Exploring Eastern Africa's Landscape: A Scoping Study on an Independent Civil Society-UN Counter-Terrorism Engagement Mechanism

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a scoping study conducted to examine the landscape of Eastern Africa in relation to an independent Civil Society-UN Counter-Terrorism Engagement Mechanism. The study aimed at gaining insights into the region's dynamics, challenges, and opportunities concerning counter-terrorism efforts involving civil society organizations (CSOs) in the region and the United Nations (UN). By adopting a comprehensive desktop review approach, the study analyzed existing literature, reports, documents, and other relevant materials. The findings highlight the significance of collaboration between CSOs and the UN in addressing the complex issues of terrorism and violent extremism in the region. The study also sheds light on the potential roles, strategies, and areas of engagement for an independent mechanism, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity, cooperation, and effective coordination. Based on the findings, this study recommends that it is important to foster partnerships, enhance information sharing, facilitate capacity building, promote dialogue and reconciliation, and ensure sustainable funding and support for CSOs-UN collaboration in CT/PCVE efforts.

Keywords: Civil Society, Counter-Terrorism, Eastern Africa, Independent Engagement Mechanism, Violent Extremism, UN

I. INTRODUCTION

The greater eastern Africa region comprising 17 countries (including Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mozambique) is characterized by intersecting drivers of conflict, terrorism, and violent extremism, making it one of the four terrorism systems on the African continent.[1] With over 33% of the total landmass in Africa and a population upwards of 562,409,000, the region showcases both its geographic and demographic significance. Moreover, Eastern Africa stands out as the fastest-growing interconnected region in Africa, boasting several rapidly developing economies, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda

While some countries have transitioned to middle-income status, the region as a whole has experienced economic growth, surpassing the continental average. Notably, Eastern Africa has successfully avoided severe recession during the Covid-19 pandemic.[2]

The interconnectedness in the region is reflected in its overlapping membership in various regional economic, peace, and security communities. Organizations such as IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development), IGGLR (International Conference on the Great Lakes Region), EAC (East African Community), SADC (Southern African Development Community) and COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) play key roles in promoting regional integration and addressing common security challenges. This interconnectedness extends beyond economic integration and encompasses peace building, conflicts, terrorism, and violent extremism, and joint responses. Terrorism in eastern Africa is a transnational phenomenon driven mainly by the Islamic Sunni-Salafist groups seeking to undermine the more tolerant Sufi version of Islam with the ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate in the region. With the decline of terrorism in the Middle East, the global jihadist movement has been focused on building a powerful network in Africa. Because of its location along the channel that connects the Red Sea

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[1] Osman Antwi-Boateng, *The Rise of Pan-Islamic Terrorism in Africa: A Global Security Challenge: Terrorism And Global Security*, *Politics & Policy* no. 45 (2017): 253-284, DOI: 10.1111/polp.12195.

[2] Etienne Gatera, "An Analysis of the COVID-19 Consequences on the Uncertainty Socio-economic Indicators of Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Sustainable Business and Economics*, no. 6 (2023): 15-25, DOI: 10.30564/jsbe.v6i1.45.

with the Gulf of Eden and the Indian Ocean, the region serves as the strategic gateway to the rest of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula making it attractive to global jihadist movements looking to expand their territory in the continent.[3]

In Eastern Africa, several countries are classified as weak states, marked by governance, public service, and social infrastructure vulnerabilities.[4] Political stability is fragile due to historical instability, a propensity for unconstitutional changes, and recurring political turmoil. The region faces a notable security concern with the presence of al-Shabaab, a globally recognized terrorist group responsible for high-profile attacks, intensifying security complexities. Al-Shabaab, affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, operates from within Somalia and conducts cross-border operations in the neighbouring Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia and as far as Uganda and Tanzania.[5] The Lord's Resistance Army, founded in 1988, is another long-standing terrorist group operating in multiple countries in the region just as well as the local ISIS affiliates Ansar al-Sunna also known as ISIS - Mozambique and Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) also known as ISIS-DRC. The presence and activities of these groups highlight the significant security challenges faced by eastern Africa. Additionally, the region has witnessed the emergence of ISIS affiliates, including splinter groups of al-Shabaab, such as ISIS/Da'esh-Somalia and Jahba East Africa among others. Although the whole region is greatly predisposed to the threat of terrorism, the Horn of Africa has borne the brunt of the scourge.[6]

Four out of five Africa's major wars in the 20th century and one of the oldest ongoing civil wars in the continent have been fought in the eastern Africa region.[7] In response to all this, the region hosts one of the largest numbers of civil society organizations in the continent and has played host to 20% of all the UN peace keeping operations globally.[8] The region has the highest number of foreign contingents and exclusive military bases of foreign troops with varied regional interests. With this background, the presence of a vibrant civil society movement is an important resource for leveraging the global efforts towards peace, security and stability in the region. According to the 2004 report on UN-Civil Society Relations, UN entities have made great strides to institutionalize the way they relate and work in cooperation with CSOs at the global, regional and national levels. In this regard, the importance of partnering with the civil society can't be overemphasized particularly in implementing the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. However, despite an equally huge presence of the UN entities in the eastern Africa, there is no dedicated CSOs-UN engagement mechanism in the region. Consequently, CSOs engagements with the local UN entities on the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy are unstructured and ineffective. Moreover, CSOs are confronted with a fast-shrinking civic space characterized by threats of violence, human rights violations and a repressive counter-terrorism national legislative and regulatory environment.[9]

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with the subsequent collapse of Somalia in 1991, and the adverse impact of globalization, brought about new forms of regional dynamics that were accompanied by unprecedented threats to peace, security and stability in eastern Africa.[10] According to Marchetti, the traditional Westphalia model of post-colonial Eastern African states no longer remained the sole actor in domestic, regional and global affairs. The dynamics of globalization challenged the exclusive role of states as the primary actors in national

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[3] Ibid

[4] Olivier Nay, "Fragile and failed states: Critical perspectives on conceptual hybrids," *International Political Science Review*, no. 34 (2013): 326-341, DOI: 10.1177/0192512113480054.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Thierry Verdier, "Regional Integration, Fragility and Institution Building: An Analytical Framework Applied to the African Context," *European University Institute, RSCAS Working Papers*, 2010.

[8] Redie Bereketeab, *Current Development, Peace and Stability in the Horn of Africa* (Publisher: SIRC & Terra Nullius Publishing, 2023), ISBN: 978-91-527-5489-4.

[9] K. Wall, 2012, "Addressing Violent Extremism: Creating Spaces for Civil Society Engagement; Report of the Global Civil Society Conference - Side event of the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy Review (GCTF)," accessed October 2019, URL: https://opev.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Human-Security-Network-Addressing-violent-extremism-creating-spaces-for-civil-society-engagement.pdf.

[10] R Marcheti, 2016, "Global Civil Society," accessed December 28, 2016, URL: https://www.e-ir.info/2016/12/28/global-civil-society/#:~:text=Globalisation%20links%20distant%20communities%20and,known%20as%20civil%20society%20groups.

and international matters, creating new opportunities for non-state actors, including civil society organizations, and to a significant extent, violent extremist organizations.[11]

Hoeffler opines that Eastern Africa is one of the most fragile regions in the world.[12] According to Verdier, the terrorism threat landscape in the region is characterized by profound political instability, endemic state fragility and chronic armed conflicts.[13] It is a region with some of the most protracted and frequently recurrent civil wars in the world and is flooded with small arms and light weapons, militia groups, cessationist movements, political intolerance and oppressive regimes. It is also a region that has witnessed some of the worst impacts of global climate change-fomenting violent ethnic rivalry, banditry, brutal state repression and human rights violation. This continues to undermine the social contract, human livelihoods and the stability of human-security. Moreover, this is compounded by the region's geographic vastness, porosity of borders and technological deficiencies among other things.[14]

While counter-terrorism efforts have traditionally been driven by governments and supranational organizations such as the UN, the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in these endeavours has gained due recognition in recent years.[15] According to Munene, CSOs as critical partners in the CT/PCVE space employ a wide array of strategies to complement government initiatives and realize their objectives effectively.[16] These strategies encompass capacity building, resource mobilization, advocacy, technical support, social accountability, research, economic empowerment, service delivery, infrastructure development, social mobilization, grant making and management, education, training, sensitization, and awareness creation. They also involve political activism, reforestation efforts, documentation and dissemination of information, networking and coalition building, lobbying, organizing workshops and conferences, conducting think tank analysis, engaging with the press and media, combating corruption, safeguarding consumer rights, holding the government accountable for its actions, pursuing public interest litigation, contributing to policy development, providing representation, monitoring and observing elections, as well as managing campaigns that involve naming and shaming corrupt public officials. These diverse strategies enable CSOs to address various social, economic, and political challenges and actively participate in shaping a more just and equitable society.[17]

Wall argues that the efforts of the civil society sector align seamlessly with the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy's Pillars I and IV.[18] These tenets, which are intertwined in the battle against violent extremism, emphasize, respectively, addressing the root causes of terrorism and protecting human rights. Preventing violent extremism, like many other global issues, requires a localized response, and the civil society movement is in a prime position to do just that. Unfortunately, the civil society actors including law enforcement experts, human rights defenders, conflict prevention practitioners, and humanitarian aid workers are often undermined by state counterterrorism strategies including repressive counter-terrorism laws, regulations and practices that overly rely on militarized security responses that are singularly meant to isolate and destroy terrorist groups without regard to the attendant cost of human rights violations arising out of unorthodox security operations and law-enforcement practices.

Despite the fact that the civic space has been more democratic over the course of the past three decades, the particular space dealing with countering violent extremism is heavily patronized, securitized and regulated by the state. As a result of which, it has been rapidly contracting, and it is marked by legal, policy, and operational constraints, as well as a significant danger of human rights breaches. This presents a growing challenge for civil society organizations engaged in CT/PCVE undertakings.[19]

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] J Akanyisi, "Terrorism in Africa: Its Social and Economic Impacts in Kenya" (Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2026).

[16] Jane Munene and Reckson Thakhathi, "An analysis of capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in promotion of community participation in governance in Kenya," *Journal of Public Affairs* 17 (2017): e1668, DOI: 10.1002/pa.1668.

[17] Ibid.

[18] K Wall, 2012, "Addressing Violent Extremism: Creating Spaces for Civil Society Engagement; Report of the Global Civil Society Conference - Side event of the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy Review (GCTF)," accessed October 2019, URL: https://opev.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Human-Security-Network-Addressing-violent-extremism-creating-spaces-for-civil-society-engagement.pdf

[19] Naomi Hossain et al., "What Does Closing Civic Space Mean for Development? A Literature Review and Proposed Conceptual Framework," *IDS Working Papers* (2018).

III. METHODOLOGY

The scoping study adopted a desktop review approach, analysing a wide range of literature, reports, and relevant materials. Extensive searches were conducted using online platforms, databases, and digital resources to gather data and insights related to the subject. The study focused on responding to key research questions, identifying and evaluating sources, and analyzing and synthesizing data to draw meaningful conclusions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Eastern Africa's Counter-Terrorism Landscape

The simultaneous terrorist attacks on the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 by al-Qaeda marked a turning point for Eastern Africa, propelling terrorism into the forefront of regional security concerns.[20] Prior to this event, the concept of terrorism may have existed, but it was not widely recognized or considered to be significant against other competing interest in the region. The timing of the twin attacks coincided with an important moment of global changes, including the end of the Soviet Union and the subsequent establishment of a new world order based on principles of pluralism, social justice, tolerance and international cooperation. Eastern Africa found itself at the intersection of these global shifts while at the same time grappling with the aftermath of the collapse of Somalia and the glaring effects of climate change. This convergence of factors created a unique and challenging peace and security landscape for the region.

Since 1998 terrorism has become a significant security concern in Eastern Africa. Although the local terrorism eco-system comprises of several insurgent groups, the region's primary security threat comes from al-Shabaab, a Salafi-jihadist organization founded in Somalia in 2006, ISIS Mozambique, which has an operational presence in southern Tanzania, and ADF, another affiliate of ISIS with operational presence in western Uganda. Eastern Africa is now part of Sub-Saharan Africa's triangle of terrorism, which includes the Lake Chad Basin terrorism system, the Sahel Terrorism System, and the greater Eastern Africa Terrorism System, including the Central Africa-Terrorism Sub System because of the presence of eastern Africa insurgent groups, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the Central Africa Republic (CAR) and the eastern parts of the DRC.[21]

Terrorist activities in Eastern Africa are a part of an "arc of conflict and instability" that extends beyond the region.[22] This arc involves three clusters of countries with a history of weak governance, instability, and conflict. The first cluster comprises of southern Libya, eastern parts of Chad, and north-eastern parts of the Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan. These neighbouring countries share porous and volatile land boundaries totalling 4,011 square kilometres. In this cluster, Sudan, in particular, serves as a weak link in Eastern Africa due to its proximity to Libya, Chad and CAR and the country's influence in the region. The conflicts and instability in this cluster have significant spill over effects in northern Uganda and South Sudan with the LRA being a major catalyst as well as a beneficiary.

Additionally, as a crucial component of the Eastern Africa terrorism landscape, Sudan serves as the convergence point for the Middle East and North Africa terrorism system, as well as the Western Africa and Central Africa terrorism sub-systems. The growing linkages between terrorist groups across regions, facilitated by porous borders, human migration patterns, cross-cross border regional trade, and the movement of arms and foreign terrorist fighters, pose a contemporary cross-regional security threat of monumental proportion in Eastern Africa, as highlighted by the East Africa Counter Terrorism Mechanism's recent publication on the trans-regionalization of the terrorist threat in the region.[23]

Notwithstanding the current civil war, Sudan is increasingly becoming a battleground for proxy supremacy wars between Russia and the US, further aggravated by the ongoing conflict between Russia, Ukraine, and NATO in Eastern Europe.[24] Multiple reports indicate the possible presence in Sudan of the Wagner Group, a private military and Security Company. According to Muhittin, concerns have been raised that the growing presence of such groups in the

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Mutahi, Patrick & Lind, Jeremy & Oosterom, Marjoke. (2015). Tangled Ties: Al-Shabaab and Political Volatility in Kenya. Report number: 130Affiliation: Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies/ University of Sussex(IDS programme

[23] Ibid.

[24] Muhittin, A. "Sudanese crisis: A new front of 'preventive proxy war." *Daily Sabah*, Opinion/Columns. Accessed [Insert Date of Access]. URL: https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/sudanese-crisis-a-new-front-of-preventive-proxy-war.

continent is a growing source of instability, and is counterproductive to ongoing counter-terrorism efforts.[25] According to Smith, since there lacks an accountability framework, such pseudo-security services can be utilized to suppress political dissent, interfere with civil society activities, undermine peace, and promote radicalization towards violence.[26]

The second cluster in the arc of instability and terrorism involves Ethiopia and Somalia conflicts, with adverse spillover effects in Kenya.[27] These three countries share a largely porous land boundary stretching 3,190 square kilometres, which is primarily inhabited by the Somali community, who serve as a common trans-border demographic denominator. Similar to the Teda trans-border demography in the Niger-Libya-Chad axis, the presence of Somalis exacerbates the fragility of this region, particularly in the border regions of Ogaden in Ethiopia and the north-eastern region of Kenya, which ate among the most affected by sporadic terrorist attacks. Illegal cross-border trade, human and wildlife trafficking, illicit firearms smuggling for terrorism financing, and the unhindered movement of people and livestock due to the nomadic lifestyle of cross-border pastoralist communities creates a security challenge for Kenya in containing the spill over effects of the Ethiopia-Somalia conflict. Moreover, factors such as climate change, involuntary human migration, desertification, livelihood opportunities, historical and ongoing ethnic conflicts, border disputes, and the presence of a large population of Ethiopian and Somali refugees further contribute to the complexity of the situation. These conditions also make Kenya's border lucrative for the operations of transnational organized criminal networks and cross-border terrorism, particularly by al-Shabaab, its affiliates and unscrupulous business community.[28]

The third cluster encompasses Tanzania, Mozambique and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).[29] In Tanzania, Islamist attacks have been relatively low-key since 2012, but on October 14th, 2020, the country experienced its first major terrorist attack. Around 300 fighters from ISIS-Mozambique attacked *Kitaya* village in the *Mtwara* region, resulting in the deaths of up to 20 people, including security personnel. Emboldened by their success, the insurgents struck *Mchenjele* and several other villages within the same region in the subsequent days, weeks and months, employing tactics such as killings, beheadings, looting, and burning of various structures. The insurgent's interest in the strategic trade and commerce corridor between Mtwara in Tanzania and *Cabo Delgado* in northern Mozambique is linked to the discovery of vast reserves of liquefied gas and valuable ruby deposits. The exploitation of these resources has led to displacement, marginalization, protests and human rights violations, raising grievances that have created conditions that contribute to the rise and thriving of insurgency in the region.[30]

The vulnerability of Tanzania to terrorism is influenced by several factors. The vastness of its territory, spanning 945,087 square kilometres with land and maritime borders shared by eight neighbouring countries, poses a significant governance challenge. The poorly equipped and coordinated security forces exacerbate the situation. In addition, its proximity to Islamist logistical hubs in Yemen and the UAE further adds to its vulnerability. It is also surrounded by neighbouring countries with active insurgent situations, including the Allied Democratic Forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, al-Shabaab and al-Hijra in Kenya, and ISIS-Mozambique in northern Mozambique. Over the recent years, Tanzania has experienced low-key terrorist attacks and made numerous arrests of militants and financiers linked to al-Shabaab. There is growing body of evidence suggesting that Tanzanian Islamists are connecting with regional counterparts, particularly Ansar al-Sunna (ISIS) in Mozambique, al-Shabaab in Somalia, and al-Hijra in Kenya threatening to make the Country the new theatre of terrorism in the region.[31]

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), also known as ISIS-DRC, has been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.[32] The ADF is responsible for escalating violence and has been recruiting foreign terrorist fighters in Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda. This poses a regional threat to peace and security. Their ISIS counterparts in Mozambique, Ansar al-Sunna, have orchestrated large-scale and sophisticated

[25] Ibid.

[26] Smith, Laura, Leda Blackwood, and Emma Thomas. "The Need to Refocus on the Group as the Site of Radicalization." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 15 (2019): 174569161988587. doi:10.1177/1745691619885870.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Cannon, Brendon, and Dominic Pkalya. "Why al-Shabaab Attacks Kenya: Questioning the Narrative Paradigm." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31 (2017): 1-17. doi:10.1080/09546553.2017.1290607.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Emily Estelle and Jessica Trisko Darden, "Combating the Islamic State's Spread in Africa," accessed February 2021, URL: https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Combating-the-Islamic-State%E2%80%99s-Spread-in-Africa.pdf

[31] Ibid.

[32] Kristof Titeca and Daniel Fahey, "The many faces of a rebel group: the Allied Democratic Forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *International Affairs* 92 (2016): 1189-1206, DOI: 10.1111/1468-2346.12703.

attacks in northern Mozambique, resulting in the capture of the strategic port of *Mocimboa da-Praia* and the displacement of thousands of people. The threat from terrorist groups in the region has led to increased cooperation between Tanzania and Mozambique, although concrete security arrangements are yet to be fully implemented making the region fragile.[33]

4.2 The Birth of Civil Society in eastern Africa

Table 1
Regional Distribution of CSOs

No	Country	CSOs	Population	CSO to Population Ratio	Landmass (Sq Km)	CSO-Landmass Ratio (Sq Km)
1.	Kenya	15,000	57,056,685	3,804	582,646	39
2.	Tanzania	4000	64,455,666	16,114	945 087	236.3
3.	Uganda	14, 207	49,750,468	3,502	241,038	168.9
4.	Rwanda	607	13,842,960	22,806	26,798	44.1
5.	Burundi	6000	12,873,608	2,146	27, 834	4.6
6.	Somalia	6000	17,122,404	2,854	637, 657	106.3
7.	Ethiopia	2953	122,863,838	41607	1,112,000	376.6
8.	South Sudan	5000	11,557,503	2,312	644, 329	128.9
9.	Eritrea	58	3,682,497	63,491	117,600	2,028
10.	Djibouti	150	1,027,834	6,852	23,300	155.3
11.	Mozambique	465	33,685,326	72, 444	799, 380	1,719
12.	Seychelles	200	98,347	492	455	2.3
13.	Sudan	2473	46,689,347	18,880	1.886,000	762.6
14.	Mauritius	8944	1,277,613	142,846	2040	4.38
15.	Madagascar	2264	29,666,096	13,103	587, 041	259.3
16.	Comoros	80	869,601	10,870	2235	28
17.	DRC	4000	95,890, 000	23,973	2, 344, 858	586.2
	Total	**72, 401**	**562,409,793**		**9,988,298**	

In the last three decades, starting from the 1980s, Africa witnessed an extraordinary surge in the number of civil society organizations, marking a significant phenomenon described globally as the "associational revolution."[34] This surge was particularly notable in the wider Africa Caribbean and Pacific region, consisting of 79 countries, where the number of civil society organizations increased from a few to approximately 50,000 by 1999. The rapid growth of civil society organizations coincided with the demand for civil and political rights, driven by civil society movements advocating for multiparty democracy and constitutional changes. During the 1990s, a powerful wave of democratic reforms swept across the entire continent, despite facing challenges from repressive state actions.[35]

In Eastern Africa, significant milestones in the transition to multiparty democracy were observed during the 1990s.[36] Mozambique took the lead by promulgating the first multiparty constitution in 1990, followed by Rwanda and Kenya, which initiated constitutional reforms to introduce multiparty democracy in 1991. In 1992, Burundi, Djibouti, and Tanzania also undertook constitutional reforms for the same purpose, while Sudan followed suit in 1999 and Ethiopia in 2005. The civil society movement was celebrated as a driving force behind the downfall of single-party dictatorships, the end of military rule, the dismantling of the apartheid system in South Africa, and the implementation of constitutional reforms. Civil society was hailed as having played a vital role in the democratization process of the region and came to be known as the "third sector," alongside government and business. However, this

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] S. Buchanan, "Has Globalisation Altered the Role of the State?" Accessed November 24, 2012, URL: https://www.e-ir.info/2012/11/24/has-globalisation-altered-the-role-of-states/

categorization also marked the beginning of tensions between civil society movements advocating for civil and political rights and the state. Despite this, the expanded civil and political rights created a conducive environment for civil society to thrive, resulting in the current presence of 72, 401 civil society organizations in Eastern Africa.[37]

Sixty-seven (67.6) percent of all CSOs in the Eastern Africa region are found in six countries; Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius, Burundi, Somalia and South Sudan with Kenya leading in this block with 15000 civil society organizations followed closely by Uganda with 14, 207, Mauritius comes third with 8,944 with Burundi and Somalia tying at number four with 6000 CSOs each, followed by South Sudan in number five with 5000 civil society organizations. Together the block of five leading countries makes a total of 46, 207 CSOs in the region. The six countries with the least number of CSOs in the region is led by Eritrea with only 58 CSOs, followed by the Union of the four Comoros Islands with only 80 CSOs, then Djibouti with 150, Seychelles comes to number four with 200 CSOs, Mozambique at number five has 465 CSOs, and at number six is Rwanda with 607 civil society organizations. Together, the six countries have a total of 1560 civil society organizations accounting for a partly 2.3% of all CSOs in the Eastern Africa region. These six countries are below the average number of civil society organizations Eastern Africa by 34.25%. The average number of civil society organization in the region stands at 4,275.[38]

4.3 Profile of Civil Society in eastern Africa

Although, hard data couldn't be found online, the review of existing literature on the region shows that eastern Africa has had a vibrant civil society movement of diverse entities that are engaged in various aspects of prevention and counter violent extremism such as legal, policy and community advocacy, resilience building, anti-corruption, governance, justice, law and order sector institutions reforms, climate change, economic empowerment, inter-faith dialogue, access to justice and promotion of human rights, mental health, awareness creation and reintegration. The movement comprise of grassroots and community-based organizations, national, sub-regional, regional, international and global NGOs. 90% of the PCVE work in the region is driven by the CSOS who draw 80% of their resources from development partners domiciled in the global north. This makes the regional PCVE agenda western-driven. Although national governments are not in apposition to allocate resources to support the work of the CSOs, they find it awkward considering that national security is considered the primary function of the state. This is why CSOs are viewed as apart of the global espionage, and it explains the discomfort of national governments and the attempt to exert greater control of the PCVE space.[39]

The CSOS in eastern Africa that are involved in the CT/PCVE exhibit a remarkable diversity, encompassing a wide range of groups and structures based on ethnic, cultural, political, scientific, economic, religious, or philanthropic foundations. These organizations operate at different levels, from local to international, and are registered using a plethora of diverse legal regime and administrative practices that differ from one country to the next. They include Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private companies, self-help groups, youth and women groups, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, conservation groups, pressure or lobby groups, professional associations, foundations, charitable institutions, trusts, philanthropic initiatives, online associations, advocacy networks, consortiums or coalitions, private sector associations, neighbourhood watch groups, trade unions, clubs, cooperatives, trusts, and private companies limited by guarantee.[40] Each of these organizations contributes to the development, well-being, and progress of Eastern Africa, addressing a wide range of social, economic, environmental, and political challenges while promoting community engagement, advocacy, and the pursuit of various causes and interests that have a direct or indirect bearing on CT/PCVE. One of the reasons that explains this diversity is the lack of legislative or regulatory clarity about what constitutes prevention and response relating to violent extremism leaving it to practioners to justify the significance of intersectionality.[41]

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[37] Munene, Jane, and Reckson Thakhathi. "An analysis of capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in promotion of community participation in governance in Kenya." *Journal of Public Affairs* 17 (2017): e1668. doi:10.1002/pa.1668.
[38] Ibid.
[39] D Armstrong et al. (eds.), *Civil Society in Regional Governance in Eastern and Southern Africa* (Routledge, 2010).
[40] Ogola, F.O., Njenga, G.N., Mhando, P.C., and Kiggundu, M.N. "A Profile of the East African Community." *Africa Journal of Management* 1, no. 4 (2015): 333-364.
[41] G Kimutai, K Oluoch, and P Opondo, "Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Regional Integration in the East African Community (EAC): A Literature Review," *International Affairs and Global Strategy* 91 (2021).

4.4 Activities and Strategies deployed by CSOs

These CSOs are involved in a broad range of issues including democratization of decision-making in governance, protection and promotion of human rights, empowerment of citizens, civic participation, trust building, rule of law, advancement of human welfare, building community resilience and peaceful transfer of power through electoral process.[42] They are also involved in the support of survivors of violence and conflict, environment conservation and climate change, audit of public finance, food security, education, access to justice, population and migration control, refugee management, peace and security including prevention/counter violent extremism, minority, women and youth empowerment, prevention of violence, disaster, humanitarian, relief and emergency response, gender equality, consumer protection, service delivery, social welfare issues such as access to healthcare, care and management of the sick, aged, widows and widowers, and orphans, and self-help activities such as livelihood programs, and table and land banking among others. They check and call out as well complement government, a role that underpins a peaceful and stable society and embodies responsive and responsible governance.[43]

CSOs employ a wide array of strategies to support government CT/PCVE programs and to effectively achieve their objectives drawing from the Sustainable Development Goals, Africa Agenda 2060 and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.[44] These strategies encompass capacity building, advocacy, technical support, social accountability, research, economic empowerment, service delivery, infrastructure development, social mobilization, grant making and management, education, training, sensitization, and awareness creation.[45] They also involve political activism, reforestation efforts, documentation and dissemination of information, networking and coalition building, lobbying, organizing workshops and conferences, conducting think tank analysis, engaging with the press and media, combating corruption, safeguarding consumer rights, holding the government accountable for its actions, pursuing public interest litigation, contributing to policy development, providing representation, monitoring and observing elections, as well as managing campaigns that involve naming and shaming corrupt public officials.[46] These diverse strategies enable CSOs to address various social, economic, and political challenges and actively participate in shaping a more just and equitable society.

4.5 Role of an Independent CSOs-UN Mechanism

The diverse profiles of the CSOs in the region speak to the many facets of the role of civil society contribution in the prevention and transformation of the CT/PCVE landscape in the region. A dedicated CSOs-UN Mechanism in this respect is vital in harnessing a collaborative environment in which partnership can thrive in line with the Global Strategy on Counter-Terrorism. CSOs are an integral part of the socioeconomic development of East Africa and a critical stakeholder in peace, security and stability of the eastern Africa countries.[47]

The whole-of-society approach that adopts a multidisciplinary strategy requires that civil society organizations be a part of government, inter-governmental and multilateral efforts on counter-terrorism. In its resolution 1624 (2005) the Security Council buttressed the critical importance of the role of civil society organizations in strengthening an environment in which counter-terrorism efforts don't radicalize communities further. Towards this, CSOs are important accountability partners.[48] For instance, in its resolution 2178 (2014) the UN security Council encouraged member states to engage relevant non-governmental actors in developing strategies to counter violent extremist narratives that can incite terrorist acts and to address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism.[49] The Security Council through Resolution 2182/2014 authorized the AU Mission in Somalia to take all appropriate

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[42] Nicolas Walle, "The Impact of Multi-Party Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Forum for Development Studies* 28 (2001): 5-42, DOI: 10.1080/08039410.2001.9666154.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Priscilla Wamucii, "Civil Society Organizations and the State in East Africa: From the Colonial to the Modern Era," in Ebenezer Obadare (ed.), *The Handbook of Civil Society in Africa* (New York: Springer Science Business Media, 2014).

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Kisinga, F. (2009). "Civil Society, Governance and Integration in East Africa: A Historical Exegis." In Amuwo, A. et al eds. Civil Society, Governance and Regional Integration in Africa. Nairobi: Development Policy Management Forum (DPMF)

[49] Ibid.

measures to carryout inclusive dialogue towards reconciliation involving all stakeholders including civil society; however, the CSO movement in Somalia wasn't invited to take part in any structured dialogue on peace in Somalia.[50]

The eastern Africa hosts one of the three United Nations' Office on Counter Terrorism (UNOCT) field offices in Africa. It is also hosts the United Nations office at Nairobi (UNON), which is the UN's headquarters in Africa that also serves as one of the UN's secretariat's four main duty stations globally. UNON hosts and services the global headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) as well as 23 country offices and several regional hubs. In the UN history, (1948-2020) the eastern Africa has played host to 14 out 71 UN peace keeping operations. All these notwithstanding, UN in the eastern Africa is considered a hugely complex, bureaucratic and opaque entity. The local perception is that the UN is an extension of national governments. Some of the UN agencies only work with government or inter-governmental institutions and lack a dedicated mechanism for engagement with CSOs. This approach is adopted by United Nations Office on Drugs Control (UNODC) despite CSOs having an important role in the implementation of the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) among others.   The lack of a dedicated multi-agency UN-CSOs mechanism makes it difficult for the CSOs to engage with the UN resulting in fragmented, ineffective and costly implementation of the Global Strategy on Counter-Terrorism.[51]

By leveraging the unique perspectives and expertise of civil society organizations and promoting the whole of society approach, a dedicated UN-CSOs engagement mechanism has the potential of strengthening human rights, enhancing community resilience, and fostering sustainable peace. The spirit of shared responsibility is what was envisioned in the pillars I and IV of the United Nations Global Counterterrorism Strategy. These pillars are focused, respectively, on reducing situations that are conducive to terrorism and preserving human rights in the war against violent extremism. Civil society is a critical intermediary in bridging the gap between global policy and local reality, including measures to prevent violent extremism.[52]

4.4 Challenges towards an Independent UN-CSO Mechanism

There is a lack of detailed information about the number, profiles and geographic spread of CT/PCVE civil society organizations in eastern Africa. This stems from several factors. Firstly, there is no centralized data system for civil society organizations in the region, and despite the existence of legal frameworks on terrorism majority of the countries lack clarity on what constitutes prevention and countering of violent extremism leading to a situation where all manner of CSOs across all sectors of development are considered as actors in the CT/PCVE space. This also makes it difficult to assess the true impact of CSOs on CT/PCVE. It also weakens the legitimacy of genuine CT/PCVE organizations and makes it easier for government infiltration particularly in repressive state background.[53]

The multiple and sometimes conflicting laws and administrative practices governing their registration and operation also makes it difficult to gather comprehensive information. For example, efforts to establish a unified database of CSOs in Kenya through the Public Benefit Organisations Act 2013 did not come into effect despite being signed into law. The registration process for CSOs in eastern Africa is carried out by various bodies, further complicating the situation. Some CSOs exist only on paper without operations, others operate without formal registration, and others lack any form of accreditation. The absence of centralized data and the large number of CSOs make it challenging to gain a clear understanding of the profile of their CT/PCVE work.[54]

The "capacity-support" language adopted by most UN agencies in reference to the CSOs in the eastern Africa infers that local CSOs lack the requisite capacity to effectively and competently engage with the UN systems.[55] In major UN events, CSOs participation is relegated to side events despite the fact that such events hardly have the kind of meaningful reach and the richness of scope needed to influence the UN agenda on CT/PCVE including advocating for an independent UN-CSOs engagement mechanism. The general feeling that the UN lacks the willingness to protect human rights defenders, and to challenge member states on accountability for the CT/PCVE excesses denies the CSOs

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[50] F.K. Matanga, "Civil Society and Politics in Africa: The Case of Kenya," paper presented at the Fourth International Conference of ISTR, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, July 5-8, 2000.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Lester E. Salamon et al., *Global Civil Society: Dimensions of Nonprofit Sector* (2000).

the protection and solidarity they need to confront unorthodox practices that result in more harm. Lack of this protection makes CSOs work a risky affair.[56]

Despite the presence of numerous UN agencies in eastern Africa, accessing and engaging with them remains challenging for many civil society organizations, particularly those working at the grassroots level. There is a perception that the UN prefers to work government or in government led partnership arrangements making it difficult for vocal CSOs that hold governments to account to retain their critical independence necessary in championing human rights and good governance.[57] The lack of structured mechanisms for independent civil society organizations (CSOs) to engage with the United Nations (UN) on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism (CT/PCVE) efforts in eastern Africa is a significant challenge.

Lastly, the repressive regulatory environment characterized by unpredictable government restrictions as well as weaponized laws and policies that seek to impose state control over the independence of civil society are a real threat to the civic space in which the CSOs need to operate and thrive.[58] In South Sudan there are severe restriction for funding of more than USD200,000. A certain threshold of funding is required to be declared through public media regardless of the security risks such publicity is likely to elicit for the organization officials.[59] In some countries such as in Rwanda the NGO Act of 2012 require that new NGOs are placed under probation during which time an NGO's registration can be revoked or denied while in South-Sudan, Sudan and Burundi and Uganda CSOs are required to comply with periodic renewal of their registration certificates with a country like South-Sudan requiring mandatory annual renewal. In 2009, Ethiopia adopted a new law known as the Charities and Societies Proclamation that criminalized NGOs human rights work in the country and restricting freedom of association and expression.[60]

The law prohibited CSOs that received more than 10% of their funding from overseas from engaging in human rights and governance among other issues.[61] It also introduced burdensome compliance requirements rid with bureaucracy and red tape. The government of Tanzania adopted the NGO Act No. 24 of 2002 on registration of CSOs that severely restrict the operation of NGOs. In 2015, the government of Tanzania introduced new complex requirements for the registration of NGOs that involved seeking letters of authorization from local authorities in which they intend to work and declaring planned expenditures within 14 days of obtaining donor funds. In 2013, the Kenyan government tendered a legislative proposal known as the Public Benefits Organization's act to the National Assembly that included serious restrictions on CSOs work including putting a 15% cap on foreign funding. However, this was rejected by parliament after successful NGOs resistance. In 2019 the government managed to introduce miscellaneous amendments to the country's primary counter-terrorism law (POTA) giving the National-Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC) non-existent powers to regulate all CSOs involved with implementing PCVE activities.[62]

In 2006 Sudan introduced a new weaponized law, the Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act, as a direct result of which in 2009, 13 were expelled from the country while in 2012 three CSOs were closed down.[63] To register an NGO in Sudan one to have up to 30 initial members representing all the geographic area that a CSO expresses interest in covering. In 2002 Uganda enacted the country's anti-terrorism law. The law as well as the subsequent amendments in 2015 was criticized by human rights actors as contravening the letter and spirit of the country's constitution and the international law. The latest to introduce the counter-terrorism law is Somalia. Although the law was approved by the country's lower house on March, 8th 2023 it was criticized for going against the constitution by granting Somalia security apparatus powers to raid and effect arbitrary arrests without court orders.[64]

These overly aggressive regimes of counterterrorism and related legislation, policies and administrative decisions have nearly scuttled the CSOs participation in CT/PCVE programs. In effect these repressive legislative and

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] P Shoki, "Civil Society, Governance and Integration in Africa," in A Amuwo et al., *Civil Society, Governance and Regional Integration in Africa* (Nairobi: Development Policy Management Forum (DPMF), 2009).

[59] Muhittin, A.(2023). Sudanese crisis: A new front of 'preventive proxy war. https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/sudanese-crisis-a-new-front-of-preventive-proxy-war

[60] Terry Odhiambo, *The Struggle for Democracy in Africa: Elections, Coups and Popular Opinion THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA* (African Social Research, 2022).

[61] Muia Mutunga, Julie. "Economic Integration: The Impact of Conflict on Economic Development of Africa." *African Journal of Public Administration and Management (AJPAM)* XXV, no. 46 (2017).

[62] Ibid.

[63] Mehari Maru, "Shrinking Civil Society Space in the Horn of Africa" (PAX, KACE & HoACS • Shrinking Space for Civil Society in the Horn of Africa, 2017).

[64] Ibid.

administrative practices are meant to restrict the operation of civil society organization and particularly those that are carrying out human rights, governance and security sector program by introducing ambiguous legislative measures that are often inconsistent with the constitution and international laws. In some cases, the restrictions are so severe. For instance, in South Sudan, PCVE programs are required to obtain accreditation from a counter-terrorism department in the Office of the President before undertaking any activity. The law regulating the registration of CSOs only recognizes organizations working under the International Humanitarian Law. The most affected set of laws include counter-terrorism laws, public order management laws, finance-sector regulation laws and cyber security laws. They have resulted in seizing and freezing of CSOs' assets, using blackmail and intimidation, arbitrary arrest, detention without trial, prosecution on trumped up charges, and extra-judicial execution and enforced disappearance of CSO staff.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

In conclusion, this scoping study provides valuable insights into the landscape of Eastern Africa regarding counter-terrorism efforts involving civil society and the UN. It emphasizes the importance of an inclusive and coordinated approach to effectively address the challenges posed by terrorism and violent extremism. By establishing an independent mechanism that facilitates meaningful collaboration, and partnership under the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, eastern Africa can harness the collective strengths of civil society and the UN to promote peace, security, and sustainable development. The absence of this framework for joint engagements has exposed the CSOs to hostile legislative and administrative environment that makes it difficult for them to carry out their mandate.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the scoping study, this paper recommends that the establishment of an independent UN-CSOs mechanism in eastern Africa, and observes that the existence of such a mechanism will harness the potential of partnership by enhancing information sharing, facilitating capacity building, promoting dialogue and sustainable development within the spirit of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Further to this, the paper recommends the establishment of an eastern Africa regional UN-CSO counter-terrorism compact -working group on gender-sensitive approaches to peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights and humanitarian affairs.

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