



# POSITIVE ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES ON PREVENTION AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN KENYA

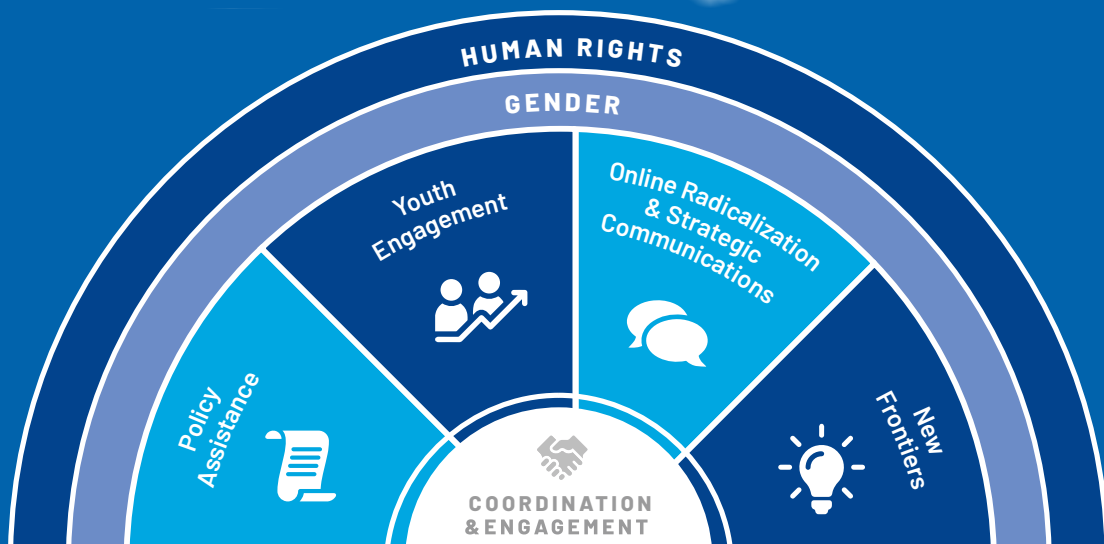
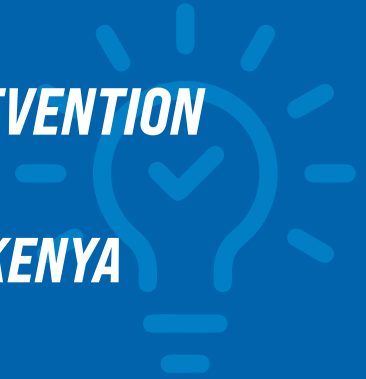
## POLICY BRIEF



SEPTEMBER  
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# POSITIVE ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES ON PREVENTION AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN KENYA



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This Policy brief presents the outcome of consultations between the IRCK, Christian and Muslim theologians, religious leaders and legal experts who provided their religious expertise in the process of developing of positive alternatives to the prevention and countering of violent extremism (PCVE). The brief is the result of a study based on a desk review done by the consultant and stakeholder engagement in selected Counties where piloting was undertaken.

Kenya remains a key target for violent extremist groups, particularly Al-Shabaab and its affiliated off-shots, due to its strategic position and proximity to the war-torn Somalia. Extremist groups in Kenya and beyond misuse religious narratives and texts to legitimise violence and exploit religion to recruit and radicalise youth. Extremist groups also capitalise on economic and social grievances to recruit followers. Abuse and misinterpretation of religious texts not only threaten national security but also undermine peaceful religious co-existence and tolerance among Kenya's citizens. Hence, the ill-fated negative narratives propagated by extremist group need to be countered by positive alternative and scriptural narratives grounded in the same religious texts misused by the extremist groups.

Kenya, continues to face violent extremism fueled by ideological manipulation of religious texts. Though security agencies have played a vital role in countering violent extremism, there is a need to also use theologically rooted positive narratives from the Holy Scriptures, Christian and Islamic, which can dismantle extremist ideologies and instead offer authentic and positive alternatives.

This policy brief provides alternative positive narratives derived from scriptural references specifically from the Quran, Hadith and the Bible which will lay a firm foundation for policy makers, clergy and community leaders to effectively prevent and counter radicalisation of youth and extremist activities.

The policy brief seeks to demonstrate how positive alternative narratives grounded in Christian and Islamic teachings can be used to prevent and counter violent extremism in Kenya. By leveraging on authentic religious texts and positively interpret them within our contemporary lenses, these positive alternative narratives will effectively de-legitimise extremist propaganda and promote peace and social cohesion among the citizens of Kenya.

The Policy brief emphasises commitments of government authorities which include, The National Intelligence Service (NIS) and the Kenya Police Service and religious institutions, namely the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslim (SUPKEM) and the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), NGO's/CSO's and international partners in its support and efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism in Kenya and beyond.



## 2. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Consultations were made between the IRCK and Christian and Muslim theologians, religious leaders and legal experts to provide their specific religious expertise in the process of developing positive alternatives to the prevention and countering of violent extremism. The consultant undertook a desk review in which literature related to theological and ideological narratives was studied and evaluated. He also examined the relevant policy and theological materials misused by violent extremist groups to radicalise individuals in Kenya. The consultant also mapped legislative frameworks and identified advocacy opportunities. The desk-review was guided by the following:

In addition to the desk review, Counties were selected to engage key stakeholders for a pilot scheme which formed an important part of this Policy brief.

The focus of these consultations was to identify scriptural misinterpretations commonly used to justify violent extremism and provision of well-reasoned theological rebuttals to the extremist narratives from a peace and human rights-based approach. The deliberations also focused on identifying opportunities for cultivating cohesion and peaceful co-existence principles to align with the national ideals of social harmony in the country.

## 3. CURRENT CONTEXT

Violent extremism is not only a national problem but has become a global threat which continues to cause regional and local turmoil. In Kenya Al-Shabaab have launched several terrorist attacks which include the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in September 2013 where more than 70 people perished, the April 2015 Garissa University College attack that killed 148 and the January 2019 DusitD2 Complex (Nairobi) strike that claimed more than 20 lives.

In response to terrorist attacks, the government embarked on stern security measures. In April 2024, the security agencies launched "operation Usalama watch" focused on Nairobi's Eastleigh area which targets suspected links with terrorist groups from Somalia. Security forces rounded up suspects, held them at a stadium for screening and thereafter deported several to Somalia. The operation was criticised by human rights groups for its mass profiling of those arrested without following due process in deporting those with refugee status.

Kenya has faced more than 200 violent extremism incidents and terrorist attacks between 2012 and 2023 in different towns which include Mombasa, Lamu, Garissa and Nairobi causing hundreds of deaths and displacement of nearly 30,000 people displaced in Lamu and Garissa.





#### 4. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The promulgation of the constitution of Kenya 2010 ushered in a new era for citizen protection and enjoyment of basic human rights. The initial implementation of the Constitution has seen a significant improvement in the promotion and protection of human rights, gender equality and access to justice for many Kenyans. For instance, Article 32 provides for and protects freedom of conscience, religion, belief and opinion allowing citizens to manifest their religion publicly and privately without discrimination. However, guaranteed constitutional safeguards are being utilised to deter security measures in combating and countering violent extremist activities.

Security agencies in Kenya continue to face challenges in determining and preventing violent extremist activities due to constitutional guarantees and public pressure. Kenya has strong laws related to the prevention and countering of violent extremism which include, the Prevention of Terrorism Act and The National Cohesion Act of 2018. However, there has been increased criticism of these Acts by human rights activists citing human rights abuses by security agencies for prioritising security concerns over human rights considerations manifested in irregular arrests and unconstitutional detention of extremist suspects without adhering to proper legal process.

#### 5. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) is a multi-religious partnership of all major faith communities in Kenya namely the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK), the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA), the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM), The National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF), the Shia Ithna Sharia Muslim Association and the Hindu Council of Kenya (HCK). Each of these religious coordinating bodies has a national coverage with structures that reach the grassroots. Additionally, IRCK has formed Local Interfaith Networks to act as platforms for local advocacy and action in various counties.

The Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK), under the Peacebuilding and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) in East Africa Programme, engaged Christian and Muslim theologians, religious leaders and legal experts to address radicalisation and violent extremism and strengthening the role of religious leaders, institutions, and networks in countering extremist ideologies. One of the key components of these consultations was the identification and rebuttal of the theological and ideological justifications used by violent extremist groups in Kenya, particularly those exploiting religion to recruit and radicalise individuals. The Consultant undertook to develop this Policy brief that incorporated positive alternative narratives in the prevention and countering violent extremism in line with the IRCK's policies and in accordance with the final agreed Term of Reference (TORs).





## 6.1 Rationale for the Policy Brief

PCVE requires a holistic approach which will combine theological, legal and advocacy strategies and integrate efforts undertaken by Government security agencies, religious institutions and community leaders to ensure sustainable peaceful co-existence and cohesion in the society.

The main objective of this policy brief is to provide the framework for the development and implementation of positive alternative narrative to PCVE. The policy brief has five specific objectives which government security agencies and religious institutions will ensure are undertaken namely:

1. Provide a framework for coordination and enabling environment for developing and disseminating positive alternative narratives on PCVE.
2. Undertake coordination and integrated capacity building towards empowering government security agencies religious institutions and community leaders in the understanding and disseminating of positive alternative narration on PCVE.
3. Provide inclusion and effective participation of religious minorities and marginalized groups.
4. Guarantee adequate secure and sustainable funding for the development of positive alternative narrative on PCVE.
5. Promote well resourced, updated and effectively implemented monitoring, evaluation, feedback processes and reporting mechanisms.

## 6.2 Guiding Principles

Processes in the development of positive alternative narratives shall be guided by adherence to the following principles.;

1. Right of every individual, group, community and religious organisation to be involved .
2. Provision of adequate and effective mechanisms and opportunities for participation in the development of positive alternative narratives on PCVE.
3. Inclusion of religious and marginalised groups in the process of developing and disseminating positive alternative narration on PCVE.
4. Non-discrimination and accommodation respecting diversity, people's faith values, culture and customs.
5. Adequate monitoring, evaluation, feedback and reporting mechanism.



### 6.3 Policy Brief Priority Areas

This section provides six policy brief areas highlighting concerns and recommendations to address the concerns. Past experiences from initiatives on Countering Violent Extremism provide important lessons on the need to develop positive alternative narrative on PCVE. This policy brief seeks to address inadequate capacity of government security agencies and religious institutions, insufficient coordination between the two entities, lack of mechanism for identification and inclusion of religious minorities and marginalised groups.

The Policy brief areas include:

- Legal Frameworks
- Institutional Arrangements
- Inadequate Coordination between Government Security Agencies and Religious Institutions
- Exclusion of Religious Minorities and Marginalised Groups
- Inadequate Funding
- Planning
- Budgeting, Implementation and Monitoring
- Evaluation
- Feedback Process and Reporting Mechanism.

The Policy brief fits well within governments objectives on PCVE, which will be pursued and achieved within the wider network of government policy in collaboration with religious institutions.

### 6.4 LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

#### 6.4.1 Policy Brief Concern

The promulgation of the constitution of Kenya of 2010 ushered a new era for the citizens' protection and enjoyment of basic human rights Article 32 provides for and protects freedom of conscience, religion, belief and opinion allowing citizens to manifest their religious publicly and privately without discrimination.

However, guaranteed constitutional safeguards are being utilised to deter security measures in combating and countering violent extremist activities.

Kenya has strong laws related to the Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism which include, the prevention of Terrorism Act of 2012, the Security Laws (Amendment) Act of 2014 and the National Cohesion Act of 2018.

However, there has been increasing criticism by human rights activist against these legislations citing human rights abuses by security agencies for prioritising security concerns over human rights consideration as manifested in irregular arrests and unconstitutional detention of extremist suspects without adhering to the proper legal process (Mutuma, Rutere 2018,4)



### 6.4.2 Policy Brief Objective

Government security agencies and religious institutions to engage legal experts in reviewing and harmonising counter-terrorist laws to balance security concerns and human rights considerations and incorporating religious input in streamlining the laws.

### 6.4.3 Policy Brief Recommendations

Government security agencies and religious institutions will:

- (i) Strengthen laws related to terrorism cohesion and integration to address evolving extremists threat ideologies and activities.
- (ii) Enhance judicial and law enforcement capacities taking into consideration respect for basic human rights guaranteed by the Constitution.
- (iii) Provide legal frameworks supported by religious aspects to ensure a holistic approach for effective and inclusive implementation.

## 6.5 INADEQUATE COORDINATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT SECURITY AGENCIES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

### 6.5.1 Policy Brief Concern

Whereas government security agencies have undertaken several initiatives to counter violent extremism these efforts are made in isolation without engaging important actors in the religious circles who include the clergy, imams and community leaders.

In some cases, parallel initiatives by Government security agencies and religious institutions have resulted in duplication and to some extent competition among the diverse agencies. The Result has been overlapping activities which lack co-ordination among the various actors in PCVE.

### 6.5.2 Policy Brief Objective

Government security agencies and religious institutions engaged in preventing and counting violent extremism will coordinate their initiatives to develop positive alternative narrative on PCVE.



### 6.5.3 Policy Brief Recommendation

Government security agencies and religious institutions to establish collaborative mechanisms to build the ability of the entities to offer capacity building on developing and disseminating positive alternative narrative on PCVE.

## 6.6 INCLUSION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES AND MARGINALISED GROUPS

### 6.6.1 Policy Brief Concern

Important segments of society, especially religious minorities and marginalised groups, have not been effectively engaged in ongoing initiatives to prevent and counter violent extremism at the grass-roots. Some of the factors contributing to the exclusion of these important groups include inadequate representation of their views stakeholders mapping and limited understanding by large sections of members of these groups on the how extremist groups misinterpret and misuse religious texts to propagate their ill-fated ideologies.

Articles 53,54,55,56,57 and 100 of the constitution provide for the participation of religious minorities and marginalised groups.

Religious minorities and marginalised groups can make substantive contribution to the development and implementation of positive alternative narratives in the Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism, but they are rarely engaged to give their valuable and indispensable input.

### 6.6.2 Policy Brief Objective

Government security agencies and religious institutions will promote effective engagement and inclusion of religious minorities and marginalised group at all levels.

### 6.6.3 Policy Brief Recommendations

Government security agencies and religious institutions will:

1. Provide guidelines for effective and meaningful participation of minorities and marginalised groups in the developing and dissemination of positive alternative narrative on PCVE.
2. Prepare a scriptural guide/brief for use in congregational teachings and interfaith outreach.
3. Develop a training manual and present materials for interfaith dialogues and PCVE training sessions.



4. Undertake stakeholders mapping of religious minorities and marginalised groups to identify areas of concern to develop positive alternative narrative on PCVE.

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5. Ensure participation and engagement of religious minority and marginalised groups on the process of developing positive narratives on PCVE.

## 6.7 INADEQUATE FUNDING

### 6.7.1 Policy Brief Concern

Funding levels determine availability and quality of materials and references on PCVE Financing for initiatives on the prevention and countering Violent Extremism which has often been inadequate unpredictable and unreliable.

Development of positive alternative narrative on PCVE needs adequate budgetary allocation to finance the process and planning for a wider consultative and participating engagements of government security agencies, clergy and community leaders. These activities require resources which should be allocated and protected. It is therefore important for government security agencies and religious institutions to plan and adequately budget for the development of positive alternative narrative on PCVE.

### 6.7.2 Policy Brief Objective:

Government security agencies and religious institutions will provide and guarantee adequate, secure and sustainable funding for the development of positive alternative on PCVE.

### 6.7.3 Policy Brief Recommendations

Government security agencies and religious institutions will:

- (i) Guidance on funding for the development of positive alternative narratives to the Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism to ensure adequate budgeting allocation regularly and continually;
- (ii) Mechanisms for collaboration with development partners to facilitate sourcing of adequate funding for the development of positive alternative narratives.
- (iii) Adequate funding for the existing frameworks to strengthen the development of positive alternative narratives on PCVE.



## 6.8 PLANNING, BUDGETTING AND IMPLEMENTATION POLICY BRIEF CONCERN

### 6.8.1 Policy Brief Concern

Planning, budgeting and implementation are important stages in developing and disseminating positive alternative narrative for PCVE programmes. On-going initiatives are often a preserve of limited categories within government security agencies and certain religious institutions on the assumption that they understand how extremist group misuse and misinterpret religious texts to advance their ideologies. Developing of positive alternative narrative on PCVE requires highly advanced religious skills and adequate planning.

### 6.8.2 Policy Brief Objective:

Government security agencies and religious institutions will provide effective mechanisms for planning, budgeting and implementation of developing positive narrative on the Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism.

### 6.8.3 Policy Recommendations

Government security agencies and religious institutions will:

- (i) Provide action plans in the development of positive alternative narratives on PCVE.
- (ii) Provide adequate resources for the development of positive alternative narration on PCVE.
- (iii) Implement effective stakeholders mapping and engagement plans with sufficient stakeholder consultations in planning, budgeting and implementation process.
- (iv) Establish collaboration with development partners and non-state actors for effective cooperation and coordination in planning, budgeting and implementation process.



## 6.9 MONITORING, EVALUATION, FEEDBACK PROCESS AND REPORTING MECHANISM

### 6.9.1 Policy Brief Concern

Monitoring, evaluation, feedback process and reporting mechanism for developing positive alternative narrative to the Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism are inadequate and their content and achievement have also been lacking.

Monitoring evaluation, feedback process and reporting mechanism are important components of programme's cycle and continual implementation of the project. Through monitoring, evaluation, feedback process and reporting mechanism, objective evidence-based facts will be generated for effective monitoring and implementation of developing and disseminating positive and alternative narratives on PVCE. Monitoring evaluation, feedback process and reporting mechanism will guide and assist government security agencies and religious institutions to assess outcomes of the developed positive alternative narratives in line with the expected outputs and recast processes where necessary.

### 6.9.2 Policy Brief Objective:

Government security agencies and religious institutions will establish a national oversight committee to monitor and promote well-recorded updated monitoring, evaluation, feedback process and reporting mechanism for the development and dissemination of positive alternative narratives on PCVE.

### 6.9.3 Policy Recommendations

Government security agencies and religious institutions will put in place:

- i. Systems and mechanisms for the development and dissemination of positive alternative narratives;
- ii. Publish and disseminate policy briefs, reports, research papers on the status of projects and programmes on the development and dissemination of positive alternative narratives;
- iii. Establish structured communication and feedback mechanisms to ensure that policy briefs, reports, research papers are disseminated to Policy makers and stakeholders; and
- iv. Strengthen the capacity of religious and community leaders and ensure they actively participate in monitoring, valuation, feedback process and reporting mechanism for the development and dissemination of positive alternative narrative.



## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS (PRIORITIES, POLICIES, AND PARTNERSHIP)

### 6.9.1 Policy Brief Concern

Religious institutions are important platforms in the process of preventing and countering violent extremism. Deeper understanding of motivations behind theological misconceptions propagated by violent extremist groups in their ill-fated narratives is crucial. Hence, there is a need to counter destructive narratives by developing and disseminating positive alternative narratives for policy development, community programming, and law enforcement agencies.

Religious leaders and local communities are the first line of defence against extremist groups who will enable timely detection and response to extremist groups' activities fostering an environment of trust and cooperation with the state organs.

Multi-sector working groups bringing together government security agencies, religious institutions, religious training institutions and community leaders plays a critical role in addressing violent extremist narratives. Religious umbrella bodies like NCKK, CJPC and SUPKEM also play a critical role in addressing crimes related to religion in Kenya.

The Policy brief underscores the need for the development of new programs and policies which focus on containing violent extremist narratives.

There is a need for the Kenyan security agencies to balance between the "hard" and "soft" measures in their efforts to handle suspects of violent extremist groups. The success of preventing and countering violent extremism in Kenya will depend on how government security agencies respond to the new emerging religious extremism. This will significantly shape the country's future strategies to face violent extremist groups and by and large the state's relationship with its population.



## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS (PRIORITIES, POLICIES, AND PARTNERSHIP)

### 6.9.1 Policy Brief Concern

The Policy brief recommends the need to:

- Develop effective inter-agency collaboration between government security agencies, religious institutions and community leaders;
- Develop pilot positive alternative narratives in high-risk areas affected by extremist groups;
- Monitor impact of violent extremist narratives through engaging government security agencies, religious institutions and community leaders;
- Establish a national oversight committee to provide effective mechanisms for information sharing and joint action among government agencies, religious institutions and community leaders;
- Develop public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to raise public awareness and education about the risks associated with violent extremism;
- Citizens need to appreciate and respect people of different social and religious backgrounds and learn how to live in peace and harmony with others; and
- Inculcate values such as honesty, sincerity, kindness, respect of other peoples' religious affiliation, peace and tolerance to enhance cohesion and peaceful co-existence among citizens of Kenya.



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**SEPTEMBER  
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**Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK)**