



Studies in Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding

RESILIENCE, PEACEBUILDING, AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

**A COMPLEX SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE ON
SUSTAINING PEACE**

Edited by

Cedric de Coning, Rui Saraiva and Ako Muto



“To build future stability and security in a polarised and a fragmented world, we need not only warfighters but peacemakers. At the heart of effective governance is educating and training far reaching leaders to harness smart power, the integration of hard and soft power. To secure nations, this invaluable and timely book calls governments and partners to invest in social harmony, political stability, and economic prosperity.”

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Resilience, Peacebuilding, and Preventing Violent Extremism

This book offers a comprehensive analysis of the complex drivers of violent extremism, along with recommendations for strengthening social and institutional resilience through peacebuilding and development efforts.

By presenting a theoretical and empirical argument that places the emphasis on social cohesion, resilience, and adaptive peacebuilding, this book challenges the conventional security-led approach to countering violent extremism. Through a range of case studies from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, the Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Syria, it explores the complex dynamics of violent extremism and the ways in which it can be prevented and countered. Drawing on complexity theory and adaptive peacebuilding, the volume provides insights into how complex social systems adapt and respond to stress, and how peacebuilders can support societies in uncertain, volatile, and unpredictable contexts by improving their resilience and their adaptive capacity to sustain peace.

This book will be of much interest to students of peacebuilding, security studies and countering violent extremism, and professional practitioners.

Cedric de Coning is a Research Professor with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), based in Oslo, Norway. He is also a Senior Advisor for the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) in South Africa.

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A Complex Systems Perspective on Sustaining Peace

Edited by
Cedric de Coning, Rui Saraiva and
Ako Muto



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Foreword

The prevalence of violent extremism undermines the resilience and cohesion of the societies it affects. Violent extremism is closely associated with armed conflict and negatively impacts efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. When violence persists, it becomes difficult for international cooperation organizations engaged in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts to respond adequately to local needs. All of these would be obstacles to peace and prosperity.

This book is the culmination of a research project, “Resilience, Peacebuilding, and Preventing Violent Extremism: A Complex Systems Perspective on Sustaining Peace,” conducted by the JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development. While conventional responses to the rise of extremist armed groups often focus on military interventions, such measures may have been insufficient in addressing the root causes of violent extremism. This book examines the effectiveness of adopting more comprehensive approaches through peacebuilding efforts aimed at fostering social resilience and cohesion.

The book offers a nuanced and in-depth analysis, starting with a theoretical chapter followed by seven case studies covering Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. It also covers a wide range of issues, including climate change, complex conflict context, community-embeddedness, grassroots prevention, gender dynamics, individual and communal emotions, as well as the role of humanitarian and development agencies in preventing and countering violent extremism.

Local communities and their members have the best knowledge of their local context. Multilateral and bilateral institutions, as well as other actors engaged in peacebuilding, can make a significant contribution to promoting social cohesion and resilience by supporting such local initiatives. To this end, trust between external actors, parties to the conflict, as well as communities and their inhabitants, can be crucial for establishing or restoring resilient and cohesive societies.

As a bilateral international cooperation agency, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has supported the building of more resilient societies based on trust and social cohesion through cooperation in economic and social development and the promotion of the rule of law. In a broader sense, this approach has been derived from the concept of human security,

which the government of Japan has consistently included in its Development Cooperation Charter, making it a “guiding principle” for all its development cooperation. JICA has incorporated the concept of human security into its mission. Human security requires people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific, and prevention-oriented approaches that resonate with the peace-building approaches discussed in this book.

In an era of instability and uncertainty, the publication of this book is very timely. By synthesizing theoretical insights with lessons learned from case studies on preventing and countering violent extremism, it provides valuable perspectives for researchers, multilateral and bilateral institutions, and other actors. Ultimately, this book serves as a significant resource to explore potential pathways toward sustainable peace in the face of pervasive violent extremism.

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List of Abbreviations

AA	Australian Aid
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data
ADIN	Integrated Development Agency for the North
ADR	Alternative dispute resolution
ADS	Automated Directives System
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AIDS/HIV	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome/ human immunodeficiency virus
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AMISOM	African Mission in Somalia
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
ATC	Anti-Terrorism Council
ATMIS	African Transitional Mission in Somalia
AWG	Aluthgama Women's Group
BARM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
BBS	Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force)
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter
BTA	Bangsamoro Transition Authority
CDCS	Country Development and Cooperation Strategy
CIRCLE	Communities of Inclusion and Resilience through Collaborative Local Engagement
CNDH	Commission Nationale des Droits Humains (National Commission for Human Rights)
COIN	counterinsurgency
CORAGEM	Community Radio Assistance for Greater Empowerment of Mozambican Institutions
COVID-19	coronavirus-2019
CRS	Catholic Relief Services (Chapter 3)
CRS	Credit Reporting System (Chapter 4)
CSO	civil society organization
CT	counterterrorism
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism

DAI	Development Alternatives, Inc.
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EASP	Easter Attack Survivors Project
ECHO	European Commission. Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid Office
EPF	European Peace Facility
EU	European Union
EUTM	European Union Training Mission in Mozambique
FADM	Mozambique Defense Armed Forces
FAN	Forces armées nigériennes (Nigerian Armed Forces)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front
GCPEA	Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
HCK	Harmony Center in Kattankudi
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	internally displaced person
IED	improvised explosive device
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
INGOs	International Non-governmental Organizations
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IS	Islamic State
ISCAP	Islamic State Central Africa Province
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahel
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
ISSG	International Syria Support Group
ISSP	Islamic State Sahel Province
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
JAS	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin
JUD (JuD)	Jamaatud-Dawa
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
L-INGO	localized international non-governmental organization
LACU	Local Administration Councils Unit
LCs	local councils

LOGOS	Local Governance Strengthening
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam
MASC	Civil Society Support Mechanism
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MINUSMA	The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPA	New People's Army
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSC	National Security Council
NTJ	National Towheed Jamaat (National Monotheism Organization)
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEV – Iraq	Observatory for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Iraq
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PC	presidential committee
PCoI	Presidential Commission of Inquiry
PFOK	Peace and Freedom Organization in Kurdistan
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PRCD	Reconstruction Plan for Cabo Delgado
PREDIN	Resilience and Integrated Development Program for Northern Mozambique
PRWG	Peace and Reconciliation Working Group
PSC	Parliamentary Select Committee
PSOs	Private Security Organizations
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Kurdish Democratic Union Party)
REAJIR	Strengthened Investigative Journalism in Natural Resources Management and Other Economic Governance Issues
RDF	Rwanda Defense Force
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
RJF	Rwanda National Police Joint Force
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAMIM	Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique
SARS-CoV-2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces (Chapter 4)
SDF	Security and Defense Forces (Chapter 6)
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
SNA	Syrian National Army

SNTs	Station Network Technicians
SRTF	Syria Recovery Trust Fund
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TAF	The Asia Foundation
UN	United Nations
UN CAAC	United Nations Children and Armed Conflict Office
UN DPPA	United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
UN RBAS	United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Arab States
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNITAD	United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by ISIS
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
UNSOM	United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia
UPP	Un Ponte Per (Eng. "A Bridge to," an Italy-based humanitarian organization)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID/ OTI	United States Agency for International Development/ Office of Transition Initiatives
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
VDOs	Village Development Organizations
VE	violent extremism
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Defense Units)



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1 Introduction

Linking Resilience, Peacebuilding, and Preventing Violent Extremism

Cedric de Coning, Rui Saraiva and Ako Muto

1.1 Introduction

It is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain peace and achieve sustainable development on a global scale. After decades of progress toward global peace since the end of the Cold War, over the last decade, both the number and intensity of conflicts have increased. Old conflicts have flared up while new conflicts have emerged. In Africa, violent conflict has increased across all five regions, especially in the areas around Lake Chad, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. In 2022, the highest number of conflict-related deaths globally was recorded in Ethiopia. In Asia and the Middle East, armed conflicts include Myanmar, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Gaza. Europe witnessed wars in Ukraine and in the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Obermeier and Rustad 2023).

The reasons for the increase in the number and intensity of armed conflicts over the last decade are complex and multifaceted, but two macro-drivers stand out, namely the increasing power rivalry occurring in the context of the changing global order and the compounding effects of climate change (United Nations Secretary-General 2022; Black et al. 2022). Several of the recent armed conflicts are also associated with the rise of violent extremism. Preventing and managing violent extremism is the focus of this volume.

According to the 2015 *UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* (A/70/674), interventions should aim at addressing the root causes and drivers of violent extremism, including, among other factors, lack of socio-economic opportunities, marginalization, and discrimination, poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law, prolonged and unresolved conflict, and radicalization in prisons (UN 2015, 7). The General Assembly's seventh review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/75/291) (UN 2015) also underlined that the COVID-19 pandemic enabled violent groups to radicalize and recruit new members and incite more attacks (UN 2021, 2). It recognized that international cooperation to prevent violent extremism and promote inclusive and resilient societies requires a comprehensive approach and multidimensional strategy, as well as a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach (UN 2021, 2). The eighth review of the United Nations

Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/77/298) reaffirms the importance of building inclusive, open, and resilient societies (UN 2023, 2). The strategy emphasizes the need for local ownership of peacebuilding and the prevention or countering of violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts, acknowledging that solutions should be locally owned (UN 2023, 3–4). The review also recognizes the crucial role of women in the design, implementation, and monitoring of P/CVE actions (4). Finally, the report highlights the importance of national, regional, and international partnerships to foster inclusive and sustainable responses to violent extremism (UN 2023, 20–21).

At the global-policy level, it is thus acknowledged that there are no military-only solutions to violent extremist insurgencies. It is broadly recognized that security force actions can disrupt extremist insurgencies and create opportunities for stabilization, but if those opportunities are not used to address the drivers of the conflict—through political, governance, peacebuilding, and development interventions—then the opportunity for sustainable peace will be lost and the conflict will most likely continue. Yet, actual national and international responses to violent extremist insurgencies across the globe are typically security-led and enemy-focused. And if they do include development and peacebuilding dimensions, then these are typically framed as complementary dimensions to a security-dominated counter-insurgency strategy.

We thus find ourselves with a significant gap between prevailing practice and global policy. International policy and guidance promote comprehensive approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism that prioritize resilience and peacebuilding. In practice, however, states and some multilateral organizations still favor and support security-led interventions. This book aims to address this dichotomy by providing both a theoretical basis and empirical evidence for why resilience and peacebuilding-led comprehensive approaches (including those that incorporate security actions) are more effective in preventing and managing violent extremism than security-led and enemy-focused approaches. In this book, the core distinction between these two approaches is that a security-led approach is typically focused on an identifiable enemy group, such as Al Shabaab, Boko Haram or ISIS, and is aimed at disrupting and neutralizing the threat they pose to people and the state. A resilience and peacebuilding-informed comprehensive approach would typically see such groups as symptomatic of a wider set of grievances and drivers. Therefore, in addition to countering the insecurity caused by these groups, this alternative approach would focus its primary efforts on addressing these drivers and grievances in the medium to long term while also aiming to strengthen communities and build societal and institutional resilience to cope with their negative effects in the short to medium term.

1.2 The Challenge of Defining Violent Extremism in International Politics

The term “violent extremism” (VE) is widely used across various domains, including academia and policymaking, yet lacks a standardized definition

(UN 2015; Davies, Wu, and Frank 2021). Its use in international peace and security discourses has been influenced by a myriad of perceptions while also being subject to political and interpretative biases (Bak, Tarp, and Schori Liang 2019). Although various national, regional, and international actors undertake policy initiatives to address VE, there is no international consensus on its meaning (McNeil-Willson and Triandafyllidou 2023). However, the 2015 United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (UN 2015, 1–4) introduced initial conceptual references highlighting that VE is a “complex phenomenon” that “undermines collective efforts toward maintaining peace and security, fostering sustainable development, and protecting human rights.” The UN also refrains from setting a definitive delineation of the concept, acknowledging the diverse interpretations among member-states (UN 2015, 2). UNESCO (2017, 18) also noted that the inconsistencies not only stem from contextualized definitions but also from their “translation.” When translated into another language, VE may acquire “new or nuanced meanings that increase the potential for cross-cultural misunderstandings.” This fragmentation of interpretations has resulted in the concept of VE becoming the subject of manipulation and politically motivated understandings (Bak, Tarp, and Schori Liang 2019; Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown 2020).

A variety of definitions and categorizations of VE can also be found in academic debates. In addition to defining VE based on its objectives and tactics, scholars also proposed defining it in terms of its behavior and ideology (Wintrobe 2006, 84; Eatwell and Goodwin 2012, 11), asserting that VE occurs when these aspects converge. The debate extends to differentiating state-backed VE from other forms, drawing the line between extremist and legitimate entities, and attempting to verify the nature of VE as either ideological, criminal, or aimless (Glazzard and Zeuthen 2016). A further dilemma in its conceptualization is the fact that the term VE is often used interchangeably with terms like terrorism and radicalization (Striegher 2015; Frazer and Nünlist 2015). Nasser-Eddine et al. (2011, 5) stated that VE was substituted to avoid the “politically-charged notion of terrorism,” as early studies on terrorism often centered on Muslim communities and identities. The problem with terms shifting and being redefined is that they are often misused so widely and arbitrarily, as with VE and terrorism. For example, Christodoulou and Nesterova (2021) highlighted that what sets VE apart from other forms of violence is that it usually occurs within the broader context of how violent extremists view the world. It is driven by a perspective often different from what most people believe (Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown 2020, 30; Schirch 2018).

The challenge of defining VE in academia is also a consequence of how research is framed and operationalized, as well as how complex contexts are understood. Powers et al. (2023, 2) note that the “frailties of knowledge on VE can be traced back to how problems are constructed at the onset of investigative processes.” They argued that scholars who study VE set out to

answer questions that aim to explain why it happens—essentially, trying to find general patterns in events that are very rare, vary in time and place, and result from complex combinations of causes. This makes any research endeavor extremely challenging, and many researchers struggle to find definitive answers. However, there is a consensus in academia that VE is related to actions that support and legitimize violence to meet social, economic, political, or religious objectives (Christodoulou and Nesterova 2021). McNeil-Willson and Triandafyllidou (2023, 17–21) provide three classifications of VE: 1) the construction of exclusivist in-groups which sit at odds with out-groups; 2) the use of anti-democratic and anti-pluralist ideologies; 3) and the advocating of the use of force or violence, largely by non-state actors, or those lacking state legitimacy—sometimes referred to as “irregular actors.”

In international politics, a relative consensus at the conceptual level seems to emerge around the idea of VE as entities or individuals adopting radical ideologies and radical methods to advance them, e.g., terrorism or insurgencies (USAID 2011; UN 2015; UNSC 2015; ICRC 2017). Similar to the academic analyses, there is also some emerging consensus on VE drivers being multifaceted, often rooted in personal or societal grievances, including economic deprivation, discrimination, weak governance, human rights abuses, protracted and recurring conflicts, and radicalization in detention facilities (UN 2015, 6–8; UNODC 2018). VE remains a highly subjective concept and is highly susceptible to politicization. The main actors in international politics today largely agree that VE negatively impacts fragile contexts on matters related to peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, and humanitarian assistance. It appears, however, that current responses to VE tend to focus primarily on reacting to the symptoms—through militarized actions and force—rather than prevention that aims to influence the underlying drivers of VE through, for example, education, youth empowerment, and sustainable development. Security-first and enemy-centric approaches are still prevalent. Often there are attempts to combine both dimensions—preventing and countering—but there do not seem to be many examples of this being implemented effectively. This book addresses the need to develop and implement policies and programs that address VE with holistic and locally owned approaches.

1.3 From Countering to Preventing Violent Extremism: Shifting Policy Paradigms in the Quest for Effectiveness

Over the past decades, VE policy discourses have undergone significant changes. A key early development of this process was the formulation of the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) approach, which gained increased political attention following the 9/11 attack in New York and the United States-led Global War on Terror that followed. Over time, CVE evolved from a direct association with counterterrorism—a securitized concept—to an understanding that encompasses many aspects of prevention and risk

reduction (Bak, Tarp, and Schori Liang 2019). There has been a convergence of security and prevention actions in both literature and practice, leading to the concept of Prevention or Countering of Violent Extremism (P/CVE). Under this umbrella term, a broad range of tools, including counter-insurgency and counterterrorism methods, as well as prevention strategies, are encompassed (Stephens, Sieckelinck, and Boutellier 2021).

A primary objective of P/CVE is to deactivate radicalization, inoculate individuals and communities against extremist tendencies, and prevent these phenomena from escalating into forms of violence, such as terrorism and extremist insurgency. A vast body of academic literature has emerged endorsing the P/CVE agenda in recent years. Following Herzog-Evans and Benbouriche's (2019) evidence-based work on VE and terrorism in France, Williams (2020) explored the design and evaluation of evidence-based P/CVE programs. Other studies examined the relationship between P/CVE, development, and humanitarian programs (Aall and Snodderly 2021), using empirical analysis through case studies (Glazzard et al. 2017; Khalil and Zeuthen 2014), and gender approaches (Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown 2020).

Instead of focusing on the idea of change through military operations and coercive methods, the concept of P/CVE emphasizes the need to intervene at the baseline and address the social, political, and economic concerns of vulnerable groups. PVE has been defined as the "efforts to influence individual and/or 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, Sieckelinck, and Boutellier 2021, 347). In contrast to hard-security or militarized approaches, preventive approaches directly address socio-economic grievances through ongoing dialogue, participation, and community-based initiatives (Baak et al. 2022). Because CVE has been widely criticized as extending security agendas into fields such as health, social work, and education, PVE approaches have emerged largely in order to avoid stigmatizing vulnerable groups at risk of radicalization, such as Muslim communities in affected areas (Awan 2012).

Considering the current spectrum of approaches to address violent extremism—from countering to preventive approaches—the international policy community seems to recognize that there are no military-only solutions to deal with violent extremist insurgencies. Security actions can disrupt extremist insurgencies and create stabilization opportunities. However, if these opportunities are not used to address the factors that contribute to conflict—by also engaging in peace and development interventions—the opportunity will be lost, leading to further political violence. As a result, PVE programs are increasingly taking resilience and peacebuilding into account for the long-term protection of communities affected by VE (Bak, Tarp, and Schori Liang 2019, 3; Stephens, Sieckelinck, and Boutellier 2021, 354). In this context, this book explores the integration of resilience and peacebuilding into P/CVE programs and discourses. It explores holistic methods for preventing violent extremism through peacebuilding and sustainable development.

1.4 Linking Resilience, Social Cohesion, and Adaptive Peacebuilding to Preventing Violent Extremism in Complex Systems

The concept of resilience is widely used in the peace and development literature as an umbrella term for a society's ability to cope with adversity. Resilience refers to how well a system—ranging from an ecosystem to a social system in a community—can deal with shocks and setbacks (de Coning 2021). As a result, resilience is closely related to characteristics such as adaptiveness and flexibility. The more adaptive a society is, the more resilient it will be during times of crisis (de Coning 2021, 17). By linking resilience to peacebuilding and PVE, we may gain a better understanding of how societies can strengthen their resilience to prevent or cope with VE (Juline Beaujouan et al. 2023). Recent scholarship on the interlinkages between resilience and peacebuilding includes research by Chandler (2014), Ungar (2021), Juncos (2018), and de Coning (2021).

In addition, insights from complexity theory broaden the knowledge base, informing practitioners on what they can and cannot do to enhance the link between resilience, peacebuilding, and preventing violent extremism:

Societies, or social systems, are empirically complex. This means that they demonstrate the ability to adapt, and that they have emergent properties, including self-organizing behavior. As social systems are highly dynamic, non-linear, and emergent, it is not possible to find general laws or rules that will help us predict with certainty, how a particular society or community will behave

(de Coning 2020, 2).

According to this understanding of complex systems, the need for context-specific initiatives and the recognition of a continuous environment of uncertainty informs the way peace practitioners should approach initiatives aimed at helping societies prevent or manage VE. A connection can also be drawn between complexity theory and the Anthropocene (Smith-Nonini 2017), a period in geological time during which human activity has come to dominate the processes and changes that occur on Earth (Dalby et al. 2009; Grove and Chandler 2017; Simangan 2021). The Anthropocene discourse recognizes that social and ecological systems are interlinked and that changes in one part of a system—for example, global warming—can manifest in ways that have compounding and cascading effects on other parts of these interlinked systems, for instance on competition over increasingly scarce resources. In the context of PVE, the best way to manage the peace and security-related risks that may emerge from these complex interlinkages is to take a broad and holistic “whole-of-system” approach to conflict analysis. It should not be limited to traditional political analysis but also take into account livelihoods, mobility and other factors that are recognized as pathways through which climate change and related factors may influence peace and security (de Coning 2021; McCandless and Simpson 2015; Van Metre and Calder 2016).

A further complementary approach for coping with this complexity is to use inductive rather than deductive methods for making sense of highly dynamic and unpredictable phenomena. In other words, instead of relying on preconceived models or so-called best practices, this approach is based on context-specific and adaptive approaches to learning from experience. Adaptive peacebuilding is informed by concepts derived from complexity theory, resilience, and local ownership. Adaptive peacebuilding is a pragmatic approach where peacebuilders and communities affected by conflict actively engage in a structured process of learning and sense-making based on the feedback generated by probing and experimental action. This framework relies on an iterative peacebuilding process of experimentation, learning, and adaptation. Contrary to peacebuilding projects planned according to the pre-existing norms and beliefs of external peacebuilders, adaptive peacebuilding aims to enable local societies to develop their own institutions and political and judicial systems aligned with their own history, culture, and context. Therefore, adaptive peacebuilding approaches highlight context-specific local solutions. International actors have a role, if requested, in process facilitation. Thus, adaptive peacebuilding is described as an iterative process of experimentation, learning, and adaptation that is home-grown, self-emergent, and locally owned and led. This approach holds better possibilities for producing long-lasting and self-sustaining results, as it is more attuned to the context of each conflict situation. Adaptive peacebuilding draws from complexity theory and the concept of resilience to understand how social systems evolve and cope with adversity, such as armed conflicts and encounters with VE. From this rationale, the goal of peacebuilding may be perceived as helping social systems prevent conflict, develop resilient institutions, and stimulate processes conducive to peace (de Coning, Saraiva, and Muto 2023).

If we take the emerging concept of *adaptive peacebuilding* into account, resilience building brings the focus of peacebuilding and P/CVE practitioners to strengthening the resilience and social cohesion of communities and societies that may be affected by violence. Social cohesion can be defined as both horizontal and vertical trust between society and the public. As part of a shared value system, horizontal trust refers to the quality of relationships between various groups and communities in a society. The concept of vertical trust refers to trust between individuals, groups, communities, and the state. To influence a community or society in all its dimensions is a complex undertaking, and even more so when involving stakeholders at local and global scales. Thus, resilience, when linked to adaptive peacebuilding and social cohesion, provides an informative conceptual framework that enhances coherence and coordination between peacebuilding and P/CVE practitioners and a mindset geared to self-sustainable peace.

1.5 The Structure of the Book

Based on a three-year research project conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development, this book attempts to achieve two main objectives:

- 1 Develop a theory of change that explains how peacebuilding and development efforts that contribute to strengthening community, societal and institutional resilience help in preventing and countering violent extremism.
- 2 Consider how peacebuilding and resilience-informed comprehensive approaches can serve as a framework for helping multilateral and bilateral agencies and other relevant actors to contribute more effectively to sustaining peace in regions affected by armed conflict and violent extremism.

In order to achieve these objectives, this book introduces a theoretical framework and examines seven case studies (see Table 1.1). As part of this research, we explored systematic evidence and analyses regarding the causes and consequences of extremist violence, as well as the role that peacebuilding and resilience play in preventing and countering violent extremism. Each case study chapter responds to common research questions from a different angle and represents a different aspect of a comprehensive and holistic approach to P/CVE.

The originality of this research project draws on the theoretical framework presented in the theory chapter and the primary data collected by experts in various academic fields and presented in seven case studies across three regions—Africa, Asia, and the Middle East—and several countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, the Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Syria. In addition to the geographic scope of the research, seven key thematic areas are explored in this book, following the theory of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) by strengthening social cohesion and resilience with an adaptive peacebuilding approach: 1) community-embedded and grassroots prevention, 2) PVE in the context of the complex conflict, 3) social cohesion, 4) PVE from a gender perspective, 5) mental health and PVE, 6) the role of development agencies and development assistance in PVE, and 7) environmental peacebuilding. The selection of thematic areas results from a shared recognition of the research problem, objectives and background described above.

The study is grounded in a complexity theory-informed adaptive peacebuilding approach to preventing and countering violent extremism using peacebuilding interventions to help strengthen community resilience. The theoretical approach presented in Chapter 2 is then analyzed, tested, and further developed through the seven case studies. The case studies comprise an analysis of the multifaceted nature of efforts and challenges to P/CVE and sustainable peace at the level of the international community, governments, and the local

Table 1.1 Common Research Framework

<i>Research problem</i>	<i>Ineffective (security-led) local to global responses to violent extremism</i>
Main research question	Are resilience and peacebuilding-informed comprehensive responses more effective than security-led responses in preventing violent extremism and sustaining peace, and if so, how?
Case study sub-research questions and approaches for case-study authors	Analyze and compare the theory of change of one or more security-led efforts with one or more resilience and peacebuilding-informed comprehensive approaches to prevent and counter violent extremism in your particular case. What are the intended and unintended effects of security-led vs. resilience and peacebuilding-led responses to violent extremism in your case? Can you explain why some approaches have been more effective than others, taking short-, medium- and longer-term effects into account? How coherent, synergetic, and complementary are international, national, and local efforts to combine and coordinate security, resilience, and peacebuilding responses to preventing and countering violent extremism in your case? Can you identify examples of more or less synergy, and if so, can you identify reasons why this is the case?
Theoretical chapter	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism by Strengthening Social Cohesion and Resilience: An Adaptive Peacebuilding approach
Case Studies Chapters	Building Resilience Amid Fear: From State to Community-Embedded Prevention in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in the Complex Context of the Syrian Conflict Reconciliation and Social Cohesion in the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Complex Systems: Iraq as a Case Study Intersecting Gender in Community Resilience to Violent Extremism: Local Actors' Perspectives in Niger “When there are many saying the same thing that I am saying, I feel less afraid to speak up”: Emotions, Resilience and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka The Role of Development Agencies in Fostering Resilience to Violent Extremism: The Case of Mindanao, the Philippines Climate Change, Environmental Peacebuilding, and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
Research Findings and Policy Recommendations	

communities and individuals that make up the community. Due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and the security situation, some case studies benefitted from field research while others relied on remote methods. Each researcher used interdisciplinary qualitative and quantitative methods adequate to the context of each case study and the related research questions. The general

methodologies used include semi-structured interviews (remote or on the ground), key informant interviews (remote or on the ground), focus-group discussions (remote or on the ground), participant observation, database analysis and surveys, and text analysis, discourse analysis, and media analysis.

In Chapter 2, Cedric de Coning and Kari Osland explore the interconnected roles of social cohesion and resilience within the wider context of peacebuilding to prevent and counter violent extremism. They apply complexity theory to understand how social systems respond to disruptions and advocate for adaptive peacebuilding as a strategy to enhance societal resilience and adaptive capacity. The authors emphasize the importance of community involvement in P/CVE initiatives, warning against over-securitized responses that fail to address the root causes of extremism. They argue for a comprehensive approach that strengthens social cohesion and resilience while transforming the political and socio-economic conditions to sustain peace.

In Chapter 3, Rui Saraiva explores the complex interplay between historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, and the emergence of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. The author highlights the ineffectiveness of predominant security-centric responses and advocates for community-embedded and preventive approaches that prioritize local socio-economic development through participatory and inclusive methods. While strengthening and building the resilience of those most affected by violent extremism is found to be effective, the focus is also placed on the importance of the local ownership of prevention and on leveraging the deep-rooted knowledge of community actors to effectively address extremist narratives and establish new pathways to sustaining peace in the region.

In Chapter 4, Ako Muto analyzes the responses and challenges to the rise, fall, and situation after the fall of ISIS within the context of the Syrian conflict. Muto examines the effectiveness of preventing and countering VE and explores the complexities of building resilience and peace in a protracted conflict environment. The chapter highlights the importance of humanitarian assistance and the necessity of support extending beyond humanitarian assistance. It also explores the challenges of reconstruction in post-ISIS Syria, including the reintegration of former ISIS members from around 60 countries. As a means of addressing VE's economic and social drivers and supporting sustainable peace and governance, Muto calls for a comprehensive approach that combines security operations, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and resilience-building.

In Chapter 5, Just Castillo Iglesias analyzes the case of post-ISIS Iraq, focusing on the challenges to peacebuilding and the importance of social cohesion and reconciliation. He emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to address the underlying causes of violent extremism, highlighting the limitations of military and security-focused responses. Iglesias argues for community-led, inclusive, and comprehensive approaches, integrating the roles of education, governance, equality of opportunities, security, justice, and reconciliation to foster resilience and prevent a resurgence of extremism. Throughout his work, he depicts a complex web of societal fractures that must be navigated to address VE and sustain peace in Iraq effectively.

In Chapter 6, Laura Berlingozzi addresses the issue of community resilience to violent extremism in Niger with a focus on gender dynamics. She analyzes how local civil society, particularly women's organizations, perceive, reshape, and contribute to initiatives aimed at resilience and peacebuilding. Berlingozzi emphasizes the need for grassroots-level intervention strategies that acknowledge the limitations of standard, security-focused responses and instead highlight the need for a bottom-up approach to address VE. This approach prioritizes local socio-economic development and empowerment, especially for women, in the broader context of preventing and countering violent extremism.

In Chapter 7, Udeni Appuhamilage explores the critical role of emotions in resilience and peacebuilding in post-conflict Sri Lanka. She examines how emotional experiences, particularly among women, influence community resilience and the peacebuilding process. Appuhamilage emphasizes the need for emotional healing and psychosocial support in conflict-affected communities, arguing that acknowledging and addressing the emotional impact of conflict is essential for building sustainable peace and preventing the recurrence of violence. Her analysis highlights the intersection of emotional well-being, resilience, and peacebuilding, as well as the importance of integrating these aspects into post-conflict recovery strategies.

In Chapter 8, Miyoko Taniguchi focuses on the role of development agencies in fostering resilience to violent extremism in Mindanao, Philippines. The chapter examines the implementation of the Communities of Inclusion and Resilience through Collaborative Local Engagement (CIRCLE) project by the Asia Foundation, funded by the Australian government. Taniguchi highlights the importance of participatory, resilience-based approaches in contrast to conventional, security-based methods. The chapter details how CIRCLE enhanced local government capacity, promoted community inclusion, and strengthened resilience against violent extremism through collaborative and adaptive strategies, emphasizing the need for development agencies to support such comprehensive and context-specific approaches.

In Chapter 9, Florian Krampe and Cedric de Coning examine the role of environmental peacebuilding in addressing the nexus of climate change and violent extremism. They highlight how climate change exacerbates conflict by increasing competition over resources while offering new opportunities for building peace through shared resource management. The authors emphasize the need for incorporating climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies into peacebuilding initiatives, underscoring that environmental peacebuilding can help communities adapt to climate change, thereby reducing the risk of violent extremism by strengthening social cohesion and resilience.

1.6 Conclusions

This edited volume is designed to bridge theory, evidence-based research, and practices on the ground concerning contemporary responses to VE. Emerging international public policies increasingly recognize the limitations of hard-

security approaches and call for holistic strategies that focus on building the resilience of societies through peacebuilding and sustainable development. Yet, in many conflict-affected regions, actions continue to be dominated by security-led responses. This book provides a theoretical foundation and evidenced-based research findings and recommendations across seven empirical case studies that collectively argue for comprehensive and holistic approaches that address the underlying grievances and drivers of violent extremism. The book emphasizes the importance of adaptive peacebuilding and context-specific, locally owned, and inclusive approaches. These approaches need the support of international, regional, and national actors, but they should be tailored to the needs of local communities and include adaptive measures to promote effective governance, the rule of law, social cohesion and human security. They should also involve the active participation of women and marginalized groups, as well as a range of stakeholders, including security, humanitarian, peace and development partners.

This book also calls for a paradigm shift in VE responses, from excessive militarization to comprehensive and holistic measures, and from countering immediate threats to addressing the long-term root causes that give rise to violent extremism. To achieve this, it is essential for humanitarian, development, and peace practitioners to develop context-specific programs suited to regions where violent extremism takes place and to foster flexibility to adapt strategies and interventions in a continuously changing environment, together with and in support of the affected communities. Throughout the book chapters, the authors emphasize the importance of women, youth, and community leaders in shaping P/CVE initiatives. They also highlight the need for more participatory processes, and for interventions that are integrated, sustained, and driven by the communities they aim to serve.

Finally, this book also calls for a re-evaluation of how international cooperation and partnerships are structured and implemented in the context of P/CVE. It stresses the need for international actors to support local efforts without imposing external agendas. It encourages development agencies to further embrace and integrate concepts such as resilience-building, human security, and social cohesion, as well as climate adaptation strategies as part of their core intervention strategies. As the case studies demonstrate, when local communities are supported in a way that allows them to leverage their inherent strengths and address their specific challenges, the potential for sustainable peace increases. This core idea links resilience, adaptive peacebuilding and prevention of violent extremism in an age of ongoing volatility and uncertainty.

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2 Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism by Strengthening Social Cohesion and Resilience

An Adaptive Peacebuilding Approach

Cedric de Coning and Kari Osland

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the theoretical framework for understanding the roles that social cohesion and resilience can play as part of a comprehensive peacebuilding approach to prevent and counter violent extremism (VE) sustainably. The chapter starts by introducing key concepts, exploring the links and pathways through which these concepts are interconnected. The chapter then introduces complexity theory as an analytical tool for helping us understand how complex social systems adapt to shocks and stress. Thirdly, the chapter introduces adaptive peacebuilding as a guiding framework for peacebuilders seeking to play a role in helping societies increase their societal resilience and adaptive capacity. Finally, the chapter discusses resilience while cautioning against unintended consequences before summarizing the key arguments in the conclusion.

The concept of VE is complex and multifaceted, defined differently depending on the discipline and field of the researchers (Schmid and Jongman 1983; Pisoiu and Hain 2017; Juline Beaujouan et al. 2023). What most of the current research has in common, however, is that it centers on understanding terrorist groups and exploring their personal backgrounds and motivations (Kepel 2005; Lia 2005; Neumann 2006; Hegghammer 2010; Lacroix 2011; Byman 2015; Hegghammer and Nesser 2015; Roy 2017). Some researchers understand VE by focusing on the extremist part, which is understood as “*political ideas* that are diametrically opposed to a society’s core values” (Neumann 2013, 874). A challenge with this definition is that what is perceived as extremist in one society may not be perceived as such in another, underlying the highly context-dependent nature of the phenomenon. Others understand VE as a way of acting, focusing on violence as a means rather than having a particular extreme view (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2021, 347). Yet others understand it as membership in an organization that perpetrates acts characterized as “terrorist” (Assanvo et al. 2019, 2). However, terrorist violence is neither unique to groups (whether left- or right-wing), nor individuals carrying out “lone-wolf” attacks (Kalyvas 2018, 41). The motives behind the use of violence vary, but on a generic level, it is claimed that

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violence is primarily a way of communicating, where often the sovereignty of the state is challenged with competitive state-building projects (de la Calle and Sanches-Cuenca 2011). As pointed out by Vigh (2020, 3), the term VE “is almost by default linked to religious and ideological fanaticism, just as it is tied to indiscriminate and disproportionate ways of conducting warfare.” We understand VE as violence justified or in pursuit of some sort of political or religious agenda (Bøås et al. forthcoming).

2.1.2 Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is understood as both horizontal and vertical trust. Horizontal trust refers to the quality of the relationships between different groups and communities in a society, i.e., the extent to which there is mutual respect, cooperation and peace-positive co-existence as part of a shared value system and national identity. Groups may self-identify as different from others based on ethnicity, religion, language, or other such shared characteristics. Vertical trust refers to trust between people, groups, communities and the state. This understanding is inspired by Chan, To, and Chan (2006, 290), who defines social cohesion as a “state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestations.” Analytical use of the concept can be traced back to Emile Durkheim, who argued that social cohesion is founded on organic and mechanical solidarity, referring to “access to formal economic and governmental conditions” and “access to family and community-based, face-to-face relations,” respectively (Duhaime et al. 2004, 301).

2.1.2 Resilience

Resilience will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter, but to introduce the concept from the outset, we can note that resilience has been understood as the capacity of a system to sustain its core function, structure, and identity despite disruptions and shocks (Walker et al. 2004). However, this definition has been criticized for being overly influenced by how physical objects respond to stress, for example, the way a ball will return to its original shape after being squeezed. This has resulted in an over-emphasis on the importance of sustaining the status quo, i.e., framing resilience as bouncing back to its original shape or form after a disturbance. A new generation of resilience scholars who think of resilience in the context of socio-ecological systems define resilience in ways that leave more room for adaptation and transformation. For example, Folke (2016, 3) defines resilience as “the ability of people, communities, societies, and cultures to live and develop with change in ever-changing environments.” Another example is Krause (2018, 20), who uses the resilience lens to show “how individual and collective

agency enables community adaptation to mitigate vulnerability and sustain prevention.” For the purposes of this book, we understand resilience in its most basic form as a set of capabilities that enables a community or society to *adapt* to changes in their environment. The extent of the adaptation—which can in some contexts include transformation and adoption of new functions and structures—will depend on the context. However, in the context of VE, there is a need to not only adapt but also reduce vulnerabilities and protect. This leads us to the concept of peacebuilding.

2.1.3 *Peacebuilding*

For the purposes of this book, we understand peacebuilding as a set of actions undertaken by a variety of actors across multiple scales (community, provincial, national, regional, and international) with the aim of assisting communities, societies, and institutions in a given context to sustain peace despite being at risk of, or having been affected by, VE. Peacebuilding attempts to assist societies and their institutions to prevent and mitigate these risks. We will argue that a community or society is resilient when, under stress from VE, it is able to reduce potential vulnerabilities or risk factors and, at the same time, promote protective experiences or conditions (Ellis and Abdi 2017). Hence, one of the objectives of peacebuilding in environments facing challenges of VE is to assist those affected in strengthening those factors that boost societal resilience, including social cohesion, and to weaken the drivers of VE.

The poor success rate of stabilization and counterinsurgency campaigns is partly because these approaches have tended to focus too much on the security dimension of the problem. A security-led approach to preventing VE is typically focused on an identifiable aggressor, such as al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin, or Islamic State in the Greater Sahel (ISGS) and is aimed at disrupting and neutralizing the threat they pose to people and the state. Identifying and deterring the threat posed by such actors may be necessary, but it is not sufficient. The challenge with a securitized approach in itself is that it fails to take into account that VE and insurgencies are symptoms of underlying causes such as social, political, and economic inequality, marginalization, and exclusion. Without transforming these drivers of conflict, there can be no sustainable peace.

In contrast, a peacebuilding-informed approach contextualizes the emergence of such groups as symptomatic of a more comprehensive set of grievances and conflict drivers. Thus, in this book, we foreground a peacebuilding approach that recognizes that managing the insecurity caused by VE is necessary but insufficient and that the broader socio-political system needs to be transformed to sustain peace. This is why we have an interest in how complex social systems manage to sustain themselves under pressure. We will introduce and discuss the relevance of complexity theory in the next section, but first, we will round up this conceptual section by looking into how these concepts relate to each other.

2.1.4 The Theory of Change

How do these concepts—violent extremism, social cohesion, resilience, and peacebuilding—relate to each other? To be explicit about our underlying assumptions, we share our understanding of the pathways through which they are interconnected, both in terms of how VE comes about and how it can be prevented, countered, and eventually overcome.

Societies face stress from exogenous factors like climate change, global economic disparities, and geopolitical rivalries, as well as endogenous challenges such as weak or no state governance, social inequality, discrimination, poverty, and political exclusion. These interconnected factors create compounded risks, escalating into multidimensional challenges. Under such stress, people often mobilize around shared identities like ethnicity, religion, or ideology to compete for resources within social groupings.

In certain societies, the state or elements of it, such as security forces, are dominated by one group, leading to the exclusion and marginalization of others. This exclusion often results in limited access to state services, decision-making processes, and economic opportunities for marginalized groups. Such groups may perceive the state as illegitimate and resist or rebel against it, especially in contexts where the state is weak or absent. This backdrop can heighten the susceptibility of marginalized individuals and groups to VE. Frustration, lack of opportunities and a sense of powerlessness can lead vulnerable individuals towards extremist groups, which often promise a better future through political or religious agendas. In some cases, both in the Sahel and the Middle East, violent extremist groups not only rule by force and violence, but they also distribute resources and provide services like protection and justice in the absence of a functioning state (Bøås et al. 2021,13–14).

Addressing and countering VE requires tackling the root social, political, and economic conditions that lead to marginalization, as well as improved governance in the affected areas. This transformation is complex and long-term. In the interim, protecting those affected by VE and strengthening their resilience and coping mechanisms remains crucial. However, there is a risk that governments and their partners might focus solely on security, without addressing the underlying conditions. This is often due to the reluctance of dominant groups to relinquish their power and privilege. While security measures and resilience-building can mitigate the impact of VE, they are not sustainable solutions.

Furthermore, security actions against violent extremists can exacerbate tensions, trapping communities in the crossfire and leading to atrocities. Harsh-handed, security-force action against civilians and communities plays into the hands of violent extremists that offer a pathway of resistance against the state (Bøås et al. 2020,127–128). On its own, security force action against VE is rarely successful. In many cases, it makes the situation worse. This is why this book recognizes that addressing the symptoms of VE—the violence perpetuated by specific violent extremist groups—is not sufficient. In addition

to trying to ensure that the security response does not cause further harm, the focus here is on the need to address the underlying drivers.

Each of the pathways discussed in the preceding paragraphs can contribute to and counter VE. Each warrants theorizing and empirical research in its own right. For each path, a rich and growing body of literature is starting to emerge. In this book, the various empirical chapters will build on and develop this knowledge further. The focus of this chapter, however, is on the theoretical foundation that underpins our understanding of how these pathways are interlinked and how their dynamic interaction may contribute to increasing the risk of VE in each social context. This theoretical understanding informs the role of peacebuilding in preventing and countering VE by assisting societal transformation and strengthening resilience at community, societal, and institutional levels.

2.2 Violent Extremism

Here, we will look at the research on VE—firstly, the causes and conducive environments for VE, and secondly, what we know has worked or failed so far.

So, what do we know about the causes and conducive environments for VE? The range of factors to consider in understanding VE is vast, encompassing each case's unique history, political economy, and context. Broadly, these factors can be classified into two levels: individual and group/community. At the individual level, explanations often delve into psychological aspects, such as the history of abuse, traumatic experiences, identity crises, purposelessness, and a deficit in social support. These elements can render individuals more vulnerable to the appeal of extremist groups, which offer a semblance of community and an alternative sense of belonging. On the societal side, explanations typically revolve around feelings of being marginalized, and limited opportunities for social and geographical mobility. Our focus is at the community level, paying close attention to the societal factors and broader explanations, and in particular to societal resilience *against* VE. This perspective aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions and environments that foster resilience towards VE.

One significant challenge in researching VE and terrorism is methodological in nature. Accessing primary data is often difficult and risky, leading to a notable scarcity of evidence-based research in this field (Strindberg 2020). However, this trend is not without exceptions, such as Harris, Simi, and Ligon (2016). Furthermore, notable work by researchers, including Raineri and Strazzari (2021), Skare et al. (2021), and Bøås et al. (2021), demonstrates innovative approaches to studying VE. These scholars have focused on understanding the non-occurrence of VE and strategies to bolster community resilience. This approach not only addresses the identified methodological challenges but also provides a solid foundation for further exploration into resilience and adaptive peacebuilding, which is the central theme of our volume. This shift towards studying resilience and non-occurrence offers a

fresh perspective and contributes significantly to the field of peace and conflict studies.

Looking more closely at this research, Bøås et al. (2021, 13–14) define an enabling environment for VE as:

an area in which the combination of various factors creates a conducive situation where expressions of violent extremism are likely. These factors or drivers can be poverty, marginalization, alienation, religious or ideological indoctrination, heavy-handed state responses, precarious masculinities, appropriation of right-based grievances, and other related factors

While contextual diversities within and across regions stress the need for cautious interpretation of general trends, some generic drivers in the regions of North Africa and the Sahel, the Middle East, and the Balkans have been identified. In North Africa and the Sahel, poverty, economic and political marginalization, including political alienation, stand out (Bøås et al. 2021). While it is clear that religion plays a role, particularly for the leadership that tries to recruit, few point to religion for those that are recruited. The reasons are more material, such as the lack of educational opportunities, land rights, etc.

Furthermore, people are experiencing a lot of pressure where there are fewer options—they are trapped between violent extremists and security forces. In the Middle East, some suggest that poverty, lack of socio-economic status, unemployment and lack of education are prominent drivers (Kiendrebeogo and Ianchovichina 2016), while others claim that neither socio-economic status (Krueger and Malečková 2003), nor the level of education are major drivers (Benmelech, Berrebi, and Klor 2012). Furthermore, as argued by Skare et al. (2021, 9), “there is similarly no agreement on the role of autocratic leadership and human rights violations as a potential driver of violent extremism.” In the Western Balkans, what constitutes a conducive environment for VE is identified as overlapping division lines in terms of ethnicity and religion, a mainly frozen conflict with competing narratives about the war, high unemployment and scarcity of resources, low degree of horizontal and vertical trust, relative deprivation and few opportunities for social mobility (Mishkova et al. 2021). It is important to note that while very many people live in such enabling environments, most people are neither radicalized nor willing to join violent extremist groups (Bøås et al., forthcoming).

We turn now to findings on what may work to strengthen resilience and hamper VE. First, if we understand the drivers of VE to be more structural in character, such as poverty, social marginalization, lack of job opportunities, geographical and social mobility, political instability, etc., rather than extremist beliefs, then these must be addressed rather than focusing on the symptoms of the problem (Bøås et al. forthcoming). This challenges the dominant academic perspective, suggesting that these conflicts are more materially based. Second, it also points to the more widespread presence of moderate religious views in these societies than previously recognized. This implies that

providing support for and strengthening trusted traditional and religious leaders can provide legitimate alternative narratives, challenging those of violent extremists (Mishkova et al. 2021).

Third, it is important to support community leaders who help their community according to their needs. Research shows how so-called ordinary people navigate their everyday actions and survive in conflict-affected contexts, demonstrating how acts of compassion, humanity, civility and solidarity can emerge and potentially disrupt conflict and contribute to a shift towards peace (Mac Ginty 2021). The importance of ordinary people's everyday actions is also documented through James C. Scott's (1985) seminal work on everyday forms of peasant resistance. He challenges the traditional view of the peasant rebellion by highlighting that resistance does not always manifest in overt, organized movements but often occurs in hidden and individualized forms. He focuses on the everyday tactics of the rural poor, such as foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilferage, and gossip, which he terms "the weapons of the weak." These methods represent a form of passive, non-confrontational resistance as a way to cope with and subtly undermine the power structures that oppress. This point is also related to the support for strengthening social cohesion by promoting trust between divided groups and between civil society and state actors. Trust is clearly a long-term endeavor that needs to be earned. External actors can help the state to earn trust by enabling them to deliver sought-after services such as health and security. In terms of horizontal trust, some steps can be taken, such as establishing common meeting places, ensuring access for all and representativity of all, and promoting common curricula, media campaigns, etc. However, these approaches must be based on a context-sensitive approach, considering the needs and inputs of those most affected. Furthermore, recent evidence suggests that external actors need to be almost invisible in their support to community agents of resilience to avoid the risk of delegitimizing them (Bøås et al. forthcoming).

Fourth, and as already mentioned, heavy-handed or repressive approaches to preventing or countering violent extremism (P/CVE) can be counterproductive, as they can serve to alienate further and marginalize already marginalized communities, potentially creating a more conducive environment for VE (ISS 2016; ICG 2017; UNDP 2017; Raineri 2018). Young men are particularly prone to extremist indoctrination if expressions of right-based grievances are met with heavy-handed state responses (Bøås, Wakhab Cissé, and Mahamane 2020). Another related point from the research literature is that labeling efforts as P/CVE may prove counter-effective. For instance, as argued by Raineri and Strazzari (2021, 10), an explicit P/CVE focus in educational cooperation can irk local sensitivities and contribute to the securitization of education, fueling tensions between "Western secular" and "Islamic" models of education (Danzell, Yeh, and Pfannenstiel 2018) as well as lead to an increase in attacks against educational institutions (GCPEA 2020). Hence, the challenge is how to strike a balance between the hard security approaches required by the state and

fostering community-led responses, thereby demonstrating that a realignment can provide something beneficial.

Finally, the questions asked and the way the problem is defined dictate the solution. For example, if VE is defined as the problem, the solution may be seen as a matter of security, particularly if the person or institution asking the questions represents a state. However, if the asker is a non-state actor or an ordinary citizen, the problem and the solution may be seen as something very different. For instance, European countries have perceived irregular migration in the Sahel region as a security threat, particularly due to the so-called migration crisis of 2014–15. This perception has led to a focus on the criminalization of the migration crisis by the regimes in the Sahel, supported by external actors. However, people living in the Sahel, especially those in the border areas, see mobility as an integral part of their livelihood, which contributes to their resilience against new security threats and helps them adapt to climate change (Osland and Erstad 2020). Hence, it is essential to recognize that different questions posed and perspectives can lead to different definitions of problems and solutions.

2.3 Complexity Theory

Any given society at risk or already experiencing VE could be perceived as a complex social system. A system, including social systems, can be defined in a very general sense as a collection of interacting components that together produce, by virtue of their interactions, some form of system-wide behavior (Mitchell 2009). In other words, a system is a community of components that form a whole due to their interconnections. Complexity theory describes the characteristics and functions of a particular type of holistic system that can adapt and demonstrate emergent properties, including self-organizing behavior. Such systems emerge and are maintained through the dynamic and non-linear interactions of their components. The behaviours of the components are influenced by the information available to them locally, interactions with their environments, and the modulated feedback they receive from the other elements in the system (Cilliers 1998, 3).

Non-linearity is one of the elements that distinguish a complex system from a linear, deterministic, or mechanical system. The latter is fully knowable, predictable, and, therefore, controllable in principle. Consequently, it is unable to perform any task that is not pre-programmed or designed, regardless of whether it is an artificial system or new in the sense that we could not know that it is a natural system in advance. In contrast, the non-linearity in complex systems makes it possible for these systems to adapt and evolve—i.e., to create something new. This is known as emergence in complexity theory—something that goes beyond what is pre-programmed in the parts that make up the system. Non-linearity is thus an essential precondition for emergence, self-regulation, and adaptation in complex systems (Cilliers 1998).

Another defining characteristic of complex systems is that they self-regulate: they do not need an external controller to determine their parameters or to trigger feedback. Complex systems self-organize spontaneously due to the

cumulative and collective interaction of all the agents in the system (Cilliers 1998). This process is non-linear and dynamic, and its specific future dynamics thus cannot be predicted or controlled. There may be agents that try to influence the behavior of the system, for example, a central bank that attempts to influence a state's economy by increasing or decreasing the availability of money in the system. Still, so many causal reactions are happening simultaneously that no one agent or group of agents working together can control the system's overall behavior. The overall behavior of the system is self-organized.

Societies, or social systems, are empirically complex (Byrne 1998). They demonstrate the ability to adapt and have emergent properties, including self-organizing behavior (Kaufmann 2013). As social systems are highly dynamic, non-linear, and emergent, it is impossible to find general laws or rules that will help us predict how a particular society or community will behave (Cilliers 2002). This means that we cannot plan or undertake a project—for example, a de-radicalization initiative in Somalia—and predict with any certainty what the outcome will be. Nor can we use a model that was assessed to have performed well elsewhere, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and expect that it will have the same effect in another context, or even in the same country, but in a different socio-political context. This uncertainty may be the result of the lack of context-sensitive analysis, planning, or implementation but is also an intrinsic quality of complex systems. Recognizing this uncertainty when attempting to influence complex social systems has significant implications for how we think about peace and conflict and undertake conflict resolution and peacebuilding (de Coning 2018).

If we analyze a society that is under pressure from VE, as a co-constituent part of a larger social-ecological system, we emphasize the importance of the dynamics that emerge from the inter-relationship between the many different parts and elements that generate and sustain a society. This includes the different identities, interest groups, and institutions that make up the society, as well as the relationships and influences between these groups and the larger social-ecological system in which they are encapsulated. Complexity demands that we recognize that the relationships between these various groups within society and the larger ecosystem they are part of are highly dynamic, non-linear, and complex. This complexity implies that specific future developments in the system and the future state of the system in any given spatial and temporal context are uncertain and unpredictable. This uncertainty principle has important implications for analyzing and understanding the emergence of VE and what we can do to prevent or counter it.

As we examine a society facing the threat of VE, we must recognize that it is a complex part of a larger social and ecological system. This complex system comprises different identities, interest groups, and institutions that interact with each other and the larger ecosystem. The relationships between these diverse groups and the ecosystem are dynamic, non-linear, and unpredictable. Therefore, it is difficult to predict the future state of the system in a

given context. This complexity has important implications for understanding the emergence of VE and developing strategies to prevent or address it.

Over the last approximately 50 years, the peace and conflict resolution research and practitioner communities have been confident in their ability to diagnose the problems affecting a specific society, and to prescribe the steps such a society needed to take to achieve peace (World Bank 2011). The outcome was believed to be more or less guaranteed if the liberal peace design was followed, and uncertainty was seen as a risk that could be managed with good planning (Eriksen 2009, 662). However, the inability of the international peace and security architecture to bring the conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria, to mention a few, to a peaceful resolution has led to a new appreciation for the complexity of these conflict systems and the naivety of the assumption that the liberal peace model is universally transferable. Complexity provides us with the theoretical framework for understanding the hubris of these assumptions.

When a closed system like a machine is stressed, it breaks down and needs to be repaired. International peacebuilders have tended to apply this analogy to social systems and often approached peacebuilding as a tool to fix fragile states (Ghani and Lockhart 2009). In complex systems, the elements react to stimuli in non-linear ways, enabling the system to evolve so that it can find new ways to pursue its goals and reach its objectives, despite obstacles, stressors, and constraints. This means that complex systems need to be under a certain degree of stress to adapt and evolve, and the systems that thrive are those that can maintain a high degree of innovation without losing their basic integrity and stability in the process (Taleb 2012). In other words, complex systems, including social systems, are not fixed through outside intervention; they “fix” themselves through a complex web of actions, interaction and agency. In fact, trying to fix them from the outside may undermine, disrupt and interfere with the self-organizing processes a complex social system needs to maintain and sustain itself (de Coning 2016).

Concepts like stabilization and peacebuilding convey the assumption that external actors like the United Nations can “build” peace in the same way that we can design and build a bridge or a tunnel. However, social systems are not like machines where the parts have a specific pre-designed role in a closed causal loop, with one ultimate purpose and only one pre-determined way to achieve that purpose. In complex systems, the elements relate in open, non-linear ways, enabling the system to evolve by finding new ways to pursue goals and reach objectives, despite obstacles, stressors, and constraints. Social systems develop and sustain themselves, and external actors like the United Nations or international development agencies can, at best, only stimulate and influence the process. Depending on how external actors relate to the societies they are trying to assist, their actions can inhibit, interfere with or even disrupt the self-organizing process in a complex social system, or they can nurture, enable and stimulate self-organization (de Coning 2018).

2.4 Assisting Complex Social Systems to Sustain Peace

A society successfully sustains its peace when its social institutions can ensure that political, social, and economic competition is managed peacefully and that no significant social or political groups use violence to pursue their interests (Caplan 2019, 22). Peacebuilding aims to help communities, societies, and institutions prevent violent conflict by assisting them in developing resilient social institutions that can manage and resolve emerging tensions before they turn violent.

Peacebuilding is undertaken at a range of levels, from the local to the global (Millar 2021). A local community in Mali may be able to adapt to changes in its environment, but it cannot influence the scope or origin of those factors that arise exogenously. Climate change is a good example. Many local communities are negatively affected by how climate change impacts their livelihoods. They may be able to adapt their livelihood options to changes in the weather patterns, but changing the weather patterns themselves requires action at a much greater scale.

The implications of complexity theory for peacebuilding practice derive from our understanding of how complex systems function. Most of the technical models we rely on for conflict analysis, planning, management, and evaluation are based on linear cause-and-effect assumptions that do not fit our experiences and knowledge of complex social system behavior. The implication of a complex systems understanding is that peacebuilding interventions should not interfere in complex social systems to engineer specific pre-determined outcomes. Trying to control the outcome produces the opposite of what peacebuilding aims to achieve: it generates ongoing instability, dependence, and fragility because it undermines self-organization.

For any society to live sustainably in peace, it must generate its own capacity to self-organize. This process can be facilitated and supported by external peacebuilders, but it ultimately must be a bottom-up and home-grown process. Resilience cannot be imposed, and any attempt to impose solutions from the outside constitutes interference and disruption in the system. The more you intervene in social systems, the more you undermine the emergence and effects of self-organization (de Coning 2016). Every time an external peacebuilder intervenes to solve a perceived problem, they interrupt the internal feedback process and thus deny the society or community the ability to develop the processes necessary to self-identify and respond to those problems. The result is a missed opportunity to stimulate the development of self-organization and resilience. Instead, such external interruptions build dependency (de Coning 2018).

National and local social institutions develop resilience through trial and error over generations. Excessive filtering and cushioning slow down and inhibit these processes. Understanding this tension—and the constraints it poses—helps us realize why many deterministic peacebuilding initiatives have made the mistake of interfering to such an extent that they have undermined the ability of societies

to self-organize and thus contributed to perpetuating the conflict. In the process, this kind of intervention prolongs the vulnerability of societies to recurring violence and adds to the protracted nature of the conflict.

Based on this understanding, the art of peacebuilding lies in pursuing the appropriate balance between external support and home-grown context-specific solutions. Many national and international peacebuilders still need to find this balance. In the process, many peacebuilders have contributed to the very weaknesses and fragilities in the societies they intended to address. Much of the policy implemented within the P/CVE umbrella seems to originate from a blueprint approach (Bakker 2015). However, as mentioned already, VE is highly context-dependent. Hence, what works in one context may not work in another.

2.5 Adaptive Peacebuilding

The adaptive peacebuilding approach provides a methodology for navigating this dilemma. In contrast with top-down approaches to peacebuilding, adaptive peacebuilding is a process where local, national, and international peacebuilders, together with the societies, communities and people affected by the conflict, actively engage in a structured collaborative process to sustain peace and resolve conflicts by employing an inductive and iterative process of learning and adaptation (de Coning 2018). Adaptive peacebuilding is a normative and functional approach to preventing and countering VE. It aims to navigate the inherent complexity of trying to nudge societal change processes toward sustaining peace without causing harm (de Coning 2020).

The core characteristics of the adaptive peacebuilding approach can be summarized in the following six principles: First, the initiatives taken to influence the sustainability of a specific peace process have to be context- and time-specific and thus emerge from a collaborative process with the people affected by the conflict. Second, adaptive peacebuilding is a goal-oriented or problem-solving approach, so it is important to analyze and identify, in collaboration with the affected people, what the problems are and what the initiatives for change should aim to achieve. Third, based on the analysis and intended objectives, multiple initiatives are simultaneously undertaken, assessed, and adapted in a continuous and iterative purposeful learning process. Fourth, one element of the adaptive approach is variety: as the outcome is uncertain, one must experiment with a variety of initiatives across a spectrum of probabilities, and the theory of change that informs each alternative needs to be clearly articulated. Fifth and finally, another element of the adaptive approach is selection: one has to actively monitor and evaluate the effects of the initiatives by paying close attention to feedback.

Adaptive peacebuilding therefore requires an active, participatory decision-making process that abandons initiatives that perform poorly or have negative side effects, while those that show more promise can be further adapted to introduce more variety or scaled up to achieve greater impact. At a strategic level, this implies refining the problem analysis, reviewing theories of change

and adapting strategic planning in an ongoing process of institutional learning and growth. Lastly, adaptive peacebuilding is an iterative process. It has to be repeated continuously because social-ecological systems are highly dynamic and will continuously evolve. Any effect achieved is temporary and subject to new dynamics.

In the adaptive peacebuilding approach, the core activity of preventing and countering VE is people-centered process facilitation. In other words, it is crucial—as captured in the first principle of the adaptive peacebuilding approach—that the communities, societies, and institutions intended to benefit from an intervention are fully involved in all aspects of that initiative. The specific arrangements will differ depending on the context, but the principle should be that no decisions are taken about a particular initiative without sufficient participation of the affected community, society, or institution.

Sufficiency here implies that key stakeholders should be represented in such a way that their knowledge of the conflict—and their interests, needs, and concerns in all their diversity and variety—inform every step of the adaptive cycle. In other words, as highlighted in the second principle of the adaptive peacebuilding approach, a collaborative approach implies that the key stakeholders should inform the processes by analyzing the problem. They can then contribute to determining the aims and objectives of any initiative, as well as choices related to the analysis, assessment, planning, monitoring of effects, evaluation, and selection processes. If the various key stakeholders in a given affected community do not feel that they co-own the process, and if they don't see their knowledge, interests, and concerns reflected in the design of the initiative, the likelihood that such an intervention will be effective is very low.

It is crucial, however, to have a realistic understanding of the limits of international engagement when it comes to its ability to support and sustain resilience (Krause 2018, 253). While international, national, or local peacebuilders can influence complex social systems by enabling and stimulating the processes that allow resilience and inclusiveness to emerge, the prominent role of self-organization in regulating complex system dynamics tells us that the affected communities, societies, and institutions need to have the space and agency to drive their own processes. This is why local adaptation processes are ultimately the critical element in creating self-sustaining political settlements (Mac Ginty 2011).

The adaptive peacebuilding approach thus requires a commitment by peacebuilders to engage in a structured and purposeful learning process together with the society, community, and institutions that have been affected by conflict. This commitment to a collaborative approach comes at a cost. Peacebuilders need to invest in the capabilities necessary to enable and facilitate such a collective learning process, ensure sufficient time is available to fully engage with communities and other stakeholders, and allocate resources for monitoring, evaluation and learning together with communities—as part of an iterative, continuous and open-ended process (Connolly and Mincieli 2019). If peacebuilders, in partnership with the affected people, invest the

time, effort, resources and commitment, the process is much more likely to generate the resilient local social institutions necessary to ensure a self-sustainable peace. On the other hand, without attempting to fully engage the affected communities, societies and institutions, the likelihood of interventions succeeding in preventing and countering VE is very low.

In an earlier project, the same editors that edited this volume steered a project to assess the potential of adaptive peacebuilding through evidence-based research. The study drew on eight case studies from Colombia, Mozambique, Palestine, Syria, and Timor-Leste—across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America (de Coning, Saraiva, and Muto, 2023). The aim of the project was to explore if peacebuilding approaches that are adaptive to context were more effective at preventing and resolving conflict than peacebuilding approaches based on pre-determined ideological assumptions and best practices.

In all five empirical case studies, the research found that top-down, pre-designed, and technocratic approaches were less effective than context-specific, locally-driven, and adaptive approaches to managing and resolving conflicts and sustaining peace. The context-specific approaches that were most effective were those that were rooted in the history, culture, and current experienced reality of the people affected by conflict.

The adaptive approaches identified in the case studies were more effective when they relied on the active engagement and participation of the conflict-affected community. When these people felt that they had been involved in shaping the peace, they also felt a sense of responsibility to sustain the institutions and processes necessary to sustain the peace. The overall finding from the case studies and research project is the link between self-sustainability and the extent to which a peace initiative is context-specific, participatory, and adaptive.

2.6 What Peacebuilders Should Aim to Influence: Resilience and Adaptive Capacity

We introduced resilience earlier and stated that, for the purposes of this book, we understand resilience in its most basic form as a set of capabilities that enable a community or society to adapt to changes in their environment. The extent of the adaptation—which in some contexts includes transformation and adoption of new functions and structures—will depend on the context.

Resilience is increased when social institutions and networks become more diverse and interconnected so that they can share and process more information. Robust self-organized networks distribute vulnerability across their social networks. If one “node” fails under pressure, others can carry the load, thus preventing system collapse (de Coning 2020). Peacebuilding should therefore be about stimulating and facilitating the capacity of communities, societies, and institutions to become more interconnected and networked so that they increase their robustness and their capacity to share and process more information.

This is what the “cohesion” in the concept of social cohesion refers to: the ability of a social system to sustain a functioning network made up of a number of constituent networks or sub-systems in a way that the whole can achieve more together, including being more resilient, than the elements can achieve on their own. From the perspective of the elements of the system, a social system is more cohesive when they can achieve their goals as part of the whole. The alternative is for disaffected individuals or groups to go off on their own or join another network, e.g., the option offered by becoming part of a violent extremist group. Achieving interests can refer to a range of needs such as security, justice, political identity, livelihoods, etc. and each person—individually and collectively as part of a community, society or institution—continuously makes judgments that take all these interests into consideration. In some contexts, some needs, such as physical security or livelihoods, may overshadow other needs. In complex social systems, this process remains highly dynamic.

McCandless and Simpson (2015, 6) explain this focus on resilience as a shift “from the aspiration to prevent conflict by controlling change, to the capacities of systems to cope with, adapt to, and shape change.” It implies channeling change, facilitating the flow of information, and generating processes that can stimulate and support the self-organization necessary to manage complex social systems. In addition to actions aimed at disrupting the obstacles to peace, for instance, through security actions aimed at degrading violent extremist groups, resilience suggests that peacebuilding initiatives can simultaneously help the communities and societies at risk or affected by VE to strengthen the adaptive capacities of their social institutions.

One way to understand resilience is to frame it as the capacity of a community or society to withstand or absorb sudden shocks, or the pressures of more gradual stress (Birhanu et al., 2017, 2). When resilience is conceptualized as a capacity, one implication is that it can be used to explain why some communities or societies can manage shocks or stress better than others. For example, the sustainable livelihood framework conceptualizes human well-being as a function of five household or community asset categories: financial, human, natural, physical, and social (Quandt 2018). Others have expanded this approach beyond the household and added institutional capital, public infrastructure, and social services (Birhanu et al., 2017). For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has developed a Resilience Capacity Index that measures household and community resilience using four latent variables: access to basic services, assets, social safety nets, and adaptive capacity. Poor households may have weak capacity to adapt and transform, so they often must rely on absorption or coping capacities, such as reducing food intake, selling assets, or over-exploiting natural resources. These “negative” coping strategies are likely, over time, to harm not only their own well-being but eventually reduce the whole community’s resilience (Bateman et al., 2016).

The resilience capacities approach can be helpful because it helps to identify what kind of resilience capacity is needed in a specific context. The challenge with resilience viewed as capacity, however, is that this approach tends

to focus on econometric capacities that can be measured, thus ignoring the importance of social cohesion, relationships of kinship and norms of solidarity, or the negative effect of social exclusion, discrimination, and inequality (Barrett and Constanas 2014, 14628). Another challenge with looking at resilience as capacities is that those phenomena are often perceived as linear variables, and this perspective may be blind to how the interrelationship among variables may strengthen or weaken resilience in a given context (Chandler, 2014). Petersen (2001, 1) shows, for instance, that how individuals act under stress is largely determined by the nature of their everyday economic, social, and political life rather than change in one isolated variable.

A third challenge with looking at resilience as capacity is that it is often defined in negative terms as something missing. McCandless and Simpson (2015, 5) point out that “the resilience lens offers peacebuilding a perspective on the endogenous strengths in systems, structures and people within conflict-affected societies, rather than the more conventional focus on the obstacles to peace.”

However, resilience is not just about coping; it is also about the ability to adapt and transform. Barrett et al. (2021, 6) distinguish between absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities. Absorptive capacities seek to mitigate the impact of shocks and can be influenced by increasing, for example, assets and savings. Adaptive capacities can spread the risk by, for example, diversifying livelihoods and relying on social safety nets. Transformative capacity, on the other hand, seeks to change the underlying dynamics, for example, by improving governance, improving access to markets or empowering women (Barrett et al. 2021, 6). Transformative resilience can therefore be thought of as the capacity to create a fundamentally new system when ecological, economic, or social structures make the existing system untenable (Walker et al. 2004, 1; Reyers et al. 2018).

Examples of the kind of initiatives that peacebuilding can support are the promotion of open and respectful dialogue and infrastructures for peace that support institutions that proactively prevent and manage tensions and disputes before they become violent conflicts. They also encourage common projects that benefit all, helping to build bridges between different communities and promoting a sense of shared purpose and identity. Interventions aimed at reducing vulnerability to VE in these contexts should thus focus on strengthening absorptive and coping capacities, as well as adaptive and transformative resilience.

However, as is evident from these examples, many dimensions of social resilience relate to aspects, such as livelihoods, food, land, and water security, that fall outside the scope of issues that peacebuilding or security actors usually have knowledge of or agency over. Improving resilience in these areas requires the assistance of and collaboration with national and international actors that work on agriculture, natural resource management, and social development. Their primary aim would be poverty reduction and development, but pursuing a comprehensive and integrated approach to development and human security that strengthens resilience and helps to prevent VE is in

the interest of the whole spectrum of actors active in the peace, security, and development nexus. A resilience lens thus also helps these actors across the spectrum to have a common understanding of the capacities they wish to strengthen and the interconnected nature of the elements that they are trying to influence.

2.7 The Resilience of Violent Extremist Groups

While peacebuilders are geared to help communities strengthen their resilience, there are also forms of resilience that peacebuilders and security actors should seek to weaken and disrupt (Juline Beaujouan et al. 2023; Grossman 2023). Violent extremist groups tend to be highly adaptive and resilient. Complexity theory helps us understand why a social system, like a violent extremist group and its supportive community, becomes stronger and more resilient when under pressure. Complex systems thrive under pressure, stimulating their ability to innovate and develop. During periods of relative peace and prosperity, there is little incentive to change, but under periods of stress and scarcity, social systems evolve rapidly, innovate, and transform. This is why, in many cases, security action against insurgents has made them stronger and more resilient. Actions undertaken by security forces prompt violent extremists to change their tactics and find new ways of sustaining themselves by diversifying their *modus operandi*, and consequently, their leaders and operatives become more experienced.

Security force actions against violent extremists are also often directed at communities in the vicinities where the extremists are active. There is often an assumption among security forces that community members actively support the extremists or do so under duress. They may also assume that community members are members of extremist groups. Regardless of the validity of these assumptions, the consequences can be profound. Tactics like the interrogation of community members and the destruction of property as a punishment for perceived support of extremist groups can cause significant harm to individuals, families, and the broader community. These actions often foster resentment towards the security forces and inadvertently aid extremist groups by validating their narratives. Such counterproductive outcomes suggest that these measures frequently have the opposite of the intended effect, paradoxically strengthening the support base and recruitment pool of violent extremist groups rather than diminishing it.

Unless the system within which VE is embedded is transformed, VE is unlikely to be defeated. Merely disrupting the system risks making violent extremist groups stronger. They learn the tactics of the security forces and the limits of their operations and learn to exploit them. They innovate and diversify and become better at what they do. Most national and international security force operations are limited in scale and capacity, which means they lack the capacity to defeat violent extremist groups and fully dominate the territory in which they operate. The actions of security forces may help secure

critical infrastructure and state institutions, but limited actions against violent extremist groups will ultimately only strengthen their resilience.

Therefore, from a security force perspective, it is also desirable to disrupt and transform the system that violent extremists operate in by focusing efforts on the drivers of conflict that generate the grievances that the violent extremists thrive on. To reduce the resilience of violent extremist groups, the focus should be on transforming the socio-ecological conditions that make people vulnerable and that generate the grievances that violent extremist groups exploit.

Counterinsurgency doctrine sometimes refers to the idea of draining the swamp. The metaphor depicts transforming the ecosystem so that it is no longer possible for the alligators or crocodiles to hide, thrive, and survive. There have been examples where this kind of tactic was crudely attempted to isolate insurgents by creating “liberated villages” and other forms of enforced protection and displacement. These attempts have resulted in significant harm to the communities and led to questions about the overall legitimacy of counterinsurgency campaigns. This kind of physical isolation of violent extremists from the communities they operate in is no longer seen as a viable tactic.

What we are arguing for by emphasizing peacebuilding and resilience is a much more subtle and more promising approach to “draining the swamp,” namely working towards reducing the grievances in the affected societies that violent extremists exploit. This implies helping to strengthen individual, household, community, and institutional resilience and adaptive capacity in the short- to medium-term while simultaneously working towards transforming the marginalization, exclusion, and inequality of the affected communities via developmental interventions, as well as initiatives to transform the political, social, and economic relationships between the affected communities and the rest of their society.

2.8 Unintended Consequences

We are conscious that the elite groups controlling a state often do not think it is in their interest to invest in the economic and social development of other groups in the state. They may also fear that political transformation will lead to them having to share power with others. They are often unwilling or unable to recognize the broader socio-political and economic inequalities, exclusion, and marginalization that generate the grievances that can be exploited by violent extremists. Instead, they seek out partners that will help them defeat the violent extremists. This has resulted in some governments opting to use mercenaries of private security companies against violent extremist groups.

For peacebuilders (international, national, and local), the medium- to longer-term effort needed to transform the causes and drivers of VE are difficult to plan and sustain. At the same time, short- to medium-term projects—i.e., those aimed at strengthening resilience, stability, and countering insecurity that can show results in the near term—are programmatically and bureaucratically more tempting. However, addressing the symptoms without

also working to transform causes and drivers will fail to help society sustain peace. Such failures will make future interventions more challenging. Short-term stabilization, counterinsurgency, and counter-terrorism interventions often fail to transform the drivers of conflict and thus end up prolonging the conflict and perpetuating a no-war/no-peace state.

For example, an unintended dilemma generated by this approach is that when an intervention is successful in securing and stabilizing a particular region or state, there are fewer incentives for the elites governing that state to invest in the political transformation needed to find a longer-term settlement for the conflict. This stabilization dilemma generates several unintended consequences, including prolonging the conflict, trapping external operations in place with no exit options, increasing the resilience of armed groups, and embedding international actors in the local political economy (de Coning 2023).

Furthermore, the peacebuilding literature of the last two decades strongly urges the policy community to seek ways to ensure the meaningful participation of the people and communities affected by the conflict (Mac Ginty 2011). While some in policy and practice are acting on this advice, the reality is that the affected communities are seldom consulted. Second, communities are not homogenous in their analysis of the problem or their understanding of what their needs and interests are. And third, they do not necessarily have identifiable leaders that represent the interests of all those affected. As argued by Krause (2018, 254), while the state is responsible for protecting its vulnerable communities, civilian empowerment needs to retain the core objective of resilience building.

In this book, we will thus argue that if sustainable peace is the goal, then pursuing and maintaining an appropriate balance between the various elements of a comprehensive developmental and peacebuilding intervention will be the key element that determines effectiveness. This needs to be pursued in terms of the breadth of its dimensions (political, social, economic, security, etc.), spatial considerations (local to global levels) and temporal aspects (short-, medium- and longer-term). This way of understanding peacebuilding resembles what has been called upstream prevention, where peacebuilders position themselves outside of a securitized approach, addressing the underlying causes of conflict and supporting societies to become more cohesive and resilient towards conflict and VE (Stephens, Sieckelinck, and Boutellier 2021, 346).

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to provide the theoretical foundation for understanding the role of resilience, social cohesion, and peacebuilding as part of a comprehensive approach to preventing and countering VE. Based on research evidence of the kinds of approaches that are effective in preventing and countering VE, the chapter cautioned against securitized approaches that deal only with the symptoms of VE. Not only do they tend to generate a backlash

against the authorities that plays into the hands of the extremists, but they also do not offer a sustainable solution to VE because they do not deal with the underlying drivers of VE.

In addition to responsible and accountable security actions, this chapter made the case for addressing the drivers of VE. These are context-specific but tend to be associated with the marginalization and exclusion of the out-groups on the political and economic periphery of states affected by VE. For peacebuilding, this implies helping to strengthen individual, household, community, and institutional resilience and adaptive capacity in the short to medium term. It works simultaneously toward transforming the marginalization, exclusion, and inequality of the affected communities via developmental interventions, as well as providing initiatives to transform the political, social, and economic relationships between the affected communities and the rest of their society.

Complexity theory and adaptive peacebuilding help us to understand why solutions imposed from the outside perform poorly, while much better results are achieved when peacebuilding approaches work in partnership with local communities, civil society and local authorities to support and strengthen social cohesion and adaptive capacity. That is why the concepts and theoretical approaches introduced in this chapter focus on social systems, including communities, societies, and institutions. They provide an understanding of how peacebuilders can contribute to preventing the drivers leading to VE by helping these social systems strengthen their resilience, social cohesion, and adaptive capacities. Adaptive peacebuilding also cautioned us to be realistic about what is possible to achieve by outside actors and to anticipate and take steps to prevent unintended consequences, such as being careful in their support to avoid delegitimizing local resilience actors who contribute with positive change.

For peacebuilders—including those from within the communities, societies, and institutions affected by VE—supporting policies and programs that promote social inclusion, tolerance, and diversity can contribute to strengthening horizontal and vertical trust. Similarly, adaptive peacebuilding initiatives that invest in local social institutions, such as traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, moderate religious leaders and practices, and local civil society organizations, can stimulate self-organization, local adaptive capacity, and community resilience. Examples of the kind of initiatives that peacebuilding can support are the promotion of open and respectful dialogue, infrastructures for peace that support institutions that proactively prevent and manage tensions and disputes before they become violent conflicts, and encouraging common projects that benefit all, which can help build bridges between different communities and promote a sense of shared purpose and identity. Such a sense of belonging and collective and shared responsibility are the foundations for the emergence and sustainability of the social institutions that prevent and resolve conflicts and make people more resilient against VE.

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3 Building Resilience Amid Fear

From State to Community-Embedded Prevention in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique

Rui Saraiva

3.1 Introduction

The rise of violent extremism has posed significant risks to peace and security in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. At the time of writing, violent extremism is also spreading to the neighboring provinces of Niassa and Nampula. Since 2017, this region has seen a surge in attacks by an extremist insurgent group, the *Mashababos*, which has targeted civilians, government officials, and foreign workers. The violence has displaced tens of thousands of people and disrupted economic activity, including in the agriculture, fisheries, and transport sectors, and delayed the development of a major natural gas project in the region. The Mozambican government and international partners have been working to address this issue; however, the situation remains volatile, and the threat of further attacks persists. In addition, climate change, environmental disasters, and infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, cholera, malaria, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, have exacerbated peace and security risks across the region.

From 2017 to 2023, the predominant responses to address the *Mashababos* insurgency have focused on a security-first approach, which has been largely ineffective in addressing the root causes of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado. This approach often uses excessively coercive actions and counter-insurgency methods that may lead to human rights abuses, further alienating marginalized communities and potentially fueling radicalization. A more comprehensive and holistic approach that addresses the root causes of violent extremism—taking into account the local context where violent extremism happens—can put local communities in the driving seat of preventive and peacebuilding interventions. This approach may be more effective in sustaining peace in the region.

In Cabo Delgado, the Mozambican government and regional and international partners have focused on a “security-first” approach with the aim of regaining territory now under the control of the insurgents. The focus on stabilization has entailed subsequent stages of humanitarian action, peacebuilding, and development assistance. However, in practice, the predominant paradigm to address violent extremism in Northern Mozambique is sectorial

and uncoordinated. It fails to incorporate a more holistic approach that, according to local experts, should focus on resilience, peacebuilding, and community-embedded prevention through grassroots actions. Along with the theoretical insights presented in this edited volume, such an approach should provide ways to address the socio-economic root causes of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado and the impact of additional compounding peace and security risks, such as climate change, natural disasters, and infectious diseases.

3.2 Methodology

Preventing violent extremism in Mozambique is a relatively underexplored topic within English-language academic literature. The lack of a larger body of empirical research highlights the need for more in-depth and context-specific studies on this topic. However, local experts have been making a significant contribution to the research on peace, security, and development issues in Cabo Delgado, particularly from an ethnographic perspective. Therefore, this study draws from primary data collected during fieldwork conducted in November 2023 in Mozambique. The field research included in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions, archival research, and site-intensive methods. The interviews with local experts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government officials, and international cooperation partners allowed for a deeper understanding of the multitude of perspectives and responses to the rise of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado. The in-depth knowledge provided by local experts on the local context has generated valuable insights into the dynamics of the conflict in the region.¹ In addition, archive and library research, as well as participant observation, allowed for the consolidation of an insider's perspective into Cabo Delgado's peace and conflict issues. These methods were combined with content analysis of online news coverage between 2017 and 2023 (mainly in Portuguese) and discourse analysis covering the main stakeholders involved in responding to the Cabo Delgado conflict.

3.3 The Mashababos Insurgency and Its Root Causes

Since 2017, English-language sources have referred to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado inconsistently, either as “Al-Shabaab” or as “Al-Sunnah Wal-Jamâa.” In Mozambique, the group is known as Al-Shabaab and is even more commonly called “Mashababos” by local experts and the local population. According to Faleg (2019, 4), in 2019, the insurgency in Cabo Delgado counted “between 350 and 1,000 militants, organized in cell-based structures with each cell comprising 10–20 individuals using basic weaponry and tactics” (see Table 3.1 for additional details). External insurgents from Tanzania, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Kenya support the insurgent group, providing organizational resources and armaments. In 2019, the Islamic State's Central Africa Province (ISCAP) formed an official

Table 3.1 Stakeholder matrix of the Mashababos insurgency in Mozambique. Sources: author. Data collected during fieldwork by the author and from Faleg 2019; Habibe, Forquilha, and Pereira 2019; ICG 2021; Matsinhe and Valoi 2019; Morier-Genoud 2020; SADC 2021; Vines 2020.

Characteristics	<i>Size: approx. 350–1000 militants</i> <i>Village attacks conducted by around 500 men</i> <i>Attacks on civil servants during payday: 400 men</i> <i>Attacks on FADM positions: 45–200 men</i> <i>Ambushes on FADM columns: 3–25 men</i> <i>Sabotage and intimidation: 3–5 men</i>
	<i>Location: Mainly Cabo Delgado province (six bases), recently expanding to the neighboring provinces of Niassa and Nampula</i>
	<i>Allies: Violent extremist groups in Neighboring countries, e.g., Tanzania, Somalia, DRC, and Kenya. Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) also claimed to be involved in the attacks</i>
	<i>Scope: Regional</i>
	<i>Membership: Disaffected youth in Cabo Delgado and Nampula who are recruited with promise money ranging from MT 2000 to MT 50,000, minority youth from Tanzania, Uganda, and the Great Lakes region, ex-leaders of mosques as the mobilizers, retired, expelled, and deserters from FADM military personnel, other commanders of the military wing. Only men</i>
Positions	Rule by a hardline version of Islamic law in Cabo Delgado
	Goal of establishing a Caliphate in the region
Interests/Needs	Interests: Undermining and degrading the Mozambican government's military and political authority
	Needs: Gaining local support and acceptance by local communities; Gain control of natural resources in Cabo Delgado
Resources	Military: AK47, PKM, RPG7, 60, and 80mm mortars. Bladed weapons: machetes, axes, knives, and sticks
	Economic: Financed through electronic money transfers from sympathizers (individuals and private organizations) and organized crime syndicates (timber, precious stones, poaching, and drug trafficking), kidnap for ransom
	Socio-political: Capacity to influence local communities by disrupting traditional mosques and criticizing local Muslims for not adequately abiding by a hardline version of Islamic law
	Media: Extensive use of the web and social media

link with the violent extremist insurgency in Cabo Delgado and subsequently used it as a propaganda tool for other African branches. Being an affiliate of the Islamic State (IS) also provided the insurgents with tactical and strategic benefits, including additional equipment and assistance with recruiting and training. Most of the fieldwork interviewees, however, agreed that the ISCAP

only has a residual influence on the ground, despite the frequent reports of them contributing to the funding and dissemination of the Mashababos' activities. After an attack occurs, the Mozambican insurgent group shares information with the IS, which then disseminates it in various ways, e.g. through their own social media channels.

Table 3.1 shows the main characteristics of the Mashababos insurgency, their positions, interests, and resources. Although violence is decentralized and dynamic—manifesting as chaotic and disorderly in practice—its flexibility and adaptability pose unique challenges for security, humanitarian, development, and peace actors. The Mashababos insurgency has gained strength over time, and the situation in Cabo Delgado has also deteriorated rapidly.

Regarding the debate on the root causes of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, two main groups of experts offer differing explanations for the insurgency in Cabo Delgado: the first group focuses on socio-economic issues such as poverty and unemployment, while the other emphasizes religious extremism. Members of both groups identify multiple other causes, such as ethnic inequalities, the competition for natural resources, and resentment towards the government (Morier-Genoud 2020).

The results of the in-depth interviews with Mozambican experts led me to conclude that the group of scholars closer to the Mozambican government tends to highlight religious extremism as one of the main drivers of the conflict. This analysis favors the justification of militarized or hard security responses. However, the prevalent view among the local experts with decades of empirical research experience in Cabo Delgado is that the socio-economic context of Cabo Delgado is the main driver of radicalization and root cause of the conflict. They also point to the country's fragile and centralized governance structures as a crucial vulnerability. The government fails to provide adequate education, health infrastructure, and other forms of social support in Northern Mozambique (Adam 2022a; Forquilha 2022; Gode 2022; Ferrão 2022; Feijó 2022; Nguja 2022; Cadeado 2022).

In a study conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), based on 309 surveys and 28 informant interviews, local communities identified the root causes of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado in this particular order: discovery of minerals and natural gas, illegal arms flow, economic marginalization, elite greed, poor governance, ethnic marginalization, youth unemployment, and political exclusion (Ewi et al. 2022, 19). For local people, Cabo Delgado's rich resources in ruby, gold, graphite, and liquified natural gas have attracted different groups such as the Mashababos, traffickers, elites, and giant foreign companies (20–21) who have taken advantage of the region's underdevelopment and weak governance. To recruit more members, the extremist insurgency exploits the area's socio-economic fragility, particularly the lack of essential social services, low literacy rates, and high youth unemployment rates, to legitimize their propaganda and enact radical interpretations of Islamic laws in the area.

Apart from the socio-economic context, ethnic inequalities in the region are equally relevant according to all the interviews with local experts. Ethnic

inequality is pointed out as a conflict driver, due to corruption and nepotism in government positions by the Makondes and the history of inequality in terms of access to power or benefits by other ethnic groups in Cabo Delgado, namely the Mwani and Macua ethnic groups which have been consistently marginalized throughout history (Adam 2022b). Therefore, the rise of violent extremism in the region, as described in an in-depth interview with João Feijó (2022), is rooted in a complex environment of historical, political, and socio-economic factors. The Portuguese administration in the 1940s and 1950s led to a “violent capitalist penetration” and the promotion of “predator capitalism” in Cabo Delgado, which created mutual distrust and tension between the Makondes living inland and the coastal population. This tension evolved into an alliance between the Portuguese, the Manchangana, and the Makonde people during the colonial period, a system that is replicated today by FRELIMO intellectuals and elite political spheres in the South (Feijó 2022).

However, it is important to recognize that ethnic tensions alone are not the main root cause of the conflict. There is also a religious element, as the coastal population is majority Muslim and the Makondes are majority Catholic, although the Makonde society is asymmetric and not homogeneous. Additionally, there is a strong resentment and bitterness towards the state, which the Makondes are seen as having privileged access to. In this context, another political actor, RENAMO, both in the form of the “Social RENAMO” and the “Armed RENAMO (in Portuguese, *RENAMO Castrense*),” takes advantage of discontentment toward the FRELIMO-governed state in Cabo Delgado. Furthermore, the issue of cross-border identity groups, particularly in the context of the border with Tanzania, also plays a relevant role in the rise of the Mashababos insurgency (Feijó 2022).

As stated by Yussuf Adam (2022b), in his in-depth interview with the author, many people in Cabo Delgado have been waiting for a long time to reap the benefits of Mozambican independence. There is a growing frustration among younger people compared to older ones, since the latter have gained many benefits over the years since the independence. In addition, because of the discovery of natural resources in Cabo Delgado, there is a general feeling of widespread corruption, together with the fear of losing access to the sea. In this regard, the fishermen are the ones most vulnerable to a new status quo in terms of management and control of coastal and sea resources. Thus, there are relevant generational gaps and a rapidly changing context since 2012. Something seems to be constantly failing in the relations between the state and local communities, and Islam is constantly associated with terrorism, further fueling the discontentment of a large Muslim population in Cabo Delgado. People of Indian descent are also discriminated against, and in general there is still a strong aversion and discrimination against Islam in Mozambique today (Adam 2022b).

According to Yussuf Adam (2022c, 2022d), to understand the rise of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, one must also understand issues of identity and ethnicity. The Makondes correspond to a population that is mostly Catholic, while the coastal region is Islamized. The formation of the political

identity of the region is also related to Zanzibar, and in turn to Tanzania, Malawi, and Inhambane. Today, the insurgents or “terrorists,” so-called by the media and the political elite in Maputo, are perceived as burning villages and kidnapping women. However, it is pertinent to look at the ancient history of tensions and inequalities in the region and discover the several cycles of violence and discrimination in the province, which at a certain point in time, was in the hands of other actors. The Makondes and other ethnic groups in Cabo Delgado have very different identities and different cultural and historical backgrounds which led to increased polarization and inequalities since the period of the colonial administration. In this light, it is critical to look at the history of Catholicism in the region and the impact of the Dutch Monfort missionaries in Cabo Delgado and the privileged relationship they have established with the Makondes. In fact, Catholicism penetrated Cabo Delgado through the Makondes, who also led the masses in the region and a high number of practitioners. The Makondes were also largely not opposed to colonialism until the break-out of the independence war. Moreover, the spirit of ecumenism was never fostered in the region, and with the low level of economic growth compared with other provinces, ethnic tensions and inequalities only gained more depth. The fact is that the “Mashababos” already existed since 1979–1980, however, the growing polarization has led to violent actions since 2018. Therefore, the rise of violent extremism cannot be understood with short-term metrics and equations, it needs to be seen through the lens of complexity, informed by context-specific knowledge and the oral history passed through several generations (Adam 2022c; 2022d).

The Makondes are now divided into sub-groups. Some are pro-Frelimo, others work with international organizations, and others intend to recreate traditional villages in the countryside of the province. In addition, it should be noted that the main merchants in Cabo Delgado have been the fishermen. In the 1990s, the fishermen business was booming, however, the recent changes related to the exploration of natural resources, led to the local communities, including the fishermen, becoming frustrated with the government, with RENAMO, and also with the Machababos. As Mocimboa da Praia was administered by RENAMO, it is pertinent to understand that the start of the insurgency was linked to inland and coastal dynamics and the ethnic inequalities between Makondes, Mwani, and Macua groups (see Figure 3.1). Ethnic inequalities in Cabo Delgado have only increased since the 1992 General Peace Agreement. Mozambique has yet to sign any peace agreement addressing ethnic inequalities in Cabo Delgado (Adam 2022c; 2022d).

The crime–violence nexus in Cabo Delgado has also been fueled by weak governance and the lack of viable economic activities and employment options. Cabo Delgado is situated in one of the drug trafficking corridors along the East African coast. Local sources underlined that narcotraffickers prefer a situation of instability because they can strategically select locations and times for drug transportation in collaboration with armed non-state actors. In addition, if the army and security forces are occupied with responses to violent extremism, little

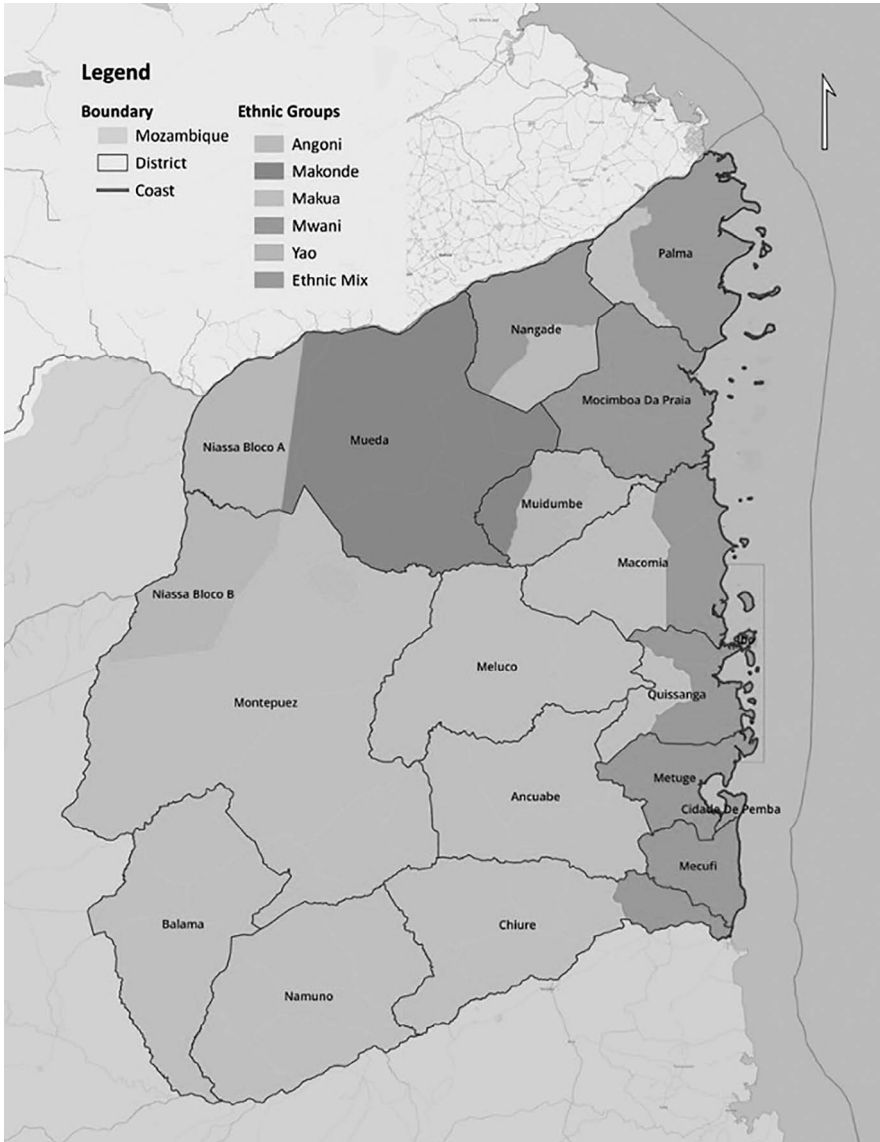


Figure 3.1 Ethnographic map of Cabo Delgado.
Source: author

attention is paid to drug trafficking, providing opportunities for expansion. Other forms of trafficking are also exacerbated by conflict in Cabo Delgado, including human trafficking—insurgents have abducted several women in the region. Other sources point to the trafficking of ivory, rubies, and wood, providing funding for the insurgents.

The rise of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, is a complex issue with multiple root causes and drivers. One of the primary factors is the longstanding marginalization and poverty of the region, which has led to competition for resources and fueled ethnic inequalities. Additionally, there is an ineffective government presence and services in the region. The socio-economic causes of the conflict are primarily rooted in the region's longstanding marginalization and poverty. Cabo Delgado has continuously been one of the least developed provinces in Mozambique with low levels of infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Combined with long-standing issues inherited from the colonial era, this context has resulted in high levels of unemployment and poverty which have further fueled violent extremism in the region.

3.4 The Predominant Approach: Security-First Responses

As Cabo Delgado has experienced a complex and evolving peace and security crisis characterized by the emergence of a highly resilient and adaptive non-state armed group, the initial response by the Mozambican government and its international partners has been primarily focused on the use of military force and counterterrorism operations. The government has an integrated strategy focused on four pillars: 1) security, 2) military, 3) development, 4) and justice or judicial (trials). As a result, the government has invested in these four dimensions, based on the 2018 Law for Combating Terrorism—in Portuguese, *Lei de Combate ao Terrorismo de 2018*. The government has been working hard to integrate these four pillars but without success. The first pillar is related to police and intelligence and has a domestic and preventive dimension. The second pillar has been strengthened through military cooperation with Rwanda, the SADC, and the EU. The third pillar focuses on sustainable development and has been instrumental in obtaining assistance from development partners. The fourth pillar provides a legal framework to prosecute individuals involved in terrorism and to ensure accountability through judicial processes (Cadeado 2022).

Despite the introduction of these four pillars, the implementation of the 2018 law largely focused on hard-security responses, or security-first responses. The law may have achieved some results in terms of stabilization but failed to effectively address the root causes of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado. From 2019 to 2021, the Mozambican government sought to contain the insurgency by welcoming private security organizations (PSOs) to assist in the fight. A number of PSOs, including the Wagner Group, Dyck Advisory Group, and The Paramount & Burnham Global Consortium, were deployed to the region, yet despite their involvement, the crisis persisted (Nhamirre 2021). In 2021, the Mozambican government shifted its strategy and decided to promote regional and international security cooperation, welcoming foreign troops and deploying them to take part in the responses to addressing the Mashababos insurgency (Nguja 2022).

This section presents a brief overview of the current regional and international security cooperation mission arrangements—namely the Rwandan

Joint Force Mission, the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), and the European Union Training Mission in Mozambique (EUTM) —to highlight how the predominant responses to violent extremism in Cabo Delgado are highly dependent on security-first approaches. The fragility of the Mozambican armed forces in Cabo Delgado is highlighted in this section by examining the underlying factors contributing to their weak capacities. These factors include insufficient preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) training, inadequate resources, and a lack of understanding of the socio-political context. Therefore, foreign military missions attempt to substitute, mitigate, and collaborate with the Mozambican armed forces in Cabo Delgado by offering essential training, resources, and operational expertise. However, these efforts have been insufficient to address the roots of conflict within more holistic, long-term, and context-specific preventive efforts.

3.4.1 The Rwanda Defense Force and the Rwanda National Police Joint Force to Cabo Delgado Province

In July 2021, the Rwandan government dispatched the Rwanda Defense Force (RDF) and the Rwanda National Police Joint Force (RJF) to Cabo Delgado Province, deploying 1000 soldiers and police officers in Mozambique to help fight the Mashababos insurgency. The RDF quickly progressed in recapturing towns and forcing the militants to disperse. It also successfully implemented the concept of *umuganda*, which involves working with residents in recaptured areas to improve infrastructure and stability (Smith 2022). Schools in some areas have re-opened, and the French oil and gas major TotalEnergies has recently returned to its \$20 billion liquefied natural gas project. Despite the progress made, some experts and opposition groups in Mozambique have raised concerns about Rwanda's intervention and the reasons behind it. There are some concerns about Rwanda's human rights record and its treatment of political opponents (Nhamirre 2021). Despite generating some controversy in Mozambican civil society, the mission is seen by experts as being very effective on the military side, while also being able to successfully communicate with the local population due to the fact that most of the local languages in Cabo Delgado are variations of Swahili, which is spoken by the Rwandan military (Feijó 2022). The RDF is also seen as a reliable partner for the European Union, which has committed EUR 20 million to support its mission (European Union 2022).

3.4.2 The Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)

The Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) is a regional security mission led by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in response to the Cabo Delgado insurgency. The mission, deployed in 2021, is composed of military personnel from

SADC member states. Its mandate includes strengthening and maintaining peace and security, restoring law and order, as well as assisting the government and humanitarian agencies in providing humanitarian relief. The mission is also tasked with facilitating dialogue and promoting reconciliation between the government and the local communities, as well as providing humanitarian assistance to the affected population (Dzinesa 2023). This mission evolved from being a hard security to a multi-dimensional mission, which now involves collaboration between the military, police, corrections officers, and civilians, including women and youth empowerment, and dialogue with civic leaders tailored towards good governance and the rule of law. The change in the mission's mandate occurred only in August 2022, so it is still to be seen how cooperation with civilians will effectively occur in practice. The EU and the US also decided to endorse the SAMIM mission after its reformulation (Cheatham, Long, and Sheehy 2022).

3.4.3 The European Union Training Mission in Mozambique (EUTM)

The EUTM is a military training mission led by the European Union (EU) to provide training and advice to the Mozambique Defense Armed Forces (FADM). The mission was launched in 2016 with a mandate to assist the Mozambican government in strengthening the capabilities of its armed forces in the areas of maritime security, military operations, and the protection of critical infrastructure. The mission is also tasked with providing training in human rights and international humanitarian law and advice on developing a long-term defense and security strategy for Mozambique. The mission is composed of civilian and military personnel from EU member states and is expected to last for an initial period of two years, with the possibility of extension.

It is important to note that the foreign military personnel in this mission do not engage in military operations. For two years, their strategic objective has been to support the capacity building of units of the Mozambican armed forces that will be part of a future rapid reaction force. It provides specialized training on countering violent extremism and on the protection of civilians, especially women and girls, with attention to the fulfilment of human rights after numerous reports that they were violated several times during the conflict. Therefore, the mission also incorporates a dimension related to prevention. The EUTM inherited Portugal's initial contributions to train the FADM in Cabo Delgado. This is a capacity-building mission and does not entail any counter-terrorist operations conducted by European forces on the ground. Non-lethal equipment was provided to the FADM until the summer of 2022. The EU, under the same mechanism designed to support the situation in Ukraine, the European Peace Facility (EPF) mechanism, which at the time of writing provides assistance worth EUR 20 million to support the continued deployment of Rwanda Defence Forces and EUR 15 million for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) (EU Delegation in Mozambique 2022).

3.4.4 The Mozambican Defense and Armed Forces (FADM) and the Mozambican Police

Most interviewees highlighted the effectiveness of the Rwandan mission and the fact that they can communicate with the locals and speak Swahili. On the other hand, they also pointed out that the SAMIM does not have the same effective logistical organization, the area they cover is too large, and some of those areas are difficult to deal with. The interviewees raised the lack of coordination and communication between SAMIM and Rwandan troops. However, the problem also resides in the ineffectiveness of the Defense and Armed Forces of Mozambique (FADM). All interviewees highlighted that the FADM needs capacity-building in the domains of intelligence, logistics, organization, and discipline. Therefore, a military-only solution is likely to be ineffective. The Mozambican armed forces are not well equipped or well-trained despite the efforts of external security partners, such as Rwanda, EUTM, and SAMIM (Feijó 2022; Adam 2022a; Nguja 2022; Cadeado 2022; Forquilha 2022).

There are reports of nepotism in the recruitment of the members of the FADM, and another dimension is related with the myth of the women in the region which influences the behavior and discipline of the FADM soldiers, many from the South. In general, the women of Cabo Delgado are considered the most beautiful in the country. They are mixed with immigration from the Indic coast. Therefore, the undisciplined behavior of the FADM regarding women in Cabo Delgado is something that any foreign military capacity-building mission will not be able to solve (Adam 2022c).

Regarding the state of corruption in the Mozambican police, an interview with a local businessman resident in Cabo Delgado reveals its implications in addressing violent extremism in the region:

I was arrested on December 24th. I was traveling from one village to another, and I was arrested in Nangade on December 24th, 2017. Around 17:30, after some beers, I was close to my destination, 20–30m away. Without wanting to, I went to a police station by car. I explained that I had made a mistake on the way. I suddenly saw that the policemen were beating the workers who were traveling with me. They started calling us Mashababos and we were accused of belonging to Al-Shabaab. I quickly called my father and uncles, who in turn called the commander, who told them that I had insulted the police and would have to sleep the night in jail. The jail was full of foreigners from Somalia and Tanzania, with about 60 prisoners. They said, “rape the white man’s arse”—they consider Indians to be white. Since I had 4000 meticaís, I gave 2000 to the police chief and started playing poker for money and managed to win that money back. Luckily, I was able to get out of the whole thing unscathed and I was freed on 25th December 2017. There are three types of police in Cabo Delgado: the normal police, the rapid intervention police, and the forestry police. There are reports of nepotism and

corruption in all police branches. When they find some mistake in your documents, they want to arrest you, and sometimes innocent local population suffers with this

(Anonymous 2022).

The ineffectiveness of the state military and police forces has led to the emergence of the *Namparamas*, a local and informal community-policing force that oversees anti-insurgency operations in southern Cabo Delgado. This is a youth movement of individuals supposedly protected by magical powers but with the potential, if offered proper assistance and training by both national and international peacebuilding actors, to become an important security actor in preventing and countering violent extremism efforts in Mozambique. Therefore, it is considered crucial for peace and development partners to extend their support to such community-based initiatives, providing resources, training, and guidance to help transform the *Namparamas* into a more effective and accountable community-based security force. This will further strengthen local resilience against extremist threats and promote long-term stability in the region (Adam 2022d).

Community-based policing may offer a more adaptive and context-specific approach to addressing violent extremism in Cabo Delgado by fostering close collaboration between local security forces and the communities they serve. This model may empower local actors with a deeper understanding of the nuances of the region—essential for designing and implementing effective counterinsurgency strategies. However, community-based policing in Cabo Delgado, in its current form, also faces several challenges that may lead to ineffectiveness. Firstly, while this approach provides some strategic advantages, it could potentially lead to more fatalities, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement. Secondly, they have been accused of severe human rights abuses, which could undermine their legitimacy. Thirdly, the use of non-state actors to perform security functions usually performed by state institutions could raise concerns over their arbitrary and often violent behavior toward the local population. Only by building trust and fostering open communication channels between law enforcement personnel and community members can community-based policing facilitate the early identification of potential security threats and enhance the responsiveness of security forces.

3.5 The Relevance of NGOs in Prevention-Oriented Responses in Cabo Delgado

Despite the focus on hard security solutions, it is also important to note that, since August 2020, the Mozambican government has welcomed the gradual transition into P/CVE approaches that attempt to address the socio-economic components of the conflict while still relying heavily on the stabilization component provided by foreign security interventions discussed above. To address the socio-economic dimension in Cabo Delgado, the government of

Mozambique decided to create the Integrated Development Agency for the North (ADIN) in August 2020 as a government agency responsible for promoting economic and social development in northern regions of the country. Its mission is to promote and coordinate the implementation of policies and programs aimed at reducing poverty and promoting sustainable economic growth. ADIN's activities include infrastructure development, investment promotion, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises. The agency also works to improve access to basic services such as education, health, and water and sanitation in the region (ADIN 2023). The criticism raised by local experts is that ADIN is geographically too broad (includes three provinces, Niassa, Nampula, and Cabo Delgado), it is FRELIMO-oriented, and it does not include the local population in its structure (Feijó 2022).

In response to this criticism of ADIN and as a means of attracting donor investment, on August 26, 2021, the government of Mozambique announced a plan for post-security interventions focused on development. This is known as the Reconstruction Plan for Cabo Delgado (PRCD), a government-led initiative in Mozambique aimed at rebuilding and revitalizing Cabo Delgado province. The plan focuses on three main pillars: 1) Humanitarian assistance, 2) Restoring and reestablishing infrastructures, and 3) Economic and financial activities. The plan aims to address the immediate needs of affected communities, such as providing humanitarian assistance, as well as promoting long-term recovery and development in the province.

Accordingly, the PRCD is focused on several key areas, including 1) humanitarian response: providing food, shelter, and other basic needs to people affected by violence and displacement; 2) infrastructure reconstruction: rebuilding homes, schools, hospitals, and other public facilities that have been destroyed or damaged by the violence; 3) economic recovery: promoting the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as the tourism and agricultural sectors, in order to create jobs and boost the local economy; 4) social services: ensuring that people in the province have access to quality education, health care, and other essential services; 5) security and stability: working with security forces to maintain peace and stability in the province and to prevent further violence; and 6) governance and participation: promoting good governance and citizen participation in the reconstruction process (Mozambican government 2021).

In addition, in August 2022, the Mozambican government created the Resilience and Integrated Development Program for Northern Mozambique (PREDIN), a comprehensive initiative to promote sustainable growth, social development, and increase resilience in the region. Recognizing the myriad challenges faced by the northern provinces, including poverty, inequality, violent extremism, and lack of access to basic services, PREDIN seeks to address the socio-economic root causes of the conflict through a multi-sectoral approach. PREDIN also aims to create a foundation for long-term prosperity and stability in northern Mozambique (Mozambican government 2022). Both PRCD and PREDIN are led by the government of Mozambique

with support from international partners such as the World Bank, UN agencies, and other development organizations. However, these plans have led to the same type of criticism by local experts, with concerns over the need to consider the north–south divide and develop more participatory approaches in its implementation (Feijó 2022). In this context, this section also explores the fundamental role of NGOs as more effective implementation partners focused on prevention, peace, and development.

3.5.1 MASC (Civil Society Support Mechanism) Foundation

The MASC Foundation is a non-governmental organization that aims to stimulate Mozambique’s political and economic transformation to end absolute poverty and promote good governance. The foundation operates across all provinces, focusing on reaching marginalized areas through a network of community mobilizers. It works to create platforms to benefit the most marginalized groups, supporting them in reaching their economic and political potential and acting as a catalyst to address inequalities in social, economic, and political systems. In the Cabo Delgado region, the MASC Foundation developed several projects to address violent extremism directly and indirectly. One project is Kuna Katumaini (“There is Hope”), which focuses on the training, management, and finance of local fishermen and farmers. It also provides trucks, engines, and boat machinery to local businesses to promote local commerce and enhance logistics. Another initiative is the Education and Capacity-building Project, designed to educate local Imams through counter-narratives based on the correct interpretation of the Koran, in partnership with the Alimos or Imam Council of Nampula, Cabo Delgado, and Niassa. The Reinforcing Peace and Social Cohesion project trains Peace Ambassadors for ongoing communication with local and district governments, security agents, police, etc. Additionally, the foundation works on other projects such as fighting malaria, gender-based violence, employment, capacity building, and reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. All this work is designed to be prevention-oriented (Pereira 2022; Mussa 2022).

The MASC foundation intends to function as a national network fostering direct interventions working with the local communities and as an observatory of citizenship. The foundation also develops a research line related to Cabo Delgado and the reintegration of former combatants and works on the issue of decentralization which is very important for Cabo Delgado. The foundation supports fishermen in Memba, Nampula, and other areas. They buy engines for boats and give both men and women capacity-building programs in financial literacy. The communities themselves build the boats with the structure of small cooperatives. The MASC also gives support to create a mechanism for drying fish, considering the dynamics of local commerce in the region. Other projects focus on the health sector like building maternities or on economic development through employment projects (Mussa 2022).

The foundation works with surveys to understand the needs of the population. Therefore, they have many projects in agriculture or industrialization of Memba, Palma, and Mocimboa da Praia. There is also a project in Gaza, in an arid region, to extract water from the subsoil. This is done by a corporation that has as clients Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The intention is to grow more potatoes and citrus fruits and to grow more food for horses. They also support agrarian development for the surrounding communities with the donation of seeds and other products. Simultaneously, the spread of extremism is happening in Niassa. There is also a project there related to Macadamia production and where 200,000 trees have been planted. The project is focused on agriculture at the local level and avoiding pests. Agriculture projects bring more stability to the towns and villages of inland Cabo Delgado, although there is the need for more security to implement these projects more successfully. Another project promoted by the foundation is about counter-narratives to terrorism. The foundation's Mukhalihero organization collaborates with several Sheiks from Cabo Delgado, Niassa, Nampula, who have studied in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and other countries in the Middle East. The foundation also supports the capacity-building of Imams and *Álimos* (or Ulama) in the region to promote counter-narratives to terrorism and the correct interpretation of the Koran. There is also capacitation in the area of accounting reporting. Related to this there is also the plan to map the mosques and madrassas in the region. The foundation also aims at helping the reintegration of IDPs currently in Niassa and Nampula (Pereira 2022; Mussa 2022).

The MASC also works closely with international cooperation partners, e.g., with funding from Japan to build a hospital maternity in Pemba and it has a privileged relation with the governor of Cabo Delgado. It also funds musicians and artists to work on counter-narratives to terrorism through art. It offers transportation to young students from rural areas to make sure they can attend school. Through trust-building it was able to develop a good relationship with local communities (Pereira 2022).

3.5.2 The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a localized international non-governmental organization (L-INGO) that works to improve the well-being and self-reliance of communities in the developing world. In Mozambique, it addresses issues of food security and community reintegration in Cabo Delgado. The AKDN supports local people in the region to revive agricultural practices using village development organizations (VDOs) as key informal institutions. The VDOs are formed in small towns that are actually “oral societies.” VDOs are comprised of between 10 and 20 members representing local areas, with a local government representative also occasionally participating. The AKDN funds the creation of the VDOs, and the members are elected by locals in a democratic fashion. Once elected, these members will work to create “the map of dreams,” i.e., their optimal vision for the

future of those communities. Each member will share their dream for their village, and the AKDN will ask what they will do to achieve those dreams if they have financial support. Creating the map of dreams and generating discussion helps to understand problems and clarify modes of assistance. It is important to note that the exchange of ideas for the map of dreams remains limited to that small group of local people. Therefore, there is no external influence, enabling the AKDN activities to be fully adapted to each context (Saraiva 2023).

Inside the VDOs, the AKDN distributes a kit to initiate agricultural activities (Kit Agricultura), as they need basic tools like katanas and hoes to work on their *machambas* (small-sized fields). The AKDN has also developed an *extensionistas* (extensionist) network to provide technical assistance, with around 20 farmers participating in the on-site farming field school. A *machamba* is selected and the farmers meet there once a week to work together for one agricultural cycle. The aims of AKDN are to ensure “safe croplands” through the possibility of sanction in public forums and generate social contracts, organize people around the concept of a farming field school, and create a facilitators network—also known as station network technicians (SNTs). To achieve these goals, AKDN hires agricultural technicians, many of them from the Agrarian School of Bilibiza, now called the Ocuca Campus. The local market absorbs 50% to 60% of the graduates, stimulating regional employment. The other 40% become technicians through a participatory and practice-based learning process. The main objective is to provide local people with the opportunity to return to agriculture practice in the inland districts. This is implemented with an awareness of the need to prepare a new generation of farmers, and for the farming field school, there is the element of capacitation. Investing in youth is therefore a long-term project for AKDN, and building a relationship between them and the market provides an effective approach (Mamade 2022).

The AKDN’s community projects include micro fish farming, micro poultry houses, beekeeping (bees help to maintain forests), and fertilizers. In Nampula, the AKDN developed the project *Mel do Mar* (“Seaside Honey”). This entails re-establishing and working in mangrove forests in the coastal area, with 20 associations producing 1.7 tons of high-quality honey. The process involves local carpenters teaching local women how to work with the hives and deal with various challenges (e.g., mice and ants). Women help plant the mangrove trees and develop mechanisms to protect and regenerate the forest. The honey serves as a substitute for sugar and allows for self-sufficiency. While the program aims to attract economic agents, the priority is self-sufficiency. This whole process around the *Mel do Mar* project helps to promote further dialogue between local communities. The VDOs play a key role in the protection and regeneration of the mangroves, and this is integrated into its mechanism for the map of dreams. There is also a direct correlation with improvements for marine life (Mamade 2022).

External partners are also key, as seen in the case of Norway and its support for the training and capacity-building activities on the AKDN food security

project in Cabo Delgado. These activities aim to help local people in Cabo Delgado abandon their dependency on humanitarian assistance. The assistance considers the concept of resilience and support for vulnerable families. This constitutes the other side of resilience: preventing radicalism through education. As unemployment and lack of opportunities are seen as key drivers of extremism in Cabo Delgado, schools remain essential, and they therefore receive support from AKDN. However, short-duration courses are also offered to those who are not in school. Such courses focus on building practical skills and expertise in the domains of agriculture and beekeeping, for example. A start-up kit is offered to the students, which in turn can be used to teach family and friends. Another side of resilience concerns social cohesion through the VDOs. In these informal institutions, there are “conflict resolution commissions,” intended to take on key roles at the local level. The VDOs have a youth sub-committee focused on inclusivity to improve life in the village. The integration of youth into the communities is done through games and sports. In addition to providing support for young people, actions are taken to integrate youth into the collective good. As a result, it is hoped that more young people will identify with the victims rather than with the insurgents (Mamade 2022).

The principles and practices guiding the execution of AKDN projects emphasize the significance of context, adaptiveness, local responsibility, institutional learning through local networking, and self-organization while aiming to build the resilience of local communities. The adaptive approach of the AKDN in Mozambique stems from the contextualization process facilitated by VDOs and the map of dreams, which promotes participatory approaches and enhances the effectiveness of peace and development efforts even in the most intricate, demanding, and unpredictable areas. The adaptive approaches developed by local implementation partners can offer a more holistic strategy for addressing violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, tackling issues pertaining to unemployment and sustainable development in Mozambique’s most vulnerable regions.

3.6 USAID and JICA’s Preventive and Sustainable Development Approaches

International partners, such as multilateral and bilateral organizations, play a fundamental role in addressing violent extremism in Cabo Delgado. This section covers two examples of international cooperation partners working on preventive and sustainable development approaches: the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Both development organizations provide financial and technical assistance to support the efforts of local and localized NGOs and local communities. They also support the government of Mozambique and other organizations working on the ground to address the root causes of violent extremism, such as poverty, lack of access to basic services, and marginalization. Their support can include funding for programs that promote

economic development, improve access to education and vocational training, and support community-based initiatives that build social cohesion and resilience. They also support the government through capacity building, technical assistance, and the provision of equipment to the security forces and institutions working on the prevention and management of violent extremism.

3.6.1 The United States Agency for International Development (USAID): The Preventing Violent Extremism Approach

USAID has identified Northern Mozambique as a priority geographic area of implementation, as outlined in its five-year Country Development and Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), approved in 2020. The US government is also developing the ten-year strategy for prevention of conflict and to promote stability in conjunction with the government of Mozambique. As the largest humanitarian assistance donor in the country, USAID adheres to the principle of first “do no harm” and “prioritizes saving lives.” The goal is to support a more resilient, more democratic, prosperous, and healthier Mozambique. Education-related activities are one of the key USAID priorities in Cabo Delgado. These are: 1) The Recovery in Cabo Delgado project: working with the government, local organizations, and the private sector in Pemba and Metuge districts to help IDPs and host communities develop sustainable sources of income that will decrease their need for humanitarian assistance; 2) The Olipihana project: working with the government, local organizations, and the private sector to restore education and livelihood opportunities for 12,000 residents of the Montepuez, Ancuabe and Balama districts of Cabo Delgado; and 3) The Community Resilience and Youth Empowerment in Cabo Delgado project: improving technical skills, employment interventions and integration into the agricultural value chain with inputs and life-changing irrigation tools to grow fruits and vegetables and attain food security, improve productivity and income in five districts, namely Chiure, Montepuez, Macomia, Mueda, and Metuge (USAID Mozambique 2022).

USAID also supports democracy and governance activities in Cabo Delgado in the following areas: 1) Peacebuilding: Building Social Cohesion and Preventing Violent Extremism (implemented by IOM), and Youth-led Action for Peace (implemented by CRS); 2) Media Strengthening: Community Radio Strengthening (CORAGEM, implemented by h2n association), Investigative Journalism Strengthening (REAJIR, implemented by MidiaLab); and 3) Decentralization: Local Governance Strengthening (LOGOS, implemented by DAI). USAID supports short and longer-term activities that develop and provide economic opportunities, especially for youth and young women. A core part of ensuring people, particularly youth, have greater economic opportunities is to equip them with skills that are relevant to the local economy, yet can also be transferable to other environments. It is understood that skill building alone will not create economic opportunities for people and must be paired with demand-oriented

interventions to create jobs and business opportunities. For example, participants should be supported with basic business management and entrepreneurship skills, as well as soft skills to assist them in finding work and succeeding in the labor market. For youth, approaches that incorporate positive youth development principles and strategies are strongly encouraged, including focusing on building young people's ability to make meaningful contributions to, and engage in, society. Approaches should work through existing community organizations and structures as much as possible, such as commune local development committees, youth councils, and market management committees (USAID Mozambique 2022).

The USAID Mozambique delegation designs, implements, monitors, and evaluates its programs in accordance with approaches that emphasize good development, as defined in USAID policy through ADS Chapter 201, USAID's official guidance for programming. This is referred to as the program cycle, which sets out key practices and procedures, including internal and external consultations, desk reviews, and possible assessments or studies to help better understand a given context or perceived problem and then to develop suitable theories of change. During implementation, there is a strong emphasis on constant monitoring and feedback to enable learning and adaptation. In addition, certain programs incorporate a mid-term or end-of-program third-party evaluation to inform implementation or any follow-on design. For Cabo Delgado, there is additional emphasis on localization, research, and flexibility. The design process of USAID programs incorporates several mandatory analyses (gender, environment, and climate risk) to ensure that no harm principles are applied and to identify areas that may require special attention or specific measures given the type of intervention (USAID Mozambique 2022).

The design process at USAID Mozambique favors a hybrid approach with the intent to merge the USAID funding and priority streams identified in the country strategy with needs and gaps raised by various stakeholders on the ground. The design process incorporates questions to ensure inclusiveness, such as "How are local communities being involved and/or benefiting from this intervention?" and "What local organizations or local entities can or should be involved in design and/or implementation?" USAID frequently uses co-creation as a process to design new programs, a style of design that allows for local perspectives to be included and for local voices to develop the programs in coordination with USAID. The newly awarded Resilient Coastal Communities award was a product of co-creation. USAID has also recently hosted a local industry day, where 80 local organizations interacted with USAID officials to learn how to better partner with the US Government. USAID aims to give 25% of all new awards to local partners by 2025 and ensure that 50% of all USAID programming reflects local priorities and initiatives by 2030. This will put locally led organizations in the driver's seat of their own development agendas (USAID Mozambique 2022).

3.6.2 The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA): The Sustainable Development and Human Security Approach

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Mozambique has been developing several initiatives to address the fragility and vulnerability of Cabo Delgado and neighboring provinces. Due to current security constraints, JICA's programs attempt to address the socio-economic root causes of the conflict by focusing on the development of Nampula and Niassa. In addition, the organization offers support to IDPs from Cabo Delgado, working with several NGOs focused on provincial repatriation. The staff participating in these programs are from both Cabo Delgado and Nampula (JICA Mozambique 2022).

Considering Cabo Delgado's socio-economic background, JICA is focusing on directly supporting fishermen and fishery centers (each with 500–600 fishermen). It focuses on building infrastructure, providing technology, and improving the model of fishery and processing methods in these centers. This should then lead to growth in aggregated value and revenues. The target areas are Memba, Nacala-Porto, and Nacala-a-Velha districts in Nampula province. Experts are dispatched to support capacity-building in six domains: 1) fishery value-chain development, 2) fishing technology, 3) fishery infrastructure development, 4) quality control, 5) marketing, and 6) fisheries' extensions (JICA Mozambique 2022).

In addition, JICA supports private organizations working on emergency services and social responsibility programs addressing the IDPs situation in Cabo Delgado. These programs focus on humanitarian aid, reconstruction, and development, creating jobs and long-term partnerships for development. The projects for job creation include cash for work and promoting income generation through the capitalization of small businesses and the informal sector. The partnerships for long-term development reduce the risk of investment by providing incentives for business partners to invest in Palma and Mocimboa da Praia and generating a stable operating environment. In Palma, the capital of Cabo Delgado, a project was implemented by the MASC Foundation with the support of JICA and other cooperation partners. As part of the project, 24 Tuk-Tuks were allocated to a local shop that will serve as a workshop and training center facility for other local Tuk-Tuk drivers (JICA Mozambique 2022).

JICA's sustainable development and human security approach in the region focuses on building quality infrastructure and improving regional industries, e.g., through the "one district, one product" concept. In this regard, JICA has been disseminating the "Oita, Kyushu model," first conceived in the 1980s. This model focuses on creating unique products with aggregated value that are local and traditional. In this regard, JICA intends to provide technical assistance and share the Japanese Kaizen model. Kaizen is a continuous improvement approach that emphasizes incremental changes and employee involvement to optimize productivity, efficiency, and overall business

performance. This model has been implemented in Nampula in 2023. In addition, the CaDUP project—The Project for Development of Local Industry through One Village One Product Movement—currently supports 200 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nampula, a priority area for the rehabilitation of SMEs. The project involves direct collaboration with the Provincial Department of Industry for the capacity building of extension agents who are employed by the county government to increase crop yields, prevent erosion, and eliminate blight—many participants are from Cabo Delgado (JICA Mozambique 2022).

Based on its sustainable development and human security approach, JICA also developed the Project for Construction of Bridges on N380 in Cabo Delgado. This project has the strategic objective of improving and expanding infrastructure and transportation services. It incorporates the main principles of policy implementation: sustainability, connectivity, accessibility, transportability, and asset preservation. The overarching goal is to accelerate development in the surrounding areas by improving the road network and enhancing fundamental living conditions. This project will secure smooth and safe connectivity for communities along the N380 (Sunate to Oasse) through the reconstruction of several bridges: Messalo-1 (45m), Messalo-3 (60m), and Mapuede (45m), thereby contributing to growth in the economy of Cabo Delgado and neighboring regions (JICA 2020).

Current efforts by international cooperation partners to address the conflict in Cabo Delgado highlight a spectrum of approaches—from security to prevention and development. However, there have only been a few attempts to integrate all three of these dimensions, with most projects prioritizing one of them. This section presented the USAID approach to prevention and JICA's approach toward sustainable development and human security in Cabo Delgado and neighboring provinces.

3.7 Fostering Resilient Development and Community-embedded Prevention through the Grassroots

Preventing violent extremism at the grassroots level is a critical component in addressing the complex challenges faced by the local communities in Cabo Delgado. Local experts have emphasized the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict and instability by linking resilience, adaptive peacebuilding, and prevention amid the complexity of the Cabo Delgado system. This aligns with the idea that peace has to emerge from within. As de Coning and Osland argued in Chapter 2,

Social systems develop and sustain themselves, and external actors like the United Nations or international development agencies can, at best, only stimulate and influence the process. Depending on how external actors relate to the societies they are trying to assist, their actions can inhibit, interfere with or even disrupt the self-organizing process in a

complex social system, or they can nurture, enable and stimulate self-organization

By integrating resilience, peacebuilding, and community-embedded preventive actions, local non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and religious groups can serve as essential nodes for sharing information and implementing related interventions. A local government that is more resilient and an emergency management system that is more responsive will contribute to preparedness at a local level as well. To ensure the coexistence of community-based prevention and security responses, it is crucial to develop coordination mechanisms and institutions that concentrate on research and capacity-building, as well as increasing the participation of local communities and civil society—especially women and young people. By enabling multi-sector coordination through a whole-of-system approach, preventive interventions should prove more effective than those that rely solely on hard-security approaches (Saraiva and Erfe 2023).

Looking at the socio-economic context of Cabo Delgado, the sectors of agriculture, fisheries, timber, mining, and transport are among the major employers in the region and play a significant role in shaping the resilience of local populations. One effective approach to preventing violent extremism at the grassroots level is to provide direct support to small and local farmers. This can be achieved by promoting self-sufficiency, by developing sustainable agricultural practices, and maintaining small-scale farming operations, or *machambas*. Additionally, the promotion of modern cooperativism and support for agriculture cooperatives and communal villages can also contribute to economic development and social cohesion. Supporting fishermen in the Cabo Delgado and Nampula coastal areas, for example, is essential for maintaining peace in the region. The initial radicalization process in the area was observed among young fishermen in Montepuez Bay, demonstrating how imperative it is to support the local fishing industry. In addition, providing assistance to the timber, mining, and transport industries can also play a key role in preventing violent extremism at the grassroots level in Cabo Delgado. Many young locals rely on jobs in these sectors, and the development of new roads and infrastructure will indirectly benefit the local population (Adam 2022c; Forquilha 2022).

According to a focus group discussion with an agricultural cooperative in the Moamba district, Maputo province, providing irrigation and refrigeration machinery can radically change the level of self-sustainability of these cooperatives. The focus group discussion centered around the challenges faced by a cooperative in the 1st Block of Mozambique, which spans 400 hectares and primarily supplies the local market with produce grown in greenhouses. The cooperative, which was once owned by Samora Machel and was supported by North Korea and Kim Il-Sung during the Cold War, needs to be reformed and rehabilitated to address issues of unemployment and infrastructure in the region. The group discussed the need for empowerment in maintenance and accounting services, as well as the need for a refrigeration system and

warehouse for canning potatoes and tomatoes. Additionally, the group identified the need for the rehabilitation of dams and water pumping stations, and the installation of solar energy to meet international standards for combating global warming (Agriculture Cooperative 2022).

The focus group also discussed the potential for the cooperative to promote food sovereignty and security in the region and the importance of preventing problems before they arise. The group asserted that the cooperative has the potential to become a breadbasket for the province and that government and development partners should provide support for its restoration. The group suggested that the cooperative could function as a service center for other farmers with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture. Members of the group discussed the need for marketing and branding to compete with rival producers from South Africa and China, as well as the need to develop a model that gives independence to the producer. Finally, the group stressed the importance of the cooperative's cultural and social dimensions and the need for community radios, libraries, and schools for the families of their members to ensure their long-term sustainability (Agriculture Cooperative 2022).

The movement for modern cooperativism in Mozambique has gained strength since 2016. This model mixes cooperativism with sustainable development, which adds value when implemented in conflict zones. Cooperatives bring together the individual and collective potentials: when individuals combine their capacities, they form a collective capacity. Today, cooperatives follow a normal business structure with an organizational hierarchy model, with a General Assembly, Supervisory Board, Executive Board, etc. Each body rotates every three years. The General Director can be a member of the cooperative or hired for the role. The most common model is for the cooperative to contract out management and design the terms of reference (Menezes 2022).

Cooperatives play a significant role in the mining industry as well. All resources are distributed through the cooperative, and this reduces smuggling, violence, and crime in local communities. Respect for the environment is also promoted, allowing the region and country to increase the value and competitiveness of extractive resources at an international level. The rubies from Cabo Delgado are sold for 5,000 or 10,000 meticaïs (approximately \$157) and then re-sold outside the country for \$1 million dollars. It is also possible to create jobs in the cutting and processing industries using the strength of cooperatives. Thus, cooperatives can play a significant role in the training and empowerment of their members, providing knowledge that is not static but adaptive, as part of an effective approach. Investing in the cooperative model could have helped to avoid the conflict because it functions as a micro-society and an early warning system (Menezes 2022).

In this context, the "cooperative act" is also relevant. In other words, all transactions are mediated through the cooperative, and its members are exempt from tax—e.g., the cooperative cannot charge tax for the supply of water. The cooperative model also allows for the formalization of the informal sector, which represents a large part of the economy of Cabo Delgado

and the country. Considering the fishing sector, there are several fishermen's cooperatives that have obtained IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) funding, sometimes exceeding \$50 million, which has allowed for considerable improvements in infrastructure and fishing systems. As a result of more natural resources and energy, cooperatives function as structures to combat illegal smuggling, as well as environmental issues. Their work requires that they adhere to international standards (Menezes 2022).

Overall, preventing violent extremism at the grassroots level requires a holistic and integrated approach to addressing the complex interplay of economic, social, political, and security factors that contribute to conflict and instability. By supporting local communities and economic development, it is possible to create an enabling environment for sustainable peace. Providing support for local farming, fishing, timber and transportation sectors can enhance the resilience of local communities in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. To promote sustainable development, it is crucial to address the socio-economic root causes of violent extremism. By implementing adaptive peace-building and community-embedded prevention programs, it will also be possible to enhance food security, create jobs and income opportunities, and improve the overall living standards in the region. Through cooperatives and other associations, a platform for community members is available for local residents to come together and work toward common goals, thereby helping to promote social cohesion and reducing the risk of violent extremism. Furthermore, by improving access to markets and providing training and technical assistance, cooperatives, associations and SMEs can help to increase the productivity and competitiveness of local farmers and fishermen. This, in turn, can help to reduce poverty, improve food security, and promote sustainable development in Cabo Delgado, which are key factors in addressing the socio-economic root causes of violent extremism.

In line with the findings presented in this section, local experts offered additional recommendations to sustain peace and resilience at the grassroots. They highlighted that security operations will continue to be necessary, but they should be complemented by the development of infrastructure and reconstruction efforts such as roads, bridges, hospitals, health centers, schools, and technical schools. Additionally, they recommend protecting forests and promoting traditional herbal medicine to increase health tourism across the region as part of a long-term vision for the province. Furthermore, these experts recommend that donors should focus on peace education and work with local imams and mosques, community leaders, youth and women to provide capacity-building and education seminars. They also advocated supporting local community policing through the development of an adapted local police system suited to the Cabo Delgado context (Adam 2022b; Feijó 2022; Forquilha 2022).

To promote peace and reconciliation, local experts recommend supporting amnesty and the human rights of the insurgents who have been arrested. They suggest developing community radios to disseminate information and support

further research related to Cabo Delgado through institutions such as the Center for African Studies at Eduardo Mondlane University and increasing the number of international exchange programs. They recommend promoting reconciliation through culture, fostering “historical memory” by, for example, restoring the National History Archive and supporting the National Institute of Cinema, currently known as the National Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries, thereby contributing to the preservation of the cultural legacy of Cabo Delgado all over the country. Finally, local experts noted the importance of managing amnesties and releasing prisoners who have committed war crimes. Other key elements for addressing the conflict include training the state and informal police forces and intelligence and fighting corruption. They highlighted the notion that mediation remains an option and that it is necessary to create a platform for negotiations (Adam 2022d).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter explored current responses in Cabo Delgado to violent extremism and offered a glimpse into preventive and holistic approaches that emphasize resilience and peacebuilding while embedding prevention efforts within local communities. Resilience refers to the ability of individuals and communities to withstand and recover from traumatic events and to resist the pull of extremist ideologies. Peacebuilding involves creating the conditions for lasting peace through conflict resolution, reconciliation, and reintegration. Finally, community-embedded prevention involves working closely with local leaders, organizations, and residents to address the underlying drivers of extremism and to build community-based solutions. Holistic approaches to address violent extremism recognize that traditional top-down and security-focused approaches are less effective and can even be counter-productive. Instead, by focusing on resilience, peacebuilding and community-embedded prevention, local, national, and international actors can develop long-term solutions that address the root causes of extremism and build stronger, more resilient communities.

The current pathway developed by the Mozambican government and international partners still differs from the advice given by local experts who have researched Cabo Delgado for decades. These experts recognize the need for a paradigm change to address this conflict, acknowledging that peace and resilience need to emerge from the people of Cabo Delgado province. For peace and resilience to truly take root in Cabo Delgado province, it is essential that local communities are placed at the forefront of interventions aimed at addressing the ongoing conflict and insecurity. This means shifting the focus from security-first approaches and top-down and externally driven initiatives to bottom-up, locally-led approaches that empower communities to create self-sustainable peace mechanisms. Such a goal can be achieved in various ways, such as community-based participatory planning and implementation, capacity-building, and establishing local governance structures that are accountable to and representative of the community.

By placing local communities in the driving seat of interventions related to peace and resilience, it is possible to build sustainable solutions tailored to specific regional needs and realities while promoting a sense of ownership and buy-in among community members. These approaches can foster a sense of unity, reconciliation, and empowerment, which will be vital in sustaining peace and resilience in Cabo Delgado. In sum, integrating resilience, adaptive peacebuilding, and community-based prevention will enable a process of *self-sustaining peace*, where the scope and pace of interventions are defined according to the local context and with the participation and agency of those most affected by violent extremism.

Note

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4 Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in the Complex Context of the Syrian Conflict

Ako Muto

4.1 Introduction

While there is no unified definition of violent extremism (VE), we understand VE as violence justified by or in pursuit of some sort of political or religious agenda (de Coning and Osland, Chapter 2 in this volume). VE is considered and addressed as “conducive to terrorism” (UNGA 2015). One of the triggers for the emergence and spread of such VE in societies has been identified as prolonged and unresolved armed intra-state conflict (henceforth referred to as “conflict”) (UNGA 2015). Specifically, in many countries affected by such conflicts, the emergence of VE by various armed groups can be observed across the whole country, regardless of the dominant party.

The international community has primarily countered such VE through military operations. However, at the same time, the international community has long believed that many people join radical armed groups for economic and social reasons, such as unemployment and discrimination, not necessarily because of their radical ideology. Therefore, it has supported building more resilient societies through peacebuilding processes, stabilizing economic and social infrastructure and restoring the provision of administrative and essential services, such as water and electricity, compulsory education and medical care, and legal institutions. In addition to military operations, the international community has undertaken efforts to provide peacebuilding assistance and has promoted the realization of resilient societies so that people are not drawn to VE.

However, there is a crucial question of how the international community should respond to VE in the midst of a protracted conflict. As the occurrence of VE will undoubtedly affect the conflict, the international community needs to prevent and counter VE while also responding to conflicts. Military interventions are able to address them to some extent, but as discussed, likely to be insufficient. During conflicts, the international community usually provides humanitarian assistance, mostly for survival and relief. In addition, humanitarian assistance can encompass community resilience, such as improving livelihoods and restoring small-scale infrastructure. Post-conflict peacebuilding approaches have aimed to enhance social cohesion and build resilient societies with post-conflict reconstruction envisioned or when there is a

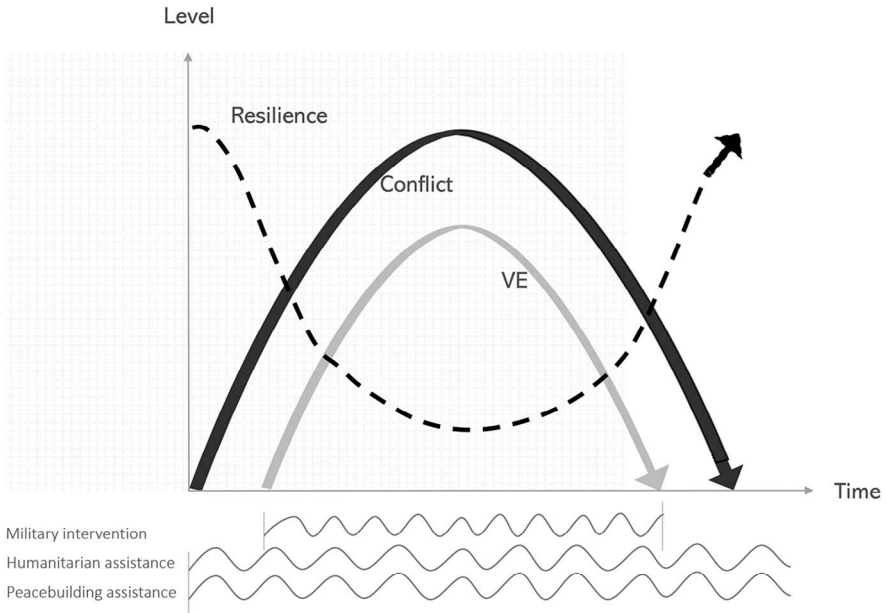


Figure 4.1 Conceptual relationship between resilience, conflict, VE, and approaches against VE.

Source: author. Figure generated based on “Pathways for Peace,” World Bank and United Nations 2018.

prospect of ending the conflict. The United Nations (UN), together with the World Bank, has continuously argued and advocated for all actors involved in conflict resolution and international cooperation to work together at all times, regardless of the stage of conflict, before, during, or after the conflict (World Bank and United Nations 2018).

Figure 4.1 visually depicts the above conceptual discussion. In other words, preventing and countering VE during protracted conflicts requires a combination of military responses and humanitarian and peacebuilding support for resilient communities. There should be an expectation that such actions will contribute to ending the conflict and further strengthening social cohesion and resilience.

Based on the above introduction, this chapter will explore and respond to the following three questions. First, in what ways does VE occur and spread during protracted conflicts, and what impact does it have on the progress of the conflict? Second, what are the pros and cons of military interventions in countering VE? Third, what peacebuilding support and humanitarian assistance practices effectively prevent and counter VE, and what are the challenges? To address these questions, this chapter explores the case of a radical armed group during the Syrian conflict, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), looking at its emergence, expansion of power, loss of practical areas

under its control and the humanitarian situation in these areas after its collapse. The period covered in this chapter spans from its beginning in March 2011 up to the occurrence of earthquakes in February 2023, before the conflict ended in 2024, at a time when the Syrian conflict remained in flux.

This chapter employs the following methodologies. First, in line with the overall conceptual framework of this book, it examines two approaches to address VE. The first comprises military interventions to counter VE, while the second encompasses non-military responses to prevent and counter VE—peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance including elements of building resilience. This chapter collected data primarily from academic literature, practitioners' reports, and media sources, combined with semi-structured online interviews with Syrians based outside Syria, the Middle East, and Europe who are engaged in assistance within Syria. The survey was conducted intermittently from December 2021 to July 2023. Qualitative methods such as narrative analysis and process tracing were used to examine the data.

Section 2 discusses the rise of ISIS during the Syrian conflict and the international community's responses. The rise of ISIS was a result of the growing instability of the protracted and intensified conflict which created the governance vacuum. While the international community's military intervention contributed to defeating ISIS, it further complicated the context of the conflict and the international community's contested roles. Section 3 provides an analysis on non-military approaches, peacebuilding and resilience. After the defeat of ISIS, governance within Syria became even more fragmented, influenced by the increasing complexity of the conflict. It has affected peacebuilding for resilience, which is vital for preventing and countering VE. This section also highlights some responses adaptive to the context initiated by Syrians. Finally, Section 4 summarizes the findings of this chapter, specifically addressing the impact of military intervention in countering VE and the possibilities and challenges for resilience-building approaches.

4.2 Emergence, Prevention, and Countering Violent Extremism

4.2.1 Rise of ISIS and Its Impact

The Syrian conflict involved many external actors at the international and regional levels. Among the five permanent members (henceforth referred to as "P5") of the UN Security Council (UNSC), France, the United Kingdom, and the United States supported the opposition groups, which demanded the resignation of the president and the formation of a transitional government. On the other hand, Russia respected the state sovereignty of Syria and the Syrian government's efforts toward a solution. In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Qatar strongly supported the opposition groups, while Iran consistently supported the Syrian government. In the case of Turkey, its political position differed from both these groups. It initially provided a base for the opposition groups (Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2013),

but after the conflict shifted toward supremacy by the Syrian government, it moved closer to Russia (UNSC 2016). Then, as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—a Kurdish-led multi-ethnic militia consisting of Kurds, Arabs, and other ethnic groups—expanded their effective control over northeastern Syria, Turkey began military interventions into Syrian territory, backing the armed opposition groups called the Syrian National Army (SNA) (or Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army) (Yüksel 2019). Turkey seems concerned about the rise of Kurdish forces.

The international community's different positions on the Syrian conflict perpetuated the struggles between the diverse parties to the conflict. Opposition groups, said to number in the thousands, did not unite to become a single actor aiming to topple the Syrian government (Sayigh 2013; Abboud 2018). Instead, they fought each other to expand their areas of control, resulting in frequent changes of the ruling armed groups (Khalaf 2015, 46). Some armed groups developed good relations with the population, while others tortured and repeatedly looted areas with pro-government populations (Human Rights Watch 2012). This resulted in a situation of perpetual fear in the population, and thus, these groups did not enjoy the broad support of the Syrian people.

These factors demonstrated the intensity of the Syrian conflict. Figure 4.2 shows the number of deaths from conflicts worldwide compared to those of the Syrian conflict. Between 2012 and 2016, the number of deaths caused by the Syrian conflict accounted for about half of the global death toll, notably more than 60% in 2012 and nearly 70% in 2013.

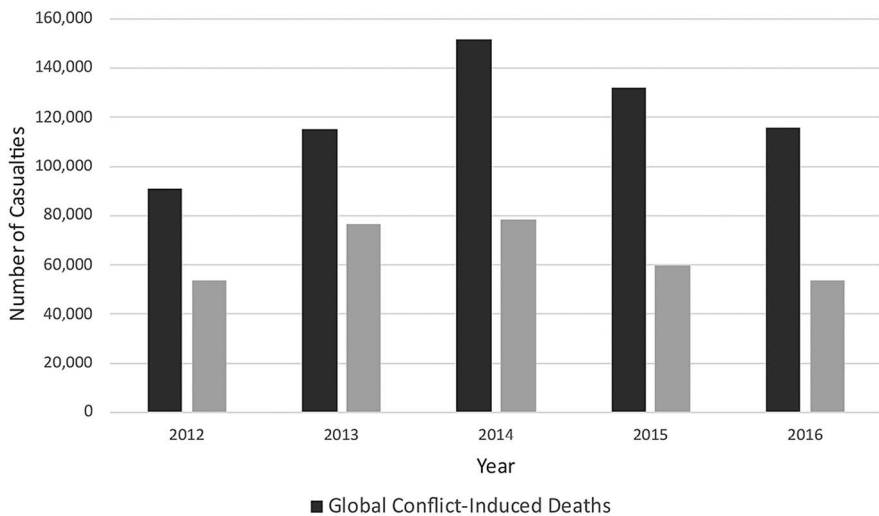


Figure 4.2 Global conflict-induced deaths and Syrian conflict-induced deaths (2012–2016).

Source: author. Figure generated based on the Uppsala Conflict Database Program (Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2022).

Because the battlegrounds were mostly in the areas controlled by opposition groups, governance in these areas became unstable and fragmented (Khalaf 2015; Favier 2016; Abboud 2018). Residents set up hundreds of local councils (LCs), an alternative administrative structure that emerged in the areas where the Syrian government had withdrawn. Their backgrounds and the situations surrounding them were disparate. For example, some LCs voted internally in selecting members; the European Union (EU) supported some; Saudi Arabia and Qatar supported others. The LCs needed to establish good relations with diverse armed groups to maintain governance. For example, some LCs worked to sustain public services with the support of the opposition groups and their backers (Darwish 2016; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2014). On the other hand, the Syrian government sought to maintain its influence within opposition group-held areas, in some cases maintaining core infrastructure such as water and electricity and keeping teachers and other civil servants on the payroll (Favier 2016). However, 60% of the LCs received no support (Khalaf, Ramadan, and Stolleis 2014). Because of this diversity in the situation of the LCs, their governance was often community-based. Many LCs did not work together, and a cohesive governing structure to replace the government did not emerge (LACU 2013; Sayigh 2013).

Restoring fragmented governance structures can lead to more resilient societies and stronger social cohesion—a significant aim of peacebuilding. Traditionally, in a narrow sense, peacebuilding denotes post-conflict reconstruction and state-building while, in a broader sense, it comprises political efforts to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of conflict (UNSG 1992; UNGA 2016). Whatever the implications, progress in peacebuilding should enhance social cohesion and enable societies to build resilience to the effects of conflict. However, if the international community is at odds and supports different parties to the conflict, and if the parties to the conflict are not willing to implement peacebuilding measures, the goal of achieving a resilient society will be challenging.

This situation of non-resilient, fragile governance was one of the significant factors that facilitated the emergence of VE, including the entry of foreign fighters. When fighters are local to an area, they may be able to establish a beneficial relationship with the community (Crawford 2015), but when they are foreign, their ties to the community are likely to be much more tenuous. In Syria, some radical armed groups created a secure base for their operations by occupying communities where governance was weak. Among many radical armed groups, between 2014 and 2015, ISIS effectively controlled around 35% of Syria's territory. This was mainly in the northeast, where it declared the establishment of the so-called "Islamic State" in mid-2014 (Richani 2016). ISIS's primary goal was to expand the so-called "Islamic State" and not to overthrow the Syrian government, although that aim was also included. For the Syrian government, the expansion of radical armed groups, such as ISIS, supported its claim from the beginning that the conflict was a fight against terrorists. As with other opposition groups, the Syrian government paid the salaries of civil servants in areas effectively controlled by ISIS and even purchased oil from ISIS after it occupied oil fields (Helou 2021). Practical necessity played a role.

In sum, from the beginning, the Syrian conflict became internationalized, with different countries supporting different parties to the conflict. With international support, the parties to the conflict continued their fight, and the conflict expanded, intensified, and became prolonged. ISIS took advantage of the governance vacuum created by the Syrian government's withdrawal to establish effective control of those parts of Syria it occupied. It prioritized the expansion of its effective control, and for the Syrian government, the emergence of ISIS was seen as a vindication of the legitimacy of its own rule. The rise of such a radical, armed, non-state actor during the conflict had a complex impact on its progress. Moreover, the rise of ISIS brought about a new dimension to the Syrian conflict—military interventions on Syrian territory by the international community.

4.2.2 Countering Violent Extremism and Its Influence

The international community, which had different views over the Syrian government's responsibility for the conflict, agreed on countering VE when ISIS expanded its power. Namely, less than two months after ISIS declared the establishment of the Islamic State, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2170 authorizing the fight against ISIS (UNSC 2014b). It found a rationale with which it could shelve the confrontation between the P5. The month after the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2170, the US-led coalition, comprising Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Al Jazeera 2014), launched airstrikes on areas within Syrian territory effectively controlled by ISIS. Then, France, Russia, the United Kingdom—the rest of the P5 excluding China—and Turkey, as well as a few other countries, also started airstrikes, independently. It should be noted, however, that measures to end the conflict were not discussed in the UNSC when this resolution was adopted.

The international community's airstrikes brought two major and distinct changes in the context of the conflict. First, the Syrian government gained the upper hand in the conflict after Russia commenced its airstrikes (Muto 2022). As the airstrikes by Russia were at the request of the government, there was no violation of international law. However, Russia was criticized as attacking US-backed opposition groups (Bannelier-Christakis 2016). In other words, the Russian airstrikes were seen as supporting the Syrian government. On the other hand, the airstrikes by other countries were aimed at defeating ISIS and were disconnected from strengthening the opposition groups or ending the conflict. Shortly before the Russian airstrikes, Syria began to criticize attacks on Syrian territory by France, the UK, and the US—three countries of the P5 of UNSC—as well as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey (UNGA and UNSC 2015). These moves were considered to have contributed to the Syrian government's dominance in the conflict.

As a result, countries that had supported the opposition groups had to make significant concessions. In late 2015, the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), consisting of 20 countries and organizations, was formed to

support a peace process among the parties to the conflict (UNSG 2015). Then, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2254 endorsing the ISSG agreement (UNSC 2015), and the UN-led peace process began in 2016. The commencement of a peace process is one of the most critical steps in peacebuilding, and in the case of the Syrian conflict, countering VE in the form of military intervention could be considered one of the drivers to advance peacebuilding. However, the Syrian government participated in the peace process as the most important party to the conflict. The ouster of President Assad was not a *de facto* precondition for the peace process.

While the UN-led peace process had begun, a pathway to sustainable peace was nowhere in sight. Since countering VE was not subject to a ceasefire, it was easy for both the parties to the conflict and the countries implementing airstrikes to find reasons not to stop the fighting. Due to the lack of progress in the peace process, the Astana talks began in 2017 (UNSC 2016), intending to revitalize the UN-led peace process. This provided a framework for dialogue between the parties to the conflict. It was initiated by Russia, which supports the Syrian government, and Turkey, which supports the opposition groups—including Iran. The Astana talks have been held irregularly, and in May 2017, the three countries agreed to designate four de-escalation zones to ease the conflict's tensions (Islamic Republic of Iran, Russian Federation, and Republic of Turkey 2017). It allowed the Syrian government to deploy its forces away from the de-escalation zones to other areas to continue the fighting (Muto 2022). In other words, the Syrian government could proceed to recover lost land while other countries conducted airstrikes.

The cessation of hostilities in limited areas increased, and the death toll in the conflict declined, as shown in Figure 4.3. Compared to Figure 4.2, Figure 4.3 shows that the number of deaths from the Syrian conflict as a percentage

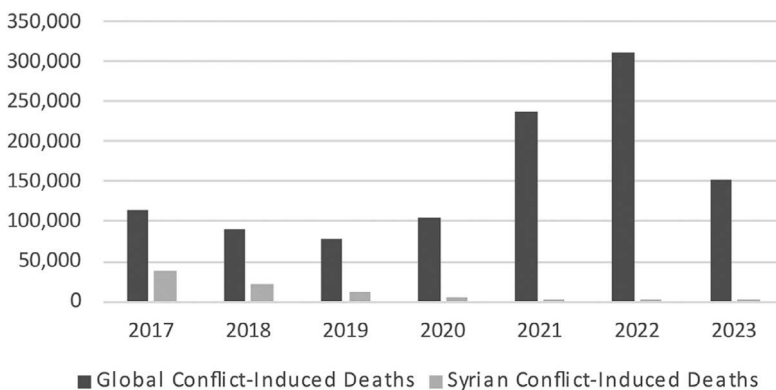


Figure 4.3 Global conflict-induced deaths and Syrian conflict-induced deaths (2017–2021). Source: author. Figure generated based on the Uppsala Conflict Database Program (Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2022.)

of the global conflict death toll has decreased. Although some have pointed to the small-scale ceasefire as a de facto surrender by the opposition groups (Hinnebusch and Imady 2017), it was assumed that the Syrian conflict was effectively moving toward what Galtung calls a “negative peace” (Galtung 1969), an absence of violent conflict.

On the other hand, it should be noted that further internationalization of the conflict influenced the Syrian government’s recovery of lost ground. For example, Russia, Turkey, and Iran, which led the Astana talks, agreed to establish monitoring posts equipped with troops on Syrian territory in order to make the de-escalation zones work (Islamic Republic of Iran, Russian Federation, and Republic of Turkey 2017). Furthermore, Russia secured semi-permanent access to a military base near the port of Tartous on the Mediterranean Sea, and Iran retained influence by training pro-government militias (DW 2017a; Jedinia and Al Hendi 2017). In contrast, Turkey, which supported the opposition groups, was condemned by the Syrian government for having stationed more troops than agreed upon in the Astana talks (DW 2017b). The US, leading the coalition, also maintained its bases inside Syria near the borders of Iraq and Jordan, and Syria and Russia criticized its illegal presence. However, the US-led coalition and the supporting countries also indicated their intention to continue their involvement in Syria (Office of the Spokesperson 2022). Although the Syrian government gained the upper hand in the conflict in the wake of the international community’s countering VE, the peace process failed to bring about a nationwide ceasefire agreement. The state sovereignty that the Syrian government was restoring was fragile in the sense that it was under the influence of several countries, including Russia, Iran, and Turkey.

The second change that the international community’s military interventions brought about in the balance of power between the parties to the conflict was the expansion of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), one of the major Kurdish parties in Syria. Even before the Syrian conflict, the Kurds had suffered from repression, including deprivation of civil rights. Nevertheless, in the early stages of the conflict, they did not make their political positions clear (Abboud 2018). However, after the Syrian government withdrew from the northeast due to the opposition groups’ offensive, the PYD became playing a leading role in the governance of three cantons (regions) in northern Syria, with all three cantons declaring autonomy by January 2014 (Khalaf 2016; Abboud 2018). As ISIS expanded its territory in northeastern Syria, the US-led coalition, rather than cultivating opposition groups through military interventions, cooperated with YPG, the military arm of the PYD, and then the SDF, which the YPG formed with other Kurds, Arabs, and other armed groups. This was effective: ISIS vacated Raqqa city, which it claimed as its capital, in 2017 and withdrew from its last stronghold in Baghouz city in 2019 (Al Jazeera 2017; 2019). Countering VE by the international community had succeeded. By contributing to defeating ISIS, the SDF and PYD could expand the areas under their effective control.

The expansion of the SDF and PYD resulted not only in a change in the balance of power between the parties to the conflict but also in a further internationalization of the Syrian conflict, as Turkey increased its involvement in the conflict. The SDF's mainstay, the YPG, and its political parent, the PYD, are considered offshoots of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which is designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the US, and the EU (Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2013). For Turkey, the expansion of the YPG along the Syrian-Turkish border was an unacceptable threat. For this reason, since August 2016, Turkey has intermittently intervened in northern Syria in collaboration with the SNA, which it supports (Arango, Barnard, and Yeginsu 2016). Turkey has supported the opposition groups since the very beginning of the Syrian conflict, providing them with political and military bases. As noted above, the opposition groups fared poorly in the conflict, and many disbanded in response to a regional ceasefire with the Syrian government. However, Turkey reorganized the armed opposition groups that remained mainly in northwestern Syria with military and economic support as SNA (Yüksel 2019). The SNA effectively controls some areas in the north, along the border with Turkey. It is fighting the SDF, which has also expanded into the northwest, and was also fighting the Syrian government, which was trying to regain its influence.

The balance of power between the parties to the conflict in northern Syria had not stabilized over the period this paper considers. In addition to SDF and SNA, another armed non-state actor, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), effectively controlled most parts of the Idlib governorate in northwest Syria and was fighting against other forces (Abhyankar 2020). Troops from various countries continue to be stationed there, possibly serving as a deterrent against a recurrence of VE through ISIS's recovery. However, ISIS has marginally revived, reorganized its network inside and outside Syria, and continues to carry out intermittent attacks (ICG 2022). In early 2022, a prison housing former ISIS fighters was attacked, resulting in heavy fighting, numerous casualties, and the escape of 200 members (UNGA 2022). In addition, in early 2023, at least twenty members suspected to be ISIS fighters escaped from prison when severe earthquakes hit southern Turkey and northern Syria (Al Arabiya 2023). Although the containment of ISIS through armed intervention appeared to be effective in the short term, the balance of power that resulted from these attempts to counter VE did not increase overall stability, and it was not possible to rule out the possibility of ISIS's resurgence.

In sum, the defeat of ISIS proved that military interventions by the international community were somewhat effective in the fight against VE in Syria. However, these military interventions were not linked to enhancing peacebuilding and did not end the conflict. The Syrian government could not control the entire country, and at least three armed non-state actors effectively controlled some areas in the north of Syria. Given the emergence of ISIS in the governance vacuum during the conflict, stable governance within Syria is essential to prevent the re-emergence of radical armed groups like ISIS.

Accordingly, the challenge is to build peace across the country to increase resilience towards sustaining peace.

4.3 Efforts and Challenges to Retain Resilience

4.3.1 The International Community's Support before the Rise of ISIS

The argument of this section focuses on the other framework of this publication, resilience and peacebuilding in preventing and countering VE. Resilience is considered “the ability to *adapt* to difficult situations” (Chapter 2). This suggests that resilience is a concept that implies being less susceptible to shocks and capable of a quick and better recovery. Building resilience does not have to be solely through full-scale post-conflict reconstruction—peacebuilding in the narrow sense of the term. Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, international cooperation with Syria has been primarily humanitarian assistance focused on relief such as food, water and sanitation, hygiene, and medical care (OECD 2022). As argued in the Introduction, Section 1, it should theoretically be possible to support resilience building through humanitarian assistance, even when the conflict has not ended.

The international community has already committed to building resilience in the context of humanitarian assistance. For example, UN agencies have included resilience building as one of the strategic objectives of their Syria humanitarian response plans and made early recovery one of the sectors targeted for support since 2013 (Government of Syria, UN System and Other Humanitarian Actors 2013). This commitment came at a time when the intensity of the conflict had almost reached its peak, as shown in Figure 4.2. Although in a very limited way, UNICEF, UNDP, the international NGOs OXFAM and NRC, and ICRC worked with the Syrian government to rehabilitate water supply facilities, support education, rehabilitate power plants, and train staff to operate and manage various facilities (UNICEF 2014; ECHO, ADE, and URD 2016; UNDP Syria 2017; Gorevan, Hemsley, and Sider 2020).

Such cooperation mentioned above was possible because Syria already had preexisting economic and social infrastructure from before the conflict. To begin with, in Syria, before the conflict, the access rate to safe water was 92% in 2007, and the utilization rate of improved sewage facilities was 82.4% in 2009 (although this was 95% in urban areas and just 65% in rural areas). Regarding coverage of essential infrastructure for daily life, before the conflict, Syria was above the average among developing countries (UNDP RBAS 2009, 230–59). In other words, pre-conflict Syria was a “highly urbanized” (Grünewald 2013, 11) country in some areas. It was primarily the Syrian government that provided these administrative and basic services before the conflict. Therefore, it is feasible to contribute to improving the humanitarian situation through cooperation with the Syrian government.

On the other hand, critics argued that the assistance provided by the UN agencies in cooperation with the Syrian government rarely reached areas

effectively controlled by the opposition groups (MSF 2013). The parties to the conflict, not limited to the Syrian conflict, tend to be reluctant to provide humanitarian assistance to areas effectively controlled by other parties. Nevertheless, the UNSC's responses to the Syrian conflict have been unique. The UNSC adopted resolution 2165 in 2014, allowing UN agencies and their partners to bring humanitarian assistance directly to the opposition-held areas in Syria through four border checkpoints in Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq, with notification to the Syrian government (UNSC 2014a). It was the first time the UNSC adopted a resolution that considered a humanitarian crisis a security issue and authorized it to be addressed without military intervention (Gillard 2013). As Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which allows for military intervention, is difficult to apply in situations where P5 are in confrontation, the UNSC showed its commitment to responding to humanitarian crises. Cross-border assistance, for example, resulted in unrestricted cash transfers to nearly two million people (OCHA 2020). These and other forms of assistance contributed to building resilience in these areas at the household level.

In addition to UN agencies, the countries supporting the opposition groups provided cross-border assistance. For example, Turkey, which borders northern Syria, announced in 2012 that it would provide cross-border assistance by itself and offered a base for the international community; the EU also began cross-border assistance in 2013 (Republic of Türkiye, Prime Ministry, Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency 2012; ECHO, ADE, and URD 2016). The UK and the US supported LCs in improving their governance and capacity to provide essential services (IMC Worldwide Ltd 2016; Brown 2018). The international community also implemented assistance to build community resilience by rehabilitating community infrastructure, such as water supplies and electricity distribution, medical equipment, and even restoring community agricultural production (SRTF 2014). In this way, the international community has provided assistance to build resilience. However, the support for resilience building has been minimal compared to humanitarian assistance focused on relief such as food, water and sanitation, hygiene, and healthcare, despite the apparent needs (Howe 2016).

Accepting assistance for resilience building requires organizations inside Syria. As discussed, hundreds of LCs emerged after the Syrian government's withdrawal in areas effectively controlled by the opposition groups. However, cooperation between LCs did not progress, and LCs accepted humanitarian assistance individually, sustaining community-level governance (LACU 2013). Thus, networks of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and individuals played a crucial role in delivering assistance to the communities. LCs, INGOs, CSOs, and individual networks appeared soon after the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, increased in number, and were divided between areas controlled by the Syrian government and the opposition groups (Khalaf, Ramadan, and Stolleis 2014; Howe 2016). Many CSOs and individual networks have bases both in Syria and the countries bordering Syria.¹ The Syrian people's high capacity and willingness to

maintain the function of their communities led to the formation of alternative administrative structures to receive humanitarian assistance, including assistance for resilience building, albeit limited.

In sum, the international community provided assistance in Syria during the conflict to retain resilience even before the emergence of ISIS, although very limited. The country's original strength and the Syrian people's capacity enabled such assistance. INGOs, CSOs, and individuals in the opposition group-held areas involving Syrians contributed to implementing such humanitarian assistance, including resilience building in the respective area. However, the rise of ISIS influenced such assistance.

4.3.2 Syrian-led Efforts and Challenges after the Rise and Fall of ISIS

As is well known, ISIS took effective control of northeastern Syria. What was their effective control like? In fact, the population's perception of ISIS's effective control was not uniform. The opposition groups that initially held the areas where the Syrian government had retreated did not necessarily enjoy the unanimous support of the population, as pointed out in the previous section. In contrast, ISIS initially gave some residents the impression that it was less corrupt and more pious than the Syrian government and the opposition groups. At least some residents benefited from the improved level and quality of services provided by ISIS, including clean hospitals and police services; kidnappings and robberies largely ceased in areas under their effective control. The fact that ISIS's rule improved administrative and basic services and freed the population from the chaos and overall insecurity they were suffering from tells us that it was exercising a kind of "non-state authority" and functioning as a *de facto* state (El-Gamal and Megally 2021, 13–14; Turkmani 2015).

Increasing the number of people supporting ISIS's doctrine should be crucial for ISIS to strengthen its effective control. However, we must not forget that at the core of its effective control was fear, including brutalities, such as public executions, the abandonment of bodies, and the "cleansing" of minorities. Many Syrians joined ISIS primarily because of money, status, and jobs in effectively controlled areas. Some cite its doctrine, but that was not the primary reason (El-Gamal and Megally 2021). In fact, ISIS fighters received higher salaries than other armed groups (Turkmani 2015). Although poverty is not the only driver of VE and nor are the poor all drawn to VE, the expectation of improving economic conditions was a significant factor in ISIS's rise to power. On the other hand, even though ISIS offered relatively good economic treatment to Syrian fighters, it paid more to foreign fighters than Syrians (Turkmani 2015). Many ISIS cadres are foreigners, and by 2015, there were about 27,000 fighters from 86 countries (Hinnebusch 2018). Many Syrians under ISIS control considered it a "non-native" organization and not the representative of their community (El-Gamal and Megally 2021, 15). Generally, it would be difficult for a sovereign state to accept such effective control by a foreign power with different political ideologies for an extended period.

Moreover, ISIS banned the activities of organizations engaged in humanitarian assistance, including resilience building (Al-Jaseem 2022). The international community also reduced its support, even humanitarian assistance, to ISIS-held areas, thus creating a sense of abandonment among the ISIS-controlled population (Howe 2016). The armed intervention by the international community against ISIS to counter its VE began in 2014 and dragged on for more than four years, destroying 80% of Raqqa city (Amnesty International 2018), which was claimed by ISIS as its capital. The number of Syrian refugees abroad reached approximately 3 million in mid-2014 when the international community agreed to fight ISIS. However, by 2019, when ISIS was defeated after the battle, the number had increased to more than 5 million. Since then, the return of refugees has not progressed during the period discussed in this chapter (UNHCR 2023). The number of people in need of assistance inside Syria also reached a record high of 14.6 million in 2022, up by 2 million from 12.2 million in 2014 (OCHA 2014; 2022). The international community's victory in the fight against ISIS came at the cost of a worsening humanitarian situation and further deterioration of the economic and social infrastructure, particularly in areas formerly controlled by ISIS.

Even in such a situation, the autonomous administration in northeastern Syria, which took over the governance of this part of Syria as described in Section 4.2.2, has tried to provide democratic administration and essential services. Its philosophy is based on unity in a multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multireligious environment (Abboud 2018). It provides services such as fuel, education, job opportunities, electricity, water, sanitation, customs, medical care, education, and security. It compensates for food shortages and establishes higher education institutions, as well as other activities. It also secured specific funds for reconstruction (Khalaf 2016). Although it does not necessarily enjoy the support of all Kurdish parties (Abboud 2018), it functions with a certain degree of autonomy and tries to enhance resilience and the legitimacy of governance in the area.

However, there are challenges. First, complex international relations have influenced the effective control of the autonomous administration. The autonomous administration strengthened its effective control as the SDF, which contributed to the defeat of ISIS with the support of the US-led coalition, expanded its power. However, the SDF also had to maintain relations with Russia and the Syrian government because it was facing Turkey's military interventions (Perry and Said 2019). Second, the Syrian government still controlled some administrative institutions, such as the registry office, and it continued to pay the salaries of some civil servants (Hatahet 2019, 7). Therefore, it was difficult for the autonomous administration to stabilize governance without coordination with the Syrian government. Third, in areas with a large Arab population, it was often difficult for the autonomous administration to gain the trust of the population. The fact that the population welcomed the defeat of ISIS did not mean that they accepted the governance of the autonomous administration (Khalaf 2016; Abboud 2018). In

other words, the autonomous administration has yet to provide the population with sustainable governance for a resilient society.

Furthermore, the autonomous administration faces challenges in managing internally displaced persons camps. In northeastern Syria, two camps, al-Hawl and al-Roj, hosted more than 60,000 people in 2021, including about 20,000 Syrians, 30,000 Iraqis, and 10,000 people from more than 60 other countries (Sudkamp et al. 2023). Sanitation in the camps is poor, and health services are inadequate. In particular, since the COVID-19 pandemic spread globally, general health services have stagnated (Sudkamp et al. 2023). Moreover, although separated, there are former ISIS members and internally displaced persons who used to be under the control of ISIS. Security is of great concern in both camps, where more than 700 died in two years, including those whom pro-ISIS residents killed (Sudkamp et al. 2023). Providing education to more than 20,000 children—including those educated by ISIS—is another pressing issue, but only 88% of the children in al-Roj and 40% in al-Hawl can access the education programs provided by INGOs (Human Rights Watch 2021). In addition, although those people who remain in the camps receive humanitarian assistance, the support provided by UN agencies and INGOs is limited.

Nevertheless, the autonomous administration and local people have continued to provide support to people formerly associated with ISIS. A few centers, run by the autonomous administration or the local people, offer rehabilitation and reintegration programs (Haid 2018; Abdulrahim 2019; Abdulaqader 2022). These centers have provided programs for deradicalization and reeducation, including literacy and numeracy for children. However, there are only a few such centers, and the number of trained staff remains low. One center, operated by the local people, has already closed due to a lack of finances (Liebing 2019). At the same time, problems have been noted, with former ISIS fighters and their families being restricted in their freedom of movement from camps and centers and children and young people being separated from their mothers and placed in rehabilitation centers (Human Rights Watch 2021; Becker and Tayler 2023). In addition, the number of organizations in Syria responding to VE remains minimal and many are not linked to INGOs or administrative structures (Center for Operational Analysis and Research 2022). The above suggests that support for preventing and countering VE has been piecemeal.

Further, prosecution, repatriation, and reintegration of the former ISIS members and their families remain a challenge. For example, those who were alleged not to have fought for ISIS have been released under reconciliation with local communities. However, the release process taken by the autonomous administration, which is a non-state actor, is not publicly available, and the whole population cannot know how offenders were identified (Haid 2018). Besides, the legal status of foreign former ISIS members from around 60 countries has not been determined (Sudkamp et al. 2023). According to Human Rights Watch, unlike the Syrians and Iraqis, their mobility is

restricted in locked camps and “rehabilitation centers.” The UN has repeatedly requested their home countries accept their early return, but many governments have not responded, considering “national security concerns or fearing public backlash” (Becker and Tayler 2023). The return of foreigners is a problem that cannot be solved by Syria alone.

In northwest Syria, the situation was somewhat different. As noted, the Syrian government recaptured many areas, but the SNA has effectively controlled parts of the Turkish border area in the north, and the HTS has kept authority over much of the northwestern province of Idlib. Both parties have provided the population with alternative administrative and basic services. The SNA and HTS have been considered to have integrated the fragmented governance structures to some extent, and travel to and from both areas has remained relatively easy.² However, these allowances and practices have not necessarily indicated stable governance. As pointed out, Turkey has supported SNA, and in areas under its effective control, the Turkish government has had more influence over the contents and delivery of humanitarian assistance.³ In the case of HTS, it is listed by the UN as an al-Qaeda-affiliated extremist organization (UNSC 2018). Therefore, there are constraints on implementing humanitarian assistance, including resilience building.⁴

Some international cooperation organizations conducting assistance inside Syria have chosen not to engage with the parties to the conflict. Instead, they have supported networks of CSOs and individuals in Syria directly.⁵ It is possible to perceive such assistance as a pragmatic response to the needs of the Syrian people, one that adapted to the context of an increasingly complex conflict. However, the provision of such assistance remained fragmented, and it has yet to promote social cohesion, as defined in Chapter 2, in the targeted areas. For such assistance to prevent the recurrence of VE and contribute to building a resilient society effectively, it is vital that peacebuilding in Syria be implemented at a full scale and that the administrative structures of the ruling parties be linked to such assistance.

In sum, the non-state actors that effectively controlled parts of northern Syria implemented or attempted to provide alternative administration and essential services to the population. These worked to a certain extent but had limited support from the population. Governance in Syria has been fragmented, and the non-state actors, effectively controlling some northern parts, included extremist groups. Furthermore, dealing with ISIS ex-combatants, including foreigners and their families, has been an issue that is difficult for Syria alone to solve. Despite these challenges, some efforts were identified that have been tailored to the context of the conflict: responding to people’s needs, maintaining community-level resilience, and supporting ISIS ex-combatants and their families. Many of them are led by Syrians based on intrinsic needs when full-fledged peacebuilding support has not been ready.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the international and local responses and challenges to the rise and fall of ISIS during the protracted Syrian conflict. A key finding of this

chapter is that the international community's armed intervention has been somewhat successful, and the Syrian people have played a significant role in implementing humanitarian assistance. However, the humanitarian assistance provided has primarily concentrated on lifesaving measures, and humanitarian assistance focused on resilience building has been rare and limited. Peacebuilding support by the international community has yet to function well in light of the lack of a national-level peace agreement during the period from 2011 to 2023, which is the focus of this chapter. In other words, while efforts by the international community to counter VE have been successful, these efforts have reduced resilience and social cohesion by further degrading the economic and social infrastructure, undermining the peace that should have been built. In terms of insights that can be gleaned from the emergence of ISIS during the Syrian conflict, its defeat, and the subsequent state of affairs, this chapter concludes with the following four points.

First, the analysis in this chapter, which follows the framework set out in this publication, shows that military intervention in countering VE has had some positive effects. The fight against ISIS provided ample reason for the international community, which had previously been unable to cooperate, to work together to resolve the conflict. Although ISIS had a mobilization capacity to bring foreign fighters from over 60 countries, the international community showed a willingness to prevent further expansion of VE. Airstrikes on Syrian territory by the US-led coalition and other countries, including Russia, have damaged ISIS's control and resulted in the loss of its dominance. The international community's strong commitment to contain ISIS has not only defeated it but has so far deterred it from regaining its lost territory.

However, as a second point, military intervention against ISIS did not directly lead to the end of the conflict. When UNSC resolution 2170 was adopted, there was no discussion about ending the Syrian conflict, which was the original cause of ISIS's rise to prominence. Military intervention to counter VE can be seen as a boost to the peace process. In fact, the UN-led peace process began after the international community launched a military intervention to counter VE. Since then, the number of deaths in the Syrian conflict decreased, and the Syrian conflict appeared to be effectively ending. However, the political differences among the various countries vis-à-vis the parties to the conflict have not been resolved, and at least three non-state actors effectively controlled parts of the country. Even after the peace process began, the number of refugees outside Syria and people in need inside Syria increased, indicating that even as the conflict comes to an end, resilience and social cohesion remain problematic and people's livelihoods have become unsustainable. Military intervention has had mixed effects, including the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria and more fragmentation of Syrian governance.

Third, military intervention has not resulted in the complete eradication of VE. ISIS has not given up on its resurgence and maintains its network inside and outside Syria, and tens of thousands of ISIS-affiliated foreigners remain in the country. While all of the case studies in this book demonstrate the effectiveness of social cohesion and peacebuilding for a resilient society in

preventing and countering VE, most of the assistance provided to Syria has been humanitarian in nature, with the main focus on saving lives. Of course, without this lifesaving, there will not be a resilient society. However, the provision of assistance that could sustain both lives and community-level resilience, which seems to be realistic and adapted to the context of the conflict, has been marginal. As discussed in detail in this chapter, full-scale peacebuilding assistance for Syria has yet to materialize. Figure 4.4 adds elements of the argument in this chapter to Figure 4.1 in the Introduction section.

Resilience should increase if military intervention is successful, radical armed non-state actors are defeated, and the intensity of conflict is reduced. However, the prolonged conflict has already caused significant damage to the country’s economic and social fabric. Given that the primary motivations for people to join such radical, armed, non-state actors are economic, such as money and jobs, restoring economic and social infrastructure is essential in preventing and countering VE. Without sufficient investment in peacebuilding to enable such recovery and social cohesion, resilience building will remain at the respective community level and the pathways to peace will remain steep. Figure 4.4 suggests that even if the intensity of VE and conflict decreases, without appropriate investment in peacebuilding, resilience cannot be restored—in which case conflict may flare up and VE may re-emerge.

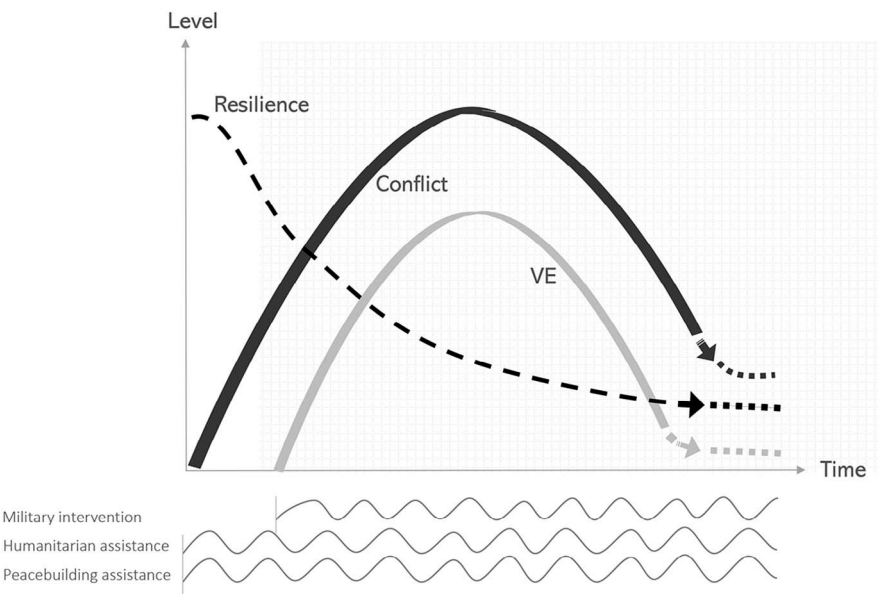


Figure 4.4 Revised conceptual relationship between resilience, conflict, VE, and the approaches against VE.
Source: author. Figure generated based on “Pathways for Peace,” (World Bank and United Nations 2018).

From the discussion so far, a fourth point should be related to the importance of supporting resilience building even during protracted conflicts. Although limited, the international community has attempted to include resilience building in humanitarian assistance during conflicts. Incorporating resilience-based support content in humanitarian assistance can help maintain the capacity of local people to sustain administrative and essential services in the target area and speed up full-scale, post-conflict reconstruction. In addition, this chapter presents some resilience-building efforts at the community level by the international community and Syrian people with high capacity and motivation. The longer the conflict drags on, the greater the need for assistance beyond lifesaving. Therefore, there is a crucial need for peacebuilding support to adapt to the context of conflict, maintain resilience, and promote social cohesion, even during conflict, in terms of protecting people's lives as well as their livelihoods and dignity.

Thus, the notion that one must wait for a conflict to end before commencing peacebuilding is flawed. Peacebuilding needs to accompany military operations because investments in peacebuilding and governance must sustain multiple interests, not only people's lives but also their livelihoods. The question, then, is how to promote peacebuilding, not what to do during an ongoing conflict. The fact that many Syrians have not joined ISIS for ideology but joined for economic reasons shows that maintaining economic and social infrastructure, even during conflict, is crucial to eradicating VE in Syria. Syrians are already engaged in a range of practices that go beyond humanitarian assistance and are adapted to the context of the conflict with their high capacity and motivation. The concept of resilience could be used in response to VE to promote the nexus of humanitarian, peace, and development practices. As the conflict ended, it should be possible to build resilience while preventing and countering VE by providing coordinated support. The international community should cooperate in building resilience along with the local context.

Notes

- 1 Interview with international cooperation organization members 1, 2023. Online interview by Ako Muto.
- 2 Interview with international cooperation organization members 1, 2023. Online interview by Ako Muto.
- 3 Interview with international cooperation organization members 1, 2023. Online interview by Ako Muto.
- 4 Interview with international cooperation organization members 1, 2, and 3, 2023. Online interview by Ako Muto.
- 5 Interview with international cooperation organization members 3 and 4, 2023. Online interview by Ako Muto.

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5 Reconciliation and Social Cohesion in the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Complex Systems

Iraq as a Case Study

Just Castillo Iglesias

5.1 Introduction

For almost two decades, Iraq has been continuously engulfed in deep-rooted ethnic tensions, crises, and violence. Until 2003, Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime privileged the Sunni minority, which dominated the country's political and economic systems while marginalizing the Shiite majority. Latent sectarian tensions that predated Saddam's rule unraveled following the US-led invasion. The establishment of a new political regime under US oversight, which effectively excluded the Sunnis from the political process, deepened the divide between the Sunnis and the Shia and gave rise to the prevalence of identity politics in the country (Butcher and Gumustekin 2022; Haddad 2013; Khedir 2022; Machlis 2022). Saddam's ousting and the US failure to uphold the rule of law, the inability to meet basic needs and maintain order, and the rapid deterioration of the country's security situation undermined people's trust in the US-backed government.

Between 2006 and 2009, dissatisfaction with the newly established political system based on informal consociationalism, corruption, and the Al-Maliki government's inadequate handling of Sunni protesters all helped pave the way for an insurgency to thrive, leading to the escalation of the conflict into a full-blown war (Dodge 2021; Mako 2021).

From early 2014, Islamic State¹ militants gained strength against a crippled Iraqi army, eventually exercising *de facto* control over approximately 40% of the country's territory, predominantly in Sunni areas. The conflict between Shiites and Sunnis intensified. Sunni communities were the most adversely impacted by ISIS, even though the majority of Sunnis did not support the militant organization nor play a role in its rise. ISIS' rule of terror between 2014 and 2017 further eroded the already-weakened Iraqi social fabric after nearly two decades of conflict. However, by the end of 2017, 95% of the territory previously controlled by ISIS had been regained (Glenn, Rowan, and Caves 2019). The defeat of the insurgents reignited Sunni-Shiite tensions in some areas, particularly those liberated by Kurdish and Shia militias who became suspicious of the original Sunni inhabitants and, in some cases, prevented them from returning to their homes and properties.

As a result of this tumultuous recent past and its post-2003 development, Iraq is an illustrative example of the failure of liberal peacebuilding (Dodge 2013) and exogenous state-building (Mako and Edgar 2021). The rapid rise of ISIS was a manifestation—a symptom—of the dysfunction of the post-2003 Iraqi state (Fromson and Simon 2015). And today, two decades after the US-led invasion, the country's weak and failing institutions continue to bear the hallmarks of a fragile state.

In Iraq, security-based (i.e., military) interventions have played a key role in the territorial defeat of ISIS and the improvement of the overall security situation since 2017. However, narrow security approaches alone cannot effectively contribute to sustaining peace and human security in Iraq in the face of the complex and multifaced challenges its society faces: ineffective governance, marginalization, lack of trust and broken emotional bonds among different groups, poor education, mistreatment by the authorities, stigma, and lack of justice toward some communities, sectarian tensions, lack of economic opportunities and inequality, among others. Unless these root causes of Iraq's low social cohesion are addressed adequately, violent extremism could reignite violence in an already hard-hit country (Culbertson and Robinson 2017; Haider 2009; Mousa 2020; Ginkel 2012).

This chapter aims to contribute to understanding how peacebuilding-informed comprehensive approaches aimed at fostering social cohesion and reconciliation can contribute to resilience and countering and preventing violent extremism in a highly complex social system, such as post-ISIS Iraq. The study follows a qualitative methodology, with data obtained primarily from academic and practitioner literature. The literature review is complemented by personal communications with local, national, and international stakeholders, as well as members of the academic community, conducted remotely between October 2022 and March 2023.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. First, it examines the factors underlying low social cohesion in Iraq. Second, it presents an overview of the hard security responses in Iraq in the post-2003 period; third, it provides an overview of the main peacebuilding approaches. Fourth, it assesses the main threats to and opportunities for peacebuilding in Iraq with a view to promoting social cohesion and attaining sustainable peace and security. Finally, the conclusion provides a response to the research questions for this volume and offers some comments on future challenges for Iraq.

5.2 Challenges to Social Cohesion and Reconciliation in Post-ISIS Iraq

When can a society be considered cohesive? When considering social cohesion, the academic literature as well as practitioners tend to identify two dimensions: a horizontal dimension, which refers to trust in other members or groups within the community, and a vertical dimension, which refers to trust in public figures or institutions (Chan, To, and Chan 2006; UNDP 2023). Hence, there are several elements that contribute to the cohesiveness of a

society. First, there needs to be trust, tolerance, and a willingness to cooperate among citizens. Second, there is an emotional attachment to the community as a collective and to its institutions. Third, there is an orientation towards the common good, a sense of responsibility for the collective welfare of society, social order, and acceptance of norms and rules (Schiefer and Van Der Noll 2017). In the case of Iraq, most of these elements are either absent or face significant challenges.

The territorial defeat of ISIS in 2017 opened the door for Iraq to move forward on the path to peace, but the challenges facing the country and its people are numerous, complex, and interrelated. Ultimately, achieving this goal in a durable and sustainable manner would require, among other things, a process of national reconciliation, the promotion of social cohesion in all its dimensions, and the eradication of the numerous factors that continue to make post-ISIS Iraq vulnerable to the resurgence of violent extremism.

5.2.1 State Fragility and Ineffective Governance

Among the many challenges that Iraq faces today—and many Iraqis would agree that these are among the most prominent factors²—the fragility of state institutions and the absence of good governance are often highlighted. The Fragile State Index (2022) places Iraq 23rd among 179 countries, albeit following an improving trend over the past five years. After Saddam's regime was toppled, an informal or semi-consociational political system known as *Muhasasa Tai'fiya* was established to help facilitate the transition from authoritarianism to a new status quo in which, theoretically, Iraq's numerous ethnic and religious communities would be empowered after decades of discrimination. On paper, Iraq's new political and institutional system was designed to bring together the elites that emerged in the post-2003 context. It was conceived as a sort of mechanism to maintain social peace by granting each of these groups access to and control over a share of power assets and posts. The reality, however, turned out very different. The process of de-Baathification targeted and excluded key segments of the population, particularly the Sunni minority, who were largely perceived as collaborators with the previous regime.

The Shia–Sunni divide was also reflected in the results of the 2005 constitutional referendum. While it received 78.6% of the national vote in favor, the result in the Sunni-majority provinces was very different, with 97% of the population in Anbar, 82% in Salah al-Din, and 55% in Nineveh rejecting the proposal (Machlis 2022). These deep divisions, along with the rise of identity politics that continues to this day, have hindered peacebuilding efforts during the transition period (Mako 2021).

The post-2003 power-sharing arrangements also undermined the coherence of the state, which remains highly fragmented (Beaujouan and Rasheed 2022; Dodge 2020; 2021; Khedir 2022). In fact, and somehow paradoxically, the semi-consociational system has fractured the state through sectarian clientelism and infighting rather than helping to prevent a relapse into corruption and

authoritarianism (Alkadiri 2022; Wahab 2022). According to Aboultaif (2020), informal consociation systems, such as Iraq's, often amplify one community's dominance while non-hegemonic groups are excluded from sharing in the goods of governance and are, at best, only allowed inclusion in specific areas that do not pose a threat to the dominant group. In the case of Iraq, Shia elites have crafted the system to reserve dominant status for themselves while holding the key to the inclusion or exclusion of non-hegemonic groups. One result is that local Iraqi civil society organizations (CSOs) and local communities lack adequate access to political and decision-making processes.

Furthermore, in the post-2003 system, sharp, divisive rhetoric and hate speech have become normalized in Iraqi politics (Dodge 2014). Iraqi political factions have shown no restraint in denigrating and dehumanizing each other. Differing views on everyday political issues have often led to accusations of mercenaryism, disloyalty to Iraq, or foreign infiltration (Kadhim 2022). Between 2021 and 2022, months of political stalemate due to confrontations between Shiite factions prevented the formation of a government, leading to demonstrations and episodes of unrest and violence (RANE 2022b).

Another phenomenon pervading the Iraqi political system is corruption. Political elites often embezzle state resources for their personal benefit and that of their parties or factions. The effects of the widespread corruption within the Iraqi state have direct spillovers on other aspects of society and pose a hindrance, if not a threat, to peacebuilding efforts. Furthermore, alongside unclear regulations, corruption reduces the ability of businesses to develop and thrive, undermining their role in creating employment and developing new economic opportunities. Businesses play a crucial role in building social cohesion and trust and constitute a positive force against the risk of renewed violent extremism. Corruption, however, often involves decisions on procurement or employment not based on merit but on sectarian affinity or nepotism (Katsos and AlKafaji 2019).

The fragility of the state is also manifested in its lack of capacity to maintain an uncontested monopoly of legitimate violence, a capacity that is challenged by non-state armed groups. As discussed below, this is an unintended negative consequence of the focus on hard security approaches pursued during and after the military campaigns against ISIS.

Furthermore, over the years, this political and institutional system has caused a profound dissatisfaction with and lack of trust in the state and its institutions among Iraqis, which is today at an all-time low (Alaaldin 2020). As the protests of the past few years—known as the *Thirteen Movement*—have shown, many Iraqis, especially the young, feel that the current political system is not working for them. They are calling for political reform and a new social contract. This would entail a new implicit agreement between elites and their constituents that meets the latter's expectations for a more equitable, accountable, transparent, and trustworthy relationship with the state and institutions (Halawa 2021; O'Driscoll et al. 2022). Iraqis have largely lost faith in the political process. For the time being, however, it remains unclear

how one could emerge, at least at the national level (Furness and Trautner 2020). The erosion of trust in the state and its institutions also erodes the meaning of citizenship and thus, weakens the potential for Iraq to articulate itself as a nation-state.

5.2.2 *A Fragmented and Complex Society*

In addition to the fragility of the state, a key challenge for social cohesion in Iraq remains the fragmentation of its highly sophisticated social fabric along multiple cleavages, some of which overlap unevenly. Besides the well-known division between Sunni and Shia Arabs, Iraq is home to other sizeable ethno-religious minorities such as Turkmen, Sunni Kurds, Yezidis, and Christians. Further relevant cleavages include the urban–rural divide, those displaced during or as members of ISIS, returnee and host communities, tribal affiliations, gender, social status, employment or economic situation, level of education, and age, among others. In the context of eroded trust—particularly inter-communal and inter-faith exacerbated by two decades of conflict, economic hardship, inequality, and competition for resources—the fragmentation of society is palpable in practically every aspect of social life. These divisions within society also condition the way reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts are carried out (Watkins and Hasan 2022).

Education reform remains a significant challenge in Iraq. Given the country's demographics, the development of a robust educational system is highlighted as a vital building block to improving social cohesion in the country and as a major factor in addressing the root causes of violent extremism³ (Halafoff, Lam, and Bouma 2019). As of 2022, the median age of Iraqis is 19.8 years old, and 38.1% of the population is under 14 years old, according to UN data (United Nations, DESA, Population Division 2022). In addition to curriculum development and teacher training, much emphasis is placed on the need for the school system to transmit narratives of unity and peace, i.e., to promote civic nationalism or a sense of Iraqi belonging that transcends ethnic, religious, or tribal divides. So far, the Iraqi state has failed to do so (Khedir 2022).

In addition, Iraq faces challenges that are inherent to its lower-middle-income country status, such as income inequalities and poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and regional disparities, which are directly related to the different regions' previous experiences of violence over the past twenty years.

Furthermore, while the overall security situation has improved significantly since the territorial defeat of ISIS, it remains precarious and vulnerable in some parts of the country, thus creating an additional risk of a resurgence of violent extremism. This is particularly prevalent in governorates in the western part of the country, such as Nineveh, Anbar, and Salah Al-Din, which were the most affected by ISIS. By contrast, the semiautonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)—constitutionally defined as a federal entity of the country but operating as a *de facto* independent state (Palani 2022)—remains the most prosperous and secure part of the country.

Finally, we should not forget that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated a host of political, economic, social and security issues that are key to social cohesion. Despite the critical importance of identifying and implementing measures to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic and monitor its impact in areas previously occupied by ISIS—those most vulnerable to violent extremism—the Iraqi state struggled to articulate a strategic and coherent approach. However, the crisis has also presented some opportunities for new partnerships between the Iraqi government and international institutions at a time when Iraqis were calling on the government to address the state’s diminished authority, maintain peace, alleviate the economic crisis, and develop an effective response to the effects of the pandemic. Remarkably, opinion polls showed that a sizeable majority of Iraqis thought the pandemic had a positive effect on social cohesion, as communities found themselves facing a common enemy in the form of the virus (Taha, Beaujouan, and Rasheed 2021; UNDP 2020).

Taken together, these factors render Iraqi society weak and vulnerable to the resurgence of violent extremism. Any initiative or action aimed to promote social cohesion in the country—either directly or as a byproduct—needs to consider such factors holistically (see Figure 5.1). A particularly relevant policy implication of this assessment is that social cohesion in the Iraqi context should be understood and addressed not only across its horizontal dimension, i.e., from the perspective of everyday interactions between people and groups in society. Certainly, there are numerous programs designed to bring people together, especially youth, to promote exchanges of views and

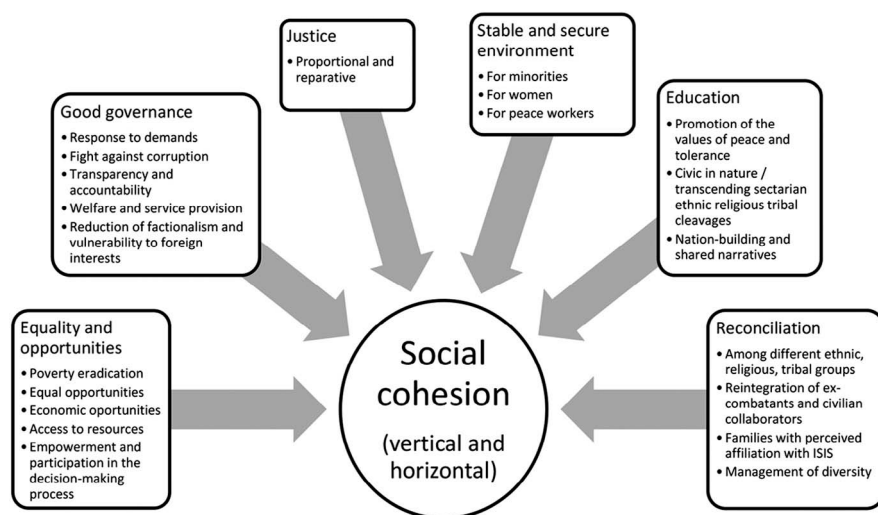


Figure 5.1 Key factors to improving social cohesion in post-ISIS Iraq.
Source: Elaborated by the author

experiences. While the task of building inter-group and inter-faith understanding is positive and extremely necessary, we must not lose sight of the fact that the social contract in Iraq is frail and that many people have lost all confidence in elites and institutions. In other words, there is an important governance dimension to social cohesion in Iraq.

Improving social cohesion in Iraq requires an improvement in socio-economic conditions through the creation of a more supportive environment shaped by the state. Besides this, better management of the country's ethno-religious diversity and complexity, the fight against corruption, the provision of economic opportunities, and elite reconciliation are also needed. For some observers, however, it is unclear whether the country is moving in the required direction (Khedir 2022).

5.3 Hard Security Responses (Security-first Approaches)

Following the US invasion, there was an outbreak of sectarian violence and the security situation quickly deteriorated. This enabled al-Qaeda to gain a presence in the country through the hand of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Following his death in a US airstrike in 2006, the group renamed itself the Islamic State of Iraq or ISI (henceforth ISIS, for consistency). In that context, in 2007, the US increased its military presence in the country to approximately 160,000 personnel. In parallel, the so-called Awakening of Sunni tribes was taking place. Having faced pervasive acts of indiscriminate violence, ideological inflexibility and intolerance toward their local and tribal customs from al-Qaeda, these tribes chose to fight alongside the US against the jihadist insurgents (Phillips 2009).

By 2011, having successfully contained the insurgency, the US decided that its engagement in Iraq had come to an end and withdrew from the country with the condition that the Iraqi government would reward the Sunni fighters who had contributed to the fight against the jihadists. The government, however, failed to do this, and in contravention of the agreement with the US, many Sunnis were detained. This opened a new chapter of tensions in cities across the country, with accusations that the Al-Maliki government was engaged in sectarian abuses.

The reemergence of tensions allowed ISIS to reconstitute through the recruitment of thousands of Sunnis within and outside of Iraq. By 2014, the group had taken control over approximately one-third of the country's territory and its leader, Abu Baker al Baghdadi, proclaimed the Caliphate with the city of Mosul at the center. ISIS' reign of terror ushered in a total destabilization of the country, with innumerable accounts of rape, executions, mass murders, abductions, destruction of heritage, among other atrocities (Melhem 2015).

The rise of ISIS further deepened the ruptures within Iraqi society. Following the call of leaders to fight against the insurgency, many Iraqis, particularly Shia, joined up and even created their own militias. The Popular

Mobilization Forces (PMF)—also known as *al-Hashd*—were formed from the amalgamation of over 60 such groups. Despite their dismal respect for human rights, popular militias played a pivotal role in mitigating ISIS' growth and its eventual territorial defeat (Dodge 2014).

The rise of ISIS in this context triggered yet another military foreign intervention. Military efforts were given priority to prevent it from gaining control over further territories, recruiting more militants, and as far as possible, countering the violence it induced. Nearly 80 countries and institutions participated in the US-led Global Coalition against ISIS, including member states from NATO, the Arab League and the European Union (EU). The EU did not participate directly in the military efforts but contributed to reconstruction and stabilization efforts, provided humanitarian aid, trained the Iraqi security forces and supported post-conflict reconciliation (Veen et al. 2021). During the three years of the counterinsurgency campaign, the Obama administration launched multiple air strikes over the territories controlled by ISIS until its collapse and territorial defeat in 2017. During this period, the Iraqi security forces, the Kurdish Peshmerga and the PMF fought with the Coalition to regain ISIS territories and contribute to its decline in 2017. Despite ISIS losing its territorial presence in Iraq, its ideology remains resilient and its presence in the country continues alongside the group's recruitment efforts (Malash 2022).

After the territorial defeat of ISIS, the Global Coalition supported a narrow vision of stabilization, which focused mainly on physical reconstruction and paid little attention to rebuilding the fabric of society or the need to promote political dialogue. The focus was on containing, countering, or mitigating the effects of the conflict, rather than on a multifaceted approach that could be owned by the people. Some authors suggest that this orientation can be observed in the way the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) managed its Funding Facility for Stabilization at the time, providing limited and mostly short-term funding for peacebuilding programs compared to other axes. Likewise, at the time, there was a lack of a joint strategy among donors and implementing agencies to develop a stabilization plan (ELPO 2017). More recently, however, EU efforts have taken greater account of issues relevant to social cohesion in the context of security sector reform (SSR) activities, such as building trust between society and the security forces (EUAM Iraq 2022).

CSOs have had only a minimal presence in SSR and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes. Notable exceptions are PAX (Netherlands) and Al-Amal (Iraq), which worked on projects to bring local security perspectives into SSR through a gender-sensitive lens. Similarly, Geneva Call trained the Peshmerga and PMF to adhere to international humanitarian law. However, for the most part, SSR and DDR efforts have taken place without the active involvement of local communities.

The period of elevated tensions and open conflict between 2007 and 2017 has left a terrible legacy throughout the country, with consequences

that have continuously undermined its already weak social cohesion. The first outcome is the militarization of society, a phenomenon that continues to this day (Parry and Aymerich 2023) and potentially endangers peace-building efforts in the country. Secondly, the non-state civilian and tribal militias that were empowered during the war against ISIS—the PMF—have remained active and engaged in business and politics (International Crisis Group 2018). In some contexts, they have become effective power-brokers and need to be considered in any negotiation process (Cigar 2015; Watkins and Hasan 2022).

Numerous reasons explain why the militias have enjoyed such popular support within Iraqi society. First, these groups are drawn from the various religious and ethnic minorities and often represent specific areas or communities. Second, their leaders are often respected community, political, or religious leaders. However, their popularity appears to have declined in recent years as they are commonly associated with repression and corruption (Al-Aloosy 2022). These groups challenge the state's monopoly to exercise legitimate violence and contribute to undermining the rule of civic law. Moreover, competition between themselves exacerbates the fragmentation of the political landscape as leaders may fight for prestige or influence and compete for resources. For example, Hadr al-Amiri, the leader of the *Badr* Brigade, is a member of parliament who recently rejected the results of the country's elections, alleging fabrications (Reuters 2021a). Likewise, the prominent Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr leads the Sadrist Movement political party and the Peace Companies (*Saraya Al Salam*) militia (Khalaf 2021).

Today, there is a broad consensus that comprehensive non-military and long-term processes will provide the best approach if the goal is to eliminate the factors that enable the resilience of extremist groups and focus on addressing the root factors that drive people to join them, including Iraqi government structures and practices (Chayes 2014; Holmes 2017). Likewise, military-only solutions are widely seen as ineffective and are thus discarded in favor of seeking long-term resolutions of the myriad issues that affect Iraq today (Reuters 2021a). But this does not mean that security-led approaches no longer have a role to play in the country. Following its territorial defeat, ISIS has continued to attack, albeit on a smaller and more localized scale. The group's strength appears stable in terms of both size and reach, and there are concerns that the group may regularly “test” the capabilities of security forces. Small-scale attacks in places like Erbil or Sulaymaniyah (Reuters 2021b) suggest this may be the case. Accordingly, security-led counterterrorism efforts remain essential to keeping violent extremists under check. However, those efforts remain poorly coordinated, relying on insufficient intelligence and based on punctual tactical interventions rather than addressing socio-economic deficits upon which ISIS capitalizes (Ezzedine and Colombo 2022).

5.4 Peacebuilding-Informed Comprehensive Approaches

After two decades of conflict, local, national, and international actors are implementing a variety of programs and initiatives to address the issues that threaten the country's social fabric, with the ultimate goal of achieving sustainable peace. The following section explores some of the initiatives that exist with respect to two of the critical challenges facing Iraq today: reconciliation and the specific problems associated with the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs); initiatives that take a broader approach to social cohesion, either as a direct objective or as a byproduct; and the empowerment of youth.

5.4.1 Reconciliation and Return of IDPs

In Iraq today, many factors fuel the resilience of violent extremist groups, such as the slow pace of reconstruction and shortcomings in reconciliation processes. Many families, especially Sunni ones, are still victims of stigmatization and discrimination. In addition, over 1.3 million people (2% of the population) remain displaced across the country (European Commission 2023). For many of these IDPs, the situation was exacerbated by the sudden closure of at least fourteen camps in 2020, forcing those displaced to return to destroyed homes and villages, many of which still lack the most basic services (Al-Khateeb 2021). This aspect is particularly concerning, as IDP camps are known to be the breeding ground for future ISIS fighters. In recent years, the group is known to have recruited children in the camps and people facing obstructed returns (Sandi 2022). This points to the need for a working strategy to reintegrate ex-combatants and their families still at risk of internal displacement (Parry and Aymerich 2023).

To be sure, not all IDPs in Iraq have been displaced because of ISIS. Displacement caused by economic factors or related to access to resources such as water is a reality in Iraq. However, ISIS is responsible for generating a large number of IDPs in the country. The insurgency and the subsequent counterinsurgency campaign resulted in the displacement of some three and a half million people. ISIS' territorial defeat brought with it the challenge of reintegrating divided communities. To this day, finding ways to deal with ISIS sympathizers or those who merely tolerated their occupation remains a key task in the reconciliation work carried out in Iraq. In many cases, people and communities perceived to be associated with ISIS—not only former fighters but also their family members and people who had been living in occupied areas—face involuntary movements such as forced or obstructed return to their areas of origin (Kadhim 2019).

Numerous organizations, such as USAID, World Vision, Relief International, the World Food Programme, the International Rescue Committee, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, have provided humanitarian aid to the IDPs. In regard to reconciliation, many organizations have established programs or lines of work to support the negotiation of peace

agreements at the local level, particularly in those contexts where IDPs are rejected or prevented from returning. Through its Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by ISIS (UNITAD), the United Nations supports the National Reconciliation Committee of the Iraqi Government.

The UNDP, through the Reconciliation and Reintegration in Iraq Project (2021–22), has helped to reintegrate over 3200 families following a multifaceted and phased approach to support their livelihoods. This includes conflict-sensitive assessments, dialogue facilitation, mediation and reconciliation processes related to the development of local peace pacts, and a comprehensive socio-economic reintegration support package in communities of return, including shelter rehabilitation and psychosocial and livelihood programs (UNDP 2023). The UNDP has also partnered with other actors, such as USIP or Sanad (an Iraqi CSO), to facilitate the brokerage of local peace deals (Parry and Aymerich 2022; Watkins and Hasan 2022).

In 2017, the EU designated Iraq as a pilot country for the development of its Nexus program (VOICE EU 2017). The program takes a comprehensive approach to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, integrating long-term development and peacebuilding considerations into its interventions. The work carried out encompasses aspects such as education, ensuring durable solutions to displacement, job creation, and service delivery. It also provides a coordination framework between the different EU agencies (DG ECHO, DG INTPA, DG NEAR and EEAS) to ensure an integrated and coherent approach between them in partnership with the member states, in addition to maintaining a unified communication with the Iraqi authorities, the UN, and other international partners (ECHO 2022).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) also works with IDPs, returnees and host communities using an integrated approach (European Commission 2022). Its strategy includes the rehabilitation of infrastructure and shelter, economic recovery and livelihood support, the establishment of community resource centers across the country, and the pursuit of sustainable and durable solutions by enhancing coordination between donors and the government of Iraq.

In addition, there are numerous region- and local-specific programs. In Ninewa, one of the regions most affected by ISIS, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) is working on a program to strengthen the resilience of returnees, IDPs and host communities. The project takes a comprehensive approach, including implementing and monitoring peace agreements, activities aimed at enhancing social cohesion for the appropriate reintegration into the host community and raising awareness of the situation of IDPs (Vuzic and GIZ 2021). The project is coordinated with other peacebuilding initiatives through the Peace and Reconciliation Working Group (PRWG), a regional coordination platform established in 2018.

Also in the Ninewa region, the UNDP, IOM, and the Iraqi government carry out activities aimed at raising awareness and bringing together tribal

and communal leaders to foster community readiness to welcome IDPs (IOM-UNDP 2022).

5.4.2 Promoting Social Cohesion and Reconciliation

Beyond the specific focus on reconciliation and reintegration, numerous other programs are being implemented in Iraq with an integrated approach designed to promote social cohesion.

The most comprehensive is UNDP's Social Cohesion Program (2020–2024). The program supports Iraq's national PVE strategy and works, among other aims, on developing a network of religious leaders to strengthen their mediation role through capacity building. It partners with other organizations to build the capacity of women peacebuilders, developing and strengthening community-based organizations across the country, youth peace groups and dialogues, and citizen journalism to promote peace narratives (UNDP 2023).

Before USAID was dismantled in February 2025, ending its operations, the USAID/Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) Iraq program had been working on social cohesion by creating opportunities for social engagement (USAID 2022). It aimed to increase the perceived sense of integration and belonging within Iraqi communities, particularly the marginalized, in order to mitigate polarization and challenges to stability as they emerge. USAID/OTI also focused on creating economic opportunities, promoting schooling and access to education, and improving livelihoods.

In addition, numerous Iraqi and international organizations at all levels are working on projects to strengthen CSOs, support monitoring of government transparency and accountability, and efforts to improve governance and economic conditions.

5.4.3 Empowering Youth

Many of these programs and organizations are working with a strong focus on young people. Youth are a crucial segment of the Iraqi population when it comes to building sustainable peace. There are a number of reasons for this. The first of these is Iraqi demographics: nearly 60% of the population is under the age of 25 (Al-Shakeri 2022). Thus, the future of Iraq depends on providing young people with opportunities that will draw them away from violent extremism and empower them to be agents of change. Second, there is a certain understanding among civil society organizations and educators⁴ that as a result of the war against ISIS, the country's youth have transcended the main sectarian divides. Many are politically motivated by issues such as improving their economic conditions or having their voices heard and taken into account in the political decision-making process. Youth have played a significant role in the protests of recent years calling for political change. However, as Khedir (2022) points out, the extent to which these protests or the movements behind them can articulate coherent and workable demands is unclear.

International peacebuilding actors have supported projects aimed at promoting interaction and dialogue between groups, raising awareness, and building capacity. It is worth mentioning two EU projects with a specific focus on youth that have adopted a comprehensive approach to social cohesion. First, the project “Mesopotamian Youth for Democratic Governance, Social Cohesion and Reconciliation” (2017–2020) focused on youth empowerment and participation in democratic and peacebuilding processes (Un Ponte Per 2020). To that end, it provided support and capacity building to the Iraqi Social Forum, based in Baghdad, and the Kurdish Social Forum in Erbil. The project established ten working groups across the country where more than 20 CSOs and hundreds of independent activists worked on issues such as social justice and human rights, protection of displaced communities and minorities, promotion of peace journalism and tolerance in the media, environmental rights, protection of cultural heritage, and women’s participation in political processes. The project led to the establishment of a cultural center in Nasiriyah, in Southern Iraq (ICSSI 2017). They also established four councils for social cohesion, coordinating civil society organizations, and engaging local authorities and religious leaders to deliberate on and enforce decisions made in the social forums.

Another project, supported by the Dutch government and implemented primarily by the Dutch NGO PAX, is the “We are all citizens—*Kulluna Muwatinun*” project. Started in 2013, it brings together and mobilizes young people from different religious and ethnic communities across Iraq by strengthening their role in advocacy processes. The program has established youth civic networks that include people from diverse backgrounds to engage in evidence-based advocacy. As part of the program’s objectives, it aims to provide a model for the inclusion of all Iraqi communities and Iraqis.

It is also relevant to mention the Italian NGO Un Ponte Per (UPP), which has been responsible for implementing numerous programs and works with a wide range of donors, other implementing partners and local Iraqi civil society organizations. Among other projects, it has implemented the Observatory for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (OPEV-Iraq), a collaborative project between UPP, Novact (Spain) and local organizations LaOnf and the Peace and Freedom Organization in Kurdistan (PFOK).

5.5 Peacebuilding in Iraq: Threats and Opportunities

This section discusses a number of issues that constitute conditioning factors for peacebuilding interventions aimed at enhancing social cohesion in Iraq. The salience of these issues depends on the particular circumstances of each intervention.

5.5.1 Justice-related Issues

The lack of fair and proportionate justice is something that can complicate the dire situation of returning IDPs, families with perceived ISIS ties, and

reconciliation efforts more generally. This issue is linked to the fragmentation of the state and the prevalence of local or tribal customary law over civil law.

Several studies underscore the need for proportional and differentiated accountability for perpetrators and collaborators or sympathizers (supporters) to promote reconciliation processes and rebuild intra-communal trust. According to Watkins and Hasan (2022), the Iraqi government's firm stance against ISIS after its defeat led to the capture and execution of fighters and members who had been declared terrorists. However, families were often harshly treated as well, with many being imprisoned in camps and forced to publicly denounce and identify other members who may be their relatives. Despite the government's harshness, studies such as the one conducted by Kao and Redlich Revkin (2019) in Mosul suggest a discrepancy between the view of many Moslawis, who are clearly aware of the varying degrees of guilt, and the official heavy-handed stance.

In this regard, some of the organizations working on social cohesion in Iraq, particularly international ones such as IOM (IOM Iraq 2019) and the EU (EUAM Iraq 2022), have launched initiatives that focus on promoting the accountability of security forces and building trust between them and those groups that may perceive them as hostile.

Scholars such as Culbertson and Robinson (2017) and Kao and Redlich Revkin (2019) argue that reconciliation and reintegration focus disproportionately on ex-combatants. Yet, doing so overlooks the fact that most people who support and enable insurgencies are civilians rather than fighters (Barter 2013).

5.5.2 Localized Approaches

Practitioners and scholars agree that peacebuilding activities should be carried out at the local level, where civil society organizations can play a leading role.⁵ Iraqi CSOs also tend to emphasize the need to “localize” peacebuilding interventions. This is undoubtedly not only relevant but also desirable. After all, people in communities and local organizations know better than anyone what they need and what problems and challenges they face.

Indeed, many organizations work primarily with local governments, especially on issues such as governance and accountability. In the case of Iraq, however, it is important to recognize that subnational politics is not necessarily more inclusive than national politics. It can sometimes be “equally if not more exclusionary and transactional than national politics” (Watkins and Hasan 2022).

Watkins and Hasan studied the process of negotiating peace agreements in the city of Yathrib in Salah ad-Din governorate, where more than 90% of the population that lived there before the rise of ISIS in 2014 was displaced during the insurgency. Their study illustrates how, in certain contexts, tribal and local customs, practices, and hierarchies can undermine goods, such as civil rights, which would be desirable from the perspective of an inclusive approach. For

example, allowing local customs to prevail in negotiating a peace agreement may result in undesirable practices such as discrimination against women. Similarly, some communities may place high importance on maintaining the ability to observe specific religious or cultural practices in the context of a healing process or in conducting certain negotiations (Bourhrous 2022). However, depending on what those practices entail, their preservation may end up detrimental to a community's civic engagement (Aymerich 2020). In this regard, Watkins and Hasan's study recounts how, during negotiations with tribes, international actors attempted to mitigate the marginalization of women by including them in the discussions. However, they admit that women were not actually present during the actual talks due to customary practices.

Watkins and Hasan point to other aspects of Iraq's subnational politics that reveal its transactional nature. International actors, knowing that groups such as the PFM undermine the rule of civilian law and contest the space that state authorities are legitimately supposed to monopolize, are often reluctant to involve them in the negotiations. Yet, when their capacity to influence local communities and their status made their involvement inevitable, international actors had no choice but to engage them, albeit indirectly via Iraqi actors.

Similarly, a study conducted by Aymerich (2020) discusses how tribal customs and practices influenced the different responses of communities with similar ethno-religious composition in allowing or rejecting the return of IDPs with perceived ISIS affiliation. According to the study, rural communities with rigid tribal codes and strong personal ties—where victims and perpetrators were most likely to know each other and where tribal customs expected crime reparations to be sought from the perpetrator's relatives—were likely to adopt a preventive resilience response. This meant rejecting any potential threat by not allowing the return of the displaced. Conversely, non-urban communities with strong social ties, where accusations could be dealt with on an individual level—and thus in a more nuanced way—showed greater scope for mediation. In these communities, IDPs had a higher likelihood of being permitted to return if the individuals responsible had not occupied decision-making roles within ISIS and had not directly committed acts of violence against the community. Communities that chose to absorb the potential risk (responsive resilience) noted that allowing returnees back into the community would allow them to control their actions and anticipate potential threats.

5.5.3 Fragmentation of Efforts

The nature of Iraqi subnational and local politics can also make it difficult to identify relevant actors, leading to the fragmentation of efforts. Duplication of effort can occur for reasons such as a lack of consistent communication with the government, a common agenda among conflicting tribes, or even among the many actors who may act as mediators. Watkins and Hasan (2022) describe how community members, unless they participated directly in the negotiations, were not aware of the role of USIP, Sanad, the Network of Iraqi Facilitators, or

the UNDP in the return of displaced persons, given that other local, provincial, and national actors were simultaneously engaged in the same task.

5.5.4 The Role of Religious Actors

In Iraq, religious actors of all traditions are generally perceived as having a role to play in the pacification of the country. Although their legitimacy varies across communities, these actors tend to be regarded as influential. There is a consensus that even if their involvement in reconciliation processes, for instance, is not a guarantee of success, their exclusion can easily lead to failures (Beaujouan and Rasheed 2022; Wainscott 2019).

Religious actors can play a potentially relevant role in inter-faith or multi-faith peace and reconciliation efforts. Studies such as Wainscott (2019) suggest that Iraqis are willing to accept or even encourage the involvement of religious actors on issues such as combating extremism and sectarianism, revising misconceptions about other religions, advancing social reconciliation locally, and acting as representatives of members of their community before political authorities.

In addition, religious actors can add value as partners in peace and reconciliation efforts. They can also contribute to the resolution of conflicts with a religious dimension. Yet, the involvement of such actors may also aggravate or intensify conflicts. If their influence exceeds their initial mandate or is abused, their presence could be detrimental to community life and resilience to violent extremism (Beaujouan and Rasheed 2022). This suggests that before deciding on the involvement of religious actors, a thorough and nuanced understanding of the matter and the contextual situation is highly necessary.

In the same vein, religious actors can support the implementation of political decisions in their communities. However, engaging with them can be difficult for international actors as they may be reluctant to be seen as too close to foreign actors, something that could undermine the legitimacy with which they are perceived by their community (Wainscott 2019). The potential for partnering and working with religious actors must also be reconciled with the fact that many Iraqis, while not outright rejecting their role, advocate a reduction in the involvement of religious actors in political decisions (Beaujouan and Rasheed 2022).

5.5.5 Religious Education

Beaujouan and Rasheed (2022) make a similar observation regarding the role of religious education. Until 2003, the state oversaw religious education matters. With the change of regime, it was decentralized and handed to the three endowment offices (*diwan*) that exist in the country: Shia, Sunni and Christian, and Yezidi and Sabian-Mandaean. Today, religious education is offered in private schools, managed by the endowment offices, and in public schools. The latter, however, only includes instruction about the country's two major

monotheistic religions, Islam and Christianity. This results in the exclusion of religious minorities, such as the Yezidis, from religious education in public schools. According to the authors, this system can be seen as stigmatizing minorities and promoting non-inclusive narratives.

5.5.6 Ethno-sectarian Divides and Perceptions of Other Groups

Another significant obstacle to peacebuilding efforts aimed at enhancing social cohesion in Iraq is the country's ethno-sectarian divisions and the deep-rooted perceptions of other groups, faiths, or ethnic minorities among the population.

Prejudices and deeply held beliefs manifest in everyday attitudes in all aspects of life. Katsos and AlKafaji (2019), for example, describe how business owners may prefer hiring employees from within the dominant group of their community, as this is perceived to contribute to the good performance of the business, reduction or mitigation of friction in the workplace, or even as a way to assure "local commitment." To be sure, not everybody adheres to these beliefs or behaviors, but they are undoubtedly pervasive throughout Iraqi society.⁶ Similarly, recent studies of social interactions in Kirkuk's bazaar suggested that intersectionally privileged men are more likely to adopt conflictive behaviors in everyday life than those less privileged or women (O'Driscoll 2021; O'Driscoll and Bourhrous 2022).

Many of the programs and actions being carried out throughout the country with a view to strengthening social cohesion include activities aimed at promoting contacts, interactions and exchanges of views among people belonging to different groups, faiths, and even ethnicities. However, changing prejudices is not an easy task. A social experiment conducted by Mousa (2020) showed that behaviors and attitudes are easier to change than deeply held beliefs. The experiment, conducted in 2019, consisted of organizing a small soccer competition where the participating teams were selected to be either all-Muslim or a mix of Muslims and Christians. After playing together for several months and thus interacting over a long period, the researcher observed a positive change in attitudes, especially on the soccer field. However, no significant change was observed in other aspects of daily life. In other words, the changes achieved within the confines of the experiment did not generalize significantly beyond it. This suggests, as people involved with many Iraqi CSOs also indicate, that if peacebuilding programs aim at changing attitudes and social cohesion, longer-term programming and prolonged interactions are needed.

5.5.7 Short-term Programming

Another aspect often highlighted in discussions with both Iraqi CSOs and international organizations that work in the implementation of projects is the difficulty for social cohesion projects to bear fruit due to short-term planning and budgeting. In this vein, an Iraqi CSO manager reported that most social

cohesion projects commissioned by UNDP last between six months and a year. In the view of Iraqi CSOs, the allocated period of time is too short for these projects to bear fruit. The experiment conducted by Mousa (2020) would likely support this view. However, members of the international community in Iraq indicated a growing awareness of this shortcoming among international peacebuilding actors and that some, notably the Dutch, are beginning to plan for longer project durations.⁷

5.5.8 The Limited Political Influence of Local CSOs

Many local organizations throughout Iraq are undoubtedly doing relevant work in areas such as monitoring government transparency and accountability, improving governance, and improving economic conditions. Yet, these groups still lack real capacity to influence policy. There are reports that local NGOs are frustrated with the fact that, while playing a pivotal role in mediating between the government and the local population, they are often left out of negotiations, coordination and advisory processes by the government, and even by UNAMI (Butcher and Gumustekin 2022).

In addition, international organizations are often the ones that select and control the trajectory of development projects, as well as the CSOs they opt to work with. According to Iraqi stakeholders, this creates room for potential biases and competition among the local SCOs. In addition, a vast majority of Iraqi CSOs—nearly all—are dependent on international funding, according to sources consulted.

Consulted members of local CSOs stated that they are often seen as mere implementers for international donors and have little say in program design. Furthermore, they consider that the technical requirements of donors are often excessively high, in a way that the role of their international implementation partners is limited to hiring skilled staff to write reports according to the technical requirements. Khedir (2022) not only corroborates this but adds that Iraqi civil society is so dependent on foreign financing, networks, and agendas that it has become a mere “service provider agent” for international donors. In his view, Iraqi CSOs have lost much of their capacity to advocate for radical political, social, and cultural changes.

In addition, Iraqi stakeholders often link this problem to the fragmentation of efforts. For them, the lack of proper coordination makes it difficult to create synergies between all actors involved, particularly between local efforts and high-level diplomatic initiatives. This is not only due to the fragmentation of the state and its inefficiencies but also because of the large number of NGOs—more than 10,000—working in Iraq.

5.5.9 Political Instability and Vulnerability to External Interests

The final major threat to Iraq’s social cohesion is the country’s pervasive political instability. A recent example illustrates this well. In October 2022,

the Iraqi parliament voted to appoint Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani as the country's new prime minister. The decision came after nearly a year of political deadlock, articulated through intra-Shia factional rivalries that provoked several episodes of politically motivated unrest and street violence in 2022. The political paralysis, which brought to the fore the pre-existing problems in the country's political system, also amplified the problems stemming from the absence of government and policymaking, such as the lack of opportunities, policy continuity, or the provision of services.

So far, the Al Sudani government has not been able to address the substantive issues that it promised to address in its government program. These include the fight against corruption, electoral reform, political and economic reform, and human rights abuses, particularly by militias that target critics and impose their own rule of law.

As a result, in the absence of a process of elite reconciliation that would pave the way for institutional reform, stabilize the political landscape, and address the weakness of the state, Iraq's instability will remain systemic. In turn, its fragile society will remain vulnerable to elite behavior. Dissatisfaction with the government remains and, with it, the risk of protests that could reignite violence (RANE 2022b).

In addition, Iraq remains vulnerable to external powers seeking to influence its internal affairs by exploiting its instability and weakness. Iran and Turkey, for example, are known to have violated Iraq's sovereign territory in the recent past without much objection from the authorities in Baghdad (Al-Nidawi 2023). Currently, Al-Sudani and his supporting factions and militias are pro-Iranian, presenting an opportunity for Tehran to try to secure a position of influence within the Iraqi government, potentially driving Baghdad away from Western countries (RANE 2022a).

5.5.10 An Emerging Civil Society and Civic Culture

On a more positive note, an opportunity for peacebuilding and social reconciliation in Iraq lies in the fact that there are remarkable signs of resilience within Iraqi society. Civil-society organizations had no place in the country prior to 2003. By contrast, a study conducted by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in 2022 suggests that, despite the many difficulties, there are at least 4000 CSOs in the country, not including the autonomous region of Kurdistan (Alshamary and Maqsoud 2022).

As Alshamary (2020) points out, Iraqi civil society has grown beyond traditional associations such as charities, community cultural organizations, unions, and advocacy networks. This associational fabric has served as a training ground for a new form of civil society, composed primarily of politically minded activists motivated to advance democratic reform in the country. In addition, young activists continue to work to raise social awareness on issues not addressed by the authorities, such as gender-based violence, human rights, freedom of expression, climate change, and the lack of government accountability and justice.⁸

In Iraq, civil society remains vulnerable to the deterioration of the security situation. This includes violence and intimidation by both the state and militias. Moreover, in many parts of the country, CSOs depend overwhelmingly on external funding and support. Yet, despite the difficulties involved in organizing and bringing about change and accountability, there is a political consciousness, a notion of citizenship, emerging among Iraqis, especially among the youth.

This increase in political awareness can also be observed in a recent report published by UNDP (UNDP 2022), which summarizes findings gathered from a series of focus group discussions on the topic of the social contract. The report highlights that Iraqis perceive citizens—and especially youth—as agents of change. Although many admit to having little understanding of the rights and responsibilities associated with being a citizen or the skills and experience to participate in the political process, they see themselves as the drivers of change to achieve the high expectations they have of the government and the state (Al-Shakeri 2022).

5.6 Conclusions

This section seeks to address the main research questions of the book and draw some conclusions and recommendations from the evidence presented in the chapter.

Can peacebuilding-informed comprehensive approaches aimed at fostering social cohesion and reconciliation contribute to resilience and sustained peace in a highly complex social system as post-ISIS Iraq?

They can. In the context of Iraq, social cohesion and resilience to violent extremism are inextricably linked to two factors: the complexity of the Iraqi social fabric and the fragility of its governance institutions. This implies that peacebuilding efforts should not be limited to addressing the following horizontal aspects of social cohesion, such as promoting the values of tolerance and respect, justice and equality, and knowledge of peace and human rights, as well as providing models of inclusion, promoting intergroup integration and interaction, or facilitating reconciliation, among others. An equally important aspect is to support the improvement of the country's governance. Promoting elite reconciliation, while challenging, is essential to overcoming decades of sectarianism, corruption, and ineffective institutions, especially given that local civil society remains highly vulnerable to elite behavior.

At present, it is difficult for Iraqis to have a clear sense of where their country is and where it is heading. While recent years have shown that Iraqi society is capable of peacefully expressing its demands for change, we have also witnessed recent episodes of politically motivated unrest that have turned violent. Thus, political change in the country has the potential to be disorderly. In this light, social cohesion and resilience to violent extremism means strengthening the mechanisms within Iraqi society to adapt and withstand potentially disorderly change without reverting to tensions and violence or jeopardizing the progress that has been made.

In the case of Iraq, change at both the local and elite levels is necessary for sustainable peace and long-term social cohesion. Comprehensive peacebuilding approaches can support institutions and contribute to positive change. However, the post-2003 experience suggests that such change cannot be driven or designed from the outside.

Is it possible to compare hard-security versus peacebuilding approaches and their effectiveness, taking short-, medium- and longer-term effects into account?

In the specific case of Iraq, military or hard-security approaches and peacebuilding approaches do not need to be seen as mutually exclusive. Each has played an important role at different moments and in different contexts. During the rise of ISIS and its control over a significant part of the country's territory (2014–2017), hard security approaches were instrumental in reversing the situation. Without a military presence, it is difficult to envision how *de facto* sovereignty over the captured territories could have been regained—*itself* a necessary condition for working towards sustainable peace and security. Hard security approaches have thus been useful in situations of high uncertainty and volatility. However, these approaches address the symptoms, such as the spread of ISIS, but not the underlying causes of violent extremism. Hard security approaches can support, but cannot address on their own, these underlying factors in generating and maintaining long-term sustainable peace.

Context-specific peacebuilding approaches, on the other hand, are more effective in addressing the myriad of complexly interconnected causes that fuel violent extremism. Peacebuilding approaches, while facing their own threats and challenges, require a prior condition of reduced violence that would be difficult to achieve without the former.

Table 5.1 Intended and unintended effects of security-led vs. resilience- and peacebuilding-led responses to violent extremism in the case of Iraq.

	<i>Hard-security approaches</i>	<i>Peacebuilding / resilience-oriented responses</i>
<i>Unintended effects</i>	Empowerment of groups, militias, that challenge the cohesion of the state and contest the monopoly of legitimate coercion. Militaryization of society. In Iraq, there remains a certain emphasis on countering rather than on preventing violent extremism.	In some cases, peacebuilding actions may need to prioritize the achievement of some goals at the expense of others.
<i>Intended effects</i>	In episodes of heightened tension, contain violence. Defeat ISIS territorially and restore state sovereignty.	Strengthening of civil society in many regards.

As discussed, hard security approaches were successful in containing the ISIS insurgency and reversing situations in which security had become extremely precarious. However, this approach led to two interrelated unintended effects with long-term consequences. On the one hand, the militarization of society remains a factor behind the uncertain security situation in Iraq to this day and increases the risk of violence during periods of heightened tension or social discontent. On the other hand, the military campaigns led to the empowerment of the PMF, other militias and non-state armed groups that continue to have a significant influence over Iraq's political landscape. Not only do they undermine the cohesiveness of the state and challenge its ability to monopolize the legitimate use of force, they also jeopardize efforts to promote a rule-of-law system. That, in turn, undermines social cohesion.

Since the defeat of ISIS, peacebuilding approaches have had considerable success in strengthening Iraqi civil society. While social cohesion remains fragile and vulnerable to elite behavior, today's Iraqi civil society shows many signs of resilience. Many Iraqis, especially the youth, are committed to transforming their country and enabling the socio-economic progress they aspire to. However, the threats remain numerous, and long-term sustainable peace and human security will still require many efforts.

Notes

- 1 Several terms and acronyms are used, often interchangeably, to refer to this extremist group and the quasi-state polity it established across Iraqi and Syrian territory between 2014 and 2017. Most commonly, it is referred to as the Islamic State (IS), as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) when speaking exclusively of its territorial expansion within the Iraqi state, and as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for reference to its territorial expansion within those two states. Daesh, an Arabic acronym for *ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah*—i. e., Islamic State—is also often used. The term Daesh has been used to imply disapproval or undermine the group's legitimacy because of its phonetic similarity to some pejorative words in Arabic.
- 2 Personal communication 2: Program coordinator of a European NGO working in the implementation of projects throughout Iraq; Personal communication 3: Program manager of an Iraqi CSO based in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.
- 3 Personal communication 2; Personal communication 3; Personal communication 4: Members of an international organization, based in Europe and Iraq.
- 4 Personal communication 5: Academic (international), based in Europe and Iraq.
- 5 Personal communication 3.
- 6 Personal communication 3.
- 7 Personal communications 2 and 3.
- 8 Personal communication 5.

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6 Intersecting Gender in Community Resilience to Violent Extremism

Local Actors' Perspectives in Niger

Laura Berlingozzi

6.1 Introduction

Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has become a crucial focus for those involved in contemporary international affairs. In this context, this chapter aims to recognize the significant role that gender plays in P/CVE programs by examining how local actors understand resilience and how they are involved in resilience-building and peacebuilding programs. Through a gender lens, it critically reflects on their (un)intended consequences and limitations. Theoretically, the chapter draws on complex theory and adaptive peacebuilding approaches (de Coning, Saraiva, and Muto 2023) for community-based, resilience-building measures to prevent and counter violent extremism. Taking Niger as a case study, it links the practice of resilience-building activities with local actors' perceptions regarding the implementation of P/CVE projects. This study critically explores the challenges and concerns faced by practitioners engaged in P/CVE, aiming to contribute to peacebuilding policy and practice.

Despite the paramount importance of gender considerations, alternative strategies that effectively harness the resilience capacities of local communities remain notably understudied and undervalued within current scholarly discourse. As such, this chapter proposes an analytical framework for P/CVE responses that takes a bottom-up approach, focusing on how civil society—and especially women's organizations—perceives, redefines, and collaboratively constructs areas of intervention while highlighting potential shortcomings. The chapter puts forward a center-periphery, multi-level analysis based on geographical and security dimensions to discern more effectively who does what, where, and with which results. Against mounting insecurity, this chapter seeks to address two primary research inquiries: How do local actors conceptualize community resilience to violent extremism, and to what extent are these measures effective, considering their gender dimensions? To explore these questions, the study concentrates on two areas in Niger where jihadists operate: Tillabery and Diffa regions.

This work aims to contribute to the discussion around the implementation of peacebuilding responses to resilience to violent extremism. To this end, the chapter introduces two main arguments. The first is that jihadist groups shifted their strategy towards a population-centric kind of insurgency, showing an

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adaptive strategy to sustain their resilience, targeting state authorities and, to a large extent, sparing local civilian communities. At the same time, local communities show resilience in abiding by their rule. In this sense, resilience can be seen as an adaptation strategy, that is, as a “bargain” to survive. This is explained in terms of limited agency because local communities, including women, have limited power in areas under jihadi governance. Those who choose differently are forced to leave their communities and their land behind—an undesirable prospect for many. This, in turn, means that those who stay are forced (under the threat of violence and retaliation) to follow the newly established jihadi rules. The chapter also highlights that local communities, especially women, want to fulfill their basic needs, such as security and assured livelihoods. The analysis shows that in communities that are “abandoned” by the state in terms of security and service provision, it does not matter who provides them as long as the community members can survive. This demonstrates how communities can adopt a new kind of resilience by collaborating with jihadist groups. The second argument put forward in the chapter is that activities aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism, which also include a gender component, are not fully effective in rural areas under jihadi governance.

This chapter draws on interpretative and ethnographic methodologies of the data collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The analysis is based on a large dataset of 45 semi-structured interviews with key informants carried out in Niger in 2022. Interviewees included representatives of the European Union, the United Nations, diplomats, scholars, representatives from women’s organizations and civil society, members of the security and defense forces, traditional authorities, and members of local communities. Most of the interviews were conducted in French or English, depending on the nationality of the interviewee.¹ The interviewees were selected according to their functions, as well as referrals from other experts in the field, and then through a snowballing technique.

This chapter is organized as follows: it begins with a concise contextual introduction to the case study. Next, it establishes the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis, drawing on complex theory and adaptive peacebuilding. Then, it proposes a center-periphery, multiscalar analytical framework to assess resilience-building activities implemented on the ground with local actors’ perception of their effectiveness. Later, the chapter explores women’s roles within jihadist insurgencies and delves into their motivations for affiliation. Following this, the chapter sheds light on key activities in the P/CVE spheres. The conclusion offers an evaluation of the main criticalities along with policy-relevant recommendations.

6.2 Contextual Framework

This research was conducted at a time when the influence of global jihadist franchises in Africa has been witnessing a significant upsurge. Violent armed

groups espousing jihadist ideologies have been responsible for an unprecedented number of casualties in Africa (Roudabeh et al. 2021), leading analysts to identify sub-Saharan Africa as the emerging epicenter of global jihadism (Institute for Economics & Peace 2022). Niger, located in the central Sahel region, finds itself at the intersection of numerous interconnected challenges, including illicit migration, drug trafficking, inter-communal and inter-ethnic rivalries, depletion of natural resources, and a diverse array of armed groups that have expanded their ambitions since the early 2000s (Audu and Ibrahim 2019; Thurston 2020).

These overlapping complexities are further compounded by the absence of effective state governance in the northwestern and southeastern regions of the country, where jihadi governance has to a large extent supplanted state control (Rupesinghe, Hiberg Naghizadeh, and Cohen 2021; Bøås and Strazzari 2020). Notably, the government confronts the insurgencies of two Islamic State-linked groups: the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP) in the tri-border area between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the southern Diffa region, bordering Lake Chad. Additionally, there are al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, such as Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' (JNIM), operating in the country. These jihadist insurgent groups have managed to garner varying degrees of local support from the population (Bahiss et al. 2022) by employing a combination of coercive tactics and incentives—through a “carrot and stick” approach (Ojo 2020). Their strategies include suppressing dissent using various forms of violence, targeted kidnappings, assassinations of local leaders, exerting control over political and economic resources, as well as restricting social practices (Berlingozzi and Stoddard 2020). It is worth noting that their military operations have predominantly targeted security forces rather than civilians in local communities, with women being relatively spared from direct harm (Berlingozzi and Raineri 2023). Under these circumstances, persistent gender inequalities and power dynamics continue to impede the emergence of Nigerien women in public roles, with adverse consequences for economic development and women's rights (Alidou and Hima 2021).

In this particular setting, it is crucial to understand the role that women and gender norms play in the mobilization of women as well as in preventing and countering violent extremism. Gender is understood as a social construct referring to the cultural meanings attached to being masculine and feminine that shape individual identities and is embedded in social structures and institutions, shaping inequalities and power structures (Connell 1987). In the context of Niger, notwithstanding efforts to mainstream gender in the security sphere in line with the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda adopted at the United Nations since the 2000s, overwhelmingly, all institutions of power are male-dominated. In addition, masculinities and femininities shape power relations whereby certain expressions of masculinity that are associated with idealized manliness are socially revered while femininities are subordinated.

While the role of women in Salafist jihadist groups has become more noticeable over time (Ranstorp 2019) prevailing gender norms about

femininity can make such violence seem inexplicable and surprising (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). This is why it is important to understand how gender shapes processes of mobilization and participation in jihadist extremist groups for both men and women. Moreover, it is fundamental to focus on local communities' resilience because the prevailing literature too often privileges a focus on individual resilience, which is problematic as it can contribute to perpetuating a neoliberal discourse that depoliticizes systemic issues and shifts the burden of managing difficult environments onto the individual (Halilovic et al. 2021).

6.3 A Complex Theory Framework

Niger is situated at the heart of the Sahel, a region where multiple interconnected factors of “vulnerability” converge, giving rise to a complex system in which various intervening variables significantly impact the likelihood of individuals joining violent extremist groups. For this reason, complexity theory can be used to better grasp how different parts of the system interact. Factors such as unequal access to resources, lack of opportunities, climate change-related effects (land degradation, drought, flooding, erratic rainfall patterns), lack of services, and socio-political marginalization underpin a complex system of vulnerabilities that can be seen as “enabling factors.” Together, these contribute to a situation where expressions of violent extremism are more likely (Bøås et al. 2021).

The analysis draws on an adaptive peacebuilding approach (de Coning 2018), combining elements of complexity theory and localization strategies to analyze resilience to violent extremism. The latter concept is understood as violence justified or pursued in the name of a political or religious agenda (de Coning and Osland, *in this volume*). The analysis is grounded in the conceptual framework that views violent extremism as a complex adaptive system, emerging from the interactions and feedback loops between individuals, groups, and their social and political environments. Complex systems like violent extremism, marked by interconnectedness and non-linearity, leverage complexity theory through the concept of hybridity, emphasizing the dynamic interplay among actors and acknowledging fluid relationships for a nuanced understanding of societal change (Mac Ginty and Sanghera 2012). Within an adaptive peacebuilding framework, understanding violent extremist groups in the Sahel as a complex, adaptive system means also focusing on home-grown, context-specific, bottom-up approaches, capitalizing on the importance of civil society and local communities (de Coning, Saraiva, and Muto 2023).

Complexity theory also suggests that resilience, defined as the capacity of social institutions to effectively absorb and adapt to unforeseen shocks and setbacks (Chandler 2014), constitutes a key characteristic of complex systems. In the context of violent extremism, resilience can be understood as the collective ability of individuals, communities, and societies to resist, recover, or adapt to the influence of extremist ideologies and groups (de Coning and Osland, *in this volume*).

Building on the concept of adaptive peacebuilding suggests that effective management of complex systems, such as violent extremism, requires a flexible approach that can respond to the constantly changing nature of the problem (de Coning 2023), involving processes of learning and adaptation, in which different actors, including local stakeholders, co-construct solutions in line with the socio-cultural and historical context (de Coning, Saraiva, and Muto 2023) to have a better chance at building long-term and self-sustaining resilience to violent extremism.

In practical terms, fostering resilience to violent extremism requires a multi-stakeholder and multi-level approach that involves different actors, such as the government, the private sector, and international organizations. Also, the active involvement of affected communities and civil society organizations is crucial, given their often-well-established positions to discern and address the underlying causes of violent extremism within their respective communities (de Coning and Osland, *in this volume*). Thus, this holistic approach should also consider the specific needs and perspectives of different groups, including women and marginalized communities, and involve them in the design and implementation of programs and policies. In turn, this means that resilience can be construed as encompassing short- to medium-term measures, aimed at enhancing agency, adaptive capacity, and strengthening social cohesion, as well as medium- to long-term efforts that address and transform the underlying drivers of violent extremism.

In applying complexity theory and adaptive peacebuilding to gender and violent extremism, previous research suggests that under circumstances of patriarchy, political and civil marginalization, and misogyny, susceptibilities to extremism are exacerbated (Berlingozzi and Raineri 2023). To this end, theoretically and empirically, vulnerabilities and resilience can be seen as two sides of the same coin. To overcome these vulnerabilities, preventing and countering violent extremism programs aimed at building resilience should focus on the systemic structural obstacles to women's empowerment while tackling the deeper underlying drivers that motivate women to participate in jihadist groups.

6.4 Center-periphery Dynamics: A Multiscalar Analytical Framework for Understanding P/CVE Activities

The chapter proposes a unique multiscalar analytical framework based on geographical and security dynamics which is useful to link the spectrum of resilience-building activities implemented in Niger with the perception of their effectiveness. The suggested analytical model is derived from the data gathered and analyzed by the author. In this multi-level framework, there are three concentric levels of intervention according to the areas where they take place.

The first level is located in the capital, Niamey—a totally securitized area where all international organizations, governmental structures, foreign military, and NGOs have their headquarters. The capital presents itself as a highly securitized “bubble” amidst insecurity. In this area, most P/CVE

activities comprise workshops and conferences that bring together international donors, civil society, government, and army officials. These activities primarily focus on the dissemination of the projects, long-term planning, and feedback. Other activities include focus groups and training with selected community members who are asked to travel to the city in exchange for a per diem. Overall, civil society and NGOs showed a certain degree of fatigue concerning the overabundance of ateliers, workshops, and seminars (Berlingozzi 2023, 202). The prevalent viewpoint expressed by local key informants emphasizes the significance of awareness-raising and dissemination; however, it is contended that these activities, despite their importance, can be perceived as smokescreens orchestrated by specific actors, primarily elites. Such initiatives are believed to exert minimal practical influence on the real-life circumstances of local communities.

The second level of intervention comprises the semi-securitized areas within the broader jihadi operational areas in securitized urban areas. These are, for instance, the towns of Tillabery, Tahoua, Torodi, Tillia, and Diffa. In these towns, the army is present and—due to the declaration of a state of emergency by the government—anyone (including international organizations² and NGOs) wishing to travel there is required to have a military escort. Without going into details on issues of perceptions of distance from local communities, members of the international community avoid traveling to these areas. Those traveling to these towns on a daily basis are local NGOs with local training personnel. Activities take place in the center of the town and mainly involve training, focus groups, and capacity-building on conflict-solving mechanisms, awareness-raising on violent extremism, and women's empowerment. The participants are selected members of each community and receive a per diem. Some participants come from the nearby towns while very few travel from neighboring local communities. The impact assessment of these activities is limited: the main positive outcome that the participants reported is the benefit of receiving a per diem—regarded as a positive source of income. In general, though, these activities, especially the workshops, provide generic content and fail to bring long-term results (Berlingozzi 2023).

At the third and outermost level, we can find rural areas under jihadi rule. Those are non-urbanized areas where villages are scattered in the Tillabery area along the border with Mali (in a stretch from northwest Bankilaré till Ekrafane in the east, and towards Tera in the south) as well as in the Diffa area bordering Nigeria (around Lake Chad in Bosso, Nguimi, Maine Soroa). These are completely neglected areas, and besides occasional army patrols, no other P/CVE or development activities are delivered. These local communities under mobile jihadi governance (Bøås and Strazzari 2020) do not receive any assistance from the state or international bodies. Given the complex situation amidst banditry, inter-community conflict, and lack of resources, the members of the communities who choose not to flee their land, have little choice but to collaborate fully with jihadist groups.

Thus, this multiscalar model presents itself in three concentric circles that critically connect geographic landscapes with models of collaboration and

resilience vis-à-vis the P/CVE activities that are delivered. Thus, the capital is situated in the middle, the urban areas in the second circle, and the rural areas in the outermost one. Along the same lines, from a bottom-up community-level perspective, the model portrays a collaboration continuum with jihadist groups: in the capital, there is no collaboration; in the towns, there is little collaboration; and in rural areas, there is full collaboration. The collaboration continuum arguably indicates community-level resilience mechanisms, whereby in the capital, strategies to resist violent extremism are discussed; at the middle level in securitized urban areas, enforcement is attempted, while in the rural areas, there is no reach. In those neglected areas, the more they are out of reach by national and international intervention, the more jihadi governance strengthens.

6.5 Gendered Roles and Motivations

Within the third level of the above-mentioned model—the area where jihadist groups operate—a great deal of importance is attached to controlling women as a way to assert their influence over the territory. The data from fieldwork in Niger indicates that the motivations for joining jihadist groups are complex and interconnected. Factors such as food insecurity, state abuses, unequal resource access, and limited education are seen as contributing or enabling factors rather than root causes (Bøås et al. 2021). With over 4.2 million people in need (UN OCHA 2022), local jihadist insurgencies are driven by micro-socio-economic issues, particularly those affecting youth,³ who lack viable alternatives. These factors relate to economic opportunities, deficiencies in service provision (education, health, justice, infrastructure), and historical marginalization of specific ethnic groups, notably the nomad Fulani herders who, in turn, have been extensively targeted in counter-terrorist activities by the security and defense forces (Raineri 2018). The Fulani express discontent over their lack of representation, with local authorities failing to adequately represent them in various administrative and parliamentary roles.⁴

Jihadist governance is wielded in matters of life and death as well as everyday practices and behaviors (Berlingozzi and Raineri 2023). As a result, women are targets of both violence and governance by jihadist insurgent groups. The involvement of women in jihadist insurgencies in Niger conforms to the typical social behaviors dictated by traditional gender norms. In this context, gaining the favor of the population is essential to contribute not only to the survival of the group but also to ensuring control over and expansion of the territory (Kilcullen 2010). For jihadist groups, women represent strategic resources for the roles they can fill and useful elements for embedding themselves in the territory (Berlingozzi 2023).

In the Tillabery region, women rarely perform combat roles. The vast majority of women instead perform logistic and structural functions. While male members stay in the *markaz* in the *brousse*, their wives live in the surrounding villages. Usually, the fighters move to the outposts during the day

and return to their families to benefit from the “warrior’s rest.” The wives’ daily activities revolve around small-scale trading in local markets—mainly the sale of milk and the purchase of millet and sorghum to prepare meals. They also take care of the children and the house, search for wood and fetch water, and assist the sick (Abatan and Sangaré 2021). In these areas, women predominantly conform to traditional gender roles, thus performing the same household care tasks that they would normally perform in any other rural area of Niger.

In the areas of Tillabery and Tahoua, “[the local women’s] husbands and children are part of the groups, so they have two choices: help them or report them.”⁵ However, if they opt for the second possibility, they will not only suffer retaliation from ISSP but also from other members of the community. These reasons, combined with the lack of protection by the defense and security forces in the event of attacks by self-defense militias and the memory of the attacks suffered by state forces, make it highly unlikely that women will cooperate with justice. According to a security expert working in these areas, “They don’t report. Rather, they encourage men to join groups.”⁶

In the Lake Chad region, the dynamics of women’s association with local jihadist insurgencies show different characteristics. Indeed, the number of cases of women being kidnapped, injured, or killed varies greatly between Islamic State factions. If ISSP in the Tillabery region does not seem to rely on such forms of violence to forcefully recruit or instill fear to induce obedience, in the Lake Chad region, the groups adopt more violent methods of coercion against the population, especially towards women (ICG 2016). Unsurprisingly, Islamic State affiliates in the region make heavy use of this strategy, as it is in line with the notorious strategy of Boko Haram (Warner and Matfess 2017), the group from which these factions originate. In this context, women also perform important auxiliary roles such as nurses, mothers, wives, cooks, and teachers in local Koranic schools. As long as the civilians respect the imposed rules, ISWAP seems to pose less threat to the civilian population than other jihadi factions such as the Jama’u Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad (JAS) or even the army (Mahmood and Ani 2018).

In line with traditional gender norms and roles found in rural Sahelian societies, women associate with jihadist groups in Niger predominantly through marital and family ties (Abatan and Sangaré 2021). In the Tillabery region, some women joined ISSP in hopes of finding a husband, while others followed their wives, boyfriends, relatives, or children. These dynamics demonstrate the extent to which traditional social norms established within the patriarchal system prevalent in the Sahel contribute to defining women’s agency. Also, obtaining the support of jihadist groups is not only related to the need to ensure physical protection but also to socio-economic and social-status issues. In this context, gender dynamics related to masculinity and femininity influence group affiliation (Berlingozzi and Raineri 2023). They define why women are required to play certain roles within the home and determine the weight that men’s ability to provide for their families carries. Given the lack of

alternatives and considering that the husband is traditionally expected to look after and provide for his wife, “joining a group can improve your position within the women’s community. Above all, in such a hierarchical social configuration, men who can guarantee safety, protection, food, and shelter give women the possibility of achieving their social fulfillment.”⁷

Overall, women can be seen as integral components of the jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel. They support husbands, gather information, provide materials, encourage affiliation, treat the wounded, educate children, and offer logistical support. Control over gender dynamics also assumes particular importance, and not only from a strategic point of view. Enforcing a strict dress and behavior code is an effective and particularly visible way of underlining one’s authority at the local level. In local dynamics of jihadist governance, in addition to the management of justice, the collection of taxes, and the provision of basic health services (Sandor and Campana 2019), the control over women helps to create the perception of territorial control that goes beyond enclaves in the bush and settles in the local imagination, structuring the power relations between state and community, between center and periphery. In this framework, the rules introduced by jihadist insurgencies that target women and confine them to the domestic sphere are often in continuity with traditional norms and do not always represent a break with cultural value systems pre-existing the implementation of Sharia. Women participate in insurgencies in subtle and diverse ways, and they are not necessarily all part of a homogeneous and universal category of victims.

6.6 P/CVE Activities in Niger

In Niger, activities in the P/CVE sphere fall within the adaptive peacebuilding approach (de Coning 2018), which focuses on the process rather than the end-state. Adaptive peacebuilding is aimed at sustaining a long-term commitment to preventing conflict and building peace, investing in measures aimed at strengthening the social cohesion and resilience of local communities to help them self-sustain their quest to prevent and counter violent extremism and promote change. P/CVE activities also include addressing the idea of radicalization (how people become involved and why) to be able to recognize signals of people turning to “the dark side,” laying down mechanisms for inter-community dialogue to foster social cohesion, and advocating for a culture of peace, highlighting the main advantages of entertaining peaceful relationships within and among communities.

At the community level, local civil society and NGOs deliver capacity-building training on conflict analysis, communication and reporting, mediation, and intra- and inter-community conflict negotiation.⁸ Also at the local level, so-called “peace committees” have been put in place by the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace⁹ to prevent and counter violent extremism. These committees include traditional leaders, community chieftaincies, religious authorities, and women’s and youth representatives. They

are mainly responsible for delivering training on social cohesion, conflict management, communication in peace and conflict, and peacebuilding, and are tasked with collaborating with the Security and Defense Forces (SDF).

Some civil society organizations, such as the Youth Movement for Development and Citizen Education, implement projects on women's advancement.¹⁰ These include activities aimed at supporting the development of income-generating activities for young people and vulnerable women and take place in the centers of Tillabery, Tahoua, Maradi, Agadez, and Diffa. The underlying assumption is that supporting violent extremist groups is linked with economic development. Thus, the idea is that by enhancing women's economic development, the likelihood of women supporting jihadist groups decreases.

Other projects include training on conflict prevention, such as counter-messaging activities. According to one of the trainers, "Those activities are very sensitive because you have to talk about violent extremism without upsetting local communities."¹¹ This concern is linked to the fact that in rural areas under jihadi governance—such as those in the northwest of the country, in the Tillabery region, in the villages along the border with Mali—it is very complicated to discern "who is who."¹² As illustrated by this quote from a member of a local NGO that carries out P/CVE activities in Tillabery (town), at the community level, distinguishing between individuals who are actively and voluntarily affiliated with JNIM or ISSP and those who, even involuntarily, engage in forms of collaboration is not always straightforward. One of the interviewees, a local P/CVE trainer, expressed a lot of caution in this regard: "It happens very often during the activities we are organizing that there might be some active members of jihadi groups present in the room. They come to surveil both what we say and what the community members say."¹³ In turn, this means that active members come from the *markaz* in the *brousse* (the bush) to surveil how the local communities are behaving, and those who misbehave will be sanctioned.

In terms of solutions, local communities and civil society organizations work with security and defense forces and traditional authorities. In northwestern areas under jihadist rule (Tillabery region), activities are mostly centered on re-establishing trust mechanisms with SDF, ensuring collaboration from the local communities, and making sure that women who are at the center of the family structures collaborate with SDF, sharing information on family or community members if they spot "radicalization" signs or peculiar movements.

Nonetheless, re-establishing confidence between local communities and SDF and encouraging them to collaborate are challenging for two main reasons. On one side, there is the fear of retaliation from jihadist groups, as those who collaborate with state forces face punishments that can range from warnings to whippings and capital punishment according to the gravity of the crime committed. On the other hand, a long and well-documented history of abuses committed by the SDF hinders the development of trust towards them.

The lack of trust in the Nigerien Armed Forces (FAN) is rooted in documented abuses and targeted killings against civilians, leading to a demand for

protection against state abuses. Data from ACLED¹⁴ reveals that, between July 2017 and September 2020, 162 civilians were killed by the FAN. MINUSMA's report further corroborates these findings, attributing 34 extrajudicial killings to the FAN in the border region between Mali and Niger (MINUSMA 2020). In 2020 alone, the FAN was responsible for the deaths of 132 civilians, whose bodies reappeared in mass graves in April 2020 (Prevost, 2020). Despite denials from the Minister of National Defense, an investigation by the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) confirmed these reports, identifying at least 71 individuals killed by the Nigerien Armed Forces. Most victims were men, and the alleged mass executions triggered widespread frustration and anger among the public, significantly impacting women's perceptions of security in these areas.

This violence helps substantiate the feeling of distrust among local communities and SDF and casts doubts on the idea of reinforcing the collaboration of women with SDF. In the trust-building and P/CVE workshops, the communities, including women, are told about violent extremism and how to recognize the early signs of radicalization. Often, "chosen" religious leaders talk about "moderate" Islam. But in this context, where community and family ties are very strong, it is very unlikely that mothers, sisters, wives, and community members would denounce or report someone to the SDF. Moreover, asking them to collaborate in gathering and sharing intelligence, knowing that jihadist insurgents severely punish those who cooperate with the security forces, puts them in a dangerous situation. As previous feminist scholarship has highlighted, women are assumed to be at the same time victims and in need of protection but also superheroines (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004; Shepherd 2011). Thus, women are thought as agents of their own salvation, capable of putting their lives at risk by collaborating with the same SDF that have not restrained themselves from attacking the very same communities in the past.

Therefore, on one hand, the SDF blame local communities because they do not sufficiently collaborate with them given that they have access to a lot of information and know what is happening on the ground in real time. Local communities become complicit by sharing intelligence and providing information regarding the location of the army patrols, spying on other community members, and reporting first-hand insights. It is thanks to real-time, first-hand tip-offs that jihadi groups are successful in ambushing army patrols. On the other hand, local communities are wary of sharing intelligence with the SDF, not only because there have been cases of abuses by the SDF but also because of their slow interventions in the localities. This means that after the military patrols leave the villages, the local communities can face retaliation, as security and military presence is not ensured. The price they may pay for collaborating is higher than the benefits they would receive from working with state authorities.

Traditional customary authorities, including leaders, elders, and religious figures, play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion by facilitating inter-community dialogue and conflict resolution. Due to their historical respect

and influence within local populations, these authorities are often effective mediators in disputes, particularly between diverse ethnic or religious groups. Their involvement builds trust and promotes understanding among communities, contributing to social cohesion. Traditional leaders contribute to peaceful coexistence by bridging gaps between different groups, while religious leaders focus on fostering interfaith dialogue, understanding, and countering extremist ideologies. Additionally, elders, such as traditional authorities,¹⁵ preserve community culture, act as arbitrators in conflicts, and promote social harmony through peaceful solutions within the community.

6.7 Assessing Resilience in Borderland Niger

Concerning the conceptualization of resilience to violent extremism, a local informant involved in policymaking argued that resilience is somewhat similar to the political process. In fact, he argued “Being resilient, it’s something natural. It’s like a tree that adapts to environmental changes. Being resilient to violent extremism means being able to adapt to the changes that happen in your context.”¹⁶

And in these rural areas, “To be resilient is not dying.”¹⁷ This statement is illustrative of the situation local communities live in. In a context where they have little alternative, they adapt to the environmental changes by abiding by jihadist governance rule, paying the *zakat*,¹⁸ and collaborating with jihadist groups to be able to survive. In this sense, the local population adapts by abiding by jihadi rule. This new way of living is epitomized in the words of a local farmer from Bani Bangou in the Tillabery region: “We follow the rules, and we are not beaten. There is no violence when we cooperate.”¹⁹

In remote areas of Niger—such as the Tillabery region in the northwest of the country bordering Mali, and in Diffa in the southeast, neighboring Nigeria, where jihadi groups operate—access to resources is one of the main drivers of conflict. In this context, local community members choose to obey jihadist rule as a survival strategy. In a situation of marginalization and lack of livelihood and with the necessity of facing the precarious situation, they can cope by adopting legal or illicit behaviors.

In the Tillabery area, adapting to the situation by respecting local norms exposes local communities to great risk of retaliation (for instance, by collaborating with state authorities such as the SDF or mayors) while not changing the situation of distress caused by the lack of livelihood and conflicts over natural resources. This provides a partial explanation as to why collaborating with jihadist groups can guarantee further benefits in terms of both security and access to livelihoods. In a context where there are no services and traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution fail, the situation of injustice pushes local communities towards siding with jihadist groups. The increasing loss of power experienced by traditional leaders is detrimental to the extent that they are not able to handle intra- and inter-community conflicts. “Local communities, especially the Fulani herders, do not have access to grazing

areas, and local banditry steals their cattle. Their protection is not guaranteed either by the state or by local conflict resolution mechanisms.”²⁰ This means that while traditional authorities have, to some extent, lost their influence in promoting inter-community dialogue and successfully resolving conflicts, local communities are faced with two options: fleeing to become internally displaced people or staying and submitting to jihadi governance, abiding by their rules and cooperating with them.

Also, according to one activist from civil society: “We can’t ask anything from local communities. The state is not protecting them.”²¹ And in this sense, local communities under jihadi governance adopt their very own brand of resilience, which means “going beyond vulnerability”²² inherent to the insecure context they live in. In order not to be vulnerable, they adapt by being less vulnerable, allowing them to preserve their bodily integrity.

Moreover, in rural areas, “They don’t have a choice. It’s impossible to resist. It’s an imposition from above.”²³ This quote from a local expert working on security governance in those areas indicates that jihadi governance is enforced through threat and violence and that local communities have little chance to fight or revolt against the new jihadi normative system.

In addition, there is a duplication of efforts on the ground, where local civil society organizations and NGOs do similar activities, such as training, awareness-raising workshops, and information-sharing mechanisms.²⁴ These efforts are not necessarily coordinated at the broader level and tend to reproduce the same weaknesses. Also, the participants receive per diems to attend the activities. Many informants claimed that receiving the payment is the main driver to ensure attendance. While receiving a small fee is not problematic in and of itself, there are significant doubts about its effectiveness. One of the implementers of such activities on the ground in the Tillabery area claimed that “We do them [the payments] because we have to if we want to work. It depends also on the international donors.”²⁵ This argument explains on one side how the external donors co-construct local civil society agenda, while on the other disregarding the effectiveness of these activities at the local community level, as they do not tackle the deeper and structural issues that motivate collaboration and affiliation with jihadist groups.

In sum, local communities want two simple things: security (which means the assurance that no bodily harm will be inflicted on them) and the ability to carry out economic activities (as farmers, herders, or fishermen) necessary to ensure a livelihood. Thus, it emerges that the local population adopts a series of adaptation strategies to cope with the situation and strengthen their resilience to violent extremism.

In this context, resilience is understood in adaptive terms rather than as a way to resist, challenge or openly fight the newly established order. First, they do not challenge jihadi authority, choosing instead to remain silent. Secondly, they respect the new norms that have been imposed concerning the tax payment and dress code for men and women.

6.8 Gender-based Resilience to Violent Extremism in Niger

In terms of short-term resilience, enhancing social cohesion involves promoting inclusivity and gender equality within communities. Gender dynamics and women's participation are crucial for building cohesive societies as they contribute diverse perspectives, knowledge, and skills. Ensuring the active involvement of women in decision-making processes and community initiatives helps foster social cohesion and resilience.

When it comes to enhancing agency and adaptive capacity, addressing gender norms and empowering women is essential. Challenging traditional gender roles and promoting women's agency allows them to actively participate in efforts to counter violent extremism. Providing women with access to education, skills training, and economic opportunities enhances their adaptive capacity and enables them to contribute effectively to resilience-building initiatives.

In the context of long-term resilience, addressing and transforming the drivers of conflict requires recognizing the gendered dimensions of violence and conflict. Gender inequality and unequal power relations often contribute to the perpetuation of violent extremism. Therefore, a gender-sensitive approach is crucial in understanding the root causes of conflict and designing comprehensive strategies to address them. This includes promoting women's rights, addressing gender-based violence, and ensuring women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding and decision-making processes. Overall, incorporating a gender perspective in both short-term and long-term resilience-building efforts strengthens the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions, as it recognizes the unique experiences, needs, and contributions of women and promotes gender equality as a fundamental aspect of countering violent extremism.

The prevalence of men and the glorification of violent masculinities within extremist groups, coupled with the societal perception of women as more peaceful and influential in shaping youth as mothers and community members, have motivated many P/CVE projects to recognize the potential benefits of engaging women. This strategy is supported by the United Nations Women, Peace, and Security agenda, particularly through Resolution 2242, which underscores the capacity of women to contribute to community resilience and emphasizes the need to prioritize gender as a crucial component of the P/CVE agenda.

Although in accordance with the WPS Agenda, the Nigerien National Strategy for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism has recognized the potential role of women, and numerous development and human security programs exist to promote their socio-economic empowerment, women often hesitate to participate or find it difficult to engage due to deep-seated societal traditions and gender roles.

Some scholarly literature contends that mothers are inherently the best placed to detect early signs of radicalization and that there is a need for increased interventions to improve their capacity to deter their children from joining violent extremist groups (True and Eddyono 2021; Speckhard 2021). However, it is

necessary not to overly emphasize women's roles as mothers in prevention efforts as it could be detrimental inasmuch as P/CVE programs instrumentalize their roles (Giscard d'Estaing 2017). An overly strong focus on the role of women as mothers in prevention efforts is based on an over-simplistic understanding of the causes of extremism and the solutions (Eggert 2018), without acknowledging women's agency, diversity of voices, and experiences.

Despite the implementation of numerous projects aimed at empowering women in countering violent extremism, a lack of rigorous evaluation of their effectiveness persists, prompting questions regarding the extent to which the underlying assumptions of these initiatives are sound. As mentioned earlier, women are active contributors to extremist movements, and thus, their inherent ability to build community resilience to violent extremism should not be taken for granted. Moreover, an additional concern in engaging women in countering violent extremism initiatives is the possibility of a backlash against those who participate (Giscard d'Estaing 2017), as well as the potential risks they may face for being exploited by the state for security purposes.

Fieldwork data shows a strong gendered approach to jihadi governance manifests itself through the imposition of measures that include the reconfiguration of marital relationships, a ban on celebrations, the enforcement of dress codes—especially in relation to female modesty—the restriction of women's mobility, and the segregation of men and women in public spaces. Even though the imposition of this new order restricts women's agency and freedom to a large extent, it is not entirely rejected by local communities, including women (Raineri 2020).

To counter this phenomenon, a gender-based resilience approach to violent extremism should be applied. This refers to the specific ways in which men and women may be affected by and respond to extremist ideologies and violence, and how gender can be considered in efforts to build resilience. A gendered approach to resilience building should be based on improving gender equity, thus focusing on the underlying structural inequalities that increase women's vulnerability. In a patriarchal society such as the Nigerien one, the central element is the family, which is a site of both recruitment and resistance to violent extremism.

Resilience-based participatory engagements are more effective in P/CVE than hard-security, top-down approaches because security-led interventions, especially in Niger, risk alienating local communities. In response to the shortcomings of hard-security approaches, a big component of P/CVE approaches is reinforcing trust-building mechanisms with local communities in light of past abuses. Even if more holistic and participatory and inclusive mechanisms to counter violent extremism are implemented, data show the limitations over the implications for women and gender aspects.

One of the most recurring strategies international donors utilize to help promote women's resilience towards violent extremism is education. Unfortunately, in remote rural areas, most schools are closed, and Koranic schools have not replaced them. In the Tillabery region, local civil society also carries out training activities for women leaders and young leaders on local planning.

Each municipality should have a community development plan in which activities are identified that could be developed to prevent young people and women from joining jihadist insurgencies.

Moreover, from the data gathered, it emerges that women's roles in seeking resilience to violent extremism follow social structural patterns and existing traditional norms. Women are seen as pillars of the family, central elements who take care of the children and the household. In turn, this means that most programs aimed at fostering women's resilience to violent extremism revolve around strengthening their economic situation through capacity-building and developing income-generating activities such as the small-scale trade of condiments, vegetables, and pottery. Sustaining women in developing profitable activities together with strengthening education are two of the main gender-based resilient strategies that have been suggested by most local experts during interviews.

Local civil society organizations—including NGOs—charged with implementing projects on preventing and countering violent extremism receive funding from international donors. This also means that they must follow specific guidelines on gender-related aspects to be financed.²⁶ One of these specific requirements is a gender quota mandating that all project activities have 30% women as attendees.

Nonetheless, there are some obstacles to women's meaningful engagement and empowerment that have been underlined by local trainers who work in the P/CVE spheres. In the context of capacity-building activities, workshops or focus groups, especially in mixed groups, women do not feel entitled to participate.²⁷ This is linked with traditional norms that relegate women—especially those lower educated living in rural areas—to a subaltern position from their male counterparts. Women in rural areas are greatly affected and constrained by so-called *pesanteurs socio-culturelles* (socio-cultural expectations and pressures) that shape their subordinate place in society. Customary traditional norms also restrict women's access to land and their equitable participation in society.

Thus, a gender-based approach in the context of P/CVE includes capacity-building activities aimed at promoting women's empowerment. However, this approach could be problematic if women's empowerment is instrumentalized for security concerns. Promoting women's empowerment and tackling patriarchal norms should be seen not only as a goal by itself but seriously call into question systems of structural inequalities that are difficult to dismantle through sporadic seminars, day-long focus groups, or practical activities. For instance, some local activists who work in this context reported that they had to plan some activities at night because women have to take care of their children and the household and are therefore unable to participate during the day, while other women were forbidden to participate at any time by their husbands.²⁸

As far as the establishment of trust-building mechanisms with state authorities and especially the army, they can be seen as quite problematic for two main reasons. At the practical level, there is the risk of exposing women to greater harm than is prevented. This is because women are likely to face

retaliation from jihadist groups when they expose themselves by collaborating with the SDF. At the general level, they are tasked with doing something that the SDF cannot do by themselves, thus creating the myth of the superwoman (Shepherd 2011).

Overall, key informants were particularly skeptical about the positive impacts that activities have on women in local communities. A local trainer on women's empowerment in the context of P/CVE claimed that "The training does not change anything."²⁹ This negative perception of the effectiveness of the training rests on the idea that women want (bodily) security for themselves and their children, as well as food security. Another source confirmed that "the training against violent extremism goes nowhere as local populations do not see the point besides getting the per diem allowance. Moreover, female leadership training does not particularly interest local women as they have other basic concerns to care about, including ensuring a livelihood, work, and transport."³⁰ Another local trainer claimed that "All these training activities achieve nothing. There is no water and no food. Women need security, transportation, and a source of livelihood."³¹ In this sense, local civil society complained that awareness-raising courses on the value of women's leadership and women's empowerment are not gender-transformative, which means that they don't tackle structural dynamics. "These trainings do not interest people."³²

Thus, the main argument that can be put forward is that this kind of approach does not respond fully to local needs because material bodily experiences and security concerns are sidelined: when women are asked to collaborate with the SDF, they risk retaliation; and also primary needs should be guaranteed.

6.9 Analysis

The research has identified shortcomings in the practices utilized in external actors' interventions—these stem from skewed understandings of the local context. Applying a complexity theory perspective can shed light on the effectiveness of training and peacebuilding activities in terms of building resilience and disrupting violent extremism. The data gathered reveal a limited impact due to their predominantly low-leverage nature, with the primary focus on individual skill development. Consequently, these interventions often fail to induce meaningful changes in the broader system, its underlying structures, or the fundamental drivers of conflict. This lack of substantial effect can potentially be attributed to the inherent constraints associated with the intrinsic limitations of individual-oriented training, further elucidating why such initiatives remain constrained, failing to induce substantial systemic change.

While training and peacebuilding activities primarily concentrate on enhancing the capabilities of individuals, especially women, they fail to comprehensively address the complexity of the wider system, overlooking the intricate interdependencies and the systemic dynamics of a patriarchal system, as well as deeper drivers of women's mobilization. To effectively build

resilience and disrupt violent extremism, it becomes imperative to adopt a more comprehensive approach that considers the interconnectedness and interplay between various components of the system.

In Niger, where intercommunity tensions are high and the political spectrum is highly polarized, there is a greater level of cumulative extremism. This phenomenon involves the coexistence of multiple violent extremist groups and the mutually reinforcing dynamics between them. Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive approach that combines peacebuilding efforts to tackle the underlying grievances that provide a fertile ground for extremism within communities. As “conflict-sensitivity for PVE initiatives is not just a technicality to tinker with the programmatic details of an intervention,” the analysis shows significant shortcomings in the understanding of how P/CVE interventions interact with the context and related conflict dynamics. In terms of gendered consequences, especially exposing women to possible harm while not tackling the underlying structural causes of mobilization in jihadist groups, there is a need to further reflect on the implications of their lack of policy coherence and effectiveness. Practitioners of adaptive peacebuilding to foster community resilience should be wary of the unintended consequences that P/CVE interventions may have at the local level.

In sum, the multiscalar model presented in this chapter which links security dynamics with resilience-building efforts highlights negative adaptations to resilience with perverse and unintended consequences, where the communities that are most affected by insecurity living under jihadi rule are the ones that adapt to the new insecurity framework to survive.

6.10 Conclusion: Possible Solutions and Ways Forward

This chapter addresses the dearth of research on alternative strategies for harnessing the resilience of local communities in Niger, particularly in terms of gender aspects. Drawing on complex theory and adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning, Saraiva, and Muto 2023), it seeks to introduce an analytical framework for P/CVE responses, employing a bottom-up approach that concentrates on civil society perspectives, particularly women’s organizations. Employing a multi-level analysis, the chapter looked at how local actors frame community resilience to violent extremism and the extent to which the measures put in place are effective while also considering their gender dimensions. First, the analysis has investigated the assumptions surrounding the gendered concept of resilience and highlighted how placing significant emphasis on women’s community work is often counterproductive in both peacebuilding and achieving genuine empowerment. Moreover, a gender-focused approach that solely emphasizes women is not necessarily adequate, as it should also address violent masculinities and collaborate with male gatekeepers within institutions characterized by gendered power imbalances, such as traditional leaders and local authorities, to make a structural difference.

This research aims to contribute to discussions on peacebuilding responses to extremism, highlighting two key arguments. First, jihadist groups adaptively shift towards a population-centric insurgency, targeting state authorities while sparing local civilian communities. Simultaneously, local communities, particularly women, show resilience by abiding by jihadi rules as a survival strategy, reflecting limited agency. The second argument underscores the ineffectiveness of gender-inclusive efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism in rural areas under jihadi governance, emphasizing the unique form of resilience emerging through collaboration with jihadist groups in communities abandoned by the state.

From the analysis of the data gathered, it seems that re-establishing confidence between the different communities is paramount not only to de-escalate inter-community conflicts but also, in consequence, by providing a way to prevent local members from joining jihadist groups. This could be done through dialogue mechanisms put in place by traditional leaders. For this strategy to be successful, traditional leaders must be seen as legitimate, trustworthy, and honest authorities.

A possible solution to restore peace in those areas would be to start a twofold process that concentrates activities where there is actual need. This would first mean open dialogue with jihadist entrepreneurs to stop violence against the SDF and negotiate a truce so that the state, international organizations, and NGOs can effectively gain access in the remote rural areas that are the most marginalized and in need of assistance. Second, one key aspect of tackling violent extremism is to restore social cohesion, and it would be recommended to give more attention to traditional leaders, especially “true Fulani leaders” who are respected and acknowledged by local communities as such. Strengthening social cohesion with traditional leaders that are recognized as legitimate by the local communities would be the first step to tackling inter-community conflicts. Finally, increasing the representation of marginalized communities in policy-making would also help tackle local grievances that bolster jihadist ranks.

In conclusion, this article highlights the adaptive strategy of jihadist groups in adopting a population-centric insurgency approach, targeting state authorities while sparing local civilian communities. The resilience exhibited by local communities can be understood as an adaptation strategy, driven by limited agency and the need for survival. The reliance on jihadist governance stems from the abandonment of these communities by the state, with basic needs such as security and livelihood becoming the priority. As a result, traditional prevention and activities for countering violent extremism, including gender-focused interventions, prove ineffective in rural areas under jihadi governance.

Policy recommendations stemming from these findings call for a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying drivers of violent extremism while prioritizing the needs of local communities. Efforts should focus on restoring the state's presence and providing security and services in these neglected areas. It is crucial to engage with local populations, including women, to understand their specific needs and involve them in decision-

making processes. Additionally, interventions should incorporate a nuanced understanding of resilience and adaptability within the context of jihadist governance. By adopting a multi-dimensional, adaptive, and context-specific approach, policymakers can develop more effective strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism in these challenging rural environments.

Notes

- 1 In accordance with ethical research criteria, all participants provided informed consent to take part in the research and be quoted anonymously. The interviews took place in safe places and no recordings were made at any time.
- 2 Besides to some extent the International Red Cross.
- 3 Interview, local security expert n.1, Niamey, June 2022.
- 4 Interview, Fulani herder from Tillia, June 2022.
- 5 Interview, local NGO n.1, Niamey, July 2022.
- 6 Interview, local civil society actor n.1, Niamey, July 2022.
- 7 Interview, local security expert, Niamey, July 2022.
- 8 Interview, local civil society actor n.2, Niamey, July 2022.
- 9 Following the coup d'état in July 2023, the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace (HACP) has undergone significant changes, including the termination of functions for advisors, mission officers, and other staff members.
- 10 The projects generally use the framing "*promotion de la femme*," which is conceptually closer to the idea of advancement of women rather than more complex and transformative concepts of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment.
- 11 Interview, local civil society actor n.3, Niamey, July 2022.
- 12 Interview, local NGO n.2, Niamey, July 2022.
- 13 Interview, local P/CVE trainer n.1, July 2022, Niamey.
- 14 The incident reports were collected using the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) dataset "Africa," updated October 2022.
- 15 Nonetheless, during the last decade, traditional authorities' power over communities has started to decline due to different overlapping processes. First, traditional authorities have lost their influence insomuch as the office is no longer assumed by inheritance, but as with other political positions, it requires money to finance an electoral campaign and to be elected. In turn, this poses questions of legitimacy because the local communities no longer recognize these figures as authoritative (Interview, Professor University of Niamey, July 2022). Moreover, the centralization of power in the hands of the government, along with economic changes such as urbanization, coupled with corruption and misuse of power, have led to the loss of trust and respect among their communities and to the weakening of traditional authorities' influence.
- 16 Interview, Cabinet of the Presidency, Niamey, July 2022.
- 17 Interview, local community member n.1, Niamey, July 2022.
- 18 The *zakat* is a form of Islamic taxation, and it is an essential part of the jihadist platform as it is one of the five pillars of Islam.
- 19 Interview local community member n.2, Niamey, July 2022.
- 20 Interview, local NGO n.1 on security and governance, Niamey, July 2022.
- 21 Interview, local civil society actor n.4, Niamey, July 2022.
- 22 Interview, local civil society actor n.5, Niamey, July 2022.
- 23 Interview, local security expert n.2, Niamey, June 2022.
- 24 Interview, local civil society actor n.6, Niamey, July 2022.
- 25 Interview, local NGO n.3, Niamey, July 2022.
- 26 Interview, local civil society actor n.7, Niamey, July 2022.

- 27 Interview, local P/CVE trainer n.2, Niamey, July 2022.
- 28 Interview, local P/CVE trainer n.3, Niamey, July 2022.
- 29 Interview, local civil society actor n.8, Niamey, July 2022.
- 30 Interview, local P/CVE trainer n.1, July 2022, Niamey.
- 31 Interview, local civil society actor n.9, Niamey, July 2022.
- 32 Interview, local security expert n.2, Niamey, July 2022.

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7 “When There Are Many Saying the Same Thing That I Am Saying, I Feel Less Afraid to Speak Up”

Emotions, Resilience, and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka

Udeni Appuhamilage

7.1 A Brief Introduction to Violent Extremism in Sri Lanka

March 2022 was a pivotal point in the political history of Sri Lanka. Individuals from across the economic spectrum, belonging to diverse ethnic, religious, age, gender, and professional backgrounds gathered together at Galle Face to be a part of *Aragalaya*, a social uprising that demanded a systemic change. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the president at the time, blamed violent extremists for instigating the protests, and the state employed various strategies to stifle the demonstrations: ignoring the protestors, negotiating with them, addressing their concerns, and violently attacking them.

Survivors of the Easter bombing of 2019 (also referred to as “the bombing” henceforth) were a continuous presence among the protesters. In April 2022, they marked the third anniversary of the bombing. Civilians and clergy walked some 40–50km to observe the anniversary, demand justice and urge authorities to expedite investigations. Some of the participants dressed up as corpses, with black placards displaying details of loved ones who had died. Some changed the screen of their smartphones to show pictures of the bombing or of those who died and held them up as an act of memorialization. Others joined vigils, lit candles, and took posters to demonstrations. Among the many survivors were those of other faiths, including Muslims, clad in their respective religious robes, turbans, sarees, hijabs and abayas, demonstrating solidarity with the survivors’ claims through their silent presence. Reflecting back on the third anniversary, Visaka,¹ 39, who lost several family members to the bombing in Katuwapitiya, said, “We all are dead inside; the pain we feel is inconsolable.” Lal, 43, from Negombo, described how he cannot remember a single day that has passed without mourning the loss of his family three years ago and his desperation over what he perceived as lack of justice. Many of those who joined the third anniversary in April 2022 echoed the sentiments of Visaka and Lal—they shared a deep pain, sought healing, and insisted on justice.

The Easter bombing on April 21, 2019 (described in more detail in Section 7.3), was the first of its kind in Sri Lanka. Subsequently, concerns about rising

violent extremism (referred to as VE henceforth) have become a highly convoluted socio-political phenomenon. The power transition in 2015 to President Sirisena raised hopes in a country that was struggling with politically sanctioned corruption, nepotism and the lingering effects of the 1983–2009 civil war. However, the new president and his cabinet failed to maintain their initial momentum for long, as high debt and increasing budget deficiencies persisted. Sirisena's coalition also fell out with the opposition party, leading to political polarization, poor governance, institutional dysfunction, and economic instability while antagonizing ethnic and religious relationships. The Easter Bombing happened against this troubled socio-political background.

The bombing exposed a devastating security failure by the Sri Lankan state. Many commentators have pointed to the political divisions within the government at the time as a primary reason for this breakdown (Gunasingham 2019). Foreign and local intelligence services had warned the state of an imminent attack on churches weeks before Easter Sunday of 2019 (Gunasingham 2019). M.C.M. Zaharan, a radical Salafi preacher and the mastermind behind the bombing, was known to the Sri Lankan police and intelligence services as a threat, especially after he had instigated a violent attack against moderate Sufi Muslims in 2017. Muslim leaders warned the police and government leaders repeatedly about the growing threat that Zaharan and his followers posed. However, ongoing power struggles between the president and prime minister at the time resulted in poor leadership and lack of coordination, as well as the overt politicization of national security organizations. Collectively, all these factors numbed the security apparatus, contributing to their deadly lack of action.

The backlash against ethnic Muslims following the bombing was fueled by the absence of a reliable process to assure accountability and safety following the attack. Anxieties and frustrations regarding the lack of concerted effort to address the rising threats of VE and the weaknesses of the country's intelligence services were directed at the Muslim minority of Sri Lanka. Even before the bombing, Muslims in Sri Lanka were being harassed, particularly by those affiliated with *Bodu Bala Sena* (i.e., BBS), an extremist group led by Sinhalese Buddhists. Such harassment intensified following the bombing, where senior Muslim leaders and the general Muslim community were accused of not foreseeing and preventing Zaharan and his radicalization and their properties and mosques were attacked.

Since the bombing, the church and survivors have consistently and peacefully demonstrated their frustration, putting pressure on the state and relevant local and foreign stakeholders. The head of Sri Lanka's Catholic Church, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, addressed the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2022, seeking international help. At the grassroots level, survivors are working with religious institutions and non-governmental organizations to organize religious activities, seek reconciliation, repair inter-faith harmony and rebuild communities. Mosques and Buddhist clergy have also been active in these efforts, working with the state, survivor communities and religious institutions to rebuild peaceful, inter-faith alliances.

7.2 Emotion, Violence, and Peacebuilding: The Nexus

This chapter discusses VE in post-war Sri Lanka, with a specific focus on local understandings, experiences, and interventions against VE. The chapter examines VE's emotional impacts on survivors, how such impacts reflect their resilience and inform their reconciliation efforts. Experiences of extreme violence constitute an emotional experience that occupies a central position in the day-to-day well-being of survivors, continuously shaping their beliefs, values, and relational practices. In contexts of ongoing violence, not only do communities find themselves living under high levels of perceived threat and uncertainty, they may also face violence and suffering in direct, personal, and systemic ways. It is a context that compels them to re-construct their views of themselves and the different other, consequently undermining their own sense of safety and worthiness. As discussed in the following sections of this chapter, any peacebuilding intervention that fails to account for these reciprocal connections between violence, individual and communal emotional suffering, and their intersubjective, historical, and political contexts will fall short; "Individuals, households, communities, and higher-level institutions are [...] mutually evolving and adjusting to meet oncoming challenges. All these diverse layers of society are required to achieve system-wide resilience" (Lordos and Hyslop 2021, 445).

Despite the evident importance of emotions to the *imaginings* (Anderson 2016) of conflict, political change and peace, there still is minimal attention paid to the systematic analysis of political significance of emotions in the study of peace interventions (Wasinski 2018). As Neta Crawford (2000, 116) states, "post-conflict peacebuilding efforts too frequently fail and wars re-erupt because peace settlements and peacebuilding policies play with emotional fire that practitioners scarcely understand but nevertheless seek to manipulate." The limited literature that recognizes the central role played by emotions in both violence and peace tends to overwhelmingly focus on a pathological understanding of emotion (Galea et al. 2002; Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, and Johnson 2006; Punamäki et al. 2005), examining how it unsettles one's psychological defenses and thereby leads to the development of psychopathologies (e.g., Lambert et al. 2019; Weine et al. 2017). Literature also examines the psychiatric morbidity of traumatized civilian communities (e.g., Mollica et al. 2014; Pedersen 2006), specifically of communities identified as vulnerable, such as children and women (Ruf et al. 2005; Catani et al. 2008).

In contrast, trauma recovery and reconciliation have received considerable scholarly attention (Pearlman and Staub 2016; Hein 2015; Summerfield 2002); however, this scholarship is mostly situated within the fields of transitional justice and peace psychology and fails to draw from critical peace studies (Baker and Obradovic-Wochnik 2016; Halperin 2016; Petersen 2017). Amidst this scholarly work that fails to recognize the complex implications of emotion for peacebuilding (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011), there is emerging literature about the potential positive outcomes of

surviving extreme violence and posttraumatic growth. This line of research discusses experiences of growth that can occur as a result of surviving crises since coping with extreme violence assists the development of not only trauma but resilience as well (e.g., Bonanno et al. 2007; Fischer and Ai 2008; Kangaslampi, Peltonen, and Hall 2022; Layne et al. 2007; Norris et al. 2008; Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004).

7.3 Research Objectives and Methodology

This study aims to analyze the nuanced links between violence, emotion, resilience, and peacebuilding interventions based on a case study of VE in Sri Lanka. It examines various local, conceptual understandings of VE and its multifaceted psychological impact on survivors' *everyday* (Das 2007). Drawing from this discussion, the chapter examines how different actors and interventions (e.g., peacebuilding, reconciliation) can strengthen individual, collective, and institutional resilience against VE and contribute to sustainable peacebuilding in regions affected by armed conflicts. The specific research questions it asks are:

- 1 How do survivors of VE in Sri Lanka conceptualize VE and its emotional impact?
- 2 How does this emotional impact reflect on their everyday lives?
- 3 What are the connections between the emotional impact, resilience, and local reconciliation movements?
- 4 How can the nexus between the emotional impact, resilience, and local reconciliation movements inform sustainable peacebuilding?

Given travel restrictions and practical difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic and political crisis in Sri Lanka at the time, the research employed both remote fieldwork and field research on the ground, carried out between April 2022 and March 2023. The sample was composed of ethnically and religiously diverse participants, including survivors of the bombing (n=7), survivors of the Aluthgama attack (n=4), VE researchers/academics/policymakers (n=6), a parliamentarian (n=1) and representatives of three community-based organizations working with survivor communities (n=10) namely, the Easter Attack Survivors Project (i.e., EASP), the Harmony Center in Kattankudi (i.e., HCK) and the Aluthgama Women's Group (i.e., AWG).

- EASP is a volunteer group of Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Islamic members initiated in collaboration with the Global Peace Institute and the Sri Lanka Reconciliation Movement with the aim of recording the stories of survivors as a means for promoting reconciliation.
- HCK is an NGO established by Muslim community leaders in Kattankudi in 2021. Its objectives are to promote community initiatives in

harmonious living, enhance inter-cultural, inter-ethnic and inter-religious interactions and recreate and sustain a resilient nation.

- AWG is an informal, volunteer group of Islamic, professional women who survived the 2014 anti-Muslim riots in Aluthgama. They primarily work on providing psychological, medical, legal, financial, and material help by networking the survivors with relevant service providers and collecting and sharing contributions from various donors.

The study involved qualitative interviews, participant observations, stakeholder and focus group discussions and key-informant interviews with a focus on two events: the 2014 Aluthgama attack in 2014 and the Easter bombing of 2019.

7.3.1 Aluthgama Attack (2014)

Communal riots between Buddhist and Islamic extremists for several years preceded the June 2014 anti-Muslim attacks in Beruwala and nearby cities in the southwestern province. Instigated by a local dispute between a Buddhist monk and a small group of Muslim youth, followed by a speech inciting clear anti-Muslim sentiment by Galabodaatte Ghanissara Thero, the leader of BBS, a mob attacked Aluthgama, killing four people and injuring a further 80. Three mosques, 174 houses and 79 shops were torched, and close to 10,000 people were displaced (Colombage 2014; Haniffa 2016; Haniffa et al. 2014). For the most part, the state response to the riots has been limited to downplaying the situation (Haniffa et al. 2014).

7.3.2 Easter Bombing (2019)

National Thowheed Jamat (NTJ)—a home-grown extremist group known for radicalizing the Muslim community and also attacking other Muslims who hold different beliefs and practices—has been held responsible for carrying out the 2019 Easter bombing (Commission of Inquiry 2021). Led by M.C.M. Zaharan and his followers from NTJ, the bombing targeted three churches, namely St. Sebastian's Catholic Church in Negombo, St. Anthony's Shrine in Kotahena, Kochchikade and Zion Church in Batticaloa, as well as four hotels: in Colombo, the Hotel Kingsbury, Hotel Shangri-La, Hotel Cinnamon Grand, and in Dehiwala, Hotel Tropical Inn. In addition, one bomb was detonated in a housing complex in Dematagoda. The bombing killed a total of 277 individuals, including eight suicide bombers and foreigners from 14 countries, and wounded more than 400 people (Commission of Inquiry 2021). Ruling on a petition filed by the families of the victims, church leaders, and activists, The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka ordered former president Sirisena and his senior officials to pay close to \$850,000 in compensation. The court also acquitted some other senior government officials, such as the former secretary of defense and former inspector general of police, of any criminal charges.

7.4 “Extremists Are Not Human”: Local Conceptualizations of VE

According to de Coning and Osland, VE lacks a cohesive definition (see Chapter 2)—a situation that also applies to VE in Sri Lanka. For the most part, literature explains VE in Sri Lanka from a historical and political viewpoint, highlighting its national and international political implications, supporting factors, socio-economic impact and the processes in place to counterattack rising extremism (e.g., Aliff 2015; Gunasingham 2019; Singh 2019; Yusoff and Sarjoon 2019). It also links VE with the civil war, increasing political victimization and scapegoating of minorities after the military victory (e.g., Morrison 2020). A critical examination of the concept itself, however, is missing in the literature. This lack of conceptual clarity has aided the unfiltered situating of various social movements within the label of VE. For instance, a research report by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (2021) notes how its sample considered the youth uprising of 1977 which was partly triggered by the frustrations of educated but unemployed youth of the country as well as the LTTE’s fight for a separate Tamil Elam in the country (1983–2009), partly caused by structural violence and systemic discrimination against minority Tamils, as examples of VE. An extreme case of such loose application of the concept was how former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa categorized people as violent extremists because they protested against the state for failing to provide them with their basic needs, including food, medicine, and fuel (Economic News 2022).

In the interviews for this study, some researchers, policymakers and the parliamentarian referred to the term VE as violence that is ideologically motivated, highlighting the unrelenting commitment to an ideology as the factor that triggers and perpetuates extreme violence. Ideology bonds members, gives them social status, serves as a means for revenge and sometimes defines the ultimate purpose for their lives. Survivors, on the other hand, questioned the implied link between ideology and radicalization. Sharmila is a 39-year-old practicing Muslim from Aluthgama. Her small shop, home, and several of her relatives’ homes were attacked during the 2014 anti-Muslim riots. Questioning the notions of religious ideology and radicalization, she said: “Many of those who attacked us were just drunk thugs. They were not trying to save Buddhism from us Muslims.” A representative of one of the three organizations that participated in the current study described the corrosive tactics that Zaharan’s group used to obtain communal obedience and questioned the belief that radicalization and ideology drive VE. Accordingly, NTJ openly shamed, socially criticized and ostracized the Muslims who participated in Buddhist or Hindu religious festivals, challenged community leaders who promoted inter-faith alliances and even killed those Muslims who followed Sufism instead of Wahhabism. NTJ also exploited the dissatisfaction of Muslim youth about the discriminatory way that Muslims are treated in Sri Lanka, transforming their hurt to anger, thereby enticing them to join the group.

Some of the participating researchers and representatives from the three organizations strongly linked VE with past violence in the country, especially the civil war and consequent socio-political tolerance of violence. Some also described VE as primarily about politics and shared identity. For instance, the BBS, who fueled the 2014 attacks, had close and supportive connections with ruling politicians. Together, they promoted a fear-based narrative of Sinhalese Buddhists as being in danger, justifying the need to not only fight against other religious groups but also to vote for politicians who would favor Sinhalese Buddhists.

When asked what VE meant to them, the survivors were reluctant to respond; in fact, they highlighted the lack of an intuitively synonymous term for “violent extremism” in Sri Lanka’s widely spoken Sinhalese language. They used the equivalent word *anthawadee* in combination with Buddhism or Islam (e.g., *Buddha Anthawadee* or *Muslim Anthawadee*). A frequently used phrase was that extremists were *hithak papuwak nethi amanussayo* (i.e., extremists do not have a heart or mind; they are not human); in other words, the difference between extremists and non-extremists was about their capacity, or the lack thereof, to feel emotions. Participants explained this implied link between VE and emotion in various ways. Visaka described some survivors from her community who lost several family members to the bombing and wondered about the depth of their emotional pain:

It will always be there because this pain in our hearts will never leave. In my daily prayers, I pray to God: Please God, give strength to that woman so that this pain will not break her heart, will not make her ill.

Malathi lost her father to the bombing. As the following quote notes, VE has created everlasting suffering for her: “It has been three years since we lost him. But it feels like today or yesterday.” For Sharmila, VE implies fear. Her fear was complex in that, while it silenced her community on the night of the 2014 attack, it also served to unite everyone in the face of an external threat. In her own words:

What I remember is fear. Everyone was scared. We all knew *they* could come anytime. I brought people to the Mosque, and we asked our brothers to keep a watch outside. We all sat together, close to each other. We kept quiet. We asked the mothers to put their children to sleep because they were making noise.

Sharmila also noted VE as something related to doubts and anxieties that divided communities. While the people who attacked Sharmila’s community were not local, her own community still failed her since none of her Sinhalese Buddhist neighbors offered to help or rescue her. Despite the fact that her community has gradually started talking to each other, Sharmila has continued to feel betrayed and doubtful: “They still cannot look me in the eye. I do not trust them. And I know my children should not trust them either,” she said.

Collectively, the participants revealed the diversity of local understandings of VE and its multifarious applications. The parliamentarian and policy-makers focused on ideology in defining VE, which explains the state's emphasis on interventions (as discussed later in the chapter) such as deradicalization. In contrast, the representatives of local organizations and survivors conceptualize VE as related to ongoing emotional pain, practices that divide communities, or persons who lack a heart to feel—and thus, are not human. As discussed in detail in the following section, their everyday reveals applications of these understandings where survivors categorize people into safe and unsafe groups, which affords them a sense of security. However, the same categorizations also perpetuate communal unrest; as Sharmila notes, shared emotions against the different other still regulate day-to-day interactions in her divided community and continue to shape the values and beliefs of her children's generation also.

7.5 Violent Extremism and the Everyday

Violent extremism and its everyday applications in post-war Sri Lanka are informed by the country's wider socio-political and historical environment, specifically its ethno-religious social divides.² The year 2009 marked the end of the civil war when the Sri Lankan Army defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (i.e., LTTE), a Tamil guerilla group. The final mission to defeat the LTTE began in 2008 after three failed rounds of peace talks in 1990, 1995, and 2002. The mission involved the state military attacking the LTTE's strongholds, pushing them into an ever-shrinking coastal strip. LTTE used civilians as a protective shield, forcing them to march with the LTTE. Thus, the final months of the war saw huge numbers of casualties as civilians lived under constant attack from both the military and LTTE.

At the end of the war, more than 200,000 Tamils were relocated into crowded camps, with some remaining in the camps for more than a year (Thiranagama 2007a; 2007b). There was mounting international pressure to address various war-related human rights violations, facilitate reconciliation, and initiate the political reforms needed to assure peace and democracy in the country. The state established a Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission in 2010 with a mandate to assess why the 2002 ceasefire broke down in 2008. The commission, its report (Presidential Secretariat 2011), and the different interventions it recommended have received mixed comments from both international and local communities. This report extensively summarized the final stages of the war and the post-war climate of the country. It reveals that Sri Lanka is still to witness a concerted effort to promote and aid reconciliation between divided communities, address their grievances and build political reforms to aid democratic transformations. This is the historical context in which the 2014 anti-Muslim riots and the 2019 bombing occurred.

Participants discussed the everyday in a country that survived a war and VE attacks in terms of individual and social perceptions of risks and related

emotions, integrated and maintained through everyday interactions with systems and institutions. They highlighted how radicalization processes involve one's relations, neighbors, friends, and much-respected religious leaders of the community. It happens in one's home, school, local administrative institutions, or places of worship, during the day or night, while studying or eating dinner. In other words, these processes and practices are integrally involved with everyday spaces and practices. The multiple forces and factors involved in the extension and applications of VE, such as the country's history of civil unrest, lack of just political representation of the different other and day-to-day experiences of ethnically and religiously motivated discrimination, are also essentially connected with the everyday. In fact, survivors discussed everyday discrimination as one of the most common ways in which they continued to experience VE and its effects.

NOORI: After the 2014 attacks, there was a period when I had to stop using tuk-tuks. Some of them would not even stop for me. Some would stop but then say, "you are a Muslim, are you not?" and, drive off. It was like they wanted to make me feel bad about being a Muslim, you know?

CHAYANI: Once the mother of one of my son's friends said sorry to me and asked how I was doing. You see, she's a Muslim. I told her she had nothing to be sorry for as she did not do anything wrong to me. But she said she still was sorry that her people did it. She also told me how her son was having a hard time in the school and in his private tuition classes.

Survivors like Noori and Chayani described a context where mundane events like going to the supermarket, taking public transport, playing in public parks and participating in their child's sports meets were assigned with new meanings and feelings of guilt, risk, and threats based on ethno-religious identities. Participants further described how this sense of threat increasingly narrowed the scope and quality of their day-to-day lives through avoidances that felt inevitable. The way VE and its effects are embedded in their everyday highlights the necessity for peacebuilding and reconciliation interventions to move beyond a narrowly defined focus on security. Instead, interventions need to recognize and work with survivors' everyday and the larger social, cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts within which individual perceptions of threat and security are formed. They also need to acknowledge the different ways that processes of mourning, meaning making, and healing take place within these contexts. This is a point to which I return in the final section of this chapter.

Ongoing emotional distress is another key theme that participants discussed vividly. Traumatic losses and grief are multidimensional experiences shaped by socio-cultural, political, and historical factors, in addition to the subjectivities of the affected individuals. The participants' emotional pain centered on two key aspects: the distress caused by 1) losing an intimate other, and 2) the need to adjust to a life without the lost person. Sampath lost his young daughter to the 2019 bombing. He explained the events of that day

in detail, making sure that the narrative was factually correct to the minute. Despite his comprehensive understanding of her death, Sampath still struggles with the reality of her absence in his everyday life. The quote below offers a vivid narrative of Sampath's struggle, as he vacillates between her life and death through an ongoing process of memorializing and emotional battle:

My daughter was scared to sleep alone. Every night, after we put her to sleep, she used to walk to our bed and sleep with us. Now, I keep her pillow with me because I do not want her to be alone in the night.

Traumatic losses of this nature are, unfortunately, not the exception but commonplace to the participants, and many share the kind of grief and suffering that Sampath reveals. Worried that our interview may remind her of her difficult losses and, in doing so, re-traumatize her, the first thing I asked Visaka was if it was ok to talk about her losses. "You are not reminding me of anything. I do not have to remember because I have not forgotten," she assured me. Mohamad's parents left Jaffna in the 1990s to escape the war. The 2014 riots and the 2019 bombing deeply disturbed his mother, reopening her old wounds. Mohamad described how, following the 2014 riots, his mother started waking up in the middle of the night screaming and sweating and how he would find her sobbing in the middle of the day.

Studying survivors' everyday provides a means to question and understand their trauma as something that is both personal and beyond the subjective. It also reveals their ability to appropriate and adapt the very socio-cultural and political factors that shape their suffering to aid their subjective grieving processes. There was a mass funeral four days after the 2019 bombing, organized by the survivors and the church, and Sampath's daughter was among the many who were buried that day. Mass burial, in the local context, is a cultural anomaly. Taking death as one of a series of ritual passages through the life cycle (Van Gennep 1909), cultural practices of funerals serve as a significant symbolical demonstration of separation and transition from one stage to another. The rituals are highly personal, aiding individuals to emotionally engage with the dead, grieve, and fulfil their moral obligations to assure the dead a smooth passage to the afterlife. Mass graves lack the personal; instead, they are communal endeavors where expressions of grief transform from the personal to the collective and to the political. As the quote below shows, Sampath openly supported the mass grave:

If I buried her alone in a cemetery, people will never know her story. This way, everyone will know what happened—who killed her. Even after 100 years, when I am not there to tell her story, people will still know what happened to her.

The mass grave helps Sampath and the many others who share his trauma to rewrite their loss narratives by translating the individual loss into a historical

and political reality. Other participants also highlighted the potential of mass graves to earn socio-political validation and historical significance of their losses, thereby aiding collective grief. The experience also offered them an alternative and reflective way to spend the financial compensation they received, aided the performance of religious rituals, and transformed their private grief into public mourning—a place where grief as well as love and respect for the dead could be outwardly displayed and acknowledged.

For the most part, the literature discusses survivors' trauma and related psychological experiences from a pathology-oriented framework, in which the unrelenting suffering and nightmares that people like Visaka and Mohamad's mother describe are translated into symptoms. Applying such a pathological understanding fails reconciliation and peacebuilding in two key ways: 1) it conceptualizes survivors' psychological reaction as a disorder, and 2) it understands such a disorder as being within the individual. Critical literature (e.g., Appuhamilage 2020; Daniel 1996; Das 2007; Jenkins 1991; Malkki 1996; Scheper-Hughes 1995) challenges the use of the pathological model to understand trauma-related psychological experiences of violence, highlighting how trauma is one of the most human and everyday reactions to violence (thus, not a pathology). It also acknowledges the ineffectiveness of problematizing the individual and their reactions when the disorder is about the



Figure 7.1 Mass grave, Katuwapitiya.
Source: author.

violence itself; as Pupavac (2001) notes, trauma, at some level, is a normal response to an abnormal situation. The participants of this study describe the suffering they endure on a daily basis as they grieve and try to make sense of their lives amidst the absences. Their narratives reveal a chronic suffering embedded in their everyday that pains the survivor as they try to sleep at night or accidentally walk into the kitchen to find their sobbing mother. They explain compelling confusions, rejections, anxieties about safety and an overall sense of alarm. However, amongst their confusion and suffering, they also describe resilience—a capacity to engage with that same debilitating trauma, make sense of it in their own way and in doing so, transform their emotional pain into alliances that channel these feelings into collective efforts that heal trauma, a point that I further discuss in the next section

7.6 Resilience, Local Reconciliation Movements and Peacebuilding

The third anniversary of the 2019 bombing referred to at the beginning of this chapter is but one example of the different practices through which local communities continue their grieving and search for reconciliation. These collective efforts offered practical assistance to link survivors with various services and support networks, including ways of connecting with the media to gain public attention, educational help for their children, information about ongoing legal procedures, or occasional material help to meet day-to-day needs and undertake employment opportunities. These kinds of activities have contributed to building trust with the different other—defined broadly as different ethnicities, religious groups, genders, ages, and languages—coupled with a sense of obligation to support each other. One of the participants, Chayani, explained her connection with those who participated in the third anniversary as a positive emotion she felt towards the collective and its purpose. She explained how “they were demanding the same things that we demand: fairness, justice, protection of the law in the country. I felt very close to them.” Visaka described a similar experience, where she highlighted how the collective assisted her during her emotional struggle: “When there are many saying the same thing that I am saying, I feel less afraid to speak up,” she said.

Emotions play a key role in building such supportive, collective alliances between conflicting identities. Sharmila reflected on how she became tearful when a group of Sinhalese Buddhist university students, professors, and medical doctors offered their assistance the day after the 2014 anti-Muslim attack. A representative of the AWG reflected on the same incident as follows: “There are no words to explain what you feel when a Sinhalese Buddhist Sir or Madam gives you counseling for the suffering caused by another Sinhalese Buddhist.” As the quote below by one of the co-founders of EASP, Rizmi, herself a Muslim, reveals, the potential of emotion to build these kinds of collective alliances that aid the development of resilience and promote reconciliation is closely connected with its capacity to challenge established implications of group identities.

I was not sure if they [i.e., survivors of the 2019 bombing] would even want to talk to us. I asked Father [...], who connected us with the survivors, if they would refuse to talk to us, attack us, if they would want to kill us. He said “maybe” and took us to them anyway. My friends were saying that I should hide my hijab. [...] But they welcomed us with open arms. They made us sit, gave us drinks, talked to us very openly, shared their pain with us, consoled me and my guilt. We all cried. It was very emotional. [...] I think my Muslim identity was an important factor in all that.

The way Sharmila and Rizmi address VE and its impacts reveals not only vulnerabilities in their everyday contexts but also—and most importantly—their *resilience* to adapt to these contexts (Folke 2016; de Coning and Osland, Chapter 2). Moreover, they exemplify a close connection between emotion and resilience. Instead of avoiding emotions as a mere vulnerability, they embrace the difficult emotions and, in doing so, use them as a means to transform their vulnerabilities. Amara, a Sinhalese Buddhist woman who is closely affiliated with EASP and has also worked with Muslim survivors following the 2014 attacks, confirms the same. She described an encounter with an elderly Muslim man who was a survivor of the 2014 anti-Muslim riots. When he asked why her people attacked him, burnt his house and destroyed his properties, Amara told him that it hurt her to see these things happening, apologized to him and asked if she could work with him in some way. She went on to say:

I felt really guilty. He told me a lot of things about his family, his worries about his family’s safety, dreams for his children to go to university and get good jobs. I told him about my own university life. At the end of the conversation, he said sorry for hurting my feelings and asked me to take good care of my heart since it must be made of butter to melt so fast.

At its core, in complex social systems, peacebuilding is about assisting communities to develop resilient social institutions that will enable them to address emerging tensions before they escalate (Caplan 2019; de Coning and Osland, current volume). The process of developing such resilience has to be self-organized since pre-determined and exogenous interventions that try to predict and control the outcomes do not create resilience but lead to dependency and fragility. The narratives shared by people like Rizmi and Amara are powerful examples of local communities’ capacity to self-organize and create home-grown, context-specific interventions. Their narratives also assert the significance of emotion in such resilience development, where emotions aid in translating established ethnic and religious divides into collective alliances and healing.

Figure 7.2 demonstrates the primary role emotions play in resilience development. Accordingly, their context (e.g., social, political, historical, cultural), shared

experiences, values, and hopes (e.g., for justice, peace, safety) enable shared emotions (e.g., grief, guilt, frustration, care). These emotional connections, in turn, challenge established group divides and facilitate collective alliances between groups. Survivors describe these alliances as voluntary and deeply fulfilling. The collective serves belongingness and aids reconciliation by transforming survivors' sense of risk into a sense of safety and trust. In doing so, collective alliances and related emotions also serve to develop resilience and convert survivors' solitary grieving into instrumental expressions of grief through protests.

The significance of emotion and collective alliances that the many survivors highlight is equally validated by the three organizations reviewed in this chapter. In addition to providing material, legal, medical, financial, and educational services, the various projects they undertake directly contribute to survivors' efforts to build emotionally vested alliances with the different other. These different projects can be broadly categorized into two groups: *implicit* and *explicit*. Implicit projects are those invested in understanding and promoting reconciliation and peacebuilding through indirect interventions that aim to challenge and change community conceptualizations of violence and peace. They assist various psycho-social experiences to raise awareness of different ideologies. The assumption is that such awareness raising will facilitate adaptations at the conceptual level and consequently lead to emotional and behavioral adaptations.

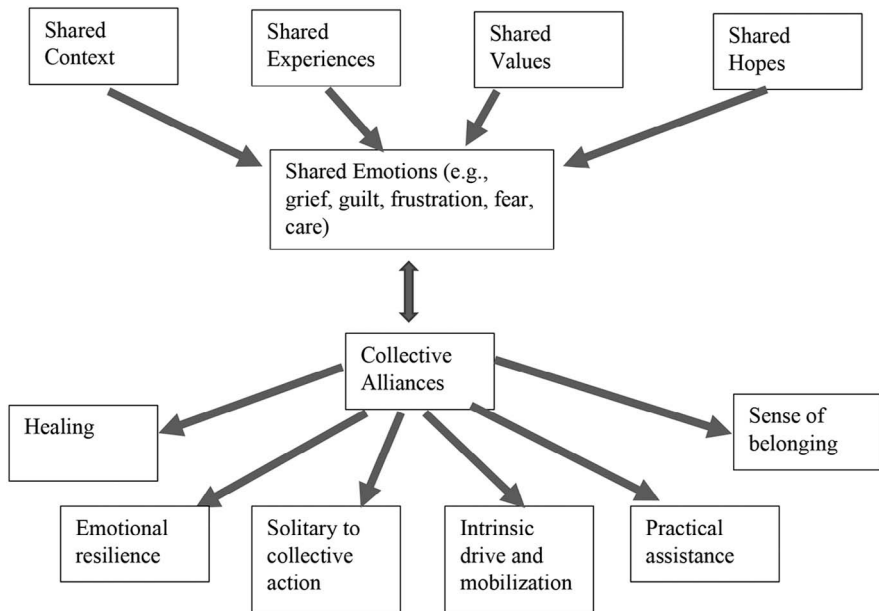


Figure 7.2 Role of emotion in resilience development.

Source: author.

For instance, HCK, which was established by Muslim community leaders, celebrates all religious festivals, including Christmas, Vesak, and Thaipongal. It invites Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian clergy, as well as civilians of different faiths, to the many events they organize—regardless of whether it is a communal event where they plant trees in a school or a formal event to celebrate the country's Independence Day. Identifying poverty and lack of access to resources as a predisposing factor, HCK organizes many projects to aid those who are in need regardless of their religious and ethnic identity. As a part of an ongoing project to raise awareness about different faiths in the community, the organization works with local universities and schools to conduct online seminars and discussions that are open to the public. All these projects aim to facilitate awareness raising and conversation as a way to subtly challenge established intercommunal, interfaith, and interethnic animosities and biases, which HCK believes would consequently lead to emotional and behavioral adaptations.

In contrast, explicit projects work directly with communities to challenge their perceptions and understandings of cues to violence and peace and their difficult emotional responses. They boldly expose survivors' raw emotions as a way to promote resilience, seek reconciliation, build intercommunal harmony and prevent future violence. One of the most recent events of EASP, for example, was the Human Library Project, where they facilitated a safe space and process for "borrowing" different people and their stories to promote conversations about challenging topics. Such topics include ethnic and religious discrimination in the country, violence and peoples' beliefs and hopes for the future. While it was an emotionally challenging encounter for the participants to share and listen to real-life stories about inter-faith and intercommunal violence, they also valued such open, personal, one-to-one conversations with the different other as imperative to building bridges between otherwise conflicting identities.

The state response to VE, however, has neglected the everyday violence and resilience of survivors. Not only is there an alarming absence of strong-willed political investments in preventing VE and building peace, but even the minimal attempts at PVE are narrowly defined from a security-oriented framework. Except for a recent initiative in March 2023 by the state to build a community directive program, the Sri Lankan government's interventions can be broadly clustered into three kinds, namely 1) commissions of inquiry, 2) various anti-Muslim measures and 3) counterterrorism measures. These interventions primarily draw from the country's criminal justice system and are driven by a focus on hard security and retributive justice.

The initial state commission of inquiry was held by a three-member presidential committee (i.e., PC), followed by a Parliamentary Select Committee (i.e., PSC), and finally, the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (i.e., PCoI). Former president Gotabaya Rajapaksha appointed a second PCoI in February 2021 to study the report prepared by the first PCoI and identify the necessary actions to prevent another attack. Based on 1588 statements, 457

witnesses and 2377 documents including audio and video material, the second PCoI made many significant recommendations, such as measures to apprehend those proven responsible for the bombing, necessary policy changes to assure good governance (e.g., equal treatment of different religions), deradicalization and disengagement programs aimed at reintegrating the radicalized back into society and welfare schemes for the survivors. Unfortunately, these recommendations are driven by a focus on tertiary prevention, working with those who have already engaged in criminal activities related to VE; moreover, the recommendations, for the most part, are yet to be implemented.

The second kind of state intervention—namely, reinforcing anti-Muslim sentiments—is not new to Sri Lanka; however, negative public attitudes towards Muslims were transformed into state-initiated changes to laws after the 2019 bombing. One such measure was a ban on different forms of face coverings, announced under emergency regulations. There was also a push for amendments to the Madrasa curriculum as well as the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act. These systemic anti-Muslim interventions further enabled and intensified already existing discriminations against the Muslim population by criminalizing their everyday practices. The widespread tolerance of the state's decision on April 2020 to ban burial of anyone even suspected of having died of COVID-19, justified by a claim that the virus could spread from interred remains, is a good example. Despite the fact that the World Health Organization and local health experts strongly challenged the state's reasoning, the policy was widely supported and continued to force the Muslim community to go against their religious convictions and cremate their loved ones.

Thirdly, the state's revised counter-terrorism program informed P/CVE policies and practices in adopting a predominantly security-oriented framework. After the 2019 election, former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his cabinet dissolved all ministries and institutions established by the previous government to work on reconciliation, placing all peacebuilding and P/CVE-related work under the purview of the Ministry of Defence. Furthermore, his government withdrew the draft Counter-Terrorism Act that was intended to replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act (i.e., PTA). PTA was a highly controversial act, temporarily enacted in 1979 as a wartime measure, enabling the police to exercise greater powers to search and arrest terrorist suspects without charge. Following criminal investigations into the 2019 attack, many people were taken into custody and detained under the PTA. According to Saroor (2021), over 125 Muslims—including 15 women and two infants—have been detained under PTA in connection with the Easter bombing in Kattankudy alone. Other state-initiated counter-terrorism measures are concerned with improving border and maritime security and countering the financing of terrorism. These interventions clearly seek security within a narrowly defined dichotomy of safe and unsafe groups. They also fail to acknowledge the complex socio-historical and political context within which VE is instigated and perpetuated, survivors' emotional experiences of VE, their resilience, or their capacity as active decision-makers regarding their healing. Even when

attention is placed on community rebuilding, it is guided by a focus on tertiary prevention and deradicalization, ignoring the contexts that mold individual and communal commitments to radical ideologies in the first place.

7.7 Conclusions

Local understandings of VE highlight three key factors: **ideology**, **context**, and **emotion**. While ideology is recognized as relevant, many do not regard it as the sole or even one of the most important determining factors of VE. This is because those accused of aiding and perpetrating VE are also driven by a combination of coercion, socio-historical factors, family and social alliances, political goals, and financial concerns. Survivor communities highlighted the experiential, emotional dimension of VE, where emotions such as grief, fear, anger, frustration and hope informed their understandings and experiences of VE. These emotions also shaped their social worlds by regulating their everyday interactions with in-group and out-group members, thereby perpetuating VE-related beliefs and practices. Ideology holds programmatic relevance from an analytical perspective since the goals and strategies of VE groups are associated with their ideology. However, given the local understandings and experiences of VE, as described in this chapter, there are questions regarding whether subscribing to a radical ideology is the only precondition necessary to instigate/precipitate violence. It is also important to recognize the socio-cultural context of VE groups and acknowledge how political ideas are shaped by social and historical circumstances. These factors can be instrumental to understanding VE as well as planning for preventing future violence and peacebuilding—since such understanding will help both policymakers and programmers to challenge the assumption that countering ideology will invariably reduce VE.

Group identity and related discrimination is a constant theme that surfaces in the participants' narratives of their everyday experiences of VE. Group identity, however, is not only about categorizing the world into safe and unsafe groups; it is also about resilience development and mobilizing collective movements. As a group, the collective facilitates the navigation and adaptation of individuated identities beyond conflicting divides. It enables communities to withstand challenges, leveraging emotional resources to adapt and grow amidst adversity. In other words, resilience is formed at both the individual and social levels, where the collective—in all its diversity—becomes not only a risk but also a resource. Secondly, trauma is an integral aspect of survivors' everyday and serves as a trigger of pain and suffering as well as an instigator to drive and adapt. A repeatedly highlighted lesson is the need to understand trauma beyond the individual and their symptoms. Instead, it is important to recognize its plurality and complexity. While many survivors are grieving and struggling, their trauma is also enabling—it drives them beyond their own suffering to seek help, identify, and connect with the pain of the others. This process aids resilience and healing while directly contributing to rebuilding communities and interfaith unity.

There are serious questions about whether established P/CVE and peacebuilding interventions—such as the presidential commissions, their recommendations or anti-terrorism measures—acknowledge the close connection between VE, emotion, and community-reconciliation practices as discussed by the participants. However, instead of proclaiming a given intervention a success or a failure, it is more constructive to identify and invest in the underlying mechanisms of promising interventions. The civilian-led reconciliation and peacebuilding programs discussed in this chapter exemplify grass-roots visions, understandings, anxieties, resiliencies, and alternative approaches to reconciliation, revealing their unique place as peacebuilders in the local context (see Figure 7.3). Unlike state interventions, which are driven by repressive thinking and a logic of incapacitation or retribution,³ community-driven interventions are guided by conciliatory thinking, aiming for interventions to rebuild intercommunal harmony by engaging with and processing their disputes, raising awareness, and looking for shared identities over individuated ones.

This analysis provides three key lessons for the development of effective reconciliation and peacebuilding programs. Firstly, any intervention that disproportionately targets a specific group based on ethnicity, religion, or political affiliations will likely fail at the local level, given that the communities are seeking the exact opposite—namely, inter-group harmony. For the survivors, reconciliation is about restoring peaceful relations with the different other. The state and various multilateral/bilateral agencies can creatively use this lesson to

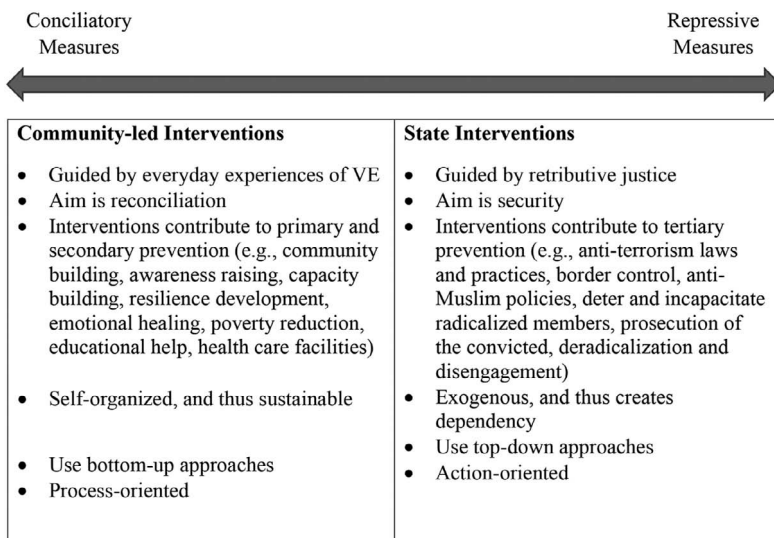


Figure 7.3 Intervention continuum: comparison of communal and state interventions. Source: author.

improve their standard peacebuilding, deradicalization, and disengagement programs. For example, established measures to capture and convict extremists can be improved by adding a component to address socio-historical and political grievances and relative deprivations, as well as cultural and personal factors that fuel marginalization and aid radicalization in the first place. Reintegration and peacebuilding programs can actively focus not only on security checks, guarded mobility, and aid programs for pre-defined victim groups but also on creating a conducive space for the divided communities themselves to self-organize and gradually rebuild their broken relationships.

Secondly, interventions need to work with survivors' everyday struggles and the contexts within which their perceptions and experiences of security, risk, and healing take place. Given how embedded VE is within the everyday of local communities, the effectiveness of any peacebuilding intervention depends on the extent to which it gains access to local communities, builds into their everyday lives and achieves their support. Thus, instead of forcefully imposing pre-defined, pre-designed peacebuilding values and programs, external organizations need to respectfully acknowledge the resilience that is already within individuals and communities, work with communities to obtain their support in identifying and assessing the community's capacities and needs, and build mechanisms to translate communal knowledge into policies and interventions.

Thirdly, in acknowledging the significance of emotion in developing resilience and healing, there is a need for interventions to 1) move beyond pathological trauma to develop an understanding of the emotional impacts of VE as plural constructs, and 2) invest in survivors' emotional capacities to create bridges between divided identities, both implicitly and explicitly. While security and structural developments (e.g., economic stability, infrastructure, institutional capacity building for good governance, improved security measures) are necessary, what survivors repeatedly highlight is their capacity to engage with grievances in alternative ways, drawing on their own psychological resources to promote an oscillation between life and loss that aids healing, and use existing resources to transform the personal to the political. Hence, peacebuilding requires a concerted effort to replace pre-defined goals and actions with process-based peacebuilding that acknowledges and invests in survivors' capacities in addition to addressing their vulnerabilities. It also needs to work with emotions as a means of aiding both individual and collective resilience. These approaches will enable peacebuilding interventions to advance beyond their narrowly defined "security" focus by translating individual and communal feelings of animosity into consensus and hostility to peacefulness.

Notes

- 1 All references to interviewees have been anonymized to protect confidentiality.
- 2 For a detailed discussion of the civil war and pre-war communal riots in Sri Lanka, see Daniel (1996), Gamage (1997), Kapferer (2012), Spencer (2004), Tambiah (1991; 1992), Thirananagama (2013), and Trawick (2007).

- 3 There are a few exceptions, such as The Commission's recommendations for reintegration and rehabilitation of former members of extremist groups.

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8 The Role of Development Agencies in Fostering Resilience to Violent Extremism

The Case of Mindanao, the Philippines¹

Miyoko Taniguchi

8.1 Introduction

With the increased risk of terrorism and violent extremism (VE) in the twenty-first century, the landscape of peacebuilding has become more complex. Policy responses have evolved from counterterrorism (CT) to countering violent extremism (CVE) and, more recently, to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) (Stephens, Sieckelinck, and Boutellier 2021). P/CVE was introduced to balance security-driven and top-down approaches by addressing the drivers that create an enabling environment for VE (IPAC 2022; Michaels 2013).

On February 23, 2016, a Plan of Action to Prevent Volent Extremism (PVE) (A/70/674) was adopted by the Seventieth UN General Assembly.² The plan affirmed global endorsement of this new comprehensive approach, extending beyond security-based CT measures to include intelligence, police, and military activities. It also embraces systematic preventive measures that address the drivers and root causes of VE, such as intolerance and government failure, as well as political, economic, and social marginalization (Ucko 2018, 251). Consequently, with the assistance of development agencies, many preventive programs have been launched worldwide using overseas development assistance (ODA) funding to address the underlying causes and drivers of VE.

This chapter examines one such program, which aimed to foster resilience to VE in Mindanao, implemented by The Asia Foundation and funded by the Australian government. Mindanao is a region in the Southern Philippines affected by protracted conflicts and violence.³ There is a peace process underway between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF),⁴ but VE is still prevalent. The Philippines is ranked 16th on the 2022 Global Terrorism Index.

The chapter will 1) provide an overview of the complexity of conflict and violence in Mindanao, 2) summarize the policies and practices of CT and P/CVE in the Philippines, 3) examine the case of the Communities of Inclusion and Resilience through Collaborative Local Engagement (CIRCLE) project as a significant attempt toward promoting resilience and P/CVE in Mindanao, 4) assess the role of development agencies in a resilience-based approach, and 5) conclude by comparing the effects of participatory resilience-based approaches with security-based approaches.

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8.2 Research Design

This study adopts the analytical concept of the participatory, resilience-based approach (bottom-up), contrasting with a security-based approach (top-down). As a form of the adaptive approach, the participatory, resilience-based approach has its origins in complexity theory and systems approaches, including non-linearity, self-organization, and process facilitation, while emphasizing local and national ownership (de Coning 2018). These concepts have been intentionally adopted for use in CIRCLE based on the knowledge, experiences, and networking that The Asia Foundation and the Australian government have gained in Mindanao through their long-term commitment to peacebuilding over the decades. Hence, this use of the adaptive approach can be seen as a key case study applicable to the Indo-Pacific region and can thereby contribute to further discussion on peacebuilding activities and approaches.

The methods used for this research comprised individual and semi-structured interviews, literature reviews, secondary surveys, process tracing, and the context analysis of narratives. The field research in the Philippines was conducted from November 3 to 15, 2022, while online surveys were intermittently conducted from January 2022 to July 2023. Interviews were conducted with 53 informants from government agencies in charge of national security (i.e., the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police, the Department of Interior and Local Government), the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), provincial and municipal local governments, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro Liberation National Front (MNLF), donors, civil society organizations, and academic institutions. For the interviews, each narrative was understood as comprising the interviewee's perception, gathered through active listening and analyzed using oral history methods. All the interviews were recorded and thematically coded to develop an understanding of the local contexts, the CIRCLE intervention, and the roles of various actors, before synthesizing a conclusion.

The purpose of this research is to compare (conventional) security-based approaches with (innovative) resilience-based approaches in the specific context of Mindanao, using a specific project (CIRCLE). However, it should be noted that the research for this case study was time-bounded from 2019 to 2022, and thus, the long-term effects of the project cannot be examined.

8.3 Overview of the Complexity of Conflict and Violence in Mindanao

8.3.1 The Ambiguous Distinction between Terrorist or VE Groups and Insurgents

Terrorism, or VE, has been a long-standing threat in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao. The landscape of terrorism and VE in the Philippines has shifted away from large cohesive militant organizations, and now involves militants mostly comprised of splinter groups of separatist insurgencies (MNLF and MILF) (Figure 8.1). This complex situation originates in historical injustices towards the Muslims (the Moros) committed by the United States (US)

(Islamic-Related) Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG)



Figure 8.1 Category of Muslim non-state armed groups in the Mindanao context.
Source: Created by the author

colonial and subsequent Philippine governments. The resettlement policy accompanying the land registration law introduced by the US colonial government in the early twentieth century gradually led to 1) the socio-economic and political marginalization of the Moros in their homeland, 2) armed conflicts between the Moro and Christian settlers since the 1960s, and 3) separatist movement and later armed conflict by the Moro (Taniguchi 2019).

Despite the ambiguous distinctions of the groups—terms that are considered to be politically and socially constructed—the key determining factor lies in the legitimacy of their goals and means (Duyvesteyn 2017; Podder 2017; Schlichte and Schneckener 2015; Toros 2008). The ICG (2008, 2) argues that the distinction between the terms can be defined by four characteristics in the Philippines context: 1) chosen targets of violence, 2) negotiable goals, 3) possession of political infrastructure, and 4) control of population and territory. In other words, legitimate insurgents with negotiable demands, political infrastructure, popular constituencies, and territorial control depend on the peace process, not terrorist tactics, while terrorist and VE groups with unresolvable grudges are treated as criminals (Della-Giacoma 2021, 128; Stephens, Sieckelinck, and Boutellier 2021).

Under this definition, MNLF and MILF are considered “legitimate” insurgents that have gone through a peace process with the Philippine government. At the same time, other splinters of MNLF or MILF, including the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter (BIFF), the Maute Group (currently called Dawlah Islamiya), Ansar al-Khilafah Philippines, are categorized as terrorist and VE groups. Regardless of their origins, the latter takes the same political position of “no negotiation and no compromise” with the government.

8.3.2 The Origin and Evolution of Insurgents and Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups

Looking first at insurgent groups, MNLF was founded in the late 1960s. It is the oldest separatist insurgent group in Mindanao to seek independence and is considered secular and nationalist-oriented. As a partial product of the

peace process, Nur Misuari from Sulu, the Chairman of MNLF, became the Regional Governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1996 after the signing of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement. However, he was ousted due to corruption charges that resulted in a failed rebellion initiated by him and his faction in 2001 (Taniguchi 2019).

MILF was officially formed in 1984, following a breakaway from MNLF in 1977. It is led by Salamat Hashim and is more Islamist in its orientation. It is fighting for a separate state for the Moro in Mindanao and Sulu (Lingga 1995) (Figure 8.2). After 17 years of negotiations, MILF and the Philippine government signed a comprehensive agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014 that led to the creation of a Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in 2019, replacing the ARMM. The MILF-led BTA will govern the region by 2025 (Taniguchi 2023).

ASG (Father of the Sword) split from MNLF in 1991 under the leadership of Utadz Abdurrajak Janjalani, a veteran of the Afghan Mujaheddin (Figure 8.2). Wahhabism has strongly influenced ASG in its goal of eradicating all Christian influence in the Southern Philippines and creating an independent Islamic State (IS) with logistical and operational links to global terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda and Indonesia-based Jemaah Islamiyah, Janjalani (Chalk 2009; Martin 2011).

The loss of financial support from al-Qaeda over the years and the death of charismatic leader Janjalani in a gun battle in 1998 led to ASG becoming more radicalized and criminalized. It also became organizationally fragmented and factionalized (Chalk 2009; Fellman 2011; ICG 2008) before splitting into two factions—ASG-Basilan and ASG-Sulu (Figure 8.2).

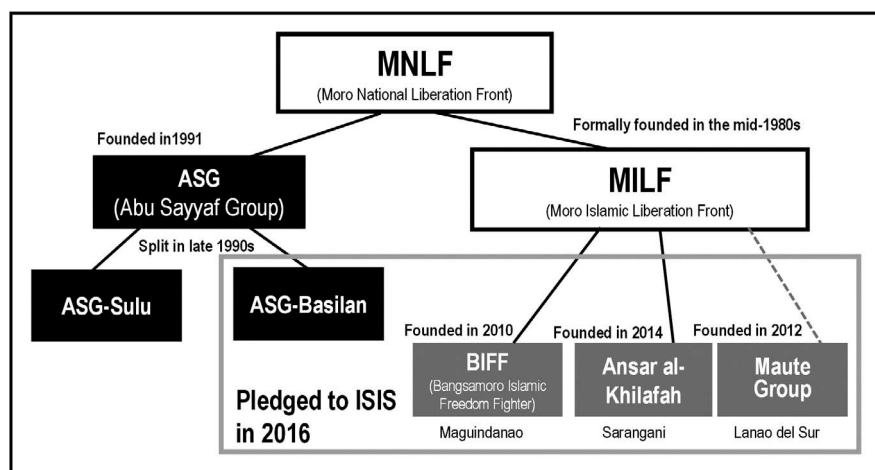


Figure 8.2 Relationship diagram of non-armed state groups in Mindanao.

Source: Created by the author

Consequently, ASG's strength was eroded by the loss of militants and critical commanders in the 2000s (Niksich 2007).

ASG resurged in 2014 when the leader of ASG-Basilan, Isnail Hapilon, and his followers pledged allegiance to ISIS in July, soon after al-Baghdadi declared the Caliphate (IPAC 2016). Under ISIS's global strategy, Hapilon was designated as the leader, or *emir*, of IS-pledged groups in the Philippines in 2016 and was required to fulfill specific "conditions and requirements."⁵ This provided the momentum for ISIS to gain its first foothold in Southeast Asia (Abuza and Clarke 2019) and be officially recognized as an IS *wilayah* (province) (Zenn 2019). For that, ASG had to restructure fragmented groups and unify them to convince the ISIS leadership of its ability to control the *wilayah* (Franco 2017a; 2022; IPAC 2016). ASG gained a reputation by aligning itself with the ISIS brand and using a pan-Islamist or Jihadist narrative that contributed to effective recruitment, logistics, and fundraising (Franco 2017b; Jadoon, Jahanbani, and Willis 2020).

Three other ISIS-linked militant groups in mainland Mindanao, BIFF, the Maute Group, and Ansar al-Khilafah Philippines, were splinters of MILF, breaking away due to disagreements over the peace process (Figure 8.2). Although these groups are not an existential threat individually, they tend to be geographically spread and autonomous, requiring the Philippine security forces to spread their inadequate resources (Abuza and Lischin 2020). Although lacking centralized command, informal cooperation and decentralized networking—as well as close clan and kinship ties—provide the basis for allying together (Katagiri 2019).

Following the territorial dismantling of ISIS, ISIS shifted toward a decentralized global insurgency model to create a *wilayah* of the caliphate in East Asia (Abuza and Clarke 2019), relying on people's grievances and the existing militant infrastructure of ISIS-linked groups (Jadoon, Jahanbani, and Willis 2020). As ISIS Central instructed Hapilon to find territory suitable for a *wilayah*, he attempted to seize Marawi City to gain recognition from ISIS leadership (ICG 2019). On May 23, 2017, a five-month CT operation, the "Battle of Marawi," was conducted by Philippine security forces to recapture Hapilon, which resulted in massive destruction and human casualties.⁶

Since the Battle of Marawi in 2017, terrorist attacks and casualties in Mindanao have decreased substantially due to 1) the death of the leaders of the ISIS-linked groups, 2) the unrelenting military operations and law enforcement by Philippine security forces, 3) the drying up of funding from ISIS, 4) travel and logistical restrictions under the COVID-19 pandemic, and 5) government programs for reintegration (IPAC 2022; Jadoon, Jahanbani, and Willis 2020). However, it should be noted that terrorism or VE is unlikely to end due to the Jihadists' ability to reconfigure and regenerate themselves in different forms, as observed in the case of al-Qaeda-linked ASG or Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia.

8.4 From Counterterrorism to P/CVE in the Philippines

Counterterrorism (CT) in the Philippines developed in response to material and operational opportunities offered to the Philippine government through an international partnership with the US under the Global War on Terror campaign (McCoy 2011). After the 9/11 attacks, US CT officials identified the Philippines as its key potential staging ground for expanding al-Qaeda's influence in Southeast Asia (Acharya and Acharya 2007; Tan 2011). The Bush administration committed US\$100 million in military aid, including the deployment of US Special Operations Forces (Robinson, Johnston, and Oak 2016).

Even before the US-led CT, the Philippines had a long history of using counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine⁷ to meet internal threats, such as the communist insurgency waged by the New People's Army (NPA) and MNLF. This COIN doctrine recognized the need for a balance between the right hand (military force) and the left hand (socio-economic and political measures to win the hearts and minds of the people), reflecting the tension between civilian and military authorities (Watts 2014). As such, terrorism and insurgency were viewed as interrelated elements that require 1) politico-diplomatic, socio-economic, and military approaches to address the root causes, and 2) the involvement of all national departments to address the drivers (Heydarian 2019).

The Philippine government approved a National Action Plan on P/CVE (NAP-P/CVE) under the National Security Council (NSC) and the Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) with technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)⁸ in 2019. It adopted a whole-of-nation approach, but some scholars and practitioners criticized the NAP-P/CVE for securitizing development, rights, and peace efforts (AA and TAF 2022; Arugay, Batac, and Street 2021). The plan has been under review by a new administration since November 2022.⁹

Aside from the P/CVE effort at the national level, BTA, whose territory is the most affected by terrorism or VE in the Philippines, has undertaken its own initiatives, although the NAP-P/CVE approach has been viewed as security-based by the BTA officials. The official position of MILF towards terrorist and VE groups, such as ASG, is that these are terrorist groups. Labelling programs as P/CVE-related programs is not considered socially or politically effective, as most members of the terrorist and VE groups are rooted in MNLF/MILF and related mainly by kinship. Further, when it comes to grievance issues raised by non-completion or delay of the peace process, some hardliners implicitly sympathize with terrorist and VE groups. In other words, a narrative that can be created from labeling efforts as P/CVE could feed into a process of moral disengagement and social division by fueling an "us" and "them" discourse (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020).

8.5 Case Study of Resilience and P/CVE in Mindanao

8.5.1 Overview of the CIRCLE Approach

In response to an emerging threat of VE, The Asia Foundation in partnership with Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc. and financed by the Australian government—implemented a three-year project in May 2019 called “Communities of Inclusion and Resilience through Collaborative Local Engagements” (CIRCLE). The key principles guiding the project were that it should be peace-promoting, context-specific, adaptive, flexible, and evidence-based. CIRCLE, which was based on the idea that local governments are at the frontline of VE, aimed to enhance the capacity of local governments to reduce the vulnerabilities of their communities to VE through strengthening community inclusion and resilience.

Toward the achievement of this objective, CIRCLE provided seventeen (17) local governments¹⁰ in four provinces with technical assistance to 1) deepen the understanding of local governments of risks and vulnerabilities (situation analysis), 2) formulate new community-level and evidence-based inclusion and resilience strategies and plans (planning), 3) implement the strategies and plans through participatory processes (implementation), and 4) facilitate shared learning among the local governments and build knowledge from local and national levels (knowledge-sharing). It undertook these activities in collaboration with diverse stakeholders, including the Philippine security forces. Beyond the piecemeal approach of existing P/CVE practices in the Philippines (Rhoades and Helmus 2020), CIRCLE attempted to provide a comprehensive framework focusing on strengthening the roles and capacity of local governments.

One of the key factors that enabled CIRCLE to emerge lies in the rich knowledge, experiences, and networking on peacebuilding on the ground of its two implementing agencies. The Asia Foundation, self-defined as a “nonprofit international development organization,”¹¹ has been engaged in the promotion of democracy and peace processes in the Philippines since the 1950s, providing technical assistance, strengthening the macro–micro linkages, and conducting research work on peace and security. Unlike other non-government agencies, The Asia Foundation in the Philippines plays a role as a development agency, extensively and substantially engaged in capacity development and institution building of national and local government and their officials, especially on peace and security over the decades. Besides, as proof of trust from the Philippine government and civil society, the country representatives of The Asia Foundation have been engaged in peace processes, officially assigned as a member of observers at the Philippine government-MILF peace panel and later a member of the Third-party Monitoring Team for implementing the peace agreement.¹² On the other hand, Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc., a Mindanao-based NGO, has been involved in peacebuilding and community-based development in Mindanao since 1995. CIRCLE was effectively programmed and

implemented by drawing on their complementary strengths despite the difficulties encountered amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the initial stage, the project team designed the approach and selected local government partners. One of the issues that the project team encountered was some apprehension from some partners in the project, who were against using the term “PVE.” Some partners pointed out that the term might have socially and politically negative impacts and that its use labeled their territory as affected or having potential VE communities. As a result of consultations with project partners and stakeholders, the project team shifted its term from “PVE” to “building communities of inclusion and resilience” to reduce the risk of stigmatization or securitization of vulnerable communities (Holmes 2017; Pierobon 2022; Ucko 2018). This shift is one of the examples of how the project team applied “Do no harm principles” throughout the project implementation.

8.5.2 Case Study: Datu Saudi Ampatuan Municipality

The Complexity of Conflict and Violent Extremism¹³

The Municipality of Datu Saudi Ampatuan is located in the so-called “SPMS Box,” which was initially composed of four adjacent municipalities: Salibu, Pagatin, Mamasapano, and Shariff Aguak.¹⁴ Out of 36 municipalities in Maguindanao province (currently divided into two provinces), these municipalities are considered the poorest in the region due to protracted conflicts and extreme violence. There are also frequent clan feuds that flare up between diverse actors, leading to the use of private army groups (the militia of local elite clans), MILF, MNLF, and BIFF (International Alert 2018).

The name “SPMS Box” was floated after the Mamasapano clash incident in 2015 during an operation to capture Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli Abdhir.¹⁵ Moreover, other terrorists hid under the protection of BIFF and affiliated groups inside the SPMS Box (DSA 2022). Even after the incident, the Philippine security forces have continuously conducted military operations against BIFF and its affiliates, as the SPMS Box has hosted the 105th and 118th Base Commands of MILF and later BIFF. Now categorized as a “lawless element” by the government, BIFF has been harassing military detachments, planting improvised explosive devices, and engaging in extortion and shooting incidents. With the persistent threat to national security, the SPMS Box has been positioned as an area of immediate concern. As the BIFF militants live among civilians, in many cases close to military camps, the clashes between Philippine security forces and BIFF have forced the civilians to evacuate following the destruction of private property (ICG 2022).

It should be noted that local armed groups in the SPMS Box are closely affiliated since they are primarily remnants or followers of the 105th base command headed by former MILF renegade commander Umbra Kato. In this area, kinship and family ties determine loyalties, and many members of

both MILF and BIFF are either relatives or friends. Marriage, sometimes forced, plays a vital role in strengthening the bond of militants. Based on local traditions, the enemy of one family member may become the enemy of the entire clan, which implies that the enemy of one is the enemy of all. This dynamic relationship makes ceasefire and law enforcement operations more difficult, especially in the SPMS Box, where most local terrorist and VE groups hide in the MILF enclave.

With the above cultural foundation, the Mamasapano clash incident became a chance for armed groups operating under the SPMX Box—which hitherto had experienced strained relationships—to unite to reinforce their comrades and fight against a common enemy. Recruitment of youths with incentives and promises from these terrorist and VE groups intensified. As a result, the SPMS Box became a haven and breeding ground for various groups aiming to sow terror while undermining the ongoing peace process between the Philippine government and MILF.

Aside from the above vertical conflict, horizontal conflicts among the Moro also frequently occur in the SPMS Box (i.e., clashes between MILF commanders or between MILF and BIFF commanders). These are triggered by conflicts over land and control over informal economies, in some cases reinforced by or escalating from clan feuds. As a result, the SPMS Box, particularly for communities surrounding Ligawasan Marsh, has become the refuge of lawless elements such as drug pushers, assassins, foreign terrorist fighters, kidnap-for-ransom groups, and other nefarious elements (Cagoco-Guiam 2020). Consequently, the municipality has been suffering from intermingling, multi-layered, and complex conflicts and violence.

Drivers of Violent Extremism

With the use of the “Community Vulnerability Assessment Tool,” developed by the project team, drivers and vulnerabilities to VE at the village and municipality levels were collected from local leaders and community representatives from the community from the women’s and youth sectors, the local peace and order council, the religious and transitional sector, and civil society organizations. The project team assumed that community vulnerability indicators could be attributed to the deterioration of general welfare, difficulty finding livelihood, gaps in the delivery of government services, and a drop in overall attendance and participation in local community events. Combining the qualitative data through focus group discussions for further validation, the consolidated drivers of VE identified are as follows.

First, the lack of economic opportunities was identified as a critical driver to VE, as unemployment and limited opportunities to improve living conditions turned out to be a local frustration, as the young were tempted to accept recruitment and join the radicals for economic reasons.¹⁶ Besides this, continuous military operations by the AFP have led to low harvests and reduced productivity, along with damage to agricultural products. The government

has not provided adequate compensation for these losses, and consequently, local residents are sometimes forced to borrow money at high interest rates.

Second, Datu Saudi Ampatuan is home to diverse armed groups such as MILF, MNLF, BIFF, and private armed groups (clan-based militias). Due to the lack of government legitimacy, the residents are inclined to approach a particular security actor for conflict or dispute resolution rather than utilizing a formal mechanism such as the Peace and Order Council under the local government. The “biased” outcomes of this government resolution mechanism have led the residents to lose trust and confidence in the justice system, feeding antagonism and intensifying social division. Furthermore, due to continuous military operations, most residents live in makeshift houses and are permanently in evacuation (*bakwit*) mode, leading to instability and uncertainty. As a result, those with grievances who have been exposed to radical foreign ideologies are more likely to turn toward religious intolerance, opening the door to radicalization.

Third, the protracted conflict and violence in the locality have devastated the lives and properties of innocent civilians. In particular, those residing in remote villages left their homes and preferred to stay in evacuation centers owing to the lack of guarantees of tranquility. Continuous military operations have already become “normal” while clan feuds proliferate. Following the deterioration of their lives and the non-linear peace process between the Philippine government and MILF over the decades, the residents have become vulnerable to recruitment by terrorist and VE groups—especially BIFF. Datu Saudi Ampatuan is the birthplace of a leader of BIFF, which has been engaged in illegal activities such as drug trafficking.

Aside from the above results, the process was significant for the local government officials, as it provided an opportunity to interact with the constituencies and understand the perspectives of the different community sectors. It allowed the residents not only to share their needs but also articulate experiences of trauma due to the armed conflict.

The above overview demonstrates that terrorist and VE groups have become fragmented, localized, and criminalized over the years. This process has escalated since the 2000s with the linkage of regional and global Salafi Jihadists such as ASG, Jemaah Islamiyah, and ISIS gaining military power and legitimacy through local networks. Despite the difficulties that terrorist and VE groups are now experiencing with recruitment and funding from abroad due to the decline of ISIS, the groups in Mindanao have historically survived through regrouping (IPAC 2022) and by exploiting the residents’ grievances against the government. As described in the previous section, the case of Datu Saudi Ampatuan is an example of how terrorist and VE groups are resilient against military operations and how such operations stimulate them to reorganize and change tactics. In doing so, they are able to survive and sustain their resilience (Abuza 2020; Henshaw 2020; ICG 2022; Banlaoi 2019).

8.6 Comparing the Effects of the Security-Based and Resilience-Based Approaches

Over the two decades since 2001, the number of terrorist attacks by armed groups such as MNLF and MILF, and terrorist and VE groups such as ASG, BIFF, Maute Group, and Ansar al-Khilafah Philippines in the present BARMM region have fluctuated (Figure 8.3). These fluctuations can be seen as interlinked with the following factors. First, the terrorist attacks decreased after intensive military operations by AFP backed by US Special Operations Forces. Second, the setbacks or stagnation of the peace process, such as the failure to sign a peace agreement and enact the Bangsamoro Basic Law, increased terrorist attacks. Third, terrorist attacks increased as regional and global jihadists became stronger after 2012. The intensive military operations after the Battle of Marawi in 2016 under the Duterte administration led to a significant drop in attacks after 2018.

According to the interviews with stakeholders of CIRCLE, including project officers and local government officials of Datu Saudi Ampatuan Municipality, the terrorist attacks and the strength of terrorist and VE groups have decreased over the last few years due to 1) the decline of the influence of global and regional Jihadist groups, 2) the progress of the peace process, 3) intensive military operations, and 4) intervention by CIRCLE. As such, CIRCLE is viewed as one of the contributing factors to P/CVE.

More specifically, local government officials have nurtured adaptive capacity against VE in the following ways. First, the mayor and key officials became aware of the potential vulnerabilities through the CIRCLE data on the people's perceptions. Prior to this, the mayor, who had depended on his security analysis, became convinced of the risks of VE after seeing the

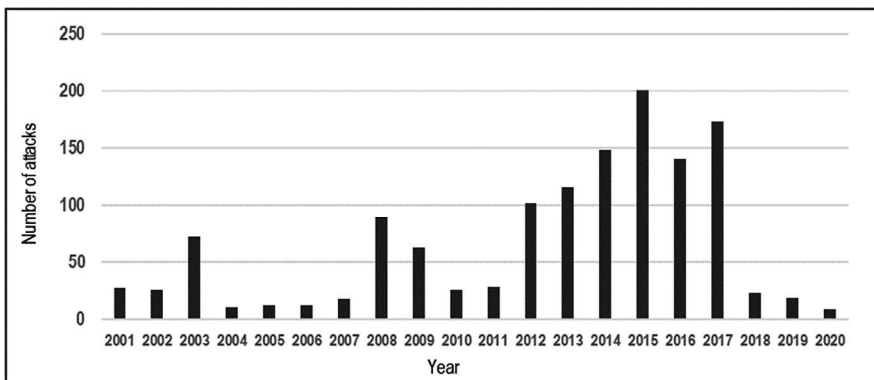


Figure 8.3 The number of terrorist attacks by non-state armed groups in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Note: Data on communist insurgent groups is not included in the figure.

Source: created by the author based on the data from START Global Terrorism Database (University of Maryland)

evidence-based results from the people. Second, local government officials gained political legitimacy from the people by acknowledging their grievances and experiences of social injustice. Third, the government allocated funds and public services to those living in more vulnerable villages. Before the intervention by the project, the people had no choice but to depend on the terrorist and VE groups. After the intervention, the people started reporting the presence of these groups to the Philippine security forces. Fourth, the local government gained the people's trust by obtaining support from religious and traditional leaders who played an intermediary role between the local government and the people in changing the extreme narratives of the terrorist and VE groups. Fifth, relationships between the military and the civil sector have improved after sharing the sentiments of people toward military operations and issues related to human rights violations with the AFP, who were then reoriented to respect democratic values.

The security-based approach effectively suppresses terrorist attacks, at least in the short term. However, as historically proven in the Mindanao context, the kinetic military operations have promoted further radicalization among frustrated and desperate people, leading to the repeated resurgence of new terrorist and VE groups in conflict-affected areas. In contrast, the resilience-based approach, which nurtures the local government's capacity to adapt and transform, can contribute to 1) placing a new social contract between the local government and the people—and in particular, the most vulnerable—through confidence and trust-building, 2) conflict-resolution among the people through the setting up of local mechanisms, and 3) peacebuilding by promoting social cohesion in the community through participatory processes in the long term. Based on the above factors, a resilience-based approach can effectively reduce vulnerabilities and foster community resilience, providing a buffer against VE.

8.7 The Role of Development Agencies in the Resilience-based Approach

Despite the difficulties of integrating P/CVE into development assistance (Brouillette-Alarie et al. 2022; Luke 2019; Malet 2021; Pistone et al. 2019; Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020; Williams 2021) and limited effects on P/CVE-related programs in the Philippines (Rhoades and Helmus 2020; TAF 2017), The Asia Foundation, as a development agency, has attempted to institutionalize community resilience and inclusion into local governance by identifying the drivers to VE to reduce the threats and vulnerabilities. Given the complex situation where diverse conflicts and violence—secessionism, terrorism, violent extremism, clan feuds—have prevailed, the efforts through CIRCLE are considered a part of strengthening the development–security–peace nexus. Based on experiences and knowledge through CIRCLE, the roles of development agencies can be summarized as follows.

First, development agencies with experience in peacebuilding assistance can play a pivotal role in facilitating diverse stakeholders involved in P/CVE, strengthening vertical and horizontal ties. Due to the complex nature of

violence and conflict in Mindanao, the relationship among the stakeholders—such as security actors, national and local governments, and civil society at national, regional, and local levels—can be tense, with conflicting interests often amid fighting or instability. Key actors may become polarized over whether to support militarized or local-government-led interventions (AA and TAF 2022). Even under the guidelines and principles from the national level, programs need to be aimed at supporting specific projects on the ground.

Development agencies have already contributed in many ways to the prevention of extremist violence and P/CVE through a program designed to prevent conflict and strengthen the rule of law, in particular through the disarmament (decommission in the term of the Mindanao peace process), demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants. Efforts have also been made to promote peace, tolerance, and resilience—all under the umbrella of peacebuilding (Holmer 2013). Using conflict-political sensitivity and analytical skills, incorporating a resilience lens, development agencies, as potentially impartial third parties, can take on a mediation role to mitigate tension, promote dialogue, and build confidence and trust. Even under the banner of P/CVE, the role of development agencies is to support a non-securitized space and build the capacity of national and local governments and civil society. From a development perspective, they can also help to reform security institutions in support of P/CVE.

For example, in alignment with the NAP-P/CVE, CIRCLE worked with community stakeholders and sector leaders, facilitating the formulation of programs and activities to strengthen inclusion and resilience. They also worked with community partners to establish links and knowledge on higher-level policies related to national and regional government strategies. At the national level, CIRCLE facilitated a dialogue between the local government and national government agencies in charge of P/CVE so that the local governments could share updates on the security situation and progress of the project. In doing so, they helped to support decision making and policy formulation by the national agencies. Also at the local level, they established a platform for the partner local governments to share information, experiences, and lessons learned regarding the reintegration program for former combatants. This relied on effective alignment between the Municipal Action Plan-PVE (Datu Saudi Amptatuan) and Provincial Action Plan-PVE (Maguindanao province). Likewise, it is expected that the diversification and interconnection of stakeholders through networking will increase resilience against VE.

Second, the capacity development of the local government officials—situated at the frontline of VE in responding to public safety concerns—refers to the significant role of development agencies in enabling local government officials and other stakeholders to identify the vulnerabilities and risks of VE, prioritize resource allocation to the vulnerable, prevent new recruitments by terrorist and VE groups, and mitigate conflicts. In particular, due to the nature of the violence, development agencies providing information and technology related to P/CVE is the key determinant for capacity development,

which requires systematic and innovative methods. This service-delivering method can also ensure accountability and transparency.

The results of the assessments of community vulnerability and capacity of local government became the foundation of succeeding project activities: strategy formulation and implementation. To achieve this, CIRCLE introduced new tools to establish a systematic way of collecting, consolidating, processing, and assessing community-level information to better understand specific vulnerabilities and needs of communities, as well as the capacity needs of local governments in P/CVE. The first approach can be used to service local needs and vulnerabilities in the areas of community, youth, gender, ideology, and the threat of VE, while the second measures the capacity of local governments to respond in six aspects: policies and programs, structure, knowledge and skills, manual operations, data management, and leadership. From the standpoint of confidentiality, the collected data is digitally stored on separate password-protected servers. All data are owned by the local governments themselves, allowing for its future use.

Through a series of workshops conducted by CIRCLE together with consultations by trainers, the local government officials enhanced their skills and knowledge, nurtured analytical skills on security—especially VE, conflict resolution, and peace promotion—and learned how to ensure that security considerations are built into regular and exceptional service delivery for the vulnerable.

Third, development agencies can contribute to institution-building and strengthening to improve public service delivery. Existing or non-existing mechanisms for alternative dispute resolution (ADR) or conflict resolution mechanisms can be institutionalized or enhanced as part of local governance in conflict and VE-affected areas. Instead of focusing only on the security component, the security component should be positioned as part of comprehensive local governance. In doing so, labeling an area as a “risk community” or stigmatizing a particular community should be avoided.

8.8 Conclusion

Despite continuous military operations under the name of CT, terrorist and VE groups have proved difficult to eradicate due to 1) the grievances of the people over military operations that damaged or destroyed people’s belongings and assets; people were also forcibly displaced, depriving them of the means to sustain their lives; 2) grievances towards the delayed or failed peace process between the Philippine government and MILF over several decades; 3) the presence of in-person recruitment networks related to kinship as well as online propaganda targeted at youths; and 4) economic factors and impoverishment due to the protracted conflict and violence.

In conclusion, security-based approaches tend to assume that the entire target community is suspect, vulnerable, or deficient (Kundnani 2012; Spalek 2012; Vermeulen 2014). By contrast, resilience-based approaches represent a shift towards a more comprehensive analysis and theory of change that

recognize the economic, political, and sociocultural factors driving VE (Grossman, 2021). In the Mindanao context, CT measures have not been effective in eradicating terrorist and VE groups. Even with the strong backing of the US, terrorist and VE groups have remained resilient by tactically allowing themselves to become temporarily fragmented and factionalized. They can then reorganize and reunite, drawing strength from the underlying grievances of local people and gaining power through links with regional and global Salafi Jihadist networks. Unless the grievances are addressed and responded to by the government, terrorist and VE groups will not be eradicated by military means. The local government can play a pivotal role in building resilience against intertwined conflicts and violence, while development agencies can contribute to enhancing the capacity of local government officials. It is their situation at the frontline of the fight against VE that ultimately leads to sustainable peacebuilding.

Notes

- 1 The views addressed in this chapter are the author's own and do not reflect the views of JICA.
- 2 The resolution urged member states to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and called upon them to counter violent extremism and fight terrorism more comprehensively and sustainably.
- 3 The conflict includes secessionist, political violence, clan feuds, and terrorism or VE.
- 4 The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), signed by both sides in 2014, stipulates that the peace process will be concluded upon signing the Exit Document, acknowledging the full implementation of the provisions of the CAB as observed by the Third-party Monitoring Team (Taniguchi 2022).
- 5 Those include 1) documenting their allegiance, 2) unifying the *jama'at* who have given *bay'at*, 3) holding consultations to nominate a *wali* (governor) and member for the regional shura assembly, 4) planning a strategy to achieve consolidation in the region for the *Khilafah* to implement the *Shari'ah*, and 5) presenting all this to the Islamic State leadership for approval.
- 6 As a result of the battle, the city center was heavily damaged, and more than 1130 people were killed (974 militants, 165 soldiers, police officers, and 47 civilians). According to the government, some 600,000 residents were displaced and 1400 wounded (ICG 2019, 4).
- 7 COIN fundamentals adopted by the US Special Operation Forces were: deny terrorists sanctuary, deny terrorists mobility, deny terrorists access to resources, and separate the terrorists from the population (Galula 1964).
- 8 UNDP, which was not engaged in the CT efforts, has been leading the UN initiative on P/CVE as part of the development agency's global shift in priorities (Lynch 2017).
- 9 Interview with the person in charge at the Department of Interior and Local Government (November 8, 2022).
- 10 Maguindanao Province, Datu Saudi Amptatuan Municipality and Datu Abdullah Sangki Municipalities (Maguindanao), Islan Municipality (Sulutan Kudarat), Tuluhan and Aleosan Municipalities (North Cotabato), General Santos Municipality (South Cotabato), Marawi, Butig, and Pagayawan Municipalities (Lanao del Sur), Sulu, Jolo, Talipao, and Patikul Municipalities (Sulu), Isabel, Tipo Tipo, and

Sumisip Municipalities (Basilan). The selection criteria are 1) vulnerability to VE threat in the local government, 2) presence of local government or PVE projects or willingness to embark on PVE projects, 3) geographic distribution among island and mainland provinces, BARMM, and non-BARMM, 4) demographic spread looking into religious and ethnicity mix, and 5) varying income classifications.

- 11 The Asia Foundation in the Philippines was founded in 1954 by a group of people who shared a strong interest in Asia and is devoted to promoting democracy, the rule of law, and market-based development in post-war Asia.
- 12 A Third-party Monitoring Team, composed of an EU diplomat (head) and international and local NGOs, was created in 2013 to monitor the mechanism for implementing the peace agreement and to help craft the final Exit Document.
- 13 This section relies on Municipal Action Plan Preventing Violent Extremism (MAP-PVE) 2022–2024.
- 14 It has now been now expanded to eight municipalities including the initial four municipalities: Shariff Aguak, Datu Unsay, Datu Saudi-Ampatuan, Datu Salibo, Shariff Saydona Mustapha, Datu Piang, Rajah Buayan, and Mamasapano. The area covers around 90 sq km and has a population of approximately 100,000 spread out across the 30–40 villages.
- 15 Zulkifli Abdhir was listed as one of the most wanted terrorists by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).
- 16 While the poverty line of Maguindanao in 2021 is set at about US\$195 per month, the financial incentives for joining the group range from US\$500 to US\$2000, depending on the ranks of a group [Interview with a local government official in Datu Saudi Ampatuan Municipality, conducted on November 9, 2022].

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9 Climate Change, Environmental Peacebuilding, and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Florian Krampe and Cedric de Coning

9.1 Introduction

The UN Secretary-General called the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) a “code red for humanity,” noting that the evidence is irrefutable: global heating is affecting every region on earth, with many of the resulting environmental changes becoming irreversible (UN News 2021). His message is that climate change is not a future risk; it is already affecting every aspect of our collective lives, including our ability to sustain international peace and security.

Climate change has profound implications for our present and future security, and thus also for preventing and countering violent extremism. Most conflicts on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council are located in countries exposed to and affected by climate change (Krampe 2021). In most areas of the world—especially Africa, the Middle East, and South America—climate change is increasing the risk of violent conflict (IPCC 2023). Our research on climate-related peace and security risks has found that climate change is undermining livelihoods in a wide range of contexts, including Afghanistan, Colombia, the Central African Republic, Iraq, and Sudan.¹ Countries and communities dependent on rain-fed agriculture are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change because it affects their water and food security. Climate change-induced scarcity can increase competition over land and water. Female-headed households are especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of both climate change and conflict because access to resources, mobility options, and livelihood alternatives are often limited due to pre-existing inequalities and gender roles (Smith 2022).

Research has shown that in places such as Mali and Somalia, the adverse effects of climate change on livelihoods have created conditions that violent extremist groups have exploited to increase recruitment (Hegazi, Krampe, and Smith 2021; Funnemark et al. 2022; UNDP 2017).² Violent extremist groups have also used disruptions caused by climate change-related extreme weather events in various other ways—for example, to gain legitimacy by offering themselves as alternative relief providers. Another example is the use of extreme weather events and the resulting flooding of roads and bridges to provide a tactical advantage when entering towns or villages to carry out

recruitment, intimidation, or other actions at times when security forces cannot reach the area.

The most widespread link between violent extremism and climate change is, however, the way in which climate change affects rain-fed agriculture and related livelihoods, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of the affected communities. Linked with weak or purposefully unequal governance and the consequent political and socio-economic exclusion and marginalization, violent extremist groups take advantage of such grievances and desperation to offer alternative forms of governance, justice, and income. In these contexts, the double burden of both climate change and conflict can trap countries or communities in a negative spiral where climate change undermines the ability to cope with conflict and violent extremism, while conflict undermines the resilience of communities and institutions to cope with climate change (UNDP 2020).

It is crucial, however, to note that the relationship between climate change, conflict, and violent extremism is not linear, mono-causal or pre-determined. Context, space, and time are important, alongside people's agency, resilience, and adaptive capacity. The relationships between these factors will ultimately be mediated by the choices people make (van Baalen and Mobjörk 2018). Moreover, how people choose to respond to the effects of climate change or the risk of violent extremism depends on the options they have (de Coning and Maalim 2022). In this chapter, we present research demonstrating that environmental peacebuilding initiatives that help communities, societies, and institutions to strengthen their resilience and social cohesion can improve their capacity to adapt to climate change. This will reduce their vulnerability to climate change and, at the same time, increase their agency to prevent and counter violent extremism (Krampe 2017, 2019).

The international community increasingly acknowledges the relevance of environmental degradation and climate change in preventing and managing conflict (Aldinger, Bruch, and Yazykova 2018; Born, Eklöw, and Mobjörk 2019). Climate-related security risks provide complex challenges for policy action, but they can also offer opportunities and entry points for preventing and countering violent extremism. In fact, cooperation over shared scarce resources or in coping with natural disasters is often the norm and can generate peace dividends by strengthening social cohesion and societal resilience, as discussed later in this chapter. In addition to some of the other approaches outlined in this book, environmental peacebuilding—which refers to the management of natural resources in fragile and conflict-affected regions in a sustainable and conflict-sensitive manner—can support sustainable and resilient peace by strengthening communities' resilience and adaptive capacities to help prevent and counter violent extremism. For instance, this can involve influencing how people respond to climate-related events or trends through proactive engagement with communities to strengthen their resilience and adaptive capacities. This would include helping to improve the way they manage natural resources or increasing their livelihood options by introducing additional income-generating initiatives through development aid projects.

Interventions at other scales—at the national level, for example—can help state institutions to develop, adopt, and implement environmental laws and policies by supporting improved management of water catchment areas. This means that actions to prevent or respond to the effects of climate change may also contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism, and conversely, peacebuilding initiatives can, at times, strengthen the capacity of communities to adapt to climate change and prevent or counter violent extremism.

Drawing on the examples of countries such as Afghanistan, Mali, and Somalia, this chapter explores what we can learn from the climate security and environmental peacebuilding literature about coping with the interlocking pressures of violent extremism and climate change. In doing so, it contributes to answering this volume's key research question: namely, are resilience- and peacebuilding-informed comprehensive responses more effective than security-led responses in preventing violent extremism and sustaining peace, and if so, how?

9.2 The Relationship between Climate Change, Environmental Stress, Conflict, and Violent Extremism

The research on how we understand climate-related peace and security risks has made substantial progress in recent years (von Uexkull and Buhaug 2021). While there were some conflicting messages and interpretations around the relationship between climate change and conflict in the last two Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports (Gleditsch and Nordås 2014), the overall findings of the IPCC and related research are that climate change does not only exacerbate the causes and effects of conflict, but also negatively impacts the capacity of communities and institutions to help make, keep, and sustain peace in specific contexts (Buhaug, de Coning, and Von Uexkull 2023). Although some countries and regions remain neglected (Adams et al. 2018), a large body of qualitative and quantitative studies from different disciplines is providing new insights into the relationship between climate change, peace, and security (De Juan 2015, 23; Brzoska and Fröhlich 2016, 197; Buhaug 2015, 272; Abrahams and Carr 2017; Sakaguchi, Varughese, and Auld 2017; Sillmann, Sippel, and Russo 2020; Moran et al. 2018).

This research finds that, although not the only cause (Mach et al. 2019, 1; Sakaguchi, Varughese, and Auld 2017), climate change undermines livelihoods and, consequently, security. It increases the populations' vulnerabilities, aggravating grievances and perceptions of exclusion and injustice, which can lead to political tensions through an array of indirect—at times non-linear—pathways. In doing so, it increases human insecurity and adds to the risk of violent conflict (van Baalen and Mobjörk 2018; Koubi 2019; von Uexkull and Buhaug 2021). The research finds that, on the one hand, climate change-related effects, such as droughts and floods, undermine the resilience of communities and institutions in places such as Iraq and Somalia to maintain and consolidate peace. On the other hand, conflict-related effects, like displacement or the disruption of livelihood practices, undermine the capacity of

communities and institutions to adapt to climate change, particularly in places such as Afghanistan or Mali.

As these examples show, context—as well as timing and spatial distribution—is significant and needs to be accounted for (van Baalen and Mobjörk 2018). Climate change can place additional pressure on a society's livelihoods, especially in regard to water and food security. This extra stress exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and the displacement, conflict, and other such maladaptation that may emerge in response to these pressures. This can further erode societal resilience and adaptive capacity, including a society's ability to prevent and manage violent conflict and its capacity to prevent and counter violent extremism (Dabelko et al. 2022).

Another important factor is people's agency, which adds an additional layer of complexity to context, space, and time. People can choose how to respond to climate-related stressors. Two households in the same community or two communities experiencing the same exposure to climate change may respond in different ways to the same stressors. The implication is that different types of climate-related risks may emerge, depending on a specific community's resilience and adaptive capacity, even if their exposure to climate change is the same. This makes it impossible to predict how climate change will affect a specific community based on past behavior and other available data. It also demonstrates the importance of the adaptive peacebuilding approach, as introduced in the theory chapter (Chapter 2), as a method for coping with uncertainty when dealing with complex social systems in transition.

The *Environment of Peace* report, published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute in 2022, highlights five risk dynamics that illustrate the spatial and temporal complexity of climate-related security risks (de Coning et al. 2022). These comprise:

- 1 Compound risks, in which the simultaneous interaction of two or more risk factors results in a greater risk complex, as the factors mutually reinforce each other.
- 2 Cascading risks, in which an event creates a risk that leads to subsequent, sequential risks, generating an increasingly escalating risk potential like a snowball effect.
- 3 Emergent risks, in which two or more temporally and spatially independent factors create a new risk that would not have existed without the previous two.
- 4 Systemic risks, in which multiple risk factors interact in such a way that they cumulatively threaten a societal or environmental system, in parts or as a whole.
- 5 Existential risks, whose impacts are so severe that they threaten the existence of a country or culture.

The relationship between climate change and peace and security risks is therefore indirect and non-linear, varying due to context, time, space, and

agency. This helps to explain why the findings on the relationship between climate and conflict in the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report may appear confusing (IPCC 2023). On the one hand, the IPCC finds that the statistical evidence linking climate change to conflict is inconclusive. On the other hand, the IPCC report provides ample evidence of how climate change exacerbates food and water security and undermines livelihoods. The IPCC is also clear that these effects of climate change are closely interlinked with political, social, and economic factors and that together, they produce compounding and cascading systemic risks that can have profound implications for peace and conflict (Buhaug, de Coning, and Von Uexkull 2023).

Importantly, the IPCC also recognizes that conflict undermines the resilience of communities and institutions to cope with the effects of climate change (Buhaug 2022). Perhaps one of the starkest examples of this in recent memory is how climate-related crop failures in Russia and Ukraine in 2010 led to a spike in the price of bread in North Africa and the Middle East. Combined with long-standing political and economic grievances, this provided a spark for the Arab Spring revolts that toppled several governments in the region and triggered two of the most serious—and still unresolved—conflicts of the early twenty-first century, in Libya and Syria (Null and Prebble 2013).

The IPCC findings can be confusing because they can create a false expectation that there needs to be a statistical correlation between climate change and conflict for the relationship to be scientifically established (Beaumont and de Coning 2022). The reality is that climate change may exacerbate existing tensions, for example, over access and use of scarce resources between herders and farmers in the Sahel (de Coning et al. 2021), but it is always up to the people involved to choose competition or cooperation. In most cases, people choose peaceful ways to manage shared resources (de Coning and Maalim 2022). In the less common cases where they do not, it is possible to trace how the effects of climate change have led to a series of choices that resulted in conflict. Therefore, while it may not be possible to find a linear statistical relationship between climate change and conflict, this does not negate the possibility that climate change can, in some circumstances, indirectly contribute to conflict by shaping conditions and increasing the stressors that influence people's decision making. Although there is growing recognition in the research community that the impacts of climate change in specific contexts increase the risk of various forms of violence, it is equally recognized that the relationship is not linear, predictable, or deterministic.

9.3 Climate Security – Navigating Complexity in Social-Natural Systems

Navigating the complexity that emerges from climate-related impacts on societies requires reducing the system to its core elements. Figure 9.1 draws from existing research on the relationship between climate change and conflict. It depicts “climate change,” “people's vulnerability” and “insecurity” as the three core variables to look at in specific contexts.

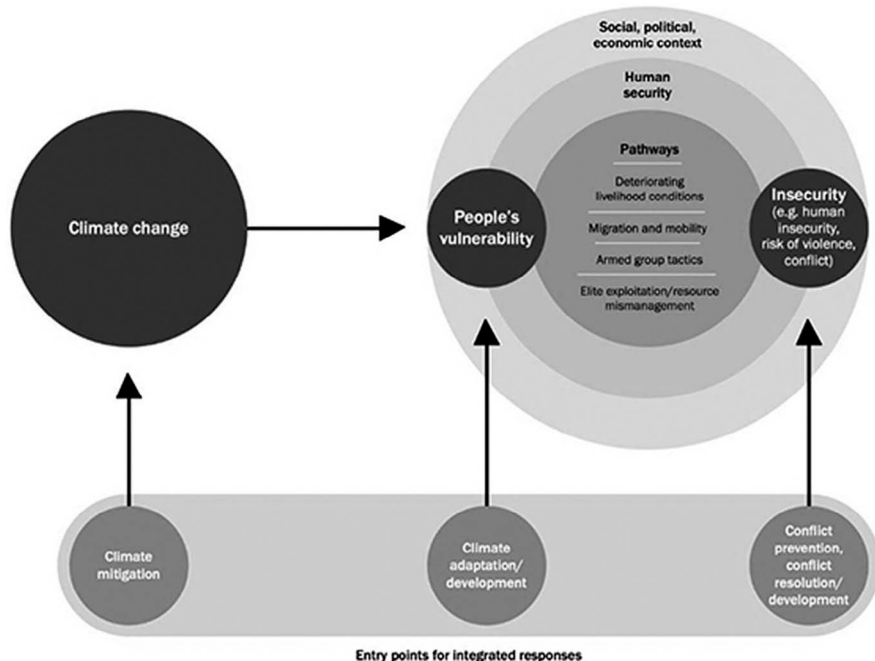


Figure 9.1 The relationship between climate change, people's vulnerability and insecurity. Source: author.

The level of climate-related peace and security risk in a given country or region can be assessed by considering exposure and vulnerability. Countries that experience violent extremism—for example, Somalia or Mali—experience above-average exposure to climate change. This means that they are experiencing above-average increases in temperature or fluctuations in precipitation, affecting the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events like floods, droughts, and heat waves.

Many countries are also vulnerable to the effects of climate change. For example, a community that largely depends on rain-fed agriculture for its livelihood is especially susceptible to climate-related fluctuations in rainfall and temperature. Climate change-induced scarcity may increase competition over land and water, for example, between farmers and herders in Mali who rely on the same natural resources. Many conflicts where violent extremism is a factor are thus partly influenced by climate change-related pressures on livelihoods. Weather patterns affect the timing and routes of migrant herders, seasonal work, and other migration patterns. Changing migration patterns can also disrupt traditional mechanisms for managing natural resources and related conflicts.

As a result of research undertaken over the last three decades, it is now well established that climate change and environmental degradation can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and push societies to the brink of their adaptive

capacities. This can lead to migration and displacement, creating additional stress—for example, tensions between host and displaced communities can contribute to conflict. Conversely, conflict and its effects, such as displacement and the over-exploitation of natural resources to finance armed groups, often contribute to environmental degradation and weaken the resilience and adaptive capacity of affected communities and institutions to adapt to climate change. Significantly, however, research has also shown that when communities cooperate to manage such stressors, for example, by creating a joint mechanism to manage a shared resource, it can contribute to sustaining peace within and between communities.

9.4 Climate Security and Violent Extremism

The effects of climate change and environmental degradation on peace and security can also be observed in studies of violent extremism. When climate change affects the availability of natural, human, and other resources, armed groups change tactics accordingly. This is evident when armed groups make tactical decisions to gain access to natural resources, particularly in productive lands and during scarcities, or when their recruitment pool expands due to climate-related disasters or climate-related livelihood losses. Armed groups can also use the impacts of climate change to position themselves as alternative service and relief providers where governments are weak or unresponsive, as seen in the case of al-Shabab in Somalia and Jamaat-ud-Dawa in Pakistan. In this section, we will consider three ways that violent extremist groups make use of the effects of climate change to advance their objectives, namely through recruitment, alternative governance, and tactical opportunities.

9.4.1 Recruitment

Recruitment to armed groups is typically underpinned by three key drivers: social, political, and economic marginalization, lack of trust in government, and grievances related to heavy-handed security force violence. Increasingly, research and reports from experts and United Nations peace missions suggest that the impacts of climate change are contributing to the first driver. Conflict and violent extremism have similar effects: they disrupt social cohesion, weaken societal trust and, consequently, leave societies less able to manage the negative effects of climate change on their livelihoods. Countries that are conflict-prone are thus usually also less resilient to climate-related shocks and setbacks. There are deep links between climate change, conflict, and violent extremism in countries where all three co-occur. They mutually affect and reinforce each other in compounding and or cascading flows of influence. Climate change, conflict, and violent extremism contribute to weakening societal trust and social cohesion and undermine societal and institutional resilience and adaptive capacity.

Research also suggests that gender can shape the motivation for different individuals to voluntarily join armed groups. Such factors include livelihood

insecurity and social, political, and economic marginalization. In some contexts, women have joined armed groups as a way to avoid oppressive structures and inequalities in their home areas. In other settings, men may join armed groups to obtain an income and live up to expectations of masculinity when circumstances destroy traditional forms of livelihood (UN CAAC 2022; Alliance for Child Protection and Humanitarian Action 2020).

When communities become displaced, they often suffer from a lack of clan protection, weakened social cohesion, and organized security. In these circumstances, IDP sites have become places where violent extremist groups like Al Shabaab in Somalia find new recruits (Eklöw and Krampe 2019; Mahmoud et al. 2017; UNICEF 2016; Ferrández 2020). Violent extremist groups offer an alternative form of income that can help people support their families. For example, in Mali, increasing resource scarcity negatively impacts local livelihood options, contributing to recruitment opportunities for armed groups who can offer economic incentives to join. Some extremist groups provide substantial economic incentives. For instance, some extremist groups in Mali will offer substantial amounts of money for the placement of an IOD as well as for engagement in trafficking (Hegazi, Krampe, and Smith 2021). Violent extremist groups also offer people a new sense of meaning, purpose, and dignity (Maystadt and Ecker 2014).

9.4.2 Alternative Governance Service Providers

Violent extremist groups in Somalia, including Al Shabaab, have leveraged the effects of climate change on livelihoods—including extreme weather events like floods or slow-onset disasters like the current drought—to offer government-like relief services in areas where the federal or state governments have little presence. For example, in response to drought, Al Shabaab has distributed cooking oil, rice, and sugar to impacted communities (Sguazzin 2022). They have organized community recovery efforts and offered relief goods as ways of presenting themselves as an alternative to the federal and state government institutions. They have also provided alternative public administration, justice, and conflict resolution services.

Similarly, before the Taliban regained control over Afghanistan in 2021 and was still operating as an armed group, they provided aid and assistance to communities affected by natural disasters as a way to gain support and legitimacy among the local population. For example, in August 2010, the Taliban offered relief to flood victims in Pakistan, leading to what one news outlet called:

a macabre race between extremist Taliban Islamists and the West. Both sides are competing to arrive first with aid and thus win the hearts of locals in remote regions who have felt neglected or abandoned by their government for decades. The flooding has exacerbated those sentiments

(Kazim 2010).

This kind of relief can result in an increase in support for the extremist group, which strengthens their position while at the same time further eroding the state's legitimacy. The relationship between rapid-onset disasters and armed groups is influenced by the ability and effectiveness of government actors, the presence of competing groups, and the armed group's ability to recruit and provide aid. In Pakistan, increased support for the Islamist group Jamaatud-Dawa (JUD) after extreme floods in the Sindh province was observed only in areas where the group already had a strong presence or where government or other non-state actors were absent, and JUD was able to provide disaster assistance to the local population (Nordqvist and Krampe 2018).

In other contexts, extremist groups can also act more opportunistically, exploiting the de facto monopoly of violence they possess in some regions. For example, Al Shabaab has challenged government relief efforts, including setting on fire trucks carrying food supplies and passengers in central Somalia, as well as destroying water wells and communication and electricity infrastructure (Dahir 2022). The Juba and Shabelle, perennial rivers in southern Somalia, are vital sources of water for daily use and sustaining livestock herds during periods of severe drought. Due to the 2022 drought and poor rainfalls, water levels in the rivers have been historically low (FAO 2022). There have been instances where Al Shabaab has exercised control over these water resources, blocking access to rivers, poisoning wells or destroying water infrastructure (Strategic Foresight Group 2019).

9.4.3 Tactical Opportunities

Al Shabaab has also used extreme weather events, like flooding, to its tactical advantage. For example, when rain causes rivers to fill, low-lying bridges become unpassable. This means government and international security forces, like the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and its successor mission, the African Transitional Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), are unable to move forces across these rivers. Violent extremist groups, like Al Shabaab, however, can cross these rivers with small boats because they often operate in small groups and use transport such as motorbikes. They also use these periods to occupy towns and villages and move around freely to exercise control, intimidate local leaders, impose taxes and recruit followers.

In the Philippines, similar effects have been seen where natural disasters weakened the logistics and supply lines of the New People's Army in 2012–13, leading to a focus on internal recovery and reorganization rather than recruitment. However, the long-term impact of these changes on support and recruitment has not been researched (Nordqvist and Krampe 2018).

Overall, tensions between political factions weaken governments' capacity to respond to climate change, while climate-related disasters continue to have an outsized effect on marginalized minority clans. Coupled with decades of conflict and instability, climate change and environmental degradation in places like Afghanistan, Mali, and Somalia have compounded the risk of continued and even increased insecurity and exposure to violent extremism.

At the same time, investments in building resilience, adaptive capacity, and social cohesion can strengthen the capacity of communities and institutions to prevent and counter violent extremism and conflict—and adapt to climate change. Enhancing the coping mechanisms of societies and their institutions thus helps to counter the adverse effects of climate change, conflict and violent extremism. One way of doing so is through environmental peacebuilding.

9.5 Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism with Environmental Peacebuilding

Environmental peacebuilding has the potential to successfully prevent and counter violent extremism by enhancing cooperation, reducing grievances and building social cohesion within communities and institutions. Environmental peacebuilding emerged in the late 1990s in the context of growing discussions about the relationship between environmental scarcity and conflict. It involves managing natural resources in a conflict-sensitive and sustainable manner in conflict-affected or post-conflict states, with the goal of supporting long-term, resilient peace. The focus is on how environmental politics and management can strengthen the social, economic, and political conditions that promote peace (Krampe, Hegazi, and VanDeveer 2021).

If the decision on whether to cooperate or compete resides in the agency of the affected communities or institutions, then the implication is that their capacity to make positive choices can be enhanced by investing in strengthening their resilience and adaptive capacity. Doing so through an environmental peacebuilding approach can build resilience while also reducing the climate and environmental impacts that drive violent extremism. To successfully work towards preventing and countering violent extremism and conflict requires that international policy actors understand that investments in social cohesion and public trust can contribute to sustaining peace, including, and maybe specifically, in societies under stress from climate change.

The environmental peacebuilding literature has highlighted three mechanisms through which improved natural resource governance could positively affect peace. These mechanisms include the contact hypothesis, which posits that intergroup cooperation can reduce bias and prejudice; the diffusion of transnational norms, which supports human empowerment and strengthens civil society; and state service provision, which addresses the instrumental needs of communities and strengthens their belief in the state (Krampe, Hegazi, and VanDeveer 2021). In the specific context of climate change, this could be achieved through projects linking climate adaptation and peacebuilding, as stressed in the latest IPCC report, which emphasizes the importance of holistically addressing climate-related vulnerabilities as well as fragility and conflict risks (Potts, Rüttinger, and Vivekanda 2022).

Communities and societies can anticipate and take mitigating measures, and they can adapt to these changes in their ecosystem in ways that reduce climate change-related risks. People can choose to cooperate instead of

competing, and climate change-induced challenges can also be seen as opportunities for strengthening social cohesion and community resilience. Moreover, there are opportunities for using climate-related stress as an entry point for initiatives aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism.

Violent conflict erodes state and societal trust, cohesion, and social capital, and thus, states' adaptive capacity and resilience to manage the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Conversely, when the effects of climate change and environmental degradation erode societal resilience, they also increase society's vulnerability to violent extremism and conflict. Consequently, one of the ways to contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism is to work toward strengthening societal trust, cohesion, social capital, adaptive capacity and resilience at both national and community levels. For example, research in Nepal shows that the development of micro hydropower systems—crucial for climate adaptation and mitigation—can contribute to building peace as they can, if appropriately managed, increase social cohesion within communities. At the same time, the implementation and management of these projects in Nepal produced other spaces of legitimate authority, constituting a highly legitimate and trusted hybrid local–national governance (Krampe 2016). This kind of environmental peacebuilding initiative can increase resilience, and the more resilient a community or institution is to the adverse effects of climate change, the less likely people within those communities are to succumb to violent extremism.

However, while environmental peacebuilding can have positive effects that may be considerable, any intervention that attempts to influence a complex social system can also have adverse effects (Ide 2020). These effects can be further exacerbated by poorly designed adaptation and mitigation strategies, as the example in Afghanistan shows, where the implementation of the Salma dam increased water scarcity after the completion of the dam in 2016. This water scarcity was a factor in grievances related to water access among local communities and increased the likelihood of related communal violence (Krampe, Smith, and Hamidi 2021).

In other words, environmental changes may necessitate adaptation, but how people adapt is informed by several additional influences and considerations. For example, two neighboring societies could be exposed to the same environmental effect, such as drought. However, their vulnerability will differ depending on various social factors, such as their dependence on water-fed agriculture and, especially, the adaptive capacity and resilience of their social institutions. So, while climate change and environmental degradation are essential in shaping the conditions that affect people's choices, the choice over whether to use violence to pursue one's interest or not remains a human decision.

The choices people make are informed by political, security, social, and economic considerations and influenced by power, agency, identity, and gender. For example, female-headed households can be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, as they often lack access to the resources needed to adapt. On the other hand, gender roles can also mean that women take on

leadership roles in adaptation efforts, as many women find themselves at the forefront of climate change due to their gendered responsibilities for growing and gathering food and caring responsibilities. The point is that exposure to climate change or environmental degradation does not imply that the outcome of these effects is pre-determined. The severity of these effects can be mitigated by measures to increase disaster preparedness and other adaptations and mitigation strategies.

Climate change and environmental degradation should thus be considered when undertaking an analysis of any situation where there is a risk of violent extremism, as it comprises a key factor influencing the changing security landscape and the drivers of conflict.

9.6 Integrating Climate-Related Security Risks into Actions to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism

In a joint project undertaken by NUPI and SIPRI, we have drawn attention to the pathways between climate change, peace, and security in ten specific cases on the agenda of the UN Security Council, including in countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Mali, South Sudan and Somalia.³ In these cases, UN special political or peacekeeping missions need to understand how the effects of climate change exacerbate the conflicts they have been tasked to manage, which in some cases include violent extremism. For example, climate-related weather patterns may result in earlier or later movement of live-stock, or herders may change their routes. Such changes in behavior will require peacekeepers to adapt their planned patrols to ensure that civilians are protected and violent clashes are prevented.

Taking the effects of climate change into account does not mean that the mandate of these peace and security operations is broadened by adding climate adaptation responsibilities. It means that peacemakers and peacekeepers need to understand how their primary responsibilities—for example, media (UN DPPA 2022) and protection of civilians (Sarfati 2022)—are affected by climate change. It requires the capacity to plan and act differently to implement their existing mandates effectively, despite climate-related disruptions. It also means that peace and security operations need to take steps to minimize their own environmental footprint (Maertens and Shoshan 2018).

The same considerations will apply to peace and security operations and programs aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism. Such interventions do not have to become initiatives solely aimed at mitigating or adapting to climate change, as others in government and civil society, together with their international partners, are engaged in that. From the literature and based on our own research, we suggest five ways in which peace and security operations and programs aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism can integrate climate-related security risks into their planning and operations.

Firstly, actors should integrate an awareness of the exposure to and vulnerability of the communities they work with to address the effects of climate

change in their conflict and situational analysis. As the vulnerability of individuals and households is likely to differ, such an awareness needs to assess and disaggregate the vulnerability of various subgroups in the communities, acknowledging gender, ethnic minorities, and other considerations. Both climate change and conflict have an outsized effect on women and girls. As women are in many places at the frontline of climate change due to their roles in cooking, growing, and gathering food, as well as caring responsibilities, they often lead or have considerable influence over local adaptation efforts. Similarly, women play important roles in peace processes, and women's expertise and leadership are crucial for ensuring successful, inclusive, and sustainable adaptation and mitigation solutions. International peace and security operations, together with their national counterparts—i.e., governments, civil society and host communities—can support and enable the empowerment of women in local and national resource management and related decision-making processes and mechanisms by ensuring that power, resources, and rights are shifted to women.

Secondly, such interventions and programs need to cultivate an awareness of other actors working on climate mitigation and adaptation, as well as related fields, such as food and water security and livelihoods. The strengthening of resilience and adaptive capacity in these areas is likely to also increase the community's capacity to prevent and counter violent extremism and explore opportunities for mutually reinforcing collaboration.

Some of the most innovative work undertaken by peace and security operations occurs at the interface of the environment and peace. For example, the buffer zones in Cyprus and Lebanon could become a shared space for environmental renewal and be used to build trust between the communities on both sides of these zones. Alternatively, peace and security operations could help communities in the Sahel or Horn of Africa to cooperate in co-managing shared natural resources. This would ensure that their cooperation preserves the resources while also building trust between the communities. These are just a few examples of how cooperative natural resource management can provide an important space for peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, contributing to preventing and countering violent extremism.

In addition to factoring climate change into conflict prevention and peace-keeping efforts, conflict sensitivity should also be integrated into climate mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and development efforts. Joint assessments, analysis and planning can inform the peace and security and the development and environmental sectors. Peace and security operations and other interventions can play a key role in bringing together national and international stakeholders and facilitating their integration through such coordination processes.

The aim is to establish a holistic approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and conflict. This would involve many stakeholders and actors in government and civil society and their international partners in coordination mechanisms. Together, they would generate a common

understanding of the drivers of conflict and extremism and adopt shared approaches to prevention and development of countermeasures. This implies a complex range of actions across many dimensions—including political, security, social, economic, development, and environmental—but planned in such a way that they are mutually reinforcing and working towards a pre-agreed set of objectives. The idea is to develop initiatives aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism and raising awareness among those working on climate mitigation and adaptation, food and water security, and livelihoods, of the interlinkages between climate change, conflict, and violent extremism.

One element of such a holistic approach is the need to monitor the effects of the campaign and to share this information regularly between key partners. This ensures that the overall effort can continuously adapt to feedback and that it remains as effective as possible (de Coning 2020). The sharing of information generated in the process helps to consolidate a whole-of-system approach because it provides the various actors in the system with the information they need to assess and adapt their actions and future plans.

Peace and security operations can also tactically cooperate with and support host governments, communities, civil society, and other parts of the international system that work more directly with food and water security, livelihoods, migration and climate change. Peace operations can provide security and logistical enablers and bring political and security actors together with those who work on development and environmental issues. This would help to ensure a whole-of-society approach to climate-change mitigation and adaptation, as well as the effects of climate change on peace and security risks.

Thirdly, local, national, and international institutions that work towards preventing and countering violent extremism can improve their early warning, analytical, and planning capabilities by strengthening the knowledge among their staff on how climate change and related environmental crises affect the communities they work with. This knowledge will enable them to integrate climate-change-related peace and security risks into their analysis, planning, programming, and performance assessments. It will also enhance how they identify and select key stakeholders for engagement and hone the kind of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors required to monitor and influence activities designed to prevent and counter violent extremism. This knowledge and related information and analysis can be shared with the host government, host communities, and other partners.

In addition to considering the effects of climate change on the conflict drivers that peace operations and other interventions need to address, peacekeepers must also consider how changing weather patterns and extreme weather events may affect their operations and their ability to achieve their mandate. Therefore, climate change has implications for the equipping and preparation of peacekeepers, as well as for how peace operations are planned, managed, and assessed. Troop and police-contributing countries should prepare their peacekeepers with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and equipment needed to operate in environments increasingly affected by adverse climate conditions and extreme weather events.

One example of an institution that has taken up the issue is the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which has been experimenting with a more integrated response to climate security risks since 2017–2018. This has included coordinating drought responses through the Drought Operations Coordination Centres and the Recovery and Resilience Framework (Eklöw and Krampe 2019). The deployment of an Environmental Security Advisor has boosted UNSOM's work in this area. The UNSOM example is still the exception, but it serves as a proof of concept of the need to consider how climate insecurities overlap and sustain other forms of insecurity (de Coning et al. 2022).

Fourthly, peace operations and interventions aimed at addressing violent extremism and conflict related to climate change can be significantly more effective when they actively collaborate with communities experiencing resource-related tensions. By adopting a people-centered approach to peace and security operations—as opposed to one that primarily engages with the host state—project implementers can assess their effectiveness and the impacts on the security of the affected communities. To do so effectively, they need to engage the communities in the planning, coordination, and evaluation of the project.

Lastly, it is essential to point out that although climate change has implications for hard security, there are no hard security solutions to climate change. Security solutions can manage some of the security-related symptoms of climate change. However, to mitigate against climate change, action will be necessary across a range of dimensions extending beyond the security sphere, especially in the energy and economic sectors. The security sector also has a responsibility to reduce and transform its carbon footprint until it can achieve a net-zero emissions regime. This includes preventing pollution and other forms of environmental degradation, as well as reducing emissions and adverse impacts on local energy, water, and other resources and services.

Peace and security operations should also consider how they can, through their actions and capabilities, support the host nation and communities to strengthen their capacities to manage climate-related peace and security risks. For example, UN peace operations consume about 500 gigawatt-hours per year of energy, most of it in its large peacekeeping missions. Some of these peace operations are also the largest energy consumers in their host countries. These missions could therefore catalyze the introduction of renewable energy capacity into their host countries. If planned with conflict sensitivity and in consultation with the host country, such assets can be transferred to the host country and become a peace dividend that can be sustained beyond the lifetime of the mission.

When peacekeeping operations shift to renewable energy, the goal should not only be to reduce their carbon footprint. They can also contribute by creating local markets and promoting long-term sustainable development. Renewable energy offers the peace operations community an exceptional opportunity to simultaneously strengthen and sustain peace and deliver a positive legacy for host communities. However, introducing a new resource into a conflict-affected society can also lead to further competition among rivals for control of such a

resource or entrench elite power, so any such initiatives need to be undertaken with extreme caution and awareness of the likelihood of unintended negative consequences (Aoi, de Coning, and Thakur 2007).

9.7 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the relationship between climate change, environmental degradation, environmental peacebuilding, and violent extremism to address the central research question of the book.

We have pointed out that climate change and environmental degradation may necessitate adaptation, but how people adapt is informed by several additional factors and considerations. The choices people make are informed by political, security, social, and economic considerations and influenced by power, agency, identity, and gender. Exposure to climate change or environmental degradation does not therefore indicate that the outcome of such effects is pre-determined. Climate change and environmental degradation may exacerbate existing vulnerabilities in communities and societies—for example, dependence on rain-fed agriculture—and such additional stresses may, in some cases, lead to people making choices that result in conflict. However, in other contexts where people face similar pressures, locals may choose to collaborate. The implication is that the severity of the effects of climate change can be mitigated by peacebuilding, development, and climate adaptation initiatives that increase the adaptive capacity and resilience of communities and societies to make choices under stress that help them to sustain peace and prevent violence. These can include initiatives to increase disaster preparedness, social cohesion, and community resilience, as well as efforts to establish community-level mechanisms to identify and manage emerging tensions that could lead to conflict if not acted on early.

Climate change and environmental degradation are both factors that will influence the changing security landscape and the drivers of conflict. They should therefore be considered when a program analyses situations that entail the risk of violent extremism. An analysis of the changing peace and security landscape that does not consider the short-, medium- and longer-term effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and the risks associated with the transition to a net-zero emission future omit important elements that will shape human security in the twenty-first century.

However, although climate change and environmental degradation have implications for both hard security and human security, there are no hard security solutions to climate change. Hard security tools can only manage some of the social insecurities that may occur as a result of the choices people make under pressure from climate change and environmental degradation.

The main finding from this chapter is that resilience and environmental-peacebuilding-informed comprehensive responses are more effective than security-led responses in preventing and countering violent extremism and sustaining peace in communities and societies under pressure from climate

change and environmental degradation. To ensure that the relationship between climate change, environmental degradation, and violent extremism is managed in such a way that contributes to preventing and countering violent extremism, the primary effort thus has to be focused on enhancing the capacity of communities and societies to make choices that sustain peace and prevent violence. This means using peacebuilding and related initiatives to strengthen social cohesion and shore up community resilience and adaptive capacity, both in terms of adapting to climate change and environmental degradation as well as to violent extremism, as these phenomena are closely interrelated.

Notes

- 1 The authors co-lead a NUPI and SIPRI Climate Peace and Security Risk project. More information, including fact sheets on the project countries, is available here: <https://www.nupi.no/en/projects-centers/climate-related-peace-and-security-risks>
- 2 For Mali, see <https://www.nupi.no/en/publications/cristin-pub/climate-peace-and-security-fact-sheet-mali> and for Somalia, see <https://www.nupi.no/en/publications/cristin-pub/climate-peace-and-security-fact-sheet-somalia2>. See also *Journey to extremism in Africa: Drivers, incentives and the tipping point for recruitment*, UNDP Africa, 2017: <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/en/reports>
- 3 See the Climate, Peace and Security Risk Project jointly managed by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). For information about the project, see <https://www.nupi.no/en/projects-centers/climate-related-peace-and-security-risks>. For the fact sheets produced by the project, see <https://www.sipri.org/research/peace-and-development/climate-change-and-risk/climate-related-peace-and-security-risks>.

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10 Conclusion

Preventing Violent Extremism Requires Community-orientated, Holistic, Comprehensive and Adaptive Solutions

Cedric de Coning, Rui Saraiva and Ako Muto

10.1 Introduction

This book project was undertaken at a time of increased geopolitical rivalry, growing recognition of the influence of climate change—including its impact on peace and security—and emergence of new technologies, some of which have contributed to escalating the intensity of violent conflict. As a result of these developments, it has become increasingly difficult to sustain peace and achieve sustainable development on a global scale. After decades of improvements in global peace since the end of the Cold War, the number and intensity of conflicts have increased over the last decade (Obermeier and Rustad 2023). As a consequence, it is becoming increasingly unlikely that the Sustainable Development Goals will be achieved by the target date of 2030. Several of the armed conflicts driving these developments were associated with a rise of violent extremism. In this context, this book is intended to make a contribution to improving our understanding of how best to prevent and manage violent extremism (VE).

Based on a three-year research project conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development, this book aims to achieve two main objectives. The first is to develop a theory of change that explains how peacebuilding and development efforts that contribute to strengthening community, societal, and institutional resilience can help to prevent and counter violent extremism. The second is to consider how peacebuilding and resilience-informed comprehensive approaches can serve as a framework for assisting multilateral and bilateral agencies and other relevant actors to contribute more effectively to sustaining peace in regions affected by armed conflict and violent extremism.

This book addresses the puzzle of why, despite recognition at the global policy level that military-only solutions cannot resolve violent extremist insurgencies, actual national and international responses to violent extremist insurgencies remain security-led and enemy-focused. The poor success rate of stabilization and counterinsurgency campaigns is partly because these approaches have tended to overemphasize the security dimension of the problem. A security-led approach to preventing VE is typically focused on an identifiable aggressor, such as al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in the

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Lake Chad Basin, or the Islamic State in the Greater Sahel (ISGS) and is aimed at disrupting and neutralizing the threat they pose to people and the state. In this volume, we argue that identifying and deterring the threat posed by such actors may be necessary but it is not sufficient. The challenge with a securitized approach is that it fails to take into account that VE and insurgencies are symptoms of underlying causes such as social, political, and economic inequality, marginalization, and exclusion. A key aim of this book is to provide a theoretical and empirical basis for explaining that without transforming these drivers of conflict, there can be no sustainable peace.

Thus, in this book, we explore a peacebuilding approach that recognizes that managing the insecurity caused by VE is necessary but insufficient. Instead, the broader socio-political system needs to be transformed to sustain peace. A resilience and peacebuilding-informed comprehensive approach would typically see such groups as symptomatic of a wider set of grievances and drivers. In addition to countering the insecurity caused by these groups, it would primarily focus its efforts on addressing these drivers and grievances in the medium to long term. At the same time, it would also seek to strengthen community, societal, and institutional resilience to cope with the negative effects of VE in the short to medium term.

In addressing the main research questions, the research project assessed whether resilience and peacebuilding-informed comprehensive responses are more effective than security-led responses to prevent violent extremism and sustain peace, and if so, how? Case studies were used to consider a number of additional research questions set out in the introductory chapter.

The study is grounded in a complexity-theory-informed, adaptive peacebuilding approach to preventing and countering violent extremism using peacebuilding interventions to help strengthen community resilience (de Coning 2018). This theoretical approach was presented in Chapter 2 before being analyzed, tested, and further developed through each of the seven case studies. These case studies considered VE in various countries across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Somalia, and Syria. The researchers systematically examined evidence and provided analyses of the causes and consequences of extremist violence, as well as the role that peacebuilding and resilience played in preventing and countering violent extremism.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the security situation, some case studies had to rely on remote methods, while others benefitted from field research. Each researcher used interdisciplinary qualitative and quantitative methods adequate to the context of each case study and related research questions. The general methodologies used include semi-structured interviews (remote or on the ground), key informant interviews (remote or on the ground), focus group discussions (remote or on the ground), participant observation, database analysis, and surveys, as well as text analysis, discourse analysis, and media analysis.

The originality of this research project draws on the theoretical framework presented in the theory chapter and the primary data collected by experts in

various academic fields and presented in the seven case studies. In addition to the geographic scope of the research, and following the theory linking resilience, peacebuilding, and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), seven key thematic areas are explored in this book: 1) community-embedded and grassroots prevention, 2) PVE in the context of the complex conflict, 3) social cohesion, 4) environmental peacebuilding, 5) PVE from a gender perspective, 6) mental health and PVE, and 7) the role of development agencies and development assistance in PVE. The selection of thematic areas results from a shared recognition of the research problem, objectives, and background—as described above.

A major focus of this edited volume has also been to examine the effectiveness of international, regional, and domestic interventions aimed at addressing the emergence of violent extremism in contexts that are also affected by intrastate or interstate armed conflicts. A crucial challenge in these fragile contexts is designing, implementing, evaluating, and coordinating effective security, humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions amid immense complexity and uncertainty. The volatility occurring in these contexts derives from numerous factors, such as continuous changes on the ground, e.g., in the behavior and organization of armed groups, and other factors, such as weak and fragile state structures, rising unemployment and inequality, the impact of climate change and natural disasters, and the spread of infectious diseases (see ACLED 2024; Institute for Economics & Peace 2023; UNFCCC 2024; International Committee of the Red Cross 2018; 2023).

Violent extremism in conflict-affected countries has also been linked to societal polarization, particularly in societies lacking the necessary infrastructure and institutions for sustaining peace. Atran's (2021) work provides a comprehensive analysis of the psychological and social factors driving violent extremism and polarizing group conflict. These include values, identity fusion, and the dynamics of social networks in motivating and maintaining extreme violence, ultimately leading to societal polarization and the undermining of peace infrastructure. Furthermore, the current proliferation of technology provided by the digital revolution is also playing a role in the transformation and sophistication of violent extremist groups, as seen with Boko Haram in Nigeria and West Africa (Oyeniyi 2018). Additional concerns, like environmental issues and climate change, have contributed significantly to conflict and the rise of violent extremism, as seen in the Sahel region, especially around Lake Chad. Deteriorating environmental conditions, resource instability, and the impacts of climate change exacerbate communal breakdowns, state fragility, and violence (Singh 2022; World Bank Group 2017). Finally, other factors, such as internal political divisions and the influence of external powers, play significant roles in destabilizing contexts that are struggling with the transition to sustainable institutions and peace (Remo, Agurob, and Lazos 2016), instead often fueling the growth of violent extremism.

The challenges associated with preventing and countering violent extremism, as well as exposure to violence at a young age, can lead to a cycle of

violence that may be carried out across generations. Despite this, it is evident that human beings can display resilience in the face of continuous exposure to violence (Betancourt 2015). The focus on resilience is therefore fundamental to combating violent extremism in conflict-affected regions. It also helps by strengthening state institutions and giving agency to local communities and actors while preparing security, humanitarian, and peacebuilding partners for volatile environments and unknown threats. In this context, resilience can be achieved through a holistic and adaptive approach that takes into account the unique context of each region and ensures more effective and self-sustainable peace outcomes.

10.2 Theoretical Insights: Toward Holistic Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the roles that social cohesion and resilience can play as part of a comprehensive approach to preventing and countering VE sustainably. Based on research evidence of the kinds of approaches that are effective in preventing and countering VE, the chapter cautions against securitized approaches that deal only with the symptoms of VE. Not only do they tend to generate a backlash against the authorities that plays into the hands of the extremists, but they also do not offer a sustainable solution to VE because they do not deal with the underlying drivers of VE.

In addition to responsible and accountable security actions, this chapter made the case for addressing the drivers of VE. These are context-specific but tend to be associated with the marginalization and exclusion of out-groups on the political and economic periphery of states affected by VE. For peacebuilding, this implies helping to strengthen individual, household, community, and institutional resilience and adaptive capacity in the short to medium term. It works simultaneously toward transforming the marginalization, exclusion, and inequality of the affected communities via developmental interventions, as well as providing initiatives to transform the political, social, and economic relationships between the affected communities and the rest of their society.

Complexity theory and adaptive peacebuilding help us to understand why solutions imposed from the outside perform poorly, while much better results are achieved when peacebuilding approaches work in partnership with local communities, civil society and local authorities to support and strengthen social cohesion and adaptive capacity (de Coning, Saraiva, and Muto 2023). Concepts like stabilization and peacebuilding convey the assumption that external actors like the United Nations can “build” peace in the same way that we can design and build a bridge or a tunnel. However, social systems develop and sustain themselves, and external actors like the United Nations or international development agencies can, at best, only stimulate and influence the process. Depending on how external actors relate to the societies they

are trying to assist, their actions can inhibit, interfere with, or even disrupt the self-organizing process in a complex social system, or they can nurture, enable, and stimulate self-organization.

This is why the concepts and theoretical approaches introduced in this chapter focus on social systems, including communities, societies, and institutions. They provide an understanding of how peacebuilders can contribute to preventing the drivers leading to VE by helping these social systems strengthen their resilience, social cohesion, and adaptive capacities. For the purposes of this book, we understand resilience in its most basic form as a set of capabilities that enable a community or society to adapt to changes in their environment. Resilience is closely related to characteristics such as adaptiveness and flexibility. The more adaptive a society is, the more resilient it will be during times of crisis. Resilience is increased when social institutions and networks become more diverse and interconnected so that they can share and process more information (de Coning 2016). Peacebuilding should therefore be about stimulating and facilitating the capacity of communities, societies, and institutions to become more interconnected and networked so they can increase their robustness and ability to share and process more information. With resilience linked to peacebuilding and PVE, we can better understand how societies can strengthen their resilience to prevent or cope with VE (Osland and Erstad 2020).

Adaptive peacebuilding also cautions us to be realistic about what outside actors may be able to achieve. This can include anticipating and taking steps to prevent unintended consequences, such as being careful in their support to avoid delegitimizing local actors who can contribute to positive change. For any society to live sustainably in peace, it must generate its own capacity to self-organize. This process can be facilitated and supported by external peacebuilders, but it ultimately must be a bottom-up and home-grown process. Resilience cannot be imposed, and any attempt to impose solutions from the outside constitutes interference and disruption in the system. The more outside actors intervene in social systems, the more they undermine the emergence and effects of self-organization (de Coning 2016).

The adaptive peacebuilding approach provides a methodology for navigating this dilemma. In contrast with top-down approaches to peacebuilding, adaptive peacebuilding is a process where local, national, and international peacebuilders, together with the societies, communities and people affected by the conflict, actively engage in a structured collaborative process to sustain peace and resolve conflicts by employing an inductive and iterative process of learning and adaptation (de Coning 2018). Adaptive peacebuilding is a normative and functional approach to preventing and countering VE. It aims to navigate the inherent complexity of trying to nudge societal change processes toward sustaining peace without causing harm.

For peacebuilders—including those from within the communities, societies, and institutions affected by VE—supporting policies and programs that promote social inclusion, tolerance, and diversity can contribute to strengthening

horizontal and vertical trust. Similarly, adaptive peacebuilding initiatives that invest in local social institutions—such as traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, moderate religious leaders and practices, and local civil society organizations—can stimulate self-organization, local adaptive capacity and community resilience. Examples of the kind of initiatives that peacebuilding can support are the promotion of open and respectful dialogue, infrastructures for peace that support institutions that proactively prevent and manage tensions and disputes before they become violent conflicts, and encouraging common projects that benefit all, which can help build bridges between different communities and promote a sense of shared purpose and identity. Such a sense of belonging and collective and shared responsibility are the foundations for the emergence and sustainability of the social institutions that prevent and resolve conflicts and make people more resilient against VE.

10.3 Beyond Hard Security Responses: Empirical Evidence Supporting Holistic Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

10.3.1 Cabo Delgado, Mozambique

Chapter 3 presents a comprehensive analysis on the emergence of and responses to violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, since 2017. The insurgency, known locally as the *Mashababos*, is marked by its decentralized and community-embedded nature, posing significant challenges to peace, security, and development efforts in the region. The Mozambican government's predominant “security-first” responses, focusing on *hard security* operations, have proven largely ineffective in addressing the root causes of extremism, which include socio-economic issues, ethnic inequalities, and dissatisfaction with the government.

The chapter on Mozambique emphasizes the importance of understanding the complex and multilayered nature of the conflict. Key issues include socio-economic marginalization, ethnic disparities, and lack of adequate social services, which have fueled the insurgency. The insurgent group exploits these socio-economic vulnerabilities to gain support and legitimacy among local communities. The prevailing approach of the government and its international partners, although multidimensional in theory, lacks coordination and failed to effectively address these underlying causes. The emergence of local informal policing forces, like the *Namparamas*, underscores the limitations of state security forces and demonstrates the need for community-based initiatives that focus on prevention, understand local dynamics, and can effectively counter and prevent violent extremism.

In this context, the chapter advocates for a shift towards resilience, adaptive peacebuilding, and community-embedded prevention strategies. It argues for the integration of these approaches to foster self-sustaining peace. This involves empowering local communities and addressing socio-economic factors such as investing in agriculture, fisheries, and mining, which are major

employment sectors in the region. The focus on modern cooperativism in Mozambique, especially in conflict zones, is highlighted as a successful model that combines individual and collective capacities for sustainable development. Such cooperative models, which distribute resources and reduce violence and crime, could have been instrumental in preventing the conflict by functioning as micro-societies and early warning systems.

In summary, the chapter calls for holistic and inclusive approaches to address the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. It suggests that solutions should be grounded in the local context, focusing on socio-economic development, community empowerment, and sustainable practices rather than relying solely on security-focused responses.

10.3.2 Syria

Chapter 4 examines the complex situation related to VE in Syria, focusing on the rise and fall of ISIS and the subsequent challenges faced by the international community and local actors. It highlights two primary approaches to dealing with VE: hard security interventions and mitigation and prevention efforts, including humanitarian assistance and resilience building. The chapter articulates how military interventions, while successful in defeating ISIS, also altered the balance of power, contributing to the fragmentation of governance in Syria. On the other hand, non-military approaches, such as humanitarian aid and efforts to build resilience, are seen as crucial in situations of protracted conflict where full-scale peacebuilding programs are not feasible. These efforts, primarily led by Syrians, have been instrumental in bridging the gap between humanitarian, peace, and development actions.

The chapter also discusses the concept of resilience as an ability to adapt to difficult situations, emphasizing that building resilience should not be confined to post-conflict reconstruction. It demonstrates the international community's commitment to resilience building through humanitarian assistance, even during the peak of the conflict. However, the support for resilience building has been limited compared to the immediate, lifesaving humanitarian aid. Critically, the chapter points out that the assistance provided by the UN and other international agencies in cooperation with the Syrian government often did not reach areas controlled by opposition groups, leading to the need for the UNSC to address humanitarian crises without military intervention.

The control exerted by ISIS in northeastern Syria is characterized as a form of "non-state authority," whereby ISIS provided administrative and basic services, gaining some support from the local population. However, the reign of ISIS was marked by fear and brutality, and many Syrians joined ISIS primarily for economic reasons. The international community's military response to ISIS, while successful in dismantling its control of the region, often led to a weakened humanitarian situation and the deterioration of economic and social infrastructure. The chapter also explores the challenges of dealing with ISIS ex-combatants and the fragmented governance in Syria, emphasizing the

importance of supporting resilience-building efforts even in protracted and fragmented conflicts. It advocates for assistance that goes beyond lifesaving, addressing the need for peacebuilding support to maintain resilience and promote social cohesion during conflict.

In conclusion, the chapter notes that while military interventions have been somewhat successful in defeating ISIS, they have also reduced resilience and social cohesion by degrading economic and social infrastructure. The fragmented governance and the incomplete eradication of VE pose challenges. The chapter argues for the importance of supporting resilience building during conflicts and highlights the efforts of Syrians in implementing humanitarian assistance and resilience building, despite the limited support and fragmented nature of these initiatives.

10.3.3 Iraq

Chapter 5 explores Iraq's complex challenges in the post-ISIS era, emphasizing the need for social cohesion and reconciliation as fundamental elements for sustaining peace and security in a highly volatile situation. It highlights that cohesive communities are crucial for resilience against reemerging crises, including violent extremism and conflict. The chapter outlines the limitations of security-based approaches alone, instead advocating for more inclusive and comprehensive community-led strategies. These strategies should focus on addressing underlying issues such as marginalization, poor education, stigmatization, mistreatment by authorities, and sectarian divisions, which can drive violent extremism and other human security risks, turning Iraq into a recurring fragile state.

The historical context of Iraq, marked by deep-rooted ethnic tensions and violence, has contributed significantly to the current state of fragmentation and mistrust. The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the subsequent US-led intervention exacerbated these issues, leading to the rise of ISIS and further erosion of the social fabric. The chapter underscores the failure of liberal peacebuilding and state-building efforts to address the multifaceted challenges of ineffective governance, mistrust, and societal fractures. It stresses the importance of addressing root causes such as marginalization, lack of trust, broken social bonds, poor education, and sectarian tensions to prevent the resurgence of violent extremism.

The chapter further discusses the multifaceted nature of social cohesion, encompassing trust among community members and institutions, emotional attachment to community and institutions, and orientation towards the common good. It illustrates the fragile state of governance in Iraq, characterized by sectarian divisions, corruption, and the inability to maintain a monopoly of legitimate violence, exacerbating the social divides. The chapter emphasizes the role of local civil society organizations (CSOs) in peacebuilding, despite their limited influence on policy and dependence on international funding. It calls for longer-term programming and greater coordination among various humanitarian, peace, and development actors to

effectively address its deep-rooted challenges and effectively contribute to sustaining peace and social cohesion.

10.3.4 Niger

Chapter 6 explores the complex dynamics of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in Niger, with a particular focus on the gender dimensions of these efforts. This case underscores the importance of bottom-up approaches to understanding how civil society—especially women’s organizations—perceives and shapes P/CVE interventions. It highlights the significance of gender in developing resilience building projects, arguing that local actors, especially women, play a crucial role in reshaping and co-constructing intervention spaces. The chapter examines the conceptual frameworks of resilience, violent extremism, and peacebuilding through a gender lens, delving into the perceptions and challenges faced by local actors in implementing P/CVE projects.

The chapter provides an insightful analysis of the multidimensional nature of violent extremism in Niger, a country facing numerous interconnected challenges, including illicit migration, drug trafficking, inter-communal and inter-ethnic tensions, and the presence of jihadist groups. These groups have employed a combination of coercive tactics and incentives to gain local support, often targeting security forces rather than civilians, with women being relatively spared from direct harm. The research emphasizes the importance of alternative strategies that leverage the resilience capacities of local communities, especially considering gender aspects. In order to enhance women’s resilience, a gendered approach should focus on improving gender equity, which in turn will address the underlying structural inequalities that contribute to women’s vulnerability. Family is the primary unit of recruitment and resistance to violent extremism in a patriarchal society such as the one in Niger.

The chapter concludes with policy recommendations that call for a comprehensive and holistic approach to address the underlying drivers of violent extremism while prioritizing the needs of local communities. It suggests restoring state presence and providing security and services in neglected areas, engaging with local populations by including women in decision-making processes, and incorporating a nuanced understanding of resilience and adaptive responses within the context of jihadist governance. By adopting a multidimensional, adaptive, and context-specific approach, policymakers can develop more effective strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism in challenging rural environments.

10.3.5 Sri Lanka

Chapter 7 examines the complex interplay between violent extremism, its emotional impact on survivors, and resilience and peacebuilding efforts in post-war Sri Lanka. The study focuses on the multifaceted emotional impact on survivors

of extremist attacks, emphasizing the role of emotions in building resilience and peace. It discusses the need for peace interventions to address systemic issues and connect with survivors' everyday realities. The study compares various civilian-led and state interventions aiming to address VE, underscoring the strength of emotions in transforming hostilities into peacefulness.

The chapter emphasizes the importance of understanding local conceptualizations of VE and its emotional impact on survivors. It highlights how VE in Sri Lanka is influenced by the country's socio-political and historical context, including its civil war and ethno-religious divides. The study points out that VE is often perceived as ideologically motivated, but survivors question this notion, suggesting that VE is driven by socio-historical factors, coercion, and shared identity. The chapter also addresses how VE and its effects are integrated into the everyday lives of survivors, with radicalization processes being deeply embedded in their daily interactions and experiences of discrimination.

The chapter concludes with key lessons for developing effective reconciliation and peacebuilding programs. It suggests that any intervention targeting specific groups based on ethnicity, religion, or political affiliations is likely to fail at the local level, as communities seek inter-group harmony. The analysis underlines the need for interventions to work with survivors' everyday struggles and the contexts in which their perceptions of security, risk, and healing are formed. It stresses the importance of understanding trauma beyond individual symptoms, recognizing its complexity, and utilizing survivors' emotional capacities as a means to bridge divided identities. The chapter advocates for a process-based approach to peacebuilding that acknowledges and invests in survivors' capacities, addressing their vulnerabilities and utilizing emotions to foster individual and collective resilience.

10.3.6 Mindanao, the Philippines

Chapter 8 examines the shift from counterterrorism (CT) to countering and preventing violent extremism (P/CVE) in the Philippines, with a focus on addressing the root causes of VE, such as social, economic, and political marginalization. The chapter highlights a program implemented by The Asia Foundation (TAF), funded by the Australian government, to foster resilience to VE in Mindanao, a region in the Southern Philippines marked by conflicts and violence and ranked high on the Global Terrorism Index.

The chapter covers the complexity of conflict and violence in Mindanao, the policies and practices of CT and P/CVE in the Philippines, and the role of development agencies in fostering a resilience-based approach. It portrays the Communities of Inclusion and Resilience through Collaborative Local Engagement (CIRCLE) project as a significant attempt at resilience and P/CVE in Mindanao, contrasting participatory, resilience-based approaches with top-down, security-based approaches. The study adopts the analytical concept of a participatory resilience-based approach, emphasizing local and national ownership and contrasting it with traditional, top-down, security-

based approaches. The CIRCLE project approach, informed by complexity theory, focuses on non-linearity, self-organization, and process facilitation.

The chapter concludes with several key findings. First, despite the challenges of integrating P/CVE into development assistance, development agencies such as TAF have attempted to institutionalize community resilience and inclusion into local governance by identifying the drivers of VE. This approach considers the complex interplay of conflicts and violence, including VE and clan feuds, and contributes to strengthening the development–security–peace nexus. Second, development agencies are pivotal in facilitating stakeholder involvement in P/CVE, mediating tensions, and building confidence and trust among various actors. Lastly, these agencies contribute significantly to the capacity development of local government officials at the frontline of VE, helping them identify vulnerabilities and risks and prioritize resource allocation to mitigate conflicts while preventing new recruitment by VE groups.

10.3.7 Afghanistan, Mali, Somalia (Climate Change)

Chapter 9 explores the impact of climate change in peace and security contexts where violent extremism tends to emerge. It demonstrates how climate-induced stressors like food and water insecurity exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, erode social cohesion, and weaken community resilience. This can create fertile ground for violent extremism, as seen in countries such as Afghanistan, Mali, and Somalia, where extremist groups exploit these vulnerabilities for recruitment and gaining legitimacy. However, the chapter also argues that climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts can serve as entry points for strengthening social cohesion and resilience, thereby helping to counter violent extremism.

This case study acknowledges the complexity of the relationship between climate change, conflict, and violent extremism, emphasizing that it is neither linear nor mono-causal. Instead, it is shaped by context, space, time, and individual agency. The chapter illustrates how climate change intensifies vulnerabilities, which in turn can increase grievances and perceptions of exclusion and injustice, potentially leading to conflict. However, the response of communities and institutions to these challenges varies greatly, depending on their resilience and adaptive capacity. This variability makes it difficult to predict how specific communities will be affected by climate change, underscoring the need for adaptive strategies.

Finally, the chapter discusses the role of environmental peacebuilding in preventing and countering violent extremism. This approach, which involves sustainable and conflict-sensitive management of natural resources, can build resilience and reduce environmental impacts driving violent extremism. The chapter highlights the importance of integrating climate-related security risks into actions aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism. It suggests that peace and security operations should consider the impact of climate change in their planning and operations, fostering cooperation over scarce

resources and empowering communities, especially for women, in resource management and decision-making processes. This comprehensive and holistic approach, which combines peacebuilding and environmental sustainability, has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of security, humanitarian, development and peace responses in communities and societies under climate pressure.

10.4 Overall Findings: Grassroots Approaches for Self-sustaining Peace: Linking Adaptive Peacebuilding, Resilience, and Community-embedded Prevention

The overall findings provide insights into the link between resilience, peacebuilding, and preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE), resulting from the insights and analysis generated by the empirical case studies. Firstly, they validate the importance of local community engagement and empowerment in P/CVE efforts. Community-embedded prevention in areas affected by violent extremism is a critical approach employed by adaptive peacebuilding to strengthen resilience and social cohesion, and when it manages to meaningfully engage the communities, their combined actions contribute to preventing violent extremism. This approach stems from the realization that centralized and security-first approaches often fail to address the root causes of VE insurgencies, driven primarily by socio-economic grievances and dissatisfaction with state authorities. By integrating community-embedded prevention strategies, it is possible to foster a sense of ownership and agency among those most affected by violent extremism. Such strategies need to involve local communities directly in leading peacebuilding and preventive efforts, making these initiatives more effective and self-sustainable.

Peacebuilding has already evolved into a concept that encompasses the entire cycle of conflict: before, during, and after. Conflicts can recur even in seemingly stable societies, and once they have occurred, they do not proceed in a linear fashion; they vary from conflict to conflict. Therefore, it is important for development agencies to implement a comprehensive approach to address VE as early as possible to promote resilience and prevent VE, rather than waiting for the end of a conflict. In cases of humanitarian agencies working to save lives during conflict, despite various constraints, they can contribute to P/CVE and peacebuilding by enhancing resilience at the community level. The implementation of different types of assistance must contribute to facilitating local initiatives from a medium- to long-term perspective, as peace arises from the intrinsic aspirations of communities.

Therefore, fostering resilient development through grassroots initiatives should involve a deep understanding of the local socio-economic context. Investing in diverse sectors of local economies can play a significant role in building the resilience of local populations. For example, when violent extremism happens in rural societies, direct support to small-scale farmers and fishermen, the promotion of sustainable agricultural and fisheries practices, and support for local cooperatives and local fisheries can enhance economic

development and social cohesion. These initiatives not only address immediate socio-economic needs but also help reduce the risk of community members turning to violent extremist groups as a way of supplementing livelihoods through the income earned from such groups.

A holistic and integrated approach at the grassroots level is crucial to addressing the complex interplay of economic, social, political, and security factors in conflict and instability. Supporting local communities and fostering economic development at the local level can create a conducive environment for self-sustaining peace. This means eschewing globalized initiatives disconnected from local contexts that enrich national elites and benefit global shareholders—e.g. extractive industries that have little benefit for local communities. This approach should include platforms for community members to work collaboratively, promoting social cohesion and reducing the risk of violent extremism. Improving access to markets at the regional and national levels and providing training and technical assistance can enhance the productivity and competitiveness of local industries, contributing to poverty reduction, food security, and sustainable development.

In addition, to sustain peace and resilience at the grassroots level, it is essential to complement security operations with infrastructure development and reconstruction efforts. Building roads, schools, hospitals, and other critical infrastructure, as well as focusing on peace education and community policing, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding and P/CVE efforts. Engaging with community leaders, youth, and women at the local level through capacity building and education seminars is also vital if implemented through long-term initiatives. Such an approach ensures that interventions are not solely security-focused but are comprehensive and holistic, addressing the socio-economic root causes of violent extremism and fostering an environment conducive to long-term peace and stability.

The second set of findings emphasizes that the challenges around violent extremism are complex and require comprehensive and adaptive solutions. These challenges vary from the cascading effects of climate change that can, for example, exacerbate vulnerabilities in societies whose livelihoods are dependent on rain-fed agriculture, to the compounding complexity that arises when there are a large number of identity groups involved. This complexity can become even more challenging when some of these groups have international backing or when some international actors actively oppose other groups, as in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. To address these challenges, strategies for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) must go beyond the predominantly security-focused approach. P/CVE initiatives should incorporate environmental peacebuilding, address historical grievances and social injustices, and recognize the gender dimensions of these challenges. This requires a coordinated and holistic approach that facilitates local ownership and initiatives and combines security, development, and environmental sustainability to build strong and resilient communities that can withstand the many pressures that fuel extremism.

Lastly, the case studies covered in this edited volume stress the critical need for adaptive and flexible strategies that are responsive to the evolving dynamics of conflicts and extremism. This involves embracing non-linear and problem-solving-oriented peacebuilding that acknowledges the complexity of the contexts in which P/CVE efforts are deployed. This ability to adapt is crucial for ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of interventions, enabling continuous learning and adjustments in response to new challenges and opportunities. The integration of resilience building—from fostering economic resilience against climate-induced vulnerabilities to enhancing social resilience through emotional and psychological support—reflects a nuanced understanding of peacebuilding as a dynamic, multifaceted process. Collectively, these insights call for a paradigm shift towards more integrated, context-sensitive approaches that prioritize local agency, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and comprehensive methods for addressing the root causes of conflict and violent extremism.

10.5 Conclusion

This book aimed to improve our understanding of how best to prevent and manage VE. It had two objectives. The first was to develop a theory of change that explains how peacebuilding and development efforts that contribute to strengthening community, societal and institutional resilience help in preventing and countering violent extremism. The second was to consider how peacebuilding and resilience-informed, comprehensive approaches can serve as a framework for helping multilateral and bilateral agencies and other relevant actors to contribute more effectively to sustaining peace in regions affected by armed conflict and violent extremism.

This volume explored the gap between, on the one hand, the recognition at the global policy level that there are no military-only solutions to violent extremist insurgencies, while on the other, actual national and international responses to violent extremist insurgencies across the globe were typically security-led and enemy-focused. A security-led approach to preventing VE is typically focused on an identifiable aggressor and is aimed at disrupting and neutralizing the threat they pose to people and the state. We argued that identifying and deterring the threat posed by such actors may be necessary, but it is not sufficient. The challenge with a securitized approach is that it fails to take into account that VE and insurgencies are symptoms of underlying causes such as social, political, and economic inequality, marginalization, and exclusion. This book provided a theoretical and empirical basis for explaining that without transforming these drivers of conflict, there can be no sustainable peace.

The problem with security-led approaches is that not only do they tend to generate a backlash against the authorities that plays into the hands of the extremists, they also do not offer a sustainable solution to VE because they do not deal with the underlying drivers of VE. Thus, in this book, we explore a peacebuilding approach that recognizes that managing the insecurity caused by

VE is necessary but insufficient and that the broader socio-political system needs to be transformed to sustain peace. A resilience and peacebuilding-informed, comprehensive approach perceives VE groups as symptomatic of a wider set of grievances and drivers, and in addition to countering the insecurity caused by these groups, a resilience and peacebuilding approach focuses its primary efforts on addressing these drivers and grievances in the medium to long term, while aiming to strengthen community, societal, and institutional resilience to cope with their negative effects in the short to medium term.

Policies and programs that promote social inclusion, tolerance, and diversity can contribute to strengthening horizontal and vertical trust. Adaptive peacebuilding initiatives that invest in local social institutions, such as traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, moderate religious leaders and practices, and local civil society organizations, can stimulate self-organization, local adaptive capacity, and community resilience. A sense of collective and shared responsibility are the foundations for the emergence and sustainability of the social institutions that prevent and resolve conflicts and make people more resilient against VE.

Adaptive peacebuilding also cautioned us to be realistic about what is possible to achieve by outside actors and to anticipate and take steps to prevent unintended consequences, such as being careful in their support to avoid delegitimizing local resilience actors who contribute with positive change. Resilience cannot be imposed, and the more you intervene in social systems, the more you undermine the emergence and effects of self-organization. The adaptive peacebuilding approach provides a methodology for navigating this dilemma. In contrast with top-down approaches to peacebuilding, adaptive peacebuilding is a process whereby local, national, and international peacebuilders, together with the societies, communities and people affected by the conflict, actively engage in a structured collaborative process to sustain peace and resolve conflicts by employing an inductive and iterative process of learning and adaptation.

In this book, we have argued that if sustainable peace is the goal, then pursuing and maintaining an appropriate balance between the various elements of a comprehensive developmental and peacebuilding intervention will be the crucial element that determines effectiveness. This needs to be pursued in terms of the breadth of its dimensions (political, social, economic, security, etc.), spatial considerations (local to global levels) and temporal aspects (short, medium and longer term). This way of understanding peacebuilding resembles what has been called upstream prevention, where peacebuilders position themselves outside of a securitized approach, addressing the underlying causes of conflict and supporting societies to become more cohesive and resilient towards conflict and VE.

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