Sahel and to address transnational organised crime and violent extremism in member countries’ border areas’ (African Union 2023; European Council on Foreign Relations n.d.).

A number of key issues have prevented the two mechanisms from fully committing to their mandate and following through on their commitment.

First, the two processes, although welcomed at their launch, did not receive full buy-in as they did not convene again. Second, the revision of the counterterrorism process via the Malabo Summit, which led to the request to merge the two initiatives, indicates that these two processes, focusing on different regions, did not realise the intelligence-sharing aspect of the AU Action Plan, or the requisite coordination and cooperation among regional actors. If this provision had been considered from the beginning, it would have created a more streamlined effort, allowing for divergence into specific focus areas and/or regions. In addition, both initiatives faced limitations due to a lack of financial means. The financial backing of these initiatives must be identified prior to the launch to avoid lack of implementation.

## **Militarised responses**

The AU, regional bodies and member states have significantly prioritised a militarised response to combat terrorism and violent extremism. This is evidenced by the plethora of mechanisms that have been extended across the continent to curb terrorism via military means. These mechanisms include the deployment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) across West Africa, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)/AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM).

The remainder of this section explores the inception and functionality of the MNJTF and SAMIM with respect to AU policies and frameworks on counterterrorism. It assesses how compatible these mechanisms are with these policies and frameworks, and identifies the limitations and gaps in terms of their ability to curb terrorism.

Established in 1994 by Nigeria in response to the Boko Haram insurgency, the MNJTF first began its operations under the regional state leadership of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin. At the time, the OAU Resolution on the Strengthening of Cooperation and Coordination among African States assigned responsibility to member states to cooperate and facilitate such engagements. In 1998, the MNJTF transformed into a more robust multinational counterterrorism mechanism with the extension of its mandate to include cross-border security challenges (De Coning 2023).

The OAU Convention and the Plan of Action gave specific directives to the PSC and the AU Commission to be primarily responsible for monitoring terrorism activities and counterterrorism efforts. However, the MNJTF was not endorsed and/or authorised by the PSC until its 484th session in 2015 (African Union 2015; Amani Africa 2022). The PSC's delayed response to the MNJTF might have been due to the delay in ratification of the OAU Convention, which only occurred in 2014. This delay in ratification resulted in member states and regional actors responding in an ad hoc manner to the issue of terrorism.

The mandate of the MNJTF combines a two-step approach: military actions to eradicate Boko Haram from the region, and stabilisation measures to address the root causes of conflict and violent extremism in the region (De Coning 2023). The following key pillars ensure a comprehensive approach to combat terrorism: engagement on issues of human rights and governance, a social contract with local communities, education, economic recovery, inclusion of women and youth, and humanitarian assistance (De Coning 2023). However, even with this mandate, the key focus of the MNJTF has been predominantly militaristic. It does not define the threat of terrorism holistically or take into consideration non-militaristic methods, such as dialogue and transitional justice, to address the threat of violent extremism and terrorism. This may be attributed to the broader framing of the AU policy framework, which until recently classified the response to terrorism in solely militaristic terms.

For its part, SAMIM is a more recent mission undertaken by the AU and the SADC. It came at the request of Mozambique's President Nyusi, and aimed to combat the growing threat of terrorism in the Cabo Delgado region. This region began seeing increasing tension between the government and local Islamist insurgents affiliated with the Islamic State (IS), known as Al-Shabaab forces, following the discovery of the country's fourth-largest gas reserve (Denis Hurley Peace Institute 2021). Since the onset of the armed confrontation, the state has aimed to control the conflict in the region by employing force, with the support of member states such as Rwanda and mercenary groups operating in the area (CIP 2021).

However, in 2021, the SADC intervened to combat violent extremism and terrorism (Mandrup 2024; SADC 2021). The mandate of SAMIM, which aims to support the government of Mozambique in 'neutralising terrorism and restoring security', points to a predominantly militaristic response from the regional body (SADC 2021). However, it also ensures collaboration with humanitarian agencies and provision of humanitarian relief.

The inception of the mission did not follow the process envisaged in the Plan of Action (African Union 2002) aimed at implementing the OAU Convention. Although neither the Plan nor the Convention stipulates the process of actions that need to be embarked on in a given situation, they do identify the AU PSC and the AU Commission as bearing primary responsibility for counterterrorism activities. In the case of SAMIM, the principle of subsidiarity resulted in the regional body taking on the responsibility of monitoring, assessing and engaging in counterterrorism activities, using provisions under the SADC Mutual Defence Pact (SADC 2003). The AU Convention (African Union 2004) and the Plan of Action (African Union 2002) were therefore disregarded as a guide to the establishment of the mission (SADC 2003).

However, the regional body was endorsed by the PSC during its 1062nd session in 2022, allowing the PSC to embark on its responsibility as stipulated in the Plan of Action. As SAMIM neared its drawdown in July of 2024, a review of its mission indicated that it successfully neutralised the threat of terrorism in the region, reduced the insurgents' capacity and assisted the Mozambican military (CDD 2023).

SAMIM also regarded its facilitation of humanitarian assistance as well as the return of internally displaced persons as an additional success, although not fully identified in its mandate. However, unlike the MNJTf, the SAMIM mission neglected to incorporate social and economic matters in its approach, thus limiting its ability to address the root causes and drivers of insurgency in an area that has not historically faced issues with terrorism and violent extremism. With the withdrawal of SAMIM, the likelihood of the insurgence resurfacing is high due to the mission's lack of a comprehensive approach to terrorism and violent extremism.

## **Structural limitations of peace and security institutions in preventing violent extremism**

There are fundamental limitations in the peace and security institutions responsible for preventing violent extremism and terrorism, including the AU. These limitations can be classified into two categories: theoretical limitations in how the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and member states perceive terrorism and the methods they use to address it; and the practical impediments that have been imposed on AU policies and frameworks, as well as the various mechanisms used.

### ***Theoretical limitations***

First, the AU's broad definition of terrorism, outlined in the OAU Convention, allows for misinterpretation and can lead to the classification of resistance movements as terrorist organisations, even when they arise from dissatisfaction with governance systems. While the definition includes cultural and traditional extremism that threatens state security and stability, it fails to provide context and measure the extent of this 'extremism'.

Second, the responsibility for identifying and addressing terrorism is placed primarily on member states, alongside the AU PSC and the AU Commission. However, this can be problematic when member states misuse the label of 'terrorism' to suppress dissent, as seen in cases like Ethiopia, where opposition parties have been labelled as terrorist organisations (Al Jazeera 2021).

Third, the AU policy frameworks fail to acknowledge that terrorism and terrorist organisations operate across borders and regions, without boundaries or sovereignty. An example is Boko Haram, which operates in various countries and regions – the MNJTF was forced to adapt its composition to address this transnational threat. AU policy does not adequately reflect this transnational nature of terrorism and, as a result, member states and RECs are often left without the necessary tools to effectively combat terrorism. This leads to inconsistencies in policy implementation, as states are forced to accommodate the specific situation at hand and deviate from the policy framework.

Lastly, the AU's militarised approach hinders it from effectively addressing the threat of terrorism. From a policy perspective, there is a dearth of legislation highlighting the importance of addressing the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism. Although some mechanisms, such as the MNJTF and AMISOM/ATMIS, have made strides to include the root causes and drivers of terrorism in their analysis, their primary responses and mandates have been militaristic. Militarised responses worsen the root causes and factors contributing to insecurity. They shift valuable human, technical and financial resources away from addressing urgent social and economic issues on the continent and instead prioritise combating terrorist groups. Economic and social concerns that pre-date the increasing economic activities that led to the increase in Islamist insurgency operations need to be factored into missions such as SAMIM to avoid a resurgence of terrorist activities in the region.

### ***Practical limitations***

The AU faces significant practical challenges when engaging in counterterrorism efforts. Most important is the member states' lack of political will to abide by the existing policy frameworks. This has hindered the AU from effectively meeting its mandate and following its own policies. As noted, the OAU Convention, adopted in 1999, was not ratified until 2002. Similarly, the Protocol of the Convention, established in 2004, was not ratified until 2014. The low levels and slow rates of ratification and implementation by state parties indicate limited political will and commitment to these policy frameworks. Consequently, this also impacts the localisation of the policies, reflecting a lack of willingness and capacity to establish national and local legislation that aligns with the AU's directives.

There have also been limited efforts in coordination between member states. The AU's Plan of Action of 2002 has provisions for member states to pursue common counterterrorism objectives by ensuring border security, effective passport control, and the profiling and verification of documents of all travellers. This has yet to be implemented due to capacity constraints and a lack of political will. The lack of national and regional coordination also extends to a lack of coordination at a continental level. For instance, several strategies have been implemented in the Sahel region. However, none has aimed to include the various actors involved in a concerted and comprehensive approach.

Bilateral engagements have become a significant obstacle to effective coordination in addressing the threat of terrorism. The case of Mozambique illustrates this challenge. Initially, Mozambique sought to combat the Islamist insurgency by engaging in bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries, such as Rwanda, as well as private military and security companies from South Africa. While these efforts show a willingness among states to collaborate, they bypass the established AU mechanisms.

Countries that have ratified the AU's counterterrorism frameworks are, in effect, weakening these structures by opting for alternative bilateral processes. Instead of aligning with the AU's guidelines and collaborative frameworks, these countries are pursuing independent avenues. The problem is not merely that these efforts are occurring outside the AU framework – they actively weaken it. Member states that have ratified the AU's counterterrorism protocols and frameworks are diminishing their effectiveness by pursuing alternative, ad hoc solutions through bilateral channels. By opting for these independent pathways, they disregard the collective

power and guidance provided by the AU, which is crucial for a unified and coordinated response. Such bilateral engagements not only hinder the utilisation of existing policy frameworks but, more critically, they undermine the very systems put in place to address the continent's security challenges.

Another significant limitation faced by peace and security instruments in preventing violent extremism is the nature of the mechanism used. The AU has aimed to establish mechanisms that counter terrorism via two pathways: cooperation and coordination, and the formation and endorsement of militarised mechanisms. However, the extent to which these two pathways intersect and coordinate is unclear.

Regarding militarised mechanisms such as the MNJTF and SAMIM, there is not a streamlined approach to how these task forces are established. This often results in ad hoc coalitions and responses to terrorism that emanate from states' requests for intervention or are led by regional states and only later incorporated into the AU PSC process through the endorsement of such mechanisms. This not only creates a disoriented process but also delegitimises the existing AU policy on counterterrorism. It also affects the monitoring and evaluation of these mechanisms. For instance, SAMIM's use of provisions under the SADC Mutual Defence Pact created a lack of clarity around which institution was responsible for monitoring the mission's progress: the PSC, the REC or both.

Lastly, the AU faces challenges around limited resources and capacity. For example, the PSC, which is responsible for monitoring terrorism and engaging with member states, has called for the operationalisation of a subcommittee on terrorism, to no avail. This has resulted in practical challenges for the AU, such as the inability to monitor and verify which member states comply with or implement relevant AU and other international counterterrorism instruments. Member states also lack sufficient resources and have limited capacity to implement the recommended counterterrorism measures. Finally, the ACSRT struggles to maintain adequate funding.

The AU has made significant strides in addressing the threat of terrorism through various legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms and regional cooperation initiatives. However, persistent challenges such as resource constraints, lack of political will and intelligence sharing must be overcome to enhance the effectiveness of these efforts. The militaristic approach that has spearheaded the objective of the AU in countering terrorism and violent extremism has not served the institution or the continent well. Addressing the threat of terrorism in Africa is not solely a

security issue but a complex challenge that requires a holistic approach. This involves not only strengthening military and law enforcement capabilities but also addressing the root causes of extremism through political reform, economic development and social cohesion. Regional cooperation and international support play critical roles in enhancing the effectiveness of counterterrorism strategies. A holistic approach that integrates security measures with socio-economic development and international cooperation is essential for sustainable success in combating terrorism in Africa. The AU's continued commitment and proactive engagement with member states and international partners will be pivotal in achieving lasting peace and security on the continent.

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## **SECTION 2**

# **USING THE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE LENS**

## CHAPTER 4

# Transitional justice and the mitigation of violent extremism in Africa:

## *Insights from the Ubuntu tradition-based approach*

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*Adeoye O. Akinola*

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In most African countries, from the Sahel region to southern Africa to the Horn of Africa, the scars of violent conflict run deep, often leaving behind a legacy of ruins, dislocation, trauma, distrust, hatred and injustice. As these countries strive to recover, heal and rebuild, the concept of transitional justice becomes a crucial framework for addressing past atrocities and preventing the resurgence of violence and extremism. The persistent neglect to integrate transitional justice and traditional peace instruments into current conflict resolution mechanisms explains the increasing incidence of armed conflicts, their protracted nature and conflict relapse across the continent. Indeed, nearly 80% of ongoing conflicts on the continent stem from instances of conflict recurrence.

Transitional justice involves various mechanisms, such as truth commissions, prosecutions, reparations and institutional reforms. It combines two major initiatives: judicial mechanisms, such as hybrid courts and domestic trials, and non-judicial mechanisms, like truth commissions, local or community-based justice, institutional reforms, reparations, memory and memorials (International Peace Institute 2013). These aim to acknowledge past wrongs, hold perpetrators accountable, and provide redress to victims of injustice. In Africa, where violent extremism and high rates of conflict relapse threaten peace and stability, the integration of Ubuntu principles with transitional justice is increasingly vital. The quest for African peace and stability relies not only on state actors but also on regional and continental stakeholders, including the African Union (AU),

which has sought to leverage the benefits of transitional justice in its conflict resolution mechanisms.

The AU Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) was instituted in 2019 to promote redress and accountability in the aftermath of violence and mass atrocities, aligning with the broader framework of the June 2006 AU Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD). The AUTJP aims at the ‘pursuit of accountability, sustainable peace, justice, and reconciliation’ for individuals and societies emerging from violent conflict (International Peace Institute 2013: 72).

While lack of implementation is at the core, many continental and regional protocols or policy frameworks are too old and unable to capture the evolved socio-political landscape in Africa. For instance, the 1977 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa is only now being revisited, several decades after its adoption. This delay comes when some African heads of state, particularly in the Sahel region, invite mercenaries to execute their bidding (Akinola and Makombe 2024).

Transitional justice is conceived as a bridge to a hopeful future and a potential facilitator of democracy and the rule of law (Mutua 2015). It is widely regarded as essential for restoring societies that are experiencing political and social dysfunction. In recent years, there has been a renewed call to revisit tradition-based knowledge systems, particularly those grounded in the philosophy of Ubuntu, as an effective indigenous response to the persistent violent conflicts in the African socio-political landscape. The relevance of Ubuntu in achieving peace is especially significant, given the growing interest in the role of culture in shaping human relations and community survival. This is particularly pertinent in the areas of conflict resolution, peacebuilding and the attainment of transitional justice.

Ubuntu embodies the spirit of solidarity and sharing, positive and inclusive thinking, compassion and inherent goodness (Omodan 2022: 42). These qualities are essential for achieving peace and transitional justice in conflict-affected African contexts. Revisiting the Ubuntu philosophy of conflict resolution becomes urgent in response to the consistent limitations and failures of liberal peacebuilding. In the post-apartheid era, South African peacebuilders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu recognised the ineffectiveness of liberal peace frameworks. Tutu served as the chairperson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). He embraced and regularly deployed the

traditional Ubuntu philosophy for peace and reconciliation to guide witnesses as they provided testimony, which contributed towards a restorative approach to achieving transitional justice.

Following South Africa's establishment of the TRC and its success, other countries adopted similar models to ensure peace and justice in post-conflict societies. For instance, the Indian Residential School Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada was established in 2008 to settle abuses committed by the state against Indigenous people in the residential school system (Ibhawoh 2014: 8). Prior to that, Uganda had had two separate truth commissions, in the 1970s and the 1980s, and Zimbabwe implemented one in 1985. Rwanda and Mozambique adopted tradition-based, community-oriented systems to foster peace and reconciliation.

Given the failures of liberal peace processes in Africa and the rising violent extremism, it is crucial to implement a predictable, accessible, equitable and effective conflict resolution mechanism that guarantees transitional justice. This chapter explores how the principles of Ubuntu could be used to manage or prevent violent extremism and achieve transitional justice in Africa. The chapter argues that Ubuntu principles represent Africa's most effective means of mitigating against violent extremism and achieving societal order, peace and security.

## **Understanding transitional justice and Ubuntu**

The links between transitional justice and Ubuntu reinforce the importance of incorporating indigenous and tradition-based African values and perspectives into efforts to ensure peace, address past injustices, and build a more just and inclusive society. By embracing Ubuntu principles, transitional justice can become a mechanism for accountability and a catalyst for healing, reconciliation and social transformation. Both transitional justice and Ubuntu focus on the victims, and Ubuntu is premised on the world view that 'a human being is a person through other people', embodied in the perspective that 'I am because you are. I am because we are'.

### ***Contextualising transitional justice***

Transitional justice addresses the legacy of widespread past abuses to promote justice and establish sustainable peace, especially in societies fractured along ethnic, religious or other group lines due to prolonged violence and turmoil.

This approach aims to heal divisions and prevent further conflicts (Gentile and Foster 2022: 503). It encompasses a society's efforts to address past conflict and human rights abuses through accountability, justice and reconciliation. Transitional justice uses a range of judicial and non-judicial processes and mechanisms, such as truth-seeking, restorative and culture-based redress processes, retributive justice, reparations and institutional reforms, to prevent future violations, bolster and educate civil society, and preserve historical memory (International Peace Institute 2013; OHCHR 2020).

Moreover, transitional justice mechanisms can play a vital role in reintegrating both former combatants and marginalised communities into society, thereby reducing the risk of recruitment into extremist groups. These initiatives can promote stability and resilience in post-conflict societies by offering participation, inclusion and socio-economic empowerment.

One of the primary challenges in combating violent extremism is addressing structural violence and the grievances that result from it. This fuels extremist ideology and the destructive activities linked to it. However, integrating transitional justice principles into broader strategies to prevent extremism holds promise for fostering lasting peace, security and resilience in Africa. By addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting reconciliation and empowering marginalised communities, transitional justice can play a role in building a more inclusive and secure future for all Africans.

Makau Mutua (2015: 2) holds that transitional justice involves the following two-step process for post-conflict change. First, it aims to stabilise society with temporary measures that show a commitment to addressing past abuses, such as statements and actions from new leaders to build public trust in the reconstruction process. In the absence of these assurances, the public may doubt the new regime's sincerity in breaking from the past. Second, it prioritises the perceptions of pre-colonial African societies, excludes a winner-takes-all approach, and ensures that no major actor is excluded. Primary and secondary victims must find justice to move beyond past grievances, but perpetrators also need to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society.

Transitional justice offers a pathway for addressing these grievances by interrogating the causes of conflict, including structural inequality, institutionalised marginalisation and historical injustices. By fostering a sense of justice and reconciliation, transitional justice initiatives can provide a counternarrative that

will contribute towards disrupting and undermining the appeal of extremist narratives and ideologies.

However, there are a number of challenges to implementing transitional justice in Africa. These include lack of sufficient awareness of the importance and function of transitional justice, limited resources, ongoing insecurity, political instability, political resistance or lack of political will, and absence of resolute commitments to utilise state mechanisms and institutions to support communities in their efforts to pursue redress and accountability. In addition, the complex dynamics of violent extremism often intersect with ethnic, religious and regional tensions, complicating efforts to achieve meaningful redress, healing and accountability.

### ***Ubuntu***

Ubuntu is a victim-centred and traditional approach to transitional justice. It is a world view or philosophy that sees entities in relational terms, and is considered the connecting thread of the people of the Bantu language group (Ndebele, Swati/Swazi, Xhosa and Zulu), one of the main linguistic groups in Africa (Tieku 2012: 375). It exemplifies a communal life founded on genuine cooperation and traditional conflict management strategies to create and sustain a community through justice, mutual responsibility and care. The philosophy celebrates humanism, compassion, responsiveness, hospitality and harmony, reinforcing respect and solidarity among community members (Mzamo and Mphuthumi 2001: 26; Ngcoya 2009: 20).

Archbishop Desmond Tutu described Ubuntu as the essence of Africans' understanding of humanity and the societal value system. Ubuntu's emphasis on community resonates deeply with most Africans, embodying the belief that the fate of the individual is intertwined with that of the entire group (Mbiti 1969). Accordingly, whatever befalls one person affects the whole community and vice versa. This perspective underscores the notion that the individual's life is inherently embedded within the community, and recognises that the community is the foundation from which the individual emerges.

While Ubuntu has been associated primarily with southern Africa, and South Africa in particular, the tenets of the philosophy are reflected in different African conflict resolution value systems. Versions of Ubuntu, such as Gacaca (a traditional justice system in Rwanda) and Gotla (a judicial meeting in Botswana), have been adopted in different African societies (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Versions of Ubuntu**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Maxim</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Sesotho (Lesotho & South Africa)	Motho ke motho ka batho	A person is a person by other people
IsiZulu (South Africa)	Umntu umuntu ngabantu	A person is a person through or by means of other people
Xitsonga (Mozambique & South Africa)	Rintiho rinwe a rinusi hove	One finger cannot pick a grain
Sesotho (Lesotho & South Africa)	A botho bag ago bon ne botho seshabeng	Let your welfare be the welfare of the nation
Chichewa (Malawi)	Mwana wa nzako ndi wako yemwe	Someone's child is your child
Setswana (Botswana & South Africa)	Moeng goroga re je ka wema	Come guest, we feast through you

Source: Ngcoya (2009: 18)

As noted, Ubuntu was a driving force in the operations and procedures of South Africa's TRC. At its establishment in 1995, the TRC was mandated to bear witness to and explore reparation and rehabilitation for the victims of apartheid and, if required, grant amnesty to the perpetrators of human rights abuses (Ibhawoh 2014). This approach was embraced to prevent a resurgence of human rights abuses and extreme inter- and intra-group violence. The adoption of Ubuntu legitimised the TRC as a transitional justice model to ensure peace in post-apartheid South Africa, a country that had endured decades of heinous crimes under white minority rule (Ibhawoh 2014).

Similarly, a traditional conflict resolution model found in Burundi in the Great Lakes region of Africa, known as Bashingantahe, mirrors Ubuntu in attaining transitional justice. The Bashingantahe are community-appointed peace-makers. They are drawn from the communities and chosen based on their established roles as societal leaders who can act as independent mediators and arbitrators. These morally sound individuals, usually regarded as the Council of the Wise, have a mutual understanding with their community to model virtuous behaviour, resolve conflicts and protect vulnerable members of society, thus ensuring local disputes are settled effectively (Buszka 2019).

As with other traditional socio-political structures, the status of the Bashingantahe declined significantly during the colonial and post-colonial periods and continued to wane during the severe conflict of the early 1990s. The assassination of Burundi's first democratically elected president, Melchior Ndadaye, during a military coup in 1993, the death of President Cyprien Ntaryamira in a plane crash in 1995, and the abandonment of the traditional Bashingantahe conflict resolution mechanism triggered a violent conflict that ended in 2009 when the Forces for National Liberation (FNL) laid down arms (BBC 2023). The country was plunged into one of Africa's most protracted and complex conflicts, resulting in the loss of over 300 000 lives (BBC 2023). Kwizera (2017: 152) notes that 'in Burundi, colonial rule halted the evolutionary processes of the traditional administrative structures and undermined the basis of traditional rule that was rooted in moral authority and consultation by making organized physical force the primary locus of authority'.

However, after the protracted violent conflicts between 1993 and 2009, Bashingantahe proved its value by preserving peace, protecting victims, organising arrests, encouraging displaced people to return, reconciling offenders and victims, and recovering stolen goods. Renewed interest in reviving Bashingantahe followed, with the Arusha peace talks (1998–2000) acknowledging their historical role in fostering national cohesion (Thien Ho 2009). Indeed, the Arusha Peace Agreement was made possible in part due to the renewed influence and support of the Bashingantahe council. In 1999, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees also endorsed the council, recognising its capacity to make impartial and collective decisions that transcended ethnic and political divisions (Thien Ho 2009).

A significant number of Burundians view Bashingantahe as more accessible, trustworthy and legitimate than government agents and the formal court system (Buszka 2019: 191). Often more independent than government administrators, foreign peacekeeping forces or mediators, traditional peace-makers such as the Bashingantahe have the advantage of understanding the local context of the conflicts they mediate. One of the major issues with giving responsibility for Africa's conflict resolution and peacebuilding to external actors and institutions is that they lack the necessary understanding of Africa's socio-cultural, political and economic landscapes, which is crucial for effective conflict resolution.

## Violent extremism in Africa

Palik and colleagues (2022) reveal a grim picture of the conflict trends in Africa from 1989 to 2021. In 2021 alone, 30 state-based conflicts were documented, leading to 19 325 battle-related fatalities. Additionally, non-state conflicts claimed 3 498 lives in the same year. Africa leads the world in the number of non-state conflicts and holds the highest absolute number of fatalities resulting from one-sided violence (Palik et al. 2022: 9). While the higher rate of violent conflict in immediate post-colonial Africa has been linked with its colonial legacy, Akinola and Uzodike (2018: 92) note that

Africa's contemporary history is dominated by violent conflict, which has prompted many war-torn nations to embrace different conflict resolution and peace-building approaches. Certain groups' desire to control power and resources at the expense of others explains the racism, ethnic conflict, genocide, xenophobia, civil wars, and armed insurrections experienced by many African states.

Beyond traditional conflicts such as civil wars and liberation struggles, and resource insurgencies in countries like Mozambique, Nigeria and Cameroon, the rise of new violent groups – including armed militias, climate-induced violence like the pastoralist-agrarian conflicts in West Africa, and religious terrorism from groups like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab in Somalia – has raised critical questions about the adequacy of the existing peace agenda. Despite more efforts being directed at peacekeeping missions and other state-centric interventions, advocates of indigenous and traditional conflict resolution methods in Africa argue that the prolonged conflicts in countries like Sudan, Mozambique, Nigeria and Somalia stem from the failure to achieve transitional justice.

### *Sudan*

After the first Sudanese civil war (1955–1972), Sudan further experienced intensive violence between 1983 and 2005. As a result of the extreme violence and gross violations of human rights in Darfur, the AU established a High-Level Panel on Darfur in 2009, led by then South African President Thabo Mbeki, and subsequently adopted the Panel's report (Reliefweb 2010). It advocated for integrated justice and reconciliation, recommending hybrid courts, comprehensive national processes, and truth-telling and reconciliation efforts (International Peace Institute 2013: 29). In hindsight, if these measures had been implemented, Sudan would have experienced enduring peace and stability.

## *Somalia*

Since the downfall of the Barre regime and the complete collapse of the Somali state apparatus in 1991, efforts to restore peace in Somalia have faced persistent challenges (Hersi and Akinola 2024). The protracted violent conflict there, with various factions clashing over political control of the country, is a significant contributor to violent extremism in the conflict-ridden Horn of Africa (Kessels et al. 2016: 29). ‘The violence that raged in south and central Somalia during the 1990s and 2000s across shifting coalitions of localised clan-based militias was fuelled by clan-based warlordism, the widespread availability of small arms, and intermittent periods of devastating famine and drought’ (Kessels et al. 2016: 30).

The subsequent militarisation of the country’s socio-political landscape by foreign powers further exacerbated the situation, contributing to the rise of terrorist group Al-Shabaab. While the group has wreaked havoc in neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Uganda, its reign of terror is mainly in Somalia. For example, Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the deadly terrorist bombing in the capital on 14 October 2017, when a truck filled with explosives detonated at a major intersection, resulting in 587 deaths and hundreds of injuries, as well as for the attacks on 29 October 2022 that claimed the lives of 121 people and injured 333 (Maruf 2022).

Introducing a Western-driven approach to reconcile the various clans in Somalia and end the conflict has proved abortive due to ‘an overreliance on top-down implementation by weak and ineffectual federal institutions based on the agendas of external partners’ (Kessels et al. 2016: 30). Despite efforts by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), in collaboration with the AU and other global stakeholders, to facilitate peace in Somalia, their peace strategies predominantly rely on military power. They lack fundamental elements of transitional justice, such as inclusive reconciliation, empathy and forgiveness (see Hersi and Akinola 2024).

## *Mozambique*

Since gaining independence in 1975, Mozambique has faced various challenges, including a civil war between the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, or FRELIMO) and the main opposition, Mozambique National Resistance (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, RENAMO). More recently, the resource-rich Cabo Delgado region has suffered injustice and been marginalised from the proceeds of crude oil wealth by the state and multinational corporations operating in the zone. The coastal communities in the northern part

of Cabo Delgado province have relied on fishing for their livelihoods for centuries. However, the discovery of gas deposits and the subsequent petro-capitalist investment model have disrupted their socio-economic order, leading to their relocation and the loss of their primary source of income and traditional way of life (Patel 2024).

The region has been plagued by Islamic terrorism since 2017, beginning with an insurgency supported and hijacked by the Islamic State Mozambique (ISM), formerly named Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama (ASWJ) (Ramontja and Akinola 2024).<sup>1</sup> Since then, Mozambique has seen over a million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Ramontja and Akinola 2024), including from the attack on Palma town in 2021, which caused over 88 000 displacements. Between 2020 and 2021, over 9 000 students and educators were abducted, arbitrarily arrested, injured or killed in attacks on schools. As of 12 January 2022, the conflict had claimed more than 4 500 lives (Aljazeera 2023).

The ISM has been violently confronting state security forces in various districts. In December 2023, intense confrontations between ISM and the defence and security forces erupted in Macomia, Meluco and Muidumbe districts, resulting in fatalities (Patel 2024). As the conflict unfolded, approximately 5 800 people were displaced from Chiure, Macomia and Quissanga to the Metuge district, while 38 000 people were displaced from Chiure to Chiure Sede. The ISM claimed responsibility for attacks in the Chiure district that led to over 70 fatalities and the destruction of approximately 500 churches, homes and public infrastructure (Patel 2024).

The root cause of the conflict lies in the injustice of structural socio-economic exclusion, marginalisation and poverty affecting the local communities and their governance. The Mozambican case echoes the experiences of the Niger Delta region, and highlights the effects of extraction of natural resources on fuelling conflict.

## *Nigeria*

Nigeria has experienced numerous violent extremist groups, including Boko Haram and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPB), as well as Niger Delta militant groups such as the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Their reigns of terror have jeopardised Nigeria's quests for socio-economic development, peace and security.

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<sup>1</sup> The ISM, otherwise called Al-Shabaab, is not linked to Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

The unresolved Niger Delta conflict has been driven by resource-related violence. Suffering from ‘Niger Delta fatigue’ due to the 30-year conflict and insurgency in the oil community in Nigeria, the Niger Delta region continues to be characterised by neglect, injustice, violent conflict, oil-related protests, environmental degradation, human rights violations and the brutalisation of the oil community by both state security forces and security operatives of the multinational corporations operating in the area (Hallmarks 2017).

Over 2.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas are flared daily in the Niger Delta. From 1976 to 2006, 7 000 oil spills polluted over 2 500 square kilometres, devastating the environment and local communities. This has led to severe flooding and soil erosion and destroyed homes and farms (Elisha 2023). The crux of the conflict was captured by Hallmarks (2017):

The Ogoni and other ethnic groups – the Ijaws, Itserikis, Urhobos, Isikos, Liages, Ikwerres, Ekpeyes and Ogulaghas – complained that Shell, Mobil and other oil companies were prospering at their expense, as the ethnic groups saw little of the wealth generated by the oil production, while suffering the fallout from widespread environmental degradation caused by exploration and production efforts.

Compounding the situation in the Niger Delta is

the high volume of small and light weapons in the custody of the militants ... [which has] brought with it increased destructive activities that pose threats to all levels – most critically at the subregional level. A surge in militancy and violent criminality (illustrated by incidents of pipeline vandalization and theft, kidnapping of expatriates and local elites, and major attacks against government operations and oil) has resulted in drastically reduced government income, sent foreign investors fleeing, and succeeded in generating a spillover effect in other West African states. (Akinola 2011: 67)

In an attempt to ensure transitional justice, the Nigerian government established an amnesty programme for militants in 2009, which provided financial benefits to over 30 000 former militants. This succeeded in reducing the region’s armed insurrection, as well as instances of kidnapping and ransom payment, and bunkering activities, but the government intervention focused mainly on ensuring security for the oil industry (Elisha 2023). The amnesty was not directed at resolving the conflict, militating against human rights violations or addressing incidents of widespread insecurity and marginalisation of the oil community.

Funding cuts to the programme in 2015, combined with the government's failure to improve socio-economic conditions in the Delta region and the hostile posture of state security, triggered a new insurgency in 2016 (EU Agency for Asylum 2019). This led to the rise of several militant groups, notably the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), which remain active in the region.

Overall, the peace programme, anchored on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), was a distorted attempt at achieving justice for the neglected Niger Delta community, and lacked the basic tenets of transitional justice, such as inclusivity, sincerity, humaneness and depoliticisation.

## **Rethinking the prevailing liberal peace architecture**

This section interrogates the underlying ethos of the liberal peace system which has informed the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). In particular, it assesses the application of the liberal peacebuilding model to African society, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. An assumption embedded in the liberal peace model, notably the idea that democracies are characterised by institutional consensus, peaceful negotiation and compromise among the elites, as espoused by the democratic peace theory, has fallen short across the African continent.

The African political landscape is defined by aggressive politicking, hostile competition, institutional weaknesses and state fragility. These challenges, including intergroup hostility, communal disputes, domestic violence and broader security threats, underscore the renewed call to integrate Ubuntu principles into modern judicial practices and everyday interpersonal interactions.

Akinola and Uzodike (2018: 99) note that Ubuntu and transitional justice contrast with the emphasis on extreme individualism in Western liberal ideology, and instead advocate for social equality rooted in dignity, mutual respect and equal concern within relationships. The celebration of individual sovereignty over the community's peace and order is one of the contradictions of the peace agenda in Africa. As exemplified by the Ubuntu principle, individual freedom is embedded in the harmony of the community.

Liberalism is extremely state-centric, assuming that states are neutral, possess authority and legitimacy, and act in the interests of all. It allocates minimal roles to non-state actors, including important African structures such as family and community heads, women, youth, traditional institutions and elders. When

practitioners of liberal peace processes attempt to involve the local population in peace initiatives, they usually co-opt them and compel them to fit within the liberal space (Mac Ginty 2008: 142).

As the proponents of liberal development and peace architectures continue to celebrate the progress of globalisation and the externalisation of liberal ideology worldwide, the international global order has failed to address the economic and social plight of citizens of impoverished countries, who have become the main victims of globalisation. Furthermore, supporters of liberal peace have also misconstrued Africa and shown little understanding of its socio-political and cultural formation.

While the mainstream literature on African conflict has reflected negatively on the issue of ethnic cleavages, Osei-Hwedie and Abu-Nimer (2009: 1) argue that ‘cultural diversity can, on the other hand, contribute in constructive ways to peacebuilding and facilitate contextually appropriate economic and social development’. Indeed, most of the conflicts in Africa are not rooted in ethnic hostility. However, African political elites have consistently deployed ethnicity as an instrument for mass mobilisation and have used ethnic groups as a support base (Akinola 2018; Osei-Hwedie and Abu-Nimer 2009). Understanding conflict – either induced by ethnic differences or reinforced by ethnic sentiments – requires a deep understanding of societal culture and ethnic relations.

Liberal political systems have failed to support people’s legitimate interests in building a society that reflects their unique identity and values (Gentile and Foster 2022: 506). It is difficult to achieve justice and promote inclusivity under such an ideological framework. As Tieku (2012) notes, the African local population has been consistently denied the opportunity to engage with foreign peacebuilding actors, participate in peace processes and contribute to post-conflict reconstruction programmes. In the few instances where the local population was consulted, their input rarely influenced the implementation stages of the peace plan. As a result, they lack a sense of ownership over the peace process. While ‘negative peace’ – the absence of direct violence – may be achieved temporarily, these societies often relapse into conflict. The extreme adherence to the liberal framework sees any other approaches as ‘obstacles to the transformation of societies into “generically liberal” oases of individual rights, social responsibility, accountability, democracy and respect for the rule of law’ (Mac Ginty 2008: 144).

A contradiction is that most of the root causes of conflict and violent extremism are related to indigenous issues and complex social problems, such as the aggressive

relocation of people from ancestral land. Some of the local militia groups that have consistently threatened Mali's statehood are culturally located (see Mac Ginty 2008). Between 1969 and 1984 in Kenya, agropastoralist conflicts displaced 168 000 people (Mac Ginty 2008: 154), while quasi-traditional conflicts have devastated many communities in Nigeria. Notably, the Ife/Modakeke violent conflict in western Nigeria during the 1990s caused significant destruction.

As Osei-Hwedie and Abu-Nimer (2009: 2) note: 'As culture facilitates people's understanding of their world and their social, political and economic relations with others, it also defines the theatre of acceptance and disagreements which ultimately lead to conflict or peaceful coexistence.' Therefore, any conflict resolution mechanism must consider the culture of the society. A criticism of the liberal peace system is its inability to include the cultural affinity of the people in conflict in peacebuilding processes.

## **Quests for transitional justice through Ubuntu**

Transitional justice can be implemented through a mix of Western and traditional methods of conflict resolution. Due to the failures of Western peace frameworks in Africa, there is a tendency to see transitional justice through a purely traditional or indigenous conflict resolution lens. While the terms 'indigenous' and 'traditional' are often used interchangeably, Mac Ginty (2008: 149) distinguishes between them: 'indigenous' refers to practices that are locally inspired and widely accepted by the community, whereas 'traditional' pertains to historical norms and practices. The philosophy of Ubuntu should be regarded as both traditional and indigenous, and the operationalisation of Ubuntu as a cultural world view is one of the most effective means of achieving transitional justice.

Discussions of transitional justice in Africa often debate whether peace and justice are competitive or complementary goals. Two flawed assumptions dominate: that peace processes only aim to end violent conflicts and that justice means solely retributive justice (International Peace Institute 2013). However, peace and justice are fundamentally linked, with durable peace requiring addressing the root causes of violence. Often, the prevailing peace architecture prioritises the militarisation of the peace process, enforcing compliance through military force and a punitive judicial system, thereby neglecting the root causes of the conflict and the suffering of its primary victims.

As noted, transitional justice and Ubuntu are complementary and share significant links, particularly in the context of African societies where Ubuntu is deeply ingrained in the cultural and philosophical fabric. Ubuntu emphasises the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of communal values, empathy and reconciliation. Transitional justice seeks to acknowledge victims, build trust in state institutions, strengthen human rights and uphold the rule of law (OHCHR 2020). These efforts are crucial for fostering redress, healing, reconciliation and preventing future violations. The application of the Ubuntu method of conflict resolution presents the most effective way of actualising transitional justice, sustainable peace and preventing conflict relapse. Following are some key links between transitional justice and Ubuntu, which should be the objectives of meaningful peace initiatives or conflict resolution in Africa.

### ***Long-term healing and reconciliation***

Africa's pursuit of sustainable peace is founded on the pillars of reconciliation and coexistence, which are underpinned by human rights and social, economic and political justice. These principles are intrinsic to transitional justice and Ubuntu (Murithi 2006). Both recognise that true reconciliation requires addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting healing at the individual and societal levels, and building relationships based on trust and mutual respect. They emphasise the importance of long-term processes beyond mere legal or punitive measures.

Transitional justice involves judicial and non-judicial measures to address human rights abuses following conflict and repression, aiming to provide recognition and justice for victims while fostering peace and reconciliation (Ibhawoh 2014). Similarly, Murithi (2006: 26) posits that Ubuntu assisted the multiracial society in South Africa to 'transcend the bitterness, hatred, and suspicion of the past and to make the transition to a more stable – albeit still imperfect – political order'.

There is a need to ensure a broader understanding of justice that 'encompass[es] processes of achieving healing, equality, reconciliation, obtaining compensation and restitution, and establishing the rule of law. This should constitute part of a comprehensive transitional justice process required to deal with the past and secure sustainable justice going forward' (International Peace Institute 2013: 76). Liberal peace processes, founded on criminal justice and militarisation, are defective in achieving sustainable peace.

### ***Restorative justice and recognition of interconnectedness***

Ubuntu recognises the interconnectedness of all individuals within society. Similarly, transitional justice acknowledges the collective nature of suffering and accountability in the aftermath of conflict or repression. Both frameworks reject individualistic notions of justice in favour of recognising the broader social, cultural and historical contexts in which injustices occur. As explained by Akinola and Uzodike (2018: 109),

justice is achievable in healthy communities in which members are accountable to one another and reconcile differences not through modern state institutions like the police or judicial system, but through cultural institutions like the family, community groups, or social institutions supported by the community or state.

Both transitional justice and Ubuntu advocate for restorative approaches to justice. Instead of focusing solely on punishment, they prioritise healing, reconciliation and restoring relationships within both smaller and wider communities. In the philosophy of Ubuntu, conflicts are seen as opportunities for restoring peace, order and harmony rather than merely assigning blame and apportioning punishments.

### ***Restitution and reparations***

While reparations have financial implications and implementation complexity, they must be considered case-by-case when necessary. For example, in September 2022, Uganda paid US\$65 million, the first instalment of a US\$325 million compensation package ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Aljazeera 2022). This follows a 2005 ICJ ruling that Uganda violated international law by occupying parts of eastern DRC and supporting armed groups during the 1998–2003 conflict. The compensation aims to address damages, including loss of life, rape, conscription of child soldiers and displacement of up to 500 000 people. Despite initial DRC demands for US\$11 billion, negotiations resulted in the agreed settlement structure of five yearly payments.

That said, reparation should extend beyond financial compensation and encompass the following five key components:

restitution (returning the victim to his or her situation before the crime was committed); compensation (payment for economically measurable

damage); rehabilitation (more general medical or social assistance); satisfaction (a broad group of measures that includes access to justice and truth-seeking); and guarantees of non-repetition. (International Peace Institute 2013: 22)

### ***Mediation, dialogue and community involvement***

There is a growing demand to integrate transitional justice objectives into mediation and peacebuilding processes to ensure sustainable peace and security. Ubuntu emphasises the importance of dialogue and communal decision-making processes. Similarly, transitional justice mechanisms such as truth and reconciliation commissions often involve extensive community participation, allowing victims and perpetrators to engage in dialogue, share their experiences and collectively seek healing and reconciliation.

Mediation represents a method of dispute resolution where a mediator facilitates communication between conflicting parties to help them reach a mutually agreeable resolution (Omodan 2022: 43). The process requires all parties to participate openly and honestly to find common ground, which is crucial for managing conflicts. Desmond Tutu outlined three distinct dimensions of truth essential to understanding the practice of mediation and reconciliation: forensic factual truth, which is verifiable and documented; social truth, established through interaction and debate; and personal truth, deeply individual and private in nature (Hailey 2008: 13).

### ***Human dignity and empathy***

Ubuntu strongly emphasises recognising the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, even those who have committed wrongdoing. Transitional justice similarly seeks to restore the dignity of victims, acknowledge the humanity of perpetrators, and foster empathy and understanding among all members of society. Transitional justice promotes ‘African shared values relative to: African ownership and leadership; promotion of national and local ownership; inclusiveness and equity; primacy of victim-centred justice; cooperation, coherence’ (African Union 2012: 1). Ubuntu’s recognition of the indivisibility of humanity fosters profound empathy, forgiveness, reconciliation and justice. Ubuntu inspires community members to act in solidarity with the vulnerable, the weak and the poor and helps them behave in specific ways for the common good by prioritising reconciliation over punishment (Hailey 2008).

### ***Consensus-building***

Consensus-building remains at the heart of both transitional justice and Ubuntu. The TRC in South Africa aimed to move beyond merely resolving conflicts between the white minority and black majority or within different segments of the black population. Its goal was transformation, aligning individuals and communities with the communal spirit and humanity inherent in African pre-colonial societies. Therefore, consensus-building emerged as a cultural cornerstone for governing and nurturing societal relationships. A community grounded in Ubuntu develops conflict resolution strategies that foster lasting peace and sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter established links between transitional justice and Ubuntu and located both in historical and contemporary contexts. Transitional justice and Ubuntu create a platform that maximises the potential for meaningful dialogue among victims, offenders and communities. Ubuntu should be understood and adopted as a guiding ethical framework for designing and implementing transitional justice mechanisms and ensuring sustainable peace in post-conflict societies. By grounding transitional justice initiatives in the Ubuntu values of compassion, forgiveness and solidarity, policymakers and practitioners can ensure these efforts are culturally relevant and resonate with local communities. Traditional and indigenous approaches such as Ubuntu are participatory and relationship-focused, offering a greater likelihood of gaining societal buy-in.

The historical externalisation of conflict resolution instruments through a military approach and other liberal counterterrorism templates has failed to address the underlying drivers of violent extremism on the continent. Introducing a purely Western peace architecture founded on a top-down approach to curtail violent conflict is misplaced. A bottom-up approach is essential for achieving peace through transitional justice and Ubuntu. It is thus crucial to integrate women and youth as active stakeholders in all peacebuilding initiatives, alongside traditional dispute resolution methods (Metekia 2023).

The motivation for adopting transitional justice continues to grow on the continent. Africa must look inward and employ a model that is compatible with the African value system, such as the Ubuntu philosophy or its variants on the continent. However, it is crucial to avoid the indiscriminate application of one model to

different societies. Although the TRC was successful in South Africa, it should be adapted to fit the unique contexts of other African societies. Therefore, ‘lessons can be gleaned from various country experiences, but each situation requires that the parties to the conflict, civil society, and victims’ groups negotiate the parameters for their situation’ (International Peace Institute 2013: 15).

In response to concerns about the possibility of abusing Ubuntu to evade justice, Boraine (2000: 427) notes that the traditional justice system, transitional justice and Ubuntu do not represent ‘an abdication of justice, it is a form of justice particularly suited to the uniqueness of the transitional context, and this is the signal contribution it makes to the ongoing debate concerning transitional justice’. Furthermore, there are questions about the compatibility of the Ubuntu philosophy with modern state systems in Africa. However, there is scope to integrate tradition-based practices with modernity to address contemporary African socio-economic and political realities. As calls for revisiting traditional conflict resolution methods echo across Africa and beyond, blending Western and traditional models is crucial to achieve optimal peace and security in African societies.

Finally, the hallmark of success for tradition-based conflict resolution mechanisms in post-apartheid South Africa is their ability to continue to address the tensions inherent within the society. This achievement demonstrates Africa’s capacity to address its challenges using locally devised models, reinforcing the celebrated principle of ‘African solutions to African problems’. However, the AU’s objectives of operationalising transitional justice remain unfulfilled, despite its policy frameworks and their emphasis on local ownership and the inclusive participation of affected communities in designing and implementing transitional justice and PCRD mechanisms. These goals have been overshadowed by state-centric liberal peace processes characterised by their exclusivity and failure to guarantee peace and stability on the continent. Ultimately, a deep change of attitude by all the conflict and mediating parties is crucial for sustainable transformation and enduring peace.

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# Transitional justice and the prevention of violent extremism in the Horn of Africa

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The current efforts of regional institutions and national governments to counter and prevent violent extremism are deficient, leaving a vacuum for extremist ideologies to flourish. The upsurge in radicalisation, including that of women and youth, within societies across the Horn of Africa exposes individuals to the risk of being co-opted into terror activities.

Violent extremism continues to hold some countries of the Horn of Africa hostage, undermining efforts to advance human security, development, respect for human rights and, in particular, women's rights. The Horn of Africa region has a long record of human rights abuses in the form of political repression, extrajudicial killings, mass arrests, torture, and the widespread persecution of opposition groups, ethnic or religious groups, and human rights defenders. Violent extremists manipulate political, economic, social, spiritual and ethnic grievances, and the phenomenon continues to spread rapidly across the region. Religion, in particular, is manipulated as a force multiplier to replace democracy with a state governed by religious law.

As a consequence, addressing political violence and armed conflict in this region is a significant challenge. The region needs to ensure justice, the healing of victims, and the consolidation of democracy, transform state institutions, and promote equality, fairness, respect and the protection of human rights. This chapter focuses on the role of transitional justice in addressing the challenge of violent extremism in the Horn of Africa.

## **Contextualising violent extremism in the Horn of Africa**

Violent extremism in the Horn is increasingly being recognised as a significant challenge for national governments, regional organisations, and bilateral and multilateral partners. Violent extremism manifests as a consequence of people's deep-seated grievances because of the perceived and targeted atrocities of governments, social exclusion and economic deprivation, but also because of reluctance to address these grievances, which are often rooted in historical injustices. State-centric unilateral and militarised interventions to address violent extremism through counter-extremism measures tend to complicate efforts to address the root causes of the violence. Increasingly, there have been efforts to give attention to addressing historical injustices and pursuing human rights, the rule of law and democracy, which is the pathway most likely to enable transformation in violence-affected countries.

The international community's engagement with states in the Horn region to promote respect and protection of human rights and the establishment of accountability mechanisms to build democratic governments is mainly framed within a securitised and militarised counter-violent-extremism approach. This move to securitise human rights has in fact reversed the gains achieved in protecting and promoting human rights. In addition, the counterterrorism approach has not addressed communities' grievances, leaving the conditions in place for the continuing radicalisation of societies. Consequently, it is necessary to reconsider the counter-extremism policy, emphasising addressing historical violations and people's needs and aspirations through transitional justice processes.

## **Transitional justice, redress and accountability**

The term 'transitional justice' became increasingly utilised in the 1990s in response to mass atrocities that were unfolding at the time, notably the Rwandan genocide and the Balkan wars. The transitional justice process offers a pathway to reconciliation through accountability for mass atrocities perpetrated during conflict, violations of international humanitarian law, and grave breaches of human rights. More specifically, transitional justice follows different approaches, including measures for accountability that do not follow judicial process: international humanitarian law and non-judicial processes such as truth-telling, compensation and memorials.

Transitional justice enables societies to transition from the conflict to a democratisation process based on accountable participatory governance, a prerequisite for achieving peacebuilding. Thus, its mechanisms are conceptualised to strengthen governance and ‘developed and put in place by societies in the aftermath of a murderous armed conflict or an oppressive regime in their transitions to peace and the rule of law’ (Justiceinfo.net. n.d.). Transitional justice mechanisms can be utilised to address the grievances of victims and survivors stemming from the atrocities committed during war or violent extremism, and to lay the foundation for catalysing peacebuilding.

The transition from authoritarianism to democracy is not viable without addressing structural violence, including past human rights violations, and thus addressing the root causes of conflict: ‘violations of all rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights’ (Arbour 2007: 25).

Transitional justice in contemporary peace-making processes is an intervention in both governmental and non-governmental efforts to ‘refer to various (formal and traditional or non-formal) policy measures and institutional mechanisms that societies, through an inclusive consultative process, adopt to overcome past violence, divisions, and inequalities and to create conditions for both security and democratic and socio-economic transformations’ (African Union 2019: 4). The nature and objective of transitional justice is to avoid the recurrence of past atrocities. Hence, this form of justice is not strictly the statutory justice related to crimes as witnessed in state function. The aim is to provide an opportunity for healing through ‘confronting the atrocities of the past and undertaking certain judicial and quasi-judicial measures to ... safeguard against the potential recurrence of similar abuses in the future’ (United Nations 2004: 4).

The elements of transitional justice mechanisms are meant to provide a roadmap for dealing with legacies of the past in conflict as well as measures to achieve justice and redress for past violations. These measures can include:

- justice and accountability, including local courts and special hybrid courts
- truth, reconciliation and forgiveness
- institutional reforms
- reparations
- return and resettlement
- memorialisation.

## International and regional institutions and transitional justice

Achieving sustainable peace through the promotion of human rights has been a common feature of the initiatives of a wide range of intergovernmental organisations, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).<sup>1</sup> Thus, a common agenda demands that these institutions coordinate their efforts to achieve durable solutions, prevent future conflicts, and provide justice to victims through transitional justice measures.

Coordination between the UN, the AU and IGAD has been important in peace-making processes, as witnessed in Somalia, where both the UN and the AU provided personnel on the ground to operationalise their interventions. For its part, IGAD has provided leadership in political initiatives to resolve disputes through mediation and offered troops from the region to the AU and UN missions in Somalia. For example, following the 2006 Doha Agreement, the AU and the UN established a Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), which provided humanitarian support and contributed towards establishing a political process.

Similarly, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) continues to operate with AU support. Political backing of IGAD member states is also vital in this context to contribute towards consolidating peace and to provide technical assistance to transitional government institutions, including the Commission for Truth, Healing, and Reconciliation, the Ministry of Peace, the Ministry of Justice, the Human Rights Commission, and the Peace Commission, which are implementing aspects of transitional justice. In addition, the AU is spearheading the establishment of the South Sudan Hybrid Court as a significant component of transitional justice under Article 5 of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).

IGAD remains committed to establishing its regional mechanism for transitional justice and promoting and strengthening efforts to improve the situation of human rights observation, respect and protection across the region.

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<sup>1</sup> The Agreement Establishing IGAD, 1996, Article 13 A (o), 13 A (q).

## **Transitional justice mechanisms to address violent extremism**

Given the limitations of militarised and securitised counterterrorism measures, it is necessary to explore using transitional justice mechanisms to address violent extremism.

The truth-telling process is administered by a mechanism at the national level within a state. In particular, truth and reconciliation commissions, as a transitional justice mechanism, are designed to receive allegations and stories of victims and investigate and record perpetrators' confessions. Commissions' processes are transparent, public and voluntary, distinguishing them from judicial or dispute resolution tribunals.

Truth commissions can receive witness testimonies and can also conduct investigations of atrocities that have occurred during conflict, ascertain the location where bodies of victims were buried, and identify the perpetrators who committed the atrocities. Truth-telling as a process contributes to providing closure to relatives of victims. It assists in knowing the fate of missing persons during conflicts by pointing out potential mass grave sites for further investigation. These investigations, testimonies and confessions establish responsibility, provide a pathway for perpetrators to be held accountable, offer grounds for reparations and, most importantly, shed light on the 'institutional reform process to ensure that such atrocities do not happen again' (OHCHR 2009: 8).

Transitional justice can be an effective tool in preventing violent extremism through truth-telling and reconciliation measures, which can help to prevent radicalisation in communities where extremists actively recruit potential jihadists. In Somalia, for example, there have been initiatives to reintegrate former Al-Shabaab ex-combatants through 'non-governmental programs and traditional justice mechanisms' (Felbab-Brown 2018: 4).

## **Transitional justice in Somalia and Kenya**

Al-Shabaab has been active in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Somalia, and has spread to neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda. To contain this threat, member states of IGAD have deployed military troops through the UN and the AU, including the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). However, the victims and survivors of Al-Shabaab

attacks continue to suffer from the violations they have experienced. The militarised approach adopted by the UN and the AU has limited community involvement in the processes of redress and healing.

In 2024, the government of Somalia established a National Reconciliation Framework as an alternative approach to addressing the more than 30 years of conflict in the country, while contributing to sustainable peacebuilding, including ‘gender-sensitive and survivor-centered traditional justice and reconciliation processes’ (Lucey et al. 2024: 2). The Framework targets the federal, state and district levels and includes a trauma-healing pillar and a mental-health pillar.

The Somali government has been implementing strategies, programmes and activities to create awareness, prevent radicalisation and extremist propaganda, and pursue redress and healing. In addition, the reconciliation agenda seeks to pursue institutional reforms, and to disarm, demobilise and reintegrate former Al-Shabaab dissidents who are willing to return, resettle and operate peacefully within the Somali federal system. In this regard, it has drawn from some of the principles of transitional justice in seeking to foster confidence in an anti-extremism approach, encouraging youth and women not to succumb to the recruitment and radicalisation attempts of Al-Shabaab.

In Kenya, which shares boundaries with Somalia and has a significant number of Somali citizens, efforts to counter violent extremism have sometimes been conducted as counterterrorism efforts, thus depending heavily on a securitised approach. The ethnic profiling of Somalis as potential Al-Shabaab members has conflated the distinction between Somali nationals who are considered refugees and Somali Kenyans who are citizens. The subsequent ‘public outcry over what was perceived to be unfair discrimination led the Kenyan government to adopt the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism in 2016’ (Lucey et al. 2024: 8). The changes employed by the Kenyan authorities did away with the securitised counterterrorism approach, instead encouraging inclusion in preventing and combating extremist narratives by adopting a multi-stakeholder and multidivisional framework to engage communities.

## **Juba Peace Agreement**

Transitional justice and the observance of international human rights law and mechanisms are part of the IGAD standards in peace-making in the Horn of Africa and are thus enshrined in the draft IGAD Protocol on Preventive Diplomacy and Mediation, adopted by the member states’ Committee of Ambassadors and pending

the signature of the Council of Ministers. Transitional justice measures are therefore increasingly becoming part of agreements to resolve conflicts and are requisite for sustainable peace.<sup>2</sup>

On 3 October 2020, for example, the Juba Peace Agreement was signed between Sudan's Transitional Sovereignty Council and several armed militia groups involved in the Darfur War, which led to the deaths of more than half a million people and the displacement of more than 2.5 million. This Agreement includes key elements of transitional justice to ensure peace: a truth-telling commission, a reconciliation framework, institutional reform,<sup>3</sup> civil service reform,<sup>4</sup> justice and accountability (a hybrid court and International Court of Justice), land reforms, return and resettlement of displaced persons, a reparations and compensation fund<sup>5</sup> and memorialisation.

Despite the Agreement being signed in 2020, the government of Sudan did not establish the required Transitional Justice Commission within 30 days of signing, indicating a lack of political will in pursuing redress and accountability. This set the scene for impunity and the escalation of violence in mainland Sudan in April 2023.<sup>6</sup>

However, the Juba Peace Agreement includes various elements that illustrate the importance of transitional justice in addressing violence. Justice is considered the heart of human rights protection, as it offers remedies for violations that have occurred and provides a sense of legal protection. Accountability is a significant indication that impunity is not condoned, and a person who commits a wrong is confronted by society, held accountable, and faces retribution for their crime.

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2 Juba Peace Agreement, Article 1.22. 'Justice, accountability, reconciliation, and transitional justice are critical for ensuring durable peace and security in Sudan. Justice shall be founded on upholding the rule of law, the ratified international human rights conventions, and international humanitarian law, including through mechanisms based on the customs, cultures, and heritage of the Sudanese peoples.'

3 Juba Peace Agreement, Article 11.1. 'The Parties agree on the importance of reforming the justice system so as to restore its professionalism, independence, and prestige.'

4 Juba Peace Agreement, Article 8.4. 'The Parties agree that the Civil Service Reform Commission shall undertake the task of reviewing appointments in leading positions in the civil service that were made since the formation of the Transitional Government, provided that the Parties agree on how the commission should be formed.'

5 Juba Peace Agreement, Article 23.2. 'Traditional justice mechanisms will establish diverse and appropriate penalties that reflect the gravity of the offenses and promote reconciliation, restitution, and compensation for the victims without prejudice to the jurisdiction of the Compensation and Reparations Fund.'

6 Juba Peace Agreement, 2020, Article 19.1. 'Without prejudice to what has been agreed in negotiation tracks, the Parties agree to accord the issue of transitional justice the utmost priority and to form a Transitional Justice Commission within thirty (30) days of the date of signing the peace agreement with the signatory parties to this agreement, provided that transitional justice mechanisms encompass all of Sudan, particularly the conflict areas.'

The Agreement notes that reconciliation does not bar the quest for justice and accountability; it improves the understanding that respect for human rights is paramount for transitional justice measures to succeed. Provisions allow for victims to know who ordered or executed crimes, and perpetrators are not shielded from facing criminal courts if they admit their crimes in the truth-telling process.

Truth-telling aims to heal the wounds caused by conflicts in order to rebuild lives and structure new social contracts that can promote healing. The Juba Peace Agreement notes that reconciliation goes beyond forgiveness and aims to rebuild relations or turn the page on atrocities to focus on establishing new relationships. It provides opportunities to rebuild nations, strengthen cooperation and refocus on moving forward together.

The Agreement identifies institutional reforms as among the most powerful tools for addressing structural violence and inequalities and adjusting socio-economic situations that led to conflict. Key to these reforms is to ensure the distribution of public resources, and to 'carry out radical reforms and transformation of public financial management systems to ensure transparency and accountability'.<sup>7</sup> Other reforms relate to restructuring and radically reforming the civil service.<sup>8</sup>

Reparations focus on compensating victims for wrongdoing that occurred during the conflict and may take the form of apologies or financial compensation. An apology is a recognition of wrongdoing and its role in causing the conflict. This was exhibited in the case of South Sudan's conflict by an acknowledgement and public apology presented by President Kiir Mayar-dit:

In the spirit of national unity, forgiveness, and dialogue, I am asking you, the people of South Sudan, to forgive me for any mistakes I might have committed. This is a spirit that our country needs, and we must act now.  
(Justin 2016)

Another form of reparations is financial compensation to victims and survivors as part of a political settlement to a conflict or peace agreement. It is codified into constitutional frameworks.

Challenges with reparations and compensation include reaching an agreement about who needs to be compensated and who deserves reparations, the cut-off date for past atrocities, and the criteria for eligibility for compensation. Another challenge is the availability of resources, as peace consolidation is very expensive,

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7 R-ARCSS, Article 1.2.7.

8 R-ARCSS, Article 1.2.10.

given that it includes the reintegration of rogue elements. Political accommodation leaves no resources for compensating ordinary people, despite this being a prerequisite of the R-ARCSS. Article 5.1.1.3 warrants establishing a Compensation and Reparation Authority (CRA) to calculate, pay or administer reparations. However, a lack of political will or of adequate resources has hindered the implementation of this agreement clause in South Sudan.

The right of victims and displaced persons or refugees to return to their residence, homeland or tribal territory is vital for restoring human dignity and preventing incidents of renewed violence. Enabling the resettlement and return from displacement represents a genuine contribution to the transitional justice process, shifting relations, restoring communal confidence and protecting human rights.

Memorialisation or commemoration of victims of conflict has an educational function in that it transfers knowledge and insights to subsequent generations about the atrocities that were committed, as a pathway to nation- and peacebuilding. For example, statues to commemorate the loss of life and violations of the past act as visible reminders to prevent the recurrence of these injustices in the future.

In the case of Sudan, one proposal put forward was the establishment of a special hybrid court for Darfur. The objective of a hybrid court is to prosecute individuals from warring parties to the conflict who may have committed atrocities resulting in gross human rights violations, or who committed international crimes such as war crimes or crimes against humanity. Special hybrid courts are designed to accommodate the national laws of the countries where the conflict occurred, facilitate the engagement and participation of judges from that country, and co-opt senior justices from the region or beyond to present an element of fairness and neutrality and to achieve justice.

Special hybrid courts remain underutilised in terms of the range of transitional justice measures available. Those who might have caused the armed conflict or war, or who directed troops to commit heinous crimes, or who were indifferent in holding to account those who committed such crimes, are often the top layer of leadership or the political class. Insights from attempts to establish a special hybrid court for Darfur revealed the paradox of trying to pursue accountability for warlords and military leaders who have committed violations, and at the same time relying on them to pursue and secure a peace agreement.

The Sudanese government effectively declined to pursue those who were alleged to have committed crimes. In South Sudan, allegations of human rights abuses and

massive humanitarian violations were documented in the conflict, which ended with an agreement signed in September 2013. Nonetheless, the AU Commission was confronted with a significant challenge in establishing the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, which is a component of the R-ARCSS (2018),<sup>9</sup> due to the difficulty of trying senior military commanders without risking a return to armed confrontation.

On 15 April 2023, a new civil war erupted in Sudan between factions of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Response Forces (RSF). A range of mass atrocities have been committed by both sides, including indiscriminate shelling of civilian populations and properties, churches, mosques, schools, hospitals, cemeteries and government civilian buildings. Other crimes include sexual enslavement, sexual exploitation of young girls, women and men, and indiscriminate bombardment by the Sudanese Air Force. Furthermore, based on a sham law named the Strange Faces Law, which targets people of African descent, people have been arrested and executed without due process. These actions are driven by a vigorous campaign of hate speech on mainstream and social media.

## Conclusion

Violent extremism is undermining efforts to promote and consolidate peace in the Horn of Africa and the IGAD region. Violent extremists continue to recruit and radicalise youth and women against a background of socio-political grievances and structural violence. Militarised and securitised counterterrorism measures have failed and are also undermining efforts to consolidate sustainable peace across the Horn region. As an alternative approach, many IGAD member states are embracing efforts to utilise transitional justice, including a range of processes and institutions that promote truth-telling, restorative and retributive justice, reparations, as well as institutional reforms, to address the scourge of violent extremism.

Transitional justice has proven to be a suitable vehicle for sustainable peacebuilding in the region. It offers acknowledgement of atrocities, allows victims' voices to be heard, offers victim support and protection, voluntary truth-telling approaches by perpetrators, as well as solutions for the integration of former violent extremists and ex-combatants – all culminating in justice blended with forgiveness.

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9 R-ARCSS, Article 5.3.1.1. 'There shall be established an independent hybrid judicial court, the Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS). The Court shall be established by the African Union Commission to investigate and where necessary prosecute individuals bearing responsibility for violations of international law and/or applicable South Sudanese law, committed from 15th December 2013 through the end of the Transitional Period.'

Much remains to be done to further internalise and implement transitional justice processes across the region. A paradigm shift away from a militarised approach to countering violent extremism is necessary if the foundations for sustainable peace are to be achieved in the Horn of Africa region.

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## CHAPTER 6

# Integrating resilience in preventing violent extremism and transitional justice for effective democratisation in the Horn of Africa

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*Yemisrach Kebede*

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Violent extremism remains a pressing threat across the Horn of Africa. This chapter argues that sustainable peacebuilding, informed by transitional justice and reconciliation processes, is crucial for preventing violent extremism (PVE) in the region. The chapter explores how transitional justice mechanisms, with their potential to foster social cohesion, can highlight the positive attributes of community resilience, reducing the appeal of extremist ideologies and instilling a sense of hope about the proposed solution. Furthermore, understanding and strengthening such resilience will promote a new framing of the state–societal relationship, supported by dialogue, and will create the foundation for democracy to take root.

The chapter discusses the existing literature on violent extremism and its root causes linked to the democratic deficit, including the marginalisation of communities through sustained inequality. It then focuses on transitional justice as an alternative approach to PVE, and furthers understanding of the resilience discourse and its contribution to the application of transitional justice and the overall democratisation process in the Horn.

### **Violent extremism versus terrorism**

A universally agreed definition for violent extremism does not currently exist. However, it can be broadly defined as the act of holding ideological beliefs and

taking actions to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. Although violent extremism accepts and justifies the use of violence to reach a particular ideological goal, this act may or may not always involve the act of ‘violence’: ‘definitions employed do not make fully clear whether “violent extremism” presupposes violent action or inciting violent action, or whether lesser forms of conduct that do not normally trigger criminal law sanctions would also be included’ (UN 2016: para. 17).

Violent extremism encompasses a wider range of groups and ideological motivations that guide the violence, differentiating it from terrorism and terrorist acts (UN 2015). Jason-Leigh Striegher (2015) argues that although the terms ‘violent extremism’ and ‘terrorism’ are used interchangeably in various contexts, there is a clear delineation in meaning and action:

An individual who justifies the use of violence in pursuit of ideological goals typically does this once they have moved through a process of radicalisation that leads to the adoption of VE [violent extremism] as an ideology; whereas terrorism is solely the act of violence carried out in pursuit of these goals. (Striegher 2015: 75)

## Preventing violent extremism

A commonly accepted definition for the term ‘preventing violent extremism’ also does not exist. However, the literature generally agrees that this term encompasses efforts outside the hard-core security framework, towards what Stephens et al. (2021: 346) refer to as the ‘upstream preventive approaches that position themselves explicitly outside of a security-driven framework’. The concept of PVE is often used interchangeably with CVE (countering violent extremism), commonly referred to as P/CVE. This confuses the definition and possibly acknowledges the hard-security approach perpetuated by the countering terrorism (CT) discourse, which defined the discourse and approaches globally as well as regionally in Africa (Buchanan-Clarke and Lekalake 2016).

This chapter uses Stephens and colleagues’ definition: ‘prevention is defined as efforts to influence individual and environmental factors that are suggested to create the conditions in which violent extremism can flourish, using social or educative, rather than *explicitly* security-driven measures’ (Stephens et al. 2021: 347, emphasis in the original).

PVE recognises that underlying grievances, such as poverty, social exclusion, political disenfranchisement and lack of opportunities, often fuel violent extremism. By addressing these grievances and fostering social cohesion, PVE programmes aim to create an environment where violent extremism is less likely to flourish (UNDP 2022). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) focuses on ‘addressing grievances that can set people on a course to radicalization’ and ‘supporting those who want to leave such groups’ (UNDP n.d.).

Although PVE emphasises promoting social cohesion and building strong communities, building trust between communities and governments, promoting human rights, and providing educational and economic alternatives to violence, there is not a coherent approach to prevention. As Stephens and colleagues (2021: 347) put it, prevention emerges

from a multitude of fields and disciplines, including psychology, psychiatry, public health, education, social work, and criminology. The breadth of the literature base and the many different frameworks and perspectives through which prevention is addressed means that rather than there being one conversation on prevention, there are multiple conversations within and between different fields. Naturally, much of the psychology literature focuses on individual-level analysis, whereas from a public health or social work perspective, primary attention is given to community- or societal-level factors. This results in interesting work, but makes it challenging for a coherent, shared discourse on prevention to emerge.

However, a recurring theme is the importance of both the individual and communities as key agents in the theory and approach to PVE. Within the ‘resilience’ paradigm (discussed later), concepts such as the resilient individual, who possesses a certain character or skill, and resilient communities, which are sufficiently cohesive or strong, are part of the framing when unpacking PVE and bringing in the dynamics of reconciliation or transitional justice as a means of peacebuilding.

The concept of resilience is significant in the prevention discourse and is important in that it offers a view of prevention that recognizes the potential and agency of individuals and communities. However, there currently is a lack of a clear framework for resilience in relation to violent extremism. A social-ecological perspective on resilience offers a promising foundation that must be built upon if such a framework is to emerge. In doing so particular attention must be directed toward ensuring attention is given not

only to possibilities for change at the individual and community level, but more particularly, what is required at an institutional and social level. (Stephens et al. 2021: 356)

The 2016 United Nations (UN) Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism is a comprehensive framework and a blueprint for tackling the issue before it arises. It acknowledges the limitations of solely reactive counterterrorism measures and calls for a multi-pronged approach. After more than a decade of the global war on terror it has become evident to practitioners and policymakers that CVE has several limitations, including its focus on religious aspects and lack of attention to push factors such as governance deficits and economic hardships.

The UN Plan proposes that governments address the root causes that make individuals vulnerable to radicalisation, such as poverty, exclusion and lack of opportunity (UN 2015). It also introduced a coordination and support mechanism for national and PVE initiatives to spearhead the development of national action plans (UN 2015).

Since 2016, thirty PVE national action plans have been developed (Simpson 2020), with four countries in the Horn of Africa region having them (Life & Peace Institute 2021). The value of these plans is that each country can tailor their PVE strategy to their specific context. ‘Through the process of developing and adopting a national strategy, countries broadcast their intention to comprehensively address the root causes and drivers of violent extremism in their domestic context’ (Fevé and Dews 2019: 1).

The UN Plan also proposes countering extremist ideologies by promoting tolerance and peaceful resolutions as part of PVE efforts (UN 2015). This includes upholding human rights and the rule of law, laying the cornerstone for a major shift in thinking.

## **Transitional justice**

Transitional justice can be a powerful tool in addressing violence stemming from violent extremism, but it needs to be implemented strategically and within a broader peacebuilding framework. Transitional justice can help rebuild trust in state institutions that have been seen as corrupt or oppressive, contributing to radicalisation. The African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP), a ground-breaking policy instrument adopted in February 2019, outlines the potential reward of well-implemented transitional justice processes in addressing the root causes of violence (African Union 2019).

The AUTJP offers a framework for African member states emerging from violence or repression, emphasising a uniquely African approach to transitional justice, drawing from the continent's shared values and traditions alongside international best practices. It emphasises addressing the root causes of conflict, such as social exclusion and human rights abuses, and dismantling the structures that enable violent extremism. The AUTJP aims to guide states in designing and implementing context-specific programmes that promote peace, justice, reconciliation and healing.

Section Four of the AUTJP discusses truth commissions, as well as judicial mechanisms and reparation programmes. Truth commissions can be powerful tools for unearthing grievances, which can uncover the social, economic and political factors that fuelled violent extremism. This knowledge is crucial for designing effective PVE programmes that address those issues.

Additionally, to promote inclusion, transitional justice should focus on addressing issues of marginalisation and discrimination that extremist groups exploit. This fosters social cohesion, reduces the pool of potential recruits and promotes agency and resilience in communities. However, a well-executed transitional justice process should ensure that there is not undue expectation on the part of communities.

Paragraph 99 of the AUTJP highlights a crucial element of transitional justice – the restoration of constitutional and legal rights to sections of society that may have been stripped of them during conflict or authoritarian rule. In order to rebuild a just and inclusive society after periods of violence and oppression, all members of society need to be able to participate in the rebuilding process.

A strong criticism of transitional justice, at least in its wider application and more Western formulation, is its focus on retributive justice (Lambourne 2021). In the more multicultural and traditional societies in the Horn of Africa, where there are inbuilt and more traditional ways to define and approach justice, reparations and reconciliation take centre stage. It is now accepted that 'a comprehensive approach to transitional justice also includes non-judicial but restorative approaches to justice involving mechanisms that offer reparation and the promise of institutional reforms' (UN 2008).

## **Framing resilience in the PVE and transitional justice discourse**

Extensive scholarly work spanning various disciplines and interdisciplinary perspectives delves into the intricate nature of resilience (Anholt et al. 2021). The precise definition of resilience continues to be a subject of ongoing debate, with the

delineation of conceptual boundaries remaining elusive for both scholars and practitioners, though some scholars highlight the benefits of the ambiguity surrounding the concept (Anholt et al. 2021). Resilience, when viewed as a multi-systemic concept, refers to the capacity of individuals, communities and ecosystems to adapt, recover and thrive in the face of adversity. Rather than focusing solely on individual strength or isolated factors, this perspective recognises that resilience emerges from the dynamic interactions among various interconnected systems (Kastner 2020). These systems include social, economic, cultural and environmental components.

The adoption of resilience language in PVE policies has been a response to critiques of security-driven approaches (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020). However, this shift has not always led to a fundamental rethinking of the overall approach, and it may sometimes obscure problematic aspects under the guise of objectivity and positivity (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020).

A strong potential lies in the effective implementation of resilience to advance the PVE discourse. It is important to leverage the multilayered and dynamic concept and draw on the extensive literature that exists to inform PVE policies. However, the current policy discourse has labelled 'resilience' as a buzzword, with policymakers often using the terminology as a strategy (Oh 2024).

While resilience is a valuable concept, its application in PVE policies should examine underlying assumptions and their implications and be context-specific. A nuanced understanding of resilience can contribute to more effective strategies for preventing violent extremism (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020). There has to be a concerted effort not to reduce the potential of resilience to mere capacity for adaptation but rather ensure agency, and leverage this value for additional benefits, such as ensuring citizens are active agents capable of social transformation.

If effectively framed, introduced and supported, the resilience discourse has the potential to empower individuals and communities to challenge violence, discrimination and injustice. Considering the conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa and the critical need to address the root causes, it is essential for a critically informed concept of resilience to recognise people as political actors who need resources and channels to address both state-driven and non-state-driven violence. This point is central in both the PVE and transitional justice fields.

Often viewed as a systemic and social-ecological concept, resilience directly aligns with key objectives in transitional justice. These objectives encompass restoring the

rule of law, fostering peace and facilitating reconciliation processes. However, resilience has not received significant focus when examining communities and societies affected by conflict, violence and grave human rights violations. Similarly, within the realm of transitional justice, resilience remains relatively understudied (Clark and Ungar 2021).

Resilience offers a valuable perspective for advancing our understanding, theorising and operationalising of transitional justice. Both emphasise interconnected, systemic, holistic and adaptive approaches (Clark and Ungar 2021). By integrating resilience as a concept and area of focus, researchers and policy actors can explore how communities adapt, heal and rebuild after violence. This is a practical starting point, especially in conflict-prone regions such as the Horn of Africa, and in the process of applying transitional justice to assist countries either emerging or transitioning from conflict.

In understanding the challenges countries face during transitional justice processes, the resilience discourse offers a new approach by broadening the understanding of the agency of individuals and communities intertwined with their environment as part of their broader social ecologies (Clark and Ungar 2021). Treating justice as a stand-alone process has major drawbacks, and research increasingly shows that there is merit in recognising its interplay with resilience within complex systems (Clark and Ungar 2021). Accordingly, policymakers must move beyond siloed approaches and embrace resilience as a guiding principle. Researchers and practitioners should contribute to knowledge production, understanding and leveraging interconnected systems. This holistic approach can create more effective and sustainable strategies for transitional justice, which in turn plays a vital role in ensuring that democratic societies flourish.

## **Violent extremism and democratic challenges in the Horn of Africa**

Violent extremism in the Horn of Africa is the result of various historical and ongoing factors. Although much of the discourse on violent extremism focuses on Islamic forms of the phenomenon, as well as actions perpetrated by Al-Shabaab in Somalia, the reality is that the issue is more nuanced and is growing in number and actors across the Horn: 'the violent extremism in the region cuts across countries, and political ideologies and support for and recruitment into extremist groupings appears to be expanding across the Horn' (Life & Peace Institute 2021: 12).

Issues that draw individuals into extremism include socio-economic grievances, political instability, conflict, weak governance and corruption, which create a sense of powerlessness and fuel grievances. With an ethnically and culturally diverse region such as the Horn of Africa, both historical and ongoing conflicts along ethnic and religious lines can be exploited by extremists. Al-Shabaab in Somalia and other extremist groups with various political and ethnic demands pose a security threat and offer a violent alternative for frustrated youth (Bruton and Williams 2014).

Addressing this with a security approach alone is costing lives and resources, without making sufficient room for dialogue and avenues to bring about structural changes where root causes are addressed and the cycle of conflict is broken. '[M]ilitary tactics and techniques employed by governments and regional mechanisms to combat violent extremism have not been as successful as were anticipated, [and] in cases also exacerbated the tensions' (Life & Peace Institute 2021: 13).

The Horn of Africa's political and overall security context is complex and fluid. The region has a long history of political instability and conflict, and is home to some powerful authoritarian regimes that are resistant to change (Neil 2019). With ongoing debate as to whether the situation is indicative of a 'stagnation in African democratization' (Arriola et al. 2023: 24) or instead a 'democratic backsliding', what is evident is that the political transitions that started in 2018 in Ethiopia and Sudan, for instance, have regressed and further closed up the political space. There are active civil wars and violent non-state armed groups operating in two of the countries in the region, Sudan and Ethiopia.

A major impediment to democratisation in the Horn is the strong power asymmetry between state and societal forces. This partly explains the prevalence of violent extremism fuelled by disenfranchised and dejected sections of the populace (Horn Center for Democracy 2024):

Historically, democracy evolved in Europe and in the West more broadly not because of good intentions nor the existence of a democratic political culture during Democratization, as is often assumed. Instead, democracy evolved because state formation was accompanied by negotiation between state and societal forces that shifted a violent contestation into not only a peaceful dispute but also effective negotiation that produced consensus over democratic rules of engagement. (Horn Center for Democracy 2024: 36–37)

Imagining a new approach to preventing the recurring violent extremism in the Horn of Africa, an incentivised and negotiated settlement holds the key to relative peace, stability and transition to a more just and fitting democracy for the region. 'Alternatively, armed groups put pressure on the state short of a violent overthrow but settle for a Magna Cartaesque moment for the Horn, with negotiation leading to a rebalance of the asymmetry between state and societal forces and a more consensus-based democracy' (Horn Center for Democracy 2024: 40).

## **The rebalancing role of transitional justice**

Transitional justice processes offer a potent tool to redress the imbalance between state and societal forces and serve as a catalyst for institutional reform. By acknowledging past wrongs, dismantling oppressive structures and addressing socio-economic inequalities, these mechanisms can empower citizens and significantly foster trust in institutions. This trust-building is a crucial step toward laying the groundwork for a more equitable and just society. However, navigating the complexities of transitional justice requires careful planning, a commitment to inclusivity, and unwavering determination to build a future where the scales of power are more evenly balanced.

However, the road to a more balanced state–society relationship is not without its hurdles. Transitional justice processes can be politically fraught exercises, often facing resistance from those who fear accountability (Sriram 2004). Powerful elites may attempt to manipulate or undermine these mechanisms to protect their interests (Loyle and Davenport 2015). The increasing prevalence and relevance of justice norms in the international community may indirectly confer political legitimacy on domestic governments that adopt and implement post-conflict justice mechanisms consistent with international standards (Cox and Van Nostrand 2023). These mechanisms can strengthen the rule of law and build more democratic institutions by exposing weaknesses within the state apparatus and fostering a national conversation about accountability.

It is important to understand the incentive structure behind why states or policymakers engage in post-conflict or transitional justice ventures, which may be costly and difficult to manoeuvre given the judicial system, which may present structural impediments (Cox and Van Nostrand 2023). Multiple factors influence the decisions at the national level on whether to engage in any post-conflict justice efforts. Countries may use transitional justice to pursue political goals, although

addressing issues around reconciliation, deterrence and a potential future-looking plan may take precedence in most instances; ‘policymakers within these contexts also choose to adopt justice mechanisms to endeavor toward a wide range of goals including social reconciliation, deterring future abuse, and attracting foreign investment’ (Cox and Van Nostrand 2023: 126). Additionally, achieving meaningful reconciliation requires not just addressing past injustices but also fostering a sense of a shared future among all citizens. This shared future is key in uniting all citizens towards a common goal of justice and equality, the bedrock for a democratic society.

However, in order for transitional or post-conflict processes to be successful, there needs to be a clear transition from an authoritarian system. For countries in the Horn of Africa that are either implementing transitional justice initiatives or are still in volatile situations, it is imperative for a post-conflict justice venture to prioritise and promote an outcome that gets the nation-state closer to addressing the foundational challenges. This will contribute to building a collective identity and establish a strong foundation on which to build a more just and inclusive democratic system. It will also ensure the legitimacy of any political order that comes after (ACHPR 2019: Part II, 33).

Ultimately, successful transitional justice not only corrects past wrongs but also inspires a society where citizens and the state act as partners in upholding human rights and building a peaceful future. Given that transitional justice is not merely a judicial exercise but includes multifaceted societal transformation, it is important to acknowledge the complexities involved in achieving a ‘balance’ between state and societal forces. This exercise is even more difficult and important in (post-)conflict contexts and should therefore be supported and promoted as part of any transition venture. Reckoning with past violations, preventing future violations, and empowering citizens to hold their governments accountable are all worthwhile pursuits to be addressed concurrently towards achieving a more equal and just system.

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# The dilemma of reparation for terror victims:

## *Who takes moral responsibility?*

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*Elias O. Opongo*

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The protection of human rights is the responsibility of all members of the international community. Governments are primarily obligated to protect their citizens from harm, including terrorist attacks. Of significant concern is the question of who takes responsibility for reparations to victims after terror attacks. When such attacks occur, questions arise about the extent of the government's commitment to this responsibility. Victims may argue that the government failed to adequately protect them or respond to known threats (Del Villar and Glasberg 2015). If a terrorist attack is deemed to have resulted from a failure in security measures, intelligence or law enforcement, the government may be held accountable.

However, whether states are willing and able to provide restitution and support to victims of terrorism, regardless of the perpetrator, remains a significant challenge in international law (Moffett 2016). The issue extends beyond mere willingness; it encompasses the ability of states to mobilise resources, establish robust legal frameworks, and ensure that victims receive the necessary support and compensation. Addressing this challenge requires a concerted international effort to develop clear guidelines and obligations for states, ensuring that victims of terrorism receive justice and support irrespective of the circumstances.

Due to the ambiguity surrounding the responsibility for human rights violations in cases of terrorism, it is difficult to establish clear principles for addressing such

crimes at an international level. Terrorist groups often operate outside the confines of international law, making it problematic to hold them legally accountable in conventional courts for gross human rights violations (Del Villar and Glasberg 2015). By integrating transitional justice perspectives with traditional legal mechanisms, the international community can better ensure that victims of terrorism are granted the justice and compensation they rightfully deserve. This dual approach reinforces the principles of international humanitarian law and strengthens the global commitment to fighting terrorism while fostering healing, reconciliation and peacebuilding in affected communities.

Although terrorist organisations are the direct perpetrators, their political motives and clandestine nature often complicate the pursuit of accountability. In many instances, state negligence or complicity might indirectly contribute to the conditions enabling terrorism (Del Villar and Glasberg 2015). For example, the rise of terrorism in the Middle East is often attributed to the actions of Western countries, such as the foreign policy of the United States of America and its allies. In particular, this manifested in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequently of Afghanistan by a coalition of forces, based on the rationale of combating various terrorist networks. Some terrorist groups view their actions as a form of retribution against such perceived injustices perpetrated by Western interests (Reiff 2008). Terrorism-as-retribution is thus considered an acceptable form of punishment by these groups, if the responsible individuals are deemed deserving.

This rest of this chapter highlights the challenging process of providing reparations and compensation to victims of violent extremism within transitional justice frameworks. It begins by examining the complexities of reparation in transitional justice, including the social, economic and political implications, and how effectively victims' rights can be upheld.

The chapter then delves into the responsibilities of the government in addressing security failures that lead to terrorist attacks and emphasises the necessity for terrorists to be held accountable for compensating their victims. The discussion underscores the critical importance of ensuring justice and reparation for those affected by violent extremism, advocating for a comprehensive approach to address these serious issues.

## **Reparation in transitional justice processes**

Since the post-Second World War period, transitional justice has gained significant traction and has become a prominent mechanism for societies recovering from periods of conflict or repression. Transitional justice includes various judicial and non-judicial measures, including prosecutions, truth commissions and reparations. Among the most prominent is reparations, which involves compensating victims of gross human rights violations to acknowledge their suffering and to take responsibility for the injustices committed (Torres 2021).

Reparations take various forms, including financial compensation, restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition (OHCHR 2008). The reparations process is therefore not merely about providing monetary compensation but also about restoring the dignity of victims, promoting social healing and collectively rebuilding societies ravaged by conflicts (Waldorf 2012). In essence, reparations are underpinned by their ability to help restore the victims' faith in the justice system and the government, promoting reconciliation.

### ***Financial compensation***

Conflicts have severe socio-economic consequences that destroy livelihoods and infrastructure, thus prompting financial compensation as a restorative measure post-conflict (OHCHR 2008). Financial compensation is the most widely recognised and accepted form of reparations. It involves monetary compensation to victims or their families for the harm they endured during the conflict, and helps them to rebuild their lives and livelihoods after the economic suffering caused by wars.

For example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, established in 1994, investigated human rights abuses by the state and liberation movements from 1960 to 1994 (Svård 2022). The Commission had powers to grant amnesty, search premises, subpoena witnesses, provide witness protection and recommend financial compensation for victims of apartheid to address the economic disadvantages stemming from racial discrimination. This served not only as a remedy for past injustices but also as a form of recognition of the wrongs committed, allowing victims to receive reparations for the harms caused during the apartheid regime (Fombad 2008).

### ***Restitution***

Restitution is a process that aims to restore conflict victims to the situation they were in before the conflict, which may involve returning property, reinstating employment or granting citizenship rights to conflict victims (Fombad 2008). Redressing major human rights crimes and restoring dignity can go a long way towards remedying the profound wrongs associated with conflict.

For example, in Colombia, land restitution programmes were implemented to return land to displaced farmers in acknowledgement of the social and cultural relations that were destroyed during the conflict (Buchely 2020). This was initiated under the recommendations of Colombia's Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition Commission, which was established under Legislative Act 01 of 2017 under the Constitution of Colombia to investigate what happened during the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) wars (Piedrahíta 2022).

### ***Rehabilitation***

Rehabilitation involves medical, psychosocial, legal and social assistance to help victims recover from harm. It addresses comprehensive needs beyond physical harm. Victim-centred and victim-directed programmes empower victims to regain autonomy, assert control over their lives and reintegrate into society (Ottendörfer 2014). Thus, in rehabilitation cases, transitional justice mechanisms involve elements such as social service provision, as well as education and training in vocational skills to enable victims to regain dignity and be useful, productive members of society, thus promoting their overall well-being through a communal, holistic approach.

For example, in transitional processes in Sierra Leone, victims of the civil war received medical and psychological assistance to treat the trauma they had undergone during the conflicts, as well as legal support in their quest for justice. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act of 2000 under the Lomé Peace Accord established a commission to document violations and human rights abuses from 1991 to 1999. The National Commission for Social Action (NACSA) was tasked with implementing the TRC's recommendations, including reparations (Ottendörfer 2014).

### ***Satisfaction***

In the context of human rights, satisfaction provides a sense of justice to victims through actions like public apologies and commemorative events (Ottendörfer 2014). Reparations address the moral and emotional elements of justice. They expose and indict the crimes of the past and who was responsible for the harm suffered, whether the state or other agents.

In Kenya, for instance, public apologies and commemorative events have been held to honour victims of post-election violence, helping in emotional healing and fostering closure. These measures also educate society about past atrocities, reinforcing commitments to human rights and preventing future violations (Okowa 2021).

### ***Guarantees of non-repetition***

Guarantees of non-repetition are measures taken to prevent the recurrence of human rights violations, such as institutional reforms and vetting of officials. These guarantees are essential for addressing systemic issues that allow violations to occur, ensuring institutions align with human rights standards for long-term stability and peace in post-conflict or repressive societies (Buchely 2020).

In Rwanda, for example, extensive reforms were made in the security and judicial sectors to prevent another genocide, alongside education programmes promoting human rights and reconciliation (Buchely 2020). Established through legislation to promote a culture of respect for human rights and the rule of law, these measures create an environment where such abuses are less likely to happen, contributing to the overall well-being of societies emerging from conflict or repression.

## **Implementing reparations**

Reparations are essential in transitional justice processes to address the harms of human rights violations and promote healing and reconciliation. However, their effectiveness relies on adequately designing and implementing the reparation process, and gauging the effectiveness of transitional justice initiatives.

The first step to adequate reparation is identifying and registering victims and documenting the violations they have suffered (Akech et al. 2021). Designing reparation programmes involves tailoring them to the specific needs of victims.

This should be done through consultation with victims to ensure relevance and effectiveness. In the implementation phase, institutional frameworks need to be established, funding secured, and monitoring and evaluation processes put in place to ensure the reparations reach the victims (OHCHR 2008).

### ***Involve victims***

A successful reparation project is victim-centred and recognises the importance of victims' rights and roles during the implementation of the programme (Akech et al. 2021). Victims should be directly involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of reparation programmes, thus making the measures taken appropriate to the specific wrongdoings committed against them. Victim-centred reparations contribute towards meeting victims' needs and help them find remedies and support after devastating events. They also provide psychological support through acknowledging victims' suffering and their right to justice (Akech et al. 2021).

Directly engaging victims in these interventions increases their commitment to the reparations process, which is crucial for restoring public confidence and for reconciliation. For example, the inclusive reparative practices of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya reflected survivors' demands and wishes and offered compensation, including treatment, schooling and symbolic gestures such as the public apology given by President Uhuru Kenyatta (Okowa 2021).

### ***Gender sensitivity***

An understanding of reparations that takes into account gender perspectives acknowledges that men and women are affected differently by conflicts, as well as the extensiveness of the harm caused (OHCHR 2008). This understanding is important in planning reparative measures. For instance, women are generally at the receiving end of gender-specific violations, including sexual violence, and require specialised services such as psychosocial counselling and medical services (OHCHR 2008).

In Kenya, for example, the reparations programme included specific provisions for female victims of sexual violence, ensuring they receive appropriate medical care and support (Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya 2013).

A gender-sensitive approach involves considering women's socio-economic roles and responsibilities in their households and communities, which may necessitate economic support and training programmes to help them regain their livelihoods

(OHCHR 2008). This approach ensures that reparation programmes do not inadvertently reinforce gender inequalities but contribute to gender justice and empowerment.

### ***Holistic and comprehensive process***

Reparation processes should be holistic and comprehensive, encompassing different intervention strategies and levels of analysis (Naidu 2012). For instance, financial compensation is essential, but reparation programmes should not overlook other forms of transitional justice, such as restitution.

Reparations should acknowledge that human rights abuses are inflicted on individuals and on collective societies and persons (Waldorf 2012). Integrated reparation measures mediate the social and symbolic repair of socio-political communities at all levels of society (Waldorf 2012). In addition, they assist in resolving conflicts by targeting the root causes of the problems, including structural challenges and social injustice, thereby bringing about long-term effects.

For instance, South Africa's TRC advised on restitution, reparations and symbolic apology: victims of human rights violations were compensated monetarily, certain communities engaged with efforts to rehabilitate themselves, and memorials were established and public apologies offered (Naidu 2012).

Comprehensive reparations provide immediate relief and contribute to long-term societal stability by fostering trust in governmental and legal systems. A holistic approach ensures that victims are compensated and supported in their journey toward recovery and reintegration into society, helping to break the cycle of violence and retaliation (Siampakou 2023).

### **Challenges to implementing reparation programmes**

Reparation programmes are a critical component of transitional justice processes and are key to addressing past human rights violations and providing redress to victims. However, implementing these programmes is often challenging and can be marred by malpractice. Challenges include political contestation, economic constraints, legal issues, and the difficulty of balancing individual and collective reparations. If not adequately addressed, these can hinder the delivery of justice and the restoration of victims' dignity.

### ***Political wrangling***

Reparations have become sites of political wrangling, hindering their effective implementation. The allocation of reparations is often influenced by political agendas, with different political factions seeking to control or influence the process for their own gain. Political contestation undermines the credibility of the reparation process and erodes public trust, making it difficult to achieve genuine reconciliation and justice.

For example, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission in Kenya faced significant political interference. Established under the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Act in 2008 to investigate and document human rights violations from 1963 to 2008 (Wambua 2021), the Commission faced opposition from politicians who sought to use the reparations process to gain political leverage. This resulted in delays and a lack of comprehensive implementation of the transitional justice process (Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya 2013).

### ***Scarcity of resources***

A scarcity of financial and other resources impacts the prospects for compensating for damage. Many post-conflict countries have limited economic resources and struggle to finance adequate reparation initiatives (Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya 2013).

For example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone called for large-scale reparations, including cash payments, treatment of diseases and educational sponsorship. However, due to the country's economy, the recommendations could not be implemented, leading to frustration and disappointment among victims of political and human rights abuses (Ottendörfer 2014). Similarly, in the Kenyan transitional justice process, only a handful of victims received monetary compensation despite the Commission identifying a wide net of victims (Okowa 2021).

### ***Legal issues***

Qualifying for compensation, assessing the amounts to be paid and enforcing compliance are all affected by legal issues that can derail the whole process (Okowa 2021). Reparations should be legal under the sovereign country's laws as well as under international law (Torres 2021).

Legal ambiguity often contributes to disparate and ad hoc rulings, worsening victims' sense of unfairness. South Africa's TRC faced legal challenges regarding who could be recognised as an apartheid victim and also in terms of compensation. Legal entanglements lead to time-consuming trials, which can delay victims receiving reparation (Naidu 2012).

### ***Individual and collective reparations***

In transitional justice processes, balancing individual and collective reparations is particularly challenging when addressing the aftermath of terrorist violence. Individual reparations are vital for affirming victims' unique experiences and dignity, providing recognition for personal suffering and specific harms (Hirsch and Dixon 2025). Yet, in post-terrorism contexts, where violence is often indiscriminate and community-wide, collective reparations ought to be equally integral to rebuilding trust and strengthening social cohesion. The collective measures may include rehabilitating infrastructure such as rebuilding roads, schools and hospitals, memorialising victims, or restoring cultural practices – all of which seek to redress structural harms and communal trauma (Shepherd 2015).

The challenge lies in calibrating these efforts; privileging one over the other can lead to feelings of exclusion or secondary victimisation among those whose needs or losses are not adequately addressed. In cases involving terrorist acts, the lines between perpetrator and victim can also blur, especially where the conflict has been protracted and cycles of violence are politically or ethnically motivated. This makes reparation claims more contentious.

Moreover, collective approaches can sometimes unintentionally obscure the personal dimensions of harm, while individual ones may fragment community healing processes. Therefore, a balanced, participatory and context-specific strategy in reparations, whether individual or collective, is necessary to ensure both symbolic and material justice and to sustain peace and legitimacy in the transitional process.

### ***Governments***

Governments are generally deemed to bear a significant responsibility for ensuring that victims of terrorist attacks receive appropriate compensation and support. This responsibility stems from governments' legal and moral obligations, as duty bearers,

to protect their citizens and provide aid in times of crisis (United Nations 2015). Under international, regional and multilateral norms and laws, the state is obligated to offer timely, effective and fair reparations for incidents that cause grave human rights violations, including terrorism (Moffett 2016). For instance, the United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation emphasise the state's duty in this respect.

Governments are solely responsible for ensuring their citizens' safety and security. Thus, when terror attacks occur, the government is expected to bear full responsibility for helping the victims and re-establishing public trust. In this regard, governments have established programmes and policies to provide reparation for victims of terrorism, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition (Moffett 2016).

For example, in Kenya, the government established the Compensation for Victims of Terrorism Fund, which has been crucial in fulfilling its legal and moral obligations by providing justice, recognition and support to individuals or groups harmed by acts of terrorism (Moffett 2016). This initiative is a step towards providing comprehensive reparation to victims of terrorism and ensuring a stable and consistent source of funds for victim compensation (Moffett 2016).

The Victim Compensation Fund, established after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, offers reparations to victims of terror activities in the US. Compensation for victims of terrorism is funded through fines and fees from convicted offenders. Each state has a victim compensation scheme covering medical costs, mental health counselling and lost wages (Del Villar and Glasberg 2015).

In the UK, victims of terrorism are eligible for free medical treatment and can claim compensation through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, although the amounts are limited. The Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme in the UK covers criminal activities from 2010 onwards. Civil suits by terrorism victims can lead to compensation and help establish effective compensation frameworks (Del Villar and Glasberg 2015). These funds are typically financed through government budgets, often supplemented by public donations or international aid. They provide immediate financial assistance to victims and their families, covering medical expenses, loss of income and other damages.

## *Courts*

Legal systems in various countries have established mechanisms for victims to claim compensation through civil suits against perpetrators, sponsors of violence or even the state in cases of proven negligence. According to international human rights law, the right to an effective remedy is crucial to protect victims of terrorism and other serious crimes. In this regard, the state must offer a range of remedies, including investigations and prosecutions of perpetrators (United Nations 2015).

In Kenya, the Victim Protection Act allows for victim compensation and punishment of perpetrators through imprisonment and fines. In addition, the Witness Protection Act established the Victims Compensation Fund to provide restitution to victims of gross human rights violations, including terrorism, and their families (Sang 2023). However, more needs to be done to fully safeguard compensation for terrorism victims in Kenya.

In other jurisdictions, like France, victims can seek restitution through criminal prosecution or civil suits against terrorist organisations or sponsoring countries, with specific laws allowing for restitution in federal cases. The Guarantee Fund for the Victims of Terrorist Acts and Other Offences offers reparations based on evidence submitted by prosecutors and information provided by claimants through the French legal system (United Nations 2015). Similarly, through the court system, the US Victims of State Sponsored Terrorism Fund (USVSST Fund) compensates individuals affected by terror attacks (US Department of Justice 2020).

Although litigation processes for compensation can be lengthy and costly, with no guarantee of success, they have proven to be effective in ensuring there is justice for victims of terror activities (US Department of Justice 2020). For example, during the peak of the Al-Qaeda attacks in East Africa (twin bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998), the courts in the US convicted Sudan of conspiring to transfer money for terrorism through the US financial system. Sudan was found guilty of aiding terrorism, leading to a US judge ruling for compensation for victims. Unfortunately, many Kenyan victims were not covered by the ruling and did not receive compensation. However, in 2015, some Kenyan individuals were awarded US\$150 million each, although many others continue to seek compensation (US Department of Justice 2020). In the US and the UK, many victims have been awarded compensation by the courts after suing the perpetrators and state sponsors of terror activities, like Syria, Iraq and Iran (Gilbert 2018).

While the court model appears ideal through the lens of international humanitarian law, with courts as custodians of justice internationally, victims of terrorism face significant challenges in accessing justice and obtaining compensation. Jurisdictions take an excessively long time to conclude cases related to terrorism, which can be very taxing for victims seeking timely justice and compensation. Moreover, there is no guarantee of conviction in such cases. The complexity and high burden of proof required often result in acquittals or inconclusive judgments, leaving victims without closure or compensation.

The clandestine nature of terror groups further complicates efforts to pursue legal redress. These groups operate secretly and are often decentralised, making it difficult to gather evidence and identify perpetrators. This secrecy hinders the legal process and makes convictions challenging. Additionally, terrorism cases are frequently entangled with political issues, influencing judicial proceedings. Political considerations may lead to biases or interferences that complicate the pursuit of justice.

Another significant issue is the ambiguity and lack of clear definitions surrounding terror groups. Different jurisdictions may have varying interpretations of what constitutes a terrorist act, leading to inconsistencies in legal outcomes. Victims may also lack the financial and legal resources to pursue lengthy and complex civil suits. Legal battles against terror groups or states can be prohibitively expensive and daunting for individual victims (Gilbert 2018).

Furthermore, terrorism often crosses international borders, creating jurisdictional challenges. Coordinating legal action across countries with varying legal systems and standards can be problematic. By understanding and addressing these challenges, the international community can work towards more effective mechanisms to ensure that victims of terrorism receive the justice and compensation they deserve. Although judicial processes in many nations are reliable, states must enact proper laws to criminalise human rights violations and ensure adequate compensation for victims of terrorism, with strict time frames for the completion of terror cases to prevent aggravated suffering.

### ***Philanthropic organisations and private donors***

Philanthropic organisations and private donors often fill gaps left by governments and legal systems. Key among these are community reparation programmes, which are used as alternative approaches to assist victims and communities affected by violence (Gilbert 2018). These interventions aim to maximise resources and

sidestep problematic comparisons between victims with differing degrees of harm or involvement by crowdsourcing finances and symbolic reparations, such as community-funded memorials.

By decentralising responsibility, such programmes reduce reliance on contested state mechanisms and allow communities to express grief, solidarity and remembrance in culturally resonant ways. This grassroots-driven approach also empowers local actors to shape reparative narratives that reflect collective experiences rather than externally imposed categories of victimhood.

However, these initiatives do not specifically address the harm suffered by victims or acknowledge government responsibility for atrocities committed. Community reparations offer symbolic measures to groups or communities affected by violence, potentially benefiting individuals who cannot provide evidence for individual compensation (Moffett 2016). Though limited in scope and finances, these community collective responses are more inclusive and participatory, involving affected communities in decision-making processes and acknowledging all victims without creating a hierarchy of suffering, as witnessed in government and court models.

### ***Frozen or confiscated terror assets***

While governments are primarily responsible for funding reparations, there is a compelling argument for using assets seized from terrorists or their state sponsors to finance reparation efforts (Sang 2023; US Department of Justice 2021). Although there is no conclusive evidence that this approach has been used anywhere in the world, proponents argue that using terrorist assets to fund reparations can provide substantial financial resources, helping to alleviate the burden on national budgets (Sang 2023). Allocating seized terrorist assets to victim reparations serves as a form of restorative justice.

These funds can be directed towards comprehensive support programmes for victims, including medical treatment, psychological counselling and long-term rehabilitation. For example, the US Victims of State Sponsored Terrorism Fund can direct terror sponsor assets to that fund (US Department of Justice 2020). This model ensures that the perpetrators of terrorism contribute, albeit indirectly, to repairing the harm they have caused, thus enhancing the sense of justice for victims and the broader community by reinforcing the principle that those responsible for the violence should bear its costs (US Department of Justice 2021).

However, while using terrorist assets for reparations is a viable strategy, it comes with challenges. Identifying and seizing assets can be complex, especially when terrorists operate across borders and use sophisticated methods to hide their resources (Gilbert 2018). Moreover, legal processes to confiscate assets have proven problematic, as witnessed in the case between Iran (regarded as a state sponsor of terrorism through proxies) and the US. The US wanted to use frozen terrorist assets to fund reparations for terror victims (US Department of State 2020). However, through a petition by Iran to the International Court of Justice, US efforts were frustrated when the court ruled in favour of Iran (US Department of State 2020).

## Conclusion

The pursuit of justice for victims of terrorism remains fraught with numerous challenges that stem from lengthy legal processes, the uncertainty of convictions and the clandestine nature of terror groups. Political complications, ambiguous definitions and a lack of resources for victims further compound these issues. International jurisdictional issues add another layer of complexity, making coordinating legal actions across different countries a daunting task.

From a transitional justice perspective, these challenges highlight the need for holistic and inclusive approaches to justice that address victims' legal, social and psychological needs. Transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth commissions, reparations programmes and institutional reforms, can play a crucial role in bridging the gaps left by traditional legal systems. These mechanisms focus on acknowledging the suffering of victims, promoting reconciliation and rebuilding trust in institutions, which are essential for sustainable peace and justice.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from the international community to develop more efficient and effective legal mechanisms alongside transitional justice approaches. By integrating these perspectives, we can better ensure that victims of terrorism are granted the justice and compensation they deserve. This dual approach reinforces the principles of international humanitarian law and strengthens the global commitment to fighting terrorism while fostering healing and reconciliation in affected communities.

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## CHAPTER 8

# Preventing violent extremism through transitional justice interventions:

## *Contemporary African Union Youth, Peace and Security policies*

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*Rhuks Ako*

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The role of youth in the peace and security space is well articulated in fundamental normative documents of the African Union (AU), including its Constitutive Act, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the AU (PSC Protocol) and the African Youth Charter. These documents have proved to be solid foundations for contemporary frameworks such as the Continental Framework for Youth, Peace and Security (CFYPS) (African Union 2020b), the revised Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy, the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) and the WiseYouth mechanism. Together, these normative provisions recognise and seek to advance the role of African youth in various aspects of the continent's peace and security agenda.

The role and contributions of youth became more visible as these contemporary frameworks developed and as youth participation was mainstreamed into various aspects of the peace and security space. At the same time, there was growing unease in multilateral institutions, development agencies and youth networks regarding the perceived proliferation of youth-related frameworks. There was concern that this would lead to competition, both at the AU Commission level and within the youth communities, and negatively affect youths' progress in this arena.

This chapter reflects on the intent of these contemporary Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) frameworks with a view to determining if, and to what extent, they are contradictory or complementary.

## Evolution of YPS

The development of YPS-related frameworks has been on the increase in Africa following the AU's recognition of the positive role that youth play as change-makers and peacebuilders.

The African Youth Charter of 2006 expresses the role, responsibilities and expectations of youth in contributing to peace, stability and development on the continent. Article 11 broadly provides for the inclusion of youth in all spheres of society and is intent on developing the institutional capacities of youth organisations. Article 17 highlights the essence of youth roles in peace and security, including through strengthening their capacity in peacebuilding and conflict prevention; using education to promote a culture of peace and tolerance among youth; and mobilising youth for post-conflict reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconciliation and development of affected areas.

Youth roles in peace and security were recognised by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in Resolution 2250 of 2015. This Resolution and the global 'Missing Peace' study (Simpson 2018) raised awareness around the important contributions of youth peacebuilders, as well as their potential as agents and partners of peace.

In September 2018, following internal conversations within the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (CPEWD) of the Peace and Security Department (PSD), the Youth for Peace (Africa) programme (Y4P) was inaugurated in Lagos, Nigeria, to further develop and implement the YPS agenda. The programme was inaugurated as a collaborative effort with Regional Economic Communities, Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) and youth peacebuilders, with a view to ensuring co-ownership, effective coordination and sustainability. To promote YPS policy development and implementation, the Y4P programme sought the buy-in of the PSC (the continent's highest decision-making body on matters of peace and security), which agreed to the first-ever Open Session on YPS in November 2018 in commemoration of African Youth Day.<sup>1</sup>

The session was a watershed moment for YPS in Africa. Following presentations by representatives of youth peacebuilders, member states, RECs/RMs and development partners, the PSC went into a closed session and made decisions

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<sup>1</sup> November 1 was established as African Youth Day (AYD) by the African Youth Charter, which was adopted through an Executive Council Decision of the Banjul Summit of 2006 (DOC.EX.CL/292 (IX)).

that underpin the institutionalisation and development of the YPS agenda in Africa. The PSC decided, among other things, to hold annual YPS sessions, called for the expeditious drafting of a final version of the framework on YPS for consideration and appropriate action, mandated a study on the role and contributions of the youth to peace and security in Africa and requested the selection of five African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAP) to work with the AU Youth Envoy in the promotion of peace and security.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequent PSC sessions contributed to the evolution of the YPS agenda, with the PSC being a central part. For example, at the conclusion of the second session on YPS, the PSC requested that its Committee of Experts work closely with the Y4P programme in the finalisation of the YPS framework and its mandated study on the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa (African Union 2020a). The participation of the PSC in the development of these critical documents is not only testament to the fact that YPS is considered an important element of promoting and sustaining peace on the continent, but also that the collaboration has enabled the PSC to understand and be invested in the YPS agenda.

It is thus not coincidental that the PSC is fully invested in and committed to promoting the development of normative documents on YPS. This has included the adoption of the CFYPS, alongside its accompanying 10-Year Implementation Plan (see African Union 2020c).<sup>3</sup> A critical decision that emanated from the second PSC YPS session was the request that the AU Commission regularly brief the Council

on the status of progress in the execution of the 10-Year Implementation Plan for the CFYPS, 2020–2029 and challenges faced, to submit a progress report during the 10th Anniversary of the adoption of the Framework on the implementation, while a mid-term report should be submitted in the year 2025 to take stock of achievements and highlight challenges to be addressed ahead of the 10th anniversary.<sup>4</sup>

This decision elevated the 10-Year Implementation Plan for the CFYPS from being the fundamental normative document on YPS on the continent to one that is of practical relevance in the PSC. The PSC has also given due recognition to other developments considered to be of importance to the evolution of the YPS agenda.

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2 AU PSC Communiqué PSC/PR/COMM.(DCCCVII) adopted at its 807th meeting held on 9 November 2018.

3 PSC/PR/COMM.(CMXXXIII) adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 933rd meeting held on 23 June 2020, on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa.

4 Ibid.

For example, it adopted the Bujumbura Declaration, the outcome of the Continental Dialogue on Youth, Peace and Security held on the sidelines of the 1080th PSC session in Bujumbura, Burundi.<sup>5</sup> Originally, the Bujumbura Declaration was adopted by the youth participants to the AU-convened Continental Dialogue, on 23 April 2022. The Continental Dialogue, held under the leadership of the AYAPs and the AU Youth Envoy to reflect on localising and improving the implementation of the CFYPS across Africa, made practical recommendations for the Framework's implementation along its five priorities.

During these deliberations, the Committee of Experts of the PSC reviewed the Guidelines for the Development and Implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) for the AU CFYPS in adherence to Council's decision at its 1067th meeting.<sup>6</sup> The Guidelines document, another important normative contribution to YPS on the continent, contains parameters to assist member states in developing their NAPs on YPS.

The Assembly of Heads of State and Government has also played critical roles in promoting youth participation in matters of peace and security. First, the Assembly decision to institutionalise the Y4P programme during its 2020 summit granted the programme operational status with the attendant capacity to have its budget. Institutionalising the programme, as well as its ability to implement a budget that draws from both the AU and partner funding streams, contributes to the sustainability of the YPS agenda in Africa.

Secondly, the Assembly endorses the AYAPs on selection and has consistently recognised the role they play in promoting peace and security in Africa. Relatedly, the Assembly has encouraged the participation of the AYAPs at the AU Summit and, since the inaugural attendance, the Youth Ambassadors have witnessed increased access and participation.

Third, the Assembly appointed a Champion on YPS in the person of Evariste Ndayishimiye, the president of Burundi, as an indication of the importance of YPS to the AU. The AU Champion has presided over two continental YPS consultations, a consultation on young persons with disabilities in Addis, and committed to promote the YPS agenda, including through consultations with his peers.

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5 PSC/PR/COMM.1080 (2022) adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 1080th meeting held on 25 April 2022 on the Reflection on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa.

6 PSC/PR/COMM.1067 (2022) adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 1067th meeting held on 3 March 2022 on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa. See particularly para. 11.

## Youth as perpetrators and victims of conflicts

Through participation in transitional justice initiatives, youth have immense potential to contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism as well as sustaining peace following the de-escalation of tensions/conflict. However, if this youth potential is to be fully explored and exploited, it is essential that policymakers overcome the dual conceptualisation of youth as only perpetrators and victims of conflicts.

The literature commonly attributes violent extremism to the ‘relative fragility of the state and its circumvention and even its rejection of citizens feeling unprotected and marginalized’, with the perceived rejection leading to ‘seeking recognition, appreciation and/or a new community by adopting deviant behaviours and methods’ (UNESCO-IICBA 2019: 14).

Much has been said about the drivers – pull and push factors – that lead youths to become involved in violent extremism. Holmer (2013: 2) captures these drivers as:

- push factors that include structural conditions such as poverty, and grievances such as lack of access to political processes or justice
- individual psychological and emotional characteristics, such as a need for belonging, dignity, meaning or revenge, or the continuation of cycles of violence brought on by chronic conflict
- the influence of socialisation by family, peers and schools, as well as group dynamics
- the pull of active recruitment, which includes extremist messaging that inspires violence.

The ‘youth bulge’ has also been considered a driver of instability, with young people typically portrayed as perpetrators of violence or potential ‘spoilers’ who should be protected from radicalisation and extremism (OECD 2011). This correlation between the youth bulge and violent extremism (particularly in Muslim countries) became popular based on the argument that this cohort of the population provides recruits for fundamentalism, terrorism, insurgency and migration (Huntington 1997).

While the central argument is that youth vulnerability and exclusion drive their involvement in violent conflicts (Huntington 1997), there are other factors at play. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report notes:

In the regions of Africa that are most affected by violent extremism, stark levels of unemployment and economic need are apparent. Often these are

well below national averages ... There is agreement that poverty alone is not a sufficient explanation for violent extremism in Africa. Still, it is accepted that violent extremist groups exploit perceptions of disproportionate economic hardship or exclusion due to religious or ethnic identity ... a sense of grievance towards, and limited confidence in, government is widespread in the regions of Africa associated with the highest incidence of violent extremism. (UNDP 2017: 55)

Of course, youth roles in violent conflicts are not limited to involvement in violent extremism. As Ismail and Olonisakin (2021: 371) highlight, ‘one question that has dominated scholarly and policy debates and also underpinned programmatic intervention on peace and security in Africa is “why do female and male youth resort to large-scale violence and armed uprising in Africa?”’

## Contributions of African youth to peacebuilding

More recently, with the advancement of YPS in Africa, the narrative is changing regarding the positive role that youth play in peacebuilding. While the ‘myriad contributions of African youth to peace and security are still mostly unseen, understated and undocumented’ (African Union 2020a: xvi), there is a steady growth in acknowledgement, both in the literature and in policy spaces, of the role of Africa’s youth in the peace and security arena.<sup>7</sup>

The AU PSC-mandated study on the roles and contribution of youth to peace and security in Africa captures several positive impacts of youth initiatives and activities from across the continent that promote peace and security in Africa. With specific regard to youth contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic, it notes that ‘accounting for Africa’s response to COVID-19 without adequate cognisance of the role and contributions of its young people who, in most countries, constitute an average of 60% of population, is incomplete’ (Keng et al. 2021: 6). Further, it has been noted: ‘Beyond peacebuilding, young people display ownership, agency and leadership in diverse areas that are of significance to local, regional, national and international peace and security, ranging from climate change to tackling inequalities’ (Ozcelik et al. 2021: 4).

In policy spaces, the AU PSC has expressed its recognition and appreciation of the contributions of African youth to the peace and security agenda. For example, on the

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<sup>7</sup> The same can be said about global recognition. See, for instance, Simpson (2018).

expiration of the term of the first cohort of AYAPs, the PSC commended the Youth Ambassadors for their contributions to the 2020 AU Youth Silencing the Guns Campaign, respective YPS priorities across the five regions, collaboration with RECs/RMs and support to the Office of the Youth Envoy throughout their tenure. In addition, the PSC commended the AYAPs 'for their contributions in advancing the meaningful participation of young peacebuilders across the Continent'.<sup>8</sup>

The PSC also commended 'youth for their important role at national, regional and continental levels in the prevention of violence, the promotion of peace, security, stability and socio-economic development and efforts towards building foundations for peaceful societies' and congratulated the second cohort of AYAPs 'for advocating for the sensitization, development and domestication of NAPs in their respective regions'.<sup>9</sup> Thereafter, the PSC noted that 'the enormity of interventions undertaken by youth across the continent on peace and security area is worthy of recognition and reward' and encouraged its member states and other African institutions/organisations to introduce non-monetary awards for young peacebuilders on the continent.<sup>10</sup> Notably, the first such awards were presented to youth by the AU Commission under the auspices of the Y4P Africa programme in 2023.

## Youth role in preventing and countering violent extremism

Terrorism robs young people of their lives and opportunities, of their present and their future. Youth, therefore, has as much a stake as anyone in counter-terrorism. We need practical and innovative ways to help them raise and address their concerns and safeguard their peers and communities.<sup>11</sup>

There is a need to explore the resilience factors that contribute to a majority of youth shunning violent extremism and the growing number actively working to prevent and counter it. Youth are generally well positioned to promote a culture of tolerance and peace among their peers due to shared linguistic styles and the use of social media targeted at the youth demographic. Strategies should be implemented

8 PSC/PR/COMM.1067 (2022) adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 1067th meeting held on 3 March 2022 on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa. See particularly para. 2.

9 PSC/PR/COMM.1183 (2023) adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 1183rd meeting held on 3 November 2023 on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa.

10 PSC/PR/COMM.(CMXXXIII) adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) at its 933rd meeting held on 23 June 2020 on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa.

11 Sevil Alirzayeva, Chief of the Office of the United Nations Under-Secretary General for Counter-Terrorism, at the 5th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in Baku, Azerbaijan.

to upskill young peacebuilders that are already active in this space, while also seeking innovative avenues to attract new recruits.

The role of youth as resilient contributors to peacebuilding, especially to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), needs to be recognised and optimised using appropriate initiatives. One example is using a peer-to-peer approach that provides young peacebuilders with the wherewithal to spread the P/CVE message with peers in their communities, including with those most affected.

Another example is to adopt transformative pedagogy to transform both teachers and students into peacebuilders. This idea is promoted in several AU normative documents, including the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (2016–2025) adopted by the AU Heads of State and Government Assembly during their Twenty-Sixth Ordinary Session on 31 January 2016, and the CFYPS, where the role of peace education in peacebuilding and conflict prevention is emphasised. The Regional Stabilization Strategy for the Lake Chad Basin specifically refers to the need for preventing violent extremism and building peace through education, knowledge and capacities (Lake Chad Basin Commission 2018).<sup>12</sup> However, action in terms of implementing peace education, as well as research to improve delivery and impact in Africa, appears to be limited or outside of the mainstream, and thus does not garner the attention of a wide range of YPS actors.

That said, some relevant work has been done by UNESCO (2008), including in collaboration with the AU's Y4P Africa programme,<sup>13</sup> and there has been other research too (Georgakopoulos et al. 2019; Podder 2022). Exposing youth to peace education and ensuring they have access to teachers or mentors with the requisite knowledge and skills will further enhance their roles and potential as positive actors in P/CVE.

Recognition of youth roles in transitional justice in Africa has been on the increase since the establishment of the AU's Transitional Justice Unit in 2020 (moving it away from the Human Rights Unit) based on the adoption of the AUTJP by the AU Heads of State and Government Assembly during their Thirty-Fourth Ordinary Session on 12 February 2019. The unit developed a comprehensive roadmap of

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<sup>12</sup> See Intervention Pillar 7: Education, Learning and Skills.

<sup>13</sup> Collaborative efforts yielded the publication of the UNESCO-IICBA 'Youth guide on education for peacebuilding and the prevention of violence' (UNESCO 2022); webinar series: Lessons learned in promoting transformative pedagogy for peace and resilience building, prevention of violent extremism and learning to live together in Africa (2022); and webinar 'Silencing the guns in Africa: How to energize and empower young people through education for peace and prevention of violence' (2021).

implementation of the AUTJP and strategic plans for African transitional justice programmes, with a strong emphasis on youth. The unit launched and runs the African Youth for transitional justice (AY4TJ) initiative that aims to ‘promote youth participation in the conceptualization and implementation of transitional justice mechanisms in AU Member States’ (African Union 2021). While the programme is aimed at youth around the continent, special consideration was given to youth from countries that are currently implementing transitional justice programmes with a view to enabling them to contribute to ongoing initiatives.

## **Provisions on youth mainstreaming**

This section analyses key provisions from the normative documents on mainstreaming in peace and security, with an emphasis on the CFYPS, the revised PCRD policy and the AUTJP.

### ***CFYPS***

The CFYPS has prevention as its second priority. It highlights that building and strengthening youth capacity by investing in their education, access to socio-economic infrastructure and opportunities strengthens their resilience against vulnerabilities that put them at risk of exploitation, manipulation, radicalisation and recruitment by extremist, criminal and armed groups (African Union 2020b: 14).

The fifth priority, disengagement and reintegration, encourages the promotion of policies, legislations and programmes towards reintegration into society of youth who have disengaged from armed, criminal or extremist groups. These frameworks should include youths’ deradicalisation, demobilisation and rehabilitation, including the provision of psychosocial support. Further, training youth to strengthen their capacity to act as relief and recovery agents in conflict and post-conflict situations is also promoted (African Union 2020b: 14).

The accompanying 10-Year Implementation Plan contains quantitative targets for the five priorities of the CFYPS. On prevention, it aims to support the implementation of youth-led conflict prevention, including against terrorism and violent extremism, as a contribution to ‘Silencing the Guns’, the AU’s flagship initiative aimed at ending all wars and violent conflicts on the continent. It calls on the AU RECs/RMs to mobilise financial and technical resources to support at least five youth-led initiatives per region by 2024 and ten by 2029 (African Union 2020c: 3).

It also calls for support in implementing AYAP regional projects, including vocational skills/empowerment opportunities for youth to reduce their vulnerabilities to exploitation, manipulation, radicalisation and recruitment by extremist gangs. It further calls for support in implementing youth-led disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and security sector reform (DDR/SSR), post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation actions.

### ***Revised PCRD policy***

The revised PCRD policy benefitted from the evolution of YPS on the continent and has two significant developments: the addition of a ‘youth’ pillar, and the adoption of a broader conceptual framework with the attendant expansion of the scope of PCRD activities. To implement the youth pillar, the policy envisages that conflict-affected countries pursue five objectives – engagement, protection, prevention, partnerships and coordination, and disengagement and reintegration – with details which align with the five priorities of the CFYPS, albeit with particular reference to PCRD contexts. Thus, for example, the ‘engagement’ priority aligns with CFYPS’ ‘participation’ to ‘actively promote meaningful participation of youth at all levels ... in decision-making processes, policy formulation, implementation and monitoring of PCRD processes’.

The revised PCRD policy contains benchmarks and standards for each pillar and lists 18 elements with regard to the youth pillar.<sup>14</sup> These 18 elements align with the intention of the CFYPS to ‘support implementation of youth-led DDR/SSR, post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization actions such as advocacy and collaboration with stakeholders on DDR/SSR, post-trauma counselling, psychosocial support; as well as strengthening of juvenile justice and corrections services’ (African Union 2020c: 7).

Notably, some of the provisions of the policy extend those of the CFYPS. For example, (j) encourages the establishment of investments and funds that enable the inclusion of youth in different projects in rebuilding, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and (k) relates to financing of quick-impact projects and peace-strengthening projects with the intention of empowering youth, including through ‘related income generating employment initiatives’.

Further, the revised PCRD policy highlights the meaningful participation of youth in PCRD through establishing and supporting youth platforms, developing and

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<sup>14</sup> See generally, Annexe A, ‘Benchmarks and standards’.

implementing programmes to encourage youth leadership and meaningful participation in PCRD, and digital media. Other provisions are related to capacity building, training and skills development, and mentoring, all in the context of PCRD-specific activities and initiatives. In essence, they extend the role of youth peacebuilders to include PCRD in their repertoire of interventions.

### *AUTJP*

The AUTJP also makes reference to issues of youth, although often coupled with those of children. For example, Section 3, titled ‘Cross-Cutting Issues,’ includes a provision on ‘Children and Youth,’ without a clear separation as to their specific and differing needs. Article 33 (Inclusiveness, Equity and Non-Discrimination) lists ‘youth (especially child soldiers)’ as marginalised and vulnerable groups whose participation must be promoted and needs met in transitional justice processes.

Other sections of the policy, such as A.108(ix), make sole reference to ‘children.’<sup>15</sup> However, youth are equally vulnerable to sexual violence, particularly those under the age of 18. This conceptual ambiguity notwithstanding, the AUTJP has provisions that aim to mainstream and promote youth into transitional justice processes.

The role of youth as victims of conflict is captured in A.50, which notes that their experiences need to be captured by truth and reconciliation commissions; A.39(i) provides for their physical and psychosocial rehabilitation and social reintegration as a consequence of giving ‘due regard to the gender and generational dimensions of violations and transitional processes’; A.65 and 66 promote their access to reparations; and A.108(iv) covers provision of programmes for family tracing and reunification and reintegration into their communities.

The policy also recognises the importance of the ‘active participation of women and youth’ in transitional justice processes ‘through affirmative action measures in designing and implementing the full measure of transitional processes crafted for the transitional needs of the affected country’ (39.(ii)). It also makes express reference to youth participation in peace processes (46.(iv)), memorialisation (A.70–74) and political and institutional reforms (A.94).

Like the PCRD policy, the AUTJP extends the participation of youth into areas of peace and security that may have remained largely uncharted territory. The documents also cross-reference one another. For example, Pillar IV of the PCRD

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Ensuring full investigation and prosecution of sexual violence against children of both sexes...’

policy cross-references the AUTJP, including adopting the latter's definition of transitional justice and expressly recognising the AUTJP, which outlines holistic approaches for implementing victim-centred transitional justice and reconciliation at all levels.

### *Missed opportunities for policy coherence*

Opportunities to optimise policy coherence, particularly with reference to YPS frameworks, have been missed. For example, relevant provisions in the revised PCRD policy note that its implementation is to be bolstered by frameworks and structures for generating and exchanging knowledge on PCRD and peacebuilding interventions on the continent.

While mention is made of contemporary structures such as I-RECKE and the Network of Think Tanks for Peace (NeTT4Peace),<sup>16</sup> there is no reference to youth structures within the AU Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (DPAPS), such as the AYAPs and WiseYouth (a network of African youth in conflict prevention and mediation), which are also integral in galvanising youth to play more active roles in both PCRD and transitional justice.

Another missed opportunity is the revised policy's listing of normative frameworks, including the CFYPS, in the section 'Political Governance and Transition', but no referencing of any normative documents in the sections under the 'youth' pillar. Here, cross-referencing the CFYPS and relying on accepted definitions of terms such as 'meaningful participation' would have been useful, especially given that the revised PCRD policy does not define the term.

Further, even though the revised policy adopts five priorities that are aligned with the CFYPS, it substitutes the first pillar, 'participation', with 'engagement', despite the former having acquired technical meaning in the YPS context.

With regard to practical development, there are evolving YPS structures within the AU's DPAPS, including the AYAPs, WiseYouth and the AY4TJ training programme. There is also the potential for a new structure to promote youth participation in PCRD in accordance with the provision to

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<sup>16</sup> The Inter-Regional Knowledge Exchange (I-RECKE) on Early Warning and Conflict Prevention was established in July 2022 to promote a more structured interaction between the AU Commission and RECs/RMs, based on knowledge exchange to enhance coherent efforts to collectively address the existing and emerging peace and security challenges on the continent. The Network of Think-Tanks for Peace (NeTT4Peace) is an initiative of the CPAPS to promote strategic long-term collaborative efforts between DPAPS and think-tanks to foster the much-needed synergy to optimise their respective core functions.

Support initiatives that bring together African youth to enhance continental exchange and capacity building in the design, and implementation of programmes to encourage youth's meaningful participation in PCRD through the promotion of exchanges and collaboration in existing national, regional and continental structures.

These structures are important avenues through which to promote meaningful participation of young peacebuilders in Africa's peace and security agenda. However, to effectively optimise this opportunity, there has to be purposeful synergy between the normative frameworks and practical realities. A lack of synergy will potentially contribute to unhealthy competition among youth and their networks. Similarly, having limited opportunities for youth participation is also likely to contribute to unhealthy competition.

These youth structures have different objectives but it is important that the overarching importance of YPS is not lost through a silo approach to implementing initiatives. The AYAPs, for example, have the mandate to advocate for the meaningful participation of youth in Africa's peace and security agenda. However, they have had little interaction with the AUTJP and initiatives such as the AY4TJ.

## **Transitional justice approach to PVE through a YPS lens**

Transitional justice is an integral aspect of PCRD, especially as expressed in the revised PCRD policy, which itself is subsumed within the YPS agenda. However, the meaningful participation of youth in YPS does not presume the knowledge, experience or skill sets necessary to engage in transitional justice or PVE, as these are more intricate parts of the peace and security discourse. Nevertheless, in order to understand their contextual underpinnings and practical interrelatedness, youth should be provided with knowledge about the broader YPS agenda as well as PCRD. These are not competing agendas but rather complementary ones that would benefit from a dedicated and coordinated approach.

Youth participation in P/CVE is usually within the framework of conflict prevention and advocacy, including for reintegration, and not in the nuanced understanding and application of PCRD principles (African Union 2020a). However, there is huge potential for youth to understand alternative means to address violent extremism, particularly through their active engagement and participation in PCRD and transitional justice processes.

Both PCRDR and transitional justice can occur in different contexts, although the classic situation is when tension or conflict of a political or violent nature has contributed to a breakdown of trust. Youth in these situations are often marginalised and excluded from actively participating in the political space, and also have limited socio-economic amenities and opportunities (UNDP 2017). The CFYPS, the revised PCRDR policy and the AUTJP all contain provisions that identify these drivers and have policy directives to address them.

The ‘participation’ pillar in the CFYPS, for example, states the following about the role of youth:

advocate and promote active and meaningful participation of youths at all levels, namely national, regional and continental in decision-making processes, policy formulation, implementation and monitoring of governance, peace agreements; support cross-sectoral cooperation as a holistic approach to youth issues and for elimination of structural barriers to youth participation; and support the development and implementation of national action plans to encourage young people’s meaningful participation in peace and security through the promotion of exchanges and collaboration in existing national, regional and continental structures. (African Union 2020b: 14)

Participation of youth in policy formulation and decision-making processes will promote understanding and inclusion of youth-centric issues in policies. This will in turn result in policies that capture the lived experiences of youths and address their expectations, particularly with respect to governance and peace agreements. These are two critical elements underpinning transitional justice processes: democratic tenets of governance that acknowledge and provide space for citizens’ expressions, and peace agreements that seek to heal society following a breakdown.

Cross-sectoral cooperation implies that YPS, PCRDR and transitional justice need to be implemented holistically rather than in silos. The YPS agenda provides the opportunity to develop such an approach – one that recognises and empowers youth peacebuilders to take a central position in the conversations and actions within the peace and security agenda.

In transitional justice contexts where the society experienced the threat or occurrence of violent extremism, allowing youth contributions through the development and implementation of NAP-YPS enables the necessary conversations among youths and other YPS stakeholders, such as the state, civil society

organisations and development partners. These should focus on holistic, youth-centred approaches that identify and respond to the push and pull factors of violent extremism. Adopting a YPS approach enables responses to draw inspiration from the CFYPS, but also integrate provisions on youth participation in specific areas of peace and security, such as PCRCD and transitional justice.

Further, a YPS approach enables youth, who are not only the majority of Africa's population, but arguably also those with the knowledge, skills and experience to successfully navigate contemporary solutions – including new technology and media – to play a key role in the peace and security arena. As noted by the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism,

They possess a talent for communication and mobilisation. Engaging and working together with youth as an effective and positive partner continues to be a key priority in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) policies, programming and capacity-building efforts. (UN n.d.)

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**SECTION 3**

**COUNTRY STUDIES  
ON COUNTERING  
AND PREVENTING  
VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

# Narratives and approaches to violent extremism in Nigeria

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*Caleb Ayuba*

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The late 1980s and the early 1990s, which coincided with the end of the Cold War, orchestrated one of the worst humanitarian challenges in modern history. This was occasioned by the widespread proliferation of violent extremist ideologies across the world and specifically within Sahel Africa. The liberties that the end of the ideological war ushered in emboldened different segments of contemporary society, especially those with extremist world views, to rise up in rebellion against constitutional authorities and institutions. These authorities are responsible for managing cultures and peoples as civilised entities driven by the tenets of law and order as moral and political compass (Ayuba 2014).

According to Samuel P. Huntington (1996), the threat against constitutionalism and constitutional states as emblematised by the activities of violent extremists aims at destroying the fabric of organised societies and the stability of liberal structures. This is the scenario across many global regions, from the Sahel to the Horn and from the Arabian Peninsula to the extremes of the Caucasus and far beyond to Southeast Asia (Kegley and Wittkopf 1995). These constitutional states are beginning to succumb to the aggressive onslaughts of anarchists terrorising previously 'peaceful regions' of the world.

This has necessitated a response strategy where victim-governments deploy kinetic strategies to curtail the activities of these organisations. This alternative is driven by expensive monetary imperatives that are detrimental to the economies of the

countries concerned, especially those located in the African region. This is contrary to the security sector reform of the post-Cold War order in that resources that should be appropriated for addressing the continent's development agenda and promoting peacebuilding initiatives are instead channelled into security management. Many of these resources fall prey to corruption, especially within the context of African military and security sector operations, which in turn perpetuates violent extremism.

This chapter looks at violent extremism in Nigeria, drawing from literature from diverse academic disciplines. It briefly interrogates the historical and contemporary contexts of the extremism of Boko Haram, highlights the issues (causes) and actors driving the violent extremism in Nigeria, and proffers context-specific pathways for addressing it.

## **Conceptual framework: Violent extremism**

There are various perspectives on the question of violent extremism. The British Terrorism Act of 2000, for example, states that extremism could be perceived as vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democratic and liberal values, the rule of law, individual liberties, and mutual respect and tolerance of British societies' diverse religious faiths and belief systems.

The British Department for International Development's (DFID) more citizen-centred definition of the concept implies that violent extremism infers the use or facilitation of violence targeted at civilians as a means of rectifying grievances, real or perceived, and forms the basis of increasingly strong exclusive group identities. Violent extremism is understood in this context to suggest the actions or activities of persons or groups that are susceptible to the use of violence to pursue their politico-ideological or religious objectives (Hoffman 1998).

The Resilient Communities of Australia<sup>1</sup> perceives the term as meaning 'beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals' (Ministry of Justice and Public Security 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> Resilient Communities in Australia focuses on building capacity of vulnerable populations to withstand and recover from challenges like national disasters, economic downturns and social disruptions. This is achieved through strategies like building the capacity of vulnerable groups in the areas of disaster response, protecting natural resources and climate change mitigations.

## Classical Islamic scholarship and the evolution of modern violent extremism

The emergence of revivalist scholars as strong forces in Islamic scholarship has significantly influenced the dynamics of Islamic movements since the beginning of the twentieth century. Their anti-Western posture is considered critical in birthing violent extremism across the world. In the Nigerian context, their ideologies have shaped the reasoning of contemporary demagogues, influencing violent extremism in the country. Examples are Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau, who gave direction to Boko Haram in their ambition to create a caliphate across northern Nigeria and the greater Sahel. Of course, 'the establishment of an Islamic state is probably the most important objective of all Islamic revivalists' (Rehema 1994: 4).

Some of the most notable thinkers and revivalists with the greatest influence in their drive to create a caliphate across Islamic lands are Abd art-Rahman al-Kwakibi, Muhammad Rashid Rida (Reza), Muhammad Iqbal Lahori, Imam Muhammad Ghazali and Said Qutb. They are renowned for their influence in the resurgence and spread of Islam in the Maghreb (Libya, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria). Beyond the Maghreb, they also influenced the revival of the religion in Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Burma and Malaysia). Continuing their campaigns beyond their bastion, 'Islamic forces seem poised to win in political power' in Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait and, in modern history, the Sahel, including Nigeria (Rehema 1994: 1).

Ghazali pioneered the necessity for reviving Islam in the mould instituted by the Prophet and the blessed caliphs. In his work *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Ghazali insisted that even Islamic states need to be restructured as conceived by the Prophet. Boko Haram claims that their behaviour is motivated by the quest to attend to the material and spiritual salvation of Muslims – a kind of liberation of those Ghazali terms the Muslim victims of modern civilisation, as championed by Jews and Anglo-Saxons. No doubt, this is the doctrine shaping the actions and behaviours of modern extremists like Boko Haram. However, unlike Ghazali, who rejected the violent overthrow of governments through insurrections and insurgency, even when those governments are considered villainous, Boko Haram considers violence and terrorism to be viable for the replacement of 'tyrant governments' (Rehema 1994).

As a revivalist thinker, Qutb subscribes to the assumption that the products of modern civilisation, as emblematised in the Judeo-Christian creed, can be divided into two broad categories: the 'attractive', which needs to be incorporated, and the

‘disgusting’, which has to be either purged or obliterated. Specifically, Islam as a revolutionary ideology justifies – ‘indeed, obliges’ – Muslims to struggle against ‘godless’ social and political structures (Ismael and Ismael 1985: 110). Qutb’s ‘godless social structure’ can be interpreted to mean the duo of *Jahiliya* (the faithlessness of pre-Islamic Arabia) and ‘Western liberalism’, which gives freedom and liberties to anti-social and anti-moral conducts that Islam perceives as the extreme of depravity – a depraved and godless culture that unless vehemently resisted by the *Ummah*, will earn the wrath of God in the Day of Judgment. In this vein, all aspects of postmodern societies, including their social and political secularism, which are opposed to the doctrines and precepts of Islam deserve to be overthrown (Ismael and Ismael 1985: 110).

It is in obedience to the injunction to struggle against ‘godless’ social and political structures that Boko Haram arose in rebellion against Nigerian citizens and the state. As ‘revivalists’, even renegades like Boko Haram claim to be nostalgic about the spirit of Islam and subscribe to its attributes of mercy, compassion, social justice and fraternity within its geographical and religious jurisdictions. These are values that are representative of the Golden Age of the Prophet’s rule in Medina. Thus, creating a miniature Medina in Nigeria remains the goal of Boko Haram – a Medina where social order, shared prosperity and political inclusivity will be the norm in the Islamic caliphate carved out of ‘infidel’ Nigeria. To achieve this dream, most of Islam’s philosopher-Imams, like Said Qutb, Hassan al-Banna and Abu ala-Mawdudi, subscribed to the invocation of rebellion against unjust and un-Islamic rulers. They challenge the call for submission to whoever is in authority, especially ‘infidel authorities’ – a concept long thought to justify rebellion against unjust rulers (Meredith 2005).

It is world views such as those envisioned by the Islamic philosophers discussed above that shaped the thrusts of later Nigerian revivalists. For example, Muhammad Marwa (*Maitatsine*), in collaboration with his hordes of ‘yan-tatsine’, organised a prolonged insurrection against the Nigerian state in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Hendricks et al. 2023). Marwa’s success blazed the trail for successive generations of jihadists like Mallam Musa Makaniki. In the quest to emulate Marwa’s feat, he instigated a rebellion in Maiduguri and Yobe, with religion as a trigger against the people.

The most infamous insurgency is that of Mohammad Yusuf’s Boko Haram. Driven by the ambition of carving out an Islamic caliphate in sovereign Nigeria, Yusuf declared a jihad on the north-east region of the country during the first decade of

the twenty-first century. The insurgency is still raging after almost two and a half decades, with enormous humanitarian consequences (Hendricks et al. 2023).

## Causes of violent extremism in northern Nigeria

This section deepens the dialogue around the triggers and drivers incentivising violent extremism in northern Nigeria. It argues that the government of Nigeria's failure to keep its part of the social contract by providing for and protecting its citizens, as a core governance mandate as prescribed by modern statecraft, is a major trigger of violent extremism in the now volatile region (Bakut 2021).

Also, diverse factors point to multiple motivations behind violent extremism in Nigeria and the greater Sahel region: increasing poverty, illiteracy, financing of terrorism, the widespread distribution of ungoverned spaces in the Sahel (Fukuyama 1992), alongside resource gaps, global inequalities, cultural disequilibrium and the failing of state authorities (Clunan 2010). Other factors include the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, unemployment, corruption, drought and flooding, and food and water scarcity as outcomes of climate change (Fukuyama 1992).

In addition, 'terror and war economies' are potent drivers of the phenomenon. Energy deposits in the Lake Chad Basin have been cited as a reason for the violence in the north-east region of Nigeria (Awodola and Ayuba 2014). Prominent businessmen and politicians in both Nigeria and Chad, in association with French and other Western oil company conglomerates, including ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and Petronas, are allegedly responsible for driving the insurgency in order to delay oil exploration in Nigeria. It is further alleged that the delay is to allow these companies to continue to enjoy a monopoly over oil exploration in the Lake Chad region. These are apparently the principal financiers and suppliers of arms to Boko Haram – critical factors without which the insurgency cannot thrive (Dokubo 2016).

Similar allegations have been made by other state actors claiming that international organisations are key factors driving the terrorism of Boko Haram. The current Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) of the Nigerian military, General Christopher Musa, has accused foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of being key drivers and actors fuelling the insurgency. He publicly expressed concerns that external funding and support have allowed terrorist activities to thrive in Nigeria for years. Musa noted that whenever the military arrested insurgents, especially in the north-east, they always had hard currency in their possession. He questioned how they

had obtained it, and added that a lot of countries are envious of Nigeria: ‘I remember that some people said we were not going to survive beyond 2015. But this is 2025 and we are still surviving’ (Onje 2025: 9).

In an apparent corroboration of the CDS opinion, a United States (US) congressman, Scott Perry, alleged that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) is responsible for financing terror across several troubled regions of the world. He alleged during the first hearing of the Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency that USAID was financially supporting terrorist groups, including Boko Haram. The hearing, titled ‘The war on waste: Stamping out the scourge of improper payments and fraud’, addressed concerns about the misuse of taxpayer money. Perry claimed that USAID provided approximately US\$697 million annually, which he said ended up in the hands of groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and others operating in extremist religious schools and militant training camps (EC Times 2025: 21).

Musa’s and Perry’s claims coincided with mounting disquiet among Nigerian officials regarding the financial channels that capacitate Boko Haram’s operations in the north-east and the greater Sahel region.

Regarding other triggers of the insurgency in northern Nigeria and the greater Lake Chad region, researchers have asserted that climate change remains a critical trigger of violent extremism (Sellström and Amu 2023: 1). Many people are subsistence farmers, and they are seriously affected by the frequent extreme weather changes. With global warming, access to land, water and pastures is increasingly becoming more difficult, leading to competition and conflict between farmers, herders, fishermen and miners. Since these groups constitute 60% to 70% of the population, conflict between them impacts the socio-economic and political relations of society. Recent studies reveal how ‘diminishing livelihood opportunities, caused by shrinking lakes, rising sea levels and other effects of climate change can spill over to an increase in violent extremism and terrorism’ (Sellström and Amu 2023: 1).

## **Boko Haram insurgency**

The Boko Haram insurgency is a transnational phenomenon, even though it started in Nigeria’s north-east state of Borno. Other countries affected by the violent Islamic sect’s activities include Niger, Chad and Cameroon, although to different degrees. While relations between some of these countries and the violent

extremist organisation started with confrontation, others initially served as sources of food supplies and as fighter recruitment stations, and only later became victims of attacks.

The Chadian provinces of Lac, Hadjar Lamis and Kanem, for example, have played key roles in supplying fighters to the movement (Awodola and Ayuba 2015). With respect to Niger, because of the porosity of its border with Nigeria and the ethno-religious affinity of the peoples of northern Nigeria and Niger, terrorists have found refuge in the border prefecture of Diffa after wreaking havoc on Nigerian villages and economic infrastructure, thereby making pursuit and arrest difficult. Similarly, Cameroonian provinces like Mayo Tsanega, the Lagone region and the Far North have also served as safe havens for the violent extremists after attacking Nigeria's heartland states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY).

Kyari Mohammed (2020: 186) claims that the insurgency in Diffa in Niger and in the Far North region of Cameroon was a direct extension of the fighting in Nigeria's Borno State. Even though the frequency and impact of casualty vary in these conflict theatres, without comparable data, it is challenging to claim definitively, as Mohammed (2020) does, that Diffa is less affected by the insurgency than the Far North region. What is clear is that some Nigeriens also became foot soldiers in the activities of the movement. It was the asymmetric and complex nature of this conflict context that necessitated the creation of a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) (Kabiru and Agu 2021).

The MNJTF was created by the Nigerian government under the leadership of General Sani Abacha in 1994 with the mandate to combat insurgency, terrorism and armed banditry in the Lake Chad region. Initially, banditry was rampant in Nigeria, Niger and the Chadian corridors so the Nigerian government established the force to stem the rising tide of insecurity along these border regions. This is what occasioned the expansion of the force in 1998 to include forces from Niger and Chad. Following an escalation in the activities of the insurgent group, the MNJTF's mandate was expanded in 2015 by the African Union's (AU) Peace and Security Council to include counterterrorism operations. The MNJTF has the republics of Nigeria, Niger, Benin, Chad and Cameroon as members (MNJTF 2025).

Terrorism has over the years maintained a strong foothold in conservative Islamic societies of northern Nigeria as a backlash to the pervasive liberal culture originating from the postmodern societies of Europe and America (Huntington 1996). As noted, Boko Haram seeks to recreate its northern Nigerian hub into a budding

Islamic caliphate (Kabiru and Agu 2021). The group's strategy for achieving this goal revolves around its rejections and attacks on Western liberal cultures, suggesting a likely nexus between the group and other international terrorist networks such as Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State (IS). This affinity ended up influencing Boko Haram to profess nominal allegiance to IS.

Boko Haram has severely threatened the sovereignty and integrity of Nigeria and its neighbours. It was responsible for 6 664 deaths in 2013, more than any other terrorist group in the world, including IS, which killed 6 073 people in 2014, making it second in the ranking. Credible sources like the United Nations (UN) and Human Rights Watch have estimated that between 2009 and 2022, the insurgency of Boko Haram was responsible for over 30 000 deaths. The profound effect of the violence in the region is felt mostly in the areas of widespread human displacements, hunger, and human rights displacements, thereby making the group one of the world's deadliest terrorist organisations (GTI 2015). The UN has estimated that around 2.8 million people have been displaced by Boko Haram-induced violence in the north-east region and approximately 5.6 million are in need of emergency food aid (Blanchard 2016: 1).

Beyond deaths and maiming, Boko Haram has also become effective in armed robbery, abductions and kidnappings as sources of terror financing. The 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, and the 2018 abduction of 110 schoolgirls in Dapchi, Yobe State, were considered aberrations. Now, attacks on education institutions in the north by terror bandits are rampant.<sup>2</sup> Many of the girls from Chibok (a Christian community) were eventually married off to the terrorists in what constitutes an abuse of their fundamental human right (Ehiane and Ayuba 2021). All the Dapchi girls were set free except Leah Sharibu, a Christian girl who refused to renounce her faith (Babangida 2023). Likewise, in what is considered a resurgence of the activities of Boko Haram, in March 2024 the group abducted close to 200 people in Gamborun Ngala, a community in Borno State close to the Nigeria–Niger border.

The resilience of Boko Haram as a regional terror organisation is legendary. The group has demonstrated operational flexibility and stealth in the theatre of engagement. Especially since 2014, the group has successfully changed its tactics and operational focus from asymmetric attacks in favour of a conventional offensive

2 See [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/528267\\_NIGERIA-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/528267_NIGERIA-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf).

to capture, hold and hoist flags over captured territories (Bello et al. 2015). Also, the group has put in place a formidable FM radio station around the Nigeria/Cameroon borders. The station transmits its mobilisation and propaganda messages in Kanuri, Hausa and Fulfulde to negate the counter-insurgency war of both the Nigerian military and the MNJTF troops.

Nevertheless, Hendricks et al. (2023: 20) have indicated that 'Nigeria is at a turning point in its conflict trajectory, with deaths and attacks from terrorism declining to the lowest level since 2021'. This positive development is attributable to the mass defection of Boko Haram's fighting forces: 'Those defections occurred after the death of Abubakar Shekau, long standing leader of Jamaat Ahl al-sunna li-Da'wa we-l-Jihad (JAS) faction and the introduction of a Mass Exit Model by the state authorities' (Hendricks et al. 2023: 20–21). Because of this, erstwhile Boko Haram territories have been liberated, their flags lowered and the authority over the territory lost.

## **Realist world views on statehood: Curbing violent extremism in northern Nigeria through the power option**

The prosperity and development of the modern state system relies on the imperative that it survives the aggressions of external and internal forces. Armed non-state actors must never be allowed to control the mechanism for government and governance. This is the normative doctrine shaping the philosophies and practices of both theocracy and secularism, as moral compasses for ordering societies. In contemporary international politics, however, different entities are challenging and opposing the supremacy and authority of states as guardians of the affairs and sovereignty of modern nation states. Unless the state mobilises its resources and prevails against its enemies, it will weaken and ultimately die.

Using the realist theory as framework of analysis, the section argues that states are the most important political units in international relations. They are thus responsible for protecting their sovereignty against both external and internal threats. Even though non-state actors are recognised entities in the international environment, their activities should not undermine the power of the state or threaten its territorial integrity.

Although various entities such as organisations and individuals exist within states, those with the greatest tendency to undermine the primacy of states are

non-state armed groups (Antunes and Camisão 2018). In terms of power, the state is a unitary actor in that it shapes the national interest and by extension the foreign policy of the state. During conditions of political violence, for example, the state acts on behalf of the people in the national interest. Therefore, it is natural for ‘Decision-makers (in the state apparatus) to be rational actors by embarking on rational decision-making’ (Antunes and Camisão 2018: 56). Realism suggests that all leaders, no matter what their political persuasion, recognise this as they attempt to manage their state’s affairs in order to survive in a competitive environment.

Realism gives liberty to sovereign states to use power to combat violent non-state actors. This state-centric approach emphasises the state as the primary actor in international relations, highlighting its role as the chief actor responsible for maintaining power, sovereignty and the territorial integrity of states. According to the realist school of thought, the international system is anarchic and therefore state actors should depend on their capacity to deter any threat against their security and sovereignty.

It is this mindset of the average realist that defines their confrontation against terrorists and insurgents. Realists thus advocate for a formidable military to demonstrate their resolve to vanquish any would-be enemy of the state. Realist states lean towards adopting ruthless measures to combat terror, using strategies such as preemptive strikes, intelligence gathering and cooperation with other state actors, like the MNJTF coalition, to combat the threat of terrorism.

A major challenge of the realist power approach is the tendency to overemphasise the hard power alternative while undermining the root causes of terrorism, like poverty, inequality and political grievances.

### ***Islamic epistemology***

From both Sunni and Shiite Islamic perspectives, states must use all their resources and might to resist threats to their sovereignty (Ismael and Ismael 1985). Both Sharia (Islamic Law) and *Ijtihad* (reason) subscribe to the idea of the necessary existence of the state: ‘the fact that Muhammad was a temporal ruler, and his immediate followers chose a successor demonstrates that the institution of the state is essential’ (Ismael and Ismael 1985: 173).

To emphasise the necessity for order through the instrumentality of the state, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) himself asserted that ‘a despotic ruler is better than

anarchy' (Ismael and Ismael 1985: 174). The implication is that a non-liberal and non-democratic environment is to be preferred over conditions of anarchy. The ideology of Boko Haram is thus a fallacy, as classical Islamic thought propagates order and social stability for society. The *Ijtihad*, in its vehemence for the existence, survival and resilience of the state, and its opposition to renegade elements within the nation, observes that 'human beings are not capable of running their affairs harmoniously without the presence of a mediating authority' (Ismael and Ismael 1985). These are the legal authorities responsible for managing the affairs of states as regulatory entities.

If anarchy is to be prevented and peace and justice are to prevail in the north-east region of Nigeria, a formidable state, as arbiter and guardian of peace and justice, is essential. The incursion of Boko Haram as alternative authority must be resisted with the military option since it negates the sought-after peace imperative that stabilises organised societies.

## From hard power to peacebuilding

Even though the military option is the preferred one for most insurgency-threatened governments, the kinetic strategy to restore peace to conflict societies sometimes fails. Examples abound of the inability of counterterrorism's hard-power strategy to bring terrorism to an end. In this regard, 'France like all major imperial powers, fought many colonial small wars against insurgents not to mention some previous campaigns in Europe and in France itself like the crushing of the revolts in Corsica and Vendee by the *Ancien Regime*' (Fremaux and Reis 2016: 47). Furthermore, the French Revolution and the Spanish uprising in the Peninsular War in the early nineteenth century serve as examples of the unsustainability of ending violence with violence (Fremaux and Reis 2016).

Similar campaigns against insurgencies were undertaken by the British in different parts of the world. However, insurgencies are not always guaranteed to succeed since they can be crushed (Beckett 2001; Fortna 2015). However, a combination of guerrilla warfare, propaganda and political mobilisation has been successful enough to make insurgency the most prevalent form of modern conflict (Fortna 2015). Records have shown that since 1945, Britain alone has been involved in campaigns against insurgents in Aden, Afghanistan, Borneo, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Iraq, Kenya, Malaya, Northern Ireland, Palestine, Suez and Vietnam, among others. Of 94 separate operational commitments undertaken by

the British army between 1945 and 1982, only 14 were not in some form of 'low-intensity' conflict (JSCSC and Serco 2011: 2).

The failure of most kinetic campaigns dictates a need for alternative peacebuilding initiatives that aim at post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction (Schirch 2005). Although women have been key actors in the atrocities committed by Boko Haram (Aloziwuwa 2014), they are also the biggest victims of the insurgency. Going forward, women should be mainstreamed into Nigeria's post-conflict peacebuilding architecture (Aloziwuwa 2014). According to the UN, the implementation of Resolution 1325 guarantees women's involvement in the peace process as facilitators of dialogue and negotiations. Their involvement often results in longer-lasting and more enduring peace deals that are generally more effective and have more positive outcomes (UN Women 2000). This has been the case in Myanmar, Mali, Colombia, Syria and South Sudan.

Beyond mere symbolism, women's participation as peacebuilders must guarantee that female negotiators produce a shift in dynamics and a broadening of the issues discussed, so increasing the chances of community-buy in and addressing root causes. This should involve greater pressure on the parties to reach an agreement or go back to the negotiating table when the talks falter (UNESCO 2022). This reinforces the fact that 'peace should never be taken for granted. It is an on-going process, a long-term goal which requires constant engineering, vigilance and active participation by all individuals' (UNESCO 2022: 20).

Women play key roles in so-called 'track 2' diplomatic negotiations at the local and state levels in Nigeria. For example, they play roles as brokers of the peace alternative in the Nigerian states of Gombe, Borno, Taraba and the entire north-east belt of the country. Women also play a critical role in shoring up community resilience, which is needed to sustain peace, while investing narrowly in 'track 1' diplomacy with the male political and military elite (UNESCO 2022: 139).

Another pathway for achieving peace in Nigeria is by fighting corruption. This is the responsibility of the relevant agencies as well as the general Nigerian public. Corruption stalls the development of nations. Anti-corruption experts point to the fact that every time corruption decreases, the prospects for peace improve (UNESCO 2022). In Nigeria, both corruption and community violence are on the increase. There is a nexus between 'violence and corruption in the police and judicial systems, which encourages a vicious cycle of low trust, low crime reporting and increased incentives for criminals to erode the rule of law' (UNESCO 2022: 132).

Nigeria signed the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2004 and operationalised it in 2005. The country now needs to fully implement its obligations to the instrument. This will facilitate wealth distribution and poverty reduction, which are important triggers of violent extremism in Nigeria.

Finally, if the violent extremism in northern Nigeria is to be curbed, it is imperative that education be mainstreamed into the core of its peacebuilding architecture. Education has the capacity to foster the social cohesion necessary for conflict management and resolution. Teaching young children the values of respect, tolerance and empathy, and equipping them with the necessary skills to resolve conflict among peers in a non-violent manner, provides them with the tools they need, now and in the future, to foster peaceful relations at home, school and in their communities and beyond. Schools are also unique hubs for multisectoral programming that reaches into communities (UNESCO 2022: 115).

To conclude, the ‘hard power’ option in responding to threats against sovereign states often does not offer the right solutions to the problem. The contemporary security framework should thus be reviewed in favour of peacebuilding, peace-making, peacekeeping and other alternatives that advance peace advocacy models over the use of force. If citizens are made the beneficiaries of development indexes and national resource appropriations, the gap(s) that lure and make men rebel will naturally be addressed.

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# Violent extremism in northern Mozambique:

*Can adaptive DDRRR lead to a comprehensive, locally owned and sustainable P/CVE approach?*

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Since 2017, Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado, Nampula and Niassa provinces have suffered violent extremism (VE) led by the armed group Ahlu Sunnah Wa Jamaa (ASWJ, also known as Al-Shabaab, Machababos or Islamic State Mozambique [ISM]). The conflict has complex social, economic, political and radical Islamic underlying causes and drivers. These multifaceted factors, including high unemployment, poverty, lack of service delivery, exclusion, discovery and poor governance of natural resources, lagging structural reforms, institutional weaknesses and ungoverned space, land grabbing and forced displacement, ethnicity, Islam and transnational organised crime, have been well documented (Chingotuane et al. 2021; Cilliers et al. 2021; Ewi et al. 2022; Mangena and Pherudi 2019; Matsinhe and Valoi 2019; Morier-Genoud 2020; Rusero and Maisiri 2023; World Bank 2020).

In particular, festering socio-economic grievances meant promises of scholarships, jobs and money for disgruntled youth were among ASWJ's recruiting tools (Chingotuane et al. 2021). There was an infiltration by foreign jihadists, mainly from neighbouring Tanzania, inflaming local grievances, and the government initially stressed ASWJ's connections to external terrorist organisations, drawing criticism for ignoring the local elements of the conflict (Columbo and Doctor 2021; Dzinesa 2023; Ewi et al. 2022).

The insurgency has been characterised by structural and cultural violence, as religion has served to justify and legitimise direct physical violence (Dzinesa 2022b). Northern Mozambique has been the scene of gross atrocities and human rights violations, with reports of unlawful killings, beheadings, mutilation, torture and mass abductions (Amnesty International 2021; Human Rights Watch 2021, 2024). As of June 2024, the conflict had caused more than 5 700 fatalities, of which about 2 400 were civilians (ACLED 2024). Approximately 583 000 of around 1.2 million Mozambicans who were internally displaced due to the violence in northern Mozambique remained displaced (OCHA 2024). The conflict has destroyed homes, damaged infrastructure, disrupted critical service delivery, negatively impacted economic activity and created an enormous humanitarian crisis.

The Mozambican government has adopted a hard-security approach, including military action supported by foreign troops, as its primary response to VE in northern Mozambique (Besenyő and Hegedűs 2024). For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and Rwandan Joint Force deployed to northern Mozambique in July 2021 to assist the Mozambican Armed Defence Forces (FADM) in neutralising ASWJ, among other strategic objectives. The Mozambican government also received security sector training and support from several actors, including the European Union (EU) and the United States (US).

The reduction of ASWJ insurgent capacity, the government's reclamation of significant areas occupied by the violent extremists and the relative pacification of northern Mozambique have been crucial strategic and operational impacts of the military intervention, allowing some 632 000 internally displaced people to return home (Dzinesa 2023; Mandrup 2024a, 2024b; OCHA 2024). The Mozambican government has attempted a development and peacebuilding approach incorporating prevention and risk reduction to address VE as secondary to the foreign-backed reactive, hard-security, militarised, counter-insurgency operations. However, the security situation in northern Mozambique remains fragile.

Against this backdrop, this chapter considers disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation, reintegration and repatriation (DDRRR) of captured or capitulating Islamic militants and their associates as a crucial adaptive peacebuilding tool that may potentially help address VE. The following section provides a conceptual overview of adaptive peacebuilding, adaptive DDRRR and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

## **Defining concepts: Adaptive peacebuilding, adaptive DDRRR and P/CVE**

This chapter draws on Cedric de Coning's ground-breaking adaptive peacebuilding approach for complex conflict settings and builds on our earlier analyses of potential adaptive DDRRR and P/CVE in northern Mozambique (de Coning 2020, 2023; Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b; Rusero and Maisiri 2023). De Coning (2020) defined the adaptive peacebuilding concept as 'a process where peacebuilders, together with the communities and people affected by the conflict, actively engage in a structured process to sustain peace and resolve conflicts by employing an iterative process of learning and adaptation'. It is consistent with the local turn in peacebuilding, which underlines the importance of local agency for sustaining peace through central roles for local communities, grounding the epistemology of peace at the grassroots (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Saraiva and Erfe 2023).

Adaptive peacebuilding is a 'context-specific approach' distinct from 'externally driven, top-down, blueprint or predetermined design approaches to peacebuilding planning and assessment' (de Coning 2020, 2023). Indeed, international peacebuilders such as the United Nations (UN), global financial institutions and Western donors have traditionally adopted deterministic, top-down liberal approaches focusing on creating and strengthening formal legal state institutions rather than indigenous political practices and bottom-up or home-grown peacebuilding approaches (de Coning 2023; Dzinesa 2022b; Zaum 2012).

Adaptive peacebuilding thus aims 'at facilitating a participatory self-sustaining peace with local and national ownership and leadership' (de Coning 2023: 26). The adaptive approach promotes self-organisation whereby a society in a complex conflict actively develops various locally and nationally owned and driven context-specific processes and mechanisms to manage its own peace consolidation process pragmatically (de Coning et al. 2023). External partners or international peacebuilders such as multilateral and bilateral agencies and international nongovernmental organisations can help societies build and maintain robust and resilient self-organised and sustainable institutions to confront and overcome complex conflict (de Coning 2013, 2018, 2020; de Coning et al. 2023). De Coning (2013) asserts that 'the art of peacebuilding thus lies in pursuing the appropriate balance between international support and home-grown context-specific solutions'.

According to De Coning et al. (2023), the adaptive approach applies to DDR, an integral peacebuilding component. Conventional DDR is a process that

contributes to security and stability in a conflict context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them and those associated with armed groups to integrate socially, culturally, economically and politically into society by finding civilian livelihoods (United Nations 2021). DDR's strategic objectives include establishing peace and security, creating space for political processes and helping to build a secure environment conducive to recovery and development (United Nations n.d.(a), n.d.(b)).

This chapter adopts the broadened concept of DDRRR of ex-combatants and others associated with armed groups in recognition of the complex VE in northern Mozambique. Specifically, the VE involves Muslim local and foreign fighters, requiring individualised disengagement or deradicalisation of those defecting, surrendering or captured after falling prey to radical ideologies (African Union 2018; Altier 2021; Dzinesa 2024; United Nations 2006).

The first additional R to traditional DDR in DDRRR – rehabilitation – refers to a comprehensive process, including disengagement and deradicalisation to facilitate behavioural and psychological changes within an individual (African Union 2018; Dzinesa 2024; Fink and Hearne 2008; IOM 2021; RAN 2020; United Nations 2006). The rehabilitation can occur inside or outside the prison context, such as in communities (RAN 2020). The second additional R – repatriation – refers to the process of returning foreign fighters and their associates, such as non-Mozambican jihadists from neighbouring Tanzania, to their own country (Dzinesa 2023, 2024; United Nations 2019).

An adaptive peacebuilding approach to DDRRR would entail peacebuilders engaging all stakeholders in a whole-of-society consultative and participatory process to collaboratively develop a common understanding of the structural drivers of VE and to formulate and adapt home-grown, locally owned, contextualised and sustainable DDRRR programmes together (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). The stakeholders may include the militants and their associates (women, men, girls and boys), affected communities, vulnerable and marginalised groups like women and youth, faith-based organisations (FBOs), psychosocial care providers, government, traditional institutions and the private sector.

Sufficient community engagement can facilitate reintegration by helping prevent perceptions of former combatants as a specific preferential group, addressing possible feelings of injustice and resentment, especially among those who have

lost everything (Hendricks et al. 2023). Since adaptive DDRRR would be endogenously rooted in particular contexts, guideline documents for the planning, implementation and monitoring of DDR, such as the UN's Integrated DDR Standards, the African Union (AU) DDR Capacity Program and the AU Operational Guidance Note DDR and Countering Violent Extremism represent helpful reference tools to learn lessons rather than deterministic blueprints (Dzinesa 2022b).

The concept of P/CVE 'seeks to deactivate radicalization, inoculate individuals and communities against extremist tendencies, and contain the escalation of these phenomena into forms of violence such as terrorism or extremist insurgencies' (Saraiva and Erfe 2023: 2). P/CVE follows a whole-of-society approach and encompasses a spectrum of tools from counter-insurgency or counterterrorism methods like hard-security militarised approaches to preventive and soft measures such as education, youth and women empowerment and sustainable development (Besenyő and Hegedűs 2024; Saraiva and Erfe 2023; UNODC 2018).

There is growing consensus about the fallacy of military-only solutions to violent extremist insurgencies (Saraiva and Erfe 2023; United Nations 2023b; USAID 2011). Essentially, they are 'band-aid' solutions that may disrupt extremist insurgencies, creating opportunities for stabilisation to address the drivers of ongoing conflict through community-level peacebuilding and development interventions (Hendricks et al. 2023; Saraiva and Erfe 2023; Stephens et al. 2021). Therefore, unlike the over-securitised CVE concept, PVE focuses instead on addressing the root causes of conflict and the drivers of VE by intervening in the baseline and addressing political, social and economic issues of vulnerable communities (Saraiva and Erfe 2023: 2). PVE employs a participatory and flexible peacebuilding approach, emphasising community engagement towards finding or designing and implementing sustainable solutions to causes of violent conflict from within the local community itself. Adaptive human-centred, community-embedded developmental approaches to PVE can thus potentially result in context-specific, inclusive and sustainable solutions (Rusero and Maisiri 2023; Saraiva and Erfe 2023).

The next section discusses how the intricacy of the northern Mozambique context presents an opportunity to use adaptive DDRRR, creating inclusive, human-centred P/CVE programming at the community level.

## **Opportunity for revisiting DDRRR approaches in the context of VE**

Significantly, VE in northern Mozambique occurred parallel to localised intermittent armed conflict between the government and the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) movement between 2013 and 2019 (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b; Lucey and Zeca 2023). The 2019 Maputo Accord for Peace and Reconciliation (MAPR) between the government and RENAMO provided for the complete DDR of RENAMO's armed wing as part of efforts to sustain peace in the country. A Military Affairs Commission (MAC) composed of government and RENAMO representatives managed the process, with a concomitant Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Military Affairs. RENAMO submitted a list of 5 221 (271 women and 4 950 men) to the MAC (Peace Process Support Secretariat n.d.). Some of the demobilised fighters were integrated into senior levels of the national security forces. The demobilisation process was completed in June 2023, paving the way for long-term reintegration initiatives (Africa Defense Forum 2023).

The collective RENAMO DDR effort is distinct from potential adaptive DDRRR of violent extremists and their associates, which requires the rehabilitative disengagement and deradicalisation of individuals who have fallen prey to radical ideologies (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). Adaptive DDRRR would also be implemented in a more complex and fragile environment, where a peace agreement is non-existent and perhaps unfeasible. The violent extremist insurgency context burdens would-be DDRRR and P/CVE practitioners with legal and operational challenges, including when, how and with whom to engage (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). Without a peace process where ASWJ has at least rhetorically agreed to disarm and demobilise, adaptive DDRRR would instead aim to whittle away at ASWJ and potential recruits by deradicalising individuals and reintegrating them into society (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b).

### **Lessons from RENAMO DRR**

Despite their differences, crucial lessons from the RENAMO process can serve as instructive inputs for possible P/CVE-related context-specific and adaptive DDRRR of ASWJ combatants and their associates.

### ***Context matters***

Context matters in designing and implementing DDRRR programmes. There is no 'one size fits all' approach. Thus, a key lesson from the RENAMO DDR is the importance of understanding the context and the drivers of conflict to adaptively and flexibly tailor DDRRR approaches to individual conflict situations. For example, the government's political dialogue with RENAMO resulted in a mutual understanding of the conflicting parties' underlying political-military objectives. These included RENAMO's clamour for more decentralisation towards an inclusive political system and military power sharing on the one hand, and the government's objective of complete DDR of RENAMO's armed wing on the other (du Pisani 2021; Vines 2019). Hence the security-focused solutions to integrate RENAMO combatants into the national security forces and DDR of the residual forces.

Therefore, adaptive DDRRR in the context of VE in northern Mozambique would require a comprehensive and participatory analysis of the political, social, economic, cultural and security factors that affect the conflict dynamics and the potential for sustainable peace (LinkedIn n.d.). A context-sensitive approach can help identify the root causes and grievances of ASWJ, the opportunities and risks for dialogue with ASWJ to understand their demands, induce more militants to surrender and seek a negotiated end to the conflict, and the potential spoilers and allies of the P/CVE process (Dzinesa 2023; Hendricks et al. 2023; LinkedIn n.d.; Moffat 2023).

### ***Comprehensive, inclusive, participatory and local ownership approach***

Participation, inclusion and local ownership around DDRRR initiatives are not easy but are essential for achieving lasting peace. Analysts note that RENAMO's DDR did not initially adequately involve ex-combatants as central actors in the design of the complex reintegration component, which should ideally be tailored to the expectations, needs and capacities of the different ex-combatants according to their diverse conditions and settings (Kingma 2021). Thus, the demobilised fighters were each subjected to a uniform two-component reintegration support programme: (1) a reinsertion package of an estimated value of US\$1 000, consisting of tools, clothing, seeds and other items for personal use, and (2) severance payments totalling US\$1 000 for a year regardless of age, gender and status (allAfrica 2021; Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). The government later decreed that DDR beneficiaries would be incorporated into the national pension system to assist their long-term reintegration (Manzoni 2023; United Nations 2023a).

RENAMO's DDR initially focused exclusively on the combatants in line with the military provisions of the Maputo Accord, and considered neither their dependents nor the conflict-affected communities expected to absorb the bulk of ex-RENAMO fighters (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). Furthermore, the politically elitist and militarily focused MAPR/MoU process originally excluded civil society, including FBOs. Yet the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) and the Islamic Council of Mozambique (ICM) have institutionalised peacebuilding, including filling some of the gaps in the design and implementation of earlier DDR at the end of the Mozambican civil war in 1992 (Dzinesa 2022b). There have been efforts to rectify the situation. For instance, the long-term reintegration framework developed with the Peace Process Secretariat's (PPS) support underlines three key pillars: community, family and individual (Folke Bernadotte Academy 2023; Hendricks et al. 2023; Peace Process Support Secretariat n.d.; United Nations 2023a).

Significantly, a whole-of-society approach to DDRRR in northern Mozambique 'could learn from these shortcomings and proactively engage the affected individuals, families, and communities in a process aimed at preventing recidivism, mitigating further radicalization, and strengthening overall community resilience to violent extremism' (Dzinesa 2022a). Potential adaptive DDRRR of former ASWJ members should ideally engage all stakeholders in a whole-of-society consultative, participatory and collaborative process to develop a common understanding of the drivers of VE, and to develop and adapt home-grown DDRR programmes together (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b).

Such a whole-of-society approach could crucially promote the complementary Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security agendas. For example, the participation of women and youth in adaptive DDRRR of ASWJ members can contribute to efforts to address the socio-economic exclusion driving tensions and VE in northern Mozambique. It would develop local capacities for sustainable peace by empowering women and youth to play a leading role in peacebuilding. It would also help to ensure that DDRRR programmes are not only context-specific but also gender- and age-responsive to differential needs, experiences and statuses of individual women, men and juveniles (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b).

Regarding ownership, notwithstanding the MAPR/MoU's creation of the MAC, comprising representatives of the government and RENAMO, as a national peace architecture for managing RENAMO's DDR, there was concern over the initially dominant role of international partners (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). For example, the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Mozambique, Mirko Manzoni, who led

the mediation process culminating in the MAPR, headed a PPS that administered the donor-financed Multiple Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) for supporting the implementation of DDR. Weimer (2020: 32) notes that ‘the institutional setup of the Peace Secretariat and the donor-financed MDTF for DDR process leave doubts about national ownership of and responsibility for the implementation of the Peace Agreement’.

However, Manzoni argued that the government and RENAMO ultimately took ownership of the process through the MAC framework (Manzoni 2023; United Nations 2023a). Notably, the PPS partnered with international DDR practitioners to eventually support the RENAMO DDR in a manner that helped nurture ownership and effective implementation. For example, in 2022, the PPS supported the parties in developing gender-sensitive national frameworks and local capacities for community-embedded long-term reintegration and reconciliation (Folke Bernadotte Academy 2022).

Given northern Mozambique’s dynamic, complex and volatile environment, strong local ownership would be a critical cornerstone of potential adaptive DDRRR (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). Significantly, the adaptive peacebuilding approach does not privilege externally imposed international programmes over endogenous processes, which creates meaningful opportunities for all stakeholders, especially local communities, to co-own and co-manage the process. Community engagement to assess their peace and security needs is crucial for a broader political solution to VE, undergirded by developing a resilience-building renewed social contract between the government and all its citizens (Hendricks et al. 2023; Lucey and Zeca 2023). International partners’ structured engagement with Mozambican adaptive DDRRR stakeholders in iterative experimentation, learning and adaptation could help balance external support and local self-organisation.

### ***Coordination***

The RENAMO DDR process demonstrated that good coordination structures are crucial to ensure collaboration and buy-in from relevant stakeholders. The MAC exemplified such a coordination institution. Three joint Mozambican Liberation Front-RENAMO implementation teams supported the Commission: the Joint Technical Group on Placement, the Joint Technical Group for DDRR (JTGDDR) and the Joint Technical Group for Monitoring and Verification of the ceasefire. An international component, comprising military experts from several countries, provided technical assistance to the JTGDDR for monitoring the DDR process to

ensure transparency and credibility. Manzoni (2023) asserts that the national peace architecture fostered trust through mutual commitment and respect, thus facilitating the disarmament and demobilisation of RENAMO combatants.

Therefore, the whole-of-society nature of possible adaptive DDRRR for northern Mozambique would require developing proper coordination mechanisms and institutions. These would promote coherence and collaboration among stakeholders. They would ideally include local communities and civil society, particularly women and youth, FBOs, educational institutions, ASWJ members, the government and the private sector in the flexible design and implementation of context-specific, gender- and age-responsive DDRRR programmes and the resolution of challenges that might arise during implementation in pursuit of self-sustainable peace. Effective coordination and collaboration would potentially foster a deep sense of ownership and commitment to the DDRRR process. International actors would ideally actively support the contextualised, home-grown, locally owned process to facilitate sustainable peace.

### ***DDRRR–transitional justice and reconciliation nexus***

There is a crucial need to establish complementary links between DDR and transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives from the onset (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b; Hendricks et al. 2023). An individual's sustainable exit from an armed group partly depends on the community's capacity to transform relationships after violent conflict (Folke Bernadotte Academy 2022). The Maputo Accord initially neglected to link DDR with transitional justice and reconciliation in practice (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). For example, the name of the 2019 pact – Maputo Accord for Peace and Reconciliation – implies the necessity of reconciliation between the signatory parties and the population, which bore the brunt of the armed conflict (Weimer 2020). However, in reality, the 'Mozambican Solution' of a blanket amnesty for atrocities by both sides, without substantive reconciliation and restorative justice initiatives, perpetuated the deep-seated fear, trauma and hatred of the victims and witnesses of human rights violations toward former combatants (Weimer 2020).

The amnestied RENAMO ex-combatants were initially allowed to return to civilian life *carte blanche* without formal programmes to promote reconciliation between them and the communities (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). Several ex-combatants expressed fear of reprisals and stigmatisation when trying to reintegrate, particularly into communities affected by the localised armed conflict, when they no longer carry weapons (Folke Bernadotte Academy 2023). Thus, President Filipe Nyusi

acknowledged the importance of the reintegration, justice and reconciliation nexus. At a June 2023 ceremony to mark the conclusion of RENAMO's disarmament and demobilisation, Nyusi said, 'We know that we still have a long path ahead of us ... Reintegration and reconciliation will require the contribution of everyone. We Mozambicans must tread this path. Peace is not a finished product; it is a continual process' (Africa Defense Forum 2023). As stated, the Mozambican parties have crafted community-embedded long-term reintegration and reconciliation frameworks supported by international partners.

Northern Mozambique's context of ongoing VE, where there is no peace deal, poses significant challenges for which there is currently no DDRRR–transitional justice and reconciliation strategy. The Mozambican government has offered blanket amnesties to those who have surrendered, or jailed captured ASWJ militants without a clear rehabilitation plan (Africanews 2019; Hendricks et al. 2023). Against this backdrop, an adaptive DDRRR approach in northern Mozambique can capitalise on the complementarities between DDRRR and transitional justice and reconciliation processes to help reconstitute trust between former militants and communities traumatised by harrowing experiences of witnessing and enduring gross atrocities (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b; Hendricks et al. 2023; Médecins Sans Frontières 2024). Community inputs for a victim-centred justice and reconciliation strategy, including what communities consider reintegration prerequisites, are essential to support sustainable peace (Hendricks et al. 2023; Lucey and Zeca 2023).

### ***Root cause and human-centred development***

The RENAMO DDR process demonstrated the importance of a human-centred approach to address the structural economic issues underlying the mobilisation and demobilisation and reintegration of combatants into civilian life (Vines 2021). For example, the 'August 2019 accord is backed up by development commitments for central Mozambique and promises of a better retirement for RENAMO's gunmen' (Vines 2021: 338). Thus, according to Manzoni (2023), the Mozambican government and RENAMO's agreement on pensions for the demobilised 'served as a clear demonstration of the negotiators' human-centered approach to the process'.

A context-specific root cause and human-centred development DDRRR approach is a vital conduit for durable peace. Potential adaptive DDRRR for northern Mozambique would need to consider the human development deficits and disputes prevalent in the region that have been contributing factors to the unfolding of the insurgency and complexities of the security situation (Rusero

and Maisiri 2023). Notably, since 2020, the Mozambican government has expended increased efforts in inclusive economic development and peacebuilding programmes to address conditions conducive to VE that influence insurgent recruitment and potential DDRRR.

In March 2020, for instance, the government established the Northern Integrated Development Agency (ADIN), incorporating several government departments, to coordinate the implementation of programmes for humanitarian aid, inclusive sustainable economic growth and youth employment, and community resilience and communication in Cabo Delgado, Nampula and Niassa provinces (Besenyó and Hegedűs 2024; Chingotuane et al. 2021; Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b; Moffat 2023; World Bank 2020). The programmes include the multisectoral 2021–24 Reconstruction Plan for Cabo Delgado (PRCD) and the Northern Resilience and Integrated Development Strategy (ERDIN), focusing on the three conflict-affected provinces. Multilateral partners need to support these programmes in a non-intrusive manner to strengthen the self-organisation capabilities of Mozambican stakeholders for sustaining peace (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b).

### *Flexibility*

Flexibility is essential for the effectiveness and sustainability of DDRRR programming (IOM 2021). It enables tailoring reintegration approaches to the needs of individuals while still adapting to the changing conflict dynamics at the micro level (IOM 2021; United Nations 2023a). The RENAMO experience proves that DDRRR must not be time-specific and rigid, and the process should allow enough flexibility to innovatively find solutions to context-specific problems (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b; United Nations 2023a). Manzoni (2023) cites the pensions measure, safe resumption of DDR during the COVID-19 era and the development of the three-pillar community-embedded long-term reintegration framework as evidence of a flexible and agile approach to timelines that reflects the evolving needs and realities of the Mozambican parties (United Nations 2023a).

The complexities and unpredictability of VE in the fold of Cabo Delgado require innovative and flexible context-specific DDRRR responses to create enabling conditions and lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b; IOM 2021; Lucey and Zeca 2023). The DDRRR approach would entail a holistic approach to engaging ASWJ members and other stakeholders in a whole-of-society consultative process. The motive would be to knit an inclusive stakeholder consultative forum that develops a common understanding of the

structural drivers of VE, and to craft and adopt a home-grown and sacrosanct DDRRR programme (Dzinesa 2022a, 2022b). A flexible approach can also help DDR programmes to innovate and experiment with new methods and tools, such as cash transfers, mobile technology, community-based initiatives or psychosocial support (LinkedIn n.d.).

### ***Learning and evaluation***

Learning and evaluation among the DDRRR stakeholders can improve the quality and accountability of programmes (LinkedIn n.d.). Evaluations are a mechanism of systematically and objectively assessing the relevance, efficiency, sustainability, effectiveness and impact of ongoing and completed DDRRR programmes and projects (United Nations 2021). Learning and evaluation can also help stakeholders identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of interventions (LinkedIn n.d.). The above-mentioned pension scheme for former RENAMO fighters and crafting of long-term reconciliation and reintegration strategies are examples of the fruits of learning and evaluation in motion.

The ASWJ militants and affected communities should ideally be sufficiently involved in the systematic, robust monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of conceivable adaptive DDRRR programmes to facilitate context-specific experimentation, learning and adaptation (de Coning 2020; Dzinesa 2022b). Such an adaptive community-embedded DDRRR approach can potentially strengthen the resilience of societies affected by VE. Furthermore, proactive monitoring and feedback may help resolve new emerging setbacks and challenges, such as revealing spoilers (de Coning 2018; Dzinesa 2022a).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter is a modest attempt to exhibit the extent to which VE in northern Mozambique can be tackled through adaptive DDRRR, which can be a critical ingredient towards a comprehensive, locally owned and sustainable P/CVE approach. Northern Mozambique's conflict ought to be nuanced through the seven thematic strands identified above, based on the RENAMO DDR experience, in order to make sense of what works best regarding adaptive DDRRR.

More importantly, the complexities surrounding Cabo Delgado and the prolonged unstable conflict environment are an opportune moment to explore the DDRRR of those ASWJ extremists who may choose to return to civilian life. This can inherently

entrench what could be a viable multi-stakeholder peace and security architecture in Mozambique. Potential adaptive DDRRR could either help stabilise northern Mozambique or shore up any stabilisation gains in the future as it would involve removing weapons from the hands of ASWJ combatants and detaching combatants from paramilitary structures.

Rehabilitation (including disengagement and deradicalisation) and reintegration should ideally result in the rehabilitated former ASWJ members or associates returning to normal civilian life. Without proper implementation and agency in DDRRR as a potential ultimate peace and stability solution, the insurgency in Mozambique could affect other parts of Mozambique and other states that Mozambique shares borders with.

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# Violent extremism in Mozambique:

## *The inconsistent use of COIN, CT and P/CVE policies and strategies*

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*Énio Viegas Filipe Chingotuane*

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Violent extremism has become a major concern in international affairs since the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States (US). To prevent and counter this threat, many states have adopted a mix of policies and strategies, ranging from counter-insurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT) to strategies to prevent violent extremism (PVE) or counter violent extremism (CVE), currently termed preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Those tools have been applied with different degrees of efficacy and success.

According to the current dominant international perspective, the traditional approaches of COIN and CT are reductionist and provide low levels of success compared to P/CVE policies and strategies. This position is taken by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), a think-and-do tank based in The Hague in the Netherlands, which maintains that security-dominated responses to violent extremism have proven insufficient to counter and prevent its spread. According to the ICCT, a comprehensive and holistic approach built around P/CVE can wield a far greater and more lasting impact.<sup>1</sup> The same position is embraced by the United Nations (UN), which has advised states to

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://icct.nl/about>.

change their traditional approach and embrace the more effective P/CVE toolkit.<sup>2</sup>

Mozambique has been facing terrorism and violent extremism since 5 October 2017, when a violent extremist group known as Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamaa (ASWJ) initiated violent terrorist attacks in Mocímboa da Praia in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.<sup>3</sup> The group started with relatively small numbers, was badly equipped and its activities were localised. However, it grew rapidly in numbers and military capacity, and expanded its violence to the neighbouring districts of Macomia, Nangade, Muidumbe, Palma, Quissanga, Ibo, Meluco, Ancuabe, Chiúre, Pemba-Metuge and Mueda, showing a significant capacity to radicalise and recruit new members.

Against this rapid advance, the government decided to engage the Defense and Security Forces (FDS), composed of the Armed Forces of Mozambique (FADM) with its army, navy, marines and special forces; the Police of Mozambique (PRM) with its branches consisting of the Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR), Protection Police, Border Police, and Criminal Investigation Service (SERNIC); the State Information and Security Services (SISE); Customs; and the National Migration Service (SENAMI). All security agencies were actively involved in CT operations, clearly showing that a security/military-driven approach was dominant. This approach was heavily criticised by many civil society organisations, academics, religious leaders and international organisations (Mansani 2022; Siteo 2020).

According to Columbo (2024), the heavily focused military approach showed the limits of counterinsurgency strategy in Mozambique. At best, the government's approach produced mixed results. The think tank Observatório do Meio Rural argued that the approach was doomed to failure and that a P/CVE strategy would be more successful (Ramos 2021; Cascais 2022).

However, this chapter contests this assumption based on the historical record of African states' attempts to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and their COIN record. We assume that past failures regarding conflict resolution mechanisms will

2 According to Shanaah (2023: 478), P/CVE is seen as a paradigmatic shift in the global war on terrorism from a purely militarised approach that characterised the response to 9/11 in the form of the invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). After the embracing of P/CVE by the Obama administration in 2015, the UN Secretary General made it his priority to place the UN in the driving seat of P/CVE global development. In January 2016, the UN Secretary-General presented the General Assembly with a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in the framework of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Later the same year, the General Assembly passed a resolution encouraging member states, as well as regional organisations, to develop national plans of action to prevent violent extremism.

3 The group is also known locally as Al-Shabaab, Ansar al-Sunna, and internationally as the Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) or as ISIS-Mozambique.

be repeated with the P/CVE approach if opportunities are not seized. The chapter argues that P/CVE will never be a substitute for COIN and CT because the strategies complement each other. It also argues that COIN and CT will prevail as a priority, even if they produce less successful results, because African states may struggle to put in place the more demanding, complex, multitask, multisector and multi-stakeholder approach demanded by P/CVE.

Although Mozambique and other affected states are aware of the benefits of establishing a balanced approach to effectively address violent extremism, one that brings COIN, CT and P/CVE onto an equal footing, the Mozambican state is delaying the introduction of P/CVE strategies due to its fear of dispersing resources that should be channelled to COIN and CT. Such deviation of resources could bring negative unintended consequences resulting from the dispersion of efforts.

This chapter advocates that Mozambique and other African countries should seize the opportunities provided by the newly shaped P/CVE policies and strategies. It starts by looking at past attempts to prevent, manage and resolve African conflicts. Thereafter, it evaluates the extent to which COIN and CT were effectively implemented and what opportunities were missed that led to demands for P/CVE. The chapter then discusses how P/CVE policies and strategies can be effectively harnessed and proposes guidelines to this end. The chapter concludes by exploring the possibility of implementing transitional justice in the context of missed opportunities in the country.

The chapter uses a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) framework to outline potential opportunities to effectively implement both COIN and P/CVE. However, obstacles to adopting and implementing both strategies are anticipated. Even if several instruments are applied simultaneously, they will not produce the desired effects if the implementation is superficial.

## **Previous conflict prevention, management and resolutions tools**

Before assessing Mozambique's COIN, CT and PCVE efforts, it is important to understand previous attempts to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts in Mozambique. The possibility of success of current policies and strategies can be evaluated by looking at the rate of success and failure of past efforts. Although contemporary problems differ from past problems, they also share similarities.

Thus, assuming that violent extremism and terrorism are manifestations of conflict, the chapter looks at previous attempts to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts to shed light on present attempts to deal with violent extremism and terrorism.

There has been growing criticism regarding the creation of new policies and strategies to deal with old problems that were dealt with using old policies and strategies, whose lack of success was due to weak implementation rather than bad policy design. For example, it has been clear for a long time that poverty, high rates of unemployment, economic inequalities, lack of education, low levels of development, political and social exclusion, marginalisation, low levels of education and illiteracy create the potential for conflicts and violence (Gurr 1970; Swift 1996; Berdal and Malone 2000; Stewart and FitzGerald 2000; Collier 2000a, 2000b; Goodhand 2001; Collier and Hoeffler 2002; Collier et al. 2003; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Østby 2008; Stewart 2009). Martha Crenshaw's (1981) 'The causes of terrorism' pointed out issues such as social grievances, frustrations, social or economic deprivation, feelings of injustice, lack of opportunity for political participation, and discrimination as drivers of terrorism. In order to overcome these socio-economic and political problems, several policies, strategies and programmes have been designed and developed at international and national levels since the 1990s, with limited results. These initiatives include frameworks like Agenda 21 (adopted in 1993), Millennium Development Goals (adopted in 2000) and the Sustainable Development Goals (adopted in 2015).

The challenge has not been the absence of clear policies tailored to African societies such as Mozambique, but rather missed opportunities to adopt and implement them effectively. In many cases, policies and strategies were adopted to please international institutions or financiers but implemented cosmetically, superficially or partially, sometimes due to lack of capacity and support. The question is whether current and new policies and strategies will work.

In the case of Mozambique, policies and strategies were implemented during the 1990s and 2000s in an effort to prevent the resumption of conflict after the country emerged from 16 years of war in 1992 with the signing of the General Peace Agreement between the government and the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO). This marked the end of the civil war which had started in 1976.

Immediately after the agreement, Mozambique embraced the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process with the support of the UN. It

adopted a reconciliatory approach based on amnesty and forgiveness, with critical participation of political parties and local communities, as well as traditional and religious leaders. Mozambique engaged in democracy building, post-conflict recovery and reconstruction, as well as in security sector reform. Under the Guns versus Butter policy, it downscaled its military and security apparatus to increase social welfare and rebuild the economic fabric, as well as critical social infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, roads, railways, bridges, ports and housing. Beyond those policies, other policies and strategies were adopted in response to the intrastate conflicts that raged through Africa in the 1990s. A plethora of policies and strategies for conflict prevention, management and resolution were put in place. These involved negotiation and mediation strategies that challenged traditional approaches such as alternative dispute resolution, restorative justice, transformative justice, retributive justice and transitional justice.

In sum, the 1990s were times of theoretical and applied discoveries on peace initiatives. It was a time of optimism embraced by international governmental organisations (IGOs), international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and individual countries. The peacebuilding narrative was dominant and the post-conflict Mozambican state was optimistic about the many new peacebuilding policies and strategies. While some were implemented successfully, others were not. However, the country was not able to prevent the resumption of conflict with RENAMO in 2013, twenty years after the guns had been silenced.<sup>4</sup>

After looking to the historical record, it is evident that many of the current policies and strategies have already been tried in some form, with mixed results. Are we changing names and rebranding policies to fight the same problems? It remains to be seen whether they will face the same incapacities, superficiality, and lack of support and enthusiasm as their predecessors.

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<sup>4</sup> Mozambique had previously been applauded as a post-conflict success for breaking the conflict cycle and not going back to conflict as expected by analysts: 'about half of all post-conflict countries relapse into conflict within a decade' (Collier 2004: 1).

## COIN and CT policies and strategies

Examples of missed opportunities are multiplying in Mozambique's fight against ASWJ. Current COIN and CT efforts, heavily centred on kinetics, have been implemented ineffectively, highlighting that existing opportunities are not being taken advantage of.

The US Army Field Manual No. 3-24 defines CT as 'operations that include the offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to terrorism', and COIN as 'those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency' (Department of the Army, 2006). The Department of Defense's Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms defines COIN as: 'Comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes' (Department of Defense 2008: 58). This is clear evidence that the military establishment is aware that kinetic operations alone cannot provide the answer to defeat terrorist groups. Therefore, states that employ only kinetic operations are not correctly utilising COIN or CT.

The idea of COIN and CT requiring more than kinetic operations dates back to the early 1960s (see Clutterbuck 1966; Galula 2006; Kilcullen 2006, 2010; Nagl 2002; Trinquier 2006). Many authors, such as Hannah Gurman (2013), have specified clear steps to achieve a broader approach to COIN that includes measures beyond kinetics.

Despite some visible achievements (see Table 1) in Mozambique's kinetic operations, there is no consensus regarding the benefits of the COIN and CT approaches. On the contrary, both can be criticised for their poor outcomes. Few would agree with expanding the COIN and CT footprint or creating new COIN and CT tactics without adopting alternative non-kinetic tools. We believe that regardless of the tactics involved, COIN and CT are incapable of dealing with the root causes and drivers of violent extremism and terrorism. That said, we assume that tactical and operational successes may occasionally create a sense of victory but they do not eliminate the embryo of insurgency and terrorism.

From this perspective, it is clear that COIN and CT are not tailored to respond to the nature of the problem being addressed. Borum (2011: 8) assumed that killing terrorists on the battlefield was insufficient to neutralise the global threat of violent extremism. Others like Bolkcom and Katzman (2005: 5)

suggested that CT military attacks against elusive terrorists may serve only to radicalise large sectors of the population. From this point of view, we can assume that COIN and CT kinetic actions may ultimately aggravate violent extremism and terrorism, given that collateral damage in CT operations would help radicalise more people.

However, as noted, the reality is that many countries fighting terrorist and extremist organisations fail to employ the broad spectrum of COIN and CT approaches, focusing instead on kinetics alone. This may be due to an urgency to defeat the insurgents and restore security, lack of alternative ideas, lack of COIN and CT expertise, lack of money, cultural attachment to kinetic methodologies, a high level of adherence to routine and repetitiveness, rigid institutions and laziness. In fact, Mozambique has been receiving support from many international partners to enhance the country's CT capacities through intensive training courses on strategic, operational and tactical skills. Looking at the level of national and international investment on training programmes and equipment for the FADM, the message is that a robust COIN strategy, centred on kinetics, is more likely to produce the expected results.<sup>5</sup> We argue that, like COIN and CT, even P/CVE will fail if not implemented to its full potential. Thus, if Mozambique wants to use COIN and CT exclusively, it must do so properly.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive SWOT analysis of COIN and CT to highlight what opportunities are being missed in current policies and strategies in Mozambique. While it is relatively easy to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a given policy or strategy, as well as threats from outside sources, it is difficult to identify opportunities. This is a problem that many states face.

As Table 1 highlights, there are numerous opportunities to better implement COIN and CT. However, the same factors that impede the successful implementation of those strategies can also impede the successful implementation of P/CVE.

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5 The EUTM Mozambique Mission provides training and support to the Mozambican armed forces. The US provides significant training and support to the FADM through its Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) programmes, tactical combat casualty care (TCCC) training, and the International Military Education and Training (IMET) programme.

**Table 1: SWOT analysis of COIN and CT strategies in Mozambique**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and Rwanda presence are major deterrents of terrorism</p> <p>FADM, SAMIM and Rwanda cooperation in joint operations contributes to stability and security</p> <p>Presence of security personnel in numbers provides a sense of security for the population (size and strength matter)</p> <p>Security force patrols, checkpoints, encampments and bases play a dissuading role</p> <p>Rapid response units available to engage in combat missions with enough geographical coverage</p> <p>Security forces help to bring stabilisation</p> <p>Security forces provide support for humanitarian assistance</p> <p>Kinetic operations are causing the enemy to desert or surrender; insurgents have suffered heavy losses, including of leading commanders</p> <p>COIN interrupted the escalation of violence</p> <p>People recognise that COIN helped keep the community safe</p> <p>Government control of the territory remains unchallenged</p> <p>Restoration of community trust in government</p> <p>Security forces help rescue abducted individuals from terrorists</p> <p>Security forces are familiar with the environment and with the local population</p> <p>Security forces have access to good equipment and weapons</p> <p>Security forces have access to better training and skills</p>	<p>Concentration on combat operations (kinetics)</p> <p>No population-centric approach</p> <p>Limited resources available</p> <p>Lack of air support and naval coverage</p> <p>Low levels of investment in the security sector, mainly the armed forces</p> <p>Low community involvement</p> <p>Institutional weaknesses</p> <p>Does not respond to the causes of insurgency (not responding to grievances)</p> <p>Involves aggressive measures</p> <p>Creates distrust, lack of credibility and legitimacy</p> <p>Creates more insurgency (fragmentation of groups)</p> <p>Creates more fatalities</p> <p>Hardens extremist positions</p> <p>Creates a chain of counterattacks and thus feeds the circle of violence</p> <p>Does not build on a whole-of-government approach</p> <p>The military did not use maximum force to deal with the insurgents</p> <p>Security forces seen as a threat by the population (fear of oppression and repression)</p> <p>Surveillance measures are seen as invasive and abusive by local communities</p> <p>Security forces use disproportionate force to search and arrest, and kill suspects</p> <p>Some cases of extrajudicial killings and detentions of alleged criminals and terrorists without trial</p> <p>COIN is unable to disrupt illicit activities that benefit insurgents financially</p> <p>Unity of effort is lacking (organisations do not share staff, expertise, intelligence, space, funds and other resources)</p> <p>Low willingness to cooperate between government departments and agencies</p>

**Table 1: SWOT analysis of COIN and CT strategies in Mozambique (cont.)**

Opportunities	Threats
<p>Assistance from external powers for military capacity-building: European Union Training Mission (EUTM), US Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET)</p> <p>Commitment of the US to work with Mozambique and its armed forces</p> <p>Training FADM instructors in COIN and CT</p> <p>Knowledge of advanced models of COIN and CT</p> <p>Knowledge of advanced models of policing</p> <p>Deployment of SAMIM</p> <p>Organisational transformation in the security forces</p> <p>Modernisation of equipment</p> <p>Cooperation with Tanzania: border security</p> <p>TotalEnergies provides capabilities and strengths to Mozambican forces around Palma</p> <p>Available financial support from EU</p> <p>Deployment of private military forces to fight the insurgency directly</p> <p>Community engagement is on the rise with the creation of local militias</p> <p>Incorporation of community policing principles, strategies and tactics</p> <p>Availability and access to better communication technologies to counter terrorist communications</p> <p>International cooperation in fighting terrorism financing and illicit traffic networks as well as organised crime</p> <p>The government has taken strides to address corruption within the security forces with anti-corruption measures and internal oversight mechanisms</p> <p>Rwandan COIN is winning the support of the local population, with increased trust in FADM and Rwandan forces</p> <p>Training and education on the protection of civilians and compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law</p>	<p>Citizen complaints as threats to security forces</p> <p>Protests against security forces</p> <p>Security forces lose legitimacy and people start resisting their command</p> <p>People voice direct threats against law enforcement officers</p> <p>Geography of insurgency expands far beyond security force capacities</p> <p>Insurgents use excessive security presence to deliver a false narrative around the security force's violent legacy</p> <p>Levels of radicalisation in society grow in response to COIN and CT</p> <p>Levels of terrorism grow in response to COIN and CT, with increased presence of foreign terrorists coming to support ASWJ</p> <p>Terrorists move on to another area</p> <p>Police misconduct fuels insurgency</p> <p>Anti-government sentiment grows among IGOs, NGOs and CSOs due to COIN and CT</p> <p>Too many players working together provide space for infiltration by insurgents</p> <p>Political animosity in a country</p> <p>Competing national and international interests can fuel contradictory approaches to COIN and CT, to the advantage of terrorist groups</p> <p>Media misperception and continuous attacks against COIN and CT</p> <p>Budget restrictions – insufficient funding affects the availability of equipment, training opportunities and overall operational capacity, limiting the effectiveness of COIN and CT</p>

## P/CVE policies and strategies

After the 2001 terrorist attack in the US, CT became the dominant trend in conflict studies, overshadowing previous conflict prevention, management and resolution narratives. However, CT was resisted in policy circles, and among strategists, scholars, NGOs and CSOs. In response, CVE and later PVE policies and strategies were designed. Given that they had many areas in common, they were integrated into what came to be known as P/CVE. Since then, P/CVE policies and strategies have increasingly become the most important instrument of CT.<sup>6</sup>

According to Bak et al. (2019: 3), the terminology was constructed in an effort to repackage the global war on terror in a manner that shifted the focus away from the overmilitarised responses of the 1990s and early 2000s, to methods linked to social support and prevention.

Although new in many aspects, the P/CVE concept revives many of the conflict prevention tools used in the 1990s. For example, 'The Handbook of Conflict Prevention' (Igarapé Institute 2018) considers structural prevention approaches such as the following to be critical aspects of conflict prevention: inclusive growth, poverty reduction, sustainable development, strengthening civil society, good governance, building strong institutions, improving education and health policy, food security, gender equality, rural development, youth programmes and infrastructure development. Most of these tools are part of the P/CVE toolkit. Like conflict prevention, P/CVE is interested in eliminating the root causes and drivers of conflict. Although knowledgeable about those tools, many states failed to grab the opportunity to invest in them during the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s.

While there is growing global consensus that military operations and security measures alone are not enough to defeat terrorism, this consensus is not being translated into practical P/CVE measures. This demonstrates that states like Mozambique remain hesitant, indecisive and reluctant to adopt P/CVE measures, preferring to continue with traditional COIN and CT.

The full package of P/CVE policies and strategies differs from COIN and CT in the focus placed on issues such as: addressing underlying causes of radicalisation and violent extremism, mitigating individual and collective grievances, developing a

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6 According to the UNDP (2022), P/CVE 'refers to the policies and initiatives, and the strategic and operational levels for countering and preventing radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism and terrorism as part of an overall counter-terrorism strategy and framework'.

more ‘people-centred’ approach, safeguarding human rights, building inclusive societies, countering the spread of radicalisation and recruitment, spreading different narratives centred on shared/common values, rehabilitating former extremists and reintegrating them into their local communities.

Kundnani and Hayes (2018) believe that CVE policies have dramatically widened the range of methods used by governments for countering terrorism and thus broadened their objectives. This results in securitising a wider range of spheres. However, they criticise the fact that a mini-industry of government-funded CVE entrepreneurs have been dominating the public debate. According to the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR n.d.), greater emphasis should be put on prevention through reinforcing structural changes, community engagement and building resilience.

However, because P/CVE is so broad, many governments struggle to identify what, where, when, why and how to do it, and question whether it will make a difference. States also resist the idea that dealing with violent extremism and terrorism requires looking at the causes.

Like COIN and CT, P/CVE has to deal with violent extremist groups and individuals that have their own sets of strategies and tactics, and are often able to counter initiatives to defeat them. The success of P/CVE thus depends on a better understanding of these groups and individuals as well as their leadership, motivations and objectives, strategic interests, support base (national and international), and strengths and weaknesses.

While many governments are hesitant to adopt P/CVE, many other actors are willing to play a decisive role. National and local CSOs, local and international NGOs, intergovernmental organisations such as the UN, various agencies and regional organisations are investing time, money and knowledge into building the right tools to respond to the threat.

A challenge is that states, especially security agencies, often do not trust organisations outside of government.<sup>7</sup> *The Backlash against Civil Society in the Wake of the Long War on Terror* (Howell et al. 2008) provides critical insight into the problematic relationship between security agencies and civil society organisations. Many security agencies believe that not everybody should be called to participate in the

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7 According to the Australian Army Research Center, the key barrier to effective coordination between civilian and military actors is a trust deficit. See <https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/land-power-forum/you-cant-surge-trust#:~:text=Although%20there%20has%20been%20significant,to%20making%20this%20a%20reality>.

fight against terrorism, as it complicates their job. They believe that too many people doing the same thing is counterproductive and dangerous. The literature on the tense relations between civil society and the state in the context of CT is vast, demonstrating varying degrees of co-optation, exclusion, inhibition and obstruction (Njoku 2018, 2020, 2022).

However, assuming that violent extremism has many causes, it is worth considering that it may warrant many solutions. According to the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (2023), a wide range of interventions is needed to address violent extremism. The idea is to eliminate the sources of grievances, resentment, discontent, hate and violent behaviour. States have limitations in terms of being able to address all of those problems at once, and should thus be open to work with other actors.

P/CVE has advantages that differ from those of COIN and CT. Mozambique's delay in establishing a P/CVE policy and strategy could be the result of various factors: scepticism about the positive results due to the complexity of the problem; fear of overstressing the state's capacities due to financial constraints; lack of trust in support from international partners; and lack of a clear idea of what to prioritise, where to attack and how to move forward incrementally. This hesitation in adopting P/CVE results in missed opportunities to implement it.

Table 2 provides a comprehensive SWOT analysis of P/CVE to highlight the opportunities it offers.

As Table 2 illustrates, there are numerous opportunities to formulate and implement a comprehensive P/CVE strategy. The challenge is that too little attention has been given to the possible benefits of P/CVE, and it is difficult to convince the state that the current situation can only be ameliorated by introducing a new approach, one that is better than COIN and CT alone. However, from the government's perspective, what is missing is better COIN and CT, not P/CVE. What the government fails to recognise is that COIN and CT will not receive the kind of support that P/CVE does, as there is more inclination worldwide to support P/CVE strategies than COIN and CT ones.

**Table 2: SWOT analysis of P/CVE strategies**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<p>Tries to target the root causes of violent extremism</p> <p>Builds on judicial and non-judicial mechanisms of justice</p> <p>Builds on inclusive and integrative approaches</p> <p>Is participatory</p> <p>Shapes new narratives</p> <p>Builds on reconciliation, trauma healing and all forms of justice</p> <p>Builds on the transformation of relations</p> <p>Builds on dialogue</p> <p>Builds on alternative behaviours, cultures, norms</p> <p>Emphasises justice, human rights, ending inequalities</p> <p>Tries to tackle political, economic and social marginalisation</p> <p>Builds on mutual respect</p> <p>Builds on a whole-of-society approach/ all stakeholders approach (multilateral, multidimensional, multidisciplinary, multisectoral)</p> <p>Builds on a gender perspective (women’s participation in violent extremism and counter violent extremism) – adopts a feminism perspective – women, peace and security agenda (UN resolution)</p> <p>Holistic, comprehensive approach</p>	<p>Government-neglected population and areas are enormous</p> <p>Weak states do not have the necessary resources to implement P/CVE</p> <p>Too broad and demands too much</p> <p>Not feasible within a reasonable time limit</p> <p>Requires consent from governments</p> <p>Requires political will (willingness of leaders, commitment, guarantees)</p> <p>Requires leadership</p> <p>No guarantees of financial support</p> <p>No strong network of willing partners to support initiatives</p> <p>Challenges are not shared with the same enthusiasm by all stakeholders</p> <p>Some stakeholders are in ‘free ride’ mode’</p> <p>No clarity regarding priorities</p> <p>Domestication of tools is difficult</p> <p>Not many African approaches</p> <p>Many policies are not sustainable</p> <p>Building a multilateral approach requires enhanced collaborative efforts and a common agenda, which is difficult to achieve</p> <p>Specialised knowledge needed to draft, implement and manage P/CVE strategies is lacking at national, district and local levels</p> <p>Culture does not value civic engagement (whole-of-society approach)</p>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<p>SAMIM withdrawal from Mozambique</p> <p>Popular involvement in the process is assured by local population’s evident interest in being involved</p> <p>International support from individual states, IGOs and NGOs</p> <p>National support from CSOs</p> <p>Current networks support P/CVE strategies</p>	<p>Not suitable to eradicate violence or to kill the economies of violent extremism</p> <p>Does not satisfy the main stakeholders’ interests, benefits, profits and paybacks</p> <p>Does not provide the kind of incentives insurgent leaders want</p> <p>Military capabilities of both insurgents and state forces deter negotiations, consensus and finding peaceful solutions</p>

**Table 2: SWOT analysis of P/CVE strategies (cont.)**

Opportunities	Threats
<p>Many governments are implementing P/CVE programmes</p> <p>Many power brokers are willing to engage in P/CVE</p> <p>Funding provided by the private sector and, increasingly, by individuals</p> <p>Current communication technologies provide good channels for the state to develop a communication strategy that supports counter-radicalisation and spreads new narratives</p> <p>Harness the potential of CSOs and build stronger connections with local leaders and religious leaders</p> <p>Capitalise on regional cooperation for intelligence collection using various channels</p> <p>Capitalise on enhanced coordination among African countries in the fight against terrorism financing</p> <p>Many states are willing to share their best practices in P/CVE, from policymaking, planning and implementation to monitoring and management</p> <p>More NGOs, IGOs and CSOs are aligned with the government strategic plan</p> <p>US and EU commitment to build community resilience and strengthen institutions</p> <p>International commitment to humanitarian assistance</p> <p>UN provides advisory services and training on P/CVE</p> <p>UN supports member states and provides assistance to various capacity-building projects</p> <p>UN provides training packages to empower CSOs</p> <p>International partners are willing to fund the implementation of DDR</p> <p>The private sector may play a key role in P/CVE and the increased promotion of public-private partnerships</p> <p>Academic and research institutions are engaged in drawing up better P/CVE policies and strategies</p>	<p>Government and insurgent willingness to use force is a critical impediment to efforts</p> <p>Leaders' cost-benefit analysis and risk-taking behaviour will determine not settling for something less than military victory</p> <p>Leaders tend to compromise when conflicts reach stalemate</p> <p>Organised crime/violent extremism association makes P/CVE difficult to attain given profits coming from illicit activities</p> <p>State-centric approach still dominates thinking in many corners of Africa</p> <p>Many spoilers fight for a share in the power-sharing</p> <p>P/CVE takes too long to address deeper socio-economic grievances</p> <p>Violent extremists bet on a long-term strategy while P/CVE efforts are dependent on periodic support</p> <p>Suspension of funding and state budget cuts are critical threats</p> <p>Competition among local NGOs, rather than collaboration.</p> <p>Many extremists know that reintegration is challenging and thus prefer to stay in their groups and continue fighting</p> <p>Popular resistance to meaningful changes in the ethnic balance can frustrate P/CVE</p>

*Note: A free rider benefits from a collective good or resource without contributing their fair share towards its cost. In international relations, a 'free rider' is a state that benefits from the actions or resources of other states (like alliances) without contributing proportionally to the costs or efforts needed to achieve those benefits.*

## Guidelines to seizing opportunities

Mozambique failed to capitalise on the opportunities to engage in conflict prevention policies and strategies and will likely fail to capitalise on the opportunities to engage in P/CVE, much as it failed to implement COIN and CT. Failure often results from not delivering what needs to be delivered at the right time and place, rather than from not knowing what tools to employ.

Zartman (2005: 1) argues that certain measures have been used for a long time and in various places to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts, and are not new or exceptional. State inaction is not because there is no remedy, but because governments are sceptical and resistant to change. This chapter argues that P/CVE policies and strategies are at the disposal of decision-makers and that it is possible to adopt the right options based on lessons learned by others.

However, Zartman (2005) cautions that there is no guarantee that taking a different option to that implemented would result in a better outcome. Even though there is no certainty that a different policy and strategy will produce the expected results, many possible options have proven to be effective. Seizing opportunities is not done without threats and uncertainties.

Often, policies and strategies are not adopted because stakeholders do not recognise the opportunity when it arises. Zartman (2005: 10) notes: 'Opportunities are favorable moments for achieving a purpose, a suitable combination of conditions for accomplishing a goal.' Janasz (2021) cautions, however, that 'not all opportunities are worth engaging in.' That said, favourable moments do not necessarily occur frequently, and missing the opportunity may result in a worsening of the problem. Thus, it is always worth sizing up the opportunity and carefully considering the costs and benefits. The following guidelines are offered:

- Have a clear vision of what Mozambique wants to achieve in terms of feasible policy options, not unattainable ideas.
- Develop a long-term strategy with targeted solutions tailored to resolving specific problems incrementally, but integrated into a broader strategy. The idea is to engage in incremental investments like Quick Impact Projects (QIPs).

- Make bold decisions like placing the right people in the right positions and dismissing those that fail to show results. Many COIN and CT opportunities were lost due to incompetent leaders and COIN practices.<sup>8</sup>
- Improve accountability mechanisms and transparency linked to public decision-making.
- Involve target groups and key stakeholders in the decision-making process.<sup>9</sup>
- Regularly implement policy reforms and improve the capacity of every institution engaged in the strategic framework. Outdated policies and practices will lead to failure.
- Have a permanent study group of highly skilled experts (preferably with academic skills) to conduct studies and write reports about local and international dynamics to identify key opportunities and to propose policy and strategic changes.
- Avoid miscalculations resulting from intelligence failures. Intelligence gathering is critical to understand complex problems such as violent extremism, to define solutions to the problem and to take advantage of opportunities.

## Closing remarks: Will other policies and strategies be implemented differently?

Mozambique's efforts to address violent extremism reflect a commitment to COIN and CT policies and strategies. However, those tools are not being implemented to their full potential, making it difficult to evaluate their true usefulness. At the same time, P/CVE is not being adopted due to the preference for kinetic operations.<sup>10</sup> It is widely accepted by some analysts that kinetics is unavoidable due to the volatile security situation but that such an approach falls short of addressing the underlying grievances that motivate violent extremism and terrorism.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Incompetent practices include corruption, laziness, lack of proper training and knowledge, lack of interest, compulsive decision making without forethought and without considering the consequences, hesitation to give battle orders, missing opportunities, and stubbornness of commanders during COIN and CT. Similar practices may prevail during P/CVE implementation or other policies adopted.

9 Military institutions are not classically known to be spaces for discussion and opinions. However, most armies do create spaces for public participation during COIN and CT. That is part of their 'win hearts and minds' strategy.

10 The general commander of the Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM), Bernardino Rafael, stated in May 2022 that the results of military operations on the ground demonstrate that government forces are 'hitting the enemy hard', and that the security forces would continue to fight terrorists relentlessly until the last stronghold (Lusa 2022). No such commitment was ever voiced around other policies and strategies.

11 In an interview with DW, Mozambican researcher Borges Nhamirre, from the Center for Public Integrity (CIP), said that it is necessary to continue supporting military actions to contain the terrorist threat but that it is also necessary to find a solution that is not through military means (Mansani 2022). Liesl Louw-Vaudran, a researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa, told DW that the military intervention in Cabo Delgado has helped secure certain areas, but it is not enough – political and socio-economic solutions are needed (Camuto 2022).

Taking into consideration that neither COIN, CT nor P/CVE are being properly implemented, what can we expect from the introduction of new approaches, policies or strategies? Will they face the same fate as COIN, CT and P/CVE? This chapter attempted to paint a realistic picture regarding the obstacles to police and strategic implementation, looking at the vast number of missed opportunities witnessed in the past. Our intention was to question expectations that success against violent extremists will come from introducing new policies and strategies. Without a careful analysis of the available opportunities and the ability to seize them, new policies and strategies will fail. Our objective was to demonstrate that both COIN and CT were insufficiently implemented. P/CVE will be insufficiently implemented and any proposed alternative policies and strategies may face the same fate if the necessary measures are not taken to avoid missing opportunities.

Given that CT is an evolving field with innovative approaches being developed all the time, many states may find it hard to keep pace. However, attempting to use tools just because they are in fashion, without a proper SWOT analysis, is not recommended. Most states are committed to kinetic approaches to defeat terrorists and are less inclined to embrace other mechanisms. This is because it is easier to provide numbers of terrorists killed, weapons seized, bases destroyed, leaders killed or captured and territory recovered than to explain that an ‘invisible’ approach such as P/CVE resulted in preventing new recruitments and caused terrorists to surrender or flee.

The greatest challenge facing P/CVE is that it needs to prove its worth worldwide and especially in Africa. Leaders need to be convinced that investments will provide the expected results without harming kinetic operations that are already producing some (albeit debatable) results. To be attractive to leaders, P/CVE must be funded and will require sustained support from both governments and other partners, domestically and internationally. Thus, addressing budgetary challenges is critical for P/CVE to gain significance.

Finally, policies and strategies may be affected by various problems, as outlined by Hogwood and Gunn (1984):

- Lack of adequate time and sufficient resources
- Poor understanding and disagreements between implementing actors
- Imperfect communication and coordination between implementing actors
- Lack of compliance from local practitioners with respect to top leadership
- Lack of local resources, including human resources and infrastructure

- Lack of organisation of the machinery required to implement the policy (the necessary bureaucracy)
- The size of the affected group
- The policy needs to be in line with local desires and expectations.

Simultaneously implementing COIN, CT and P/CVE may improve overall security, assuming they are implemented with enough depth and determination. A well-designed policy and strategy coupled with effective implementation is the foundation for success. To avoid perpetuating the mistakes that have been made, there is an enduring need to seize opportunities.

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# Violent extremism in north-east Nigeria:

## *Conflict drivers, alternative approaches, transitional justice, and reintegration challenges*

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*Manpaà Aliyu Musa*

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Nigeria has been grappling with a plethora of challenges since the attainment of independence on 1 October 1960. Of particular significance is the country's struggle to manage its political and identity-based conflicts, which have resulted in devastating human and material loss. Ethno-religious conflicts have affected the majority of the over 200 ethnic nationalities within the country, which has an estimated population of over 200 million (Ajayi 2012; United Nations Population Fund 2020). Northern Nigeria, comprising 19 of the 36 states that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria, has over the years been a melting pot of violent conflict, with each of the three geopolitical zones (north-east, north-central and north-west) having had its share.

Like Nigeria more widely, the northern region is a product of imperial domination, both exogenous and endogenous, beginning with the nineteenth-century Islamic jihadist expansion, followed by the European politico-economic colonial expansion and reaching its climax in today's neocolonial imperial domination. Throughout the three historical phases of this imperial expansion, communities and people of different socio-economic, political and religious backgrounds were forced into one complex political entity known as northern Nigeria. This has created a region of internal and external contradictions – the cornerstone of the contentious divisions that permeate the society.

States like Kaduna and Kano in the north-west, Nassarawa, Benue and Plateau in the north-central as well as Bauchi, Borno and Taraba in the north-east have been plagued by violent conflict. There have been farmer–pastoralist clashes across all 19 northern states of the federation, armed banditry, cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom in the north-west (Sokoto, Zamfara, Kaduna) and north-central (Niger, Kogi, Benue) regions. Added to this are the violent conflicts by Boko Haram in north-east Nigeria, particularly in the states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY).

The conflict generated by Jamáatu Ahlus-Sunnah LiddaAwati Wal-l-Jihad (JAS), locally known as Boko Haram, has received the most attention globally. A faction of the group currently refers to itself as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), but the name Boko Haram is used throughout this chapter. Since 2009, the north-east region comprising Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Yobe and Taraba states has been the hardest hit by Boko Haram insurgents. Borno state has been the epicentre of this insurgency, which has led to the mass killing and displacement of people, as well as the destruction of properties, sources of livelihood and cultural artefacts/sites. The displacement of about 2.7 million people that were taking refuge in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, and other neighbouring states, created a humanitarian crisis in West Africa between 2000 and 2025. These internally displaced persons (IDPs) were placed in deplorable living conditions characterised by poor shelter, healthcare and clinical facilities, water, sanitation and hygiene.

When the violent conflict reached 22 of the 27 local government areas of Borno State in 2014 and 2015, it had effectively fallen under the control of the Boko Haram insurgents. This situation required a collective and collaborative effort by the state and citizens to counter the violent extremism, including both military and non-military responses. The conventional security architecture consists of the army, navy, air force, police, Department of State Service, Customs, immigration service, and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps. Non-conventional forces are voluntary security organisations, specifically the Civilian Joint Task Force, the Vigilante Group of Nigeria and hunters.

There have also been non-garrison counter-violent-extremist responses by the Nigerian government at both state and federal levels, aimed at restoring peace within the region. The local, state and federal governments collaborate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local and foreign development agencies to provide support to survivors through implementing development projects, and providing relief materials and services. They have also been

engaged with the rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure and socio-political and economic institutions. There have been many workshops, as well as advocacy and mass media programmes aimed at the de-escalation of conflict in the affected areas.

In March 2020, the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that the north-east region of Nigeria had 52 national NGOs, 39 international NGOs, 17 UN agencies as well as 9 government agencies. They are all involved with 'life-saving emergency interventions as their main priority' (UN OCHA 2020). There are also non-UN agencies like the Nigerian Red Cross, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Action against Hunger, and Save the Children.

The northern part of the country has always been plagued by development challenges. An estimated 50.2% of the population in the north-eastern region was living below the poverty line prior to the outbreak of the conflict (Walker 2012). A 2019 report by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2019) revealed that the north-east region had a poverty rate of 76.3%, making it the second highest in Nigeria after the north-west region at 77.7%.

Given the situation in the north-east, it is imperative that more should be done to end violent extremism and raise humanitarian aid levels in the region. There is increasing consensus that military action must be coupled with significant investments in addressing the humanitarian crisis, while at the same time building positive and sustainable peace that benefits the local population.

That said, there have been some major improvements in the security situation in the north-east. Communities that were hitherto under the control of the Boko Haram insurgents have been recovered by the Nigerian joint security operatives, peace and security has gradually returned, most communities have been resettled and livelihood and economic activities are gradually picking up.

Important challenges remain, however: How can the positive gains made be replicated? How can existing peace and security be sustained and violent extremism ended? How can new cycles of violent conflict be prevented? The answers require alternative narratives for conflict resolution that are informed by an African perspective.

A key concern is the continuous imperialism of knowledge production. Countries of the global North have not experienced the penetration of violent extremism to

the extent of those in the global South, yet their scholars have been at the forefront of the conflict narratives, providing solutions, strategies and alternatives to the countries of the global South. This chapter seeks to address this imbalance by providing a perspective from someone who has lived and studied in the area under discussion. African conflict experts and scholars must be critical actors in fashioning new models for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). This chapter analyses violent extremism in northern Nigeria with particular attention to exploring alternative approaches, the transitional justice system and reintegration challenges.

## **Drivers of conflict**

Despite being the largest economy in Africa, Nigeria lags behind in development measures, mostly due to weak governance, unequal economic distribution and corruption. Demographically, 43% of the 216.7 million population is aged 14 years or younger, and 40% of the population lives below the national poverty line (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics 2022). The north-west and north-east are the least developed areas with the highest poverty rates (67% and 75% respectively), while the south-west has the lowest estimated poverty rate (22.9%) (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics 2019). The lack of service provision and of functional governance has increased socio-economic grievances and exacerbated the government's loss of legitimacy, which non-state armed groups then exploit. The prevalence of deep social and economic disparities within the population has also deepened perceptions of political marginalisation and exclusion.

Research has demonstrated the correlations between poverty and conflict, particularly when combined with a high degree of horizontal and vertical inequality (Delgado 2022). Horizontal inequality denotes disparities among groups defined by shared identities such as religion, ethnicity, race or gender. These inequalities often stem from historical or systemic discrimination and can manifest in economic, social or political dimensions. Vertical inequality, on the other hand, focuses on the disparities between individuals or households and is often measured by income or wealth distribution. While the drivers of violence in Nigeria are complex, much of the political tension, criminality and conflict is due to competition for resources. Poverty and disparities are key drivers of recruitment for violent extremists.

## **Transitional justice and counter violent extremism in north-east Nigeria**

Without well-crafted peacebuilding measures and mechanisms, most of the states that have experienced violent conflicts tend to relapse into conflict within approximately five years of signing a peace accord (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Peacebuilding encompasses a series of interrelated activities: peacekeeping or peace maintenance or enforcing peace, transitional justice and other measures to prevent conflict and provide security, stability and prosperity (United Nations 2004). Although these three concepts are conflated and used interchangeably, they are in a real sense different from one another. Peacekeeping refers to the deployment of national or more commonly multinational forces for the purpose of helping to control and resolve an actual or potential armed conflict between or within a state. It is an international effort often involving military personnel to maintain or restore peace in an area of conflict. Peacekeeping forces are either unarmed or lightly armed and use minimal force only where necessary. Peacekeeping operations are undertaken with the authorisation of, and are often led by, the UN, even though regional organisations and in rare cases single states have also undertaken peacekeeping operations.

Peace maintenance denotes a multidimensional approach involving diplomacy, the military and civilians. It involves a range of strategies and activities beyond traditional peacekeeping to prevent conflict, promote stability and resolve disputes between nations. It encompasses a broader scope than simply maintaining a ceasefire, and extends to establishing order, fostering justice and addressing the root causes of conflict.

For its part, peace enforcement refers to the use of military assets to enforce peace against the will of the parties to the conflict, usually when a ceasefire has failed.

Societies emerging from conflict and repression and trying to rebuild and move on from a violent history marked by gross atrocities and human rights violations require acknowledgement of the violations, justice for the victims, prevention of recurrence, establishment of the rule of law, restoration of the social fabric of communities, and building sustainable peace.

This task is only feasible through the vehicle of transitional justice, an element of peacebuilding. Transitional justice provides recognition to victims of past human rights violations and related atrocities; enhances trust and promotes reconciliation

among people and between the people and the state; and prevents future human rights violations from occurring.

Transitional justice covers a wide range of processes that attempt to address the legacy of large-scale human right abuses and past violations through ensuring accountability, justice and reconciliation. This victim-centred approach includes both judicial and non-judicial processes, such as dialogue and consultations, truth commissions, prosecutions, reparations, measures to prevent the recurrence of human rights violations, security sector reform, gender justice and memorialisation.

Transitional justice efforts can, however, be hampered by unnecessary interference and influence from the political class. This is especially so when transitional justice affects the interests of key political actors or those linked to them. In some cases, the transitional justice process is thwarted or even sabotaged. Rather than aiding the healing and reconciliation process, this aggravates levels of disaffection and disenchantment, especially among those who feel victimised or denied adequate compensation, and when punishment for perpetrators is not commensurate to the atrocities and violations committed.

## **Failure to implement recommendations**

Nigeria and north-east Nigeria in particular are notorious for being graveyards for good policy recommendations and government white papers. Although the country has many sound policies capable of positively transforming the nation, they are never implemented. Transitional justice programmes and recommendations are no exception.

Nigeria is a member and signatory of the African Union Transitional Justice Policy Framework (AUTJPF). Member states, the primary implementers of the policy, are mandated to domesticate, own and utilise the AUTJPF to the benefit of African citizens. The scope and focus of the AUTJPF is largely inspired by the AU's shared values, instruments and policies relative to democratic governance, human rights, peace and security, and post-conflict reconstruction and development (Wachira 2019). The AUTJPF emphasises synergy, complementarity and coherence between the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (African Union 2011). The AGA is a mechanism for dialogue between stakeholders that are mandated to promote good governance and bolster democracy in Africa. It was founded in 2011 and inspired by the AU's Consultative

Act. APSA is a framework established by the AU to promote peace, security and stability across the continent. It encompasses a range of instruments, institutions and procedures designed to address conflict prevention, management and resolution as well as post-conflict reconstruction and development.

The AUTJPF is structured along four broad areas: principles and values, consultative elements, peace-making processes, and transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms. The Nigerian authorities' performance in these four areas is dismal. There has been no effort towards realising the principles and values, and no visible coordinated consultation and stakeholder engagement within the context of the transitional justice framework. There are also no healing processes and bridge-building activities to pave the way to forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. Lastly, the wheels of the justice system and the prosecution process turn slowly, with many suspected combatants languishing in government detention facilities across the nation while others walk freely on the streets.

## **Reintegration process and challenges in conflict-affected areas of north-east Nigeria**

A fundamental element of the conflict cycle is the complex, multidimensional issue of reintegration. Reintegration take place during different phases of the conflict cycle. The first stage of reintegration takes place during the displacement of distressed populations, where conflict survivors seek asylum as IDPs in camps or host communities. Relations are often tense in the new communities due to distrust and scarcity of resources. IDPs are thus frequently marginalised and excluded socio-economically.

The second stage of reintegration takes place during the period of demobilisation, deradicalisation and reintegration (DDR). In northern Nigeria, this process was started in 2016 and has led to the demobilisation of many Boko Haram combatants. A December 2023 International Organization for Migration (IOM) report indicated that about 160 000 combatants had been demobilised, with 2 311 reintegrated – many of whom were women, girls and child soldiers associated with non-state armed groups (IOM Nigeria 2023).

Combatants who are captured by security operatives or who willingly defect are the most complex in the DDR programme. They either go through the Operation Safe Corridor programme at the Boko Haram Deradicalization Centre in Gombe State

or the Maiduguri Mass Exit Model in Bulumkutu, Borno State. Operation Safe Corridor is a home-grown Nigerian programme for providing violent extremist recruits with a voluntary exit route from Boko Haram. The programme was launched in 2016 to help defectors reintegrate into civilian life. Most of those sent to the facility are voluntary defectors from the jihadist group.

The programme is a reflection of the Nigerian authorities' growing recognition that military might alone cannot defeat violent extremism. However, despite the programme's initial gains, a number of challenges need to be addressed if it is to be sustained. The initiative is facing resistance from both the political class and ordinary citizens. This resistance is due to the increasing lack of popularity of the initiatives, disenchantment among the locals and fear of backlash from members of the host communities. Locals distrust the genuineness of combatants' repentance, and feel deep-rooted animosity towards the insurgents for the atrocities they committed against their family members in particular but also against humanity in general.

Locals are also dissatisfied with the government's failure to implement transitional justice, particularly the prosecution component to bring the insurgents to book for their past crimes. Similarly, they feel that the government is giving undeserved attention and care to the insurgents, who ought to be condemned. They are provided with vocational training, a monthly stipend, proper nutrition as well as other livelihood support programmes using taxpayers' money. In contrast, law-abiding citizens wallow in poverty, hunger, depression and are not compensated for the loss of loved ones. Some locals swore they would never see face to face with these insurgents without vengeance.

In addition, there are still serious problems that test donors' confidence and most likely deter potential defectors. Key among them are transparency and accountability, as well as sincerity of purpose on the side of the Nigerian authorities to ensure value for money. Coordination and collaboration are also complex due to the web of actors involved, including federal and state governments, international organisations and local communities. Other challenges include information sharing, funding (gaps) and resource allocation, prioritisation in terms of which areas and populations require support the most, as well as providing sustainable solutions.

Donors are also concerned by escalating humanitarian and security risks, including localised hostilities and the impact of conflict on vulnerable populations. Key institutional hurdles include limited local capacity, a lack of national ownership and

resistance from host communities. Furthermore, there is growing alarm that authorities are funnelling civilians through safe corridors only to unjustly mislabel them as jihadists.

The last phase of reintegration is that of IDPs during relocation and resettlement to the reconstructed communities across the state. Here the challenge is community acceptance for those being reintegrated. This is owing to the complex nature of the post-conflict communities created by the years of forced migration and displacement as a result of the insurgency. It has created conflict between late returnees and early returnees as well as IDPs from other communities that are not willing to return. For example, houses and other assets such as farmlands of the later returnees were taken over by the IDPs and earlier returnees, who are not willing to return them to their original owners. Similarly, there is mutual suspicion and distrust by the early returnees towards the new returnees, who they now see as strangers.

In a study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2019, cited in Manpa'a (2022: 42), 92% of the women and youth respondents maintained that they would be willing to accept deradicalised insurgents who had passed through the Operation Safe Corridor programme, as they had received enough training and reform to be accepted. According to a female respondent:

The government has done well in the process they have used and they are appreciated but people should be properly screened. We will accept to support and stay together with them, because most of them that attended rehabilitation centres in Gombe state have truly repented. They are welcome even today. (Manpa'a 2022: 42)

Similarly, another survey participant noted that 'low risk associates' of Boko Haram (those who were forcefully abducted, particularly girls, women, the aged and children) should be reintegrated if they have been properly screened and the relevant authorities deem them fit to go back to their communities. They added that some of the girls have already returned and are reunited with their parents. Others have already married and been fully reintegrated into the community.

However, some male youth respondents (35%) expressed apprehension about certain of the girls, suspecting them of keeping in contact with their insurgent husbands and acting as informants (Manpa'a 2022). Some communities are also suspicious and distrustful as they view the girls as direct threats, on the assumption that they have already been radicalised and could recruit other girls.

The most common challenges of reintegration are resource constraints; a lack of social services and infrastructure, such as shelter, water, schools and health facilities; lack of trust; and a thirst for revenge. Others are lack of clear eligibility criteria for amnesty and rehabilitation, lack of defined deradicalisation programmes, fear of recidivism among the ex-combatants, and the challenge of demobilisation and reintegration of civilian militia, particularly the Civilian Joint Task Force.

## **Approaches to countering violent extremism in northern Nigeria**

Although several approaches, both kinetic and non-kinetic, have been used globally and in northern Nigeria in particular to counter violent extremism, they have not managed to eradicate the scourge, despite their contributions to improving the security situation. In a security and conflict context, the kinetic approach refers to the use of direct force, like military operations, to achieve an objective such as countering violent extremism. The non-kinetic approach places a premium on the use of indirect methods such as diplomacy, community engagement and information sharing. The major difference between the two approaches is that the former focuses on direct action and seeks immediate results, whereas the later focuses on long-term stability and addressing the root cause of conflict or violence.

Key among the kinetic approaches adopted by the government and other stakeholders in the Lake Chad Basin are the formation of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and the Islamic Military Alliance (IMA), the establishment of a joint military coalition among member states under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and Operations Restore Order 1–3.

In terms of non-kinetic approaches, the efforts made by the Nigerian government and other strategic stakeholders include the establishment of the National Focal Point on Terrorism (NFPT), the Presidential Initiatives for North-East (PINE), the Buhari Plan of 2016 and the Regional Stabilisation, Resilience and Recovery strategy; persuasion; dialogue and consultation with political, religious and community leaders in the affected areas; peace studies and peace clubs; interfaith dialogue; setting up the National Committee on Security in the north-east under the chairmanship of Ambassador Usman Ghaji Galtimari; and the Enactment of the Antiterrorism Prevention Act of 2011 (Manpa'a 2022).

This chapter offers three key alternative approaches for countering violent extremism in northern Nigeria, discussed in the sections that follow.

### ***Comprehensive constitutional and political reforms***

Nigeria is a secular state practising constitutional democracy fashioned along the lines of the liberal Western model. Historically, before the amalgamation of 1914 and the subsequent emergence of Nigeria as a sovereign entity in 1960, northern Nigeria was part of the Sokoto Caliphate, with sharia as the system of government.

At the attainment of political independence, Nigeria adopted parliamentary constitutional democracy, which it later abandoned in favour of the American model of presidential democracy. The country was under military dictatorship for a relatively long period of time, spanning the periods 15 January 1966 to 1 October 1979, and 31 December 1983 to 29 May 1999. The end of the Cold War and the emergence of a new world order resulted in liberal democracy being the only acceptable system of government, and Nigeria was no exception. This form of democracy, however, comes with its own principles, some of which are in discord with Islamic sharia.

This contradiction between Islamic sharia and liberal democratic ideals is a key trigger of violent extremism in northern Nigeria. To better understand the discord between Islam and liberal democratic principles, one needs to understand the nature and character of Islam. The concept 'Islam', literally defined as peace, is not only a religion but a total way of life for every Muslim.

The life of a Muslim is guided by two responsibilities, moral and mutual. While moral responsibility denotes the relationship between the believer and his or her creator, mutual responsibility is concerned with relationships between Muslims and their fellow humans, including the rights and responsibilities of each for another. These two responsibilities are guided by an Islamic code known as sharia. The two main sources of sharia are the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet, whose injunctions are supreme and non-negotiable.

Whenever there is a clash between the provisions of constitutional democracy and Quranic injunctions, the position of the Quran prevails and is non-negotiable. The fifth Hadith of Al-Nawawi clearly forewarns Muslims against introducing innovation into the religion: 'If any of you introduced anything new in to our religion it is rejected.' The introduction of democratic ideas such as liberalism, feminism, sexism and LGBTQ are thus considered innovation and have no place in Islam. Al-Nawawi Hadiths is a compilation of forty Hadith by Islamic Imam Yahya Sharaf Al-Nawawi. Hadith is a collection of the teachings and sayings of the holy prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the second most important book and source of Islamic law.

Curbing the menace of violent extremism in northern Nigeria therefore requires comprehensive constitutional and political reforms that integrate the main Islamic concerns into the Constitution and the political process.

### ***Sustainable livelihood support and financial inclusion***

Poverty is widely acknowledged as a major push factor driving people into violent extremism (Graff 2010; Allan et al. 2015; Ojo 2020; Ikpe et al. 2023). Northern Nigeria, where 70% of the population consists of youths, has the highest poverty index in Nigeria. The Multidimensional Poverty Index rates poverty among children in Nigeria at 90% in the north-west and north-east, compared to 74% and 65.1% in the south-east and south-west, respectively (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics 2022).

Poverty is exacerbated by other factors such as hunger, unemployment, lack of skills, low literacy levels, high levels of out-of-school children, population explosion without corresponding economic opportunities, climate change, desertification, floods, the receding of Lake Chad and the closing of several industries and factories across the major cities of northern Nigeria. Violent extremist groups capitalise on and exploit these conditions to recruit new members.

Three main categories of people join violent extremist groups in northern Nigeria: religious fanatics and zealots; those who are poverty stricken, impoverished and lured by economic gain; and those who are forcefully conscripted against their wishes. Extremists and insurgents target the second category as recruits by offering economic incentives. For example, they provide poor youths with alternative sources of livelihood such as starting capital, farm inputs and implements, as well as vocational and technical skills through apprenticeships in the informal sector of the economy. These apprenticeships are often in trade and commerce, welding, automobile mechanics and masonry.

Extremist groups amplify the neglect and failure of the government and its institutions through sermons, emphasising the high levels of corruption and affluent lifestyles among the elites and political class as well as their insensitivity to the plight of the poor. This not only weakens people's trust in government and its institutions, but systematically erodes the legitimacy of government among the majority of the disenfranchised populace.

It is imperative for this situation to be reversed. Deliberate efforts and synergy from the government and other development partners is needed to restore hope and

boost confidence and trust in the future of the economy. A viable step to achieving this is to create alternative livelihood support among youths in the region. This will scale up the household economy and drive regional socio-economic transformation. The trickle-down effects will reduce poverty, hunger, unemployment and the uneven distribution of societal resources among the citizenry.

Several initiatives and economic programmes would be required, such as boosting agricultural productivity and livestock production through the provision of agricultural inputs and implements (for instance, improved and high-yielding seeds, fertilisers, herbicides, tractors) as well as interest-free cooperatives and agricultural credit facilities.

In addition, the financial inclusion and integration of the northern population into national and international financial systems is key and must be given attention by both government and development partners. This would require providing grants and start-up capital to youth who want to engage in trade, commerce and other ventures but who lack working capital – not because of ignorance about financial institutions that offer credit facilities, but because Islam forbids the faithful from giving or collecting interest-based credit.

This enhanced financial inclusion and integration should be accompanied by increased financial literacy among the broader northern population. This should include inculcating a culture of investment and saving in addition to electronic-based transfer knowledge, that is, how to use electronic devices such as mobile apps, automated teller machines, point of sale devices and FinTech devices for financial transactions like buying, selling and money deposits. This could be achieved through collaboration between the government, civil society organisations and development partners.

Furthermore, states in the northern region and the federal government should collaborate to bail out various moribund industries and factory complexes in the major cities of northern Nigeria to create additional job opportunities. Non-functional and inactive vocational and technical training centres also need to be resuscitated and new ones established across communities in both urban and rural areas. This will definitely provide training skills and provide alternative sources of livelihood for the vast majority of unemployed youths in the region. It will also add value to the informal sector, thereby booting both the regional and national economy.

At the regional level, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and member states should fast-track the process of recharging Lake Chad in order to facilitate irrigation and

fishing and increase grazing area for livestock. When achieved, this will address the push factors such as poverty, hunger and unemployment that drive people, particularly the youthful population, into violent extremism.

### ***Reforming the Almajiri/Tsangaya system of education***

The term 'Almajiri' is a Hausa word to describe a student who migrates from home in search of Islamic knowledge, usually from his community to a faraway city. The term is derived from the Arabic word 'Al-muhajirun', meaning emigrants, or the traveller or person in transit. The Almajiri system, otherwise known as the Tsangaya system of education, is the traditional and rudimentary method of teaching and learning Islamic knowledge. This system of learning is still popular in northern Nigeria.

The Almajiri system of education has been in existence since the beginning of the eleventh century and pre-dates the colonial intrusion across the coast. Young males of school age and even younger are brought to a city, town or village to learn and acquire Quranic knowledge and Arabic education in the areas of Islamic jurisprudence, syntax, grammar and literature, under the tutelage of an Islamic scholar.

Before the advent of Western forms of education, the Almajiri system was a major driver of socio-economic and political transformation. It produced a large class of elites, aristocrats, bureaucrats and administrators that worked in the traditional precolonial system of administration in northern Nigeria. However, over time the Almajiri system has developed fundamental defects, with many negative consequences. It has become an incubator for violent extremism and a steady source for recruiting extremists.

Under this system of education, practised in most parts of northern Nigeria, under-age children are exposed to appalling conditions. They are left to grow up on the streets with no shelter, food, parental guidance or love, and have to fend for themselves by begging and engaging in menial jobs (Shimawua 2020). Today's Almajiri practice is based on abuse, hunger, destitution, exploitation and lack of empathy:

They are abounding in all the cities towns and villages in the northern part of Nigeria, they sleep in the outhouse or veranda of delapidated house which also serve as their school or classes in the day time every day they are seen carrying plastic bowl, dressed in tattered clothes and mostly without footwear begging. (Taiwo 2013: 3)

In addition, Almajiri is a system in which the victims of parental irresponsibility and societal and institutional failure are blamed. The system was originally designed with the goal of enshrining Islamic values and knowledge, but its new methodology is an affront to Islamic injunctions on ways and means of acquiring Islamic knowledge. The current system is also at variance with societal needs and norms that drive the socio-economic and political transformation of society.

The Almajiri system of education as practised today is closely associated with Islamic fundamentalism, child abuse and poverty. In its current form, it will continue to pose a serious security threat to the region and the nation. However, Almajiri is an integral part of the cultural identity of many urban centres of northern Nigeria and any attempt to completely eradicate it will be resisted. An alternative is to overhaul the system through introducing new reform initiatives that are not in conflict with Islamic injunctions and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). These initiatives should be in line with global best practice, bearing in mind the religious and cultural sensibilities of the area. This can be realised through the following strategy:

- Comprehensive profiling of the Almajiri schools, pupils and Ulamas (religious scholars) for the purpose of documentation, planning and integration into national basic education programmes.
- Provision of decent accommodation and classes to the Almajiri through revisiting and implementing the national Almajiri school's initiative by former president Goodluck Jonathan across all the northern states of Nigeria.
- Creation of livelihood support programmes such as farming, trade and craft centres, national vocational training centres and skills acquisition centres to make the system self-sufficient and sustainable.
- Integration of the Almajiri system into the federal government school feeding programme.
- Deploying reputable Ulamas to campaign on reforming the Almajiri system through media platforms, including radio, national television and new media.
- Integration of the various Ulama into the state and national payroll and the National Nomadic Education Programme.

## Conclusion

This chapter analysed violent extremism in northern Nigeria with a specific focus on the issues of alternative approaches to conflict, transitional justice and reintegration challenges in north-east Nigeria.

The adoption of counter-violent-extremism measures, both kinetic and non-kinetic, has had positive results in restoring security. There is also evidence of significant restoration of social services, the improvement of livelihood activities, the dismantling of IDP camps, the relocation of displaced communities, as well as rehabilitation and resettlement of conflict survivors.

The federal government's Operation Safe Corridor and the Borno Mass Exit Model are ground-breaking and represent robust home-grown models in tandem with global best practices. Plausible and promising as the Borno model might appear, however, it has its limitations. In particular, it lacks a legal and institutional framework to guide its implementation and operations. In addition, the localisation of the model and confinement of its operations to Borno State is of serious concern, given the transnational outlook of violent extremists and their operations. For instance, the model cannot operate even in neighbouring Adamawa and Yobe states, or in neighbouring countries, due to the lack of a larger legal framework.

There is also growing concern about the absence of transitional justice elements such as prosecutions, a truth and reconciliation commission, gender justice and major institutional reforms. For example, there are still hundreds of suspected violent extremists in detention facilities across the country who have not been to trial.

There has been significant effort by the government and other development partners in the areas of relocation, rehabilitation and resettlement. There is concern, however, that these promising and viable efforts have been cut short by challenges such as a lack of funds, infrastructure and social services, mutual distrust and a thirst for vengeance. Much more can and should be done.

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# Conclusion

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Violent extremism remains a serious security threat in many parts of the world and in African countries in particular. This situation led to the adoption of various strategies, such as counter-insurgency (COIN), counterterrorism (CT) and the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) (Schmid 2021). However, traditional approaches such as COIN and CT have been criticised for being reductionist and for their low success rates (Gray 2012).

Recent developments in Africa and elsewhere around the globe show that the use of military force in preventing or countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has serious limitations: the return of the Taliban to power in Kabul (Afghanistan) despite decades of US assistance to the previous regime under Hamid Karzai and his successors (Snider 2022); the continued attacks from Al-Shabaab in Somalia after many years of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) presence and assistance to the successive governments (Mustapha 2021); the emergence of violent extremism and persistent insecurity in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado and its northern parts. Other examples include car ramming attacks (use of car as weapons) and street stabbings that have taken place in several Western countries (Hess and Mandhan 2023). These include two June 2017 attacks by vans on the London Bridge and in Finsbury Park in the UK that killed nine innocent pedestrians. Other car ramming attacks were carried out in New Orleans in the US in January 2025, killing fifteen people, and in Germany's Magdeburg in Saxony-Anhalt in December 2024, killing five people and injuring 200 more who were visiting a Christmas market (Associated Press 2025). These examples demonstrate that military operations alone cannot curb violent extremism, and that there is an urgent need to look beyond the kinetic approach.

The African continent has already shifted its perspective on the importance of using force, and is developing a significant number of initiatives and policies aimed at expanding the scope of approaches that can be employed in P/CVE efforts, especially with a focus on non-kinetic methods (Mwaniki 2019; Sambo and Sule 2024). Although these initiatives were initially heavily influenced by militaristic tendencies, there are indications that the African Union (AU) and its member states are open to considering other approaches, especially those that propose a holistic aspect that takes into account the combined use of both kinetic and non-kinetic methods, such as intelligence gathering, programmes dedicated to deradicalisation, and socio-economic development while addressing grievances linked to marginalisation and injustice in P/CVE (Sekibo et al. 2024; Aina and Ojo 2025).

The AU has been trying to address the growing threat of terrorism in Africa by ensuring that states scale up their efforts to implement relevant instruments and decisions. In 2022, the AU passed the Malabo Declaration, reiterating the existing framework on terrorism and calling for the development of a comprehensive Continental Strategic Plan of Action (Fenemigho 2024). The AU has also deployed various mechanisms to combat the threat of terrorism, focusing on coordination and cooperation, as well as a militarised approach. Both types of mechanisms are essential in combating terrorism.

In addition, the AU has implemented three specific processes to combat terrorism: the Nouakchott Process, the Djibouti Process and the AU Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL). These processes aim to strengthen regional security cooperation and information sharing in the fight against terrorism. The Nouakchott Process, established in 2013, focuses on the Sahelo-Saharan region, while the Djibouti Process, established in 2019, focuses on the Horn region (Mensah 2023; Lofane 2022). However, neither process has fully fulfilled its mandate. The Malabo summit highlighted the need for revitalisation of CT mechanisms, leading to the merger of the two processes. A lack of coordination and financial means also hindered the implementation of these initiatives.

The AU's prioritisation of a militarised response to combat terrorism and violent extremism is evident in the ongoing military operations across the continent: the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in West Africa, the G5-Sahel Joint Force in the Sahel region, the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), and operations in Mozambique (Kuwali 2022; Mensah 2021).

As noted, however, the dominance of militaristic solutions has not translated into overwhelming success on the ground. The AU's PVE work is being undermined by fundamental ideological, practical, financial and logistical limitations within its peace and security institutions. At the national level, the responsibility for addressing and identifying terrorism is primarily placed on member states. However, this can be problematic when member states misuse the label of terrorism to suppress dissent. Relying heavily on the use of military force also shifts resources away from urgent social and economic issues.

A holistic approach to CT and violent extremism in Africa requires integrating military responses into an all-inclusive strategy that focuses on addressing the root causes of radicalisation and use of extreme violence in attempts to bring attention to existing grievances. This contextualised understanding prioritises addressing these challenges as the centre of prevention, utilising non-military and non-violent responses or measures. The failure of states to provide basic goods and services is a key factor used by terrorist and extremist groups for radicalisation. Recent research and some discussion in this book show that high rates of poverty or unemployment create conditions that incite young people to become radicalised or to join extremist groups. In the Lake Chad Basin, for example, underinvestment in social services and poor economic development have created barriers to accessing basic needs. As a result, the number of unemployed youths has increased tremendously, creating a large pool from which recruitment for violent extremist groups becomes possible, with unpredictable consequences on stability and security in this volatile region (Tayimlong 2021).

States must fulfil their responsibilities by addressing these issues and creating the necessary conditions to meet people's needs, thus minimising the possibilities for recruitment. This is crucial for preventing violent extremism and terrorism. Fair distribution of resources and access to economic opportunities are critical in preventing inequality and fostering a more equitable society. In turn, such policies help to prevent or curb extremist ideologies, particularly in African countries.

Government institutions in African countries play an important role in economic development and peace, but often lack a strong presence in peripheral and border areas. Coupled with the absence of effective governance, this creates a power vacuum that can easily be used by extremist groups to spread their ideology and to radicalise communities. To prevent terrorism and violent extremism, a comprehensive approach should include measures to boost state presence and governance throughout the entire territory, including in border areas. The presence

of responsive and accountable state institutions is important in creating trust at grassroots level. This is where radicalisation and recruitment take place, and it should be where countermeasures and prevention start.

The state must adopt suitable governance structures that consider relevant factors such as demographics, culture and resources to ensure proper representation and to meet societal aspirations. This will help curb the propagation of incompatible interests and radical opposition movements, which can lead to terrorism and violence.

There is also a growing call to consider the use of dialogue with radical groups in order to find peaceful solutions. For example, the US contacted the Taliban in Afghanistan to discuss some of the conditions leading to the evacuation of American soldiers (Gibbon-Neff 2021). Notwithstanding the fact that this is contrary to past practices, it is worth considering this new interaction in the framework of P/CVE approaches.

Al-Shabaab remains a significant security threat in Somalia, despite AMISOM's efforts. In 2022, AMISOM was replaced by ATMIS in a process leading to a reduction in AU presence while giving more responsibilities to the Somalian government. Today, as ATMIS draws down, discussions are under way to determine a post-ATMIS AU presence and engagement to support the Somalian government in its battle against Al-Shabaab (Ajú 2022).

AMISOM has been instrumental in CT efforts against Al-Shabaab in Somalia for over a decade. However, it is now recognised that resolving the situation in Somalia may require not only military action but also, and most importantly, some sort of negotiations with Al-Shabaab, and the involvement of local communities in finding adequate solutions. Dialogue and negotiations processes are proving crucial for resolving terrorism and violent extremism in Somalia. Most grievances that influenced the emergence of the extremist group are rooted in socio-economic issues. Ignoring these issues means limiting the chances to find durable solutions.

The United Nations (UN) has focused on PVE by addressing the root causes of conflict and drivers through community-level peacebuilding and development interventions. PVE employs a participatory, flexible approach, emphasising community engagement and sustainable solutions. The UN's disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) aims to counter the spread of radicalisation and recruitment, promote inclusivity and strengthen social cohesion. This method differs from COIN and CT in its focus on addressing underlying causes and promoting a people-centred approach. The UN and other international peacebuilders tend to adopt deterministic, top-down approaches to peacebuilding,

planning and assessment. This approach is criticised for not paying attention to local priorities (Thiessen 2022; Ucko 2018).

However, adaptive peacebuilding, a context-specific approach, aims to facilitate participatory, self-sustaining peace with local and national ownership and leadership. This approach promotes self-organisation, allowing societies to develop various locally and nationally owned and driven context-specific processes and mechanisms to manage their own peace consolidation process.

The UN's DDR process, which removes weapons from combatants and helps them integrate into society, is an integral part of this approach. The strategic objectives include establishing peace and security, creating space for political processes, and building a secure environment conducive to recovery and development. In contexts where dialogue has been established with extremist groups and they have agreed to hand over their weapons, this approach could be important in diffusing security threats. Using various African experiences, the chapters in this book demonstrate that the continent has been developing new approaches that can contribute to the fight against violent extremism. What these approaches have in common is that they have been designed to operate outside the security-driven framework (Stephens et al. 2021).

Kenya has developed a comprehensive CVE approach through national and county action plans, focusing on nine pillars: psychosocial, education, political, security, faith-based, ideology, culture and art, legal and policy, and media and online. These plans promote collaboration, knowledge sharing and trust between communities and government stakeholders (Lucey et al. 2024).

Nigeria has implemented a Mass Exit Strategy to combat Boko Haram, focusing on screening, prosecutions, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, vocational training and reintegration into original communities. Borno State government has also implemented a 'cash for guns' strategy, focusing on community participation and localisation, with former combatants receiving incentives to give away weapons. The Borno policy emphasises community engagement and dialogue, aiming to shift Nigeria's approach to terrorism and extremism towards a 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approach. However, challenges remain, such as a lack of willingness to consult stakeholders and a trust gap between communities and the government (Hendricks et al. 2023).

Northern Mozambique has been facing a prolonged and unstable conflict environment. Adaptive disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation, reintegration

and repatriation (DDRRR) could be a crucial component of a comprehensive, locally owned and sustainable P/CVE approach to tackle this. This approach would involve removing weapons from Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamaa (ASWJ) combatants and detaching them from paramilitary structures, with the aim of rehabilitating and reintegrating them. Proper implementation could stabilise northern Mozambique and positively affect other parts of the country (Lucey and Zeca 2023).

PVE or promoting CT is a process in constant evolution. States often struggle to keep up with the latest innovations. Due to their perceived benefits, kinetics are often preferred over other mechanisms, such as P/CVE or transitional justice. These approaches need to prove their worth globally, and particularly in Africa, and require sustained support from governments and partners. As with COIN and CT, addressing budgetary challenges is crucial for P/CVE and transitional justice to gain significance. States need to invest in the full toolkit to achieve the desired results.

The AU has made significant strides in addressing terrorism through legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms and regional cooperation initiatives. However, challenges like resource constraints, and lack of political will and intelligence sharing, still remain high on the agenda and need to be overcome. It cannot be overstated that addressing violent extremism requires a holistic approach, including strengthening military and law enforcement capabilities, political reform, economic development and social cohesion, with a particular focus on involving local communities as important actors in the prevention process at the grassroots levels, where radicalisation and recruitment often take place. This is important and necessary at both the continental and national levels.

New approaches show that transitional justice is increasingly becoming a crucial tool in addressing violence and extremism, but it requires strategic implementation within a broader peacebuilding framework. The African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) provides some tools to diffuse security concerns, including dialogue and community involvement in promoting peace. The Policy helps in designing and implementing context-specific programmes that promote peace, justice, reconciliation and healing.

The AUTJP shows the importance of addressing root causes of conflict, such as social exclusion and human rights abuses, which have been identified as factors that push young people to join extremist groups. In addition, it underlines the necessity to promote inclusion by addressing marginalisation and discrimination – issues that are exploited by extremist groups. A well-executed transitional justice process

has the potential to create enabling conditions for P/CVE by addressing community members' concerns, especially those of the youth. The AUTJP also emphasises the restoration of constitutional and legal rights to sections of society that may have been stripped of them during conflict or authoritarian rule, ensuring participation, contributing to a brighter future and preventing violent extremism.

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**Alternative approaches to preventing violent extremism: Using transitional justice lenses**  
*Edited by Prof. Cheryl Hendricks, Patrick Hajayandi and Prof. Tim Murithi*

Violent extremism remains one of the most pressing challenges confronting the African continent, especially across the Horn of Africa, Sahel and Mozambique. The over-emphasis on **security focused and military responses** has often failed to address the deeper grievances, injustices and structural inequalities that fuel radicalisation and extremism in these regions. This timely edited volume offers an innovative perspective by applying a **transitional and reparative justice lens** to preventing violent extremism.

The book brings together leading inter-governmental actors, civil society practitioners, analysts and academics to assess how transitional and reparative justice interventions – including truth seeking, reparations, institutional reform, constitutionalism and democratic consolidation – can provide sustainable alternatives to militarised approaches. It highlights the importance of **inclusive governance, community resilience and reparative justice** in tackling the root causes of extremism.

The book includes insightful case studies from across Africa and generates comparative insights which reinforce the compelling argument that preventing violent extremism requires more than security – it demands **justice, redress, dignity and accountability**. This book is essential reading for policymakers, civil society actors and academics seeking innovative pathways to sustainable peacebuilding and democratic consolidation in Africa.

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