


# 'Mixing religious logics in peacebuilding': An Integrated interfaith approach to counter-violent extremism in Kenya

**Author:**Stephen A. Kapinde<sup>1,2</sup> **Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Research Institute for Theology and Religion, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Pwani University, Kilifi, Kenya

**Corresponding author:**Stephen Kapinde,  
kapinsaa@unisa.ac.za**Dates:**

Received: 09 Dec. 2024

Accepted: 28 Feb. 2025

Published: 29 May 2025

**How to cite this article:**

Kapinde, S.A., 2025, "Mixing religious logics in peacebuilding": An Integrated interfaith approach to counter-violent extremism in Kenya, *Theologia Viatorum* 49(1), a295. <https://doi.org/10.4102/tv.v49i1.295>

**Copyright:**

© 2025. The Author. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

**Read online:**

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

International discourses on counter-violent extremism (CVE) have been characterised by 'liberal notions' that view religion as problematic in addressing global peace and security. In the liberalisation of conflict, scholars have underestimated the potential of religion and interreligious actors as 'viable agents to conflict transformation' particularly in Kenya's CVE architecture that is more militaristic in approach. This essentially leaves little space for nonstate actors' engagement, including interfaith actors in peacebuilding and prevention of violent extremism (VE). Using grounded theory and adopting an integrated but multidimensional approach, this article seeks to systematically explore the interfaith initiatives (IFI) to VE in the Kenyan context.

**Contribution:** The article narrows down to the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics of Kenya (CICC-K) as an empirical case to understand how the integration of belief-oriented approaches (religious knowledge, ideas, beliefs, values and attitudes) can help in the prevention of VE both at the local and national levels. This is of significance considering that different interfaith groups have increased their social engagement in peacebuilding but with less collaboration with the state, which leads eventually to less impact on CVE and deradicalisation.

**Keywords:** CICC; counter-violent extremism; extremism; interfaith approaches; Kenya; peacebuilding.

## Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, the challenge of violent extremism (VE) has emerged as a significant threat to global security and social cohesion. This multi-faceted issue often intersects with religious beliefs and identities (Mandaville & Nozell 2017:2). Thus, religious actors can play a significant role in international peace and security, yet scholars have underestimated the contribution of religion in counter-violent insurgency from terrorist groups despite the existing consensus that religion is a 'viable tool for conflict transformation' (Kadayifci-Orellana 2013:149). Perhaps this academic neglect and undertheorisation of religion is largely because of the 'militarised' state approach to peacebuilding and counter-violent extremism (CVE). This leaves little space for nonstate actors' engagement, including interfaith actors in peacebuilding and prevention of VE. However, the role of religion in peacebuilding is quite complex and multifaceted because of the accusation that religion and religious fundamentalism provide an ideology for VE (Altemeyer & Hunsberger 1992; Arifianto 2017; Kundnani & Hayes 2018) and work against global security. Some scholars have described religious fundamentalism as an element of bad religion (Basedau, Pfeiffer & Vullers 2016) because radical religious beliefs and practices fuel violence (Gartenstein & Grossman 2009) and hinder development and international security. This, however, is a unidimensional and narrow construct of religion in VE and does not compressively account for the transformative role of religion in conflict, as evident in this study. Building on the emergent literature on religion, interfaith dialogue and conflict studies that expound on the role of religious actors in peacebuilding, this study draws attention to religious logic to peacebuilding by centring integrated interfaith initiatives (IFI) to CVE in Kenya. Broadly, the term CVE is used to refer to various interventions aimed at preventing or containing VE and terrorism in society (Fink 2015). While IFI refers to strategies, policies and practices designed by religious actors, including faith-based organisations (FBOs) in preventing radicalisation and VE.

Since September 11, 2001, East African countries witnessed the resurgence of VE and terrorism with a devastating impact. Undeniably, this was exacerbated by the ongoing counter-violent insurgency operations against Al-Qaeda-affiliated terror group, Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Kenya in particular faced more frequent and multiple terror-related attacks than any East African nation, Uganda and Tanzania combined. The first terrorist attack happened in 1980 when a terrorist

linked to the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) bombed a Jewish-owned Norfolk hotel in Nairobi. This was followed by the 07 August 1998 bombing of the American embassy in Nairobi, which claimed more than 200 lives with over 5000 wounded and injured (Gikunda 2003). Quantitatively, Kenya experienced 200 terrorist attacks between 2008 and 2014 with devastating impact on lives and properties (Pate & Miller 2015). The worst terrorist incident took place at Garissa University, where over 150 students were murdered with several injured (Makanda 2019). Beyond these incidents, the Al-Shabaab extremists continued to target both Muslims and non-Muslims through suicide bombings, direct attacks by armed insurgents, kidnappings, rape and the like.

In its response to VE and terrorism, the Kenyan government had underestimated as well as undervalued the significance of religion in CVE and generally profiled some faith-based institutions (especially mosques and madrassas) as potential grounds for recruitment of jihadists in East Africa. Broadly, the State CVE architecture relied extensively on a militarised approach characterised by extra-judicial methods and summary execution of suspected jihadists and violent extremists (Kundnani & Hayes 2018). Moreover, several mosques and madrassas were raided and closed on suspicion of harbouring radical clerics and youths. These raids were followed by a crackdown on humanitarian groups affiliated with Muslim organisations (BBC Africa 2015), thus equating Islam to extremism (Mogire & Agade 2011). In the wake of militarised and extra-legal approaches to CVEs and increased terror-related attacks, debates shifted to 'soft' approaches in which interfaith actors have a central role to play because of their grassroots presence and theological and social disposition in society. On the other hand, religious actors are viewed as having integrity and credibility, and the general motivation of their members based on romanticised religious logic of stewardship, compassion and humanitarianism (Heuser & Koehrsen 2020). According to this study, these religious logics were appropriated by interfaith actors in framing nonviolent strategies that challenged a theology of violence propagated by terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab.

More intriguing, however, extant literature lacks a systematic empirical analysis of IFI as an integrated intervention to VE in Kenya. Literature in social sciences has engaged extensively with state-led initiatives, particularly the so-called hard approaches (Botha & Mahdi 2020), yet there are still less encompassing accounts of IFI approaches in CVE from a sociological and religious perspective in Kenya. While there have been some exceptions, there is a risk that the current scholarly literatures does not reflect the 'missing link' between IFIs and state-led approaches and their concomitant effect on the ongoing war on terrorism and VE. This project narrowed on the integration of religious actors in the prevention of VE both at the local and national level in Kenya. This is of significance considering that different interfaith groups have increased their social engagement on peacebuilding but with less collaboration with the state, which leads eventually to less impact on CVE and

deradicalisation. For instance, while religious actors have been approached to support the ongoing efforts to tame VE and religious radicalisation, such calls came late and without clear guidelines on their specific mandate in the whole CVE architecture, making them have relatively little impact on peace processes. On the other hand, the epistemological differences between IFI and state actors on CVE are not easily overcome, and there is a need to create effective processes to enable better coordination between religious and state actors and build synergies towards achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation.

By positioning religious actors in CVE, this study bridged the gap between IFI and state-led approaches in the prevention of VE by engendering disparate but diverse voices from Kenya's religious landscape, which have been undertheorised in mainstream literature on religion and international security. The study investigated the interfaith initiatives employed by the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC) of Kenya, as they encompass religious diversity and a wide spectrum of views concerning religion and the prevention of VE. The scientific contribution of this work relates to studies on religion and public life, with a more heterogeneous and complex understanding of IFI in CVE. Thus, contributing to increased knowledge and awareness by amplifying the multidimensional capacity of religious actors in peacebuilding from the Global South. This has manifold significance, particularly to the interfaith organisations such as CICC working on peacebuilding. Firstly, the outcome of this study has policy implications for professionals and practitioners dealing with interfaith relations, peace and conflict studies. Thus, it may help in the identification of the main critical areas that require further research and capacity-building programmes among religious actors towards mitigation of VE. Secondly, the study addressed the 'missing links' in CVE by calling for mainstreaming of belief-oriented approaches in peacebuilding. Thirdly, the study provided research-based empirical insights on the interface between state and nonstate actors in CVE by focusing on their pivotal role in deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalised youths and jihadist offenders. Moreover, this study provided a conduit to capture valuable input from interfaith groups on CVE discourses from an interdisciplinary, yet multidimensional perspective.

## Case study and methods

This interdisciplinary research employed qualitative research methods in a complementary manner to capture different dimensions of religion and CVE in Kenya (Appendix 1). It benefited from interdisciplinary methods and training on grounded theology and ethnographic research. As such, the study employed ethnographic approaches in seeking to understand how religious actors respond to VE. It discerned the hidden costs and unintended consequences of their engagement in peacebuilding and reconciliation in a conflict-ridden and fragile context. The application of the grounded theory was motivated by its interdisciplinary relevance, capacity to interpret complex phenomena and its

appropriateness for socially constructed experiences (Charmaz 2003), such as those of victims of VE in conflict settings. Yet other scholars such as Bruce Stevens also appraise 'grounded theory' for its natural application to theological research, thus providing a means of drawing the nexus between theory and praxis (Bruce 2017). The central approach of this study was knowledge production from the grassroots or local religious actors who are undertheorised in international peace and security studies. The study targeted interfaith actors drawn from CICC involved in CVE. Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics brought together religious actors from different religions, including Islam (Sunni and Sufi), Christianity (Catholics, Pentecostals and Protestants), Buddhism and African Traditional Religion (ATR) and practitioners. Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics established a history of dealing with violence and mediating peace dating back to the 1990s when ethnic violence broke out in Coastal Kenya. By 2007, when Kenya witnessed devastating political violence, it had established structures and grassroots networks that were effective in its CVE crusade. Subsequently, interfaith actors from CICC were instrumental in generating sufficient data for this study. Based on purposive and theoretical sampling, a snowballing technique was used to identify potential respondents for the interviews and dialogic workshops. In this context, I conducted 20 face-to-face interviews with respondents in various locations to understand how they addressed VE. Thus prioritising their perspectives, approaches, religious insights, ideas and local experiences with VE in contemporary Kenyan society. Furthermore, conducting research from this perspective encouraged a joint theological reflection and coproduction of knowledge from the bottom up. Therefore, open-ended oral interviews with interfaith actors, in which they elaborated on some of their activities geared towards CVE, enhanced the personal interaction of the researcher with the participants. Primarily, the respondents were asked how they collaborated to address VE, main programmes (activities) and challenges they faced in their peacebuilding processes. This helped us understand how religious actors build social resilience to CVE. The unintended impact of such resilience on sustainable peace globally and how it defines interfaith relations and peaceful coexistence in Kenya. Lastly, oral data were complemented with discourse analysis of primary documents and reports from CICC on peacebuilding and CVE. The following section presents a summarised study outcome.

### **Integrated interfaith approaches to counter-violent extremism**

Following heightened VE and terrorism, the CICC initiated many public outreach programmes targeting youths, women and religious leaders across different faith groups. Firstly, CICC organised sensitisation programmes across different Coastal counties. The outreach programmes were marked by peace messages of coexistence, which were preached by a team of religious leaders and volunteers from different faith groups. These included public talks dubbed 'Gumzo Mtaani' aimed at sensitising communities on the threat of VE and why

communities needed to maintain peaceful coexistence (Stephen Khayenda, pers. Comm., 05 February 2024). Interviews with different actors on public outreach initiatives point to success stories in taming the wave of violence that had rocked coastal Kenya between 2010 and 2015. One of the respondents, Sheikh Ali Abdullahi, observed that:

Community engagement through open public gatherings effectively helped reach a wider audience from different faith groups to address the conflict and promote peaceful coexistence and social integration. (Abdullahi 2024)

Based on the interviews, it was noted that communities understood the problem of VE and decried the use of religion in luring school children into violence (Gloria Lupoi, pers. comm., 05 February 2024). They felt that religion had been instrumentalised by individuals and groups for political ends, particularly in the radicalisation of youths (Kiti & Maganya, pers. comm., 03 February 2024). The discussion was not hushed or swept under the carpet as they mentioned places where children were radicalised and demanded action (Mahmud Khalifa, pers. comm., 06 February 2024). Broadly, during the public talks, CICC came to learn that certain dumpsites had been turned into radicalisation grounds because Quranic verses had been found and individuals had been seen a couple of times on the sites (Mahmud, pers. Comm., 06 February 2024 & Khayenda, pers. Comm., 05 February 2024). Based on the intervention of CICC, the County Government of Mombasa cleared the dumpsites. Consequently, the community appreciated the work of CICC in addressing their plights and building peace in society. Secondly, the CICC also organised peace walks in violent-prone areas to complement their public talks (Gloria Lupoi, pers. comm., 05 February 2024). The walks dubbed 'msafara wa amani' or peace caravans were used to mobilise people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to reject violent ideologies and embrace peaceful coexistence. As one of the participants noted, 'We walk for peace but also for our faith, which was erroneously demonised for promoting extremism' (Khalifa, pers. Comm., 04 February 2024). Ideally, the soft approaches such as peace walks adopted by CICC were significant in building community resilience and challenging violent ideologies (Willybard Lagho, pers. comm., 08 February 2024).

Thirdly, interfaith symbolic prayers were conducted regularly and attended by people of different faith groups. The respondents acknowledged the significance of 'the power of grassroots community engagement in promoting peaceful coexistence'. They noted that positive interreligious cooperation through interfaith prayers, teachings and interreligious celebration of various religious rituals was essential in building trust and erasing historical tensions that have existed over the years (Taqbir, pers. Comm., 03 February 2024, Khamisi, pers. Comm., 04 February 2024 & Mahmud, pers. Comm., 06 February 2024). Additionally, the interfaith prayers provided opportunities for promoting counter-narratives against violent ideologies. In one of the interfaith

workshops, different religious actors discussed shared religious customs, rituals and practices such as fasting.

Fourthly, the interfaith group also used art to CVE. In a project dubbed Art4peace, CICC, in collaboration with one of the state agencies, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and local security agencies, engaged the youths in drawing and murals as part of social change from VE and criminal activities. Artwork has been proven to be an effective tool in peacebuilding globally (see, for instance, Kim 2020). Subsequently, CICC employed Art4peace to provoke dialogue, diversity and inclusion but also build a civic culture (Richard Airo, pers. comm., 07 March 2024). According to Cynthia Cohen, 'Arts are resources for addressing conflicts, reconciling former enemies, resisting authoritarian regimes, memorialising the past and imagining and giving substance to a better future' (Cohen 2017:1). In his assessment of Art4peace, Airo, one of the CICC board members, argues that art exhibitions and cultural events created spaces for building interfaith relationships and social bonds necessary for peaceful co-existence (Airo 2024:152). The CICC art activities were complemented with dialogical workshops for the youth and women who were vulnerable to VE by radical and fundamentalist groups (Jackson, pers. Comm., 22 June 2024, Kalu, pers. Comm., 08 February 2024 & Airo, pers. Comm., 07 March 2024). As one respondent noted, 'Extremists had taken advantage of religion to lure community members into violence' (Jackson, pers. Comm., 22 June 2024). They used religious texts as justification for their violent actions, often calling upon the people to defend their faith against secularisation and other religious competitors. This was compounded by historic socioeconomic marginalisation by successive postcolonial regimes. Broadly, the youths and women were particularly affected by VE, which caused them to suffer trauma, stigma and harassment. They were unable to refute the scriptures used to justify violence as they lacked counter-narratives against extremist dogma. As this study untangles the gender dynamics in VE, there was indeed less analytical focus on women and VE despite the fact that some had participated in the recruitment of terrorists. In studies conducted in Indonesia, Syria, Iraq and Pakistan, there were robust analysis on women's pathways to violence, either as wives, ideologues or online activists (Gan et al. 2019; Macfarlane 2024). However, in Kenya, less accounts were dedicated to the entanglement of women and VE with the exception of empowerment workshops conducted by CICC.

In underscoring the relevance of the gendered dimension of VE, between June 2015 and August 2016, CICC conducted two sessions per month for 6 months with women drawn from Tana River County, Mombasa, Lamu and Kwale and later with the youths through a similar approach. In one of the meetings attended by the researcher, the women shared their experiences and narratives with violence, thus engendering CVE in Kenya. Some women whose children have been recruited by extremist groups decried the stigma and exclusion their families faced in society (Stephen

Khayenda, pers. Comm., 05 February 2024). Others also noted that they were not able to trace their children who joined extremist groups. While women were projected as victims of terrorism, it was noted that they played diverse roles in VE, including working as recruitment agents, spies, brides and cooks, among other roles (Badurdeen 2020). On the other hand, women and youths are also viewed as transformative agents in countering VE (Barbera 2020). Thus, in the CICC workshops attended by different interfaith leaders, women were engaged in developing counter-narratives, thus empowering them with the knowledge to protect their families from VE (CICC 2022).

In a similar workshop with the youths, they highlighted the drivers that make them join violent groups, including socioeconomic inequalities, unemployment, political marginalisation and social injustices, which forced the majority to end up in VE. This was compounded by inadequate religious knowledge and formal education (Mahmud, pers. Comm., 06 February 2024). Consequently, they made poor judgement and decisions because of a lack of knowledge. Furthermore, the desire for recognition and status in the community, which comes with money and power, made some youths join terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia (Khamisi, pers. Comm., 04 February 2024, Mwanaisha, pers. Comm., 04 February 2024 & Mustafa, pers. Comm., 06 February 2024). To address these pull factors and based on its integrated and multidimensional approach to peacebuilding and CVE, the interfaith group initiated economic empowerment programmes to help vulnerable families across coastal counties. This was undertaken through cash transfers, construction of houses, payment of school fees to children from poor households and providing funds for the reintegration of rehabilitated violent extremists (Lupoi, pers. Comm., 05 February 2024 & Khayenda, pers. Comm., 05 February 2024). In addition, the CICC also paid health insurance premiums for vulnerable households (CICC 2022). These development programmes, however, were effective because of partnerships with other state and nonstate agencies. Sufficing these development programmes were effective in persuading some youths to abandon crime and violence. During a community theatre activity held at Vienna grounds in Mombasa, eight youths surrendered to CICC, who intervened on their behalf with the county security committee for amnesty (Mbodze, pers. comm., 04 February 2024). The youths were later enrolled in a rehabilitation centre before gradually being reintegrated back into the community. By the close of 2021, over 500 youths had surrendered and were placed under the reformation programme (Mbodze, pers. comm., 04 February 2024). These youths undertook different short certificate courses on life skills, mentorship, business skills, etc.

Lastly, the interfaith group leveraged technology to prevent VE. The project, dubbed Expanding Spaces to Countering and Preventing Extremism (ESCAPE), entailed developing narratives against VE for the online community. The religious leaders created alternative narratives by recording their sermons for teachings for the online community. This was

because extremist groups were utilising digital spaces for radicalisation of people. The interfaith actors decided to work with alternative narratives, creating a different ideology and working to sell it. An ideology derived from scriptures focused on the positive messages of peace and social cohesion (Khayenda, pers. Comm., 05 February 2024 & Mahmud, pers. Comm., 06 February 2024). The CICC, for example, embarked on a step-by-step guide to assisting religious leaders in understanding how to create alternative narratives. They had to understand the problem, know their audience, the communication channel and how they would package their peace messages. Through intrareligious dialogues, religious leaders created different messages and had them backed with scriptures; then they chose social media as the ideal channel as many young people were found on social media (Mahmud, pers. Comm., 06 February 2024). Through the programme, a total of 24 religious leaders were used to video record the messages, which were later uploaded on CICC Facebook pages (Mahmud, pers. Comm., 06 February 2024). The religious leaders appreciated the exercise and were amazed by how one can create very different and good messages that will be receptive as opposed to countering a message. Expanding spaces to countering and preventing extremism was significant as extremists used social media as a tool for luring susceptible people to their violent activities, including recruitment, propaganda, planning and executing attacks across the world (Gielen 2017; Stewart 2017). Correspondingly, CICC, through a multidimensional approach, helped clerics to design counter-narratives or counter-messaging to violent ideologies as opposed to the militarised approach adopted by the state.

Empirical analysis of the interreligious approaches demonstrates that dialogical practices 'helped different faith communities to draw meanings and enrich their interpretations, motivations and strategies' on CVE (Kadayifci-Orellana 2013). The interfaith initiatives demonstrated a shift from the militarised approach to the adoption of integrated approaches involving the whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering VE. This study established that the CICC was involved in the CVE process partly because of the growing calls for the involvement of religious actors in designing and implementing policies on peace and security (Willybard Lagho, pers. comm., 08 February 2024). The interfaith activities of CICC were complemented by the Interreligious Council of Kenya (IRCK), a national umbrella group bringing different faith leaders together, which offered technical support. In addition, Agiamondo, another international nonstate actor, sponsored many CICC interreligious projects including provision of technical experts (Richard Airo, pers. comm., 07 March 2024). The partnership with secular organisations as well as government agencies served as a counterforce to the perception of religion as intolerant and destructive to peace and security by viewing it as a unifying factor in CVE interventions. Consequently, this led to the recent mainstreaming of religious knowledge and

counter-narrative in Kenya's CVE architecture. While the CICC initially took a minimalist perspective by focusing on the dialogue between religious leaders and/or actors, it changed its trajectory. It adopted a maximalist approach to comprehensively address the conflict by involving the whole-of-society approach, thus identifying the social roots of VE and embracing noncoercive solutions in its peacebuilding processes. The latter has been appraised by scholars in peacebuilding studies as effective in preventing and countering VE as opposed to repressive approaches involving military and police interdictions (Ahmed 2019). By adopting the new approach, CICC allowed adherents of diverse religions and cultures to learn about the 'other' and acquire training on interreligious engagement, mutual respect and tolerance (Khayenda, pers. Comm., 05 February 2024 & Airo, pers. Comm., 07 March 2024). In addition, it generated a level of understanding and coordinated local action to foster peaceful coexistence, social cohesion and nation building. The dialogical practices, for instance, workshops targeting women and youths, helped in mapping social-risk factors of vulnerability to VE. In addition, the workshops provided spaces for demystifying violent ideologies, thus shattering theological misconceptions constructed by extremist groups to achieve socioeconomic and political goals.

Although interfaith actors were inalienable partners in countering VE through their holistic approach, they did face challenges. Firstly, poor coordination of some joint programmes because of competing interests, that is, the CICC Action Plan on CVE, faced numerous challenges, including a lack of commitment from various stakeholders (Richard Airo, pers. comm., 07 March 2024). Consequently, this impacted programmatic effectiveness, institutional processes and financial security. Secondly, theological and doctrinal differences emerged as a result of the interpretation of various texts, which led to suspicion among and between different interreligious actors (Khayenda, pers. Comm., 05 February 2024). While CICC was cautious enough in its approach to interfaith dialogue, some of its members were trapped in the doctrinal debates that undermined the corporate vision and hindered constructive dialogue and sustainable peace (Airo, pers. Comm., 07 March 2024 & Khayenda, pers. Comm., 05 February 2024). This, however, was worsened by a hermeneutical challenge because of the pluralistic nature of the organisation. Indeed, interreligious dialogue and belief-oriented approaches to CVE require an intercultural hermeneutic that embraces diversity, relates similarities in ethical practices of coexistence and appreciates religious differences as an existential reality. This does not mean that individuals compromise on their faith over dialogue on unresolvable differences rather focusing largely on shared heritage, ethical values and practices that promote peace, harmony and social cohesion (Airo 2024:176). Thus, a cross-cultural hermeneutic should help each participant in dialogue to understand their religion better and discover the areas in which their religion is unique. But also recognising that differences exist and seeking to understand them without compromising their own beliefs. A few studies in

Asia, mainly Indonesia, have shown that tolerant religious education has effectively reduced cases of radicalism and violence (Kirana 2018; UNDP Report 2019), yet on the other hand, the hermeneutical crisis underscores a deficit in interreligious dialogue as far as its peace-promoting potential is concerned, thus embracing an integrated and multidimensional approach is still necessary. Thirdly, another challenge is assessing interfaith initiatives' effectiveness in peacebuilding processes. While generally, we may not completely eradicate cases of radicalisation and VE, there have been challenges in evaluating the effectiveness of belief-oriented programmes as VE is context specific. Indeed, literatures on CVE acknowledge gaps in monitoring and evaluation of programme effectiveness (Charkawi, Dunn & Ana-Maria Bliuc 2024; Gielen 2019). Emerging evaluation concerns relate to questions of successful deradicalisation programmes, and defining what success looks in CVE programmes is also problematic. Thus, there is a growing need to expand and develop diverse measuring indexes and tools on prevention and countering VE as a whole.

## Conclusion

Religious beliefs, values and practices can provide 'moral warrants' that can either escalate VE by sanctifying violence or de-escalate extremist acts through counter-narratives and the promotion of theologies of peace. However, this study essentially established that prevention of VE requires an integrated and multidimensional approach as terrorism and violence are not rooted in one cause, whether political, religious, historical and socioideological. Subsequently, it called for the mainstreaming of religious logic from interfaith groups such as the CICC in the prevention of VE. The CICC demonstrated the positive power of faith in preventing VE through its interreligious actions and dialogical practices. Through its public talks and workshops, including *Gumzo Mtaani*, CICC helped different faith communities embrace nonviolent options for conflict mitigation. In addition, the interfaith dialogue allowed different communities to deepen their understanding and appreciation of their religious heritages as well as that of others in peacebuilding. But more importantly, building a dialogue of life where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, thus inspiring a vision for a peaceful world. This form of dialogue acknowledged the potential for interfaith exchanges and growth that happen, often unnoticed, at a local community as well as national level. It pointed to, honoured and celebrated peacebuilding from the bottom up rather than from the top down common with state peacebuilding initiatives. Furthermore, the interfaith actors also engaged in dialogue with action in which persons of all religions collaborated for the integral development of society as a whole. Finally, the CICC, through a broad range of programming including creation of awareness, capacity building, counter-narrative messaging and many other targeted programmes for youths and women, helped in addressing issues of identity and social cohesion by reducing emerging intergroup tensions, strengthening communication and fostering mutual respect, community integration and national stability.

## Acknowledgements

Much appreciation to Prof. M.E. Baloyi for his guidance and support throughout this research. The author would also like to acknowledge the support from Research Institute for Theology and Religion (RITR), University of South Africa, for the support during this study.

## Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contribution

S.A.K. is the sole author of this research article.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained by Pwani University Ethics Review Committee at Pwani University (approval no.: ERC/PU-STAFF/006/2022). This study was part of broader research on religion and peacebuilding in Kenya that went through ethical clearance.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

## References

- Ahmed, S., 2019, 'Combating violent extremism cannot be limited to just security', *The Daily Star*, viewed 23 June 2024, from <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/perspective/news/combating-violent-extremism-cannot-be-limited-just-security-1741189>.
- Airo, O.R., 2024, 'Interreligious Dialogue: A Roman Catholic Church Pastoral Approach for Social cohesion in Kenya, *Archdiocese of Mombasa (1983–2023)*', Unpublished PhD Thesis of Pwani University, Kenya.
- Altemeyer, B. & Hunsberger, B., 1992, 'Authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, quest, and Prejudice', *International Journal Psychology Religion* 2, 113–133. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr0202\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr0202_5)
- Arifianto, A.R., 2017, 'Islamic defenders front: An ideological evolution?', *RSIS Comment* 228, 1–3, viewed from <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CO17228.pdf>.
- Badurdeen, F., 2020, 'Women who volunteer: A relative autonomy perspective in Al-Shabaab recruitment in Kenya', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 13(4), 616–637. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2020.1810993>
- Barbera, N., 2020, 'How Kenya's Women are Preventing Violence and Extremism', *United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Blog*, 05 March 2020, 16 March 2024, from <https://www.usip.org/blog/2020/03/howkenyas-women-are-preventing-extremism-and-violence>.

- Basedau, M., Pfeiffer, B. & Vullers, J., 2016, 'Bad religion? Religion, collective action, and the onset of armed conflict in developing countries', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60(2), 226–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002714541853>
- BBC Africa, 2015, *Kenya court rules Haki Africa and MHR not terrorists*, viewed 18 April 2024, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33092786>
- Botha, A. & Mahdi, A., 2020, *Experiences in the Kenyan Criminal Justice System and violent extremism*, viewed from <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Experiences-in-the-Kenyan-Criminal-Justice-System-and-Rates-of-Violent-Extremism.pdf>.
- Bruce, A.S., 2017, 'Grounded theology? A call for a community of practice', *Practical Theology* 10(2), 201–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1308455>
- Charkawi, W., Dunn, K. & Ana-Maria Bliuc, 2024, 'Evaluations of countering violent extremism programs: Linking success to content, approach, setting, and participants', *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 77, 100674. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcrj.2024.100674>
- Charmaz, K., 2003, 'Grounded theory – Objectivist and constructivist methods', in N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, pp. 249–291, Sage, London.
- CICC, 2022. *Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC). CICC Development Report*, August, 2022 Mombasa, Kenya.
- Cohen, C., 2017, *Arts and building peace: The basics and envisioning the future*, viewed 20 August 2024, from <https://www.icip.cat/perlapau/en/article/arts-and-building-peace-the-basics-and-envisioning-the-future/?pdf>.
- Fink, N.C., 2015, 'Countering violent extremism: What are the key challenges for UN?', *The Global Observatory*, 03 November, viewed 05 March 2024, from <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2015/11/countering-violent-extremism-united-nations-ban-ki-moon/>.
- Gan, R., Neo, L.S., Chin, J. & Khader, M., 2019, 'Change is the only constant: The evolving role of women in the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)', *Women & Criminal Justice* 29(4/5), 204–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2018.1547674>. January 12, 2024.
- Gartenstein, R.D. & Grossman, L., 2009, *Homegrown terrorists in the US and UK: An empirical examination of the radicalization process*, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Washington, DC.
- Gielen, A.J., 2017, 'Evaluating countering violent extremism', in L. Colaert (ed.), *Deradicalisation: Scientific insights for policy*, pp. 101–118, Tomas Baum, Leuvenseweg, Brussels.
- Gielen, A., 2019, 'Countering violent extremism: A realist review for assessing what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how?', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31(6), 1149–1167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1313736>. February 20, 2024.
- Gikunda, K., 2003, *Terrorism in Kenya*, viewed 29 July 2023, from <http://web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/Terrorism%20in%20Kenya.htm>.
- Heuser, A. & Koehrsen, J., 2020, 'From a quiet revolution to the tolerance of ambiguity: Religious NGOs in international development discourse', in A. Heuser & J. Koehrsen (eds.), *Does religion make a difference? Religious NGOs in International Development Collaboration*, pp. 1–13. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden.
- Kadayifci-Orellana, S.A., 2013, 'Interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding', in C. Cornille (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to inter-religious dialogue*, pp. 149–167, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., Hoboken, NJ.
- Kim, S., 2020, 'Peacebuilding in Korea through Minjung art: Struggle for justice and peace', in J. Mitchell, G. Vincett, T. Hawksley & H. Culbertson (eds.), *Peacebuilding and the arts. Rethinking peace and conflict studies*, pp. 71–90, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Kirana, D., 2018, 'Enhancing religious education: An attempt to counter violent extremism in Indonesia', *Studia Islamika* 25(1), 199–206.
- Kundhani, A. & Hayes, B., 2018, *The globalisation of countering violent extremism policies undermining human rights, Instrumentalising Civil Society*, Societal Security Network of Excellence, Amsterdam.
- Macfarlane, K., 2024, 'Indonesian women and terrorism: An analysis of historical and contemporary trends', in N. Franklin & H. Hägerdal (eds.), *Indonesian heroes and villains: National identity, politics, law, and security, politics and governance*, pp. 38–52, Cogitatio Press, Lisbon.
- Makanda, J., 2019, 'Fighting terrorism in the horn of Africa: The role of ordinary Kenyans in Kenya's military intervention in Somalia and the fight against al-Shabaab', *Journal of African Union Studies* September, 08, 2023. 8(1), 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4306/2019/v8n1a2>
- Mandaville, P. & Nozell, M., 2017, 'Engaging religion and religious actors in countering violent extremism', *Special Report* 413, the United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC.
- Mogire, E. & Agade, K.M., 2011, 'Counter-terrorism in Kenya', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29(4), 473–491. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2011.600849>. September 08 2023.
- Pate, A., Jensen, M. & Miller, E., 2015, *Al-Shabaab Attack on Garissa University in Kenya*, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, College Park, Maryland.
- Stewart, C.M., 2017, 'Countering violent extremism policy in the United States: Are CVE programs in America effectively mitigating the threat of homegrown violent extremism?', Doctoral dissertation, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA.
- UNDP, 2019, 'Fostering tolerant religious education to prevent violent extremism in Indonesia', UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME Report, 22nd March 2019.

Appendix starts on the next page →

## Appendix 1

### Interviews

Abdullahi Salim, digital recording, dialogic interview by the author on 4th February, 2024 at al Ridha Muslim Complex, Likoni, Mombasa: Kenya.

Gloria Lupoi, digital recording, interview by the author on 5th February, 2024 at CICC offices, Nyali, Mombasa: Kenya.

Innocent Maganya, digital recording, interview by the author on 3rd February, 2024 at St. Joseph Pastoral Centre, Tudor, Mombasa: Kenya.

Jackson Mwamburi, field notes, interview by the author on 22 June 2024 at Mombasa: Kenya.

Julius Kalu, digital recording, interview by the author on 8th February, 2024 at his home, Kakuyuni, Malindi: Kenya.

Mahmud Khalifa, digital recording, interview by the author on 6th February 2024 at Masjid, Swahilina, Kisauni, Mombasa: Kenya.

Mustafa Genz, digital recording, online interview by the author on 6th February, 2024 from St. Joseph Tudor, Mombasa: Kenya.

Mustafa Mbodze, digital recording, interview on 4th February 2024 at al Ridha Muslim Complex, Likoni, Mombasa: Kenya.

Mwanaisha Rashid, digital recording, dialogic interview by the author on 4th February, 2024 at al Ridha Muslim Complex, Likoni, Mombasa: Kenya.

Richard Airo, digital recording, dialogic interview by the author on 7th March, 2024 at St. Joseph, Tudor, Mombasa: Kenya.

Samuel Kiti, digital recording, interview by the author on 3rd February 2024 at St. Joseph, Tudor, Mombasa: Kenya.

Stephen Khayenda, digital recording, interview by the author on 5th February, 2024 at CICC offices, Nyali, Mombasa: Kenya.

Ustadh Khamisi, digital recording, dialogic interview by the author on 4th February, 2024 at al Ridha Muslim Complex, Likoni, Mombasa: Kenya.

Ustadh Taqbir, digital recording, interview by the author on 3rd February 2024 at Masjid, Saada, Mkomani, Mombasa: Kenya.