European Commission

STRIVE
Lessons Learned

Horn of Africa

Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism

International Cooperation and Development

Contents

1 *Introduction*

THE STRENGTHENING Resilience to Violence and Extremism (STRIVE) Horn of Africa (HoA) programme represents the first dedicated effort by the European Commission to implement a project outside of the EU with the specific objective of countering violent extremism. In line with the EU's Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the project sought to prevent terrorism and counter violent extremism while continuing to respect human rights and international law. Launching in January 2014, STRIVE HoA had a 36-month timeframe that integrated a research assessment phase, pilot programme implementation phase and a wrap up and evaluation phase.

'The conference was focused on challenges, lessons learned and recommendations'

As part of the evaluation phase for STRIVE HoA, a one-day 'Lessons Learned' conference was organised in Brussels on 24 November 2016. The event was designed to introduce the findings of the STRIVE HoA project to senior EU, UN and EU member state officials, as well as representatives from civil society. The conference was focused on the challenges, lessons learned and recommendations that arose from STRIVE, in an effort to strengthen the knowledge base for future counter violent extremism (CVE) programming.

This report introduces the lessons learned from the STRIVE HoA project based on the presentations, discussions and key recommendations outlined during each of the seven conference panel sessions: Background; Result Area 1; Result Area 2; Result Area 3; Result 4; Preventive Communications; and a presentation of the findings of the Independent Evaluation of STRIVE HoA, which was carried out at the end of the project. While the broader findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation will follow at the end of this report, those referring to specific result areas are covered under the relevant result areas.

'The STRIVE project sought to prevent terrorism and counter violent extremism while continuing to respect human rights and international law'

2 *Background*

STRIVE HOA sought to develop a set of best practices for implementing and monitoring preventative programming in the region, building the EU's internal knowledge and capacities alongside contributing towards global CVE strategies. As a relatively small-scale initiative with a budget of €2 million, STRIVE deliberately followed a pilot approach to CVE activities where 'failure was an option' in testing assumptions associated with radicalisation and recruitment. An initial formulation study was conducted in 2012 to identify a suitable geographic scope for the project taking into consideration other CVE initiatives. The findings from this assessment were collated in a final report in 2013 and fed into the terms of reference for STRIVE HoA's final design and objectives.

While activities under STRIVE HoA were wide-ranging, they were limited in time, scope and resources. The result areas included:

'Failure was an option in testing assumptions'

1. Building the regional capacity of security sector and law enforcement authorities to engage with civil society in fighting violent extremism (initially intended to cover Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia).

2. Strengthening the capacity of women's organisations in Puntland and Somaliland to fight violent extremism.

3. Increasing understanding of the challenges faced by EU-born Somali youth in Somaliland.

4. Increasing understanding of the drivers of radicalisation among youth in Kenya.

A fifth area that was subsequently included focused on preventive communications.

Each of the result areas consisted of three phases: a six-month research and assessment phase, a 24-month project implementation phase and a final six-month evaluation phase. Under these areas, a limited number of actions were implemented to create a demonstrable impact on strengthening resilience against violent extremism. These

pilots sought to both identify best practice in efforts to counter violent extremism and to strengthen the evidence base around CVE programming. In designing and implementing the activities within each result area, there was an emphasis on research, monitoring and evaluation to extract lessons on an ongoing basis.

Acknowledging the complex nature of radicalisation and recruitment to violent extremist groups, the project adopted an initial working definition that conceptualised the phenomenon as 'a process by which individuals are introduced to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages movement from mainstream beliefs towards extremist views and the promotion of and use of violence'. The recognition of a 'process' emphasised the need for a multifaceted, collaborative approach, integrating different actors to engage at different stages (while appreciating that radicalisation is non-linear).

The results, challenges and lessons of these pilot interventions are analysed in the following sections.

'The recognition of a "process" emphasised the need for a multifaceted, collaborative approach, integrating different actors to engage at different stages'

3 *Result Areas*

Result Area 1: Relationship Between Law Enforcement and Civil Society

THE FIRST component of STRIVE HoA concentrated on building the capacity of the Kenyan security sector and state authorities to engage with civil society in combatting violent extremism. It was emphasised that this was distinct from 'security sector reform' at large, which remains beyond the project's remit.

The theory of change was that if law enforcement actors improve their relationship with communities, and civil society is able to mitigate drivers for violent extremism and contribute positively to CVE responses, then the narratives of extremist groups will lose their appeal, recruitment into violent extremist groups will decline and the likelihood the citizens will cooperate with the police will increase. This is because relations between law enforcement and civil society will improve, including cooperation on CVE matters.

Working in partnership with the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) in Nairobi, RUSI designed a CVE curriculum as a preliminary framework for strengthening the capacity of both civil society organisations (CSOs) and security agencies operating in the preventative space. This was subsequently delivered in two separate workshop programmes.

The first was a three-day training course for CSOs from Mombasa, Kwale and Kilifi counties in Kenya's coastal region. Its main objectives were enhancing the role of civil society in CVE initiatives, bolstering dialogue between law enforcement and non-state actors, and improving the communication and technical capabilities of CSOs engaging

'The course's main objectives were enhancing the role of civil society in CVE initiatives and bolstering dialogue between law enforcement and non-state actors'

in CVE. This was regarded as particularly important as local communities often lack a nuanced understanding of CVE. They are therefore liable to conflate the term with 'hard' counter-terrorism activities or interpret it as foreign interference with local culture and religion. Local organisations also have a tendency to rebrand development programmes as CVE to exploit funding opportunities, reducing its conceptual coherence and diminishing 'buy-in' by domestic stakeholders.

The second workshop involved a set of short five-day interventions for selected mid-level management security personnel from the same counties. These included participants from the National Intelligence Service, Anti-Terrorism Police Unit, regular police, administrative police and the Kenyan Defence Forces. The programme was designed to raise awareness in Kenya's law enforcement institutions by improving technical knowledge, the fluency of beneficiaries in CVE terminology and developing a set of best practices. Crucially, it encouraged security personnel to adopt a more cooperative approach to civil society. It also emphasised how excessive use of force, ethnic profiling and a perceived culture of impunity can contribute towards increased radicalisation.

A preliminary survey and written test were conducted to establish baseline perceptions of security actors towards civil society. This process was repeated after the project's conclusion in order to identify any change. The scheme encouraged a participatory approach and recipients were open to discussing sensitive issues, with many having not previously heard accounts of security abuses expressed in such a personal way. A particularly effective exercise highlighted by the coordinators was a class analysis of a re-enacted police interview, which was based on conversations researchers convened with real victims of police abuse.

Outcomes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

'The end results show promise in this form of intervention and its ability to contribute towards substantive and practical outputs'

The end results show promise in this form of intervention and its ability to contribute towards substantive and practical outputs. The data indicate a concerted change in perspectives, with only one participant out of 80 objecting to the involvement of civil society in the implementation of CVE. The vast majority of beneficiaries similarly claimed they appreciated the virtues of collaborating with civil society and civilian actors in a way they had not previously. They were also able to more articulately describe CVE related issues. Finally, there is evidence of greater cooperation between law enforcement personnel and CSOs in certain precincts following the programme's conclusion. This suggests that cognitive shifts induced by the training course precipitated changes in how local security and CVE programmes were subsequently implemented on the ground.

While the training courses were limited in scope due to their nature as pilot activities, they offer a number of advantages. By producing a refined and tested curriculum, it is feasible to scale up similar programmes in the future by leveraging available e-learning technologies and organising further workshops. As a co-creation of RUSI and the NCTC, the projects foster a sense of ownership, making it more likely to be internalised and replicated by domestic stakeholders. Similarly, any negative connotations associated with

STRIVE's external funding were largely mitigated by the European Commission's flexible regulations. Coordinators were allowed to disclose the origin of their funds at their own discretion depending on whether it would be helpful for project implementation.

Despite these benefits, several key challenges experienced by the project were also highlighted. While, the NCTC is legally mandated to manage Kenya's CVE policies, and previously operated under the Interior Ministry when STRIVE HoA was originally launched, the Centre has subsequently been incorporated under the administrative umbrella of the Office of the President. It therefore now operates separately to other law enforcement institutions, including those that supervise frontline security operations and community policing. As such, the NCTC's ability to deliver sustainable reform in the implementation of CVE may be constricted by a series of departmental silos. Any transformation in the security sector is therefore dependent on coordination between disparate branches of government, elements of which may be less receptive to the CVE curriculum and its emphasis on civil–state cooperation.

'Outreach programmes should inform local communities of CVE activities in a transparent manner to distinguish them from "hard" counter-terrorism measures'

Recommendations

A number of key recommendations were identified on the basis of this pilot and its outputs:

- It is crucial that law enforcement personnel receive CVE training that instructs how excessive use of force, ethnic profiling and the lack of rule of law can contribute towards increased radicalisation.

- Outreach programmes should inform local communities of CVE activities in a transparent manner to distinguish them from 'hard' counter-terrorism measures.

- Individuals with experience in security, CVE, local languages and culture should deliver these sessions, and the training should provide a platform for future policy development.

'CVE programmes need to be grounded on strong partnerships between government actors, CSOs and CVE specialists'

- CVE training for security actors should be implemented in as many locations as possible. However, it should prioritise areas with a history of violence and discrimination against minority groups, high levels of recruitment and high rates of terrorist attacks.

- CVE programmes need to be grounded on strong partnerships between government actors, CSOs and CVE specialists, ensuring a mutual degree of ownership and shared credit by all stakeholders.

- CSO networks should collaborate with national authorities to maintain positive relations between CVE implementers and government stakeholders. Networks must also facilitate the exchange of ideas and information between implementers to exploit available synergies and avoid programme duplication.

To build on this initial progress, STRIVE II aims to expand the training sessions to both a county and station level. This would provide the groundwork for an eventual survey across recipient and non-recipient communities to establish whether any significant, positive impact from multiple interventions can be identified.

Thematic Recommendation by the Independent Evaluators: Law Enforcement

In relation to law enforcement, it is important that sensitisation and capacity development initiatives reach down to front line officers in hotspot areas and their station commanders and are complemented by inter-agency cooperation and institutional change with the aim that performance across relevant agencies and interaction with communities is enhanced. Achieving this requires political will. STRIVE's experience demonstrates that non-state actors can play an active role, but it needs to be backed up politically and administratively (via a Memorandum of Understanding, for instance). With state agencies also active in this area (agency-to-agency cooperation), it is relevant to establish coordination forums among the donors/implementers concerned. Regarding beneficiary linkages, STRIVE has demonstrated the value in securing a centrally placed counterpart (the NCTC) and nurturing the relationship. The experience suggests that under the right conditions, it is feasible to include other national actors (CSOs) in the arrangement.

Result Area 2: Strengthening the Capacity of Women's Organisations to Counter Violent Extremism

The second strand of STRIVE concentrated on enhancing the capacity of women-focused organisations conducting CVE in both Puntland and Somaliland.

The theory of change here has been if women and women's organisations increase their capacity to identify and address violent extremism, and secure their participation in locally driven de-radicalisation initiatives while increasing their support for each other and exchanging approaches and good practices, then radicalisation and violent extremism in their communities will diminish. This is because women will be able to leverage their special role and influence within communities and families to enhance local CVE initiatives.

Puntland was subsequently excluded on the basis of safety concerns after a locally coordinated attack by Al-Shabaab on a UN convoy in April, 2015. In Somaliland, a number of urban sites were identified for the project, including the town of Burao. These areas were selected because they had sufficient infrastructure for accommodating external interventions. They also had reputations for acting as gateways for extremist infiltration into the region.

'There was little pre-existing empirical data outlining the agency of Somali women in the CVE space'

The intervention incorporated a preliminary assessment study to map the role and agency of women engaged in preventative programming. This produced a body of research that helped to tailor more effective and targeted local projects.

There was little pre-existing empirical data outlining the agency of Somali women in the CVE space. Local researchers were therefore contracted by RUSI to capitalise on their grassroots' knowledge, and lead interviews and focus-group sessions. These were designed to gauge community perceptions of the role of women in delivering security, the extent they were able to influence 'at-risk' youth and how far they motivated young Somalis to join violent movements.

While descriptions initially adhered to default perceptions of women as passive observers in radicalisation and recruitment processes, respondents gradually revealed how female actors can play both a direct and indirect role. They serve as effective conduits for disseminating radical messages and amplifying local extremist sympathies. They also provide front line logistical support and, in certain cases, can operate as combatants. Given

their proximity to community 'grapevines' and their traditional management role in the family structure, women were highlighted as critical 'agents of change'. As such, they are able to generate extensive multiplier effects for the promotion of non-violence, civic engagement or violent extremism, depending on their orientation. The research therefore underscores the need to integrate women more effectively within the CVE space.

Pilot actions were developed with the aim of including and empowering female voices in Somaliland's pre-existing security mechanisms. Two stakeholder coordination meetings were arranged to help women engage community elders, religious leaders and government actors and to secure female participation in local CVE initiatives. With the help of STRIVE HoA, eleven women's peace committees were established in Togdheer, Saahil and Sool regions to raise awareness of violent extremism. They also sought to improve the circulation of information between law enforcement and community actors. These were strengthened by a set of capacity-building workshops. Women were instructed in methods to effectively present themselves when interacting with local authorities. RUSI staff also provided guidance and technical support to the committees as they convened meetings with their respective communities to mobilise local 'buy-in' across both urban and rural contexts. Finally, STRIVE HoA trained policewomen, and members of women's police forums, in how they could actively participate in CVE programmes, identify security issues in their local precincts and design targeted solutions.

Outcomes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

In terms of outcomes, a dearth of available data on the role of women in Somaliland's CVE efforts has allowed STRIVE HoA to collate an unprecedented body of research. This can be leveraged for future interventions and has already contributed towards raising local awareness over CVE and associated social issues.

'Research indicates women are more likely to engage with female police officers'

Similarly, the pilot training stimulated a concerted increase in employment rates of policewomen in recipient areas, including Burao's police station. While they continued to be largely relegated to administrative tasks, this trend creates an entry point for female participation in the security services. It may therefore provide the necessary groundwork for inducing a broader cultural shift over time in local perceptions of gender. This is essential as research indicates women are more likely to engage with female police officers. Greater gender parity would therefore reduce distrust between law enforcement and the general population. It would also promote cooperation between a broader range of stakeholders and could contribute towards a more coherent referral system. However, due to logistical and time constraints it must be qualified that these results were collated by STRIVE HoA's local partners. As such, they require independent verification, particularly in terms of measuring the long term sustainability and impact of women-led policing.

Beyond these initial results, the project identified a number of key lessons that should inform subsequent programming. There was significant hesitation across segments of the community to the inclusion of women in discussions about peace and security. This was especially the case among religious groups and traditional leaders. Nevertheless, resistance can be mitigated partially by involving village authorities in the pre-assessment phases of CVE activities. This provides an opportunity for avoiding the perception that such initiatives are vehicles for foreign interests to challenge local norms.

Similarly, many potential stakeholders on the local level may not have a full understanding of CVE from the outset. These perpetuate popular misconceptions that such projects criticise Islamic and customary values. If these fears are not legitimately allayed, CVE practitioners may inadvertently curtail local support. STRIVE HoA also identified the susceptibility of CVE-specific programmes to straying too far into the realm of gender mainstreaming. Conflating prevention with gender empowerment diminishes the traction CVE initiatives are liable to generate in conservative societies. As a result the efficacy of CVE may be diluted in the very areas it is most needed.

Recommendations

On the basis of this pilot, a series of important recommendations were identified:

- Village leaders, elders and critical local stakeholders should be included during all pre-assessment phases of CVE activities in Somaliland, and must have a voice in defining programme objectives. This is particularly the case when projects involve the empowerment of women.

- STRIVE HoA recognises that initiatives will have to be largely designed by specialists due to the lack of local proficiency and experience in CVE. However, there must be adequate flexibility to balance sensibilities, avoid perceptions of external intrusion and amend programmes where necessary after consultation with local partners.

'Be cautious that gender-focused programmes complement rather than annex CVE'

- Religious groups and community leaders should be sensitised to the importance of integrating women into discussions over peace-building and security. This would encourage them to support rather than obstruct CVE activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of women-led organisations combating violent extremism.

- Practitioners should appreciate the mutual synergy between preventative activities and broader gender equality agendas. However, they must be cautious that gender-focused programmes complement rather than annex CVE as this could be detrimental to CVE's objectives.

Thematic Recommendation by the Independent Evaluators: Women and Youth

In relation to counter radicalisation efforts concerning women and youth, it is recommended to undertake rigorous research into cultural and social norms in the localities concerned so that pre-conditions for change are exposed and can be addressed during project design. STRIVE has demonstrated that there are significant differences between Somaliland and Kenya (Somaliland being generally more conservative), implying that different approaches are needed. Actor mapping should highlight potential influencers (positive and negative). As one moves from group-focused initiatives (for instance, dialogue) to those more focused on individuals (such as mentoring), there will be a need to identify possibilities for referral.

Result Area 3: Understanding the Challenges Faced by EU-Born Somali Youth in Somaliland

The third pillar focused on engaging with Somalia diaspora youth born in the EU. This included an initial mapping of key drivers fuelling their radicalisation and recruitment, and using the data to implement targeted pilot programmes.

The theory of change here is if efforts are made to promote better understanding of diaspora youth, and these youth and local youth integrate more freely, then the risk that diaspora youth will be radicalised while in Somaliland will diminish. This is because diaspora youth will feel less marginalised, and their resilience will become stronger through friendships and contacts made with the local youth and their communities.

'No evidence was uncovered of larger-scale radicalisation of the diaspora youth in Somaliland '

A field-based, hypothesis-testing research programme was launched to cultivate an understanding of factors contributing towards the radicalisation and recruitment of EU-born Somali youth in Somaliland. The methodology incorporated a literature review and key informant interviews with government officials, teachers, sheikhs and NGO staff. This was supplemented with a small qualitative perception data collection exercise with diaspora and non-diaspora young people across a number of selected cities (Borama, Burao, Erigavo, Las Anod and Hargeisa).

A wide variety of drivers were identified as potentially accelerating local manifestations of violent extremism. Diaspora youth returning to Somaliland for longer durations were also catalogued as a higher 'at-risk' demographic relative to those staying with their families or visiting for a shorter period of time. Importantly, however, no evidence was uncovered of larger-scale radicalisation of the diaspora youth in Somaliland. Instead, the data indicated such processes were anecdotal and individualistic rather than systemic. Similarly, radicalisation and recruitment largely occurred in an individual's home country and, often, this was through the internet. This therefore challenged the initial assumption of the pilot (that is, the need to identify effective activities for mitigating the risk of in-country radicalisation of diaspora youth) as the risk of radicalisation was already low.

On the basis of the evidence, it was concluded that longer-term male diaspora youth could still potentially benefit from Somaliland-based CVE projects. This could be achieved by substituting a comprehensive intervention with smaller-scale, targeted prevention initiatives that integrated a substantive research component. A five-track targeted prevention approach (tackling push/pull factors, weakening catalysts and

strengthening moderators) was recommended in Somaliland. This should complement regular research projects analysing radicalisation in both Somaliland and Europe. Key elements of this strategy were identified as:

- Promoting sustained engagement with the diaspora in their home countries parallel to interventions into Somaliland's social, economic and political spheres.

- Using strategic communication and Islamic cultural events to counter violent extremist narratives.

- Collaborating with Somaliland's ministries of education and religious affairs to compile a list of intermediate-level religious schools, and to conduct thorough teacher inspections.

- Supporting the appeal of secular education systems as a vehicle for engaging diaspora youth.

- Supporting the role of the Diaspora Agency as a consolidated focal point for all diaspora in Somaliland.

This research was supplemented by a series of pilot schemes specifically designed to encourage the engagement, empowerment and participation of young Somalis. Aside from familial issues associated with parents suffering from psycho-social problems, many diaspora youth are isolated from broader society. They are often segregated from their host communities and have similar difficulties integrating with local peers when visiting Somaliland. This is partially attributable to significant culture shocks they experience stemming from linguistic and social barriers.

In this context, STRIVE HoA mediated four discussion forums for diaspora and local youth in Hargeisa, Borama and Burao. The aim was to educate members of youth clubs on the role of religion in peace-building, the importance of peaceful coexistence in Islam and the dangers of radicalisation. These groups had a mixed membership and regularly invited moderate actors with an Islamic background to act as positive role models and offer guidance. 'Sports for Change' tournaments were also organised and cultural excursions were held in Maroodi Jeex, Awdal and Togdheer regions. These were primarily to assist visiting expats in their understanding of Somaliland's cultural and social norms, and to help them build relationships with young local Somalis. Collectively, the pilot's various branches therefore focused on three key areas: developing confidence and mutual familiarity between different youth groups, occupying their time, and expanding their horizons.

'The research was supplemented by a series of pilot schemes specifically designed to encourage the engagement, empowerment and participation of young Somalis'

'A five-track targeted prevention approach was recommended in Somaliland'

Outcomes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

The project's outputs had clear implications for the design of future CVE programming. Discussion groups were highlighted as efficient mechanisms for facilitating cross-societal engagement, although the impact was greatest when meetings were smaller and included panellists in their teenage years. This was because young audience members were able to better relate to their advice.

'Despite their good intentions, imams appeared to be out of touch with the anxieties, priorities and interests of their youthful congregations'

A problem also surfaced with the inclusion of religious authorities. Despite their good intentions, imams appeared to be out of touch with the anxieties, priorities and interests of their youthful congregations. Many were frequently ill-equipped to tackle the broad range of socio-economic, political and international challenges facing younger generations. Community leaders similarly often lacked a clear understanding of sensitive topics such as radicalisation. This led them to scale back their interactions out of concern for their personal security and reputation. Nevertheless, over the duration of the project it became clear more substantive support could be generated if CVE practitioners listened to the concerns of local actors, and allowed them to engage at a pace with which they felt comfortable.
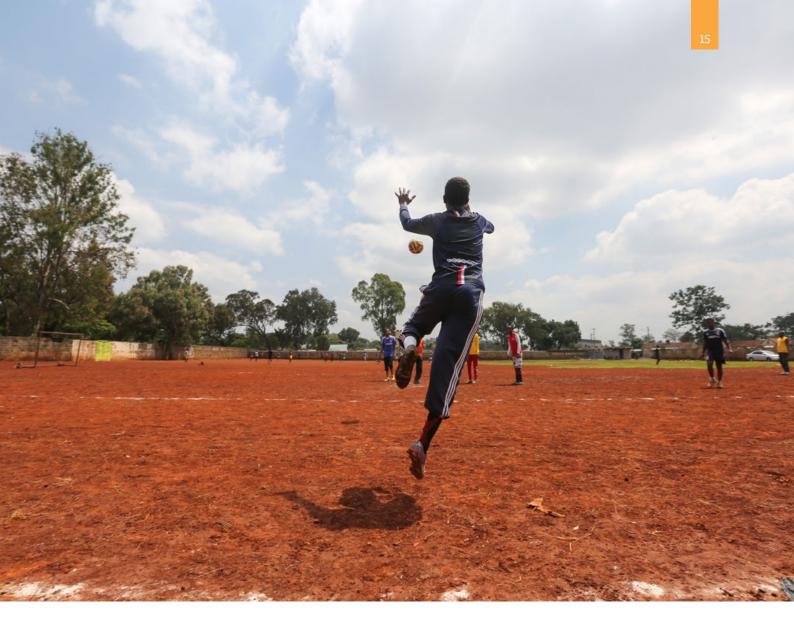
In contrast to the more structured focus group sessions, sport provided effective opportunities for 'breaking the ice' through informal interactions between expat and local youths. It was highlighted as a particularly useful introductory exercise. However, coordinators emphasised the need for additional projects capable of operating across gender lines, as female participation was severely hampered by conservative social norms.

The pilot intervention also experienced several shortfalls. RUSI's principal collaborator in Somaliland had a tendency to focus on activities that did not align with the project's objectives. It also seemed more concerned with local politics and remained reticent about experimenting with new methodologies. The group similarly missed opportunities to reach out to a greater number of participants by failing to develop a marketing campaign on social media.

This was further compounded by the logistical limitations of the intervention. RUSI's ability to provide continuous support to its implementing partners was restricted. This therefore required costly and time-consuming remote management strategies. Direct cooperation with community stakeholders and influential local actors was also significantly constrained by the sensitivity of CVE. Finally, the pilot's timeline did not correspond with optimal conditions on the ground. Activities started and finished outside the summer holiday period when diaspora youth were available in the greatest number and variety.

'Sport provided effective opportunities for "breaking the ice" through informal interactions between expat and local youths'

Recommendations

On the basis of these lessons and challenges, a series of prescriptions have been recommended for future CVE programming:

- There should be a well-trained local partner to collaborate with CVE specialists in the design of sensitive and relevant preventative programming. These activities should then be executed in a careful manner.

- Since the largest wave of diaspora youth travel to Somaliland during the summer, prospective programmes must be implemented in this period (nominally May to September).

- Social media, including Facebook and Twitter, can be leveraged as additional avenues for mobilising and involving beneficiaries in project activities.

'Discussion groups were highlighted as efficient mechanisms for facilitating cross-societal engagement'

'Direct cooperation with community stakeholders and influential local actors was significantly constrained by the sensitivity of CVE'

Result Area 4: Understanding Drivers for Violent Extremism Among Youth

In this Results Area, several independent but mutually reinforcing pilot projects were developed to specifically target youth radicalisation in Kenya. These included: mentorship schemes; interfaith dialogue; capacity building for media and religious authorities; and the production of radio programmes. A STRIVE HoA researcher attended each of the meetings organised under the pilot initiatives, interviewing participants to monitor the activities' progress and to gather data for future CVE programming. Recommendations drawn from each of these pilot initiatives are collectively examined at the end of the 'Result Area 4' section of this report.

Mentorship

'The selection criteria for potential beneficiaries targeted key 'at-risk' demographics'

The theory of change here is that if youth vulnerable to radicalisation and violent extremism are identified and brought together through a dialogue that identifies and responds to their needs, then they will become more resilient to extremist recruiters, leading to a reduction in extremist attitudes and behaviour. This is because the vulnerable youth will have enhanced capacity to resist extremist rhetoric, and develop viable alternatives to radicalisation and recruitment.

Organised in partnership with a Nairobi based CSO, STRIVE HoA delivered mentorship opportunities to vulnerable youth in Majengo and Eastleigh in Nairobi. The selection criteria for potential beneficiaries targeted key 'at-risk' demographics. These included school drop outs, recent converts to Islam, individuals involved directly in criminal activity/violence and those with peers involved in criminal activity/violence. Over a six-month period, CVE practitioners, living inside the community, filtered the list of individuals recruited on to the scheme. Those deemed most susceptible to radicalisation were prioritised on the basis of a loose set of indicators and the discretion of local practitioners, many of whom had interacted with these individuals in person.

A relatively small cohort of 20 'at-risk' young Kenyans was eventually formed. Crucially, however, the programme's boundaries remained flexible to accommodate dropouts and the inclusion of new beneficiaries over time. A researcher conducted analysis and evaluation over the course of the project to gauge the impact of mentorship.

STRIVE HoA also retained a photographer to document the life circumstances of the participants.

Outcomes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

Of all the pilot initiatives launched under STRIVE HoA, the mentorship scheme was considered the most effective for successfully competing in the 'same space' as violent extremist groups. Its positive results demonstrate the advantages of engaging with vulnerable youths on a personal and individual level. This was particularly the case when mentors were relatable role models for young Kenyans (such as entertainers, athletes and doctors who had carved new lives for themselves despite their deprived economic backgrounds). Formers/Returnees also generated significant traction and had a positive influence with 'at-risk' youth. This was especially the case when they emphasised the 'hard realities' of being a violent extremist. In both instances, the programme was enhanced when practitioners were contactable outside the course's formally scheduled meeting sessions. Using mentors already known by the community also helped to reduce barriers to participation and alleviated concerns over foreign funding.

'The scheme remains dependent on sourcing credible mentors capable of both building relationships with young Kenyans and sustaining a long-term commitment to the project'

However, a number of challenges have also surfaced that will need to be addressed in any future initiatives. The scheme remains dependent on sourcing credible mentors capable of both building relationships with young Kenyans and sustaining a long-term commitment to the project. Selecting the right personnel to implement the project is therefore essential. This requires thorough vetting procedures and an ongoing monitoring process to mitigate any vulnerability the programme has to infiltration by malign actors. Recruiting from within local communities also elevates the risk for individual mentors. This must be factored into design process so CVE practitioners do not compromise the 'do no harm' principle.

Due to its overall success, it was suggested the mentorship initiative should be scaled up in any future local CVE programming. This has already been launched in a new project funded by the Canadian government, and the mentorship model will be expanded over the course of a follow-up STRIVE II intervention.

Interfaith Pilot

The theory of change here is that if conflict drivers between Muslim and Christian communities are understood, and some or all of those drivers are addressed through religious networks, then youth will become less vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremist organisations. This is because religious networks in vulnerable communities will become more aware of interfaith conflict drivers, and contribute more effectively to eliminating these drivers.

A series of interfaith discussion groups were convened by STRIVE HoA at various locations along the Kenyan coast. These integrated a broad cross-section of society, including young Muslims and Christians, government officials, county leaders and local religious authorities.

Outcomes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

'It became clear dialogue would not be constructive unless it was underpinned by trust and credibility from all invested stakeholders'

As the project progressed it became clear dialogue would not be constructive unless it was underpinned by trust and credibility from all invested stakeholders. This drastically limited its effect as any receptive individuals were usually not very far down the 'pathway' of radicalisation. The pilot was similarly constrained by a lack of planning from STRIVE HoA's local partners who were responsible for structuring and mediating each meeting. Inexperienced mediators failed to stop sensitive discussions becoming emotionally charged, inhibiting the project's ability to increase tolerance and social cohesion. Importantly, there were also extensive intra-religious tensions – particularly between youth and local Muslim leaders (outlined in the Alternative Voices section below) – that persistently disrupted efforts to build linkages between communities.

'Inexperienced mediators failed to stop sensitive discussions becoming emotionally charged'

The Alternative Voices Project

The theory of change here is that if moderate imams and ukhtis better understand the process of individual radicalisation and incorporate this knowledge into sermons geared towards CVE, which also feature improved preaching skills, then radicalisation in mosques will decrease. This is because vulnerable youth will feel more attracted to moderate mosques led by moderate imams and ukhtis who are better able to detect early warning signs of radicalisation and counter the radicalisation process.

The programme involved a set of capacity-building sessions with religious authorities from across Kenya. These examined their potential role as 'alternative voices' to radicalisation. They also delivered training courses on specific issues pertinent to younger members of Muslim congregations, including the role of media in society. Additionally, youths were taught key monitoring techniques for assessing how imams – perceived by their communities to be moderate – were tailoring their sermons, and the ways in which local audiences received them.

Research highlighted significant inter-generational grievances, with youth often referring to religious leaders as 'corrupt' and 'self-serving'. Young Kenyans are becoming increasingly engaged in foreign policy and current affairs, areas in which imams often lack sufficient knowledge and fail to provide relevant advice. Exclusionary attitudes common among local Muslim authorities also have a tendency to marginalise women and youth from issues of mosque management and responsibility. Many clerics collectively dismiss them as immature and undeserving of inclusion in local decision making.

'Research highlighted significant inter-generational grievances'

Outcomes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

The pilot contributed only towards incremental changes in attitudes. This was largely due to resilient conservative social, cultural and Islamic norms that limited concessions by local imams, especially in terms of female empowerment. There were also conceptual problems with how 'moderate' was interpreted in Kenya's diverse religious landscape, with many communities referencing sermons delivered by 'radical' preachers. Those figures the programme did identify as 'moderate' were often reluctant to participate at all due to the misconception they would be co-opted to change and challenge elements of Islam itself rather than acting as voices against violent extremism specifically.

Despite these problems, STRIVE HoA drafted and published a sermon guide as an open resource for imams to help enhance their positive engagement with young Kenyans in the coastal region.

Radio Pilot

The theory of change here is that if youth vulnerable to violent extremist organisations listen to CVE radio programmes that feature educated figures of religious authority who are moderate in their views, and if the radio programme contains well-researched content, then radicalisation and recruitment will decrease. This is because the public will

become more aware of the negative consequences of radicalisation through an open and public discussion that welcomes moderate imams and gives them a louder voice.

STRIVE HoA broadcast four feature stories and four religious programmes discussing issues related to radicalisation. This incorporated a range of features designed to raise awareness over how violent extremists approach and captivate young people. It also sought to generate disincentives for further recruitment by sharing stories of families who had already lost members to violent extremist groups, and by highlighting the negative realities conflict can have on young people.

The pilot was expected to capitalise on an extensive audience base due to the popularity of radio programming in Kenya, and researchers monitored the reaction of a small group of youths living in Mombasa to gauge receptivity and impact. A local radio station in Mombasa was selected as a local partner because of its reputation as a well-received domestic brand.

Outcomes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

'Broadcasts generated substantial interest and participation from its listeners'

The broadcasts generated substantial interest and participation from its listeners, and were shown to be a conducive platform for exploring sensitive social issues. However, this was somewhat hampered by the broader political climate in Kenya and the constraints regularly imposed on the media industry by government authorities. In this context, the radio station experienced sporadic cancellations and delays that interrupted the pilot's output. The lack of specialist training among local journalists and their limited understanding of security, peace and violent extremism meant the programme was not as helpful as it could have been. Successful shows were therefore dependent on the ability of individual presenters and the compelling nature of particular stories. This left the pilot relatively inconsistent in its impact. Similarly, many of the guest speakers were often reluctant to share their views in full during on air debates.

However, there was an increase in the objectivity and clarity delivered by presenters once they had received information and training on CVE. This underscored the need to more effectively educate journalists who operate in this space. The partner radio station was also able to launch a comprehensive online marketing strategy to cultivate popular interest.

Recommendations Drawn from all Pilot Programmes in 'Result Area 4'

A number of recommendations were highlighted from across these youth-focused pilot interventions:

- Mentorship programmes should be prioritised in CVE efforts as they are highly effective tools for understanding and engaging with vulnerable individuals 'at-risk' of radicalisation and recruitment.

- Actors already engaged in media, sports or crime prevention are ideal candidates for mentorship roles, as are formers and youth who have already resisted radicalisation attempts.

- Where possible, mentors should be available outside office hours and outside the meetings formally convened within the project.

- On-air debates should select mediators who are well known to the community to allow participants to feel comfortable, thereby increasing information sharing and raising awareness among listeners.

- Media content needs to be reinforced with a targeted advertising campaign to generate the greatest possible social traction.

- Interfaith dialogue sessions require the participation of a conflict management expert or a mediator with a strong inter-religious profile to navigate potentially contentious or sensitive issues.

- Religious and community leaders, alongside journalists and broadcasters must receive training to sufficiently understand what is meant by violent extremism and CVE.

- CVE material should avoid displaying donor or organisational logos.

- The suitability of core and international team members directly participating in programmes for youth in 'at-risk' areas varies on a case-by-case basis. This should be informed largely by whether it is both safe to do so and the extent to which their presence will have a positive contribution.

'Religious and community leaders, alongside journalists and broadcasters must receive training to sufficiently understand what is meant by violent extremism and CVE'

Thematic Recommendation by the Independent Evaluators: At-Risk Individuals

Concerning individuals identified as being at-risk, it is recommended to include initiatives providing mentoring by credible experts who are able to develop a relationship of trust and confidence with those concerned. The team has identified a number of important findings from the STRIVE 1 pilot, including that initiatives prioritise the use of credible and capable mentors who enjoy local respect, are individually targeted and needs/incentives-based and allow sufficient time for the development of trust between mentor and mentee and follow up. Peer influencing approaches may also be worth considering provided they are supervised. It is critical that the mentors concerned have capacity and credibility to perform their roles and that a medium/long-term approach is used that extends to monitoring so that evidence of sustainable change is available. The team is conscious that mentors (and mentees) place themselves at personal risk due to the targeting of extremist organisations (note, this may argue against strong local anchoring in some cases). Mentoring initiatives should adopt a do-no-harm approach that systematically assesses and monitors risk.

4 *Preventive Communications*

Learning Lessons from Media Research and Activities in Kenya

STRIVE HOA'S operational flexibility enabled the inclusion of preventative communications as a result area after the initial launch of the project. A pilot activity was developed to address assumed 'gaps' in Kenya's media conversations on violent extremism. This incorporated three areas:

- Integrating the voices of young Kenyans, a demographic typically marginalised in media discourses at the national level, to add new viewpoints on CVE.

- Expert contributions to generate nuanced, evidenced-based context.

- Social media engagement to connect audiences and exploit available synergies with conventional media platforms.

'A significant proportion of the audience does not have a sufficient understanding of what CVE, violent extremism and radicalisation are'

These media activities emphasised the sporadic interest from the Kenyan media in violent extremism. Similarly, the pilot demonstrated the limitations of disseminating ad hoc news articles, which were usually ignored in the wider media environment. Importantly, while issues of radicalisation and CVE have profile and impact, these are relatively transient and do not guarantee sustained public interest. This is partially because a significant proportion of the audience does not have a sufficient understanding of what CVE, violent extremism and radicalisation are.

The programme also integrated a research phase designed to map and analyse media coverage of violent extremism in Kenya. This involved local CVE practitioners, researchers, reporters and editors. It was supplemented by a desk-based qualitative analysis of language in print and media broadcast coverage. Drawn from 80 media outlets, the data spanned a six-month period.

A number of important issues were identified:

- Kenyan media was defined by a dearth of evidence-based conversation. Instead, its output was largely reactionary, emotional and consistently failed to unpack complex questions (such as what factors were driving radicalisation and terrorism).

- Coverage usually relied on generalities about drivers and perpetrators, overly associating violent extremism with poverty, Islam and youth. This tended to accentuate social tensions within Kenya.

- It had an acute problem with language, using ill-defined jargon that lacked legal distinctions and gravitated towards an international rather than local focus.

- The debate was usually incomplete, omitting key voices such as Kenyan youth.

- There was a substantial disconnect between social media and traditional media platforms, undermining any sense of national dialogue and compounding the sense of exclusion experienced by Muslim and other minority communities.

'Coverage usually relied on generalities about drivers and perpetrators'

- Coverage of violent extremism and CVE dissipated between terrorist attacks, leading to missed opportunities for rebuilding social cohesion and educating the public.

'There should be a drastic increase in both the platforms available for young Kenyan voices and the output specifically addressing youth-relevant issues'

On the basis of these findings, STRIVE HoA researchers cited a series of recommendations for improving Kenya's media coverage of CVE, terrorism and violent extremism. Primarily, there should be a drastic increase in both the platforms available for young Kenyan voices and the output specifically addressing youth-relevant issues. Second, the media must provide more erudite analysis into violent extremism. This is supplemented by the need for the government to explain its CVE policies in a more coherent way if it wants to mobilise popular support. Doing so would involve a comprehensive outreach strategy to build linkages between the state and local communities – in particular youth groups – through transparent and sustained communication.

The programme also highlighted the importance of preventative communications. In contrast to traditional counter-narratives, which concentrate on persuasion, content management and population control, this process prioritises empowerment and relationship building. STRIVE HoA findings suggest preventative communications can build legitimacy for legal and/or coercive sanctions, especially when such provisions risk infringing on individual rights or community dignity. It also has the capacity to strengthen trilateral relationships between the state, civil society and 'at-risk' groups. This can encourage greater social 'buy-in' and youth empowerment through inclusive dialogue at the local and national level.

Thematic Recommendation by the Independent Evaluators: Preventative Communications

In relation to preventative communications, the evaluation recommends continuing to cooperate with journalists in order to promote good and responsible media coverage of CVE-relevant information, especially following violent incidents. In addition to the current work with print and TV journalists, engagement with social media and its influencers should be explored. The team observes that there needs to be a strong analytical basis of programming so that relevant themes and target groups are identified and that data are collected to assess the impact of transmissions on these groups. The radio station pilot suggests that the choice of radio station is important (there needs to be an audience and the audience needs to be relevant). Presenters need to be sufficiently experienced (also thematically). Support from a media expert with CVE experience appears useful in helping to focus programming. While radio remains a relevant medium in Kenya, social media is also growing in importance.

5 *Independent Evaluation*

AN INDEPENDENT evaluation of STRIVE HoA was conducted by two external consultants. The findings of the evaluation are briefly outlined below and available in more detail in the Evaluation Report. The evaluation was carried out with a distinct forward-looking focus, motivated by the need to strengthen the knowledge base around CVE programming more broadly. The Evaluation Report concludes with a set of key recommendations for future CVE programming, which are also included in the following section.

Monitors assessed the pilot activities against their stated aims, the purpose and objectives of the STRIVE HoA project as a whole, and how they align with wider EU interventions and interests. It also examined whether the programmes had met international standards and best practices.

Beyond the logistical difficulties in assessing an ongoing project (especially in determining its sustainability and long-term impact), there is currently no definitive framework for measuring CVE best practices. The evaluation therefore relied on an amended set of DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance designed by the OECD: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and project management.

While individual pilot schemes varied, STRIVE HoA was described as having strong overall contextual relevance (such as targeted identified hotspots and areas vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment processes). This is despite deviating from the design framed in the original terms of reference, with the 'net effect being to more strongly focus on activities in Kenya (Nairobi and the Coastal Region) and Somaliland'.[1] The adjustments were 'discussed with the EU on a needs basis' and served to positively increase the focus of STRIVE's intervention modalities over all. It also had policy relevance for parallel EU initiatives in the region, including the Counter-terrorism Action Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen, and broader initiatives in the CVE space such as the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Practitioners were deemed sufficiently aware of the intersections between CVE and peace-building,

'STRIVE HoA was described as having strong overall contextual relevance'

1 Julian Brett and Andre Kahlmeyer, 'Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism – STRIVE (Horn of Africa)', Evaluation Report, Tana and Conflict Management Consulting, 23 January 2017. p. 11.

development and security programmes operating in the same environment. Crucially, STRIVE HoA also not only had a high degree of alignment with international standards and best practices, but was actively contributing towards the improvement of existing CVE approaches.

'Despite STRIVE HoA's remit for experimentation, not all of its projects were set up to effectively promote learning'

Despite STRIVE HoA's remit for experimentation, not all its projects were set up to effectively promote learning. The reviewers identified four key steps underpinning a coherent learning cycle for pilot programmes. These included: establishing a strong baseline that maps the situation before the intervention; efficient implementation; consistent monitoring for the duration of the pilot; and a final evaluation to determine any conclusions. Not all STRIVE HoA's initiatives adhered to this framework. Baseline studies were produced, but some of the associated theories of change were applied retrospectively once the activities had been launched. It would have been better if these underlying assumptions had been exposed and tested in the project's preliminary stages. This would have created a more rigorous set of metrics for informing later monitoring and evaluation. The assessment similarly pointed to the lack of a clear holistic approach in STRIVE HoA's programming, which diminished its ability to fully exploit available synergies. There were also limitations in terms of innovation. While the project did launch pilot initiatives, it also largely relied on a process of 'continuation and adaption rather than starting new processes'.[2] Nevertheless, the activities and processes that were implemented were found to be inclusive, participatory and directly contributed to learning in the CVE space. A further aspect of effectiveness highlighted in the report involved the assessment and management of risk. The STRIVE team specifically identified macro-level risks, but failed to assess risks for 'security of staff, programmatic risks as well as reputational risk' in a 'systematic way or in sufficient depth'.[3] As such, the evaluators recommend that the 'do no harm' dimension of initiatives be 'more explicitly assessed so that possible unintended impacts can be identified'. Despite its pilot nature, there should also be greater attention paid to sustainability issues, the constraints of experimental programming, the implications of exit and the remit for extensions.[4]

In terms of efficiency, STRIVE HoA adopted a lean management structure with a small team of conducting a variety of different, context specific approaches to CVE implementation. However, the progress of certain activities was partially inhibited by the low or insufficient capacities of local partners. When the STRIVE team was able to sustain close supervision, their interventions led to much stronger results. Practitioners were also able to align project resources, its scope and expectations with its relatively small budget size. The changes in the programmatic parameters had a positive impact of efficiency as they enabled the team to 'concentrate on fewer pilots and project locations'.[5] In this context, it was recommended greater funding should be made available for future interventions to maintain momentum and to strengthen the scope for sustainable results. Importantly, the reviewers emphasised the need to improve coordination and knowledge sharing to elicit a more effective overall donor impact.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Over its lifespan, STRIVE retained a relatively strong output level, particularly through its CVE-specific programmes, including CVE curriculum, mentoring schemes and radio broadcasts. Weaker results were generated from pilots with less of a CVE focus or from those with weaker underlying assumptions, such as activities concentrating on female empowerment and inter-faith dialogue.

More broadly, there was a collective problem with attribution across its initiatives. This was due primarily to weak baselines and indicators that reduced the scope for monitoring, evaluation and, by extension, the ability to accurately identify and ascribe causalities for particular outcomes. However, it was also the result of shifting norms in programme design and implementation. When STRIVE HoA was initially launched, the value of using 'Theories of Change' were not fully appreciated. As its utility became clear over time, these frameworks were retrospectively integrated into existing projects. Theories of Change will feature prominently in STRIVE II.

'There was a collective problem with attribution across its initiatives'

Overall, STRIVE HoA was found to have generated novel research into CVE, identified successful avenues for accessing communities and interacting with 'at-risk' groups, and has learned from its experiences. At the Lessons Learned Conference the external evaluators highlighted the following three overarching findings:

- Important drivers fuelling radicalisation and recruitment were identified, including structural motivators, individual incentives and enabling factors. While it was always a combination of the three, the particular dynamics precipitating these processes were varied, individual and context-dependent.

- Recruitment is local and CVE interventions must be entirely based on local political reality at the community, regional and national level. This is because each region has its own political dynamic that violent groups utilise and tailor in their narratives, meaning any preventative programmes must compete in this same specific space if it is to be effective.

- Opportunities for engagement depend on state capacities, which are often related to its proximity to armed conflict.

Overview of Key Recommendations from the Independent Evaluators

In addition to the thematic recommendations included in textboxes throughout this report, the following key recommendations were put forward by the independent evaluators.[6]

In relation to CVE project design and delivery:

- **It is recommended that CVE projects systematically adopt a theory of change approach during project design that makes assumptions explicit.** From its

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6 *Ibid.*, pp. iv–vii.

outset, it needs to map actors and focus clearly on at-risk groups and their concerns in order to distinguish CVE interventions from other forms of activity, such as peace-building (where there can be considerable overlap). Project relevance is strengthened through inclusive, participatory approaches that secure local buy-in. Arrangements for building trust with the target audience should be prioritised and built into the project, as trust is often a precondition for attitudinal and behavioural change and thus CVE-relevant outcomes and impact. For example, language must be tailored to local sensitivities and efforts made to avoid stereotyping beneficiary groups.

'Project relevance is strengthened through inclusive, participatory approaches that secure local buy-in'

- **It is recommended that programming includes baseline research and arrangements for monitoring that identifies and validates change assumptions and provides data in response to CVE relevant indicators, thus helping to provide evidence of what works and the pre-conditions involved.** To the extent that it is feasible, the team recommends involving the same experts in the baseline research and project monitoring in order to promote consistency of approach as well as confidence and trust among stakeholders. The team also believes that a constant engagement of experts would be beneficial for any pilot for the same reasons. The team notes that large-scale perception surveys, while considered beneficial and a valuable way to assess attitudinal change, are likely to be costly.

- **It is recommended to engage in systematic risk assessment before and during project implementation in order to understand and mitigate risks as much as possible and to promote project impact.** Risk categories include contextual, programmatic and institutional risks, the latter including personal and reputational risks. STRIVE has demonstrated the relevance of thematically competent and politically neutral implementing partner(s) with previous project management experience.

- **It is recommended to adopt a pilot project approach for the first engagement in a new geographical location that allows for trial and error, provided that sufficiently rigorous monitoring arrangements are in place to learn from it.** STRIVE has demonstrated that some contexts are decidedly less permissive than others, emphasising that tailored approaches are needed. The inclusion of an inception phase during project implementation – during which the approach can be tested and finalised – has also proved very useful and should be replicated. The emphasis on learning remains highly relevant in any future CVE project and can be supported by a strong focus on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).

- **It is recommended to have funding available to immediately extend successful pilot projects and thereby maintain the momentum generated (thus strengthening the scope for achieving sustainable results).** Equally, there is a need to prepare for exit from pilots that will not be continued. Risks

associated with an exit that is not adequately prepared may include frustration, exposure and incomplete process among beneficiaries etc.

- **Adequate human resources should be made available, especially if CVE projects cover more than one country and/or operate in hard-to-access countries and locations.** If testing pilot approaches is a main focus, the funding agency and selected implementer should consider including a full-time M&E officer position. The officer's sole responsibility would be to accompany all project work with advice on monitoring and evaluation, to ensure maximum learning from all work and to ensure the quality of implementing partners' work and reporting. As implementing partners may experience capacity constraints (CVE-related and/or project management), the project team should be prepared to also provide a mentoring role in these respects.

- **As implementing partners may experience capacity constraints (CVE-related and/or project management), the project team should be prepared to also provide a capacity development and/or mentoring role in these respects.** STRIVE's experience with the capacity of local partners was mixed and, in certain locations, the project had to choose between either not working on CVE or working with those CSOs that were already present. This was particularly the case in Somaliland and Puntland. Through providing an element of capacity development and following this through with longer-term mentoring, overall effectiveness can be increased.

'Through providing an element of capacity development and following this through with longer-term mentoring, overall effectiveness can be increased'

In relation to the EU's CVE engagement:

- **Within the EU system, it is recommended to ensure maximum cohesion with other EU funding instruments.** For example, a regional focus of STRIVE activities in the coastal region in Kenya would likely benefit from a strong link with the EU's development support in this region (for instance, with economic development support) to achieve synergies and increased impact of both approaches.

- **It is recommended to systematise dissemination and information sharing within the EU system to ensure that the relevant EU delegations have full access to all project reporting and have an opportunity to respond to reports.** Also, wider learning within the EU system and among the donor community in Africa and beyond could be promoted through wider sharing of project reporting. There would be considerable value in improving coordination among donors and implementers and a project such as STRIVE would be a good catalyst in this regard.