



# FROM HIGH-RISK TO RESILIENT

## Reducing Vulnerability to Violent Extremism in Kenya through Social and Economic Interventions

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As recruitment into violent extremist organizations (VEOs) continues to stoke conflict and instability around the world, governments and peacebuilding actors are increasingly prioritizing preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts as part of a larger violence prevention strategy.<sup>1</sup> P/CVE approaches span both programs that address the underlying, systemic drivers of violent extremism and those that work to reduce the risk of radicalization and recruitment among individuals and within vulnerable communities.<sup>2</sup>

While an increasing number of studies have evaluated the impact of P/CVE interventions, there is still a significant need to understand “what works” in these programs.<sup>3</sup> These evidence gaps are particularly pronounced for programs that seek to *reduce the vulnerability of those who are most at risk* of radicalization or recruitment into VEOs, compared to broader, community-based approaches that seek to reduce risk

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<sup>1</sup> Ris and Ernstorfer, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Alliance for Peacebuilding, 2016; CSO, 2017; Sahgal and Kimaiyo, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Mercy Corps’ decades of work in conflict-affected countries includes research in this area. For instance, past research has evaluated the impact of education and civic engagement interventions on violence among youths in [Somalia](#) and [Somaliland](#). In [Afghanistan](#), the combination of cash and vocational training interventions reduced support for armed opposition groups. Mercy Corps also designed and tested a set of assessment tools to enable the identification of communities most vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist groups in [Niger](#). A growing body of research has also evaluated the impact of interventions to reduce violent extremism including Savage et al., 2014; Marrone et al., 2020; Rhoades et al., 2020.

across an entire population in an affected area. This evidence gap exists because of the infancy of such programming approaches and attempts to identify who is most at risk, as well as the ethical, technical, and operational challenges of implementing impact evaluations with such populations.<sup>4</sup>

This research report uses analysis of data from Mercy Corps' Collective Resilience Against Extremism (CREATE) program to help fill two key evidence gaps: 1) **what matters** for reducing vulnerability to VEO recruitment, and 2) **what activities and approaches are most effective** in increasing resilience among the highest-risk individuals. The CREATE program operates in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, and seeks to demonstrate how to identify and engage with at-risk individuals and how interventions that provide holistic packages of personal guidance, knowledge, and access to opportunities can be an effective means of reducing their vulnerability to radicalization and recruitment.<sup>5</sup> We used pre- and post-assessment surveys from participants in CREATE's program activities in four counties in coastal Kenya (Kwale, Mombasa, Kilifi, and Lamu) to collect data on five key indicators of individual resilience to VE recruitment and participants' attitudes towards the use of violence.<sup>6</sup> Our analysis also draws on open-ended qualitative responses from participants and the program team's broader learning from the process of implementing CREATE.

Taken together, this evidence provides new insights on how social and economic interventions can build resilience to VE recruitment, which has implications for how and when practitioners should engage in P/CVE programs and how to tailor programs to more effectively flip risk of recruitment into resilience.

## Summary of Key Findings

- On average, after participating in CREATE program activities, participants report improvements across five dimensions of resilience: diverse social networks; skills and livelihood opportunities; sense of agency; sense of their position in society; and participation in governance processes.
- Improvements in resilience dimensions are associated with reduced vulnerability to violent extremism, with diversity of social networks and sense of agency having the strongest relationship with reduced support for violence.
- Participating in CREATE activities is associated with a 22% reduction in the likelihood of justifying the use of violence.

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<sup>4</sup> Holmer et al., 2018; Gaarder and Anna, 2013; Idris, 2019; International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Activities discussed and evaluated in this brief relate to CREATE's Outcome 1. CREATE also seeks to support key non-state influencers and partners to more effectively prevent violent extremism (Outcome 2) and strengthen the capacity of government actors to constructively engage other stakeholders to prevent VE radicalization and recruitment (Outcome 3).

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this brief, we refer to these key indicators that the program targets with its interventions as "resilience dimensions" to reflect the role that they play within the theory of change. We used survey measures of support for and justification of violence as a proxy for level of identification with the aims of violent extremist organizations, under the logic that if someone endorses, justifies, is willing to engage in, or has engaged in violence, then they are more likely to support violent extremist ideologies and/or support or join a violent extremist organization. See Mercy Corps' [body of research](#) for evidence that the drivers of support for and participation in violent conflict are similar to those for VE.

## Program Context and Theory of Change

Although Kenya has made significant progress in developing the structures and strategies for reducing violent extremism, it is still one of East Africa's most vulnerable countries when it comes to home-grown violent extremism and recruitment into VEOs.<sup>7</sup> This is largely due to its proximity to Somalia, but also because extremist groups operating in Kenya capitalize on local grievances and vulnerabilities to spread and justify their ideology and world view and recruit at-risk individuals.<sup>8</sup>

CREATE is a learning-driven program that aims to understand what drives radicalization and recruitment into VEOs within at-risk communities, as well as what works to address those drivers, both at the individual and systemic levels. CREATE works with community-based organizations to identify individuals determined to be at particularly high risk of joining a VEO, differentiating the program from other, more community-focused P/CVE interventions. The program team drew upon previous local analysis to design a diagnostic approach that enabled community champions to identify and refer potential participants, and to assess their risk levels in ways which avoided stigmatizing or turning away any individuals once they were approached.<sup>9</sup> These sensitive approaches are used to reduce risk to organizations and participants when implementing targeted programs, where individuals lack trust and confidence and express genuine fears of profiling or surveillance.

CREATE's diagnostic approach is premised on the idea that it is often *who you know*, as much as *who you are*, that determines risk. Mercy Corps therefore engaged community champions who identified potential program participants with the help of a diagnostic tool that considers knowledge of associations and connections, as well as personal experiences and characteristics. The program identified five dimensions of risk that make an individual susceptible to radicalization and recruitment by VEOs when they are absent or weak, but which serve as sources of resilience to VE recruitment when they are strong: 1) diversification of social networks, 2) access to livelihoods; 3) sense of agency or self; 4) sense of one's position in society; and 5) inclusive participation in governance processes.

CREATE then designed specific integrated intervention packages that aimed to transform these risk dimensions into sources of resilience, building off lessons from previous programming and adapting as the team learnt more. These packages included activities that focused on mentorship, trauma counselling, networking and bonding, dialogue and access to information, and personalized referrals (Table 1). The program lasted five months, before and after which the evaluation was conducted, though not all participants were engaged for the full duration.



**Figure 1. Kwale, Mombasa, Kilifi, and Lamu Counties within Kenya**

<sup>7</sup> Sharamo and Mohamed, 2020. Jones, 2020, Royal Services Institute.

<sup>8</sup> Van Metre, 2016; Freedom House, 2018

<sup>9</sup> The previous study identifying risk factors can be access [here](#). Diagnostic tool is available upon request.

Individual Mentorship Sessions	Each week, a mentee (participant) and their specifically identified, paired, and trained mentor held a mentorship session in a private setting of the pair's choice.
Group Mentorship Sessions	These sessions provided a platform for interaction among mentees from the same locations, encouraging sharing of information, and identification of common interests and challenges.
Trauma Counselling Sessions	Trauma Counselling sessions were conducted in group settings and designed to reduce the impacts of toxic stress, violence and abuse that mentees may have experienced. <sup>10</sup>
Dialogue Sessions	Dialogue sessions were facilitated discussion forums that enabled mentees to discuss contextually relevant issues that may increase risk, or to connect with subject matter specialists and government officials as guest speakers to address concerns or questions, and access information on opportunities and funds.
Sports Activities	Mentees were organized into sports teams to compete with other teams within their communities during which messages of tolerance, diversity, and respect were shared.
Entrepreneurship & Livelihood Skills Training	The entrepreneurship and livelihood skills training involved imparting basic business concepts to mentees, to enable them to: (i) develop basic book-keeping and financial management skills; (ii) understand the common mistakes made in running small businesses; (iii) appreciate the importance of development of a savings culture; (iv) refine some existing ideas of starting up small-scale income generating activities.
Personalized referrals	Mentees were provided with information about and connections into specific, personalized support or opportunities based on their need and interests. These included psychosocial support, religious education and guidance, job referrals, access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and training colleges, and access to governance spaces such as Youth Assemblies.

**Table 1. CREATE's Program Activities for High-Risk Individuals**

The theory of change underpinning this set of interventions posits that if individuals participate in these integrated program activities, they will experience improvements across all five resilience dimensions and thus will be less susceptible to VE radicalization and recruitment (Figure 2).

This brief seeks to test the assumptions within this theory of change regarding the connection between CREATE's social and economic interventions, the five identified resilience dimensions, and support for violent extremism.

<sup>10</sup> [Toxic stress](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html) can occur as a result of "strong, frequent, or prolonged adversity" and can disrupt child development (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2015). It is also an identified risk factor for participating in violence. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>



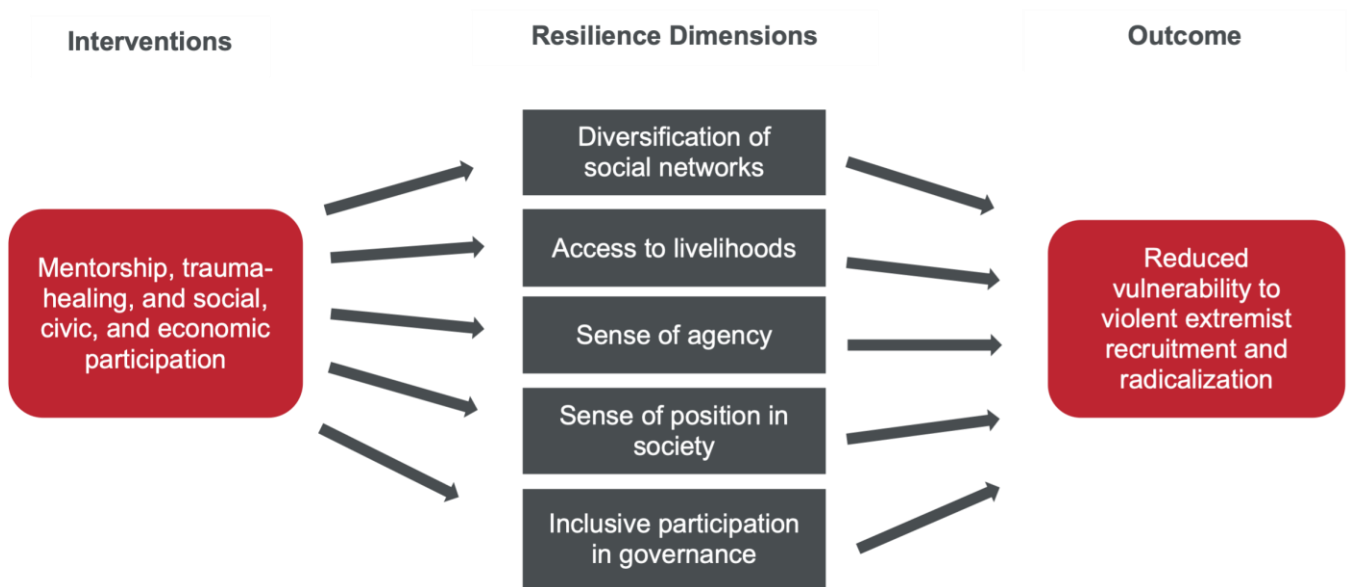


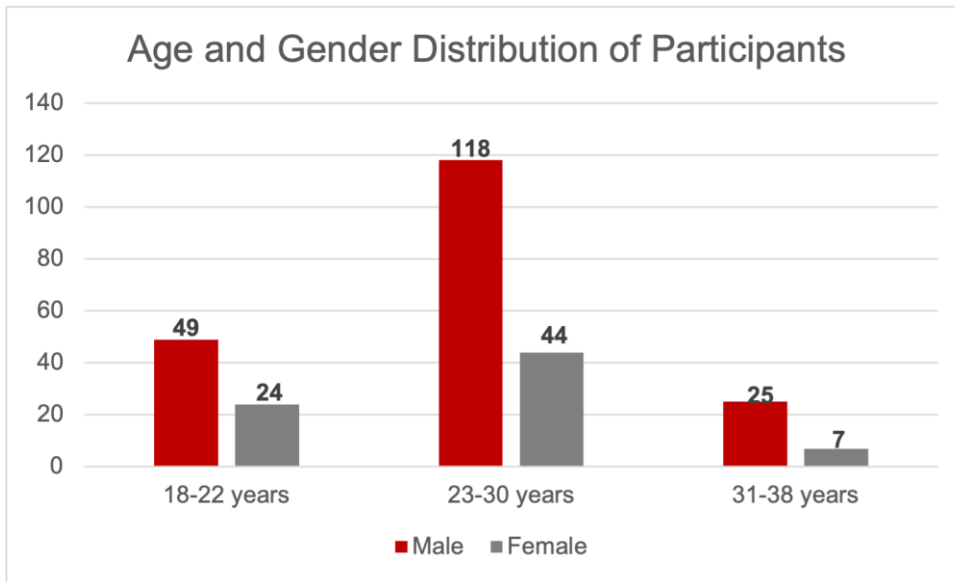
Figure 2. CREATE's Theory of Change for Intervention Activities for High-Risk Individuals

## Data and Methods

In this brief, we answer the following research questions:

1. **To what extent does participation in CREATE's bundle of social and economic activities influence outcomes across the five resilience dimensions?**
2. **How do changes in specific resilience dimensions affect attitudes towards the use of violence?**
3. **How does participation in the program contribute, overall, to changes in attitudes towards violence?**

CREATE administered a pre-intervention survey tool to 284 identified at-risk individuals (200 male and 84 female participants) in the four intervention counties in Kenya to measure the baseline levels of the five dimensions and attitudes towards violence. After the intervention, a post-intervention survey was administered to 267 (192 male, 75 female) participants. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the survey participants by gender and age. As the analysis did not reveal any significant differences by gender nor patterns by age, we present the results together across gender and age groups (see findings below). The post-intervention survey included questions about the interventions in addition to the questions in the pre-intervention survey. In addition to the multiple-choice survey questions, participants were also asked open-ended qualitative questions to better understand their experience with the program and interventions, and to probe their own understanding of how the program activities led to changes in their lives.



**Figure 3. Demographic Distribution of Survey Respondents**

In this brief, we present statistically significant results based on an analysis of differences within individuals between pre- and post-intervention survey responses, using county fixed effects and controls for respondent demographics. Combined with additional support from qualitative data and broader learning from the program team, these sources of evidence help us to tell a convincing story about the effects of the program. However, the analysis cannot definitively

establish direct causality between the program and post-intervention changes in outcomes, due to an inability to estimate how participants would have changed during the same period if they had not participated in the program.

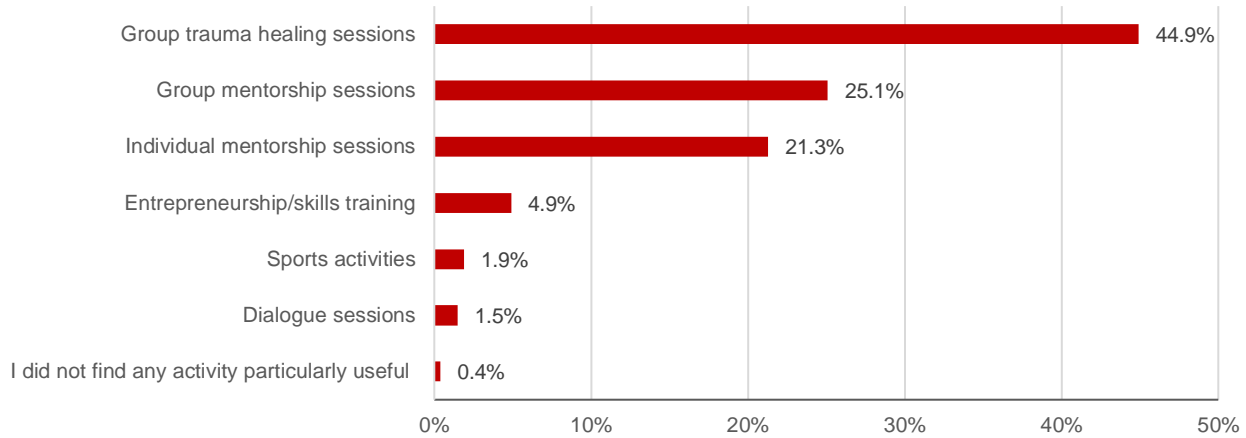
## Key Findings

Overall, we find that **participating in CREATE’s bundle of social and economic interventions is associated with improved outcomes across the five resilience dimensions, as well as reduced vulnerability to VEO recruitment, as measured by attitudes toward violence.** The key findings for each of the research questions are as follows:

### 1. To what extent does participation in CREATE’s bundle of social and economic activities influence outcomes across the five resilience dimensions?

Participation in CREATE’s bundle of activities is associated with an increase across all five resilience factors. On average, after participating in CREATE program activities, **respondents have more diverse social networks; more skills and livelihood opportunities; a better sense of agency; a better sense of their position in society, and increased participation in governance processes compared to what they reported before participating in the program.** They also reported higher levels of trust and tolerance, which are underlying aspects of several resilience dimensions. Although it is not possible to quantitatively assess the relationship between specific program activities and resilience factors with data from this survey, the open-ended qualitative responses by participants provide insights into these relationships.<sup>11</sup> Participants report that each type of program activity helped to strengthen different dimensions and combinations of factors that build resilience to violent extremism.

<sup>11</sup> The low variation of responses within each program activity variable (approximately 99% of respondents in the post-assessment phase attended each program activity) makes it challenging to quantitatively assess the relationship between the individual program activities and resilience dimensions.



**Figure 4. Activities described as “most useful” by participants**

**Diversification of social networks:** In the quantitative survey, the mean of participants’ social network index **increased by 11%**. Specifically, pre-intervention, only 66% of participants reported regularly engaging in conversations with people of multiple religions or cultures, and by post-intervention this had changed to 85% of participants. Difference-in-means tests show that the differences between pre- and post-intervention levels of social networks are statistically significant. Through qualitative interviews, participants described an increased willingness to interact and engage with people outside of their usual social networks. Group mentorship and trauma healing sessions, and individual mentorship sessions, all of which were the most useful activities cited by participants (Figure 4), worked on issues of past trauma, forgiveness, and tolerance, enabling the mentees to understand the value of engaging with other individuals of various backgrounds and improve their interpersonal and communications skills. Participants then reported that they had expanded their networks through sports activities and dialogue sessions, giving them access to new and different voices, opinions, and information.

**Access to skills and livelihoods:** Participating in the interventions is associated with an increase in access to skills and livelihood opportunities. Compared to pre-intervention survey responses, participants reported higher access to skills and livelihood opportunities post-intervention, with a **20% increase** in the mean of the index at post-intervention. Participants’ reported confidence in their ability to provide for themselves and their families increased from 53% pre-intervention to 83% post-intervention. This difference in mean levels pre- and post-intervention is statistically significant. Participants reported improvements in their ability to set short- and long-term goals. One participant said, *“I have stopped idling at home. I have minimized my daily expenses so that I can save money to achieve my goals.”* Mentees cited program activities as being key to increasing their confidence to pursue opportunities that they previously thought were not possible. They reported to now know where to seek economic opportunities, because of the program’s referral system, and to have created a network of friends which is a source of motivation to them.

**Sense of agency and self:** In open-ended qualitative responses, program participants also described improvements in several aspects of their agency, including their outlook towards life, conflict management and communication skills, self-confidence, and work ethic. Further, analysis of the survey data showed that the mean of the agency index **increased by about 20%** across all participants. The percentage of participants who reported that their community respects them increased from 65% to 92% post-intervention. Participants reported that the trauma healing sessions provided a safe space to deal with past traumas and provided them with the skills to deal with stressful life situations. One participant said, *“Through trauma healing sessions, I realized that when stress is not managed, it results in poor decision making. Now that I am able to manage stress, I have avoided a lot of problems that would have resulted from my poor decision*

*making.*” Many mentees also cited mentorship sessions as being key to acquiring life skills that enabled them to make positive changes.

**Sense of position in society:** After the interventions, participants reported having more positive engagement in community activities, and expressed more respect for other members of their communities, which are both sub-components of the ‘position in society’ dimension. Indeed, overall, the average of the position in the society index **increased by about 20%** by the end of the program. This is also evident in greater tolerance of people of different cultures and religious beliefs. As one participant said, “*I stopped being judgmental; I now allow others to speak their opinion without disrespecting them.*” Further, they attributed better relations with family members to their improved anger management skills, reduced trauma, and ability to seek support when needed. Indeed, some participants mentioned a desire and willingness to actively support their peers and influence them to stop violent behaviors through sharing skills they learned in the CREATE program.

**Inclusive participation in governance:** Mentees reported significant increases in trust in authorities and overall reported less resentment of the government, with the mean of the overall participation in governance index **increasing by 24%**. Within this category, prior to the intervention, 35% of participants strongly agreed that they trusted authorities, compared to 61% post-intervention. Participants reported becoming more engaged in civic activities and visiting Chiefs’ offices to inquire about services and contribute to conversations.<sup>12</sup> One participant said, “*I have stopped being silent when my rights are being violated and those of my friends.*” These changes may be attributed to direct activities, such as the program’s referral system that linked individuals with some government initiatives, participation in dialogue sessions, support from mentors in obtaining key government services, as well as indirect effects of hearing other participants talk more positively of their experiences with the government.

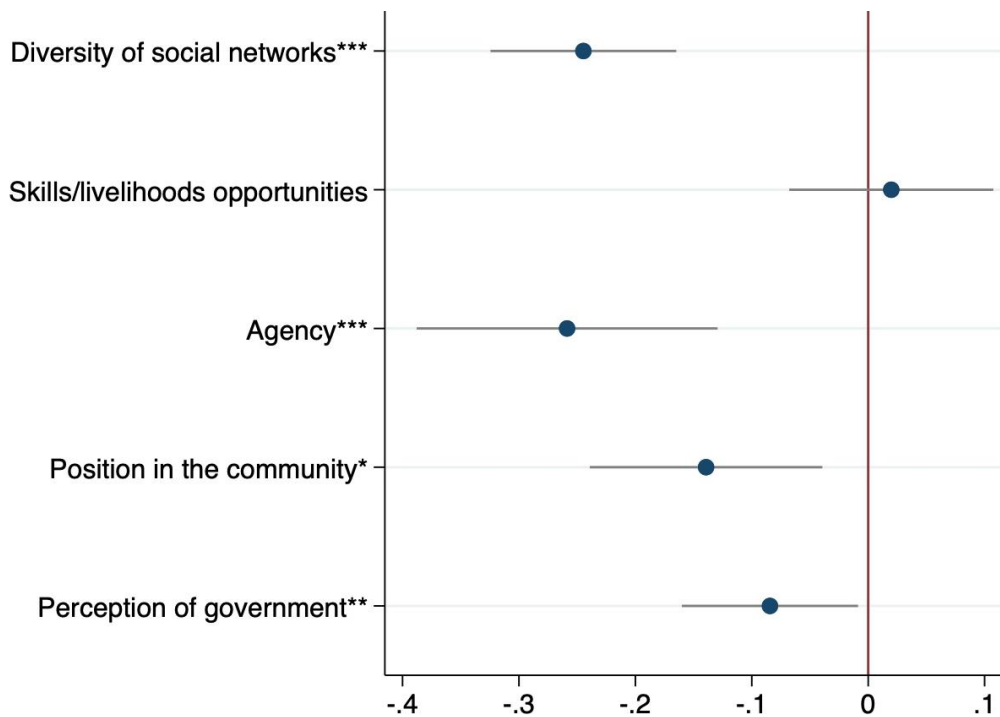
We tested whether there were any significant differences between male and female participants and found no statistically significant differences between male and female participants across all the resilience dimension indices both pre and post intervention. Similarly, difference-in-means tests reveal no significant differences across age groups in all resilience dimensions and we do not detect any meaningful patterns when disaggregated by age groups.

Qualitative responses suggest that several program activities contributed to multiple dimensions at once. In particular, mentees cited ***one-on-one mentorship sessions*** as leading to improvements in ***skills and livelihoods, a sense of agency, inclusive participation, and position in the community.*** They described improvements in their self-awareness, self-confidence, attitudes towards life, and stress and anger management abilities. One participant said, “*My mentor worked very hard, [and] she told me that I wasn’t the only one going through hard times and that I have a room for change. She connected me to a professional counsellor.*” Another said, “*I have changed how I live my life. I now know how to live with people and also respect their opinion.*”

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<sup>12</sup> In Kenya, Chiefs are centrally appointed civil servants who are responsible for implementing and coordinating government initiatives at the local level (Osborn 2020).





Plotted points to the left of the red line indicate less support for violence and plotted points to the right indicate more support for violence. The bars surrounding each point correspond to the 95% confidence interval for each coefficient.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 4. Resilience Factors and Support for Violence**

## 2. How do changes in individual-level resilience factors influence attitudes towards the use of violence?

**Improvements in resilience dimensions are associated with reduced support for violence.** A majority of the resilience dimensions are negatively correlated with respondents' support for violence and willingness to justify the use of violence (Figure 4), with a sense of agency and diversity of social networks having the strongest relationship with less violent attitudes.<sup>14</sup>

More favorable perception of the government and a better sense of one's position in the community are also associated with reduced support for violence, whereas there was no relationship between access to skills and livelihoods and reduced support for violence. Overall, these results support CREATE's theory of change, which suggests the importance of improving these dimensions for reducing support for violence—the proxy for individuals' alignment with the aims of violent extremist organizations. They also suggest that social assets may be more influential than purely economic factors in increasing individuals' resilience to radicalization and recruitment in the coastal Kenyan context.<sup>15</sup> In particular, these findings are consistent with research that shows the importance of social connections with those who are dissimilar to oneself for

<sup>13</sup> This graphic summarizes the relationship between each resilience factor and support for violence by plotting the regression coefficients. Variables for which the confidence interval intersects the red line are not statistically significant. The stars also denote statistically significant results: \* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . The regression model that is the basis for this graphic includes county fixed effects and demographic control variables.

<sup>14</sup> These associations are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) even when controlling for demographics and include county fixed effects to account for county specific attributes.

<sup>15</sup> Mercy Corps' previous research on drivers of participation in armed opposition groups, including VEOs, similarly shows that social and governance-related factors may have more salience than economic pull factors on radicalization and recruitment. See [Youth and Consequences](#) (2015, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Colombia), [Motivations and Empty Promises](#) (2016, Nigeria), and [We Hope and We Fight](#) (2017, Mali).

reducing susceptibility to the narratives of violent extremists.<sup>16</sup> They also indicate that engagement with the government and others within one's community plays important roles in reducing the risk of radicalization.<sup>17</sup>

### **3. How does participation in the program contribute, overall, to changes in attitudes towards violence?**

Overall, there is a statistically significant decrease in support for violence post-intervention: participating in the program's activities is associated with a 22% reduction in the likelihood of justifying violence. Further, results from the analysis show that on average, after participating in CREATE's program activities, respondents are less likely to support violence after the program than they did before.

In addition to these significant changes in participants' own attitudes toward violence, the program has also shaped perceptions of community *norms* around violence. Such changes in perceptions of norms are essential for participants to be able to 'lock in' their own individual attitude changes and sustain more peaceful attitudes in the long term. For example, compared to 55% of respondents in pre-assessment, only 31% of respondents in post-assessment agree that their community accepts that young people may use violence. Compared to 27% of respondents in pre assessment, only 6% of respondents in post-assessment agree that using violence earns the respect of others. Finally, compared to 16% of respondents in pre-assessment, only 4% of respondents in post-assessment now state that they are still unwilling to speak out publicly against violence in their community. As mentioned above, difference-in-means tests show that, on average, these differences between pre- and post-intervention levels of attitudes and norms towards violence are statistically significant.

In interviews, respondents highlighted program activities such as mentorship sessions, personal support from mentors, trauma healing sessions, skills training, dialogue sessions as drivers of changes in these overall attitudes toward violence. Participants mentioned disengaging from violent attitudes and commencing a journey towards rehabilitation from drugs and alcohol abuse because of changes they experienced in the program. One participant said, *"I decided to change from engaging in violence when I realized that it degrades my status in the community."* Another echoed this, *"I am now participating in peaceful dialogues with peers. This can be attributed to the mentorship sessions where I acquired facilitation skills and the desire to see a better community."*

## **Summary of Evidence and Learning**

The evidence presented above, along with broader learning from CREATE's delivery of integrated social and economic support to at-risk individuals suggests several important lessons for P/CVE program. The most significant are:

- Mentorship and trauma healing interventions were valued the most by participants, and their qualitative responses suggest that these approaches contributed significantly to the attitudinal and behavioral changes experienced, particularly those associated with improved agency and respect for others and diversity.
- The value associated with these approaches is likely to come from both the content of the support, as well as the personalized way in which these activities were delivered. Both mentorship and trauma counselling were delivered through extensive, personal support from mentors and were cited as the most useful program components by respondents. Respondents also credited these individual and group sessions as instrumental in affecting changes across the resilience dimensions. Mentorship and counselling interventions should be sequenced before other activities so that participants are better

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<sup>16</sup> Ellis and Abdi, 2017; Van Metre (2016)'s study also shows that communities that associate with associations with members of different groups have less violent extremism activity.

<sup>17</sup> This is similar and consistent with findings that link perception of the state and state legitimacy to violent attitudes (Cho & Kirwin, 2009).

positioned to benefit from subsequent skills development, livelihood opportunities, and civic engagement.

- Once participants' confidence, tolerance, and general sense of agency are strengthened through mentoring and trauma support, qualitative responses suggest that all the other activities deepen impact across all of the resilience dimensions, building momentum in a virtuous cycle. Qualitative responses suggest that referrals and livelihood options contribute to agency, position in one's community, and other dimensions closely associated with violence reduction. CREATE's referral system evolved from the deep, personal relations developed between the mentees and their mentors, which allows mentors to identify the specific needs and interests of each individual. The referral system highlights the types of support, information and access that many young people, in high-risk locations need, if they are to be able to take up opportunities available. As such, a holistic approach in which participants can meet many of their needs—in a highly tailored way—is essential.
- The nature and diversity of an individual's social networks continues to be a key determinant in levels of risk of recruitment and radicalization and is strongly associated with support for violence in the post-assessment. This aligns with CREATE's underlying theory that 'it is who you know, not who you are' that more significantly impacts risk. Diversification of social networks was the area that saw the lowest level of change among CREATE participants, with an 11% shift in the mean indices post-intervention. CREATE's next phase of implementation has adapted to focus more on this dimension, including the provision of more group activities and access to information that address isolation, and aim to diversify participants' social networks.

## Recommendations

The above findings indicate that program that seek to make deep, substantial gains among some of the highest-risk populations *can* be successful in reducing vulnerability to VEO recruitment. They also point to the importance of social networks and sense of agency in reducing support for violence. Finally, qualitative evidence suggests which approaches and activities stand to make the biggest impact. Based on these findings, we suggest several recommendations for donor, practitioners, and governments implementing P/CVE program:

- 1.) Design interventions to boost at-risk individuals' sense of agency.** An improved sense of agency is associated with a statistically significant reduction in justification of violence. The mentorship and trauma counselling program in CREATE, which respondents found the most useful, were designed to enable participants to recognize their own potential, plan for their futures, and see the value of seeking help when undergoing difficulties. Referral mechanisms helped many mentees realize or work towards these plans.
- 2.) Focus on building social networks of at-risk individuals.** The findings outlined in this brief show the importance of social networks in reducing support for violence and justification of violence among at-risk individuals. In general, the findings demonstrated the importance of resilience factors that focus on interpersonal relationships among peers, widening individuals' worldviews and giving them access to information, and creating opportunities for safely and constructively engaging with people outside of individuals' regular social circles. P/CVE programming should focus on crafting activities that address issues of isolation, lack of access to services and opportunities, and marginalization experienced by many individuals, rather than profiling based on specific demographics.
- 3.) Invest in personalized and carefully sequenced approaches** for reaching and engaging the highly at-risk, who traditionally do not engage in wider community efforts. Participants developed strong relationships with their mentors, which enabled them to manage issues such as mistrust and

trauma while building their confidence and agency. This foundation then enabled participants to take advantage of tailored opportunities that mentors identified to meet their potential, interests and needs. Highly tailored and focused program require more investment per participant than community-based approaches, but they represent an important prevention tool in P/CVE that can reduce vulnerability among individuals who most need the support *in the near term* and complement longer-term efforts to transform drivers of VE at community and societal levels.

- 4.) **Expand intervention designs that aim to change norms and attitudes.** Shifting individual support for the use of violence can be challenging when social and cultural norms persist that continue to justify its use. Using a combination of individual and group activities that focus on building trust and relationships, as well as providing safe spaces for discussions, can give participants the confidence to not only question and adjust their own attitudes, but those of the society in which they live. Enabling individuals to recognize shared realities and challenges strengthens their empathy towards others and the need for collective change.
- 5.) **Ensure P/CVE interventions are holistic and multidimensional, integrating prevention across various levels of government and civil society program.** As well as tailored, focused support for the most at-risk, the findings highlight the importance of mainstreaming such approaches into wider sectoral departments and program, so that practitioners can reach into and support individuals from high-risk locations, while also supporting early prevention and reducing risk. While the findings demonstrate that downstream prevention is possible with highly at-risk individuals, governments and civil society actors must deliberately integrate the fundamental approaches of peacebuilding and violence prevention—which address drivers of VE—into other program to reach the numbers of people and communities required to meet the scope of the challenge. CREATE’s work in other outcome areas, in supporting civil society and government actors to mainstream prevention thinking and best practices into development approaches, seeks to address the drivers of vulnerability to ultimately prevent individuals from experiencing elevated risk of recruitment in the first place.
- 6.) **Increase investments in testing the impact of interventions and programs on participants.** To fully explore the specific types of interventions and packages of activities that are most effective for reducing risk factors and reducing overall violence risk, programs should a) have longer program cycles that will make it possible to observe interactions between multiple combinations of activities for a greater duration and b) incorporate rigorous research designs to increase researchers’ ability to identify program impacts in an ethically responsible and conflict-sensitive manner.

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## CONTACT

Sarah Gibbons  
Team Leader | CREATE Program  
[sgibbons@mercycorps.org](mailto:sgibbons@mercycorps.org)

Lisa Inks  
Senior Specialist, Peace and Governance | Technical  
Support Unit  
[links@mercycorps.org](mailto:links@mercycorps.org)

Adam Lichtenheld  
Senior Researcher | Research and Learning  
[alichtenheld@mercycorps.org](mailto:alichtenheld@mercycorps.org)

### About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



1111 19<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 20036

45 SW Ankeny Street  
Portland, Oregon 97204

888.842.0842  
[mercycorps.org](https://mercycorps.org)

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