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## **Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: An Evaluation of Socio-Cultural Factors Underpinning the Sustainability of Programs in Lamu County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

For more than a decade, Lamu County, Kenya, has faced violent extremism rooted in historical grievances, socio-political marginalisation, and social inequality. In Kenya, authorities define violent extremism as the radicalisation of individuals who engage in or support violence to advance illiberal and undemocratic ideologies. This article analyses how socio-cultural factors shape the sustainability of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) programmes in Lamu. The authors examined how cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors influence community responses to P/CVE interventions through surveys and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 431 respondents, including government officials, security personnel, religious leaders, and community members. The authors applied the Theory of Change to explain how interventions aim to achieve outcomes and the Social Exchange Theory to explain how perceived costs and benefits influence community engagement. The analysis shows that while government and security actors demonstrate high awareness of P/CVE strategies, inadequate coordination, limited training, and persistent mistrust constrain implementation. Cultural and religious institutions strengthen resilience through traditional conflict resolution, yet gender exclusion and political marginalisation weaken broader participation and threaten sustainability. The article argues that sustainable P/CVE efforts in Lamu require shifting from a security-centric model toward inclusive, culturally grounded approaches that foster collaboration across state and community actors.

**Key Words:** Socio-cultural factors, sustainability, P/CVE programmes, Lamu County, Kenya

### **Introduction**

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to undermine peace and stability in Kenya, and Lamu County faces unique challenges because of its proximity to Somalia and its complex socio-cultural fabric. Over the last two decades, militant groups such as Al-Shabaab and Al Qaeda have carried out devastating attacks in the County (Onyango, 2021), disrupting local economies, displacing communities, and straining inter-group relations (Anderson & McKnight, 2015; Botha, 2014). Kenya's military operations, particularly *Operation Linda Nchi*, sought to neutralise these threats but instead provoked retaliatory violence, further exacerbating insecurity (Bryden, 2014). The constant active presence of militants in Boni Forest underscores the limitations of military interventions and indicates the need for alternative strategies (Rotich, 2020).

This article thus addresses three main concerns. First, it examines the background of P/CVE interventions in Lamu and their evolution within the county's political and cultural landscape. Second, it analyses the socio-cultural factors that enable or constrain these interventions, with particular attention to cultural beliefs and practices, religious leadership, gender roles, and inter-group relations. Third, it explores community perspectives of P/CVE initiatives and programmes, highlighting the importance of trust, ownership, and participation for the sustainability of initiatives. By organising the analysis around these three areas, the

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article situates Lamu within broader debates on countering violent extremism through locally grounded evidence.

Lamu has diverse ethnic and religious groups, which include the Swahili, Bajuni, Arabs, and migrants from inland Kenya. These communities have distinct histories and cultural beliefs and traditions that shape how they perceive and participate in government initiatives, security sector interventions, and donor-driven programmes. Historically, Lamu has been marginalised, especially along religious and economic lines, and such discrimination has fostered exclusion and vulnerability, which in turn are exploited by extremist groups for recruitment (Cachalia et al., 2016; Botha, 2014). Large-scale projects, such as the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) corridor, have further exacerbated the complex security environment, with questions of land rights and economic inclusion fuelling local grievances (Anderson & McKnight, 2015).

Literature on violent extremism in Kenya often concentrates on urban centres, such as Mombasa, or treats the coastal region as a homogeneous whole (Botha & Abdile, 2017; Ndung'u, 2018). These generalisations obscure the specific dynamics of Lamu, where distinct socio-cultural factors significantly shape community responses to P/CVE. Whereas scholars have identified youth unemployment, religious or doctrinal manipulation, and state heavy-handedness as the drivers of extremism (Botha, 2014; Ruteere, 2020), few have disaggregated their findings to show how these dynamics are present in Lamu. This article contributes disaggregated empirical evidence across gender, age, and ethnic groups on community awareness, perceptions, and participation in P/CVE interventions.

By addressing these concerns, the article responds to a critical gap in both scholarship and practice: understanding how socio-cultural factors influence the sustainability of P/CVE initiatives and programmes in Lamu County, which remains highly securitised and deeply distrustful of government-driven interventions. In doing so, the analysis emphasises that community perceptions matter not only for the legitimacy of interventions but also for their long-term viability.

### **Methodology**

This article adopted a mixed methods design to examine P/CVE interventions in Lamu County, utilising qualitative and quantitative approaches to document the complexity of these interventions and their impact on local communities (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Using statistical data with in-depth interviews, the paper explored how socio-cultural factors such as beliefs, traditions, values, and community perceptions affected the effectiveness of these interventions. A descriptive design was employed to assess engagement patterns in communities and the socio-cultural dynamics and factors that shape intervention reception and outcomes (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). This approach supported the identification of how cultural norms, levels of trust in authorities, and local leadership structures, including religious ones, affected the success of interventions aimed at countering violent extremism.

Case studies of specific interventions in Lamu County were assessed to evaluate intervention scope, strategies, and results. This analysis examined whether initiatives such as youth-focused activities, educational outreach, and interfaith dialogues produced different effects across demographic and cultural groups (Yin, 2014). Religious leaders provided insights on the extent to which P/CVE activities aligned with religious teachings, and security and government representatives discussed challenges related to the

implementation and coordination of interventions. Civil society organisations contributed community-level perspectives on participation, acceptance, and the perceived impact of these programmes.

Quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to different stakeholders who represent varied demographic backgrounds in Lamu County, among them members of the local community, religious leaders, representatives of civil society, government officers and personnel from security agencies. The survey examined perceptions of P/CVE interventions, trust in authorities, initiative/programme effectiveness, levels of participation by community members and feelings of personal safety. The standardised format facilitated responses and enabled comparisons across respondent groups. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with key stakeholders who served as Key Informants, including religious leaders, government officials, law enforcement officers, and civil society representatives. These interviews provided qualitative insights into intervention challenges, successes, and the influence of socio-cultural sensitivities on implementation. The open-ended format encouraged in-depth and context-specific responses drawn from participants' lived experiences in Lamu County (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Pilot testing and expert review enhanced the reliability and validity of both instruments, with the feedback leading to minor amendments to improve clarity and ensure contextual soundness.

A total sample of 398 respondents was initially determined using the Yamane formula, based on the population of Lamu County of 143,929 inhabitants (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS] 2019) at a 95% confidence level (Kothari, 2011). Stratified random sampling, however, enabled diverse representation by categorising participants into groups. This saw the study gathering 431 respondents towards it comprised of 105 community members, 88 government officials, 97 security personnel, 64 civil society representatives and 77 religious leaders. 4 representatives from each stakeholder group were engaged as Key Informants in the same exercise. Random selection within each stratum ensured balance across various variables such as age, gender, and social role, providing a comprehensive reflection of local perspectives (Kumar, 2019).

Quantitative data from the respondents was analysed using Microsoft Excel to generate descriptive statistics, including frequencies and correlations. These outcomes showcased trends in community perceptions of P/CVE interventions, particularly regarding trust in government institutions, perceptions of safety, and assessments of intervention effectiveness. Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were also examined using thematic analysis to identify patterns and draw insights into community engagement, cultural resistance, and implementation challenges (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more nuanced understanding of how P/CVE initiatives interact with Lamu's sociocultural environment, divulging both their strengths and limitations. The analysis also considered broader issues, such as the root causes of violent extremism in the region, community resilience mechanisms, and the role of leadership and local trust in shaping programme outcomes.

Ethical principles of confidentiality, informed consent, and respect for intellectual property guided all stages of the study. Sensitive information was handled responsibly, and secondary data were used in compliance with ethical and academic standards. To enhance transparency and strengthen the credibility of the study, the research applied methodological triangulation by comparing survey results with insights from key informant interviews, documented sampling and data collection procedures for replicability, and maintained an audit trail outlining key decisions made during tool development and data analysis. The

instruments were pilot-tested to improve validity, and participant quotations were attributed to their specific data sources, such as KIIs or semi-structured interviews, without compromising confidentiality. These steps ensured that the study's interpretations were clear, traceable, and grounded in the evidence collected, hence making cultural legitimacy and trust-building even more central to programme success.

The research maintained neutrality in interpretation and prioritised an accurate representation of participants' perspectives. Overall, the methodology ensured that findings reflected local realities and contributed to the development of culturally grounded, community-driven approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism in Lamu County.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by two complementary theories that help explain how communities interact with counter-extremism interventions: The Theory of Change, advanced by Carol Weiss (1995), and Social Exchange Theory, developed by Homans (1958) and later expanded by Blau (1964) and Emerson (1976). Together, these frameworks offer a structured way to understand why certain P/CVE strategies succeed or fail in culturally diverse and historically marginalised contexts such as Lamu County.

The Theory of Change (ToC) provides a pathway for explaining how an intervention is expected to lead to specific outcomes. It maps the logical sequence connecting activities, outputs, intermediate results, and long-term change (Weiss 1995). Within P/CVE studies, ToC is especially useful for examining whether interventions align with community needs and whether the assumptions behind programme design reflect local realities. It also helps clarify the enabling conditions required for transformation, such as trust, inclusion, community ownership, and effective leadership structures.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) complements ToC by focusing on how individuals and groups weigh the perceived benefits and costs of engaging in an intervention. In the context of P/CVE, community members often evaluate participation in terms of personal safety, trust in authorities, expected social gains, and potential risks such as profiling or retaliation. SET therefore provides insights into why awareness of programmes may be high, yet participation remains low. It highlights that engagement is likely when communities perceive fair reciprocity, transparency, and meaningful benefits (Smith & Jones, 2022).

Together, these theories help conceptualise the socio-cultural dynamics that shape community perceptions, engagement patterns, and the long-term sustainability of P/CVE efforts in Lamu. They also form the analytical lens through which the findings of this study are interpreted.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The study engaged 431 respondents from various stakeholder groups in Lamu County's P/CVE programmes. The sample comprised 24.4% local community members, 22.5% security personnel, 17.9% religious leaders, 20.4% government officials, and 14.9% civil society representatives. Demographically, 35.5% of respondents were aged 35–44, 26.2% were aged 25–34, and 23.4% were aged 45–54, with a male-to-female ratio of 61.7% to 38.3%. In terms of education, 48.6% had secondary education, while 19% had college or university qualifications. Ethnically, the sample was diverse, with 58.2% (Awer, Somali, Swahili, Pokomo, Mijikenda, Meru, Taita, Sanye, Giriama, Luhya, Orma, Luo) identifying as smaller ethnic groups, and the rest comprising Bajun, Kikuyu, Somali, and Kamba. The religious composition was predominantly Muslim (58%), followed by Christian (40.6%).

The study found that P/CVE programme implementation in Lamu County has attracted significant attention from state and non-state actors, yet community engagement remains uneven. Among community respondents, 63% reported moderate awareness of P/CVE interventions, while only 11% indicated high or very high awareness and 26% reported low awareness. These patterns point to limitations in top-down sensitisation campaigns and highlight the need for more localised, participatory mechanisms that reflect community priorities. Historical grievances such as land disputes, economic marginalisation, and perceived state neglect further contribute to low engagement, underscoring the importance of community-driven solutions.

In contrast to the mixed awareness among community members, stakeholders such as government officials, security personnel, CSOs, and religious leaders demonstrated substantially higher awareness of P/CVE programmes. Their insights emphasised challenges related to coordination, capacity gaps, and the persistence of mistrust between state and community actors. These stakeholder perspectives point to structural and institutional issues that influence programme delivery at the county level, complementing the community-level findings and clarifying where gaps in participation originate.

### *Awareness of P/CVE Programmes*

Findings revealed that different stakeholders exhibited high levels of awareness of P/CVE programmes, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Awareness of P/CVE Programmes Among Different Stakeholder Groups**

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>No Aware / Total Surveyed</b>	<b>Awareness Level</b>	<b>Level of Awareness</b>
Local Community	78 / 105	74	Mostly moderate; some high, some low
Religious Leaders	71 / 77	92	High awareness, mixed engagement
CSO Reps	60 / 64	94	High awareness, varied capacity
Government Officials	81 / 88	92	High awareness, some gaps
Security Staff	90 / 97	93	High awareness, trust issues

The study found that 92% of religious leaders were aware of P/CVE interventions, highlighting their crucial role in counter-extremism efforts. However, their engagement and participation are uneven, partly due to tensions with the state, which are exacerbated by the security-centred approach of counter-extremism and the profiling of some religious leaders. This, in turn, has limited the potential impact of faith-based interventions. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), which play a crucial role in advocacy and programme implementation, also reported high awareness (94%). However, the differences in their capacity, political interference, and resource constraints often deter efforts from community-driven needs, underscoring the necessity for capacity-building initiatives and more focused and targeted engagement strategies.

Government and security agencies stood out as critical actors in P/CVE interventions, with 92% of government officials and 93% of security personnel reporting awareness of P/CVE strategies and approaches. Nonetheless, inconsistencies in coordination and capacity hinder the effective implementation of these strategies. The high reliance on security-centred approaches, particularly in Lamu, has contributed to community distrust of government interventions, which undermines efforts to build sustainable peace. The findings thus point to the need for a more integrated, multi-stakeholder approach that balances security imperatives with grassroots-driven interventions. Strengthening partnerships amongst government agencies, CSOs, religious leaders, and local communities, with a focus on human rights-compliant law enforcement and trust-building, is integral for the long-term effectiveness of P/CVE interventions in the county.

From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, this gap is rooted in the imbalance between perceived benefits and costs. Community members often viewed engagement and participation in P/CVE activities as risky, with potential to expose them to scrutiny by security agencies or stigmatisation without clear, tangible, long-term benefits such as improved livelihoods or security. The result is a form of awareness without ownership where people know of the interventions but do not feel invested in them. To encourage meaningful engagement, awareness strategies must be coupled with mechanisms that ensure reciprocity, transparency, and visible community benefit.

### ***Socio-cultural Factors Affecting the Success of P/CVE Programmes in Lamu County***

Cultural and religious institutions in Lamu County emerged as both enabling and constraining factors in the implementation of P/CVE programmes. About 60% of respondents identified cultural practices as beneficial to counter-extremism, particularly in the areas of dispute resolution, social cohesion, and moral education. Traditional leadership systems, such as *baraza la wazee* (councils of elders), were repeatedly cited as trusted mechanisms for mediating local conflicts and diffusing tensions. In Faza and Hindi, elders emphasise that reconciliation rituals, storytelling, and communal prayers often restore harmony faster than external interventions.

However, 31% of respondents remained neutral, and 8% viewed cultural practices as obstructive to P/CVE goals. Some participants argued that traditional hierarchies reinforce gender exclusion and generational divides. As one woman from Faza noted during a semi-structured interview, “*When decisions are made, it is always by men or elders. Women are told to listen, not to speak.*” Others observed that certain religious interpretations discouraged youth from engaging with government-led peacebuilding activities, perceiving them as un-Islamic or politically motivated.

Religious leaders occupy a pivotal but delicate position in Lamu’s P/CVE landscape. While 92% reported awareness of P/CVE initiatives, several described tensions between faith-based principles and state-driven agendas. A Muslim cleric from Mokowe commented, “*We want to promote peace, but when government officers attend our forums, people think we are working for the police.*” Such perceptions undermine the credibility of religious leaders, even when they act in good faith to promote non-violence (Hassan, 2018). Despite these challenges, interfaith dialogue forums, particularly those organised by the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, were widely regarded as successful in bridging divides and reducing inter-group suspicion.

These insights suggest that community responses to interventions are shaped not only by program design but also by deeper cultural and religious norms. To interpret this relationship more clearly, the Theory of Change helps explain why culturally grounded interventions are more effective. When programmes align with community norms, use familiar authority structures, and demonstrate respect for local values, they gain legitimacy and longevity. Conversely, initiatives that disregard these cultural logics are seen as externally imposed, leading to apathy or quiet resistance. These dynamics help set the stage for understanding how communities interpret and respond to P/CVE initiatives, which is examined in the following section.

### ***Community Perceptions on P/CVE Interventions***

Trust is a critical determinant of the success and sustainability of P/CVE interventions in Lamu County. The research points to a deep mistrust of government security sector agencies due to historical grievances, marginalisation, and harsh security operations. Although some stakeholders reported positive collaboration with the government, the prevailing perception is one of suspicion and mistrust. A community member stated that they felt monitored rather than engaged, indicating concerns that P/CVE activities are viewed more as intelligence-gathering efforts than genuine peace-building interventions.

This mistrust has a direct impact on intelligence sharing. Community members are often hesitant to report suspicious activities due to fears of retaliation or profiling. Security agencies have observed that individuals with critical information are unwilling to come forward, and this undermines early warning systems and counterterrorism efforts. As a result, the lack of trust significantly hampers the effectiveness of these interventions.

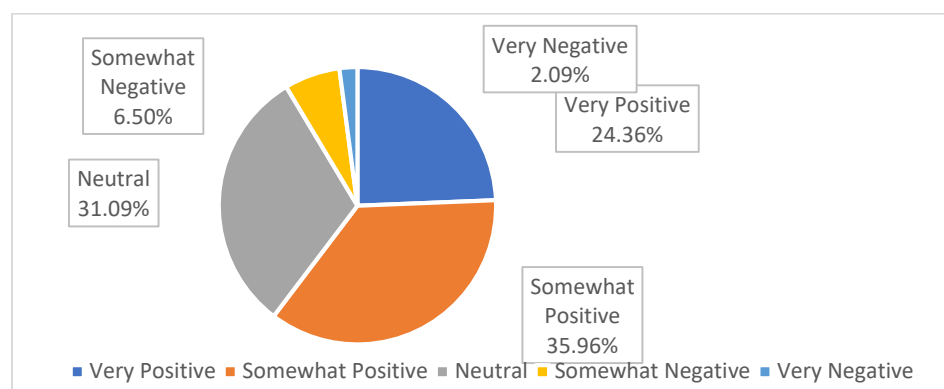
The relationship between security agencies and CSOs is also varied. CSOs frequently cite bureaucratic barriers, lack of transparency, and political interference as challenges to collaborating with the government. Conversely, local community members expressed concerns that CSOs' initiatives are donor-driven as opposed to the actual needs of the community. A respondent highlighted how donor-driven approaches can undermine the long-term sustainability and credibility of P/CVE interventions, suggesting that they often fail to resonate with local realities.

Notwithstanding these challenges, there have been positive strides in trust-building in Lamu County. Community policing (Mwangi, 2017), joint forums, and inter-agency partnerships have enhanced trust, enabling communities to feel more comfortable sharing information. Security officers underscore the importance of inclusive governance, transparent communication, and continuous feedback mechanisms to allow community voices to influence decision-making. These strategies have shown progress in building mutual trust, which is essential for the long-term success of P/CVE interventions.

Interfaith collaborations and cross-community dialogues have played an integral role in bridging differences, addressing historical grievances, and fostering collective solutions. When communities see tangible benefits such as improved security, economic opportunities, and social cohesion, trust in security agencies and their interventions increases, further reinforcing the effectiveness of P/CVE programmes.

Community perspectives of P/CVE interventions and programmes were mixed as indicated in Figure 1: 24% of respondents viewed the programmes as "Very Positive," 36% as "Somewhat Positive," and 31%

were neutral. Nevertheless, 6% and 2% viewed the programmes as "Somewhat Negative" and "Very Negative," respectively. These findings suggest that, although some respondents recognise progress in attitude and perception changes among Lamu residents toward P/CVE programs and improvements in reporting of violent extremist activities, others perceive the direct benefits as unclear, reinforcing concerns about inclusivity and unmet expectations.

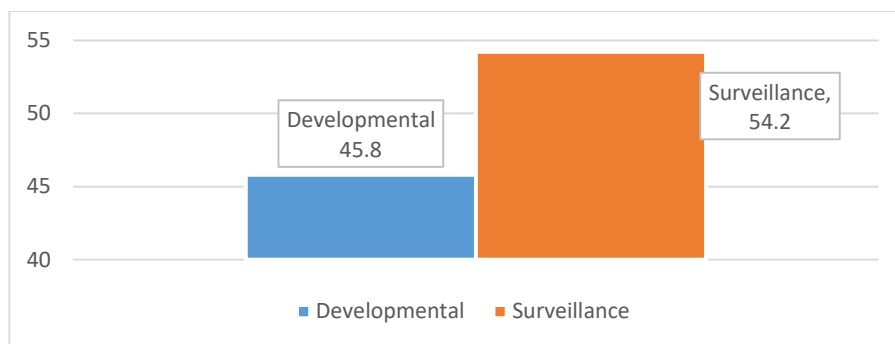


**Figure 1: Influence of Cultural Practices on the Success of P/CVE Programmes**

Among those with negative views, their frustrations were mainly unmet expectations and a perceived lack of inclusivity. Some community members voiced concerns that the same individuals repeatedly attended forums, limiting the diversity of representation. One participant remarked, *"It's the same faces at every meeting, while others never get invited."*

While mistrust remains a barrier, the research suggests that deliberate, inclusive, and transparent strategies are key to fostering genuine collaboration. Trust can only be built through consistent engagement, mutual respect, and shared goals for peace and security. Trust should not merely be an outcome of P/CVE initiatives, but a foundational component for long-term resilience and peace in Lamu County.

One of the most striking findings concerns perceptions of government-led programmes. As described in Figure 3 below, more than half of respondents (54.2%) described P/CVE as surveillance mechanisms rather than development initiatives. This perspective resonates with Botha and Abdile's (2017) conclusion that communities often interpret P/CVE through the lens of state repression, as well as Schmid's (2013) warning that interventions can inadvertently strengthen extremist narratives portraying the state as hostile. Social Exchange Theory helps explain this pattern: when individuals perceive the risks of engagement, such as profiling, harassment, or retaliation, to outweigh potential benefits, they disengage. Far from generating cooperation, security-heavy P/CVE can alienate the very communities it seeks to protect, echoing Bryden's (2014) critique of *Operation Linda Nchi* as a trigger for retaliatory violence rather than a sustainable solution.



**Figure 3: Community Perceptions of P/CVE Programmes**

### *Gendered exclusions*

Gender dynamics emerged as a critical yet under-addressed factor influencing the sustainability of P/CVE programmes in Lamu County. The study found that women remain largely excluded from both the design and implementation of counter-extremism efforts, despite their crucial roles in community cohesion, early warning systems, and youth mentorship. Interviews with local leaders and programme beneficiaries revealed that existing initiatives tend to focus on male youth, overlooking the nuanced vulnerabilities and contributions of women in both radicalisation and resilience-building processes.

Data from focus group discussions indicated that many women, particularly in rural parts of Lamu such as Faza and Hindi, expressed a willingness to engage in peace and security programs but cited cultural constraints, lack of formal representation, and limited access to decision-making spaces as persistent barriers. Moreover, women's religious and social roles place them in strategic positions to influence family and community values, a potential asset that remains underutilised in current P/CVE programming.

To ensure long-term sustainability, P/CVE strategies in Lamu must intentionally incorporate gender-sensitive approaches. These include empowering women as peace agents, training female religious leaders and educators, and creating safe platforms for their participation in community security dialogues. These steps also align with the National Strategy Countering Violent Extremism (NSCVE), which recognises the role of educating all individuals in the community with the necessary skills for CVE under Pillar 6 (Training & Capacity Building). Such initiatives are essential for strengthening community ownership and inclusive resilience.

### *Pathways toward sustainability*

Findings from across all stakeholder groups point toward several pathways for improving the long-term sustainability of P/CVE programmes in Lamu. First, linking peacebuilding with tangible socio-economic outcomes is essential. Respondents repeatedly cited vocational training, small business support, and youth mentoring as effective deterrents to radicalisation. These programmes resonate with the Theory of Change, which emphasises the link between empowerment and resilience.

Second, partnerships between government, civil society, and faith-based organisations must move beyond episodic coordination toward long-term collaboration. Regular inter-agency meetings, shared monitoring frameworks, and inclusive decision-making can help close the gap between awareness and ownership. Third, integrating traditional governance mechanisms such as elders' councils and inter-clan mediation can help resolve conflicts in culturally acceptable ways.

Finally, sustainability depends on perception management. When communities view P/CVE as an extension of national security rather than a shared social good, participation wanes. Shifting this narrative requires reframing programmes as locally owned, participatory, and developmental in orientation.

The findings reveal a recurring tension between formal frameworks and community realities. Awareness is widespread but shallow; institutional coordination is strong on paper but weak in practice; and while cultural and religious structures provide legitimacy, they remain underutilised. High awareness among state actors contrasts sharply with low community ownership, which many participants described as “*programmes for us, without us.*”

Sociocultural factors both enable and constrain sustainability: religious and traditional institutions foster trust and cohesion but can also entrench exclusionary practices. The persistence of gendered marginalisation, political mistrust, and economic inequality continues to erode the foundation of local resilience. Comparatively, Lamu’s experience mirrors trends in other coastal counties such as Mombasa and Kilifi but is distinct in its geographic isolation, ethnic diversity, and history of political neglect.

In theoretical terms, the Theory of Change underscores the need for locally grounded pathways from intervention to outcome, while Social Exchange Theory highlights that engagement must yield visible, reciprocal benefits to sustain participation. Together, they point to one central conclusion: sustainable P/CVE programming in Lamu County must evolve from a security-centric model to an inclusive, community-driven process that values culture, gender, and local ownership as the cornerstones of resilience.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation of P/CVE programmes in Lamu County demonstrates that while awareness of counter-extremism initiatives is high, genuine community ownership remains limited. This disconnect reflects a persistent imbalance between top-down state interventions and bottom-up community realities. The paper found that awareness alone does not ensure engagement; meaningful participation depends on whether communities perceive tangible social and economic value from their involvement. As Social Exchange Theory suggests, individuals and groups engage in cooperative behaviour when the perceived rewards, such as improved safety, trust, and opportunities, outweigh potential risks.

Socio-cultural and religious institutions continue to shape the effectiveness and legitimacy of P/CVE efforts in Lamu. Elders’ councils, mosque committees, and interfaith forums provide trusted entry points for peacebuilding but remain underused in formal programming. At the same time, restrictive traditions, gendered hierarchies, and generational divides can undermine inclusivity, especially for women and youth who are often excluded from decision-making despite their critical roles in early warning and resilience-building.

Community perceptions of P/CVE programmes reveal a complex duality: many residents support the idea of peace and coexistence but remain wary of state-led approaches that are perceived as securitised or externally imposed. This mistrust, rooted in historical grievances, economic marginalisation, and uneven development, continues to limit cooperation between communities and government agencies. Yet the emergence of community dialogue forums, women’s groups, and youth skill-building initiatives demonstrates that local actors can lead effective, culturally grounded peace interventions when adequately supported.

In theoretical terms, this article reaffirms that a theory of change rooted in local culture, intercultural dialogue, mutual trust, and visible benefits provides the most sustainable pathway for countering violent extremism. P/CVE interventions in Lamu must therefore transition from being primarily security-driven to becoming community-driven, focused and development-oriented. Sustainability depends not only on institutional coordination but also on whether interventions are embedded in the social fabric of Lamu County and responsive to its diverse cultural logic.

Ultimately, the findings emphasise that the future of peacebuilding in Lamu lies in a partnership between state institutions that provide resources and oversight and communities that supply legitimacy, trust, and local knowledge. Without this balance, P/CVE interventions risk remaining well-intentioned but ineffective.

### **Recommendations**

At a strategic level, national policymakers should institutionalise inclusive community consultations throughout all stages of intervention or programme design and implementation. This participatory approach can shift perceptions of P/CVE from externally imposed surveillance to community-owned initiatives. A clear communication framework embedded in the NSCVE is also important to consistently articulate objectives, benefits, and safeguards. Finally, security agencies must recalibrate their strategies by emphasising trust-based, community-centred engagement over coercion and suspicion, thereby strengthening cooperation, early-warning systems, and joint problem-solving.

Operationally, interventions should engage trusted local actors, particularly religious leaders, elders, women's groups, and youth organisations, who possess cultural legitimacy and social capital. Interventions must integrate economic empowerment through vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and youth employment to address the root causes of vulnerability. Security agencies require continuous training in cultural sensitivity and communication, while outreach campaigns should use local languages and narratives that resonate with women and youth. To avoid perceptions of external imposition, religious messaging should be co-created with local clerics. Civil society organisations need stronger capacity and autonomy, with simplified donor funding processes that reduce bureaucracy and protect independence.

While this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of how socio-cultural dynamics shape the effectiveness of P/CVE interventions in Lamu County, several areas require deeper investigation. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how community-led P/CVE initiatives evolve and whether early indicators of success, such as improved trust, reduced recruitment, or enhanced community participation, translate into sustained resilience. Current evaluations often capture short-term outcomes rather than long-term transformations. Longitudinal analysis would support evaluations on whether shifts in community attitudes, institutional collaboration, and gender inclusion persist beyond initial project cycles or donor funding periods.

Further research should assess the role of digital platforms and social media in radicalisation and counter-radicalisation within coastal Kenya. While this study focused on community-level interactions, emerging evidence suggests that online spaces are progressively influencing identity formation, recruitment, and political discourse among youth. Investigating how extremist narratives spread through Facebook, TikTok, or WhatsApp, alongside how local actors use these same platforms to promote peace and civic engagement, would provide valuable insights for designing more adaptive and youth-responsive P/CVE interventions.

Such studies could also assess digital literacy gaps and explore ways to integrate online counter-messaging into broader community peace-building frameworks.

Another critical area for future studies concerns the intersection of gender, religion, and culture in shaping women's participation in P/CVE. Although women in Lamu play an integral role in social cohesion and early warning systems, their participation remains restricted by cultural expectations and institutional exclusion. Future studies should explore innovative models for women's participation that respect cultural and religious norms while expanding opportunities for agency and leadership. This may require undertaking an ethnographic study on women's informal networks, intergenerational mentorship, and faith-based women's initiatives that quietly contribute to local resilience but remain under-documented. Additionally, comparative research in Kenya's coastal and border counties, such as Mombasa, Kilifi, Garissa, and Tana River, could illuminate how geography, migration, and governance influence P/CVE outcomes. Such comparative studies would help identify context-specific variables while highlighting scalable best practices.

Finally, there is a need for policy-oriented and participatory research that brings together scholars, practitioners, and communities to co-produce knowledge on P/CVE. Engaging communities not just as respondents but as research partners could amplify local ownership of findings and ensure that future interventions are grounded in lived realities rather than externally imposed assumptions.

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