

PEACEBUILDING FROM THE BOTTOM: LOCAL YOUTH NON-
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS STRATEGIES TO PREVENT TERRORISM
AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MALI

by

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DEDICATION

To my lovely wife, Luca, and my wonderful daughters, Danielle, Gabrielle, and Alexandra for their love, understanding, prayers and continuing support to complete this research work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.....	AQIM
Armed Conflict Location and Events Data.....	ACLED
Association of Youth Against Enrolment in Terrorism.....	AJCET
Collectif des Jeunes pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Mali.....	COJEPAREM
Civil Society Organization.....	CSO
Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Office.....	CTITF
Countering Violent Extremism	CVE
Economic Community of West African States	ECOWAS
Forces Armées Maliennes.....	FAMA
Federal Bureau of Investigation	FBI
Human Development Index	HDI
International Crisis Group.....	ICG
Internally Displaced Person	IDP
International Monetary Fund	IMF
International Non-Governmental Organization	INGO
Institute for Economic and Peace	IEP
Local Youth Non-Governmental Organization	LYNGO
Malian Armed Forces Armées	FAMA
Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa.....	MUJAO
Movement for Oneness and Jihad Mali.....	MUJAOM
Non-Governmental Organization.....	NGO
Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	OCHA
Politique nationale de prévention et de lutte contre l'extrémisme violent et le terrorisme....	PNLEVT
Preventing Violent Extremism.....	PVE
The Institute for Security Studies	ISS
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.....	MINUSMA
World Food Program	WFP

ABSTRACT

PEACEBUILDING FROM THE BOTTOM: LOCAL YOUTH NON- GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS STRATEGIES TO PREVENT TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MALI

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George Mason University, 2021

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Not long ago, Mali was considered a beacon of stability and a model of democratic evolution in West Africa. However, since 2012, when Mali experienced a military coup, many parts of the country, especially the central and northern regions, have become insecurity hotspots of activity by violent extremist groups, military operations, and intercommunal violence. With the Malian state unable to establish its authority and exercise the monopoly of force in these regions, chronic insecurity reigns and undermines prospects for peace and economic development.

As interest in young people has gained significant traction in both policy and academic circles, partly informed by the correlations between a “youth bulge,” youth involvement in violent extremism, and the failure of national and international military presence to curb insecurity across Mali, Local Youth Non-Governmental Organizations (LYNGOs) have become key actors in preventing young people from joining violent extremist groups.

LYNGOs have contributed in different ways to the proactive prevention of violent extremism through peacebuilding initiatives. They have flourished in ways that validate the local wisdom and indigenous conflict resolution and prevention techniques of indigenous population groups. Their presence within and service to communities has positioned them as effective interlocutors to tackle many of the ongoing development, political, and socioeconomic challenges that give rise to an environment conducive to violent extremism.

Despite their rapid rise, there are still significant gaps in the development and security sphere regarding LYNGOs' strategy and what LYNGOs in Mali do in specific contexts. In addition, existing academic research does not provide an in-depth analysis of the strategies and instruments that LYNGOs implement in preventing and countering the engagement of young people in violent extremism. This research aims to help fill these gaps.

Through an in-depth analysis of three LYNGOs working to prevent youth enrolment into violent extremism in central and northern Mali, this research seeks to identify the strategies of these LYNGOs — and then to situate them within broader theories of conflict analysis and resolution that are relevant to efforts to prevent violent extremism.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

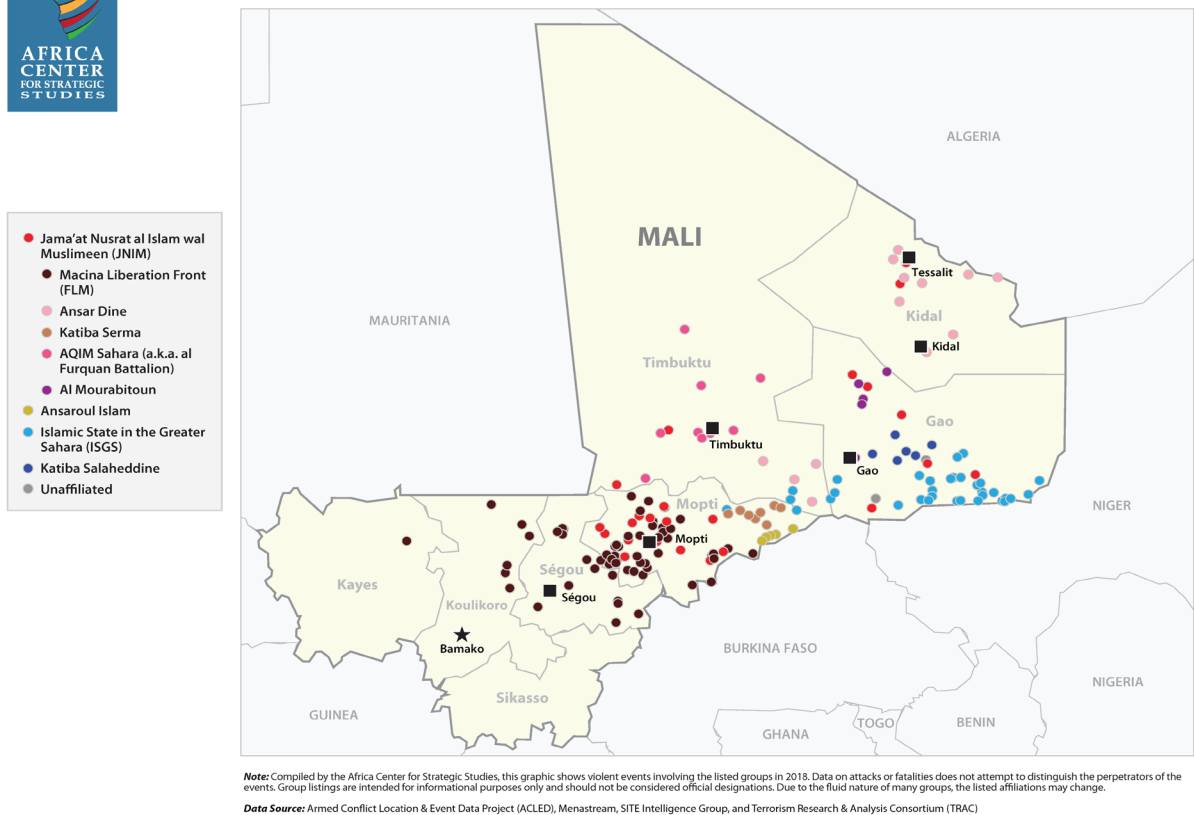
There is growing awareness that international and national strategies and policies to prevent, and counter violent extremism do not align with the realities on the ground, particularly in the current environment in Central and Northern Mali environments. There is no cookie-cutter approach to countering violent extremism. Tactics and methods need to vary not only from country to country but even within countries, and within different groups and communities.
—Mr. Abdoul Kassim Fomba, National Coordinator, Think Peace Mali

Introduction to the Problem

The evolving nature of the security threats posed by violent extremist groups such as the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar Dine, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al-Mourabitoun have resulted in death, destruction, and instability in Mali (Savage & Shanker, 2012). In Mali and beyond, violent extremism has become a cause for serious global concern, because of the heavy use of large ungoverned spaces as drug and human trafficking routes; the rapid increase of youth populations; and the persistent lack of educational, housing, and vocational opportunities, as well as long-simmering grievances among marginalized populations and separatist groups (Sauvain-Dugerdil, 2013; Rupesinghe & Morten, 2019).



VIOLENT EVENTS LINKED TO MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUPS IN MALI IN 2018



Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies

Figure 1: Hotspots of Violent Events Linked to Militant Islamist Groups in Mali

According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), violent activity by Islamist militia increased considerably after 2010, having climbed from “5% of all political violence in Africa in 1997 to 13.5% in 2012” (Dowd & Raleigh, 2013; Marc et al., 2015). Straus (2012) submits that the way violent extremist groups move with ease between states and draw support and funding from international terrorist networks has shaped “our image of violent extremism and the debate about how to address this threat.”

In the current heightened security and political environment created partly by the decline of the state and the culture of interdependency between and among state and non-state actors, a growing number of local youth groups, loosely referred to as Youth-Led Non-Governmental Organizations (LYNGOs), have been involved in a range of activities, including early warning functions, monitoring and promoting human rights, implementing grass root or sustainable development, resilience and conflict resolution workshops, and many other functions that were in the past duties of national governments (Tronc et. Al, 2019; Grace, 2020).

The increase in the number of LYNGOs involved in designing programs aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism has captivated the imagination of academics, development planners, policy makers, activists, and analysts (Kelly, 2019). The evidence of this explosion currently is seen in the number of LYNGOs that are represented in international conferences and on worldwide websites. Development planners, security experts, and economists have lauded the broader role that LYNGOs play in community resilience, in alleviating poverty and in incorporating “soft approaches” in the fight against violent extremism (Subedi, 2017).

The recognition of multiple factors capable of radicalizing an individual and influencing him or her on whether to join a violent extremist organization are counteracted by these “soft approaches” with the aim to prevent the spread of violent extremism and dry up the labour pool for the potential recruitment of violent extremists (Koehler, 2016). Among other soft approach methods to prevent recruitment, LYNGOs provide vocational training, job provision, and information sharing, all of which inoculate residents against

incentives to join violent extremist organizations. In addition, LYNGOs have used radio broadcast on peace and tolerance to reduce tensions between communities and to keep community members away from supporting or joining violent extremist groups (Ditlmann et al., 2017).

As LYNGOs become more involved in peacebuilding, it has become important for policy makers and academics to understand the strategies and approaches that they deploy and their impact on the ground (Aldrich, 2014). Although much has been written about the involvement of LYNGOs in conflict situations, including in refugee camps, systematic analysis of the preventative strategies deployed to prevent violent extremism has been somewhat less researched. Any discussion of the evolution and the strategies of LYNGOs, especially in preventing violent extremism in Africa, are further complicated by the inability of different actors to find a common definition and understanding for the term violent extremism and terrorism. This also occurs among the drivers of violent extremism, the increasingly complex linkages existing between LYNGOs, government agencies, social movements, and transnational issue networks (Keck & Sikkink, 2018). Therefore, any analysis to identify intervention strategies should begin with understanding the conflict.

Backgrounder: History and conflict in Mali

Mali is a vast Sahelian country and one of the poorest in the world. It had experienced rapid economic growth from the 1990s and relative social stability. Once an emerging force for democracy in West Africa, Mali was threatened in March 2012, when a steady collapse of state control over the north of the country—a result of several factors, including ethnic nationalism, political isolation, and a lack of economic opportunity — was followed by a military coup, ensuing military intervention in the north, and uprisings by rebel and extremist groups throughout the country (Lindberg, 2013).

Fact Box

Official name: Republic of Mali

Capital: Bamako

Borders: Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal.

Population: 19,658,031 (2019 est. World Bank)

Size: 1,220,190 sq. km (2018 est. CIA)

Independence: 22 September 1960 from France

Capital: BAMAKO 1.628 million (2009)

Ethnic groups: Bambara 33.3%, Fulani (Peuhl) 13.3%, Sarakole/Soninke/Marka 9.8%, Senufo/Manianka 9.6%, Malinke 8.8%, Dogon 8.7%, Sonrai 5.9%, Bobo 2.1%, Tuareg/Bella 1.7%, other Malian 6%, from members of Economic Community of West Africa .4%, other .3% (2018 est. CIA)

Languages: French (official), Bambara, Peuhl/Foulfoulbe, Dogon, Maraka/Soninke, Malinke, Sonrhail/Djerma, numerous vernacular sub-Saharan languages (2009 est. CIA)

Religion: Muslim 93.9%, Christian 2.8%, animist .7%, none 2.5% (2018 est. CIA)

GDP : USD 17.28 billion (2019 est. CIA)

Source: Computed from CIA and World Bank

Table 1: Mali Demographic Overview

Mali was created based on arbitrary borders following the European colonial era (Griffiths, 1986). It is divided into two regions, which are both geographically and ethnically distinct. The southern area, which hosts the majority of the population, has a tropical climate and is dominated by the Mandé population and other West African peoples, while the northern region is located in the Sahara Desert, historically the domain of Tuareg nomads. The Bambara (Bamana) ethnic group and language predominate, with several other groups, including the Fulani (Fulbe), Dogon, and Tuareg, also present in the population. Mali is largely flat and arid (Oxford Analytica, 2017).

The Niger River flows through its interior, functioning as the main trading and transport artery in the country. Sections of the river flood periodically, providing much-needed fertile agricultural soil along its banks as well as creating pasture for livestock. At the heart of ancient empires going back to the fourth century A.D., Mali was conquered by the French in the middle of the 19th century. After a brief experiment in federation with Senegal, Mali became independent on 20 June 1960. After independence from France, Mali was overwhelmed by Tuareg rebellions, two coups and twenty-three years of military dictatorship, until a new constitution, approved by referendum in 1992, led to democratic elections in 1992 (Springer Nature Limited, n.d.; Kshetri, 2020). Religion plays a substantial role in Mali, a country with a majority Muslim population. There have been no efforts to make religion a factor in politics and break with the secularism of colonial times.

Mali is one of Africa's major cotton producers. Cotton and food are closely linked: in order to hold the country's place as one of Africa's top cotton producers and keep its people fed, cotton farmers get state subsidies on the condition that they also cultivate crops like

corn and millet (Oxford Analytica, 2016). A chronic foreign trade deficit makes it heavily dependent on foreign aid and remittances from Malians working abroad.

Main Underlying Causes Behind the Rise of Mali Terror Problem

A complex set of underlying causes have led to the rise of terrorism in Mali:

- The first critical underlying cause has been the Libya uprising in 2011 and the 2012 political crisis in Mali, which provided the opportunity to the Islamists and the Tuareg nomads, who had fought for Muhammad Gaddafi in Libya, to carry out violent armed rebellion against the government in Bamako, which resulted in Islamist extremists gaining control over large swathes of Mali's territory, drawing international attention to, and intervention into, Mali's security and politics. Linked to this factor is the competition that seems to be played out in the region, with each of these groups trying to outpace the other by carrying out violent attacks to assert its power (Zimmerer, 2019).
- The second is the crisis in governance. The Malian government that was established after French intervention in 2013 was very weak in its ability to govern the northern territories. Due to weak law enforcement and chronic corruption-prone criminal justice institutions, the vast Sahel region has become a sanctuary for local radical Islamic groups and terrorist cells, and a conduit for drugs, arms and human trafficking, organized crime, and money laundering, which help to sustain funding for terrorist activities. Lack of concerted and coordinated efforts to address the underlying governance issues have made Mali vulnerable to terrorism. Linked to

this factor is large-scale poverty, inequalities, lack of education, unemployment, particularly in the central and northern areas, and lack of dynamic government policies for disadvantaged communities, which provide space for youth radicalization (Craven-Matthews & Englebert, 2018).

- The third important underlying cause has been the failing peace process between Bamako and northern groups, including the Tuaregs, who seized northern Mali in 2012. The peace negotiations have left out the Islamists and dealt with the Tuaregs, while the Islamists are the most serious challenge to the state. Groups such as Ansar al Dine have spoken out strongly against the peace agreement (Raineri & Strazzari, 2017).
- The fourth, international intervention, especially by France, is also important, as some of the Islamist groups have targeted French and international interests in the region because of its intervention and long-term presence in Mali. After a request from the Government of Mali, the French intervention in 2013 drove out the Islamists from areas such as Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu, which they had seized. The intentions of Jihadists groups affiliated to both al-Qaeda and ISIS have been to attack France and its allies in the region for their involvement in Mali (Charbonneau, 2017).
- The fifth issue is criminal activity and cross-border smuggling networks in the country. Historically vital to regional trade, the advent of modern transport has consigned the nomadic couriers of the Sahel and Sahara to dependence on illegal and semi-legal trafficking for income. Such networks include those moving cheap

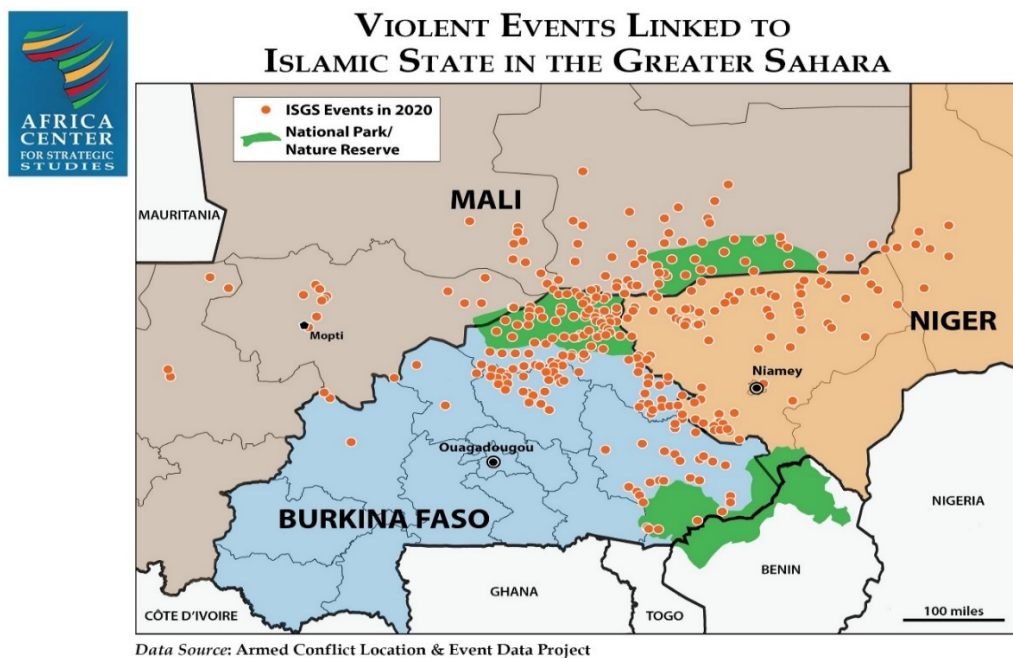
and counterfeit cigarettes eastwards to more expensive markets and facilitating cocaine delivery northwards to various trans-shipment points and onwards to Europe (Amadou, 2019).

Summary of Current Violent Extremism and Terrorism Situation

Although Mali has historically been a country with relatively low, though recurring, levels of violence, a dramatic spike in terror attacks and mortality has occurred since late 2011. On 10 February 2020, Human Rights Watch released a new report detailing the rising number of Jihadist-backed armed attacks in Mali. According to the same report, 2019 was the deadliest year for civilians since Mali's political and military crisis in 2012. With most of the attacks occurring in central Mali, more than 456 civilians have been killed and hundreds more have been wounded. In addition, ACLED (2020) notes that 2020 has been the deadliest year on record in Mali. It states that "a downward spiraling trend has been observed since 2016, following the spread of violence to central Mali amid the emergence of Katiba Macina" (ACLED, 2020). This centered on two distinct yet intersecting violent campaigns: one by the Tuareg separatists and the other by Jihadists affiliated to both al-Qaeda and ISIS, which have been encouraging interethnic attacks in hopes of asserting their power throughout the country and the West African region. Communities in central and northern Mali have armed and defended themselves with the support of sectors of the Malian security forces (Baldaro & Dially, 2020).

The government's response has so far focused on security. Although this has had some results, violence continues to spread because of the presence of armed militia groups (Chafer et al., 2020).

Although Mali currently hosts the intersecting missions of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping, European Union (EU) capacity-building to train local security forces, the French-led counterterrorism effort (Operation Barkhane), and the regional G5 Sahel Force, Jihadi groups have not only spread across Mali but also into neighboring Niger and Burkina Faso, and transnational crime, including drug trafficking, smuggling of migrants, and kidnapping, has become a lucrative income source for militants. Security forces argue that several groups, rather than a single organization, target the state. These groups do not necessarily coordinate their agendas even though they are in contact with each other (Hansen, 2020).



Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies

Figure 2: Violent Events Linked to Islamic State in The Greater Sahara

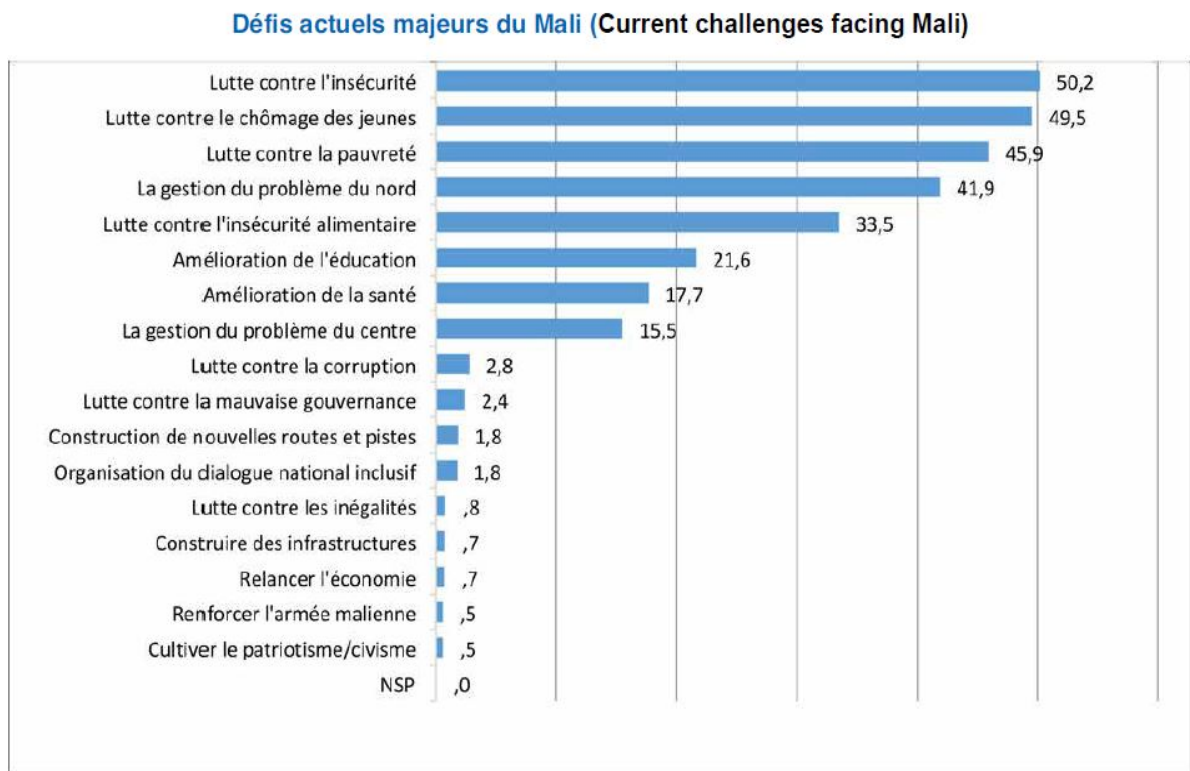
In addition, the management of natural resources has given rise to multiple conflicts that the government and local elites are unable to control (Crisis Group, 2020). On 18 August 2020, Mali's conflict took a dramatic turn when a group of mutinous senior officers based in the garrison town of Kati ousted former President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK) in a coup d'état (Oxford Analytica, 2021). Parallels were quickly drawn to the military coup in 2012 that removed IBK's predecessor, Amadou Toumani Touré, from power. The coup numbered the fourth since Mali's independence (Morgan, 2020).

The presence of so many international troops to stabilize the West African nation did not prevent a military coup, which came amid months of socio-political upheaval. Notwithstanding the undeniable fact that Mali is still in the state of crisis and that the international military interventions, to a large extent, saved the country and the West African region from the disastrous consequences of Islamist control, to better understand the context a brief note on the factors behind the rise of Mali terror problem will be helpful (Coulibaly et al., 2020).

Challenges faced by the Country

Almost fifty years into independence, Mali's economy is still in a challenged position and its standard of living is low. While the average skilled worker's annual

salary is approximately \$1,500, half of the Malian population lives below the international poverty line of \$1.25 per day. Mali is struggling with inadequate infrastructure, lack of access to clean water, poor transportation, poor electricity networks, inadequate access to schools and hospitals, poor quality of education and healthcare, corruption, and the dependency on rain for the supply of staple foods (Ude, 2020).



Survey « Mali-Mètre » by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in March 2020 - Enquête d'opinion « Que pensent les Maliens ? »

Figure 3: Survey of Challenges Facing Mali

Education

The education sector has recently faced considerable challenges due to political instability. Although education has been improving over the last few years, more than “two million children aged between 5 to 17 still do not go to school, and over half of Mali’s young people aged 15 to 24 are not literate.” (UNICEF, 2018). This is partly due to a severe shortage of qualified teachers, as well as materials and infrastructure, which would be necessary for Malian schools to fulfill their roles effectively. Even under moderate estimates, the number of youth and children between the ages of five and nineteen is expected to increase from 7 million in 2015 to 9.4 million in 2025, a rise of almost 50 % (World Bank PER, 2017). Inadequate access to secondary and tertiary education, as well as quality of education overall, is a major challenge that has yet to be faced. Education continues to struggle with a 31.1% literacy rate. Currently, approximately three million youth and children are enrolled at primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools across Mali, suggesting that participation is under 50 %. Only 73.8 per cent of girls are enrolled in primary basic education, compared with 85.8 per cent of boys. Malian girls are generally married very young. Seventy-one percent of young girls admit to having been married before the age of 18 (World Bank PER, 2017, p. 7). Most girls drop out of school when they marry.



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics - As of July 2016

Figure 4: Number of Out-of-School Children (Primary) in Mali

Health

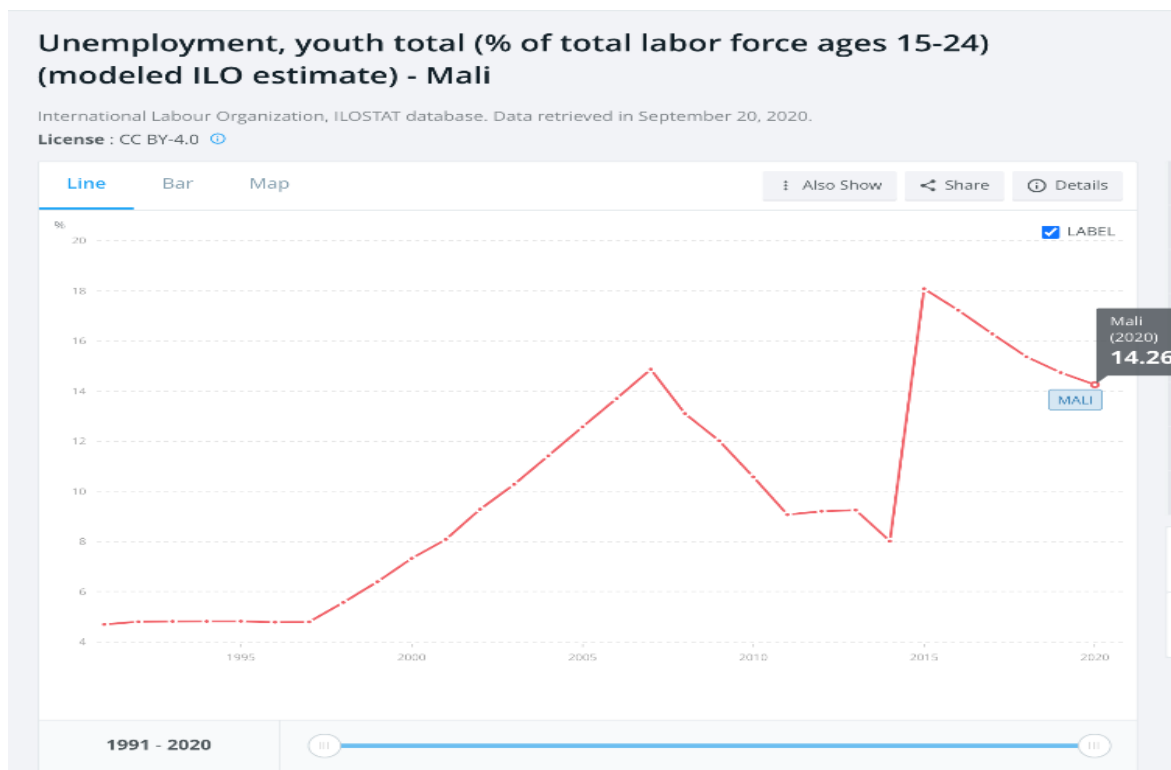
Mali's decentralized health system presents numerous challenges, with widespread sanitation issues and malnutrition across the nation. Life expectancy at birth is among the lowest in the world. The infant mortality rate is particularly high in Mali, with 191 deaths for every thousand births. Malnutrition remains the number one cause of infant mortality. Under terrorist occupation, nearly all health facilities in northern Mali were ransacked in 2012.

Although there have been significant improvements in the health sector in Mali, healthcare facilities and medicines in Mali are very limited, especially outside the capital city of Bamako. The history of violence and unrest have left many regions with critical shortages of medicines and trained health workers capable of reducing maternal and child mortality and able to respond to emerging infectious diseases. Though there is no comprehensive statistics on the number the sexual abuse cases, particularly of young

girls, it is common especially in active conflict settings. Although the punishment for sexual abuse is severe, these acts often go unreported. The healthcare system heavily relies on foreign aid.

Employment

Young people in Mali face employment challenges. Fewer jobs are created in the economy than are needed to keep pace with the growing population. It is estimated that around 60% of the population is under twenty-five years old. Each year around 300,000 young people are entering the labor market. The youth unemployment rate is remarkably higher than the total average (12% in the whole country and 32% in Bamako). As the population of the region is expected to double in the next thirty years, according to the African Economic Outlook for Mali 2014, addressing youth unemployment has become increasingly urgent in the face of a deteriorating security situation where criminal and radical groups have penetrated many parts of Mali.



Source: International Labor Organization

Figure 5: Youth Unemployment as Percentage of The Labor Force

Problem statement

Among the twenty-five poorest countries in the world and a place where more than half of the total population of around 19 million people are under the age of eighteen, Mali provides a good case study of a country that was supposed to be an American foreign policy success story but has undergone an extraordinary transformation since 2012. The transformation is the result of years of combined pressure from a military coup, a Tuareg revolt, and violent extremist group attacks in central and northern Mali.

The phenomenon of violent extremism in central and northern Mali seems to have various origins and foundations. As discussed in the introduction, it can be difficult to grasp the links between youth, and violent extremism without first understanding and analyzing the security situation in Mali and the work of LYNGOs in the sphere of violent extremism. LYNGOs in Mali have increasingly turned to preventing violent extremism (PVE) programming to address the root causes of radicalization.

Many LYNGOs in Mali serve to fill a gap in the youth violent extremism prevention field as a result of inadequate governmental support for young people and communities across Mali. Their efforts within the PVE space are profoundly diverse, including initiatives to foster civic education and economic empowerment, counternarrative dissemination, and community-based dialogue that foster the peaceful resolution of disputes. Although the last five years have produced a wealth of research and information on violent extremism and violent extremism prevention, many LYNGO representatives in Mali have reported that these studies often are not specific to community-level dynamics, and they identified the need for localized research and data collection to help ensure that interventions are evidence-based, and that impact is monitored in a granular way.

While LYNGOs play a significant role in addressing youth involvement in violent extremism, as previously discussed, what is yet unknown is the extent to which individual LYNGOs actually do so. LYNGOs must and are currently contributing to

violent extremism prevention in Mali but their contributions remain largely unexplored to date. Therefore, it is a particularly prudent time to understand the strategies of LYNGOs to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism in Mali.

Research Questions

Drawing on a substantial body of literature, this research aims to understand Malian LYNGOs' violent extremism prevention strategies by answering the following questions:

- What are the drivers of violent extremism among the youth in Mali?
- What are Malian LYNGOs' assessment of the drivers of youth enrolment into violent extremism in Mali?
- Do LYNGOs in Mali have violent extremism prevention strategies?
- What are the LYNGOs' violent extremism prevention strategies in Mali?
- What are the youths' perceptions of the work of LYNGOs involved in preventing violent extremism in Mali?

LYNGOS Involved in the Study

While violent extremist groups are increasingly working to recruit young people into their ranks in Mali, the international peacebuilding community is increasingly acknowledging that locally led activity is a key element to successful peacebuilding and preventing young people's recruitment into violent extremism (Darden, 2019). Donors and governments are increasingly embracing a narrative that encourages "locals" and "locally led" approaches in the peacebuilding, violent extremism, and counterterrorism

sectors (Tronc et al., 2019). According to Peace Direct, locally led peacebuilders have high levels of trust, accountability, and legitimacy among their constituencies; set their own strategic direction, priorities, and programmatic focus; and determine their own leadership and governance structures (Moix, 2019; Ervin & Lechoe, 2018). However, many locally led peacebuilding organizations, including youth-led organizations, are run by volunteers with limited professional skills, including financial management, fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, and no organizational management training (Does, 2013).

The three LYNGOs listed below were chosen among a long list developed by Peace Direct of NGOs in Mali, whose primary strategies to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism include youth capacity building, empowerment, inclusion, advocacy, prevention, and service delivery. In selecting the three local youth NGOs, I made sure to consider geographic spacing in respect to the region of the country where they operate, especially in the central and northern part of Mali.

Also, the three LYNGOs are members of the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), whose mission is to enable and facilitate the development of cooperation mechanisms between individuals and civil society organizations involved in the framework of peacebuilding in Africa (Bombande, 2016). They have been referred by WANEP as active agents of conflict transformation in Mali. In addition, the selection was made using the following criteria: (1) the number of years they have been in operation, (2) the impact made on youth empowerment and violent extremism prevention, and (3) how well they are known within the local, national, regional, and international

peacebuilding community. I believe that the following three LYNGOs satisfy these three criteria.

Think Peace¹

Think Peace is a local youth NGO that works directly with local actors and local decision-makers to address radicalization and violent extremism and governance in local communities. Think Peace is present in most regions of northern and central Mali and extends its actions to Burkina Faso and Niger through its focal points. This organization aims to help strengthen the resilience of grassroots actors against various forms of threats to peace and security. On the organization's website, it is stated that Think Peace is a Malian NGO that works to improve peace and governance in the country through youth engagement. Think Peace has positively impacted the lives of 20,000 people since being founded three years ago. In 2017 Think Peace expanded to the neighboring countries of Niger and Burkina Faso to further strengthen their work in countering violent extremism and promoting peace.

Think Peace's ARC project, which stands for Addressing the Root Causes of Conflict, is a campaign that encourages young people to advocate for the prevention of violent extremism in the Sahel region. In conjunction with the National Direction of Penitentiary Administration and Supervised Education, Think Peace trains prison guards and social workers on how to detect signs of radicalization and how to prevent the rise of violent

¹ Additional information on Think Peace can be found in methodology and design section in Chapter 4.

extremism in the prison system. Over 280 prison workers have been trained through this scheme.

Think Peace also runs a project to improve relations between the security forces and the local communities in southern Mali, near the borders with Niger and Burkina Faso. One project initiated was an agricultural cooperative, where the community was given \$5,000 to create a sustainable project and enable young people to be self-sufficient. These kinds of initiatives reduce the risk of being recruited by extremist groups working near the southern borders.

Think Peace puts special emphasis on local actors' participation in the process of reflection and implementation of its activities. First, Think Peace conducts field research studies to identify local needs and dynamics, draw recommendations, and conduct response activities. Second, Think Peace implements activities for communities and conducts field studies to better understand the difficulties encountered. The organization's vision is to make Mali a haven of peace in which every citizen is a full player in development and governance. It strives to influence, alert, and guide public policies to promote the values of freedom, democracy, and governance in Mali through concrete actions. This youth-led NGO has three pillars: national coordination, local coordinates, and an institute. The National Coordination is located in Bamako, which is the headquarters; the Local Coordinates are located in the regions of Mopti (Sévaré), Timbuktu (Diré, Goundam and Timbuktu city) and Gao (Gao city) and the district of Bamako. They operate semi-autonomously with a local office. Think Peace's Institute is the department in charge of studies and production of materials and research. This section

is composed of resource persons, researchers, and academics

(<https://www.thinkpeace.in/>, n.d.).



Source: Think Peace Website

Figure 6: The Logo of Think Peace

Association des jeunes contre l'enrôlement dans le terrorisme (AJCET).² This LYNGO was created informally in 2013 and then officially registered in 2015, with the aim of preventing the radicalization of young people and the recruitment of youths into armed and violent extremism groups. AJCET runs activities for young people age fifteen to twenty-five in five regions in Mali, including in Ségou and Mopti. AJCET also works with young prisoners, many of whom have links with armed groups. The mission of this organization is to restore peace and sustainable development through the "Civil Initiative" approach. Additional information on the organization's website suggests that

² Additional information on AJCET can be found in methodology and design section in Chapter 4.

the organization, with the help of local actors, is dedicated to transforming many communities in Mali into peaceful and nonviolent societies. The methods this youth local NGO uses to achieve its objectives, including youth empowerment and education in



Source: AJCET Facebook Page

Figure 7: The Logo of AJCET

conflict affected communities. AJCET employs thirty-two people (men and women), twenty at the center (Mopti and Segou), and twelve at the northern level (Gao and Timbuktu). Their partners include Think Peace, Search for Common Ground, and the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue.

Collectif des jeunes pour la paix et la réconciliation au Mali (COJEPAREM)³

Created on 07 April 2014, this youth association seeks to help victims of the Malian crisis, promote peace and cohesion in communities, and prevent the recruitment of young people into terrorism and violent extremism. Its mission is to create a more secure community where young men and women live at liberty from any attempts at enlistment and violence. COJEPAREM coordinates its programs in four areas of activity: (1) community conflict management and prevention, (2) youth training and integration, (3) awareness-raising on social cohesion and livelihood, and (4) the fight against violent extremism. It aims to help the victims of the crisis in northern Mali, promote peace in Mali, and involve young people in the process of conflict management and resolution in their localities.



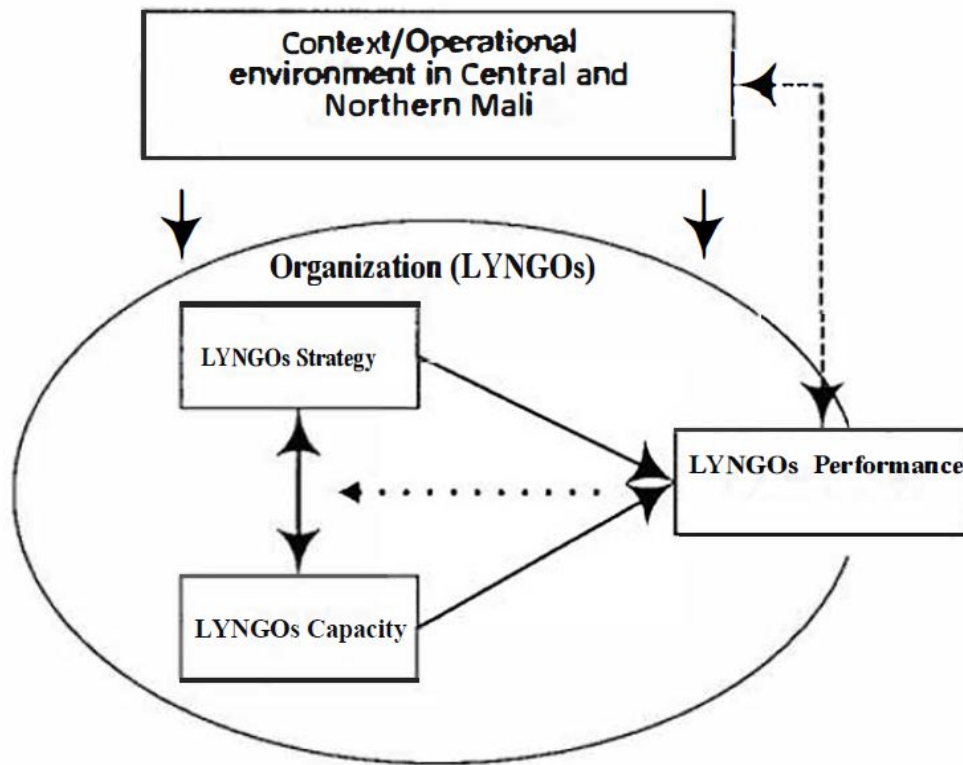
Source: COJEPAREM Facebook Page

Figure 8: The Logo of COJEPAREM

³ Additional information on COJEPAREM can be found in methodology and design section in chapter 4.

Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) Tool for the Analysis of LYNGOs' Peacebuilding and Violent Extremism Prevention Efforts

An Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) is a systematic process for obtaining information about the function, performance of an organization, and the factors that affect performance. This type of assessment is different from other types of evaluation because the assessment focuses on the organization as the primary unit of analysis. This tool helps to evaluate the capacity of LYNGOs to prevent young people from joining extremist groups as a function of the operational environment, the LYNGOs' organizational motivation, and their organizational capacity. It is a dynamic multidimensional process that is influenced and affected by internal and external factors, such as economic trends in the country, stakeholders involved, and the political environment. A well-planned and -designed capacity building framework could shed light on how these factors impede or facilitate capacity-building efforts.



Source: Adapted from USAID

Figure 9: Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool

There are a number of methods for conducting an OCA of LYNGOs' peacebuilding and violent extremism prevention efforts. The method used for this dissertation includes four main elements: (1) Context, (2) Strategy, (3) Capacity, and (4) Performance. As the first element, the context shows the importance of understanding the social and economic operational environment in which the LYNGOs exist and carry out their activities. The second element of the OCA consists of understanding the factors that influence the direction of the LYNGOs and approaches that they utilize to prevent young

people from joining violent extremist groups. The approaches may include protection, monitoring, advocacy and public communication, in-group socialization, social cohesion, intermediation and facilitation, and service delivery.

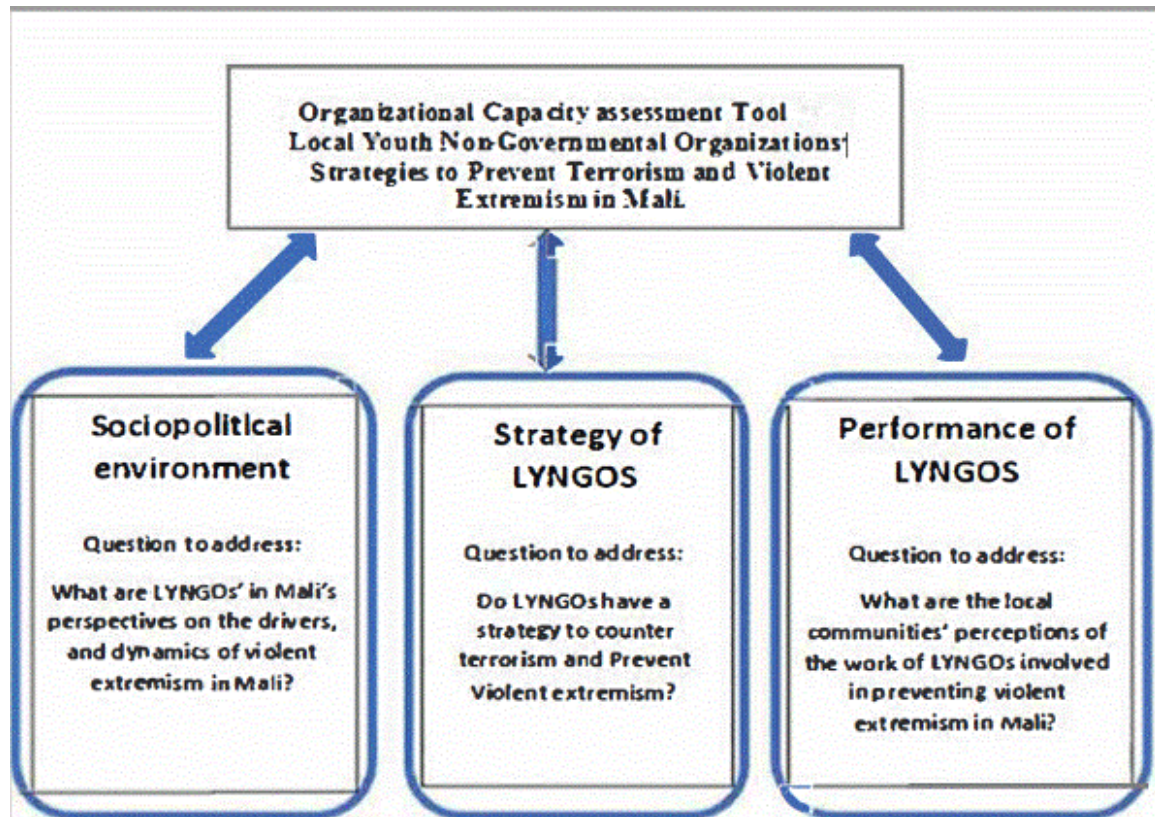


Figure: By Author: Framing context-specific questions to probe the capacity factors relevant to LYNGOs violent extremism prevention goals

Source: Author

Figure 10: Organizational Capacity Assessment Adapted to The Research

The third element involves making assessments of the capacity of the LYNGOs. This means validating the resources LYNGOs possess as well as the structure and linkages

with other stakeholders. In the fourth element, performance is gauged in terms of the LYNGOs' effectiveness and relevance. Effectiveness refers to the degree to which the LYNGOs achieve their goals; relevance refers to the extent to which the LYNGOs' outputs and results are valued by key stakeholders. This section of the framework highlights key contributions of LYNGOs to peacebuilding and violent extremism prevention in Mali. The focus is to assess the degree to which the LYNGOs achieve their objectives and the degree to which their objectives and activities reflect the necessities and priorities of key stakeholders, including donors and young people in the communities they serve.

Conclusion

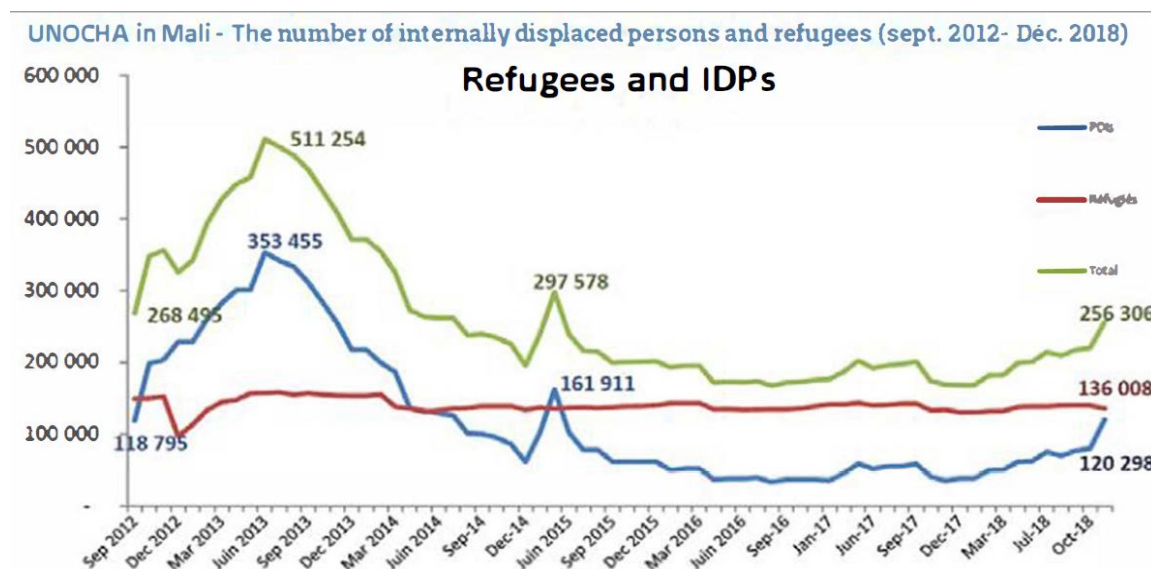
This chapter has provided an overview of the social and political context in which the research took place and has detailed key challenges and opportunities in Mali as well a brief description of the LYNGOs involved in the study. A table in Chapter Four provides an elaborate description of the three LYNGOs involved in the study. The next chapter reviews the literature on radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism; the role of NGOs in peacebuilding; and factors driving youth vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

THE RISE OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MALI

Introduction

In recent years, Mali has experienced an unprecedented rise in terrorist violence, with more than 356 terrorist attacks in Mali in 2019, resulting in 922 deaths (ACLED, 2020). Ibrahim (2017) and Sangaré and McSparren (2018) note that, since the early 2000s, tensions have challenged the legitimacy and stability of several states in the region. A surge in conflict has increased the number of displaced people in central and northern Mali over the past two years.



Source: UNOCHA

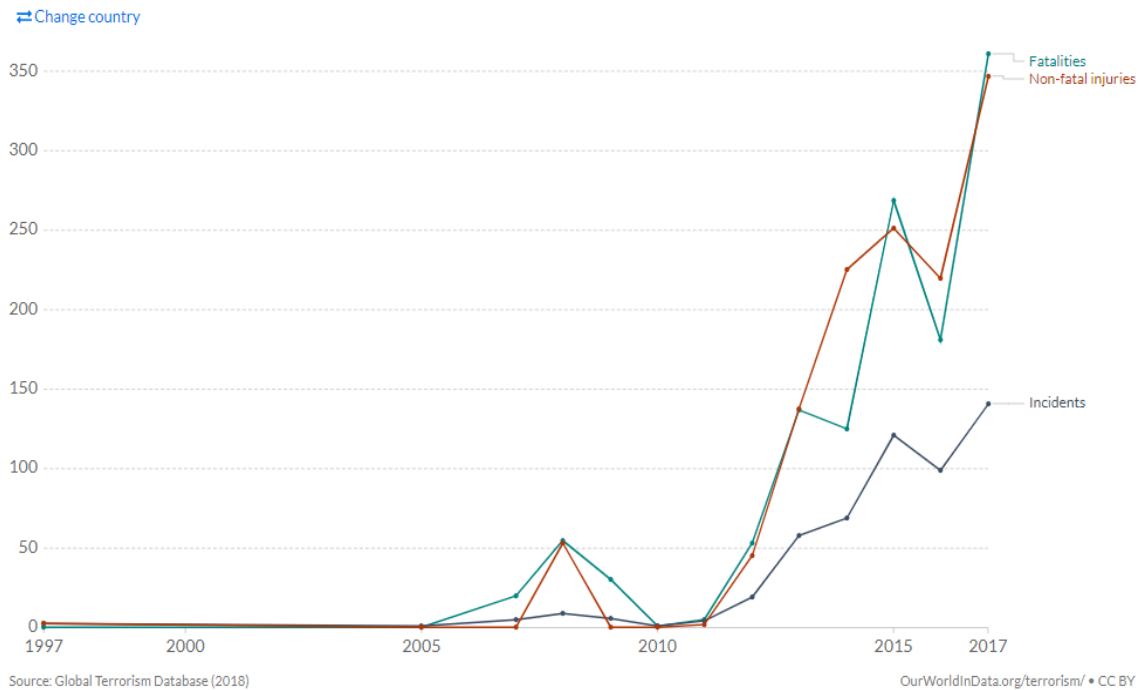
Figure 11: The Number of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees

According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), non-state armed groups have targeted communities, health centers, schools, and other public services, leading to the rise in displaced people from displacement 35,000 people in December 2017 to 121,000 people in December 2018 (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2019).

Since the Tuareg rebellion in 2012, northern and central Mali have been enveloped in armed conflict. Initially a separatist rebellion, the conflict has become a complex set of interlinked sub-conflicts, posed in part by the collaboration between criminal organizations and violent extremist groups that espouse fundamentalist religious narratives (Thurston, 2018). In addition, links between national and international violent extremist groups have increased the overflow of the conflict into neighboring countries (Arieff & Johnson, 2013). Together with criminal organizations, violent extremist groups have engaged in various forms of illicit activities, especially in smuggling and trafficking of drugs and weapons in the northern part of the country, and trafficking of migrants to the Mediterranean (Shelley, 2020).

Incidence, fatality and injury from terrorist attacks, Mali, 1997 to 2017

The total number of recorded terrorist incidents, fatalities and non-fatal injuries by country or region. This includes fatalities or non-fatal injuries of both victims and perpetrators.



Source: Global Terrorism Database (GTD). University of Maryland.

Figure 12: Incidence, Fatality and Injury from Terrorist Attacks

Despite the 2015 Algiers Peace Accord between the Government of Mali and two coalitions of armed groups, the conflict continues, with violent extremist groups launching attacks on civilians and national and international armed forces. Terrorism, insecurity, scarce resources, and a lack of accountability or effective governance have all resulted in a significant increase in intercommunal violence, particularly in central and northern Mali. Kinetic approaches, including the Franco-African military campaign, which led to the recovery of northern cities occupied by violent extremist groups, have largely failed to contain the geographic footprint of violent extremists' groups in the

Sahel region. As many now recognize, the “kinetic” approach to combatting violent extremism must be accompanied by additional strategies aimed at deterring individuals from joining violent extremism groups (Hinkel & Traore, 2020; Harrigan & El-Said, 2011). This has prompted the emergence of more development-oriented strategies (Zeiger et al., 2015), which seek to address root political and socioeconomic causes of extremism (Hardy, 2018).

Conceptualizing Radicalization, Violent Extremism, and Terrorism

A wealth of books and journals has debated the best ways to define radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism, key concepts around which both counterterrorism and violent extremism prevention revolve (Wensink et al., 2017). However, starting in the early 2000s there has been renewed academic interest in understanding these phenomena, largely with a focus on identifying the personal, contextual, and situational drivers behind both phenomena (Widdershoven, 2018). Even now, many academics and policy makers have questioned the need for describing these phenomena through unitary definitions. The common approach was to come up with several comprehensive and inclusive lenses through which to define these concepts (Schmid, 2004). Radicalization remains a complex field, with no single profile for identifying who is likely to radicalize.

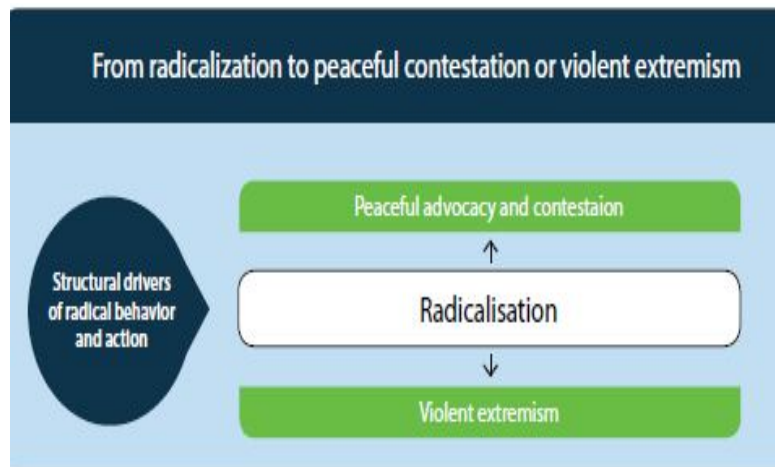
Similar to extensive debates about what constitutes radicalization, there is no single, agreed-upon definition of violent extremism (Blackbourne et al., 2013). The challenge of articulating a clear definition makes it difficult for national leaders and policy makers to design appropriate policy responses (Hardy, 2018). Many policy makers

often explain violent extremism as a particular form of unusual, unexpected behavior that exceeds the ordinary. Yet, simply behaving in an unusual manner is unlikely to earn someone the title of extremist. That is because behaviors or norms that are odd in one country may be common and acceptable in another country (Mattsson, 2018). For example, heterosexuality, the sexual or romantic attraction to or between people of the opposite sex, is the norm in many communities. Any behaviors that challenge heteronormativity could be seen as deviant and extreme. In Zambia, for example two men were imprisoned for 15 years for gay sex (BBC, 2020).

So, how best can we describe radicalization? At its core, radicalization is described as a process in which an individual adopts extremist views on political or social issues and moves towards committing a violent act. McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) assert that in the past, the radicalization of an individual or a group requires serious investments of time, talent, and money. Nowadays, the costs of engaging in radicalizing efforts have gone down (MacCauley & Moskalenko, 2016). With a computer and an internet connection, anyone can put together a website, complete with links to videos, photos, and audio to track and move people toward radicalization (Horgan, 2009).

Keeping the above caveats in mind and depending on the context, violent extremism is largely considered a form of terrorism and/or an extreme form of radicalization. It occurs when an individual decides to pick up a weapon, don a suicide belt, or drive a vehicle into a crowd with the intent of killing or maiming other human beings. It is an extremely diverse and multi-faceted phenomenon that can only be explained by many variables (Allan et al., 2015). No policy or war against violent extremism is likely to

succeed without a full understanding of the factors that attract many individuals to such acts, and of effective methodologies to curb their interest about a career in extremism (Koehler, 2016).



Source: UNDP (2016), p. 24

Figure 13: From Radicalization to Peaceful Contestation or Violent Extremism

Crenshaw (2011) argues that several factors, including social and cultural, ideological, political, and economic grievances, tend to motivate people to join violent extremism movement or to allow violent extremism movement to grow. However, the socio-economic and ideological factors have generated interesting debates, particularly on the link between ethnic and religious identity, poverty, education, and violent extremism (Glazzard et al., 2018).

Andrew Glazzard (2014), the Director of National Security and Resilience Studies at the Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security (RUSI), argues that “violent

extremism is usually considered to be a more inclusive term than ‘terrorism,’ although they are broadly synonymous in use.” Based on Glazzard’s point, this research avoids distinguishing between violent extremism and terrorism. It also recognizes the interchangeable use of violent extremism and terrorism by policy makers as underlying challenges facing Mali. This is not to say that distinguishing between these terms is not important. It is simply so extensive that it would distract from the purpose of this research. Therefore, this research will adopt definitions of violent extremism that are clearly stated by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS). According to the FBI, “violent extremism is encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals” (The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, nd). Preventing or countering violent extremism, or PCVE, refers to proactive actions to counter efforts by extremists to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize followers to violence. Fundamentally, VE actions intend to address the conditions and reduce the factors that most likely contribute to recruitment and radicalization by violent extremists” (United States Department of Homeland Security, nd). The table below shows definitions of terrorism, counterterrorism, and preventing and countering violent extremism that will form the basis of this research.

Concept	Definition
Terrorism	An anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative of symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organisation), (imperilled) victims and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion or propaganda is primarily sought.
Counterterrorism (CT)	A complex set of strategies, policies and programmes designed to take direct action against terrorists or their sponsors and supporters. CT can include both proactive and passive measures designed and implemented across a wide array of fields and domains, including those of politics, law, finance, communications, defence, intelligence and infrastructure. CT may engage and be implemented by a variety of actors, including government, law enforcement, the military, private sector and civil society actors, and the general public.
Preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE)	A complex set of strategies, policies and programmes designed to strengthen the resilience of individuals and groups to the appeal of radicalisers, extremists and terrorists by preventing individuals and groups from completing a process of radicalisation and mobilising to commit violence, and by disengaging and deradicalising individuals and groups who are planning to commit or have already engaged in extremist and terrorist violence. PCVE can include both proactive and passive measures designed and implemented across a wide array of fields and domains, including those of politics, law, education, communications, public health and social work. PCVE may engage and be implemented by a variety of actors, including government, law enforcement, the military, private sector and civil society actors, and the general public.

Source: RAND Corporation: Definitions of key project concepts (RAND Corporation, 2018) ⁴

Figure 14: Definitions of Key Terms

⁴See especially Definitions of key project concepts.

Theories and Drivers of Violent Extremism

There are many different theoretical explanations as to how and why people join violent extremism groups. The academic literature strongly suggests that violent extremism has many drivers and cannot be predicted by one variable alone. In addition, research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (2020) has suggested that many factors contribute to people's association with so-called jihadist groups in Mali, not all because of religious indoctrination. To simplify the understanding of what factors drive people to join violent extremist groups, Allan et al. (2015) conceptualize factors in three levels, with situational factors working at the macro level (i.e., country or community-wide), social and cultural factors at the meso-level (i.e., affecting smaller communities or identity groups), and individual factors at the micro level.



Figure 1: Theoretical Model of Drivers of Violent Extremism

Source: Allan et al. (2015)

Figure 15: Theoretical Model of Drivers of Violent Extremism

Poverty Theory (Socio-Economic Factors)

While the debate on the nexus between poverty and terrorism remains inconclusive, certain countries in West Africa, particularly Mali, present an appropriate landscape in which to consider this relation. This is due to the fact that “besides being one of the poorest countries in the world, it has been one of the most plagued by terrorist and violent extremist group attacks” (Bere, 2017). Mali ranks 182 out of 189 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) for 2019 (United Nations Development Programme Human Development Reports, 2019). Poverty is much lower in urban areas, with 90% of all poor living in rural areas, and concentrated in the south, where population density is highest (The World Bank in Mali, 2020). Drought and conflict have only increased the incidence of poverty. Though Mali has continuously received large amounts of development aid to alleviate the high rate of poverty, it still faces resource and capacity constraints. Food security depends upon an unpredictable and harsh climate, in a country wrecked by frequent drought and conflict. Against this backdrop, a number of scholars have rightly linked terrorism in the country to socio-economic conditions such as poverty. According to a report by the *Vatican News* entitled “Mali: Religious extremism fueled by poverty,” Father Arvedo Godina of the White Fathers stated, “Jihadism is fueled by injustice, poverty and misery, thousands of unemployed young people look for hope, which they find in an extreme form of religiosity that leads them to take up arms against anyone who does not profess their faith” (Vatican News, 2011).

Drawing largely on evidence from terrorist activity in the Middle East, Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova in their article entitled “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” conclude that “there is little reason to believe that a reduction in poverty or an increase in educational attainment would meaningfully reduce international terrorism.” For example, Hassan (2001), based on interviews with two hundred and fifty members of most Palestinian militia groups, observed that “none of them were uneducated, desperately poor, simple-minded, or depressed. Many were middle class and, unless they were fugitive, held paying jobs, which suggests a weak or no correlation between terrorism and roots causes such as socio-economic conditions” (Hassan, 2001).

In addition, in an article in the *New York Times* on the characteristics of the 9/11/2001 terrorist hijackers, Jodi Wilgoren notes that “They were adults with education and skill... spent years studying and training in the United States, collecting valuable commercial skills and facing many opportunities to change their minds... they were not reckless young men facing dire economic conditions and dim prospects but men as old as forty-one enjoying middle-class lives” (Wilgoren, 2001).

The existence of concrete grievances among a group of people that belong to a larger population, such as a minority ethnic group discriminated against by a majority ethnic group, has also been deemed a driver of violent extremism (Kessels & Nemr, 2016). This can be a result of political and economic grievances, which is related to the democratic peace theory. According to a report entitled “Liberal Democracy and the Path to Peace and Security” by Madeleine Albright and Mehdi Jomaa (2017),

The evidence affirms the standard observation that democracies do not go to war against one another. But the data also prove that democracies are less likely to spawn internal armed conflicts or experience deadly terrorism because they channel dissent through nonviolent means and manage violence through respect for the rule of law and human rights. Authoritarian and failed states, on the other hand, are more likely to experience intra- and interstate conflict, generate refugees, hinder women's equality, and harbor violent extremists.

The democratic peace theorists argue that violent extremism is fundamentally a symptom of failures of democratic governance. Thus, the greater extent to which a government respects the democratic freedoms such as free speech, expression, privacy, and pluralism in a given country, the lower the rates of violent extremist threats (Magen, 2018). This is because democracies have conflict prevention mechanisms associated with institutionalized participation in governance that tend to mitigate the outbreak of violent conflicts.

According to this theory, a central element of democratic peace is the welfare system. Burgoon proposes that countries that have more generous welfare systems are less likely to experience higher rates of terrorist attacks. He argues that underdeveloped, developing, and developed countries would register fewer cases of violent extremism threats if they institutionalized more social policies, and health services that cater to the most vulnerable people in a given community (Burgoon, 2006). On the other hand, Shaun and Phillips (2009) found democracy to be a negative predictor of the rate of violent extremist threats against civilians. This suggests that there is no empirical evidence supporting a direct link between the lack of democracy and extremist violence. The “strategic” school of the democracy-terrorism according to Drakos and Gofas (2006a),

can provide an open and free space that encourages violent extremist ideologies to grow. These trends can be observed in recently democratized states or weak states such as Mali.

Failed State Theory

Of the various nontraditional threats linked to terrorism, state failure has received considerable scholarly attention. However, the question, “Do failed states generate conditions hospitable to terrorism and violent extremism?” remains a topic for discussion in many policy circles. To answer this question, Robert Rotberg explored the nexus between state failure, terrorism, and peace in his 2002 article "Failed States in a World of Terror." He argued that “failed states, such as Afghanistan and Somalia, are incapable of projecting power and asserting authority within their own borders, leaving their territories governmentally empty.” As a consequence, territories that are governmentally empty have come to be feared as "breeding grounds of instability, mass migration, and murder." In the words of political scientist Stephen Walt (1998), territories that are governmentally empty have become “reservoirs and exporters of terror.” According to a hearing before the committee on homeland security in the U.S House of Representatives in 2015, Representative Michael McCaul stated: “In many ways, we are no longer talking about terrorist groups. We are talking about terrorist armies. ISIS now controls a territory the size of Belgium, governs millions of people, draws on billions of dollars in revenue and commands tens of thousands of foot soldiers” (Hearing before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives One Hundred Fourteenth Congress, 2015).

Another advocate of the failed state theory, Lai (2007), proposes that countries which experience instability and state failure because of civil war are more likely to register higher rates of violent extremism. To support this argument, Sandole (2010:105) suggests that state failure often occurs because of poverty, corruption, and unemployment, all of which create a conducive environment for recruitment to join violent extremist groups. Corruption and state failure can lead to relative deprivation which, according to Gurr (1970), is the belief that an individual or a group of people are deprived of socio-economic resources compared to others (Sen, 2008). Mariel and Arthur (2013) argue that structural inequality and poverty as a result of state failure can create the preconditions for the recruitment of individuals to join violent extremist groups. For example, on the Fund For Peace's "Fragile States Index" for 2019, Mali's rank is Alert - 94.5 (lower ranks being less desirable) and Somalia's rank is High Alert - 112. In contrast, Botswana's rank is More Stable -59.5(Fund for Peace, 2019). Also, the United Nations Development Programme in 2016 estimated that nearly 51% of the Malian and 73% of the Somali population live below the poverty line. These two countries have been cited as breeding grounds for terrorism and violent extremism due to the correlation between the failed state index, the poverty rate, and the increase in terrorist activities on their grounds.

Madeleine Albright, the former 64th Secretary of State of the United States, notes that the international community should focus on promoting failed state recovery. Addressing the conditions of state failure itself, she suggest, will remove the situation that furnishes sanctuary and cover to terrorist cells (Albright, 2003). Countries that are in

a political transition ranging from elections to peace agreements after civil war, according to a report entitled “Managing Political Transitions in Africa” by the United States Institutes of Peace (USIP, n.d.), are more likely to be prone to violence and terrorism threats. This is often because, according to Krieger and Meierrieks (2011), rather than using conventional channels of political participation, individuals tend to see the value of joining a violent extremist group that has ample influence when a country is experiencing state failure. To amplify the hypotheses that terrorism is correlated with unsuccessful political transitions, Anastas in his 2003 article entitled “The Challenge of Terrorism and Organised Crime” stated:

No sooner did we free ourselves from fifty years of totalitarianism than we were forced to expand resources and energies to defend our newly acquired freedoms from the shadowy threats of religious fanaticism and the crime syndicates, both of which thrive in disorder and poverty.

However, Blair (2002) notes that there has been insufficient inquiry into the hypothesis that failed states constitute a cause of violent extremism and terrorism. According to Chandler (2006), “The idea of failed states as a security threat is, I believe, an exaggerated one.” To support Chandler’s argument, Oriola and Knight (2019) propose that proponents of the use of military power to counter violent extremism routinely identify failed states as the main reason for the threat posed by violent extremism groups.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative deprivation theory provides a plausible understanding into the underlying roots of violent extremism and terrorism. Many articles in the fields of security studies

have sought to explain “relative deprivation” as the underlying reason that leads an individual or a social movement to commit an act of violence (Merton, 1938). Also, econometric studies have analyzed global and regional terrorism in order to test the links between terrorism and macro- and socioeconomic determinants (David, 2013). In his book *Why Men Rebel*, Gurr argues that people become dissatisfied when they perceive that they have less than they could or should have had. Relative deprivation, according to Gurr, consists in a perception by marginalized population groups that their value expectations for what they deserve from society are not realized in their value capabilities regarding what they can actually achieve. Marginalized population groups live in a prolonged state of collective grievance, where their hopes for what society should provide are rarely realized in what society actually provides. Their dissatisfaction creates frustration and, in turn can cause a violent rebellion against the perceived source of their deprivation (Gurr, 1970). However, Gurr was not the first to propose the theory that frustration leads to act of aggression. Dollard et al. (1939) also articulated the relation between frustration and aggression. Davies (1962) also argues, in his article titled “Towards a Theory of Revolution,” that political violence in some cases occurs due to the gap between what people’s expectations and what they get. According to Davies, the frustration by reason of this, “is sufficiently intense and focused to result in either rebellion or revolution.” In addition to Gur’s and Davies’s arguments, Feddes, Mann, and Doosje (2015) argue that such dissatisfaction and frustration can occur among groups of people as well when they perceive that they are treated inferiorly to other groups. Freytag and colleagues (2011) tested Gurr’s theory by conducting several regression

analyses for 110 countries between 1971 and 2007. They concluded that poor socio-economic development indeed matters to terrorism, contrary to other results. However, critics argue that the proponents of the relative deprivation theory fail to explain why some people who feel deprived do not turn to violence or join violent extremist groups. Krueger and Malecková (2003) write that “eradication of poverty and universal secondary education are unlikely to change these feelings. Indeed, those who are well-off and well-educated may even perceive such feelings more acutely.”

Other critics against the link between relative deprivation and violent extremism argue that relative deprivation cannot be determined unless there is documented and accurate proof differentiating between an individual’s attitude before and after joining a violent extremist group (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984).

Social Identity Theory

While there is a significant grey area that exists among drivers for radicalization at the individual level, much credit has been given to terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda in their efforts to radicalize and recruit young people. According to a hearing before the Committee on Homeland Security in the U.S House of Representatives in 2015, Mr. Nicholas J. Rasmussen, the Director of National Counterterrorism Center in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence stated: “The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other like-minded terrorist organizations have been effective in recruiting fighters from Western countries” (Hearing Before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives, One Hundred Fourteenth Congress, 2015). Many scholars

argue that radicalization is a social process, and that social identity is a key factor in recruitment of young people in violent extremism movements. Of particular importance is the work of Marc Sageman on the social processes that drive radicalization in his book *Turning to Political Violence: The Emergence of Terrorism* (2017). Sageman develops a theoretical model based on the concept of social identity. His analysis focuses on the complex dynamic between the state and disaffected citizens that leads some to disillusionment and moral outrage. In particular, he argues against the common explanation that terrorism is a result of a top-down process in which leaders manipulate individuals who become radicalized and join violent extremist groups. According to Sageman, the relationship between identity and social integration is ambiguous; identity can promote as well as negate integration into a violent extremist group.

In his book *Identity: Youth and Crisis* Erikson (1968) described identity as a process rooted in the core of the individual, yet also rooted in the core of his or her communal culture. He believes that communities need a certain level of cohesion for the maintenance of public order and governmental legitimacy. Apart from policies of economic growth, redistribution, and welfare, which may influence patterns of social integration, communities often rely on shared beliefs, language, religion, culture, race, or territory to promote a sense of oneness among their diverse citizens. He further argues that individuals who join violent extremist groups consciously assume a negative identity, which he explains as often expressed as an angry and snobbish rejection of the roles expected by one's family, community, or even society.

In addition, Piazza (2006) shows that the two most pronounced dimensions of social identity, that is, religion and ethnicity, have become factors embedded in the fabric of how communities view violent extremism. Contrary to the view by some analysts that limitations on religious freedom, while they may be morally problematic, are sometimes necessary to curtail religious extremism and terrorism, Piazza proposes that ethnically and religiously diverse societies where the law fails to protect the rights to freedom of religion and belonging to an ethnic group tend to have a higher likelihood of incidents involving violent extremism. In addition, he states that the repression that often accompanies restrictions on religious freedom can also radicalize religious communities. For example, Human Rights Watch (HRW) in 2013 accused “Malian soldiers of executing, torturing and facilitating the forced disappearances of suspected rebels based on ethnicity.” Corinne Dufka, a senior West Africa researcher at HRW, said:

There have been a number of abuses, and many of them seem to have been committed by soldiers who appear to be responding to the fall of Konna [a key city in Mali] and the concern that Sévaré and several other towns were being infiltrated. So, they went out and detained people on what appears to be very flimsy evidence, based on their ethnic group or how they were dressed and so on (Lazuta, 2013).

Also, according to the *New York Times*, the U.S. State Department issued a report implicating the Burkina Faso’s government in a litany of “human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detentions and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national, racial and ethnic minorities.” The article went further to suggest that “Human Rights Watch documented more than sixty killings of civilians by armed Islamists between late 2017 and February

2019, but it uncovered more than double that number, 130 extrajudicial killings by the Burkinabe security forces, over that same period” (Turse, 2020).

In short, the literature suggests that the connections between religious freedom and religious extremism, for example, may be both positive and negative. Positively, the presence of religious freedom may moderate, contain, counteract, or prevent the origin and spread of violent religious extremism. Negatively, according to Basuchoudhary and Shughart (2010), the absence or lack of religious freedom may encourage or contribute to the origin and spread of violent religious extremism for several reasons. For example, according to Hayee (2012), governments that do not respect religious freedom, silencing and marginalizing religious voices, inadvertently promote an “environment that insulates extremist religious groups from criticism and competition” that could help them recruit many individuals in communities.

Psychological Perspectives

Violent extremism and terrorism sit at the forefront of today’s policy discussions, especially in countries affected by this phenomenon, although, according to Daniel Rothbart (2018), “many modern social institutions have the power to transform individuals, converting them to regimented beings, or treating them like robots devoid of feelings, emotions, and sentiments.” Such psychological factors, such as one’s self-image, expectations, a sense of identity and belonging, and beliefs and attitudes, can shape an individual’s experiences and reactions to his or her environment and events (Horga & Taylor, 2006). These factors can influence how negative feelings of

displacement, rejection, relative deprivation, victimization, injustice, frustration, exclusion, humiliation, victimization, revolt, and superiority are developed (Möller-Leimkühler, 2018). Such factors can entice individuals, especially young people, to be more prone towards violent extremism as they cope with issues of identity, their place in the world, and methods to achieve their goals.

The exposure of dominant narratives of a perceived enemy who is threatening the well-being or survival of the affiliated identity group, as well as ideas that legitimize violent extremism and promote its appeal, are key factors that must be taken into consideration. In addition, Randy Borum (2014) highlights the links between psychological vulnerability and the propensities for an individual's involvement in violent extremism. He explains vulnerabilities as "factors that point to some people having a greater openness to increased engagement than others." Such factors might shape an individual's attitudes toward a particular type of victim or target. According to Borum, three specific psychological vulnerabilities have been commonly observed among violent extremists: (1) a need for personal meaning and identity; (2) a need for belonging; and (3) perceived injustice and humiliation (Borum, 2015). For example, in 2012, Fulani pastoralists joined various armed and terrorist groups, including MUJAO in Mali (MUJAOM), as a means of defending themselves against the perceived injustice and the growing power of the Tuareg Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA) and its Islamist allies AQIM and Ansar Dine (Benjaminsen, 2019).

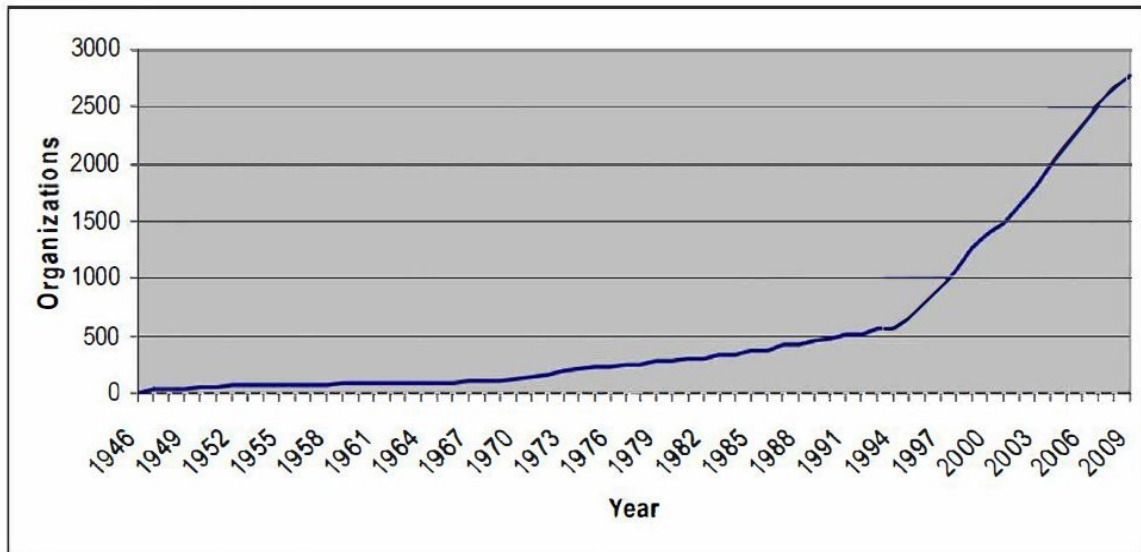
According to Fatima Kyari Mohammed, the Permanent Observer of the African Union (AU) to the United Nations, violent extremist and terrorist groups are using

increasingly sophisticated tools, including social media, to convince their followers of perceived injustice and humiliation (United Nations, 2020). To amplify Mohammed's comment, Rosemary Dicarolo, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, states that violent extremist groups in Africa continue to pose the most persistent threat to security in Africa. She further suggests that violent extremists who claim that violence is a necessity in the pursuit of their social, ideological, and political goals cleverly weave public perceptions of poor governance into their own narratives that claim to fight injustice and impunity and disseminate these ideas in a way that will reach and resonate with a wider audience (United Nations Press Releases and Coverage, 2020).

Understanding the Role of NGOs In Peacebuilding

The African continent has seen the proliferation of NGOs in peacebuilding in the twentieth century, with a rapid increase during the 1990s (Brass, 2016).

Total Number of U.N. Recognized NGOs by Year, 1946-2009



Source: United Nations Economic and Social Council, List of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council as of 1 September 2009, available at <http://esango.un.org/paperless/content/E2009INF4.pdf>

Source: United Nations Economic Council

Figure 16: Total Number of UN-Recognized NGOs by Year, 1946-2009

For example, in Kenya the number of NGOs grew by over 400% between 1997 and 2006. This country is home to more than 12,000 NGOs that work in different sectors of peacebuilding (education, human rights, and civic engagement) (Anderson, 2017).

The increase of peacebuilding NGOs working in conflict affected communities is reflected especially in countries where governments are unable to deliver physical security, a productive economic environment, and a stable political system for its people (Dupuy et al., 2016). A February 2013 Malian opinion poll conducted by Afro Barometer, “La qualité de la démocratie et de la gouvernance au Mali,” concluded that

the perceived causes of the country's various crises were "lack of patriotism among leaders" and "weakness of the state" (31% and 16%, respectively) (AfroBarometer, 2013).

Recent research findings in the Malian regions of Mopti and Ségou by Dr. Grégory Chauzal, researcher at SIPRI, entitled "Achieving Peace and Development in Central Mali: Looking Back on One Year of SIPRI's Work," states that,

The provision of public services such as roads, water and education is poor and unevenly distributed, whether due to structural weakness or insecurity. Even when these services are present, the populations express dissatisfaction about the quality. The most commonly identified weaknesses are the lack of functioning schools, the absence of human and material resources in community health services, the deficiency of basic infrastructure (roads and water points) and the dearth of competent staff..... The security crisis has forced the populations to turn to non-state service providers such as traditional/religious authorities and armed groups. It has also led to local populations organizing to fill these gaps through informal structures such as popular justice and local militias. In some places, non-state armed groups have also assumed state responsibilities, especially in the provision of security and justice (Chauzal, 2020).

The increase in the number of peacebuilding NGOs constitutes both an opportunity and a problem for policymakers in these countries because the very presence of NGOs alters the context for the formulation of government policies (Demars, 2005). Regarding the opportunity, NGOs play an important role as partners to governments and use their funds to provide human and financial resources, material and equipment, and communication facilities to address social and economic issues and improve the lives of the citizens. For example, the Global Community Engagement & Resilience Fund (GCERF) has partnered with the government of Mali to raise awareness of recruitment and radicalization to violent extremism and formulate policies to guide at-risk individuals to get the help they need in 123 village/district communities (GCERF, n.d.). As a problem, the collaboration

between government and NGOs has been very weak because of lack of trust, accountability, and oversight. One manifestation of this lack of accountability and oversight is the diversion of aid resources in Mali. *The New Humanitarian* quoted Mahmoud Cheibani, a teacher at a Timbuktu secondary school, saying, “We are poor not because of a lack of aid, we are poor because aid does not reach the targeted populations” (*The New Humanitarian*, 2013).

Also, peacebuilding scholar-practitioners seeking to explain the growth of NGOs draw upon various ideologically driven perspectives. On the far left, many policymakers argue the increase in the number of NGOs is the result of attempts to critique or produce revolutionary change in many countries. In the ideological middle, political liberals perceive NGOs as a democratization force designed to guarantee societal rights by holding governments accountable for their policies (Sakue-Collins, 2020). On the far right, neoconservatives laud NGOs for taking over many of the responsibilities of failing government bureaucracies. All three interpretations foresee differing advantages and disadvantages from the proliferation of NGOs (Johnson, 2016).

NGO: Concepts and Definition

The term NGO was first mentioned in Article 71 in the charter of the newly formed United Nations in 1945. While NGOs have no formal or fixed definition, they are often described in a simple way as not-for-profit bodies that are independent of any governmental influence (Legutko, 2018) or a not-for-profit organization operating in the international arena, though some countries label their own civil society groups as NGOs.

Since the colonial period, the state has remained the major actor in the development and governance in Africa. However, NGOs have since then played a major role in addressing socio-economic development gaps in Africa. Their role has increased especially from the 1980s, following the demonstrated failure of the newly formed post-independence state all over the continent, as a credible provider of basic needs services to the poor both in the rural and urban environments.

With little concern for clarity of objectives and meaning, many organizations have often been referred to as NGOs. Numerous policy makers, scholars, and pundits often prefer a minimalist definition which sometimes includes all organizations listed in various catalogues of international organizations (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004), while policy makers tend to ascribe the title NGOs to organizations that suit a particular policy agenda (Kamat, 2004).

Although the meaning and the use of the term NGO has been widely debated, there exists a consensus in the academic and policy world that NGOs have become important actors in the developing countries. They are one group of players that are active in increasing the welfare of people, especially in poor and conflict ravaged countries. For the purpose of this study and borrowing from the World Bank Vague Operational Directive 14.70, NGOs are defined as "organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services or undertake community development" (Werker & Ahmed, 2008).

NGO Proliferation in Mali

For a long time, the Malian state remained the major actor in the areas of development and governance. However, the last decade has seen a shift in the role of the state, particularly in areas controlled by the terrorist and armed groups. Malian NGOs have reached a certain level of maturity and have moved beyond soup kitchens and band-aids to more aggressive strategies for social justice, violent extremism prevention, and long-term peacebuilding.

NGOs in Mali sit at the nexus of several issues that are directly related to preventing youth enrolment into violent extremism in the short and long term. Their work in economic development and conflict resolution has long been recognized and supported by a range of international governance bodies (Barnett & Walker, 2015). However, because these NGOs are often the first responders in crisis zones and in transitioning states, some of their policies and practices have reinforced the good/bad binary, an iteration of the “working with us or against us” mentality that has in many cases divided societies and cultures than curtailed violence (O’Neal, 2016).

According to officials of Think Peace, the Malian government alone is unable to prevent youth engagement in violent extremism. Local non-governmental organizations are often more capable of identifying the drivers of violent extremism and know what will work in their communities, yet local NGOs routinely face many challenges, including funding and operating in a restricted space and have limited access to decision-makers (Bebbington et al, 2013).

Can Local NGOs Make a Difference?

NGOs have long operated in the context of global conflicts, not only as humanitarian actors but also as active promoters of good governance, rule of law, and government accountability. According to Whaites (2000), “the role of NGOs through government programs and policies is particularly important since they provide a realm in which society interacts constructively with the state.” While improvement is always possible, there are many areas where NGOs have brought positive change in people’s lives, in societies and in the workings of the national and international institutions (Fowler, 2000; Batliwala & Brown, 2006).

Present-day academic research on the work of peacebuilding NGOs is explained using two conflicting images. In the first image, grassroots organizations design and fund projects for the benefit of the communities, whereas in the second image, wealthy foreign aid donors design, fund, and implement programs with the help of contractors and sub-contractors on behalf of the global poor. According to Bebbington (2005) and Wallace et al. (2006), a key problem for wealthy foreign aid donors is their inability to reach beneficiaries directly, relying instead on an “aid chain” of other organizations. Thus, billions of euros and dollars are distributed to international NGOs (International NGOS, or INGOs) often with headquarters in developed countries (Longhofer & Schofer, 2010), who after retaining their overhead costs, distribute the rest of the funds to medium-sized NGOs, often referred to as national NGOs that have their headquarters in the capitals of poor countries (Heimer, 2007, p. 557). In turn, national NGOs retain their overhead costs and distribute smaller amounts to small NGOs, often referred to as local NGOs to implement the work that the original wealthy donor designed for the benefit of local

communities. The complexity of conceptualizing what NGOs are and what they do stems from uncertainties of altruism at long distance. The combination of unpredictable, poorly understood environments and often unrealizable goals means that wealthy donors often find it more appealing to engage with medium-range NGOs that they can manage to rationalize their activities (Thompson, 1967).

The proliferating of NGOs around the world during the past decade was especially significant in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. The rapid expansion of the NGO organizational field has been described by nearly every article using the word “outbreak” and has been captivated in a number of theories of NGOs developed in the fields of anthropology, political science, and geography (Spiro, 2007). What explains the increase in the number of local NGOs that are committed to prevent the rise of violent extremism in Africa? Many explanations are presented by peacebuilders. According to Think Peace, local NGOs affect social change where others cannot, especially because their focus is primarily on community level development. During the Global Meeting organized by UNDP, entitled on “Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity,” held in Oslo on 14-16 March 2016, participants agreed that “effective programming partnerships must primarily focus on strengthening local and endogenous capacities for Preventing Violent Extremism and community resilience to violent extremism” and that “development actors must invest in analysis to understand the local context, trust building processes with partners, and capacity development of endogenous structures.”

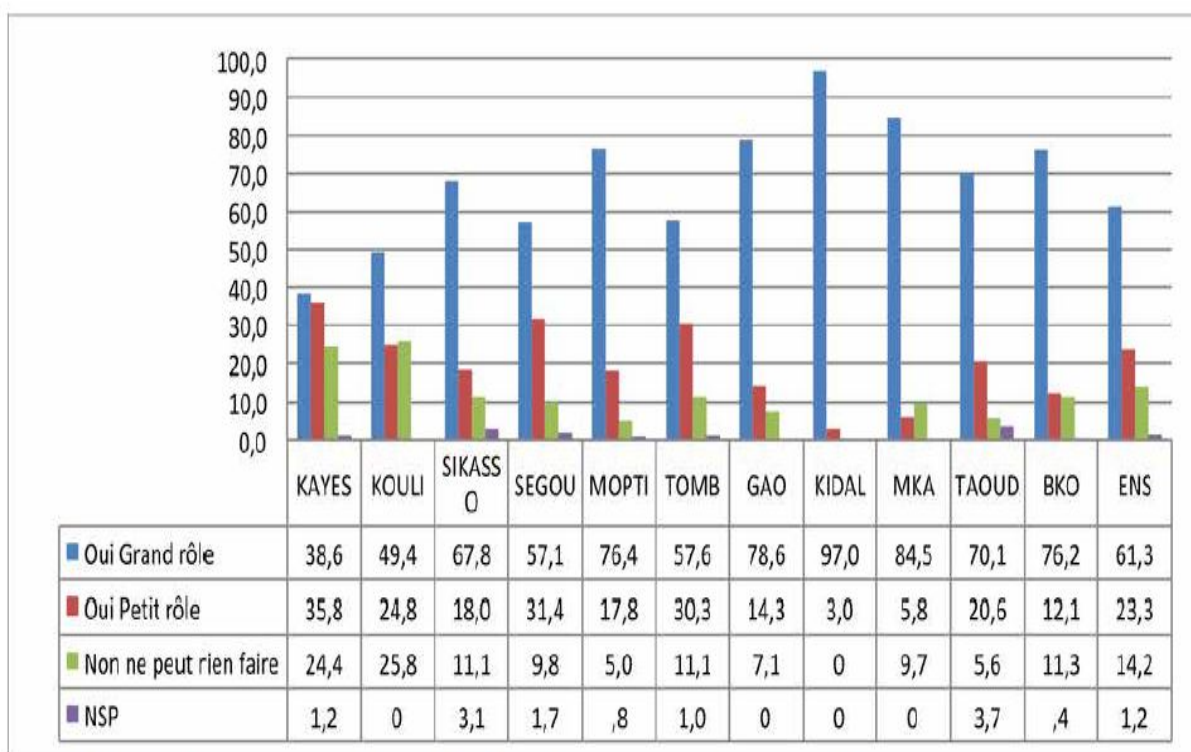
Chin (2018) argues that NGOs often serve as advocates for the poor and service providers and that distinguishing between the objectives of advocacy and service delivery is not always helpful. According to Hearn (2007), the objectives of many NGOs operating in many developing countries have changed over time. Though many NGOs, particularly in Africa, were created with the explicit focus on tailoring best strategies to address structural violence such as economic inequality and marginalization, some NGOs have added to their objectives managerial and technical solutions to social issues, for example, alleviating poverty through the provision of welfare and service delivery.

In an effort to end Mali's highest infant mortality rate in Africa, with 100 deaths per 1,000 live births, the NGOs Muso and Tostan have made a huge impact by training and equipping community health workers to go door-to-door proactively searching for patients, while mobilizing social networks to bring children in for care at the earliest signs of illness. In the community of Yirimadjo, at the start of the project, the rate of child mortality was 155/1000. Three years later, the rate of death for children under age five was 17/1000, a ten-fold difference. Miriama, a resident of Yirimadjo and a recipient of Muso and Tostan aid stated:

A few months ago, I was pregnant. One night I started bleeding heavily and it wouldn't stop. It was 11pm. I was weak and couldn't walk. When someone in our house gets sick, we used to have to choose between not eating, begging for food, or taking the person to the health center. But since Muso started my family has health care for the first time. Our Community Health Worker Jeneba arranged transportation and we went together to the community health center. I needed a blood transfusion because I was anemic and had malaria. Since I was so sick, they transferred me to the referral hospital. I was treated at the hospital and within a couple of days I was healthy again. My baby was born early, but thanks to Muso he was born at the health center and he received treatment there until he was

strong. Today he is healthy and is no longer small. He is my light. He gives me hope.” (Office of the UN Secretary General, 2014).

Most NGOs, especially those working with local communities, are considered by donors as sometimes having superior insights into the grievances and conditions that lead individuals to violent extremism and as being better able to respond mostly because they work close to disadvantaged communities. As shown by the table below, of the 2186 people surveyed in Mali to assess of the role of civil society and local NGOs in peacebuilding, the overwhelming majority (blue line) agree that civil society and local NGOs are playing a big role in peacebuilding and violence prevention.



Survey « Mali-Mètre » by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in March 2020 - Enquête d'opinion « Que pensent les Maliens ? »

Source: Mali-Mètre

Figure 17: Assessment of the Role of Civil Society and LYNGOs in Peacebuilding

Keck and Sikkink (1999), Goodhand (2006) and Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) agree with the findings that the roles that NGOs play are very critical in diffusing conflicts on the ground and raising global awareness for moral causes.

By contrast, several scholars studying NGOs have challenged this interpretation of the influence of NGOs in peacebuilding. Nesbit (2003) argues that the mere presence of NGOs does not mean that the problems will be resolved. For example, an investigation

by *The New Humanitarian* and the Thomson Reuters Foundation revealed that fifty-one women, many of whose accounts were backed up by aid agency drivers and local NGO workers, recounted multiple incidents of abuse by NGO workers during the 2018 to 2020 Ebola crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, mainly by men who said they were international workers. In addition, the report stated that “at least 30 women said workers from the World Health Organization were involved and others came from UNICEF, Oxfam, Médecins Sans Frontières, World Vision, ALIMA, and the International Organization for Migration” (Flummerfelt & Peyton, 2020). In a different development, The United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services has launched an inquiry into allegations of sexual abuse and the exploitation of vulnerable women by members of its staff in Uganda’s drought-stricken northeastern Karamoja region (Okiror, 2020).

Goodhand (2006) argues that in some cases, the actions and activities of NGOs have worsened conflict situations. For example, an NGO might provide water tanks for the community without addressing the power imbalances that resulted in some having water while others do not. An NGO’s choice of individuals to employ, goods to purchase, and communities to target their aid toward can fuel separate group identities, inequalities, and conflict. A review of fraud and corruption risks in the Democratic Republic of Congo, one of the world's longest-running humanitarian crises, carried out by three international consultants and two Congolese researchers under contract to Adam Smith International, an aid consultancy, concluded that: (1) Workers at international aid groups—in particular UN agencies—have been demanding kickbacks from national NGOs in exchange for contracts; (2) Corrupt practices have undermined the Ebola response and other aid

operations; and (3) Corruption has led to a breakdown in trust between aid agencies, government officials, and local communities (Henze et al, 2020).

According to Menkhaus (2000), any peacebuilding intervention in Africa must involve local actors and external actors must make sure not to hijack the process by demanding kickbacks from local actors in exchange for contracts. More importantly, peacebuilding must be driven by the individuals and communities and NGOs should not be a substitute for civil society organizations (Stewart, 1997). This is not to say that NGOs do not have a role to play in addressing issues related to peacebuilding. Instead, they can help community-based initiatives and civil society groups in addressing underlying issues that can help in peacebuilding especially in conflict affected communities.

Another criticism of NGOs, especially those working in the realm of violent extremism prevention, is the reliance of source government funding that use the language of violent extremism to target Muslim communities or a particular social group. Faiza Patel (2011) notes that even though a recent US Department of Homeland Security study of the pathways to violent extremism concluded that “there is no one path” to political radicalization, according to a new study issued by the Brennan Center for Justice, a public policy and law institute: “Some 85 % of the grants which are offered by the United States federal government under the controversial rubric of Countering Violent Extremism, or CVE, programs — target Muslims and other minority groups.” (Hussain, 2018.)

Among the organizations listed as recipients of CVE grants from the United States federal government are an array of NGOs engaged in public safety and counterextremism

work. Some of these NGOs include Peace Catalyst International and Global Peace Foundation. According to the U.S Department of Homeland Security (DHS), “One grantee jointly planned and facilitated a conference geared to youth and faith leaders that linked the nearly 200 participants to job opportunities/assistance and other social service resources.” (United States Department of Homeland Security Office of Terrorism Prevention Partnerships, 2013). Another NGO conducted messaging campaigns, launched message creation competitions, and hosted resources on their websites.

Thus, by receiving federal grants that seems to target minority communities especially Muslim communities, critics argue that NGOs neglect to consider that violent extremism cuts across socioeconomic, religious, ethnic, and racial lines (United States Department of Homeland Security Office of Terrorism Prevention Partnerships, 2013). An employee of one of the Malian NGOs interviewed for this research stated that “instead of providing support to local NGOs to respond to local needs and priorities that they identify in the communities, violent extremism funding forces local NGOs to focus on violent extremism prevention only, neglecting other priorities such as poverty alleviation, or try[ing] to twist their work so that it fits within the violent extremism framework.” Another criticism of the NGOs is that initiatives funded by CVE grants are ineffective and target these communities for unjust surveillance. Critics argue that funds from CVE programs that target minorities in schools undermine young people’s ability to express themselves in ways protected by the constitution, by making them feel like they will be under government scrutiny for their speech.

Peacebuilding NGOs and Violent Extremism Prevention

Peacebuilding NGOs have increased in numbers as a means of seeking to prevent violent extremism in many parts of the world, especially in West Africa's Sahel region. To prevent violent extremism in the West Africa's Sahel region, Zartman (2005) argues that it is vital to deal effectively with the deep-rooted drivers of violence. For example, in the discussion generated in March 2005 by former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan about violent extremism, the Algerian representative to the United Nations said, “You should not deal with violent extremism without addressing the root causes” (Stewart & Brown, 2007). The importance of peacebuilding NGOs in the violent extremism sphere is more widely accepted by local, national, and international NGOs than governments in the developing world. This is because many governments believe that the importance of NGOs implies that they have failed to alleviate poverty, corruption, and unemployment, in addition to their ineptitude in creating an environment nonconducive for terrorism. To amplify this point, during the seventy-second session of the United Nations general Assembly on 21 September 2017, Crown Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II of Jordan pointed out that

The world had spent \$1.7 trillion on arms but had fallen short by \$1.7 billion to answer the United Nations appeal to support Syrian refugees. War economies continued to thrive, while real economies suffered. The United Nations is our global conscience, but for too many in my country and others around the world trying to do good, it sometimes feels like the world’s conscience is on ‘silent mode’ (UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2017).

Peacebuilding NGOs and civil society are seen as central to the task of preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism. Ms. Tolani Joacquim-Runchi, an expert for

the Home Office of the Government of the UK, at a side event on Civil Society Engagement in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism organized by the UNODC in 2018, stated that “civil society participation is a fundamental part of building community resilience and contributing to the success of the United Kingdom's counterterrorism strategy, PREVENT” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018). The reliance on NGOs in the effort to prevent violent extremism is understandable, because of the many successes they achieved in some key areas, such as human right promotion and poverty reduction. Some of these successes were achieved using varied approaches based on the institutional configuration of local conditions, direct or indirect intervention, and root causes of the problem. Their impacts have also varied based on the quality of the services they are providing. For example, the LYNGO Think Peace has been lauded for their effectively engaging with MIKADO FM to shape the public discourse around terrorism and violent extremism. Although NGOs use various operational approaches to identify and address the underlying drivers of violent extremism, there is some degree of convergence in their approaches and activities.

International NGOs are one group of critical actors that play a pivotal role in building good governance in conflict situations besieged by violent extremism groups. Their contributions include funding existing local mechanisms, civil society networks, and violent extremism prevention programs that focus on building capacity and resilience in communities (Farhadi, 2020). For example, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) is a leading provider of funding for the organization of justice and security and dialogues, which are implemented at the local level in communities affected by violent

extremism. These dialogues are funded, implemented, and co-facilitated with the help of local NGOs to promote cooperation, improve relations, and enhance joint problem solving among religious leaders, business elites, security actors, community members, and the government.

Other efforts by international NGOs are designed to prevent recruitment by extremist groups through counter messages, reform of Islam messaging, social media monitoring, and arrests of suspects. The Global Center on Cooperation and SIDA are two international non-governmental organizations that use human rights-based principles as part of their violent extremism prevention initiatives. These principles include researching, publishing, and designing interventions that are based on their impartial analysis of all dimensions of the conflict that have a violent extremism. For these two NGOs, preventing violent extremism interventions are designed to directly disrupt the recruitment of vulnerable people and prevent the spread of cultural, religious, and social messages of intolerance that are used by violent extremist groups for the purposes of recruitment.

In June 2018, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and other NGOs, including the African Union's Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), held a workshop entitled "Investing in Peace and Prevention of Violence in the Sahel-Sahara" in Algiers. Participants at the workshop concluded that strategies to prevent violent extremism must consider the existence of the drivers of violent extremism at the local, national, and international level. At the national level, they agreed that CVE efforts led by NGOs must focus on improving the local conditions believed to radicalize

individuals (such as poverty, instability, and oppression), for example, through empowering women and youth, vocational training and employment programs, political and economic development, stabilization efforts, supporting government reform, and policies to increase and foster economic and social inclusion.

Another method to counter violent extremism involves an educational approach to increase access to alternative religious knowledge, religious education, and rehabilitation for detainees in prisons, and promote alternative and moderate voices. This method is exemplified by Think Peace, a Malian local NGO working to prevent youth engagement into violent extremism. During an event on civil society engagement in preventing and countering violent extremism conducive to terrorism organized by the UNODC Civil Society Team in 2018, Mr. Abdoul Kassim Fomba, the National Coordinator of Think Peace stated:

In a conflict-ridden society such as Mali, the positive outcomes in de-radicalizing youths are only possible through the support of civil society. Think Peace Mali utilizes the influence of religious leaders, community leaders, local chiefs, and celebrities to show vulnerable young people alternative means to achieving a successful and fulfilling life (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018).

Most recently, the US Department of State and U.S. Mission to Mali announced an open competition for NGOs to submit applications to carry out a program (or programs) to help counter violent extremism through cultural events and civic dialogue. The aim of this grant, entitled “Community-Based Activities to Build Civil Society and Youth Capacity in Mali” was to (1) build resilience to violent extremism among vulnerable communities; (2) support economic development in regions at risk of extremism due to a lack of economic opportunity by ensuring members of the local community are involved

in carrying out and executing events; (3) provide positive alternatives to populations vulnerable to recruitment and violent extremist messages; (4) strengthen civil society capacity to counter violent extremism; and (5) counter violent extremist messaging and narratives (USAID/Mali, nd).

This kind of grant announcement has become routine and NGOs in the region have for some time devised various strategies to achieve intended goals, should they be selected and given the grants. Think Peace Mali is one of the local NGOs that has applied for this grant.

Theoretical Approaches to Violence Extremism Prevention

According to Sandole (2010), the prevention of violent extremism can benefit from the dynamic field of conflict analysis and resolution. Peacebuilding as a conflict analysis and resolution concept emerged from an “idealist” view of human relations instead of the “realist” power politics that dominates international relations. The realist approach to peacebuilding assumes that the world is anarchic and violent extremism can only be countered by establishing a power balance, preserving state interests, and taking states as the only legitimate entity for representation. By contrast, the idealist view of peacebuilding rests on the notion that the prevention of violent extremism must be based on the values of justice, compassion, cooperation, non-violence, and human relationships, and lays strong emphasis on the role of non-state actors such as NGOs (Jervis, 1999). Thus, an approach to peacebuilding that involves the interaction between people and local communities with the aim of changing the hearts and minds of people and preventing violence is based on the idealist paradigm.

Three approaches will be used to analyze the conceptual factors that underpin the strategies of NGOs seeking to combat violent extremism. The first draws heavily on a socioeconomic perspective that relies on the proposition that violent extremism can be prevented by reducing socio-economic disparities between ethnic groups and other identity groups within a state. The second adopts a psychological disengagement approach, and the third adopts a narrative framework, both relying on the assumption that the sharing of positive narratives, effective training processes to build trust and empathy, and effective dialogue processes to facilitate communication and cooperation are the best ways to prevent violent extremism. These frameworks are presented as a guide for action to help curb the spread and mitigate the growth of violent extremism.

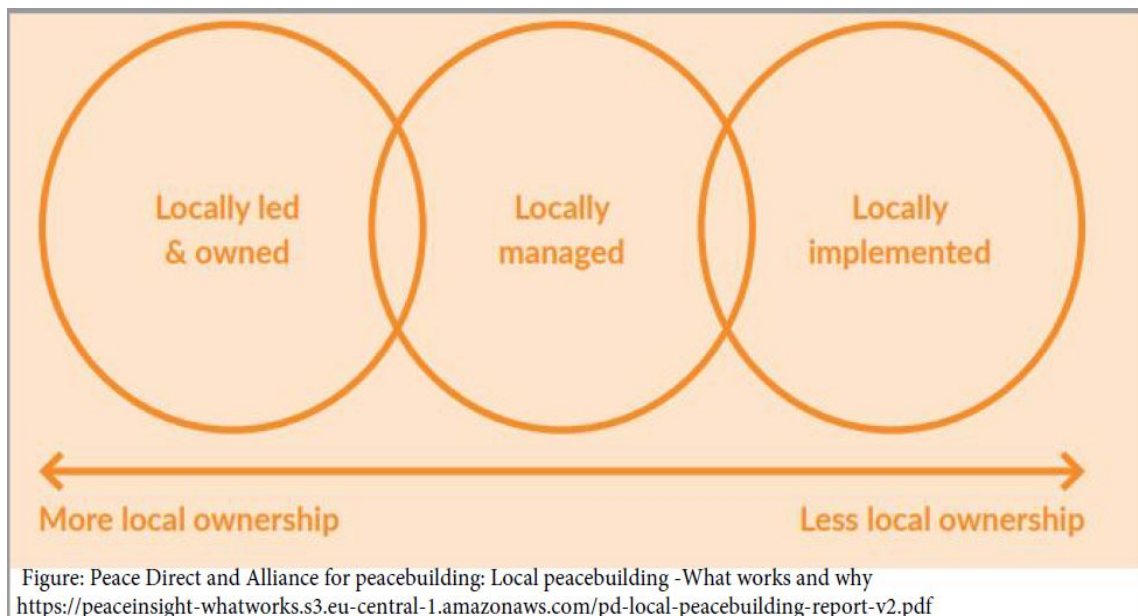
Peacebuilding Theory

Although the Global Peace Index recorded the first increase in global peacefulness in five years in 2019 (Global Peace Index 2019), the facts on the ground in many countries speak to a different reality, one where groups such as Al-Qaeda commit violence against civilians, including genocide, mass killing, and terrorism. The persistence of violent extremism and terrorist groups in many parts of Africa challenges peacebuilders to “rethink” our world. Peacebuilding theory tells us that peace can be built and sustained through improvements across a very broad range of issues. According to Sandole (2010), the prevention of violent extremism can benefit from the dynamic field of conflict analysis and resolution. To best explain conflict analysis and resolution theories that underpin the work of NGOs, this research focused on the proposition that peace is best

achieved by building and strengthening the work of NGOs and civil society groups in community besieged by violent extremism.

The 1992 United Nations Agenda for Peace, which underscores the aim of peacebuilding as preventing large-scale violence or the recurrence of violence immediately after wars or armed conflicts (one to three years, maximum five years), is an example of a narrow definition of peacebuilding based on the concept of negative peace. Here, peacebuilding activities end when the international community makes the determination that large-scale violence has been stopped or prevented. The concept of positive peace, however, is wider and allow a clear definition of the end of peacebuilding, as it includes not only a cessation of violence but also activities to heal victims of violence.

In addition, the field of peacebuilding has seen a significant emphasis on local peacebuilding, an approach to peacebuilding that involves the interaction between local peacebuilding NGOs and local communities. According to Séverine Autessere (2010), a peacebuilding expert, this significant emphasis is due to the fact that “international



Source: Peace Direct

Figure 18: Approaches to Local Peacebuilding

peacebuilding failed in the Democratic Republic of Congo because the reigning peacebuilding culture precluded attention to local conflicts. The dominant paradigm emphasized “top down” interventions at national and regional levels and viewed local conflicts simply as a consequence of weak state authority.

Two theoretical frameworks have influenced the significant emphasis on local peacebuilding. First is liberal peace theory, which provides a rationale for international support for NGOs and civil society groups as a key component of liberal democracies. The second is conflict transformation peacebuilding theory, which provides an understanding that conflict is a normal social occurrence and, therefore, focuses on peacebuilding as a long-term process of systemic transformation from war to peace.

The question of why NGOs are formed and what underpins their strategies to combat violent extremism thus becomes why organizations emerge to prevent violent extremism and what is their “theory of change.” NGOs have agency and are shaped by a variety of factors. To better understand why NGOs decide to work in the field of peacebuilding and violent extremism prevention, one must appreciate how NGOs’ organizational structure and culture, global trends in conflict, and humanitarian crises contribute to the different types of strategies and outcomes NGOs achieve.

Two distinct approaches underpin the strategies of NGOs seeking to combat violent extremism. The first approach draws heavily on a socioeconomic perspective, relying on the proposition that violent extremism can be prevented by reducing socio-economic disparities between ethnic groups and other identity groups within a state. The second approach adopts a narrative framework, relying on the assumption that the sharing of positive narratives to build trust and empathy, and effective dialogue processes to facilitate communication and cooperation, are the best ways to prevent violent extremism. For example, in post-war Sierra Leone, community-based initiatives were deployed by NGOs to help communities regained a sense of mutual trust, and local NGOs’ efforts in South Sudan to build mutual trust between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups illustrate this well. These examples are presented as a guide for action to help curb the spread and mitigate the growth of violent extremism.

Burton's Human Needs Theory: The Security-Development Nexus

Humans need a number of essentials to survive. As a generic theory of human behavior, human needs theory was developed by John Burton (1990) based on the notion that people have basic needs that must be met to maintain a peaceful society. Human needs scholars such as Northrup (1989) argue that one of the primary causes of conflict is people's unyielding drive to meet their unmet needs on the individual, group, and societal levels. Thus, the belief that individuals participate in conflict situations or join violent extremism groups to satisfy their primordial and universal needs partly explains the non-ideological basis for the establishment of NGOs that are involved in development-related programming aimed at violent extremism prevention. However, the satisfaction of basic needs is culturally bound, because perceptions, values, identity, and other cultural factors play a major role in identifying what those needs are in the first place. For example, identifying the notion of a good life for an individual or a community is key to how their basic human needs are satisfied. The significance of this theory is that it recognizes the link between culture, development, and security.

NGOs in Africa such as CARE, ACTIONAID, and Catholic Relief Services have played roles in addressing human needs since the colonial period. Many analysts argue that NGOs provide services that fill gaps left by the public and private sectors. Thus, the existence of NGOs is proving to be a necessity rather than a luxury. For example, with almost 50% of the Malian population living below poverty threshold (that is, with less than \$2.00 per day), CARE has been helping drought, disaster and conflict-affected communities in Mali with food security and nutrition since the Sahel food crisis began in June 2012 (CARE, nd). Also, Mercy Corps has given aid to 98,000 Malians affected by

food insecurity since 2012. Bibata a twenty-five-year-old Malian who sells paddy rice and grilled potatoes from her home, noted that “most of her income comes from her business. With grant money she received from Mercy Corps, she was able to buy more paddy rice, spices, and vegetables, doubling her profit within months” (Schmidt, 2019).

Narrative and Counternarratives Framework

Drawing on theories of modernization and culture, NGOs design anti-violent extremism narratives as a tool for promoting their causes and communicating human right values. In addition, related studies on the strategies that NGOs deploy in third world countries have also tried to explain the complexities involved in the process that NGOs use to communicate their intended goals on the ground.

The debates about of religious elites, ethnic elites, and victims of discrimination cut across several violent extremist groups in Africa. In this regard, violent extremist groups across Africa have exploited longstanding religious, ethnic, and tribal divisions within societies to gain community support. The most obvious example would be a report suggesting that Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram take advantage of ethnic differences in appealing to different audiences in their propaganda videos (Menkhaus, 2013).

A study in 2015 by David M. Anderson and Jacob McKnight notes:

The magazine *Gaidi Mtaani* as well as videos such as ‘Mujahideen Moments’ feature Swahili-speaking Kenyan militants who emphasise themes such as the humiliation suffered by Muslims in Kenya, Christian ‘occupation’ of coastal land, revenge for the killing of prominent preachers, and the liberating potential of violence.

Al-Shabaab's video referred to modern-day discrimination against Muslims in Kenya and Somalia and the historical separation by Western powers of Somalis in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. By claiming victimhood, violent extremism groups capitalize on the lack of proper education to justify that their actions have the ultimate moral "high-ground" (Anzalone, 2016). To amplify this argument, Zahed Amanullah, the head of the Institute of Strategic Dialogue's network outreach, noted, "There is a danger that a segment of Kenyan society could be lured in by the narratives promoted by extremists of all stripes" (Amanullah & Harrasy, 2017).

The impact of violent extremist narratives on the processes of recruitment and radicalization has been established by multiple studies (Omar, 2007). Cvrtila and Perešin (2009) observe that "the media is a tactical tool that violent extremist groups depend on to spread fear within a community following a violent attack." Current literature on theories that underpin strategies of NGOs with regards to violent extremism narratives and counternarratives focus on two distinct themes. These themes are (1) the roles of civil society groups and NGOs in counternarratives; and (2) the media as a main component of violent extremism narratives and counternarratives in the modern context.

Drawing on theories of modernization and culture, NGOs have been able to design anti-violent extremism narratives as a tool for promoting their cause and communicating human rights values. Key findings from a study conducted by in Kenya with local NGOs by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) grassroots networks concluded that local NGOs in Kenya have developed their expertise and capacity for the promotion of peace through online messaging over the past few years. During the Kenyan Presidential

elections of 2017, local NGOs' counternarrative campaigns were able to reach "4.4 million users, with over 1.6 million views, over 23,000 reactions, over 5,000 shares and over 1,600 comments, during a 1-2 weeks of paid promotion with high engagement and minimal resource" (Amanullah & Harasy, 2017). An evaluation conducted by USAID to assess the impacts of radio program containing information about peace and tolerance in Kenya concluded that the program contributed to dissuading certain individuals from radicalizing (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014).

Rapaport (1947) asserts that what people say or think about a conflict has a great impact on the outcome of the conflict. As Hamburg (2002) argues, one approach to dissuading people from joining violent extremist groups would be to plant contrary ideas in their mind, for example, using violent extremism victims' narratives to reinforce dissatisfaction with the dangerous methods violent extremists use to carry out their objectives. People who may be inclined to join violent extremist groups would have become aware of alternatives to violent extremism in the pursuit of their goals. This theory assumes that violent extremism prevention requires changes in the mindset, perceptions, and attitudes of the people who may be inclined to join a violent group.

In exploring narratives, the opportunity for NGOs lies in intensifying reliable themes that reinforce inclusive values and highlight peaceful avenues for change in communities affected by violent extremism, that is, strategies to win over the "hearts and minds" of real and potential violent extremist. For example, the table below shows a full breakdown of themes chosen by Kenyan NGOs for their counternarrative campaigns. The themes ranged from addressing hate speech to targeting Islamist extremism and

tribal hate.

Researchers need to understand why and how violent extremism recruiting messages are capable of winning the hearts and minds of young and vulnerable people. Several concerns have been raised considering the increase of counternarrative approaches within strategies for countering violent extremism. Taylor and Ramsay (2010, p. 109) said:

Until we can be sure what the counter-narratives should be addressing, and how we can identify the content and actors they should target, we will not be able to judge whether what we do either works, or even influences behavioral outcomes. This must raise serious policy questions, which, given the extent of public attention to this area, is a source of concern.

Critics of the counternarratives approach suggest that research projects designed to measure the views of individuals hearing the stories of victims of violent extremism may reinforce the popular view that violent extremism is a powerful tool to achieve one's goal. Thus, a poorly designed violent extremism prevention counternarrative strategy oriented towards enabling members of a violent extremist group to leave the group could in fact create the very problem it sets out to solve. In addition, scholars have noted one of the most glaring gaps in the countering violent extremism literature, which is the absence of empirical data to substantiate the claim that counternarratives are successful in preventing violent extremism (Ferguson, 2016; Rosand & Winterbotham, 2019). There is consensus, however, among policy analysts that the threat from terrorist and violent extremist propaganda is real, and counternarratives could be the main short-term intervention in the fight against violent extremism. Policy analysts also recommend that local NGOs incorporate and apply innovative methodologies to understand the scale and nature of real-world harm that is produced by violent extremism narratives. This

understanding could help to prioritize and triage the detection of the narratives that could lure young people to join violent extremist groups and cause harm.

Factors Driving Youth Vulnerability to Recruitment by Violent Extremist Groups

Background on “Youth” and Violent Extremism

“Youth issues” have risen high on the international peace and security agenda after several influential studies showed a correlation between a country’s instability and youth bulges (Oosterom, 2018; Hilker & Fraser, 2009). More recently, concerns have grown over the recruitment of young people into violent extremist groups especially in Mali. While there is a great deal of debate on what constitutes violent extremism and who is a violent extremist, there is little doubt that youths are beginning to play a significant role in this arena.

The current world population is the youngest ever. According to the United Nations, there are 1.2 billion young people aged fifteen to twenty-four years, accounting for 16% of the global population (United Nations—World Youth Report [WYR], 2018). Throughout the world, young people are the most vulnerable to different forms of violence, ranging from political violence and criminal gangs to organized crime and terrorist attacks that plague their communities (Rogan, 2016). Yet many scholars and policymakers especially in the Global South pay little attention to their experiences, needs, and capabilities. In many cases young people, particularly young men, are seen as part of the problem, contributors to violence extremism and terrorism rather than the

solution (Oosterum, 2018). The overwhelming emphasis on young people as a security threat has invited critique and many have pointed at the forms of injustice, political and social marginalization that young people experience (Barber, 2013).

Despite young people often being the largest population group affected by violence and instability, there is little understanding of youth-specific issues in violent extremism and terrorism settings. Pessimistic images and stories describing young people as security threats do so with little regard to young people's potential role in preventing insecurity. Using a distorted understanding of youth bulge theory, they equate young people, especially in undeveloped or developing countries, and especially young men, with an increased possibility of violence. However, in countries that provide formal education and employment for large proportions of their young people, the youth bulge is seen as a demographic bonus. Supporting youth bulge theory as a security threat are two images of angry young men and veiled young women as potential terrorists who also control future population growth rates.

Many media commentators, especially in the Global South, have eagerly embraced the unspoken dual security threat of explosive violence and explosive fertility that provides a rationale for government surveillance of young people, and for the crafting of punitive policy measures that aim to control youth bulges. Some phrases that have echoed in punditry and popular western journalism discourse include "Arab societies are going through a massive youth bulge, with more than half of most countries' populations under the age of 25. A huge influx of restless young men in any country is bad news. When accompanied by even small economic and social change, it usually

produces a new politics of protest" (Zakaria, 2001). In addition to the youth bulge theory, the super predator theory coined by John DiIulio in 1995 equates a rise in the proportion of young men in each population with a rise in the numbers of criminal young men. In short, the theory argues that "more boys beget more bad boys" (Garland, 1999).

Multiple critics of the youth bulge theory in the context of violent extremism have argued that young people who participate actively in violence are a minority, while the majority of young people, despite the injustices and deprivations they endure daily, are not violent and do not join violent extremism groups (Rogan, 2016). In addition, a growing body of literature suggests that young people can and do play active roles as agents of positive and constructive change in communities affected by violent extremism. In this context, many young men and women purposefully develop social and economic relationships with other young people belonging to different religions and ethnic groups in ways that help prevent radicalization into violent extremism.

Defining the Concept of "Youth"

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, adopted in 2015, is the first to be fully dedicated to the important and positive role that young men and women play in the preservation and promotion of international peace and security. The Security Council, in this resolution, requested that the Secretary-General "carry out a study on the contribution of young people to peace processes and conflict resolution in order to recommend effective local, national, regional, and international measures."

The concept of “youth” has long been contested and difficult to define, as it covers such a diverse area. In diverse fields focused on youth, there are different epistemological stances that inform research and impact approaches to research “with youth.” One reason for this difficulty is that policymakers, social scientists, and many pundits generally tend to work with different figures of youth. Another reason for this difficulty is that youth adopt many different identities: daughter/son, sibling, child, teen, peer, friend, student, and so on. Each of these identities has impacts on how we construct our understanding of participants in research on youth. For example, the youth as student identity has its roots in the concepts of life stages and biological and cognitive developmentalism as defined by Piaget (Pulaski, 1980), which inform how life, and in particular schooling, is ordered in mostly Western countries.

These cognitive stages guide how we order curriculum development, how public institutions organize themselves, how teachers educate, and how pedagogical instructions are designed. This way of linking chronological age and biological development ignores the impact of culture on knowledge and individuals’ capacities (Woo, 2012). Critical youth studies have argued that we have long made assumptions based on developmental theory and leading to the formulation of disciplinary narratives that are limiting (Kelly & Kamp, 2014). Feminist researchers studying girlhood offer the same critique: when we position girls as “becoming,” we limit our understanding of their lived experiences (Driscoll, 2002).

Characteristics of Malian Youth: “When is One Young in Mali?”

In recent years, the world has witnessed a new wave of violent extremism in Mali that has taken the lives of many innocent people, including the youth. At the same time, youth participation in violence has risen high on the international peace and security agenda after a number of leading studies demonstrated a correlation between a country’s instability and “youth bulges”—especially large numbers of unemployed youth (Cincotta, 2008). Mali, like many countries in West Africa, has been experiencing a population explosion. In 2015, young people below the age of fifteen constituted nearly half of the population, and those between fifteen and twenty-four represented 19% of the population. One of the major challenges in studying Malian youth is the perceived notion that the “youth” are a homogenous group, which overlooks important power inequalities among youth, especially based on gender and socioeconomic status. While many youths in Mali live in contexts of ongoing insecurity, where space for social interactions is limited, some have the capacity to engage socially and politically with governance actors.

The United Nations uses an age-based definition of youth, referring to youth as those in the fifteen to twenty-four age group, whereas many African countries and institutions define youth as people aged fifteen to thirty-five. In Mali, it is common to hear and read about the youth as a social construct and as a pathway to adulthood. In general, different communities in Mali define the social variables that mark the transition from youth to adulthood differently.

For example, in some communities in Central Mali, the transition from youth to adulthood is not determined by age, but rather by marriage, starting a family, assuming

certain caring responsibilities within the community, and making contributions to the household.

The small number of young people who are targeted to join extremist groups or get involved in violence demonstrates that current approaches to violent extremism prevention and peacebuilding must be reevaluated. Instead of focusing on expanding short-term security gains, evidence shows that long-term community-based development initiatives that deal with underlying factors that pushes youth to engage in violence can contribute to violent extremism prevention and strengthen Malian youth participation in peacebuilding.

Over the past several years, the challenges faced by Malian youth, including poverty, economic deprivation, and unemployment, have garnered national and international attention (Flynn et al., 2016). An African Development Bank study examining youth unemployment in twenty-four developing countries over thirty years concluded that economic factors such as poverty and unemployment play a significant role in a nation's risk of political instability. Insecure environments, then, become ripe for terrorism.

According to a report by the United Nations, *Child Poverty and Deprivation in Mali* (2014), the national poverty and deprivation rate in Mali is 50%. The poverty and deprivation rate in Kidal is 73%, in Tombouctou 72%, and Mopti 68%, the three regions the research is focused on. Save the Children's office in Mali states that "36% of the population in Mali lives below the poverty line and one out of two Malian children lives in poverty" (Save the Children, nd). The 2006 U.N. Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

(United Nations General Assembly, 2006) and the 2015 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism United Nations General Assembly, 2015) both acknowledge that youth unemployment and poverty make the spread of violent extremism easier.

These economic factors have contributed to growing concerns of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism of young people and children in Mali. In response, the 2015 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security underscored the importance of changing the discourse on youth as positive agents for peacebuilding, rather than branding them as threats to stability. In addition, emerging literature on Youth, Peace and Security and the SCR 2250 recommend that local and national governments, international organizations, and civil society actively engage young people as partners in implementing community-based solutions and in shaping peace and security processes.

Violent Extremism and Youth Involvement in Poverty

Radicalization of youth leading to violent extremism in the form of terrorism is an urgent problem, considering the rise of young people joining extremist groups of different ideologies. Young people play a key role, as they represent most of the Malian population (almost 70% are twenty-four years old or younger) and therefore the future of the country. Their engagement in promoting alternatives to violence is therefore crucial for any counterterrorism initiative to succeed. As countries try to find more effective means of preventing violent extremism, more efforts are made to understand why and how young people join violent extremist in the first place, and how this can be avoided

early on. To that end, many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa have adopted youth policies, as well as including objectives on youth employment promotion in their mainstream policies (Schwebel et al., 2019). Also, the UN Millennium Declaration (2000) resolved to “develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work” (UN, 2000). However, according to Mercy Corps (2015), youth unemployment, poverty, and injustice continue to alienate the youth and drive them to join violent extremist groups. Geographically, violent extremism flourishes in areas that are relatively deprived, including in terms of access to employment. A special report commissioned by the United States Institute of Peace in 2014 concluded that “Boko Haram draws its members mainly from disaffected youth, unemployed high school and university graduates, and destitute children. Its membership also includes some wealthy, educated, and influential people” (Onuoha, 2014).

Mali is one of the youngest countries in the world. Young people make up more than two-thirds of Mali's population. Mali's young people play a key role in the country's fragile peace, even though they are often targeted by violent extremist groups seeking new recruits (Inks & Fomba, 2017). For young men and women living in remote parts of the central and northern Mali, education has been an essential element to consolidate peace and prevent them from joining violent extremist groups. It is also necessary for combating the systemic exclusion that they face depending on their origin or gender. However, in the absence of educational and other opportunities to take part in social, political, and economic life, many young people in Mali demonstrate remarkable creativity in finding different avenues through which to express themselves.

Social Media and Online Radicalization

Addressing radicalization and recruitment of youth in violent extremism (VE) has become the main program and policy focus of what is known as countering violent extremism (CVE). Yet, most of the CVE methodologies have laid more emphasis on addressing consequences of radicalization and extremism once violence erupts. A preventative approach that could minimize the threat of extremism has received less attention compared to the punitive responses by law enforcement, military, and intelligence services by some African countries and their partners. For example, Marc Sommers and Eric Rosand's 2020 article entitled "Militarized Counterterrorism in Africa: Moving Beyond a Failed Approach" states that "the United States has increased its military and intelligence support to African counterterrorism units, intensified its security cooperation with abusive regimes across the continent, and cut funding for development programs aimed at addressing local drivers of the violence." A better understanding of the process of radicalization and recruitment of people by violent extremists' groups could help the development and implementation of early response measures that will prevent young people from falling prey to these groups. The displacement of extremist content to smaller technology platforms that are harder to monitor remains a concern.

LYNGO efforts aimed at online messaging are more prevalent, including platform providers' actions to remove extremist content and LYNGOs responding to and challenging that content when it appears. LYNGOs' partnerships (like Peer2Peer education to prevent violent extremism program) are presented as success stories (Savoia,

2020). Though some online counter messaging campaigns have demonstrated substantial reach, there is limited evidence to support the conclusion that those who engage with countermessaging content online have a reduced risk of youth involvement in violent extremism (Jackson & Costello, 2019).

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism; the role of NGOs in peacebuilding; and factors driving youth vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups. The next chapter will examine existing gaps in the international, regional, subregional, and national instruments designed to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism in Mali.

CHAPTER THREE: LOOKING BEYOND GLOBAL AND REGIONAL STRATEGIES TO COUNTER TERRORISM AND PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

“Governments remain overwhelmingly and erroneously oriented towards a view of security that is focused on the security of the state.”

Allan Ngari and Denys Reva (2017), The Institute for Security Studies (ISS)

Introduction

For more than a decade, government agencies have worked with academic experts around the globe to explore processes of radicalization to violent extremism and terrorism as well as design global strategies, regional conventions, and national frameworks and strategies to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism. Many of these documents clearly articulate the nature of today’s international, regional, and domestic challenges, including providing an extended assessment of religiously and ethnically motivated violent extremists groups. Initially, these documents, especially in many countries in the Global North, focused on coercive approaches, relying on law enforcement and security agencies roles and activities to prevent and tackle terrorist attacks before they occurred. For example, the 2002 Patriot Act gave the United States government broad powers, including search warrants, increased scope for use of surveillance of suspected terrorists, and enhanced maximum sentences for various crimes committed by terrorists.

It is worth noting that, in recent years, counterterrorism practitioners, scholars, and policymakers have recognized the importance of adopting holistic and broader approaches to preventing and tackling terrorism activities. Hence, strategies and policies have shifted in posture, given the widespread recognition that kinetic or physical security approaches to counterterrorism were mostly reactive and not adequate for preventing violent extremism. For example, the EU Counter Terrorism Agenda adopted by the EU Commission in September 2020 put a strong emphasis on an “anticipate, prevent” approach by dealing with the factors or root causes which can lead people to join terrorist or violent extremist groups in Europe and internationally.

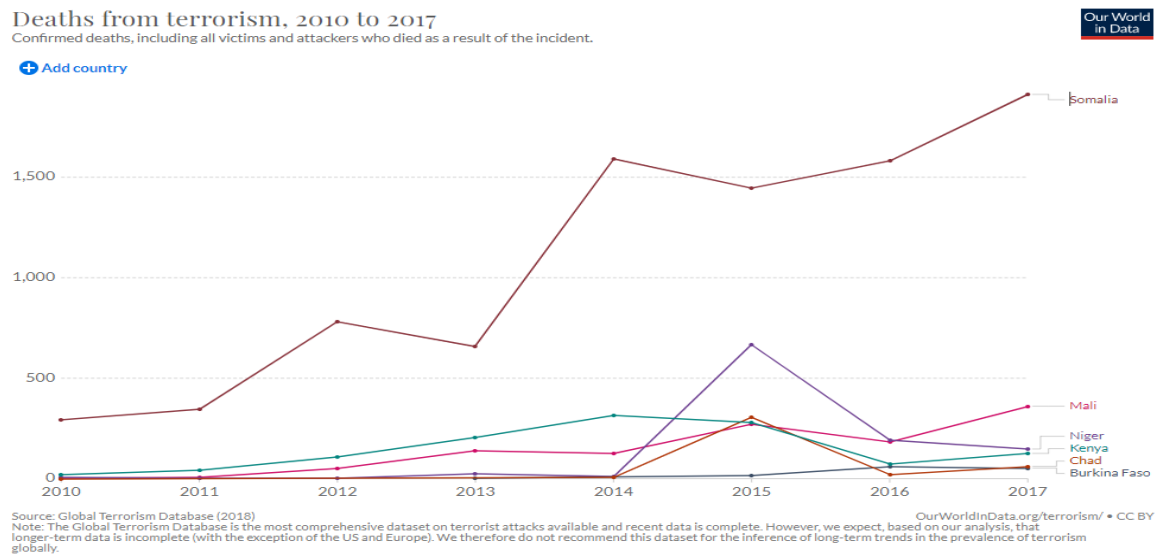
Despite these comprehensive documents, the problems of violent extremism and terrorism have only increased in many parts of the world, especially in Mali. New and powerful violent extremists’ groups have taken root. During a July 2020 meeting of the United Nations Security Council on the security situation in West Africa, the Russian Federation’s representative to the UN shared concerns over terrorist activity, interethnic and intercommunal conflict, drug trafficking, and organized crime across West Africa. He noted that “Boko Haram has become more active in the Lake Chad Basin” (UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2020).

Violent extremist groups have used the media, technology, religious schools and mosques, and familial and fraternal networks to push for their ideologies, justify their acts of violence, and convince young people in their ranks. A staff member at Think Peace Mali noted:

The dominant strategy at the global, regional, and national level guiding the approaches and current policies to combat extremism violent remains ineffective

because it largely depends on the use of violence against violent extremism. Starting at the root of the crisis, actors at the community level, especially LYNGOs, could work with national and international actors to contribute to redefining the social contract and the state-society relationship and using governance as a tool for prevention.

An article published by Robbie Gramer and Colum Lynch in *Foreign Policy* in 2020, “U.S. Tussles With France, U.N. Over Counterterrorism Efforts in West Africa,” noted that “the United States has long been skeptical of the French approach, citing the failure of the United Nations, Paris, and its African allies to curb the rise of Islamist terrorists and broker peace between Mali’s central government and northern Tuaregs.”



Source: Global Terrorism Database

Figure 19: Death from Terrorism in Mali

In addressing the complex aspects of counter terrorism and preventing violent extremism, there is international consensus that the biggest challenge with any strategy, convention, and policy will be to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, as well as ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the foundation of the fight against terrorism. The conclusion of a 2019 survey entitled “Mali-Mètre,” produced by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Germany’s oldest political foundation and associated with the Social Democratic Party, states, “So far, the millions of dollars invested in counterterrorism and peacekeeping efforts, and the hundreds of lives lost in these endeavors have produced few positive results in Mali, as more regions suffer deadly assaults than ever” (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2019).

UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

In the immediate aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack in the United States, it was very hard to find a detailed policy document that highlighted the role of the UN in countering terrorism and violent extremism. This was largely because, prior to al-Qaeda, groups such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) were seen as having only domestic relevance, and not considered a threat to international peace and security writ large.

Even though the LTTE and IRA received political and financial support from sympathizers abroad and their violent actions occasionally were felt across borders, states did not want them to internationalize. Consequently, the UN was either absent or marginally invited to discussions aimed at addressing the threat posed by such groups.

However, at the demand of member states, over the past decade, the United Nation's work to combat global terrorism has expanded dramatically.

In 2004, the United Nations High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change recommended in its report that then-Secretary General Kofi Annan promote a comprehensive global strategy against terrorism, one that would strengthen the ability of responsible states to counter terrorism and promote the rule of law (UN General Assembly, 2006). After many challenging efforts dating back to the year 2000 to draft a comprehensive strategy to address international terrorism, the definition of terrorism that Kofi Annan proposed to the General Assembly of the United Nations, which focused on "the targeting and deliberate killing of civilians and noncombatants for political purposes," did not gain consensus among member states.

For many states, the definition alluded to the arguments about foreign occupation and state terrorism. To ensure states' commitment to the strategy document, Annan understood the need to focus on the practicalities of a counterterrorism strategy. Also, he realized that although states were not in agreement about the definition of terrorism, they shared a common interest in peace and stable development. In crafting the next draft strategy that was sent to the UN General Assembly for adoption, Annan and his team focused on highly operational initiatives, such as guidelines for cooperation in the event of a terrorist attack and measures to improve security in the creation of identity and travel documents.

The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Resolution was then adopted by the General Assembly on 8 September 2006. It was hailed as a global instrument designed to

improve national, regional, and international efforts to counter terrorism, and it represented a shift in the global response. According to the United Nations, “The Strategy does not only send a clear message that terrorism is unacceptable in all its forms and manifestations, but it also resolves to take practical steps, individually and collectively, to prevent and combat terrorism.” (UN General Assembly, 2006). Also, speaking before the UN Sixth Committee in October 2009, the Nigerian Ambassador to the United Nations observed that UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy signified

the international community’s unity of purpose and commitment in this regard ... offering a comprehensive framework for a coherent international response to terrorism, [that] gives priority attention to addressing underlying conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, such as poverty, prolonged unresolved conflicts, dehumanization of victims of terrorism, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and lack of good governance ... [and] emphasizes the imperative for respecting human rights and promoting the rule of law as a *sine qua non* to the successful combating of terrorism and the implementation of the Strategy. (Ipe et al, 2010)

This was the first time that all UN member states agreed to a common strategic and operational approach to fighting terrorism. By adopting the resolution, member states recognized the role of the United Nations in promoting coherence and coordination in the implementation of the strategy at the national, regional, and international levels. They also underscored the role of the United Nations in aiding member states where requested. This reflected the recognition by many member states that terrorism and violent extremism had evolved into a transnational threat and that international collaboration was the key component in their efforts to address it. Since the adoption of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, much of the implementation work has been initiated by the

UN system, under the leadership of the Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF).

Although they clearly recognized the important role of the United Nations, states stressed that the primary responsibility for implementation rests with member states (UN General Assembly, 2008). Member states also approved the establishment of UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UN Victims of Terrorism Support Portal, n.d) to improve cooperation and coordination among member states and other actors engaged in addressing terrorism and violent extremism. With the vulnerabilities and poor capacity in many countries, especially in the Global South, it was clear that the UN system had the key responsibility to promote and support efforts to implement the Strategy.

The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in the form of a resolution and plan of action is composed of four pillars, namely:

1. Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism
2. Measures to prevent and combat terrorism
3. Measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard
4. Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism

Achievements

The United Nations leadership role to fulfill the need for a coherent UN message and voice is very vital. It has a unique comparative advantage as a forum for discussion,

dispute resolution, norm development, and a space for generating mutual understanding. The recent growing problem of foreign fighters and the rise of new terrorist and violent extremist groups have led to an international consensus that the focus on security and military approaches alone to counterterrorism has not been sufficient. This has compelled states and organizations to focus on the elements of the UN's global counterterrorism strategy that deal with human rights and underlying causes of terrorism and violent extremism. The United Nations has provided leadership in combatting global terrorism, especially by giving member states' access to niche expertise, such as civil aviation (the International Civil Aviation Organization) and border controls. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) Terrorism Prevention is frequently singled out for praise for its capacity-building work that deals with the human rights portion of the UN Strategy.

While the bulk of counterterrorism assistance is provided outside the United Nations framework, and mostly bilaterally by member states, United Nations entities such as UNDP have coordinated capacity-building assistance to support requesting member states in fulfilling their counterterrorism responsibilities and obligations under international law. It has served as a sounding board conducive to states interested in fusing their comprehensive counterterrorism efforts with human rights and international law (United Nations General Assembly, 2020). In addition, the UN strategy provides a cover for governments to improve their counterterrorism actions and procedures without being seen by their citizens or political opponents as buying into the controversial US-led war on terror.

Shortcomings: Cooperation and Legitimacy

As much as the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy has several opportunities, it is also confronted by various challenges. Critiques of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy revolve around issues directly related to the implementation of the strategy, such as effective cooperation and abuse by national authorities.

During a workshop organized by the CTITF in partnership with the Government of the Republic of Namibia on the “Regional Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy” in 2011, participants noted that the implementation of the global counterterrorism strategy continues to suffer from “haphazard institutional arrangements, lack of much-needed resources and a severe trust deficit.” Similarly, participants commented that “various regions of the African continent perceived the issue of terrorism and counterterrorism differently, which necessarily impacted their priorities” (United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Office, 2011). For example, in June 2020, Human Right Watch accused the Malian government of sending armed men dressed in military fatigues to kill twenty-nine people, including women and children, and burning down houses. Martins (2008) noted that:

Rather than reducing terrorist and other politically motivated violence in a country, widespread arrests and detentions and the use of torture under the guise of counterterrorism have contributed in some instances to the violent radicalization of detainees, the targeting and marginalization of vulnerable communities, and a further fraying of the trust between the state and its citizens, which is critical to an effective long-term counterterrorism strategy.

As stated by Andrea Bianchi (2007), policies and strategies may be developed at the UN, but they cannot be implemented effectively without the political will and proper actions of governments and NGOs. Hence, the role of civil society, NGOS, and

government in the implementation of the Global Strategy must be recognized and enhanced. The way each government understands the value of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy may affect their timeline for the adoption and enforcement of the measures listed in the documents. According to Eric Rosand, the director of the Prevention Project, and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, many authoritarian governments have used high-level meetings intended to review the implementation of the United Nations counterterrorism strategy to weaken the United Nations strategy's human rights pillar, limit the role of civil society, remove references to prevention, and focus the UN on security-oriented, state-centric approaches to counterterrorism (Rosand, 2020).

The High-Level Panel on Threats and Challenges convened by then UN Secretary-General Annan acknowledged that

the effectiveness of the global collective security system, as with any other legal order, depends ultimately not only on the legality of decisions but also on the common perception of their legitimacy their being made on solid evidentiary grounds, and for the right reasons, morally as well as legally (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2004).

Consequently, the question of efficacy and legitimacy are therefore fundamentally linked.

Dichotomy Between Human Rights Paradigms and Counterterrorism

There is a general feeling inside and outside of UN that its “Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy” was designed to please “Northern” countries while, in fact, most deaths from terrorism are happening in the Global South. Many critics of the strategy argue that it has almost become a truism to assert that counterterrorism measures must be

conducted in conformity with human rights laws, especially because many countries have opportunistically used the terrorism strategy to justify repressive policies against political opponents, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. For example, a report by the Rand Corporation (2017) entitled “Mali's Next Battle: Improving Counterterrorism Capabilities” observed that “Malian leaders speak of adopting a more global approach to counterterrorism but default to quickly acquiring tactical capabilities that would enable them to perform better on the battlefield.” A report published by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), “Global Group of NGOs Deplore Lack of Attention to Human Rights in Latest Review of UN’s Global Counterterrorism Strategy by UN Member States” states:

We are, however, concerned at member states’ failure to adequately address human rights abuses and the increased militarization of counter-terrorism approaches. We are also concerned about member states’ failure to provide an enabling environment for civil society entities, including those relating to women, to be meaningfully engaged in the Strategy review (International Federation for Human Rights, 2018).

Another criticism of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is the absence of an accepted international legal definition of terrorism by all UN member states. During the 1970s and 1980s, the United Nations’ attempt to define the term failed, mainly due to differences of opinion between various members about the use of violence in the context of conflicts over national liberation and self-determination. Also, the UN General Assembly has not reached consensus on a definition of terrorism that would be adhered to by all countries. Although the UN documents provide an operational definition of terrorism, the absence of an internationally accepted legal definition by UN member

states is seen by many academics and policy makers, especially in the Global South, as an obstacle to the development of uniform laws necessary for implementation across the international system. They highlight that differences over the definition have been a major factor in the failure to implement the UN strategy.

Though ensuring respect for human rights for all remains a fundamental pillar of the strategy, local communities argue that, in many instances, national leaders violate the international human rights laws they have vowed to promote in the name of security. For example, a report published by Human Right Watch in 2017 stated that “the skewed logic of torturing, killing, and ‘disappearing’ people in the name of security only fuels Mali’s growing cycle of violence and abuse. The Malian and Burkinabe governments should rein in abusive units and prosecute those responsible” (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Hence, the violation of the fundamental pillar of the UN strategy not only increases the legitimacy of terrorist organization in the eyes of communities, but it also serves as a tool to recruit young people to join the ranks of these groups.

Building State Capacities: Coordination and Coherence

As proposed by the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, law enforcement communities and states must collaborate to address issues such as the terrorist misuse of the internet for terrorist purposes, use of chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) materials, and the protection of the most vulnerable targets. These initiatives would usually fall under bilateral relations; effective coordination, however, has been hampered by national aspirations of wealthier states. The absence of clearer structural

and procedural guidelines to create a more synergistic and positive-sum relationship between states makes it harder to implement the strategy consistently. In addition, most countries, especially in the Global South, would benefit from training for and assistance to deal with the lack of counterterrorism legislation and, more broadly, an effective criminal justice system and other democratic institutions.

Awareness and Ownership of the Strategy

Though a number of African states have taken important steps individually and in partnerships with other states in recent years to strengthen their capacities to prevent and combat terrorism, the differences among the states on how to implement the UN Strategy is reflected in two main views. On one hand, rich countries in the Global North promote a repressive approach to counterterrorism, while on the other hand, underdeveloped and developing countries in the Global South express concerns about the shift from development to security and how resources are allocated to suit diversion of Western/Northern security agenda that had little relevance to their own priorities. (International Peace Institute, 2012). Hence, critics of the strategy, especially in the Global South, argue that the strategy is forced on them. Awareness and ownership have become a central issue for the performance of the UN Strategy, and most policy makers and scholars agree that African ownership of any agenda for action for the subregion is essential to its success. For example, the table below show that ten countries that have contributed to the most funds to the UN Strategy are not in Africa.

Source: United Nations office of Counter-Terrorism, Counter Terrorism Database

Table 2: Donors Contributions to the Trust Fund for Counter Terrorism

DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE TRUST FUND FOR COUNTER TERRORISM SINCE INCEPTION (USD)				
	Donor	Total	Contributions received	Pledges
1	Saudi Arabia	110,000,000	110,000,000	
2	Qatar	75,250,000	250,000	75,000,000
3	European Union	10,015,124	1,459,340	8,555,784
4	Netherlands*	6,312,273	6,312,273	
5	United States	5,458,903	5,458,903	
6	Norway	3,879,942	2,937,064	942,878
7	Japan	2,946,612	2,946,612	
8	Spain	2,258,193	2,258,193	
9	Russia	2,000,000	2,000,000	
10	United Kingdom	1,449,193	1,388,896	60,297
11	Canada	1,221,253	887,330	333,923

Evidence suggests that there is currently limited awareness of the UN Strategy, especially at the local level. For example, some of the programs that the UN offers to local civil society organizations on countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism are not first adapted to the realities of the local context in order to make them effective.

It remains debatable whether the UN strategy has produced concrete accomplishments on the ground, other than generating a cottage industry of meetings and expert workshops in New York and elsewhere. In short, the UN counterterrorism strategy must be reviewed to focus on human rights and underlying drivers of extremism and find mechanisms to hold accountable governments that continue to rely primarily on military and law enforcement tools in their counterterrorism efforts.

In terms of accountability mechanisms and best practices for policymakers, political leaders and governmental agencies, what do all the UN's efforts in the field of counterterrorism add up to? Richard Barrett, the former head of the UN expert panel on monitoring implementation of sanctions against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, concluded that "the U.N. is too political, too uncoordinated, too focused on process rather than outcomes and follow-up, and too far removed from the people who actually deal with the problems of terrorism on the ground to make much of an impact, or even to appear relevant" (Sengupta, 2016). For many actors, the strategy does not reflect best practices from other efforts by civil society, government, and private sector actors in the areas of education/reeducation and interfaith/intercultural dialogues to join forces and leverage resources.

African Union (AU) Convention on the Prevention and Combatting Terrorism

Attacks from violent extremist organizations such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have reached unprecedented levels and account for the bulk of fatalities from militant extremists in Africa. In 2015, African countries represented half of the ten countries with the highest number of deaths as a result of terrorist attacks, accounting for over 25% of terrorism related deaths worldwide (Global Terrorism Index, 2016: 17).

AQIM has established a membership and presence in local communities across national borders, and in some cases, they control territories in a number of states. For example, AQIM has been involved in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. The porous borders

across the African continent have enabled the transitional action of these terrorist groups (*The Sun Newspaper*, 2018). These territorial loopholes have also enabled partnerships and collaboration among these terrorist groups. This continues to happen despite the fact that the AU has put a great deal of emphasis on promoting peace, security, and stability in Africa.

Many African security experts believe that AU's relevance in the global discourse has evolved over the years, in that the role it plays in successfully maintaining continent-wide peace and security has sealed the necessity of cooperation among states. For these experts, cooperation among African states comes with a mixed bag of fruit. For example, biometric information from terrorist suspects arrested in joint operations involving Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso was shared with other countries via the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to identify potential links with other terrorist attacks and suspects across the region and beyond. (INTERPOL, 2020). The absence of a clearly articulated counterterrorism approach by some Malian neighbors, such as Algeria, has fueled suspicions of Algeria's support for Algerian nationals, including AQIM commanders, thereby limiting the amount of cooperation between the Malian authorities and the Algerian authorities.

In response to growing evidence and member states' concerns about the impact of violent extremism in their community, and in a collective effort to counter this global threat, the AU developed frameworks, including the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in 1999, the Algiers Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism (2002), and the African

Model Anti-Terrorism Law (2011), among other counterterrorism measures. The OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism identified priority areas for collaboration between countries to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism. As stated by Boutros Ghali in Tsakonas (2003),

The Security Council has and will continue to have primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, but regional action as a matter of decentralization, delegation and cooperation with the United Nations could not only lighten the burden of the Council, but also contribute to a deeper sense of participation, consensus and democratization in international affairs.

The OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism underscores the seriousness of terrorism as well as acknowledges that terrorism “constitutes a serious violation of human rights and a threat to peace, security, development, and democracy in Africa.” Article 3(1) (a–k) of the OAU Convention on the Prevention of and Combating Terrorism states that it is the obligation of governments to fully implement the provisions outlined in the document.

Some of the provisions are:

1. Prevent their territories from being used as a base for planning, organization, or the execution of terrorist acts or for the participation or collaboration in these acts in any form whatsoever
2. Take all necessary measures to prevent the establishment of terrorist support networks in any form whatsoever
3. Ascertain, when granting asylum, that the asylum seeker is not involved in any terrorist act

4. Develop and strengthen methods of monitoring and detecting plans or activities aimed at the illegal cross border transportation, importation, export, stockpiling and use of arms, ammunition and explosives and other material and means of committing terrorist acts.

The AU member states have spoken and drafted documents in one voice, but the greatest challenge is the implementation. Francisco Madeira, the head of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), which operates under the AU, argues that “our counter-terrorism efforts require better planning and wider coordination by agencies across the continent, and this requires trust and confidence. The only way to build trust is for the intelligence agencies to meet and build personal rapport” (Kalinaki, 2014).

Unlike the EU’s administrative bureaucracy that is tasked with coordinating the implementation of the counterterrorism policies, AU member states lack the resources, commitment, political will to mobilize, and ability to react speedily on issues such as violent extremism and terrorism.

In some cases, policies and convention are agreed on at the AU level, but member states refuse to implement them, deciding to sign other agreements with other countries either on or outside the continent, at times in contradiction with what they have agreed as a collective at the AU. Many analysts see the AU as an institution that is still finding its way. It is doing well in some areas, such as mediation and reestablishing some forms of stability after coups have happened; in other areas, however, such as coordination of the

counterterrorism convention, it is still behind in terms of time and due to lack of resources.

The AU organization has been committed to finding solutions to solve intractable security and stability problems on the continent, but on the questions of capability and capacity to deploy not just strategy document but also implement them, the organization is lagging behind.

Three years ago, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the organization, the AU signed a solemn declaration to end strife on the continent and to work for peace and prosperity. The declaration's goals were to rid Africa of violent conflicts, wars, human rights violations, and humanitarian disasters, and to prevent genocide. More ambitiously, leaders pledged not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation and to end wars on the continent by 2020. Critics of the AU argue that peace and security continue to elude the continent. In 2019, near the Burkina Faso border, simultaneous attacks on the Malian Armed Forces Armées (FAMA) post in Mondoro and a joint FAMA-G5 Sahel Joint Force base in Boulkessi by groups presumed to be terrorist elements left at least thirty-eight FAMA soldiers dead, seventeen wounded, and as many as twenty-seven missing, according to the government's mid-October reports. Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) subsequently took responsibility for the attack, claiming to have killed eighty-five soldiers. According to an article published by *The Guardian* entitled "African Union Missing in Action in Conflicts from Mali to South Sudan,"

In all this bloodshed the African Union (AU) is nowhere to be seen. It was French troops that were airlifted into CAR to save the day – just as they did in Mali,

Niger and Ivory Coast..... Weak leadership and rivalry between states have hampered African efforts to bring security to the conflict-hit continent. (Plaut, 2014).

Critics argue that the attacks in Mondoro and Boulkessi highlight that the AU convention to prevent extremism and terrorism is too ambitious and does not reflect the grievances citizens have with their governments. They also argue that weak states persist, where legitimate governments do not have the capacity to control their territory against terrorist groups.

ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan

Though the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has achieved many successes in the area of peace and security since its formation in 1975, the threat of violent extremism and terrorism in Mali has become one of its biggest challenges. So far, many analysts argue that ECOWAS has achieved minimal success in its response, due to the rapidly changing nature of the security threats in the region.

Prior to 2012, there was a little appetite on the side of ECOWAS to join the efforts to counter terrorism, partly because leaders of the region viewed counterterrorism as a US- led effort. Instead, they wanted to prioritize challenges of poverty, conflict, and underdevelopment. Also, many of the issues in West Africa were understood in terms of differences in the history, experiences, and location of each country in the region. In terms of conflict, it was seen through the lens of ethnicity, identity politics, poverty governance, and struggles over natural resources, rather than terrorism.

However, with the increase in the number of violent attacks in Mali and surrounding states, ECOWAS initiated the drafting and implementation of counterterrorism instruments, including the “ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan” in 2013, against the backdrop of the AU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and the UN-backed Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy to address insecurity in the world and especially in Mali.

The ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan has three pillars:

1. Prevent violent extremism by adopting and implementing regulations
2. Pursue rapid action against terrorist threats
3. Reconstruct societies damaged by terrorist activities

Despite a well-written and -adopted strategy, many analysts believe that implementation has been left entirely up to individual member states. For example, the The Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S), which Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger decided to establish in February 2017, was sponsored by France to combat terrorist and criminal groups in the region. Mali has also signed a bilateral defense agreement with France. France’s government website noted:

At the request of Mali’s Government, France launched Operation Serval in January 2013 to push back the terrorist groups in North Mali, supporting troops from Mali and other African States. UN Security Council Resolution 2085 of 20 December 2012 highlighted the need for UN Member States such as France to support Mali in its efforts to restore peace and security. (*France Diplomacy*, 2020)

One critical challenge ECOWAS is facing in its approach to counterterrorism and the prevention of violent extremism in Mali is the lack of complementarity between

international, continental, and regional responses. For example, Mali's national policy for curbing extremist activities is viewed within the narrow prism of national security and territorial sovereignty, a view that has resulted in limited articulation of ECOWAS efforts. There are significant gaps in human and material resources in the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan. Perhaps more importantly, the gap is also because many of the provisions remain at the level of ideas and aspiration than reality.

Absence of Complementarity between the Continental, Regional, and National Levels.

The security narrative in the West Africa has largely been overgeneralized with a focus on one-size-fits-all approaches to countering terrorism. These have been reflected in the ways that regional bodies, including ECOWAS, deal with terrorism. The gaps between broad strategies and specific local dynamics impedes the ability of ECOWAS to achieve its stated objectives. In addition, the lack of proper coordination between ECOWAS and other actors in Mali and the absence of transparent and accountable mechanism to hold countries that are not cooperating with ECOWAS to account hinders progress.

Focus on Military Action and Not Enough on Human Security

A major gap in the implementation of the ECOWAS counterterrorism strategy has largely been its focus on traditional military tactics, instead of investing in and dealing with the underlying human security vulnerabilities, such as unemployment and

diminishing resources to support livelihoods of communities across the region. Due to the traditional military tactics that ECOWAS has relied upon to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism, local communities' roles have diminished and ethnic leaders, traditional authorities, civil society organizations, women, and young people have been sidelined.

Instead of focusing exclusively on traditional military tactics, most analysts argue that ECOWAS needs to prioritize human security as part of its counterterrorism strategy. This is partly because the challenges the West Africa region is facing are largely related to governance issues and national authorities' inability to address issues such as youth unemployment, resource depletion, and climate change.

Mali National Policy to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism and Terrorism (Politique nationale de prévention et de lutte contre l'extrémisme violent et le terrorisme PNLEVT)

As discussed in previous chapters, terrorist and violent extremist groups have taken advantage of modern technologies and especially social media to reach a wider audience and to recruit of young people. As a response to an uptick in complex attacks organized by highly skilled transnational organizations, both terrorist and violent extremist groups, in Mali, the government, supported by its international partners, has made significant investments to draft the Politique nationale de prévention et de lutte contre l'extrémisme violent et le terrorisme (PNLEVT) both to increase societal and individual resilience to the lure of extremist ideologies and to respond to terrorist threats and attacks. This policy is in addition to the country's July 2008 policy on

counterterrorism in Mali. In his speech, the Secretary General (SG) of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MARC) praised the fruitful cooperation with United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and other international partners to for the support of his department since 2016 in the development and implementation of the PNLEV.

In general, because of the complexity and dynamism and of the phenomena involved, the PNLEVT is too new for us to thoroughly evaluate its effectiveness and assess its relevance and impact. However, with one year since its adoption, civil society groups and scholars have zoomed in on assessing the short-term implementation achievement and gaps. For example, MINUSMA, in collaboration with the Platform for Youth Engagement in the Reform of the Security Sector, organized a workshop on 21 and 22 January 2020 in Bamako to make proposals that could accelerate the effective implementation of the PNLEVT. Participants gathered in the working groups identified gaps and concrete actions to improve the implementation of the policy. Many young people in the room highlighted the gaps in the education system; lack of entrepreneurship among young people and women; failure to properly reintegrate radicalized young people; the state of corruption in the country; and, above all, the climate of mistrust between the population and the security forces. Others in the room underscored the need for the government to reevaluate the text in the policy to align it with the underlying concerns of people in the communities, as well as reevaluate the text on the ratification of international conventions in the field of counterterrorism and violent extremism prevention.

It is worth noting that the PNLEVT focuses on five lines of effort:

1. Prevention (La prevention)
2. Protection (La protection)
3. Pursuit (La Poursuite)
4. Response (La Response)

Specific objectives outlined in the PNLEVT include eliminating conditions conducive to the development of terrorism and violent extremism, including but not limited to: religious outreach and interfaith efforts; prosecuting all perpetrators and accomplices of crimes of violent extremism and terrorism; providing fair and diligent responses in the event of a terrorist attack or acts of violent extremism perpetrated on national territory, with respect for human rights and the rule of law; contributing to the regeneration of a collective identity, including religious tolerance and coexistence, to strengthen the bonds of national solidarity (PNVLEVT, 2017).

Compared to the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combatting Terrorism, the Malian PNLEVT has shown a noticeable shift to a greater focus on prevention at its core pillar of CVE. With the five pillars, it calls for a whole-of-society and community-led solution to preventing violent extremism prevention. It recognizes the importance of a multilevel approach that is threat-based and respects the rule of the law.

As stated by Mohamadou Doucouré from the Democracy 101 Association, a member of the youth engagement in the reform of the security sector platform,

“As an actor in the civil society, I think the State must put youth at the heart of PNLEVT, because nearly 70% of terrorists are young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and unemployed young graduates” (MINUSMA, 2020).

In addition, Boubakar Maiga, the coordinator of the platform, made no secret of his concerns about the delay in the implementation of the policy. He stressed that having the youth at the center of the policy ensures that social cohesion discussed in pillar four of the policy not only helps to mend the social fabric torn apart by the conflict but above all ensures civil-military collaboration and builds trust between populations and law enforcement agencies.

In parallel to the adoption of the policy, the government tasked a wide range of actors including LYNGOs, key figures in the community etc. with developing violent extremism prevention programs, including initiatives that are suitable both at the national and community levels. While the number of programs implemented across the country since the adoption of the PNLEVT has increased incrementally, to date, there is no concrete data on the actual number of programs in addition to the lack of a theory of change and standard metric to evaluate them against the details in the PNLEVT.

Like the 2015 EU resolution on the prevention of radicalization that tasked the EU to “to establish as a priority an action plan to implement and evaluate the EU strategy for combating radicalization and recruitment to terrorism” (European Parliament, 2015), a well-designed metric for the evaluation of programs that is pegged to the Mali PNLEVT could help the government, partners, civil society groups and citizens better understand:

1. Successful and unsuccessful practices
2. If and how results are being achieved
3. How better results could be achieved
4. Identify any changes that might be necessary in the crafting and implantation of the program
5. How to achieve the same or better result at a lesser cost

Achievements of the PNLEVT

The “De-Radicalization Seminar and After Release Program

People suspected of violent extremism activities or accused of committing crimes or involvement with violent extremist groups are held in prison and detention centers run by the Malian government. Periodically, NGOs such as Think Peace and AJCET are invited to these prisons and detention centers to organize seminars where experts and religious leaders, including Muslims and Catholics, often sent from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Worship, engage in dialogue and exchange ideas with detainees on religious tolerance, etc. According to Think Peace, messages from clerics are important in countering violent extremism narratives. Their approach is conciliatory, as it offers the detainees interpretations and evaluations of the Qur'an.

In addition, in conjunction with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Worship, the US Embassy in Mali supported religious leaders to organize a dozen activities to emphasize the importance of religious tolerance and freedom. According to the US Embassy, the activities included the “Kalata Mankantan Tolerant Elections Campaign

and Concert Series” in July 2018, which consisted of six events and involved more than 50,000 participants, and the “Living Together” civil society workshop and focus group in Timbuktu, which included more than 15,000 participants” (United States Department of State, 2018).

Relationship with Civil Society Groups

There is an official relationship between the Malian government and NGOs on the issue of countering violent extremism. Unlike many prior policies that were drafted by the government, many in the civil society were invited to take part in the consultation, drafting, and implementation of the policy. Though many NGOs receive considerable support from international donors, the national government has been able to engage with civil society groups in an effort to advance the texts in the policies that refer to human rights, equality, development, peace, and reconciliation.

Shortcomings of the PNLEVT

Need to Track Trends.

There is concern that many programs are not data-driven and lack effective oversight. Additionally, most of the programs in Mali that might be defined as fitting within the national policy are primarily the product of the international community in collaboration with local NGOs rather than the national government. For example, with the approval of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Worship, the US Embassy supported programs to counter violent extremism in the amount of \$3.5 million in the

first year of a five-year program (United States Department of State, 2018). Several NGOs receive these funds and others from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Search for Common Ground, and other international partners. There is a general concern with the fact that many databases to track activities and most reports from the government on the positive impact of their policy are based on anecdotal evidence or statistically unreliable data. There is a general sense among government officials that no objective metrics are possible and that more time is needed before making reliable conclusions on the impact of the policy.

Coordination and Absence of Available Outcome Metrics to Measure Short- and Long-Term Effects

Ministerial department in Mali are finding it difficult to identify actions for the implementation of the PNLEVT. The lack of coordination at the highest level has in many ways delayed implementation on the ground. There is reliance on civil society groups to help with identifying programs and activities to be implemented in communities.

There is an absence of evaluation metrics that take into account the short- and long-term impact of social norms and expectations from beneficiaries and target stakeholder groups of CT and PCVE initiatives.

Ownership and Financial Resources

In addition to the mismatch between planned and actual funding that the government has allocated for the implementation of the policy, the current language of the document does not render the text understandable to communities that have French as their first method of communication. It also struggles to explain the complexity of the phenomena, due to the lack of clarity and limited ownership and understanding of the drivers of violence.

Conclusion

International and national policies and strategies to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism can play an important role in strengthening community resilience against violent extremism and reducing many of its enabling factors.

While many of these documents have overlapped in complex ways, the overall analysis points to what can be termed the “securitizing policies and strategies for local consumption.” Namely, these policies and strategies invite actors, national and local, to design social approaches that are local in theory but have the logic of security and social control. In Mali, many in the NGO community argue that the violent extremism prevention strategies and policies are focused on integration and community cohesion, albeit enforced through a counterterrorism and radicalization lens. Sadly, implementation of these strategies and policies at the community level, where violent extremism is the most rampant, do not seriously consider the concerns of the community, including relative deprivation and marginalization. While on paper these documents address community concerns, in practice they only focus on the state’s and government’s ability

to survive. Practical, community-centered, and civil society-led strategies must be well-defined, drafted, coordinated, implemented, and closely monitored.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Introduction

Through three in-depth case studies of PVE programming, approaches, and implementation by LYNGOs, the research provides insight and details about the structure, progress, and potential synergies of PVE local initiatives. In addition, this study aims to explore community members' perceptions of the violent extremism preventative strategies utilized by the LYNGOs involved in the research. This research also intends to highlight areas within the field of peacebuilding which may need assessment, improvement/ and/or complete development, in order to improve standards and quality of violent extremism prevention programs.

Research Method

The research design for this study is a qualitative case study. Qualitative research is exploratory research that enables the researcher to examine in detail the problem under study. The research instruments were customized to the local context and designed to elicit reliable responses to sensitive research questions. The research focused on groups of people at risk of radicalization: low to middle-income young men and women aged eighteen to thirty-five. The researcher used a combination of approaches for this study.

Qualitative data was collected from November 2019 through January 2020 using a stratified qualitative sampling frame. It draws upon qualitative data from primary source interviews as well as secondary source material. The study covers secondary sources produced by academic specialists on NGOs and PVE, as well as by development actors currently supporting or implementing PVE programming in Mali. Secondary sources include research and report documents, such as the assessment of the UN's Efforts to Counter Terrorism (von Einsiedel, 2016), the influences of NGO interventions on terrorist activity (Hodwitz, 2018), "The Dynamics of Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the Domestic Security Dilemma (Field, 2016), as well as relevant reports (Holmer, 2016) written on drivers of violent extremism and PVE approaches in Africa, such as "Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism," written by Peter Mandaville and Melissa Nozell (2017). The research leveraged questions asked about violent extremism from the Afro Barometer public opinion surveys to supplement and strengthen the qualitative analysis of the PVE landscape in Mali.

Research Design

According to Parahoo (2006), the design selected for research should be the one most suited to achieve an answer to the proposed research question. To answer the proposed research questions, the researcher has chosen to carry out a descriptive qualitative research design. Qualitative research is also a way of exploring and explaining social phenomena (Leavy, 2014). The descriptive nature of the design enables the researcher to present the nature of the participants accurately. The method will prove significant since

the researcher aims at conducting an explorative study of the situation in Mali and exploring LYNGOs' ability to prevent violent extremism. This research aims to address the following question: (1) What are the drivers of violent extremism among the youth in Mali?; (2) What are LYNGOs in Mali's assessment of the drivers of youth recruitment into violent extremism in Mali?; (3) What are the LYNGOs' violent extremism prevention strategies in Mali?; and (4) What are the youth's perceptions of the work of LYNGOs involved in preventing violent extremism in Mali? Robson (1993:40) suggests that the research question should determine the choice of research strategy: experiment, case study, and a survey. The research design will allow the use of questionnaires and interviews to obtain information from respondents who are staff members of three LYNGOs working to prevent youth enrolment into violent extremism.

The research is divided into three main activity phases: pre-field, fieldwork, and post-field activities. The pre-field activity includes activities such as literature review, development of field research instruments, and selection of sample populations for the interview. The field activity involves travel to the field to conduct interviews and surveys, and field observations. The post-field activity phase entails data analysis, interpretations, and dissertation writing.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher must be clearly defined to highlight how I impacted the study in order to provide full transparency. To do that, I identified my personal perceptions and professional experiences about the research (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell,

2013). To address my personal perceptions, I have been always been interested in understanding the nexus between youth, development, and security, in addition to how political and economic crisis shapes youth relationships with their community at large. Thus, I have participated in many workshops regarding the role of youth in sustainable development and conflict prevention in Africa. Furthermore, I strongly believe that LYNGOs play a major role in addressing youth vulnerabilities, including underdevelopment and poverty. I kept notes and journals from the field to track any personal opinions or biases that arose during my interview sessions with the employees of the LYNGOs involved in this study. Also, I kept a journal to write down any idea that could have been perceived as bias on my part. I also used audiotaping to make sure that the interviewees' answers are reviewed a couple times to ensure that I accurately documented what they said. My previous engagement at the United Nations and my general knowledge of the work of NGOs could have constituted a form of bias during the drafting of the research questions and writing of this dissertation. To avoid that, I kept a reflective journal throughout the process. In addition to the test administered by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I took extra steps to complete an ethical study. I made sure that my research caused no damage to participants by allowing voluntary participation or withdrawal from the research at any time without consequences.

Prior to each interview, I contacted the leadership of the three LYNGOs and they gave me the permission to interview their employees in a very safe manner. I gave them the consent form and questionnaire to review before the interview, then I called them to assign the date, time, and place of the interview. Upon full agreement and careful

planning, I conducted the interviews with employees of the LYNGOs and used thematic analysis to analyze the data from interviews. I accomplished the role of planning, listening, and taking notes for my research study as well as selecting participants and collecting, organizing, and analyzing data in an ethical manner, as suggested by Sullivan and Terjesen (2011).

Participants and Sampling

The participants in this study were local youth NGOs staff members who are dealing with the issue of youth enrolment into violent extremism as well a number of youths across Mali who have had the opportunity to either engage with any of the three LYNGOs in the study or have a relative understanding of the reasons young people decide to join extremist groups.

The LYNGOs were selected according to the localities where they operate and their mission and vision as stated on their website, as well as how active they are at the local level in central and northern Mali. In addition, I selected these three LYNGOs according to their activities, campaigns, and the active role they are playing in preventing youth enrolment into violent extremism. I reached out to two of the selected LYNGOs by phone and set up a meeting to introduce the study and to take their consent for participating in the study. I met with the leadership of the third LYNGO in New York during his trip to a conference at the United Nations a couple of months before my trip to Mali to share more information about my research, give him the consent form, and ascertain the availability of his staff to be interviewed.

Overall, the three LYNGOs were chosen for the expertise and knowledge they have contributed about the role of youth in the struggle to prevent violent extremism in central and northern Mali. The focus of the interviews in this research included:

1. The role of the LYNGOs within the communities where they operate
2. The activities and events these three LYNGOs conduct to prevent youth enrolment into extremism
3. Their commitment to the mission and the vision outlined on their website and shared during the interviews
4. The other NGOs that they partner with to achieve their mission and vision

As noted by Cresswell (2014), there are various types of sampling methods used in a research study, including stratified, convenience, snowball, and judgment. In this study, the researcher used systematic sampling and random sampling techniques. Systematic sampling technique entails gaining access to members of the LYNGOs in Mali. This research seeks greater understanding of the role of LYNGOs in preventing violent extremism. Throughout the study, the research attempts to engage the topic using multidisciplinary means of analysis, writing, and research techniques. All the interviews were conducted in person.

A table outlining the vision and purpose of the three LYNGOs and demographic information of the participants involved in this research is presented below. For example, Think Peace Mali is local youth NGO created to undertake research and advocacy with the goal of fully understanding the situational context before implementing security or development programs. The organization also conducts capacity building and community

support projects, to encourage local communities to take ownership of their own prevention and peace-building programs. Out of the over forty national and local staff that Think Peace employs, I interviewed twelve. In addition, the table details information about AJCET: for example, this organization work specifically in local communities in Sikasso, Mopti, Segou, Gao, Ménaka, and Timbuktu. Out of the over thirty staff that AJCET employs, I interviewed six. Similarly, COJEPAREM is an LYNGO established to prevent the enlistment of young people in armed groups. Out of the over twenty staff that this LYNGO employs, I interviewed six. Also, in the table are details about the youth participants that I surveyed for this research. I had access to and surveyed one hundred youth. However, only fifty-seven of the surveys were fully comprehensible. Of fifty-seven youth respondents, thirty-nine were males and nineteen were females. Also, twenty-nine were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, twenty-two were between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-three, and four were between the ages of thirty-four and forty. Also, fifty-two were Muslim and three were Christian. The objective of the religion, age, and gender analysis is to have diverse views and informed perspective from youth in Mali.

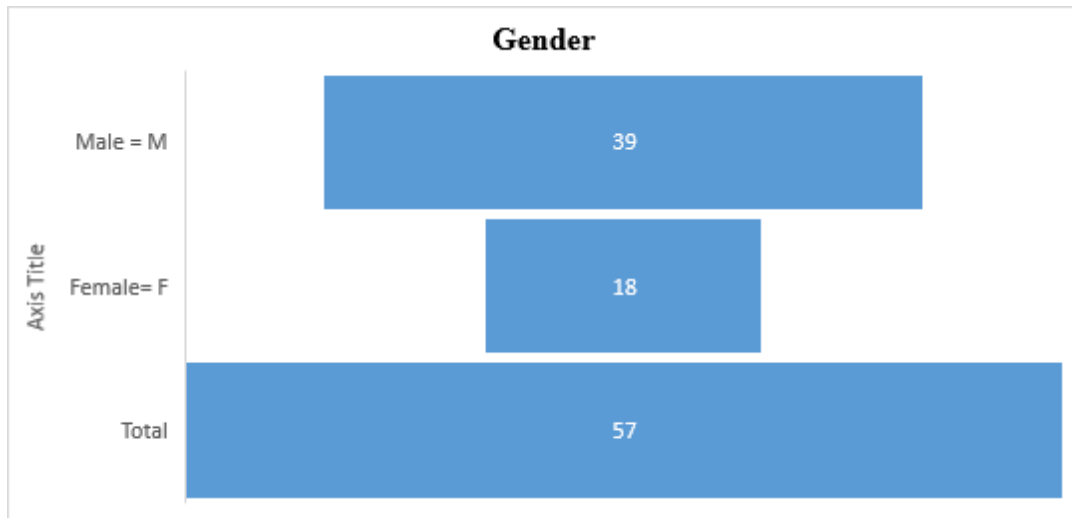
All participants gave their written and verbal consent before the interviews and the surveys begun. As a researcher, I took the necessary measures to protect the participants from risk and harm. In this research, I only refer to participants as youth, young person, or staff member of LYNGO 1, 2 or 3.

Source: Author

Table 3: Demographic Information of LYNGOs and Survey Participants

Participants	Description
NGOs	
NGO 1 <i>Pensons Paix</i> <i>Think Peace</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A local youth NGO working in local communities in southern, central and northern Mali for over 10 years. - This LYNGO works to improve peace and governance in the country through youth engagement. - In 2017, Think Peace expanded to the neighboring countries of Niger and Burkina Faso to further strengthen their work in countering violent extremism and promoting peace. - The organization undertakes research and advocacy to fully understand the situational context before implementing security or development programs. - This organization also conducts capacity-building and community support projects, to encourage local communities to take ownership of their own prevention and peace building programs. - Employs 40 + national and local staff members - Interviewed 12 staff members
NGO 2 <i>AJCET:</i> <i>Association des Jeunes Contre l'Enrôlement dans le Terrorisme</i> <i>Association of Youth Against Enrolment in Terrorism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A local youth NGO working in local communities in Sikasso, Mopti, Segou, Gao, Ménaka, and Timbuktu, all in southern, central, and northern Mali, for 7 years - Prevent violent extremism among young people, prevent conflicts between communities, involve young people in the search for peace and humanitarian action - The organization carries out awareness-raising activities involving young people and works in prisons through professional training for prisoners who are going to be released. - Employs 30 + national and local staff members - Interviewed 6 staff members

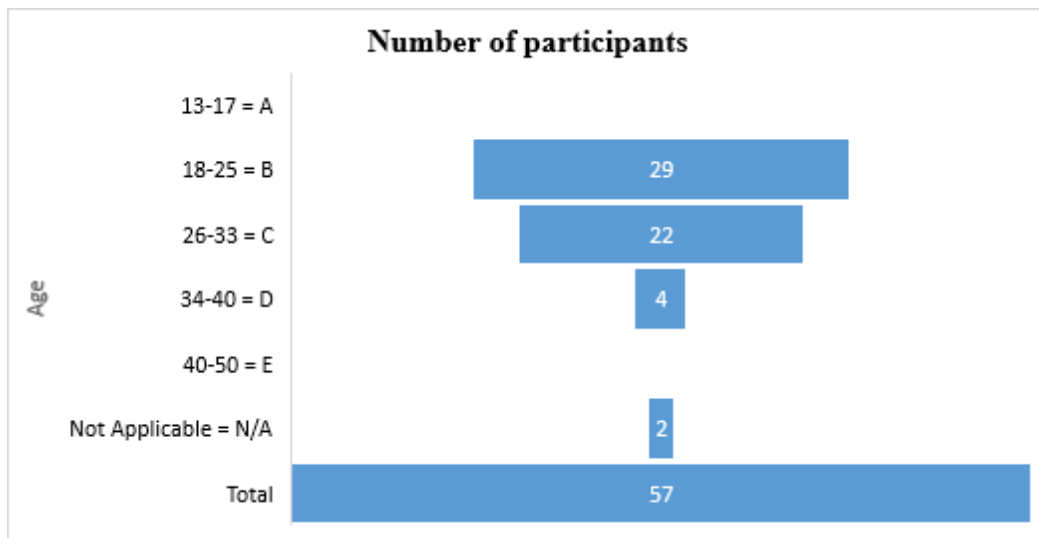
<p>NGO 3</p> <p><i>COJEPAREM</i></p> <p><i>le Collectif des Jeunes pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Mali</i></p> <p><i>The Youth Collective for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A local youth NGO working to prevent the enlistment of young people in armed groups (rebellion, terrorism, violent extremism) for 6 years - The organization's objectives are to help the victims of the crisis in northern Mali, promote peace, and involve young people in the process of conflict management and resolution in their communities. - Its mission is to create a more secure community where young men and women live at liberty from any attempts at enlistment and violence. - The organization coordinates its programs around 4 areas of activity: (1) community conflict management and prevention; (2) youth training and integration; (3) awareness-raising on social cohesion and livelihood; and (4) the fight against violent extremism - Employs 20 + national and local staff members - Interviewed 6 staff members
<p>Youth Participants</p>	
<p><i>SAMPLING PROCEDURE</i></p>	<p>100 youths in Mali were invited to provide their opinions on the security environment in Mali, their overall assessment of LYNGOs' strategies to prevent youth enrollment into violent extremism, including the effectiveness and results of activities conducted in Mali; and their opinion on what LYNGOs must do to deal with or prevent violent extremism in Mali</p> <p>Out of the 100, 57 youths responded to all questions posed during the survey in a clear and concise manner.</p>
<p><i>Demographics of the Sample</i></p>	<p>The 57 youths represented the following geographic location Bamako, Gao, Kayes, Kidal, Koulikoro, Ménaka, Mopti, Sikasso, Ségou, Taoudénit and Timbuktu. Youth respondents were from different ethnic groups, including the Tuareg, Songhai, and Peulh. Additional demographic information is depicted below.</p>



Source: Author

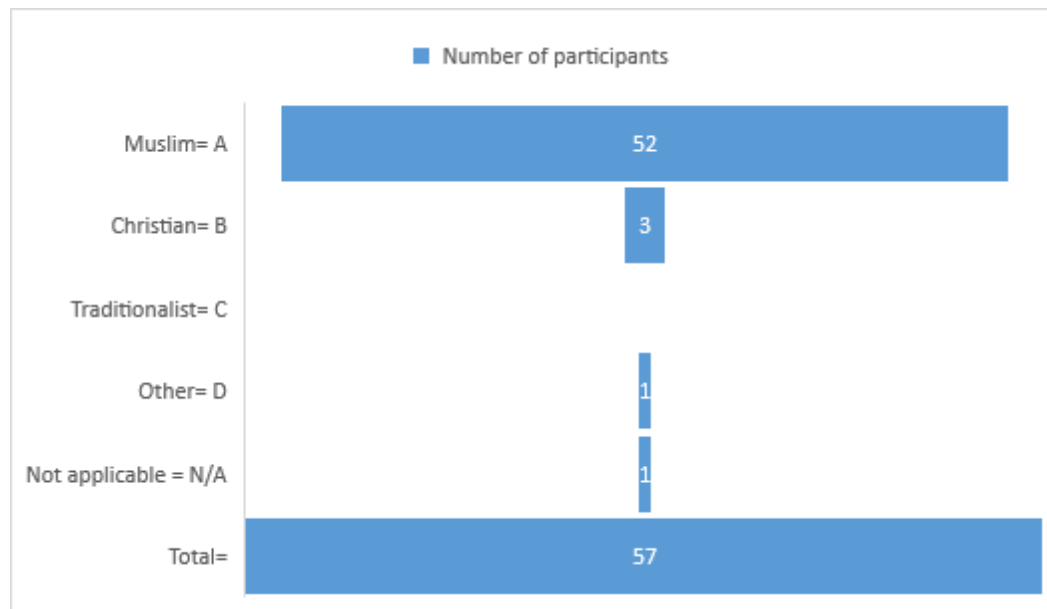
Figure 20: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

The quota of 50% for female participation was not met due to the reluctance of some of them to be surveyed. All the female respondents were at least 18 years of age.



Source: Author

Figure 21: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group



Source: Author

Figure 22: Distribution of Respondents by Religious Affiliation

Data Gathering from Interviews

Upon reflection, my field work in Mali was a unique experience, in that I arrived in the country at a time when the country was preparing for a national dialogue to draft a roadmap to restore state authority against a backdrop of insecurity, intercommunal violence, and increasing displacement. The first few days I arrived in the country, I spent time reaching out and scheduling interviews with the staff of the LYNGOs that I previously contacted. This initial contact was very useful, especially because it helped ensure that they were interested in my research. Also, the initial contact I made on the

ground let me meet others who had additional information or documentation that were relevant to my research.

One of the staff members at the LYNGO ACJET was extremely helpful. He spent a lot of time with me as a volunteer research assistant. With him, I discussed the research more deeply, including the type of data I was interested in collecting, in addition to ethical concerns surrounding the field trip. Throughout my interviews with the LYNGOs, I was very aware that the staff members that I was interviewing were probably not going to be critical of their practices or approaches. Many of the research participants on the side of the LYNGOs were not chosen randomly by their leaders. This method of selection represents a purposive approach to sampling. Palinkas et al. (2015) state that “engaging in a purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is widely used in qualitative research and is a form of non-probability sampling in which one’s own judgment is relied upon when choosing members of the population to participate in their study.”

With the help of staff members of the LYNGOs Think Peace and AJCET, I was given access to over 100 Malian youths from all over the country who were in the capital, Bamako, for a leadership training that was organized by another LYNGO. I surveyed all 100 youths on their perception of the work of the international and national NGOs and LYNGOs in their communities, especially in the realm of youth and violent extremism prevention.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

I applied thematic analysis process to transcribe and analyze key concepts that were evident in the data collected. First, I transcribed the interviews and read them three times to make sure that any error from the transcription was resolved.

Secondly, I started coding the data by identifying data that I considered pertinent to the research question. The next stage involved searching for themes. I combined different codes that have very similar or may have the same aspect within the data. Once a clear idea of the various themes and how they fit together emerged, analysis phase begun. I defined and named the themes, each theme clearly defined and accompanied by a detailed analysis. The findings from the primary research were then connected to the literature review on violent extremism in Mali. The data were then be checked for inconsistencies and grouped together, based on the responses, to ease analysis.

Validity and Reliability

According to Baumgarten, et al (2013), validity and reliability refer to criteria for evaluating a research study. Baumgarten, et al (2013) noted that the willingness of a respondent significantly affected the honesty of the answers, which in turn affected the accuracy and reliability of the study. Also, the researcher provided consent forms that

affirmed the willingness of the respondent to participate in the study as well as communicate to them that the responses given will only be used for academic reasons.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are a significant aspect of a research study. Creswell (2014) state that “ethical concerns ensure that the rights of the researcher and the respondents are protected.” Since this study involved LYNGO officials and members of the civil society, I made sure to adhere to ethical guidelines to protect them from any harm the research may cause. According to Scheyvens and Stoney (2003:139), “ethical research should not only do no harm, but also have the possibility to be beneficial.” One possible way to prevent harm to the potential research participants is to disclose all information about the research and explain the voluntary nature of participation and possible risks and benefits related to the research, and the right to refuse to participate in the research without any consequence. It is key to remember the inherent power imbalance that could exist between me as the researcher and potential research participants in Mali. If well done, the careful consideration of ethical issues could take time.

The process of considering ethical issues for me started with a discussion with the chair of my dissertation about potential issues that may arise prior to and during my trip to Mali for field work. Following this conversation, I took several free lessons online about ethical research principles and acquired a written approval to conduct my research from the George Mason Office of Research Integrity and Assurance. During the approval process, I submitted information about participant confidentiality, the handling and

storage of data, minimizing potential harm, gender and cultural considerations, and any other issues that may arise to the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance. Also, I provided information on how I protected the identities of the respondents by ensuring that the real names of the participants were not indicated on the questionnaires but rather code names.

Thus, undertaking ethical research has three major components: (1) acquiring ethical clearance from the institutional review board (IRB) at one's university; (2) acting in a sensitive manner; and (3) building relationships that are mutually beneficial to both the researcher and the subjects of the research (Scheyvens & Stoney, 2003:139).

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings and analysis of the study. The findings and analysis are divided in three and respond to the following research questions:

1. What are LYNGOs' assessment of the drivers of youth involvement into violent extremism?
2. What are the LYNGOs' violent extremism prevention strategies in Mali?
3. What are the youth's perceptions of the work of LYNGOs involved in preventing violent extremism in Mali?

The findings suggest that, on one hand, violent extremism remains a threat to communities across Mali, and on the other hand, based on the assessment of what drives young people to join violent extremist groups as well as the strategies and policy necessary to address it, LYNGOs have a unique understanding of how to prevent the youth from joining violent extremism. Their presence within local communities and their understanding of local realities and grievances and of the messaging that may lead young people into violent extremist groups have resulted in unique insights on how to effectively craft strategies either to prevent young people from joining violent extremist

groups or bring young people who have already joined violent extremist groups back to their communities in a safe manner.

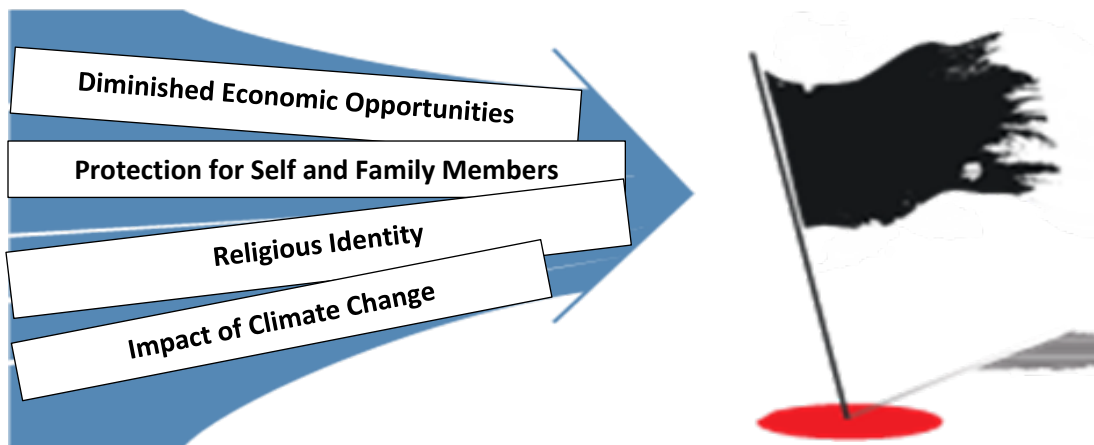
In addition to having a unique knowledge of local realities, the findings suggest that LYNGOs involved in the study have been able to reach out to marginalized young people in communities across Mali, specifically in the center and north of the country. From community dialogues to peer-to-peer education forums, LYNGOs have been able to help young people connect and build relationships that are seen as the bedrock of community violent extremism prevention strategy. The findings underline the importance of LYNGOs' strategy to prevent violent extremism and counter terrorism in Mali.

LYNGOs' Assessment of the Drivers of Youth Involvement in Violent Extremism

Although there is a growing body of VE research and literature, there is limited knowledge and understanding about the specific emerging trends and drivers of youth involvement in violent extremism in Mali. To identify the underlying drivers of youth involvement in violent extremism, several respondents from Think Peace, COJEPAREM, and AJCET stated that their respective organizations have developed early warning indicators that are helpful to identify young people who may be at risk of being recruited by extremist groups in central or northern Mali, based on their understanding of how young people enter into violent extremist groups. A staff member at COJEPAREM noted that "early warning is a central concept in violent extremism prevention. Thus, early warning and early response have been critical elements that helps COJEPAREM prevent young people from joining extremist groups."

A staff member at Think Peace noted that the collection and analysis of data and dissemination of information with either family or community leaders or national authorities to prevent violence before it occurs or the enrolment of young people into extremism has helped to reduce the number of young people who have joined extremist groups over the years. This statement echoed responses from most interviewees, who suggested that early warning is not a one-off activity but entails continuously engaging communities. Thus, collecting, analyzing, and understanding the early indicators of youth enrolment into violent extremism helps LYNGOs and the communities they serve avert or mitigate youth enrolment into violent extremism. A respondent from COJEPAREM observed that the underlying reasons for enrolment and the recruitment processes of young people by violent extremist groups may be different for young men and young women. Nonetheless, participants from the three LYNGOs noted that the role of traditional and local leaders, community-based organizations, and faith groups need to become more prominent in providing information and support. A staff member at AJCET noted that, in many communities in Kidal, Gao and Mopti, “mutual mistrust between the authorities, the youths, and different actors, including violent extremist groups, have reignited fighting and have prevented information sharing that helps detect young people who may be on the verge of joining extremist groups.” In addition, she noted that early warning is a step in the right direction; she added, however, that “the proper flow of information and trust cannot be built without transparency..... Therefore, the job of LYNGOs is to gain community trust by addressing core concerns of the community.”

AJCET staff members interviewed noted that the organization piloted situational studies in collaboration with Think Peace, with the support of several national organizations and international stakeholders, to understand the underlying drivers of youth involvement in violent extremism in villages and communities in the central and northern parts of the country. The situational studies revealed four main drivers of youths to join violent extremist groups. These factors are diminished economic opportunities, protection for self and family members, religious identity, and the impact of climate change.



Source: Author

Figure 23: Underlying Drivers of Youth Enrollment into Violent Extremism in Mali

A respondent at Think Peace noted:

The reasons for the recruitment of young people by terrorist and violent extremist groups are complex and multifaceted, and they may vary depending on the situation and the community. Because of the young age and psychological malleability of some recruits, they may become particularly dangerous instruments of the groups that recruited them.... They may help lure their peers into the violent groups as well.

Several respondents from the three LYNGOs noted that while many grievances and perceptions of social and economic exclusion have facilitated the recruitment of young people into violent extremism, they are not the only underlying recruitment factors. They noted that the “very presence of violent extremist recruiters in communities contributes to radicalization and recruitment of young people.”

- ***Diminished Economic Opportunities Push Youths Towards Supporting Violent Extremism***

According to several respondent at COJEPAREM and AJCET, the relationship between diminished economic opportunities for youths and their recruitment into violent extremist groups is complex and varies across communities. Several respondents noted that many young people find themselves in poor economic positions because the state no longer supports them. In addition, many unemployed youths have been recruited by promises of regaining dignity lost as a result of their unfavorable economic conditions. A staff member at Think Peace, who works to de-radicalize incarcerated violent extremism groups members in prisons, explained that a prisoner once told him, “Many poor, young people without hope have thrown themselves in the arms of the Jihadist networks.... they are fighting against Westerners and Christians who they see as the cause of their misery.”

According to three respondents at Think Peace, young people in the central and northern part of Mali in particular identified with a general feeling of neglect by the government, manifesting itself with limited or non-existent access to basic services, such as health care, food, and water. For example, a respondent from COJEPAREM stated:

Many young people do not feel that they are Malians, they feel like once you leave Bamako, you are no more in Mali, they feel economically alienated, and to explain their grievances they point to the general view that the region's resources are in the hands of elites and to corruption in Bamako.

Hence, many young people from city of Mopti and Timbuktu are opting for criminal and radical groups for their survival and livelihoods. As stated by a respondent at AJCET, “the possibility of getting a job was referred to not only as a mean to gain financial resources but also as a way to have a clear role and purpose in life.” A respondent at Think Peace noted that “unmet expectations among young people drive radicalization and recruitment. Violent extremist groups strike at the most vulnerable moment, recruit and lure them with short-term cash or goodies.”

- ***Youths Are Attracted to Violent Extremism by the Need to Protect Themselves and Their Families***

According to several staff members of COJEPAREM, the absence of the “Malian state, and its inability to provide protection, and, in particular, the malfunctioning of the justice system has contributed to the violent extremism crisis.” Most respondents from Think Peace noted that the absence of proper security in many communities, especially in central and northern Mali, have led many young people to join violent extremist groups. According to a staff member at AJCET, a recent study by AJCET concluded that over 50% of young people surveyed consider the state as a repressive body. In many cases, the staff member noted, “Young people are misunderstood by government agents, security forces, and communities, due to unfounded suspicion that they work for violent extremist groups as agents of manipulation.”

According to a respondent at Think Peace, the justice system is severely criticized for its poor governance. The perceptions of poor governance and injustice lead young people to join groups as a self-protection mechanism because of unstable or weak governmental presence at the local level. Several respondents noted that, in many cases, armed groups, including terrorist or violent extremist groups, are perceived by communities as a defense against the threat of violence from a different group or from the state. Hence, many youths are recruited by sympathetic family members based on a perception among young people that is rarely considered by analysts, that membership within violent extremist groups is the result of normal behavior designed to defend their families or communities. As a result, a staff member AJCET noted, “Young people conclude that their behavior and loyalty to violent extremist groups are insignificant when compared to the injustice situations that their families or communities face.” However, where a violent extremist group or a terrorist group does not have wide geographical support or is unpopular among the population, youths may be difficult to recruit to the cause.

- ***Religious Identity Constitutes a Pathway for Violent Extremism***

The role of religious identity has been an important factor that has led many young people to join violent extremist groups in Mali. Respondents at Think Peace and COJEPAREM noted that there is a gap between how the youths understand religious texts and their duty to adhere to the religious teachings. In some situations, the youths consider acts of violence perpetrated in the name of religion as a “defense” of the religion

they follow. In addition, some violent groups present themselves as defending a religious order or seeking to repair social injustices. A respondent at ACJET noted that it is “common knowledge among many development and security actors that many youths have received scholarships to study in several foreign countries, including in Iran and Saudi Arabia.” In addition, he stated:

These youths return to Mali with several interpretations of Qur'an. It's important to note that many youths who return from these trips seek to legitimize their rebellion against society by finding justifications based on the defense of the form of Islam that they studied abroad.

The youths therefore mistake the defense of their religious studies with the commitment to defend community members. In response to the threat of youth enrolment into violent extremism, a respondent at COJEPAREM noted that in recent years, Sufi Islam leaders have created a new collective entitled “Collective of Muslim Spiritual Leaders,” or GLSM, to counter what they say is an influx of foreign-sponsored radical preachers and institutions courting Mali's young Muslims. In addition, he noted that, for example, Sheikh Cherif Ousmane Madani Haidara, who leads prayers at the main mosque in Segou in central Mali, has been visiting a new mosque in a different city almost every Friday. Also, thousands of Malian youths have participated in a two-year program at the Morocco training schools in Rabat that included instruction on how to push back against calls for terrorism and jihad.

A respondent at Think Peace noted that the real problem is the absence of proper oversight of religious organizations funded by foreign donors. Hence, Iranian-funded universities such as the Mustafa International School and Saudi Arabia-funded universities such as the University of the Sahel are rapidly increasing the number of their

branches in Mali and have brought a new religious ideology to many communities. A respondent at ACJET noted that some radical preachers often say to the youths that “if they kill people who do not believe in the same interpretation of the religious texts like them, they will be rewarded in paradise, killing one person will be rewarded with one house, killing two will be rewarded with two houses.”

Several respondents emphasized that organizations and universities that are largely financed by money from Gulf states are championing religious beliefs that make Malian youths more vulnerable to violent extremism recruitment. A majority of the respondents noted that, although Malian laws limit the government’s ability to regulate religion, the state needs to look more closely at what is being taught in organizations and universities that are largely financed by money from Gulf states.

- ***Impact of Climate Change Provides a Fertile Breeding Ground for Violent Extremism***

While the relationship between climate change and violent extremism is not linear, many respondents noted that the impacts of climate change, especially in the north of Mali, have acted as threat multipliers and in many cases have also been found to provide a fertile breeding ground for violent extremism. Climate change-related vulnerabilities are understood by many respondents as the impacts of climate change on the livelihoods of the youths and their immediate communities. Many of the areas, for example, Timbuktu, where violent extremist groups are operating, are vulnerable to climate change, thus posing challenges for peacebuilding. A respondent at AJCET noted:

Two-thirds of Mali is desert and climate change makes matters worse. Over recent years we've seeing an increase in temperatures, an increase in extreme weather events like floods and droughts, and less predictable rainy seasons. Desertification in many communities means herdsman and their families have to move in search of resources. The entire wealth of herdsman is tied up in their livestock. It's not a choice, it's a necessity. Many of them have pushed their youth to join violent groups in the name of protection against farmers.

According to multiple respondents at AJCET and Think Peace, the recurring droughts, especially in the northern part of the country, have had a negative impact on the livelihood of young people, especially those who cultivate the land to feed their families. The income from their harvests has not been the same as before. A respondent at COJEPAREM noted that, while the suggestion that climate change is a root cause of extremism would be overly simplistic, having fewer resources to adapt to the impacts of climate change has forced many young people to migrate to other communities.

For AJCET, the need to find solutions for the challenges above led to the design of early warning mechanisms and raising awareness by engaging communities. In addition, this organization works directly to rehabilitate and deradicalize young people who were or are in violent groups. Also, this organization work in prisons because it has been observed that several young people have been enrolled while in prisons. For example, often a young person can be arrested because he or she has committed a minor crime and put in prison together with suspected terrorists. Being in prison with terrorists and other bandits sometimes facilitates the recruitment of these vulnerable young people.

LYNGOs' Strategies to Prevent Violent Extremism and Terrorism

Introduction

Respondents from the three LYNGOs involved in this study concur that lasting peace and sustainable development in Mali are contingent on peaceful and inclusive coexistence between groups. As part of the strategy to prevent violent extremism, staff members at the three LYNGOs argued that young people are both the principal actors in, and victims of, the Malian crisis. According to a respondent at AJCET, unemployed youth have been recruited by promises of regaining lost dignity, making easy profits, or taking revenge. She stated that there are many reasons to pay attention to young people in Mali, because the story of youth and violent extremism is often told alongside the story of the fast and steady economic growth in the country. Sadly, she noted, “Young women feel the sting of unemployment even more sharply. Young people find work, but not in places that pay good wages, develop skills, or provide a measure of job security. It’s common to find young Malian university graduates doing menial jobs.”

Despite many challenges, a staff member at Think Peace noted that many young people in Mali come with high energy, creativity, and talents. He noted that there are several different ways in which different communities and LYNGOs perceive young people in Mali, summarized in the table below. The way young people are perceived by LYNGOs and communities helps inform the strategies to use them as positive change agents or prevent them from joining violent extremist groups.

In the table below, the first three viewpoints, coded A, B, and C, are characteristics of a liability viewpoint, where young people are seen as a liability in their community.

They are studied as potentially risk to themselves and are considered not yet fully formed. According to respondents at Think Peace, these views are grounded in a conception of “young people are in a phase of preparation for ‘real life.’” The fourth viewpoint, code D, sees the youths as useful and contributors to security and the development and the society. In addition, this viewpoint D helps LYNGOs invite the youths to serve as partners, positive change agents, and as part of the solution to prevent other youths from joining violent extremist groups.

Source: Author

Table 4: Viewpoints of How Young People Are Viewed in Their Communities

Viewpoints Young people as...	Description	Program Response
(A) Vulnerable	<p>Victims Liability-Based</p> <p>Young people are susceptible to various dangers and risks such as crime, violence, sexual exploitation, dangerous ideologies.</p>	<p>They need to be kept safe and protected. This can lead to over-protection that fails to enable young people to learn how to navigate the world around them.</p>

<p>(B) Consumer</p>	<p>Victims Liability-Based</p> <p>Young people are “empty vessels,” only there to receive and use public goods.</p>	<p>They need more entertainment programs that help switch their mentality from consumers and lay an emphasis on outputs.</p>
<p>(C) Problem</p>	<p>Victims Liability-Based</p> <p>Though they are future of Mali, young people are troublemakers and are deviant. They can cause harm to others and are a threat to society and are not ready to contribute positively to society.</p>	<p>They need to be controlled, managed, and contained.</p>
<p>(D) Useful and contributors to social development and security</p>	<p>Victims Asset-Based</p> <p>Young people have agency – the means or power to act. They are part of the solution and should be celebrated. They have the capacity to create, contribute, and make a difference in their communities.</p>	<p>They are the present and not just the future. They should be involved in activities such as: dialogue, partnership, discussion of sensitive issues, youth-led approaches, learning by doing.</p>

In the analysis below, the participants' responses are organized into two categories: first, participants that expressed positive views of the themes and second, participants that expressed clear reservations regarding the work of LYNGOs in their communities.

Theme #1: Promoting Peers for Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion to Mitigate Youths' Enrolment in Violent Extremism

The strategy of LYNGOs, Think Peace, COJEPAREM, and AJCET is to partner with communities, young people, and stakeholders to promote a culture of nonviolence and peace in communities across Mali, with a particular focus on children and youth in schools. A respondent from COJEPAREM noted:

Providing an atmosphere in which young people can flourish is not an easy task, due to security constraints. Young people have different values and upbringing. So, how can we provide peer to peer engagement? A key component of our peers for peacebuilding strategy is to establish and promote violence prevention academies in the schools and in the communities.

According to three respondents from Think Peace, the LYNGO's strategy is to implement programs that promote peer mediation and peace clubs in schools as well as peace education curriculums at various levels: schools, colleges, teachers' training colleges, universities, and at the policy level. A respondent at Think Peace stated that "peacebuilding and violent extremism prevention is not an event but rather a process which, when properly inculcated in the minds and comportment of children and youth, will help them become agents of change." Hence, Think Peace's strategy is to "empower young people who are trusted influencers" with the skills and tools they need to provide concrete solutions to help at-risk individuals in their surrounding feel that they have more options than turning to a violent extremist group. A respondent from Think Peace noted that

the internet now affords violent extremist groups a key forum for spotting and assessing individuals who are receptive to a specific grievance or ideology and to share radical thoughts and beliefs. Hence, training young people to spot any information that may be used to enroll their peers and friends, and actively pushing them to prevent their peers from joining violent groups, is the way forward.

According to several respondents at Think Peace, the Peers for Peace theory of change states that:

If community structures for conflict prevention and transformation are strengthened, and local livelihoods are improved through income generating strategies, then communities and youths will be more resilient to violent conflict related to natural resources management, social fabric will be restored, and social cohesion will increase.

In addition, the Peers for Peace program focused on approximately 100 households in Mopti and Segou. The Peers for Peace program gave youths in the 100 households training in conflict mapping techniques and in traditional conflict mediation mechanisms. Many of the youths who attended the program have become active conflict mediators in their communities.

As part of the Peers for Peacebuilding and social cohesion strategy, several respondents at AJCET noted that the LYNGO set up “football teams in Mopti and Kidal to bring young people together around sport as a unifying factor.” According to the founder of AJCET, the strategy of football for peace came to life during a meeting with young men and women who were vulnerable to being recruited into criminal activities and violent extremist groups. So far, respondents at AJCET noted that the LYNGO has organized several football games and follow-up activities that have seen over 100 youths engaged in cultural events, peer-to-peer discussions around topics of common interest,

and mixing that encouraged learning about different languages, such as Bambara, Peulh, Sonrhai, Dogon, and Tamacheq.

Theme #2: Empowering Youth to Be Actively Engaged in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution Activities

Youth empowerment refers to the “attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and in their societies” (UNDP, 2014). According to a staff member at COJEPAREM, “violent extremism is a real threat to communities and young people across Mali. It impacts the security, well-being, and dignity of countless youths. Therefore, engaging youth as partners in building resilience will create safer, more aware communities.” The response to violent extremism discourse in Mali requires early detection and the use of varied approaches to reduce actions and ideologies that promote and sanction violence. The strategies of Think Peace, COJEPAREM, and AJCET have focused on addressing social and economic challenges that young people face. In addition to addressing social and economic challenges, AJCET has adopted a strategy to be impartial and inclusive. With the aim of countering a growing perception that young people are violent and threats to peace and security in Mali, Think Peace and AJCET have been working directly and indirectly with national and local leaders, including the Minister for Youth and Citizenship Promotion, the leaders of the Malian National Youth Council, and the leaders of the Youth Malian Political Parties Coalition, to encourage economic, social, and political reforms that prioritize the needs of the youth. Their strategy has been to use “informal social meeting grounds, homes, and mosques, as a safe

space to create a controlled discussion between young people and national and local leaders who are prepared to offer constructive solutions to young people's grievances."

In addition, LYNGOs appeal to national leaders and community leaders to promote the inclusion and engagement of the youth in structural and operational conflict-prevention mechanisms. This is partly driven by the youth demand to partner with state authorities not only in policy dialogues, but also in the implementation of interventions that are recommended during these dialogues. A respondent at Think Peace noted that it is important to ensure that marginalized youth are provided with the space and platforms for civic engagement and participation in decision-making in their communities. To address civic engagement issues, Think Peace in partnership with the Global Fund for Preventing Violent Extremism (GCERF) organized a mural project where youths can think, innovate, and collaborate with each other to solve conflict problems at the community level. The image below shows one of the drawings from the mural project.



Source: GCERF Website

Figure 24: Mural Project Organized by Think Peace, GCERF, and Local Authorities

A staff member at AJCET noted that “the reduced amount of funding for youth initiatives aimed at engaging and empowering youth remains an operational challenge for LYNGO’s ability to engage young people in many communities, especially in Kidal.”

Theme #3: Providing Access to Formal Education and Skills Development

Given the limited educational and skills development opportunities in many communities across Mali, LYNGOs have collaborated with some stakeholders to provide assistance to young people either to enroll in schools or in skills development training programs. Twelve respondents from the three LYNGOs noted that one key reason for youth participation in violent extremism stems from their “perception of frustration and exclusion, the accumulated anger” they have for corrupt leaders who govern the economy and offer them no future, the increasing intergenerational mistrust, and the ways that the elites use the youths to achieve their political objectives. Another reason that indirectly fosters the recruitment of young people by violent extremist groups is the “poor quality or lack of an education system and an economy that creates fewer opportunities for young people,” noted a respondent from COJEPAREM. The institutions of education, formal or informal, public or private, secular or religious, are important sites that can promote resilience or vulnerability to violent extremism. Sadly, a staff member at AJCET noted

that the limited capacity of the Malian state manifests itself at the community level, where the youth have the most direct contact with state institutions, and where the lack of education sites and services becomes most noticeable. Three respondents from Think Peace noted: “Improving the quality of youth education and engagement between state leaders and young people could enhance trust and state legitimacy that are at the root of just and peaceful societies.”



Source: Think Peace Facebook Page

Figure 25: Education Campaign Organized by Think Peace and REJEFPO on Youth Education and Skills Development in Mali

The founder of AJCET noted “We put emphasis on education and information-sharing. In this sense, we organize mobile debates in the villages, where we travel with a team of experts to discuss and exchange ideas related to violent extremism with the citizens of the community, including how to spot a young person who may be vulnerable and may join violent extremism groups.”

Twelve respondents from Think Peace and COJEPAREM noted that their strategy in this area is to “highlight the importance of education, especially at home with the family and with educators in schools in vulnerable communities.” In addition, they argued that young people are particularly vulnerable to hate speech and violent speech as they are going through a defining phase of their lives during which they seek to assert their identity. This identity crisis can be exploited by recruiters of extremist groups, who are particularly good at giving these young people clear and Manichean answers on the problems of existence. However, as vulnerable as they may appear, many young people have been active in creating educational spaces that foster critical thinking and participation, which has helped reduce the recruitment of young people into violent extremist groups. Many of the activities that have been held have involved workshops, lectures, and dialogues on violent extremism prevention with the goal of promoting critical thinking skills and an appreciation of diversity.

In addition, two respondents at Think Peace and AJCET noted that families have an unparalleled opportunity to spot the youth that have been pulled toward violence. However, they are unable to effectively prevent acts of violence perpetrated by violent extremists’ groups, or to protect their relatives against this phenomenon due to the inability to access adequate education or information. Schools have a role to play in helping build students’ resilience and preventing them from joining violent extremist groups. To this end, Think Peace and AJCET work hand in hand with schools to educate the youth on major themes, such as tolerance, respect for others, and human rights, as a key tool for preventing extremism. In addition, to address the challenges of weak social

cohesion, initiatives in this arena designed by Think Peace and AJCET in the study focus on improving the livelihoods of at-risk youth, including by improving their skills and education levels and ensuring better access to employment and upward mobility. For example, Think Peace Sahel and members of Multidisciplinary Commission for Prevention of Radicalization in Prison (COMPRAC) carried out a follow-up mission to monitor the progress of the skills development activities that young people who were released from prison have undertaken in Koulikoro and Bamako Central Stop House. Staff members that were part of the follow-up mission noted that the progress of the youths is encouraging. One staff member noted “young people have been able to sew around ten shirts and around sixty masks with the materials and raw materials provided by the PESAI project and Think Peace.”

Think Peace and AJCET’s approaches to support inclusive political processes involve directly working with the young women to protect and expand their participation in public life, with a special focus on regular engagement with decision-makers in the security sector and national leaders. In addition, Think Peace, COJEPAREM and AJCET create platforms for the youth to organize cultural events and sport activities aimed at decreasing alienation, managing frustrations, and generating a strong sense of inclusion and tolerance. A staff member at AJCET noted that “the reduced number of young people who are consulted in the design of violent extremism programs” remains a structural challenge for effective implementation of LYNGO’s strategies.

Theme #4: Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Young Women to Engage In Prevention And Response Efforts Related To Violent Extremism

Young women are frequently seen only as victims of violent extremism. But in reality, they play multiple roles, and they are on the frontlines of prevention and response. The basis for gender equality and strategies to empower young women has already been established through various national and international frameworks. The significance of this strategy, according to several respondents, stems from recognition of the gendered drivers and impacts of violent extremism. Several respondents noted that tailoring effective violent extremism prevention strategies requires understanding how the social status of young women and men in their communities inform their motivations to a violent extremist group. Additionally, respondents noted that many young women are often victims of the actions of violent extremist groups that operate especially in northern part of the country. These young women, respondents noted, suffer from sexual violence and rape, restrictive limitations to their freedom of movement, and in some cases essentially become slaves to the men in violent extremist groups.

There are a number of reasons why young women are favored targets for recruitment, a respondent from Think Peace noted, in addition to the fact that young women do not conform to traditional security profiles and tend to raise less suspicion. That is because, young women have “greater propaganda value, as they tend to garner more media attention than attacks by their male counterparts.” Another respondent noted that “young women who have been abused by members the of Forces Armées Maliennes may feel that they have no other choice than to join a group for protection.”

The majority of respondents noted that additional attention must be paid to the questions of how gender considerations and the inclusion of young women can bring value to the design of effective violent extremism prevention strategies. Respondents from AJCET and COJEPAREM noted that “promoting gender equality and empowering young women as agents of peace recognize their contributions to peacebuilding and prevention of violent extremism and upholds respect for basic human rights of everyone in areas afflicted by violent extremism.” LYNGOs’ gender equality and strategy to empower young women to prevent violent extremism address the different needs and experiences of young women and men in the communities.

To address many of the issues raised previously, Think Peace has been organizing monthly videoconferences entitled “Ben Kéné – The word of the communities.” One of the recent conferences which took place in March 2021 focused on the following question: “What are the obstacles to the participation of women in peacebuilding and conflict mediation processes?”

Also, in reference to the promoting gender equality and empowerment of young women one respondent staff at AJCET noted:

Although it is difficult to analyze the degree of individual radicalization, due to the absence of objective indicators and analysis tools, studies on the role of women in violent extremist activity show that women should not be hypothesized as victims or passive supporters of violent extremism.

In addition, the several respondents stated:

We have seen that an increase in young women’s empowerment and gender equality has a positive effect on the success of our violent extremism prevention objectives; this is the approach we take to prevent young people from joining violent groups.

According to several respondents at Think Peace, a full understanding of the differences between gender roles sheds light on existing power dynamics within a socio-cultural context and remains a key factor in designing the most effective violent extremism programs. This why they stated, “Think Peace, in coordination with two women’s associations and one international donor, has recently established a young women’s council for peace, which aims to spread the concept of peace and fully explain gender roles in the process of preventing young women from joining violent extremist groups.”



Sketch de la tontine « Fôkaben Moussow »

Source: Think Peace Facebook Page

Figure 26: A Campaign Organized by Think Peace on the Role of Women in Preventing Violent Extremism in Mali

According to two staff members at COJEPAREM, it is important to recognize the different roles young men and women play in various communities. They noted that “gender norms can impede or encourage the voice and agency of young women, and equally relegate young men to certain roles, militating against the goal of achieving

inclusivity in policy and programs.” Three staff members at AJCET noted that young women are considered to have a unique position in “early warning” and “early response” as they are perceived as “non-polarizing” in their communities, and as potentially helpful in developing other young people’s self-esteem and social cohesion. One of the three staff members noted, “We teach young women to be in a position to be the first to detect and influence extremist thinking and behavior in their families and communities.” The youth and gender equality strategy of AJCET seeks to empower young women and young men as partners in achieving gender equality. AJCET works to convey the messages that individuals in the communities must get out of the view and ideas that downplay the importance of women and girls. When it comes to recruiting young people into the organization, it places great emphasis on the importance of recruiting people who do not belong to political parties. According to a staff member at AJCET, it consciously chooses and employs the maximum number of women so that it can show young people that women can succeed in the actions that they carry out in the communities. Another emphasis is placed on the credibility of the person within his or her community and his or her level of education, depending on the position the person will occupy.

Despite the good work that many LYNGOs are doing to prevent young people from joining violent extremist groups, many respondents noted that many violent extremism prevention strategies have not been able to fully incorporate the views of women in some communities. In addition, respondents recognized the ongoing challenge of measuring the impact of violent extremism prevention activities on young women that may be pushed to join violent extremist groups. One participant from AJCET noted:

The absence of generally accepted definitions of gender and violent extremism in strategies constantly leads to inconsistent design of measures to prevent young women from joining violent extremist groups..... hence, strategies designed by LYNGOs “instead of encouraging gender equality, can unknowingly promote gender blindness which ignores the struggle that gender minorities have had to endure.”

The interviews reveal the following: while most respondents stressed that their current strategies in the area of women’s empowerment have contributed to a decrease in the number of young women that join violent groups from the communities they serve, many respondents were keen to highlight the complexities and challenges they encounter in addressing young women’s roles as both perpetrators and victims of violent extremism. By advancing gender-responsive strategies tailored to local needs, LYNGOs seek to restore societies that are just and peaceful for young women and men.

Theme #5: Promoting Community Engagement Is Key to Preventing Youth From Joining Violent Extremism

The engagement of the LYNGOs with local communities is key to the success of any strategy to prevent violent extremism. A bottom-up strategy to prevent violent extremism, according to a respondent, involves community engagement through partnerships and engagement between authorities, LYNGOs, and communities, and is influenced by concerns and issues of those communities. In other words, responsibility and accountability for preventing young people from joining violent extremism is the responsibility of the local communities. In response to concerns about youth involvement into violent extremism, LYNGOs have developed community-focused initiatives as part of their violent extremism prevention strategy. For example, the image below was taken

by the author during a community engagement event hosted by couple of local organizations, including Think Peace.



Source: Author

Figure 27: A Staff Member of Think Peace Engaging Young People in Mali

For example, to raise awareness among young people women and local authorities about the need to live together, Think Peace, in partnership with Mercy Corp, and with fund from the USAID “LAFIA” project, carried out four days of an awareness campaign in four districts, namely Medina Coura, the Boboli market in Niarela, Bagadadji, and the San-Zou field at the Hippodrome in March 2021. A respondent at Think Peace noted the campaign was designed to address the need for community involvement to prevent youths from joining violent extremism and raise awareness of the dangers associated with the proliferation of small arms in local communities. Several respondents at Think Peace

who attended the campaign noted that “at the end of the campaign, the participants were satisfied with the lessons learned during the exchanges and agreed to be agents of change in their communities by sharing the information received during the campaign with their community members.”

Theme #6: Providing Access to Basic Needs and Services Is Key To Preventing Youth From Joining Violent Extremism

Several respondents indicated that in many communities, the impact of the violent extremism on young people has become a daily phenomenon. In addition, what is really distressing is that young people are starting to get discouraged because they think that the national government is unable to find solutions to their concerns. Particularly in some communities, employment is not easy to find and young people cannot go to work if they have their own businesses because of the insecurity in the country. A respondent at COJEPAREM stated:

It is the responsibility of the state is to provide basic needs, services, and health care to the youths. An increasing number of youths are unemployed and cannot afford to provide themselves provide basic needs, services, and health care, which is why they commit themselves to violent extremist groups.

A young person surveyed by Think Peace during a study conducted in 2019 about the state of security and development in Mali clearly stated, “If the security situation does not change and the government does not provide me with basic needs, I will not know what to do.”

Also, a respondent at ACJET noted:

The sense of insecurity plays a major role economically all over the country. In short, this means that young people can no longer get by. Previously young

people could create some form of employment. For example, the arrival of tourists especially in Mopti, an area that tourists liked very much, contributed tremendously to the economy of the region. Now that there are no more visitors, and tourism has stopped due to the insecurity, this situation has suddenly paralyzed the activities of young people.

In addition, a respondent at Think Peace noted:

We need to have concrete strategies, because when you go to meet young people, you have to get out of the theoretical a bit. Awareness is a good approach, but you can't just keep raising awareness all the time. We must bring concrete things, for examples materials, food, clothes etc. that have a direct impact on the lives of young people.

According to respondents at Think Peace, COJEPAREM, and AJCET, part of the strategy they adopt is to bring essential materials that youths in the communities need in addition to involving young people in everything they do when they organize an activity in their community. In addition, several respondents at Think Peace and AJCET noted that their organizations have made a conscious decision to include youths and community members in the development and implementation of activities such as food distribution in the communities. In fact, they prefer to have an evenly divided number with 50% of people involved in the development and implementation of activities come from within the communities where the activities will be implemented. In many cases, respondents noted that in addition to having community members involved in all phases of program development and implementation, it is vital to seek the buy-in of community leaders in order to have a positive outcome.

In other cases, an employee of AJCET noted that it remains imperative to collaborate with women only due to cultural norms in some communities. To do that, LYNGOs work with women's organizations that have the leverage and ability to identify young women

or areas requiring the expertise of LYNGOs. This approach falls under the overall strategy of identifying all the influential people who can either facilitate access to communities or influence the decisions of young people in communities. Gradually, they are using this strategy to communicate and work in difficult areas. Three staff members at COJEPAREM noted that there are many ways communities contribute to their violent extremism prevention strategy. For example, many communities share information concerning young people who may be on the verge of joining a violent group or have demonstrated some early warning sign of violence or any suspicious behavior. A respondent from AJCET noted:

Information from community members in two villages, Ogossagou and Welingara, have been extremely helpful to us in many ways. We were able to reach out to a couple of young people who were at the pre-radicalization stage and wanted to join Islamic terror cells. With the approval from their parents, we took them out of their community and travelled with them to Bamako where we enrolled them into a youth vocational program.

A respondent from Think Peace also noted that for any community engagement to be effective,

engagement should be honest. LYNGOs workers should get to know people in the communities they serve and build a relationship in which community members can talk to each other openly and share their opinions and grievances freely.... This is because community members need to feel that they can trust us to the point that they will want to confide in us for a fruitful engagement to happen.

Theme #7: Communications Strategies to Confront the Propaganda Messaging of Violent Extremists

Many respondents recognized that young people in Mali use social media platforms and messaging as a means of communication and information sharing on various topics.

Three respondents from AJCET noted that violent extremist groups use the same types of

social media and have been “particularly skilled at creating and disseminating propaganda, such as video clips, messages, and narratives that aim to generate support for their cause among young people and gain new recruits.”

In addition, several respondents noted that young people do not have the right information and, paradoxically, the terrorist groups that attack the communities also have a communication strategy in place to be able to discourage young people who want peace. According to staff member at COJEPAREM, “Jihadist groups are always trying to ensure that young people are discouraged by playing psychological games with them. Therefore, our organization has put in place strategies adapted to such situations.”

ACJET has specific approaches to deal with the Jihadist influence on young people. The need for crafting specific strategies is due to the fact that a strategy could be appropriate for certain communities while the same strategy might not work in other communities. The global strategy is to reach out to communities and share key information that can help prevent violent extremism.

In many communities, the narratives disseminated by extremist groups using online and offline approaches exploit pre-existing grievances of young people. According to respondents at COJEPAREM, on the one hand many local authorities in many communities in central and northern Mali claim that they no longer feel the pulse of their communities and do not have the facilities for outreach and communication with the youth who are inclined to join the ranks of violent extremists’ groups. On the other hand, many alienated and disaffected youth complain that they are misunderstood by their families, community, and state authorities. Because social media platforms are used by

both the youth community and violent extremists, social media is a key means to either fuel or reduce violence in the country.

A staff member at Think Peace attributes this phenomenon to the deep differences in intergenerational communication generated by modern technology, culture, and religion. Regarding religion, all respondent argued that LYNGOs' strategies to counter violent extremism narratives must be context specific. A staff member at Think Peace noted that a counternarrative project organized by Think Peace found that "in Timbuktu, young people being recruited into violent extremists' groups were enrolled in three madrassas that were teaching 'Wahhabism' and promoting the views of literalist theologians rather than those of more spiritual Islamic scholars." A staff member at Think Peace noted:

Every evening, hundreds of young people crowd into the courtyard of Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara's mosque, located in run-down Bankoni neighbourhood on the outskirts of Bamako, to wait to hear about Shari`a from the head imam..... Much of the information has purported to offer justifications and solutions for many young people's sense of exclusion, disempowerment, and social isolation by providing a vision of empowerment and community through commitment to a bigger cause.

The information young people hear from some imams have led to some people to join some violent groups. Hence, "we need to counter that information," noted a respondent at AJCET. In addition, he stated that the success of AJCET's communication strategy to prevent violent extremism narratives has been reliant on how well "we understand the community we are targeting as well as how engaging the counternarrative strategy is." As seen in the figure below, the president of AJCET is leading a three-hour session on violent extremism counternarratives at MiKADO FM, with the aim of teaching the youths how to spot fake and misleading news.



Source: AJCET Facebook Page

Figure 28: The President of AJCET During a Violent Extremism Counternarratives Session At MiKADO FM Radio

A staff member at COJEPAREM noted that “while understanding the target community was important for an effective communication strategy to prevent violent extremism narratives in communities across Mali, the credibility of LYNGOs and their representatives in the community is the most important aspect of any strategy.” That is because if the LYNGO, its representative, or the counternarrative message is not credible, it risks worsening community relations and increasing the number of young people who

might be inclined to join violent extremist groups. The figure below shows a preventing violent extremism communication campaign jointly facilitated by HSC's implementing partners, Think Peace, REJEFPO and PJC, with the objective being to engage youth and local leaders/authorities in the prevention and fight against violent extremism in Mali.

PVE Campaign in Bamako

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A video on the PVE campaign in the municipalities of the district of Bamako. This campaign was jointly facilitated by HSC's implementing partners, Think Peace, REJEFPO and PJC, with the objective being to engage youth and local leaders/authorities in the prevention and fight against violent extremism in Mali.

Source: Think Peace Website

Figure 29: Violent Extremism Prevention Communication Campaign

As part of their communication strategies, Think Peace, COJEPAREM, and AJCET play a vital role in designing programs to prevent youth involvement in extremism in all its forms, including hate speech, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia, by promoting social cohesion and a sense of belonging. According to a staff member at Think Peace,

Our actions towards the communities we serve are responsible and, in general, favor a discourse of inclusion. In that, our communication strikes the right balance between delivering a clear message and not stigmatizing young people in the community. We are also very instrumental in allocating the necessary resources to establish programs to prevent the youth from joining violent extremist groups.

An employee of COJEPAREM noted that collecting, analyzing, and assessing programs have some challenges. One important challenge involves the reliability of data LYNGOs collect in communities.

Theme #8: Key Stakeholders Engagement to Support Local Violent Extremism Prevention Strategies

In many cases, local authorities sometimes do not have the means to deal with youth enrolment into extremism nor they do consider it a priority. For staff members of COJEPAREM, it is important to highlight to these leaders that they have information and knowledge in this area which can be very useful in the fight against extremism.

According to an employee of AJCET, LYNGOs raise awareness among a range of stakeholders who are in direct contact with individuals or groups at risk. These stakeholders include, for example, community leaders, local security officials, prison staff, social workers, teachers, and health professionals. They provide them adequate training to help them better understand the concept of violent extremism and the importance of tolerance as a tool for preventing youth extremism. A staff member of COJEPAREM stated: “Most engagement between local communities, civil society groups, and government agencies make communities more resilient and governments more responsive to those communities’ concerns.” In addition, she stated:

There is a need for greater networking opportunities at the community level for all stakeholders involved in violent extremism prevention...this would allow for more sharing of lessons learned that will ensure that current strategy incoherencies are addressed and effective strategies to prevent violent extremism are mutually reinforced.

A staff member of Think Peace went further and noted that his organization understood the need to lay emphasis on young people, especially women, as part of the stakeholder's engagement. For example, Think Peace was involved in the drafting of the country's national strategy to prevent violent extremism and made sure that the role that young people can play to prevent extremism was highlighted in the document. He acknowledged that LYNGOs have also deemed important the need to work with, and have the state and other national and regional institutions involved in, the prevention of youth recruitment into extremism.

In terms of national institutions, Think Peace and AJCET have acknowledged that they must work with women, youth, religious, and traditional groups. However, they posit that Mali cannot solve its current security concerns in isolation, especially because the problems the country is facing are "regional by nature" (AJCET staff member). While AJCET initially focused on the youth at the local level, eventually this organization started working with other institutions, such as the institutional framework to promote development and security within five member countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger (G5 Sahel) and institutions that are part of ECOWAS. This shift in strategy has helped them gain a better assessment of the violent extremism crisis in Mali.

In relation to their national activities, COJEPAREM, Think Peace, and AJCET have made a conscious decision to go down to the villages and communities at the lowest level

possible because they understood that from one community to the other the concerns are different, and the general understanding of the Malian crisis is conceived differently as well.

Thus, the key strategy that these three organizations adopted was to go to the communities and villages in central and northern Mali and conduct studies to understand the underlying concerns, including the needs of the communities, and evaluate the security arrangements in place for community protection. These studies were conducted in the forms of surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. After completion of these studies, the organizations began to decide which projects or approaches could be implemented to resolve the issues outlined by the communities. A respondent at Think Peace noted:

All or most of our projects that we implement are linked to the evaluation that has been conducted to understand the needs and concerns of the citizens in the local communities Also, it is worth noting that these interventions often differ from region to region, and from community to community.

For example, in the resolution of conflict, one thing that LYNGOs have observed, especially in the center or northern of the country, is that conflicts are only resolved in some communities due to the status and legitimacy of the head of the community or village, while in other communities, where the head of the community has no legitimacy or power, conflict drags on forever.

Respondents noted that LYNGOs need to explain to key stakeholders, including donors, the importance of surveying communities and understanding the drivers of youth enrolment into violent extremism, and not to generalize the findings. According to several respondents at Think Peace, “There is no magic formula for communities that are

near each other; therefore, the best solution is to look at issues in Mali on a case-by-case basis. This has been the most important aspect of our strategies in the local communities.”

Respondents from the three LYNGOs noted that there are external dynamics that are greater at the community level, while external influences could come from the regional or national levels. A staff member of COJEPAREM stated:

In Mali, there exists the economic plan for social development that defines the action plan and priorities for national, regional, and community development and security. Sometimes, regional priority could influence some decisions that take place at the community level. Even though the national strategies for security and development of Mali have influence on regional and community priorities and decisions, it is important to highlight that these strategies are political in nature. This means that the strategies the LYNGOs design to prevent extremism in the local communities are sometimes influenced both positively and negatively at the implementation phase by national and sometimes regional strategies that have been put in place by the state.

According to several respondents, the violent extremism prevention strategy of the national government does not take into account the needs of local communities. The design, drafting, and implementation of the government strategy remains general in nature and does not seek direct input of vulnerable youths and communities. For example, a respondent noted that during a violent extremism prevention dialogue at the community level in Kidal, a national authority made the decision to promote the United Nations Global Strategy to Prevent Extremism and implement it at the national, regional, and local community levels equally. As stated by a respondent at AJCET: “This is plainly wrong, Mali is different from Kenya; Mopti is different from Gao, and extremist groups function differently in the central and northern part of the country.”

Perception of the Cumulative Impact of LYNGOs' Strategies to Prevent Youth Enrolment into Violent Extremism and Terrorism

Though LYNGOs are among the main actors in many local communities in Mali that work to prevent youth enrolment into extremism, doubts and criticism have arisen as to their legitimacy as civil society actors representing the people they serve and their ability to deliver on the objectives for which they exist. The literature that praises LYNGOs tends to see them as important holders of economic resources and sources of hope in the youth and violent extremism prevention sphere. Thus, the opinion survey of young people in Mali is designed to help gain a better understanding of how young people in Mali perceive the national, international, and local youth NGOs. It provides systematic feedback and information from young people on (1) their views regarding the security environment in Mali; (2) what they perceive as responsible for the current youth participation in violence associated with extremist groups in northern and central Mali; (3) overall impressions of national, international, and local youth NGOs' effectiveness and results, knowledge work, and activities in Mali; and (4) their opinion on what LYNGOs must do to deal with or prevent violent extremism in their communities.

Conceptualization of Peace and Violent Extremism in Mali

When asked what the term peace and security mean for young people in Mali, most alluded to the necessity to define the context and agreed that peace does not mean the absence of violence or the end of violent conflicts. Young people interviewed for this research described peace as a collective harmony, "absence of tension," and the idea of

“no harm to others.” Also, respondents described violent extremism in the following ways:

The attitude or an idea of defending a position at all costs; it is all violence based on social and or ethnic belonging; it is irresponsibility; people who kill to satisfy their envy to kill and hide this behind the cover of religion; radicalization in an armed group that kills innocent people in the name of social identity; political, social or religious ideology that serves as a theoretical basis for actions that go against the will or the interests of all, in a violent way or with violence.

Respondents mentioned that the concepts of violent extremism are not foreign to them and that peace is part of their values and aspirations as citizens of Mali. Despite a widespread feeling of injustice, frustration, mistrust, and even despair, youth respondents made it very clear that many young people who join violent extremist groups are in many cases in favor of peace in their communities. Respondents underscored the importance of trust between the youths, their communities, LYNGOs, and other stakeholders that are engaged in violent extremism prevention in Mali.

Perception of Actions of LYNGOs

At the onset, twenty-seven out of fifty-seven respondents noted that the use of the terms violent extremism, terrorism, and violent extremism prevention has gained increasing popularity among LYNGOs. In addition to the fact that these terms are controversial, fifteen respondents noted that they can become a source of problems not only for the LYNGOs but for the communities that LYNGOs intend to help as well. One respondent noted that LYNGOs have borrowed these terms from the West and have taken

on the discourse, which according to the respondent does not seek to understand violence in Mali from “multiple lenses.”

Despite the concern about the use of the terms violent extremism, terrorism, and violent extremism prevention, twenty-two out of fifty-seven respondents noted that LYNGOs must use these terms to tackle youth enrolment into violent extremism, especially because of the widespread acceptance of these terms among donors, government officials, and the international community at large.

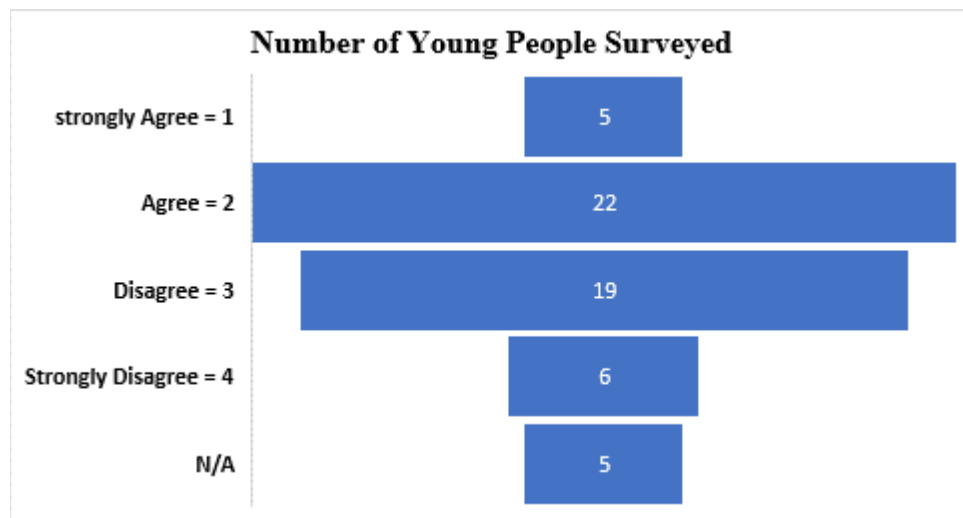
Out of fifty-seven respondents, twenty-two agreed that LYNGOs are working positively to prevent violent extremism, while nineteen respondents disagree that the strategies of LYNGOs have been effective at preventing violent extremism in Mali. In addition, twenty-six young people argued that what gives LYNGOs credibility over national and international NGOs is that their violent extremism prevention strategies have predominantly been focused on their understanding of local conditions and in the trust, they have built with the different groups of young people in the communities in which they operate. These relationships, according to young people, have informed and made it easier for local NGOs to work with different communities in which other actors could not always easily have access. A young person surveyed wrote:

There is a strong relationship between perceived grievances and violent extremism although there is some speculation about whether grievances are causative. However, the relationship that LYNGOs have with local communities helps them identify young people who may become or are radicalized and helps prevent them from joining violent extremist groups.

A respondent surveyed noted that most projects of LYNGOs focus on building resilience of communities, countering extremist messages, engaging with young people,

and dealing with broader intercommunity grievances. He stated that the strategy of Think Peace on youth empowerment has been useful and their work in schools has a measurable impact on changing attitudes. Another young person argued that while there exists evidence of successful LYNGO violent extremism prevention efforts, many initiatives to prevent young people from joining extremist groups do not always fully succeed. This is because some of these initiatives are poorly conceived or executed.

The chart below shows that there was a mixed evaluation of the work of LYNGOs, even though participants to the survey agreed that LYNGOs have established several projects to strengthen social cohesion and fight against radicalization of young people. Twenty-two respondents agreed that LYNGOs' strategies to prevent violent extremism have been effective. Nineteen respondents underscored that LYNGOs' strategies to prevent violent extremism have not been effective, due to the lack of proper consultation and coordination with at-risk youth.



Source: Author

Figure 30: Survey Result of Youths Respondents

Out of fifty-seven respondents, nineteen respondents disagree that the strategies of LYNGOs have been effective at preventing violent extremism in Mali. A respondent noted that although Mali is making every effort to emerge from its security and governance crisis, the recruitment of youths into violent extremism remains generally unaddressed. Another respondent noted that:

The ability of LYNGOs to effectively prevent young people from joining violent extremism remains varied at best..... This is because strategies designed by LYNGOs are often based on a simplistic understanding of the reasons why some young people engage in violent extremism.

Other common themes underscored by respondents were concerns about mismanagement, lack of transparency, and duplication of LYNGO activities. A respondent noted that “many LYNGOs exhibit a wide range of corruption, if you want to become rich, found an LYNGO.” In general, the majority of the respondents noted that despite Mali’s challenges, youth remain the country’s biggest source of hope and possibility. Therefore, LYNGOs and their partners must strive towards finding a solution to prevent youth enrolment into violent extremism groups and support youths who remain peaceful, even when the odds are stacked against them.

Actions LYNGOs Should Take to Prevent Young People from Joining Violent Extremism Groups

Despite the persistence of worrying factors, young people identified approaches that could prevent their peers from joining violent extremists. The majority of the respondents aspire to see jobs created for the youths and an end to the isolation of their communities and see this as a precondition for peace in Mali. It is noteworthy that even though there are mixed opinions about the effectiveness of LYNGOs, the majority of youth respondents were convinced that LYNGOs must be at the forefront of all strategies to combat violent extremism in their communities. Among the strategies perceived as effective by a majority of respondents, addressing the grievances of the youths and orienting them towards economic and beneficial training were seen as the most important tools to prevent youth enrolment into violent extremism. A youth respondent noted that “LYNGOs need to craft strategies that are based on evidence about risk and resilience factors and avoid the marginalization of already vulnerable young people.”

These sorts of recommendations that are underscored by many youth respondents show that they are very much aware of the real costs and effects of violent extremism in their communities. By recommending these ideas, the youths are invariably conveying their predispositions to support efforts to combat violent extremism. Young people surveyed have a clear understanding of the intervention of international and national LYNGOs. According to the survey, they argue that collaboration between national officials and LYNGOs could make a major contribution to the fight against violent extremism. Many mentioned that LYNGOs should play a critical role in reestablishing the social contract between the government and its citizens. As stated by many youth respondents, LYNGOs need to work with key stakeholders to implement strategies that

could reestablish a national sense of belonging, enhance mutual trust among different social actors, overcome perceived discrimination, and provide young people all over the country with adequate opportunities to engage in the political discourse and political sphere. Another young person noted that “strategies designed by LYNGOs must be long-term, with consolidated efforts to address the fundamental needs of at-risk young people.”

Conclusion

This chapter provides data that addresses the following three research questions:

1. What are LYNGOs’ assessments of the drivers of youth involvement into violent extremism?
2. What are the LYNGOs’ violent extremism prevention strategies in Mali?
3. What are the youths’ perceptions of the work of LYNGOs, and national NGOs involved in preventing violent extremism in Mali?

The findings suggest that, despite some significant steps to prevent violent extremism in Mali, it remains a serious threat to the youths and communities. The youths are a vital source of support for many violent extremist groups in Mali. However, the ways the youths are recruited vary widely across contexts. The findings suggest that the vulnerability of youth to violent extremism recruitment can be affected by a multitude of factors that include the following: diminished economic opportunities, protection for self and family members, religious identity, and the impact of climate change. However, the

relative importance of these factors varies individually and according to the local community context.

To counter this threat, LYNGOs have crafted bottom-up strategies to prevent youth enrolment into joining violent extremism. These strategies include counterextremist messaging, awareness-building, and development approaches intended to address the drivers of individuals and communities choosing to align with violent extremist groups. Whether LYNGOs' strategies have actually prevented Malian youths from joining violent extremism is yet to be fully proven. This is especially because, as the findings suggest, the youths in Mali have a mixed perception of the effectiveness of LYNGOs' strategies designed to prevent youth enrolment into violent extremism. The findings concluded that LYNGOs will effectively prevent the youth from joining violent extremism groups if their strategies are sustained by local communities, supported by other stakeholders, and address the underlying drivers of violent extremism in Mali. The table below shows the list of themes and examples of supporting descriptions that were discussed in this chapter.

Source: Author

Table 5: List of Themes and Examples of Supporting Descriptions

Table: Themes	
Broad themes	Examples of Supporting Descriptions
Theme #1 Promoting Peers for Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion to Mitigate Youths Enrolment in Violent Extremism	A key component of the peers for peacebuilding strategy is to establish and promote violence prevention academies in the schools and in the communities.
	My local organization set up football teams in Mopti and Kidal to bring young people together around sport as a unifying factor.
Theme #2 Empowering Youth to Be Actively Engaged in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution Activities	To address civic engagement issues, Think Peace in partnership with the Global Fund for Preventing Violent Extremism (GCERF) organized a mural project where youths can think, innovate, and collaborate with each other to solve conflict problems at the community level.
	Our strategy has been to use informal social meeting grounds, homes, and mosques, as a safe space to create a controlled discussion between young people and national and local leaders that are prepared to offer constructive solutions to young people's grievance.
Theme #3 Providing Access to Formal Education and Skills Development	Think Peace and AJCET work hand in hand with schools to educate the youth on major themes, such as tolerance, respect for others, and human rights, as a key tool for preventing extremism.
	My local organization highlights the importance of education, especially at home with the family and with educators in schools in vulnerable communities.

Theme #4 Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Young Women to Engage in Prevention and Response Efforts Related to Violent Extremism	Tailoring effective violent extremism prevention strategies requires understanding how the social status of young women and men in their communities informs their motivations to join a violent extremist group.
	Think Peace has been organizing monthly videoconferences entitled “Ben Kéné – The word of the communities.” One of the recent conferences, which took place in March 2021, focused on the following question: “What are the obstacles to the participation of women in peacebuilding and conflict mediation processes?”
Theme #5 Promoting Community Engagement is Key to Preventing Youth from Joining Violent Extremism	We teach the youth diverse ways in which people communicate with one another and consider how to respond to “hate speech.”
	To raise awareness among young people about the need to live together, our organization in partnership with Mercy Corp, and with fund from the USAID “LAFIA” project carried out four days of an awareness campaign in four districts, namely Medina Coura, the Boboli market in Niarela, Bagadadji, and the San -Zou field at the Hippodrome
Theme #6 Providing Access to Basic Needs and Services is Key to Preventing Youth from Joining Violent Extremism	We need to have concrete strategies, because when you go to meet young people, you have to get out of the theoretical a bit. Awareness is a good approach, but you can’t just keep raising awareness all the time. We must bring concrete things, for examples materials, food, clothes etc. that have direct impact on the lives of young people
	Our organization has made a conscious decision to include youths and community members in the development and implementation of activities such as food distribution in the communities.
Theme #7 Communications Strategies to Confront the Propaganda Messaging of Violent Extremists	AJCET’s communication strategy to prevent violent extremism narratives has been reliant on how well “we understand the community we are targeting as well as how engaging the counter narrative strategy is.”
	Our actions towards the communities we serve are responsible and, in general, favor a discourse of inclusion. In that, our communications strike the right balance between delivering a clear message and not stigmatizing young people in the community

Theme #8 Key Stakeholders Engagement to Support Local Violent Extremism Prevention Strategies	There is a need for greater networking opportunities at the community level for all stakeholders involved in violent extremism prevention...This would allow for more sharing of lessons learned that will ensure that current strategy incoherencies are addressed and effective strategies to prevent violent extremism are mutually reinforced.
	Many Malian and foreign organizations operate in Mali, and therefore it is important to coordinate and create synergies between different efforts.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Introduction

Mali is facing a rapid rise in violent extremism in which young people are the main actors. Faced with these challenges, international, regional, and national actors have suggested solutions in the form of policies, conventions, and strategies. However, these solutions are poorly informed by evidence-based data. The little research that does exist on the topic of countering the involvement of young people in violent extremism in Mali often takes the form of studies and literature reviews, which does not capture an in-depth analysis of the involvement of young people in violent extremism and the crafting of viable solutions to prevent them from joining violent extremist groups.

This dissertation was developed to fill these gaps. Hence, it identified international, regional, sub-regional, and national strategies and investigated LYNGOs' strategies to prevent violent extremism and counter terrorism in Mali. The specific questions addressed are: What are the drivers of violent extremism among the youth in Mali? What are LYNGOs' in Mali's assessments on the drivers of youth recruitment into violent extremism in Mali? What are the LYNGOs' violent extremism prevention strategies in Mali? What are the youths' perceptions of the work of LYNGOs involved in preventing violent extremism in Mali?

Through interviews, discussions, and surveys, the research takes an in-depth look at the strategies of three LYNGOs, namely, Think Peace, AJCET, and COJEPAREM, in

their quest to prevent youth radicalization and enrolment into violent extremism in Mali. The data sources are the literature and semi- structured interviews of twenty-four employees of the three LYNGOs and survey of fifty-seven young men and women (eighteen to thirty-five years old), representing the following geographic locations: Bamako, Gao, Kayes, Kidal, Koulikoro, Ménaka, Mopti, Sikasso, Ségou, Taoudénit, and Timbuktu. The interviews and surveys represent a rich process that provided respondents with the opportunity to express their observations in a confidential manner. The respondents for this study provided important, practical, and forward-looking views that can inform future strategies and policy and program interventions. In order to ensure respondents' confidentiality and identity protection, the research followed a rigorous procedure of protection of respondents' identity and confidentiality. Also, the research outlined theories such as relative deprivation, social identity theory, and psychological frameworks to understand the motivations for radicalization. In addition, the research utilized an organizational capacity assessment process to obtain information about the internal and external factors, such as economic trends, stakeholders involved, and the political environment in Mali.

Summary of Key Findings

This section summarizes the findings from the study subdivided into (1) the global response to violent extremism in Mali; (2) LYNGOs' perspectives on the drivers of youth involvement into violent extremism and terrorism in Mali; (3) the strategies of LYNGOs designed to prevent youth enrolment into violent extremism; and (4) the youths'

perceptions of the work of LYNGOs involved in preventing violent extremism in Mali. It is important to note that the findings of this dissertation cannot be generalized beyond the studied locations. The respondents' views offer valuable and coherent insights that fill knowledge gaps in the available data and field research.

a. Global Response to Violent Extremism in Mali

Mali has been the scene of perpetual conflict and displacement for nearly eight years, with the security situation in Mali, especially in the central and northern parts of the country, remaining a source of widespread concerns. In many communities, civilians are falling victim to violent extremist and terrorist groups which are increasingly asserting control in places such as Ogossagou, in the Mopti region. Despite the fact that the international community has pledged billions of dollars in military aid to counter the crisis in Mali, in addition to attempts by the UN, the AU, ECOWAS, and the Malian government to implement policies and strategies to prevent young people from enrolling into violent extremism, the question is, why is the violence getting worse, given the significant efforts to stem it?

Against a backdrop of rising extremist violence, many experts and policy-makers have argued that international efforts have failed to yield substantial progress, challenging the assumption that increased international engagement advances security and governance objectives. International efforts to prevent violence in communities in Mali have not been successful for many reasons. One reason is that strategies and policies designed to date have often been based on speculative conclusions about the drivers of violent extremism

and the best means to address them. Also, responses to violent extremism and acts of terror have been primarily through the use of security forces and have alienated and created mistrust in local communities that should otherwise serve as a vanguard against violent extremist and terrorist groups. Another reason for the failure of most of the existing international, regional, and national arrangements to prevent violence and terrorism is due to the fact that they are either not inclusive enough or not sufficiently grounded in the local context. For example, limited resources represents a major challenge for AU- and ECOWAS-led initiatives.

On one hand, researchers have concluded that the global and sometime local search for a singular root cause of youth enrolment into violent extremist groups in Mali largely misinterprets the problem. This conclusion often leads national and international actors to design violent extremism and counterterrorism strategies that wrongly and unfairly label many young people in a community as more likely to join violent extremist groups. On the other hand, researchers have concluded that local actors, especially LYNGOs, are innovative on how to prevent young people from joining violent extremist groups. However, while they have a good grasp of the context and ideas to prevent young people from joining extremist groups, they often lack the funds to put their innovative solutions into practice and make them last. To help local actors succeed in the quest, international and national actors must continue to allocate resources to support local development approaches and develop local capacity to prevent young people from joining violent extremist groups. The research ends with young people's perceptions of the work of

LYNGOs, and national NGOs involved in preventing youth enrolment into violent extremism in Mali.

b. LYNGOS' Perspectives on the Drivers of Youth Involvement in Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Mali

Youths are the group most commonly identified as being vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism. The explanations and motivations as to why youths join terrorist and violent extremist groups abound. Approaching the issue of terrorism and violent extremism, its consequences for youth, and individual forms of participation in and support of armed and violent groups represent a complex and sensitive topic. The research data presented have provided key insights into LYNGOs' assessments of violent extremism. The findings show that most interview respondents believe that perceptions of economic exclusion, in addition to protection and social obligation, climate change, and religious factors were the most common reasons why youth join violent extremist groups. Also, youth enrolment into violent extremist groups is the result of the environment where various religious interpretations are acceptable. In addition, the use of online communication is a relatively new means of disseminating terrorist and violent extremist propaganda. Respondents noted that many young people are recruited through propaganda on the internet, through schools, or as a result of pressure from their community or family members.

The findings also show that many interview respondents noted that many young individuals in Mali do not become radicalized, despite facing similar economic, social,

and political challenges. Also, both educated and uneducated youth from wealthy or poor families may be equally predisposed to radicalization and violence.

In general, the fact that so many youths have been radicalized to join terrorist and violent extremist groups remains a cause for concern that requires closer scrutiny and understanding. The findings highlight the pressing risks among young people as a result of the ongoing conflict situation in Mali. Young people continue to suffer disproportionately from the effects of the crisis in Mali. The scale of grievances combined with personal experiences and the influence of violent extremist narratives can push or pull young people into embracing violence as a legitimate means of redress. Hence, many respondents noted that grievances and underlying push or pull factors should be mitigated through strategies that are tailored to each community. Thus, to effectively prevent youth enrolment and the rise of violent extremism in communities across Mali, the Malian state and its regional and international partners should move away from the increased reliance on military action, and urgently focus on working with LYNGOs to improve education and employment for young people. One lesson is central: rebuilding positive and trust-based social relationships across ideological divides among young people and communities is of the utmost importance. The presence of LYNGOs in Mali present the key opportunity for the state to assess the grievances of the youths in vulnerable communities, including those at risk of being recruited into extremism. The findings also suggest that for violent extremism prevention strategies to succeed, LYNGOs need a solid structural base and support from national leadership.

c. The strategies of LYNGOs in Preventing Youth Enrolment into Violent Extremism

As terrorist and violent extremist attacks remain a persistent threat in Mali, there is a consensus among the research respondents that military operations and security measures alone are not enough to defeat terrorism and violent extremism. At the same time, many security sector actors have also recognized that responding to violent extremism deals with symptoms, not with underlying root causes, and therefore does not provide long-term solutions. Also, there is a general understand among security sector actors and LYNGOs that local grievances can be rapidly and easily manipulated into violent extremism through modern communication technology. The use of social media and communication forums have made it easier for violent extremists' organizations to construct, and for young people to subscribe to, narratives of injustice. Therefore, in order to understand young people's desire to become members of violent extremist groups and design solutions to prevent them from joining such groups, it is also critical to recognize the nature of young people's agency. Despite all the difficulties and confusion, LYNGOs' violent extremism and counterterrorism strategies both rest on a theory that is both important and timely in Mali. The three LYNGOs have developed early warning tools to spot individual youth that may be at risk of been recruited. In addition, the strategies recognize the strong influence of the community and address risk factors at the group level.

The findings suggest that successful strategies demand identification of early signs of radicalization and the mitigation of individual and collective grievances, structural factors, and drivers that in the worst case may support or fuel violence. The key strategies of

LYNGOs that were highlighted by the respondents include (1) peer to peer engagement and support; (2) engaging and empowering youth; (3) education and skills development; (4) promoting gender equality and women's empowerment; (5) promoting community engagement; (6) strategic communications to prevent violent extremism narratives; and (7) key stakeholders' engagement.

The research highlights that prevention is not an alternative to security actors' responses; it complements those efforts and lays emphasis on the importance of focusing on youth and all local stakeholders, including religious and community leaders, in the quest to prevent youth enrolment into violent extremism. Therefore, LYNGOs have a critical role to play in intervening at different stages of the youth radicalization process before a violent extremist or terrorist act is committed.

In addition, the research reinforces the need for LYNGOs to focus on understanding and addressing the underlying root causes of violent extremism as part of a strategy. They must invest in analysis to understand the local context, trust-building processes with community actors, and capacity development of local structures. In the design and implementation of violent extremism prevention strategies, youths should be engaged to reflect the context-specificity of violent extremism dynamics and the need to draw on and reinforce local, endogenous PVE mechanisms. Malian youths will find an alternative path away from violence if they feel they can achieve economic and social status without joining violent groups.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Study

In recent years, violent extremist activities in Mali have escalated dramatically. Violent extremist groups have increasingly targeted youths, women, and communities at large. Using many forms of violence, they have terrorized communities and destroyed the social fabric. Violent extremism is a serious crime. It cannot and should not be associated with any nationality, religion, or ethnicity. However, an understanding of the factors that influence youths to abandon the life of violence and the violent extremist group they join in the first place could help identify effective strategies that could help prevent youth radicalization. This research informs a set of actionable recommendations for policymakers, donors, LYNGOs, and civil society organizations aimed at preventing youth participation and enrolment in violent extremist groups in both the short and long terms.

Key Recommendations for LYNGOs

Short-Term:

- Map the changing dynamics of violent extremism and conflict across Mali
- Reassess LYNGOs violent extremism strategies for their effectiveness in Mali, strengthen good practices, and prioritize community engagement
- Evaluate the impact of recent LYNGOs programs and the durability of their effects on youth attitudes, behavior, and perceptions of the community

Long-Term:

- Link local and national responses together in a combined top-down and bottom-up strategy
- Promote gender equality and women's empowerment
- Evaluate the impact of local and national responses and the durability of their effects on youth attitudes and behavior
- Build partnerships for preventing violent extremism
- Formulate an LYNGO-wide strategy for Mali that is gender-sensitive, feasible, and pays attention to the structural drivers of youth enrolment into violent extremism

Key Recommendations for national, regional, and international actors

The human security lens highlights how the youth in Mali experience insecurity at a personal and community level. In addition, the way the youth understand, and experience insecurity is often directly influenced by events or actions taken by national, regional, and international actors to redress the conflict issues in the country.

Therefore, national, regional, and international actors should not focus exclusively on counter-terrorism operations, which contribute to a rejection of the state by the youth, especially when accompanied by abuses. On the contrary, national, regional, and international actors must demonstrate a greater ambition to support the work of local actors especially LYNGOs in the following area:

1. Promote efforts towards dialogue that ensure Malian youths' ownership of violent extremism prevention and peace

Depriving Malians of control over their own future could risk creating space for forces that oppose long-term peace in Mali. Therefore, national, regional, and international actors should facilitate dialogue between Malians, old and young, rather than hand over any discourse to regional actors such as ECOWAS. In practice, this means that national, regional, and international actors must harmonize their methods, including how they support LYNGOs' endeavors, so as to avoid doing more harm than good.

2. Purposefully help expand and improve LYNGOs operational capacity

National, regional, and international actors should be committed to nurturing a collaborative culture, including by helping to build the capacities of LYNGOs and giving them greater decision-making power and flexibility. In addition, national, regional, and international actors must purposely provide additional resources, including access to information and financial resources for LYNGOs in an efficient, effective, and responsibly way. Capacity building is a real challenge. Hence, national, regional, and international actors need to walk the walk.

3. Purposefully focus on results

National, regional, and international actors should work and support LYNGOs to enhance quality services, reduce duplication of services, and ensure uniformity of violent extremism prevention strategies through collaborative efforts with other stakeholders in their geographic area of operation.

4. Commitment to shared partnership and ongoing mentoring

National, regional, and international actors should support partnerships between LYNGOs and other organizations with different strengths, such as administrative capacity and local technical knowledge. They must also continue to mentor and encourage LYNGOs to work with other civil society groups that are engaged in violent extremism prevention.

Appendix

Interview Questions

The following information is presented to the participant so that he/she can acquire knowledge about the research study. My name is Joel Amegboh. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University. I would like to interview you; I am conducting a research on the topic “**Understanding the Strategies of Local Youth Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: A Focus on Central and Northern Mali**” for my doctoral dissertation.

Researcher:

Telephone:

Email:

The primary aim of this research is to identify the range of strategies of local youth non-governmental organizations working to prevent and counter youth participation in violence in Central and Northern Mali — and then to situate such strategies within broader theories of conflict analysis and resolution that are relevant to efforts to combat violent extremism.

The research objectives are:

- I. What are the underlying drivers of violent extremism in Central and Northern Mali?
 - What are the factors that push and pull the youth to extremism?
 - What are the direct and indirect effects of violent extremism on the youth?
- II. What are LYNGOs’ perspectives on the underlying drivers, and dynamics of youth participation in violence in Central and Northern Mali

- III. What are the strategies of LYNGOs in the struggle to prevent and counter youth participation in violence in Central and Northern Mali?
- IV. What are the local perceptions of the work of LYNGOs involved in the prevention of youth participation in violence in Central and Northern Mali?

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study. There are no costs to you for participating in the study. Participation in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw at your own convenience. However, you will need to inform the researcher prior to withdrawing.

Data Confidentiality

In what format will you store the data?	Computer
Where will you store the data?	Computer Programs
How long will you keep the data?	5 years
Describe what security provisions will be taken to protect this data (e.g., password protection, locks).	Recording will be erased as soon as information has been transcribed or coded and is no longer needed for research. No names will ever be associated with the data, only a number that the participant is given to allow voluntary online feedback for longitudinal research

I will collect data for the study using the interviewing method in addition to reviewing documents. Equally, after the interview, I may be contacted for any clarifications (if any).

I will ensure confidentiality through the following process: The data collected during the interview will be recorded and stored in a safe place until the study is completed, after which all data will be destroyed. Your personal information will not be made known during discussion or published by the researcher. Upon written request, participants will receive a copy of the transcripts of their interview (only) for their review. The data collected during the interview will be recorded and stored in a safe place at George Mason University until the study is completed; after which all data will be destroyed. The data collected will be used for the above aim and objectives only. All recordings made during this study (participant observations, semi-structured interviews) and participants' names will be known only by me. I will create a system of pseudo-names; nobody except you needs to see their real names. In addition, if you choose to participate, you will respond to questions on demographics, drivers and effects of extremism, and the strategies for preventing and countering violent extremism in central and northern Mali. If you have any questions regarding this research,

Please fill the form on the next page.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

PhD Candidate - George Mason University

I. Demographic Information

Respondent #

Ethnic Group.....

Location:

Occupation:

f) Sex: Male ☐ Female ☐

g) Age Range 13-17 ☐ 18 – 25 ☐ 26 – 33 ☐ 34 – 40 ☐ 40 – 50 ☐ 50 – above ☐

h) Marital Status: Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Others ☐

i) Religion: Christian ☐ Muslim ☐ Traditional ☐ Others ☐

M. Educational level: No Education ☐ Some Education ☐ Primary School ☐ High School ☐ Graduate ☐ **(I. Factors that contribute to youth participation in violence in Northern and Central Mali?**

This section explores the general perception of factors driving youth vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups.

- In your opinion, what is responsible for the current youth participation in violence associated with extremist groups in Northern and Central Mali?
- How do you define youth participation in violence associated with extremist groups?

II. What factors contribute to youth participation in violence associated with extremist groups in Northern and Central Mali **I.What are LYNGOs perspectives on the underlying drivers, and dynamics of youth participation in violent extremism in Central and Northern Mali?**

- Who is experiencing violence?
- What forms of violence are people experiencing?
- What is the frequency of youth violence in your community?
- Where is violence happening?
- What are the driving factors causing people to feel unsafe?

- What are the impacts of violence?
- What makes people vulnerable to violence?
- How much violence is being reported?
- What are some of the barriers to reporting?
- What supports and services are people accessing?
- What are some barriers to accessing services?
- What are some gaps in services?

III. What are the strategies of LYNGOs in the struggle to prevent and counter youth participation in violence in Central and Northern Mali?

This section asks questions about strategies for coping with violent extremism:

- What preventive measures has your organization taken to help victims or to deal with perpetrators of violent extremism?
- What do you think local non-governmental organizations should do to deal with or prevent violent extremism?

Question for the local community members where local NGOs operate:

IV. What are the local perceptions of the work of LYNGOs involved in the prevention of youth participation in violence in Central and Northern Mali?

- My community is under threat.

Strongly agree										Strongly disagree	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		<input type="checkbox"/>

- My community has historically suffered more than most other communities in Mali.

Strongly agree										Strongly disagree	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		<input type="checkbox"/>

- Local Nongovernmental organizations working in your area respond to the needs and priorities of my community.

Strongly agree										Strongly disagree	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		<input type="checkbox"/>

Overall, please rate your impression of Local Nongovernmental organizations' effectiveness in Central and Northern Mali.											
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Not effective at all									Very effective	Don't know	

To what extent do you believe Local Nongovernmental organizations' employees are well prepared (e.g., skills and knowledge) to help prevent youth participation in violence in Central and Northern Mali?										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="checkbox"/>
To no degree at all									To a very significant degree	Don't know

How EFFECTIVE do you believe local non-governmental organizations are in terms of their capacity building work in violence prevention in Central and Northern Mali?

Not effective at all									Very effective	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		<input type="checkbox"/>

How EFFECTIVE do you believe local non-governmental organizations are in terms of preventing youth participation in violence in Central and Northern Mali?

Not effective at all										Very effective	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		<input type="checkbox"/>

When thinking about how to improve capacity building in Central and Northern Mali to help ensure the prevention of youth participation in violence, how IMPORTANT is it for local non-governmental organizations to be involved in the following aspects of capacity building?

	Not important at all										Very important	Don't know
Project implementation (or other organizational strengthening)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		<input type="checkbox"/>
Citizen engagement (incorporating citizens' voices into development)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		<input type="checkbox"/>
Policy design (for clarity and better incentives to achieve development goals)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		<input type="checkbox"/>

Which of the following do you identify as the local non-governmental organizations greatest WEAKNESSES in their work towards combatting extremist-oriented violence in Central and Northern Mali? (Choose no more than TWO)

1	Staff too inaccessible
2	Not exploring alternative policy options

3	Not adequately sensitive to political/social realities in Mali
4	Not enough public disclosure of its work
5	Arrogant in its approach
6	Not aligned with community priorities
7	The credibility of its knowledge/data
9	Not willing to honestly criticize policies and reform efforts in the country
10	Imposing technocratic solutions without regard to political and social realities
11	Inadequate number of staff members
12	Corruption
13	Other (please specify): _____
	Don't know

Conclusion:

I have completed the questions I have for you, thanks for your time. Do you have any question for me or any other thing you would like to say with regards to this interview?

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