

**Africa Center for Strategic Studies**

**Preventing Youth Radicalization  
in East Africa**



**Program Summary**

**Kigali, Rwanda  
22–27 January 2012**



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## **PROGRAM BACKGROUND**

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East Africa faces dynamic and complex radicalization challenges. From 22–27 January 2012, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) hosted a workshop titled *Preventing Youth Radicalization in East Africa* in Kigali, Rwanda. The workshop sought to foster a deeper understanding of the drivers of youth radicalization in the region and to generate policy recommendations aimed at decreasing the appeal of violent extremist groups. The event expanded upon a previous ACSS seminar, *Preventing Terrorism: Developing Comprehensive Solutions to the Challenges of Radicalization*, hosted in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2011. Like the preceding event, the *Preventing Youth Radicalization* workshop was organized in cooperation with U.S. government partners, including the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of African Affairs, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, and the U.S. Agency for International Development, which generously funded participants representing East African civil society organizations. U.S. Africa Command also contributed personnel to the workshop and provided important information about U.S. security cooperation in the region aimed at countering violent extremism.

The workshop was attended by forty-five participants from the governments of eleven East African countries (Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda), the United Kingdom, the United States, as well as a variety of East African civil society organizations. Attendees presented a diversity of perspectives drawn from military, intelligence, law enforcement, development, culture, communications, and civil society backgrounds. The workshop offered a unique opportunity for counter-radicalization practitioners to engage in discussions about cross-sectoral cooperation and best practices for mitigating violent extremism among the region’s growing and politically consequential youth population.



## INTRODUCTION

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East Africa's burgeoning youth population is increasingly defining the region's security environment. Population growth over the past several decades has made East Africa one of the youngest regions in the world and is projected to continue. At the same time, violent extremist organizations (VEOs) remain active in the region and have extended their influence in a number of areas. The *Preventing Youth Radicalization* workshop set out to identify the common challenges facing East Africa's youth and to explore strategies aimed at enhancing their resistance to radical ideologies.

Although violent extremists in East Africa adhere to diverse ideologies, the strategies that they employ to enlist youth into their ranks are often similar. Radical organizations understand and prey upon a combination of political realities, socioeconomic factors, and individual characteristics that render youth in East Africa vulnerable to VEO recruitment. A primary goal of the *Preventing Youth Radicalization* workshop was to promote understanding of the drivers of youth radicalization, identify East African youth's resiliencies and coping mechanisms to these drivers, and to generate policy recommendations aimed at mitigating the drivers.

With this objective in mind, the workshop assembled a diverse group of participants drawn from security institutions, civilian government agencies, and civil society organizations to discuss collaborative approaches to engaging the region's youth. Addressing radicalization challenges at both macro- and micro-levels requires that these sectors, often unfamiliar with each other, understand the other's strengths and limitations. Notably, East African youth representatives participated both as speakers and participants, enabling a cross-generational as well as cross-sectoral discussion to ensue.

Enhancing cross-sectoral trust is especially important when engaging youth at the margins of society. Rural-to-urban migration, the disintegration of traditional family and community structures, and a lack of formal employment have pushed large numbers of East African youth into the informal sector, where they interact infrequently or at cross-purposes with state institutions. Youth living in the informal sector are struggling to meet their basic needs and find their place in society. These youth are vulnerable to VEO recruiters, who offer them a strong sense of purpose, community, and even financial compensation.

Even though many East African youth live at the margins of society, they are nevertheless inundated with information made available by new technologies. Cell phones and, to a lesser extent, Internet access, even in rural areas, have revolutionized the ways in which East African youth communicate and stay informed. Information and communication technology is shaping youth culture and the methods used by young people to consume music, film, and art. The *Preventing Youth Radicalization* workshop sought to explore ways that technology and East Africa's evolving youth culture can be leveraged to resist radical narratives and promote positive alternatives to violent extremism.

A necessary caveat when approaching issues related to youth radicalization is the treatment of religion. Although violent extremists may articulate and justify their agendas using religious language, the workshop began with the assumption that religion is not an inherent source of violence, but rather, a positive channel through which youth radicalization is often most effectively countered. This point was reinforced by the inclusion of religious perspectives throughout plenary sessions and discussion groups, with many concrete examples of civil society and faith-based organizations' efforts to address active youth recruitment into VEOs in East Africa.

The analysis that follows is based on presentations and discussions that took place over the course of the workshop. While participants' reflections inform this program summary, identifying details are omitted in keeping with ACSS's strict policy of non-attribution.



## **KEY PROGRAM THEMES**

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### **OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT? EAST AFRICA'S YOUTH POPULATION**

#### ***Youth and Economic Growth***

The prevalence of a large and dynamic youth population is shaping East Africa's security landscape. The region's population is already one of the youngest in the world and is projected to grow younger over the coming decades. Seventy percent of Kenya's population and seventy-seven percent of Uganda's population are under the age of thirty, and Africa's overall population is expected to double by 2030.

Initial reactions to East Africa's "youth bulge" are frequently negative. East Africans wonder how they will feed, house, educate, and prepare for future generations of young people. Research on conflict and political violence indicates that young populations are more prone to conflict than older ones, and that youth are more likely to join radical organizations than adults. Participants at the *Preventing Youth Radicalization* workshop recognized the security challenges that a young population presents, while also highlighting the opportunities that it may bring.

The potential for East Africa's youth to serve as drivers of economic growth are apparent when comparing its demographic trends to other world regions, such as East Asia. In South Korea, for example, the country's youth bulge was converted into a national asset through a blend of educational programs and youth-oriented services that prepared young people for jobs in a modern and globally connected economy. However, most East African countries have not conducted sufficient government planning, attracted adequate amounts of private sector investment, or fostered the social awareness necessary to convert these demographic trends into national advantages, or even to properly accommodate their current and future young citizens.

#### ***Characteristics of Contemporary East African Youth***

East Africa's up-and-coming youth generation, or "cheetah generation," as it is increasingly identified, is marked by a number of unique characteristics. Participants noted that East African youth are increasingly connected to each other and the global marketplace of ideas via information and communication technology. Even very poor youth in East Africa are willing to sacrifice large portions of their income to purchase cell phones. In addition, improvements in Internet penetration have increased the number of East African youth accessing information online, albeit at relatively low levels when compared to other parts of the world. East African youth are using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and others to share ideas about a range of topics with each other and their peers in the diaspora. Although social media use is on the rise, texting and FM radio broadcasts remain the predominant modes of youth communication in East Africa.

Participants also noted that East African youth are more urban than previous generations. Youth in the region are migrating to cities in search of educational opportunities,

employment, and the modern amenities that accompany urban life. Although East Africa's rapidly growing cities provide opportunities, they are also places where youth experience hardships connected to job shortages, high costs of living, and a lack of traditional family and social structures. The difficulties of urban life are a source of youth frustration and may render certain young people vulnerable to radical influences. Participants suggested that counter-radicalization programs make special efforts to reach young people struggling to survive in large cities. Participants nevertheless underscored the importance of differentiating between youth in the region. Some East African youth choose to live in rural areas, adhere to more traditional lifestyles, and are far removed from the activities of the state. The region's youth bulge is both an urban and rural phenomenon.

East African youth also vary according to religious preferences, practicing Christianity, Islam, other world religions, or no religion at all. Participants agreed that religious experiences are an important factor when addressing youth radicalization, both as potential drivers of and antidotes to violent extremism. As such, they recommended that governments include religious leaders and mentors in their counter-radicalization planning and program implementation.

The country contexts in which East African youth are formed also impact their vulnerability to radicalization, especially the prevalence of conflict. Certain East African youth have experienced inter-state war, civil war, ethnic conflict, or post-election violence, while others have enjoyed relative peace. In addition, the region's youth live under different types of governments and have divergent experiences with their countries' public institutions. The diverse interactions that states maintain with their youth populations shape how young people view political involvement and their trust in or disillusionment with political leaders. Participants noted that confidence in political institutions discourages youth radicalization, while skepticism leads to feelings of frustration and increased VEO vulnerability.

## **DRIVERS OF YOUTH RADICALIZATION IN EAST AFRICA**

VEOs cannot sustain themselves without young recruits. Radical groups are astute observers of the challenges facing young people in East Africa, and they tailor their recruitment strategies to exploit youth vulnerabilities. Participants exchanged information about the hopes, desires, and needs of youth in their countries with the goal of better understanding how to counter the appeal of VEOs. They acknowledged that individual factors, socioeconomic conditions, and political realities enter into a young person's calculus when deciding to join or refuse membership to radical organizations.

### ***Individual Factors that Drive Youth Radicalization***

Participants' experiences tended to confirm the finding of empirical studies that indicate that radicalization is fundamentally an individual process, and countering it requires adopting strategies with an individual touch. With this in mind, they agreed that civil society organizations that engage parents, teachers, coaches, mentors, and religious

leaders, as well as individual young people, are critical to counter-radicalization efforts. Civil society organizations that operate at the grassroots level are capable of detecting radicalization in its nascent stages and intervening before it metastasizes into violent extremist acts.

Participants also recognized that East African youth, like young people in other world regions, seek a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Young men frequently convey a longing for adventure, glory, and heroic or iconic status, and search for outlets that enable them to break from convention. VEOs are aware of young people's quest for meaning and construct worldviews that satisfy youth desires for self-actualization and fulfillment. In order to offset radical worldviews, participants noted that youth must be exposed to a plethora of counter-narratives and positive life visions. Some of the most important interlocutors for communicating counter-narratives are religious leaders, mentors, coaches, teachers, and other civil society leaders.

Quantifying the counter-radicalization impact of a single civil society representative is admittedly challenging. However, participants agreed that when taken as an aggregate, civil society organizations form a first line of defense against VEOs. The challenge for governments is to create space for and, when possible, to encourage the myriad interactions that occur between civil society groups and East African youth. The end goal is not to create a single counter-radicalization program per se, but rather, a civil society network that engages young people in the countless ways necessary to avert violent extremist ideas from taking root.

With this observation in mind, participants recommended that East African governments adopt regulatory frameworks to empower civil society organizations to carry out youth-oriented activities and to advocate on behalf of youth causes. At present, legal restrictions placed on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups in some countries may be inhibiting them from realizing their full potential as counter-radicalization mediators.

### ***Socioeconomic Drivers of Youth Radicalization***

In addition to exploiting young people's need for purpose and meaning, VEOs take advantage of socioeconomic factors that render East African youth vulnerable to radicalization. Youth in East Africa struggle to access employment, education, housing, health services, and other necessities. Although a number of East African countries have experienced impressive economic growth over the past decade—a handful of countries represented at the workshop posted GDP growth rates of seven percent and higher this past year—young people are still finding it difficult to gain employment and advance according to various development indicators.

In particular, participants noted that achieving culturally recognized adulthood in East Africa is difficult for poor and non-elite youth, especially the young men among them. The prevalence of conflict, high rates of unemployment, lack of education, and especially the inability to establish a home and marry have all contributed to East Africans remaining youths much longer than their counterparts elsewhere in the world. For

instance, while the United Nations and most international fora define a *youth* as a person between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, the East African Community defines a *youth* as a person between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five. During these decades of being categorized as a youth, young people experience long “in-between” periods, in which they sporadically pursue studies, work part-time, live at home with parents, or migrate to urban centers in search of economic opportunity.

Young people caught in this “in-between” stage may become frustrated with their inability to achieve culturally recognized adulthood and seek validation by joining violent extremist groups, which give them an adult-like status through responsibility, purpose, and often financial compensation. Participants emphasized the need to reshape cultural understandings of adulthood in ways that reflect regional realities regarding marriage, housing, employment, and so on.

Compounding the problem of delayed adulthood is the common perception among older generations that young people should “wait their turn” for jobs and influence. Participants recognized, for example, that most government jobs are held by older workers, who are unlikely to leave their posts anytime soon. They recommended that public institutions reform pension systems and offer incentives for older functionaries to retire with the goal of creating space for young civil servants to enter public service. Increasing the number of young civil servants would bring fresh perspectives to the ranks of governments, which are desperately needed as East Africa’s youth population now represents the majority of the citizenry in these countries. Participants also recommended that private sector companies adopt measures to hire young employees and integrate them into their corporate governance structures, which would not only bring new skills and perspectives to African companies, but also develop the next generation of African business leaders.

### ***Political Drivers of Youth Radicalization***

Political realities in a number of East African countries were also cited as drivers of youth radicalization. Participants noted that young people are motivated by a desire to combat injustice, impunity, and corruption. When youth observe any of these negative behaviors in public officials, especially corruption among security sector personnel, they become disillusioned with public institutions and look for solutions to problems outside of their countries’ political processes.

The unequal or inconsistent application of the rule of law was also highlighted as a major driver of youth frustration. Impunity among politically connected elites causes young people to lose confidence in their legal institutions, especially when youth receive harsh punishments for seemingly small offenses, such as operating an unregistered business or living in makeshift homes without formal titles.

Participants also noted the problem of politicians mobilizing youth before elections in order to broadcast their political platforms and gain the youth vote, frequently communicating with young people using cell phone technology and online platforms. Politicians commonly stoke youth frustrations and promise sweeping reforms aimed at improving their lives. After winning their elections, they may ignore or abandon youth

supporters, leaving a semi-organized and politically charged youth cohort idle. Politicians who lose their elections may similarly exploit their youth followers by inciting them to violent protests or armed resistance. In both cases, political manipulation leads young people to feel disillusioned with politicians and electoral politics. This feeling may contribute to the conclusion that solutions to youth problems must be achieved outside of mainstream politics, perhaps through violent extremism.

A crisis of national identity was also cited as a potential cause of radicalization in East Africa. When young people are not firmly rooted in a sense of nation, they are more likely to be persuaded by foreign extremists who invoke transnational and radical ideals. Similarly, homegrown radicalization is more likely to surface along ethnic, clan, or communal lines when a strong sense of nation is absent from the national consciousness. Participants recommended that governments foster healthy nationalism through civic education, national sports teams, cultural events, and other activities that strengthen national solidarity.

Although enacting government reforms is challenging, addressing the politically rooted drivers of radicalization may actually be more straightforward than tackling radicalization's individually based and socioeconomic causes. Participants suggested that enhancing the role of youth in political decision-making is an important step in addressing the political drivers of radicalization. They recommended that governments appoint young people to serve in leadership positions and organize forums that provide youth with opportunities to express their concerns to government officials. Participants acknowledged that East Africa experiences some cultural inertia when attempting to include young people in government, but that challenging traditional views about youth serving in positions of authority is necessary to address pressing challenges facing the region. Participants also recommended that more government resources be devoted to youth-related programs. This includes appropriately funding youth ministries and ensuring that they have clear mandates and sufficient influence vis-à-vis other government bureaus.

## **ENGAGING EAST AFRICA'S INFORMAL SECTOR**

A significant portion of East Africa's youth lives and conducts business in the informal sector. These youth are characterized by their infrequent interactions with state institutions, unregulated business activities, lack of registered property, and participation in unofficial security networks. Although they are a large and diverse group, the common hardships that they face add another layer of vulnerability to radicalization and VEO recruitment.

Participants described youth in the informal sector as being "on the edge," "at the margins," "dropped-out," or "away from the mainstream." East Africa's informal youth may be physically distant from state institutions, such as youth living in remote areas where the state has little capacity. Alternatively, youth in the informal sector may be regularly exposed to state institutions, such as urban youth who live in proximity to

police officers, gendarmes, municipal authorities, etc., but interact with them in superficial ways or at cross-purposes.

### ***Youth in the Informal Economy***

Youth living in the informal sector engage in myriad economic activities (selling goods and services in informal marketplaces, working as day laborers, cleaning homes, cooking meals, serving as porters, conducting agriculture, making cloths, selling homemade CDs and DVDs, and engaging in countless other income generating activities), but they do not register their businesses and pay few if any taxes.

Participants expressed mixed opinions about youth working in the informal economy. On the one hand, informal economies are subject to criminality, yield little to no tax revenue, and fail to monopolize on the economies of scale achieved by formal businesses and corporations. Various East African countries have taken steps to mitigate the negative ramifications of the informal economy by illegalizing informal business activities or moving them away from central business districts. In some instances, these measures have led to violent clashes between police forces and informal merchants, or “hawkers,” and decreased trust between governments and youth.

On the other hand, participants recognized that the informal economy is a source of youth entrepreneurship and ingenuity. Young people operating in the informal economy are inventing new products and finding creative ways to generate profits in tough business environments. Participants noted their societies’ changing perceptions of *Jua Kali* workers, the Kiswahili term for those who operate informal businesses under the *hot sun*, and the positive impact of their services. Without their informal economic activities, young people would likely experience higher rates of unemployment, idleness, and feelings of desperation, all of which increase youth vulnerability to radicalization.

Participants recommended that governments strike a balance between curbing the negative externalities of the informal economy and incorporating its benefits. They suggested that governments, especially youth ministries, create programs to promote youth entrepreneurship and business development. A handful of East African governments and NGOs have already created these types of programs, such as annual competitions that award start-up business capital to young entrepreneurs. In addition, participants recommended that financial institutions explore more options for extending credit to young entrepreneurs in the informal sector. They suggested that their country’s central banks subsidize or underwrite loans that commercial banks and microfinance institutions extend to young businesspeople.

Participants also underscored the importance of education to finding suitable jobs, and recommended that governments invest more heavily in both university and vocational training programs that correspond to market needs. They largely agreed that vocational training should be offered equally to men and women, even if this contradicts cultural norms about women engaging in certain occupations.

Participants also suggested that governments and civil society organizations work to destigmatize professions that young people consider undesirable, including traditional work. They noted that youth in some East African countries occasionally hesitate to work in construction, sanitation, farming, fishing, or other industries that rely on manual labor, and that workers from India and China are employed in these sectors. East African youth should not only want these jobs, but should demand that their governments require companies from China, India, and elsewhere to source labor locally. This would create jobs for workers in East Africa and help them to build their professional skills.

Ultimately, a more robust economy provides youth with increased opportunities and erodes VEOs' ability attract them with financial incentives. Perhaps more importantly, holding a job that provides a sustainable livelihood helps to instill a sense of purpose and meaning in the lives of young people, reinforcing their resistance to radicalization.

### ***Interpreting Youth Culture***

Listening to and observing youth culture provides useful clues about how young people are responding to contemporary social and political events, including the activities of radical groups. Youth in the informal sector are making music, film, poetry, theater, and radio programs, sometimes referred to as "ghetto radio." A great deal of their cultural output is communicated in Kiswahili, English, or French, making it accessible to the majority of young people in the region. The transnational nature of East African youth culture enables young people to communicate rapidly and potently with each other.

Participants expressed some reservations about the form and content of youth culture. East African hip-hop, rap, and other modern forms of youth expression occasionally seem unusual and inappropriate to older generations. Some participants were concerned that youth culture is overly preoccupied with money, power, and vanity. Younger workshop participants encouraged their colleagues to keep an open mind and recognize that youth culture is an authentic expression of young people's feelings. Even if youth culture seems intimidating or unattractive, it nevertheless relays important information that older generations can use to understand youth, especially when attempting to decipher radicalization trends.

Information and communications technology is bolstering the dissemination of East African youth culture. Cell phones, text messages, and the Internet are providing young people with access to music, videos, and information about popular East African youth artists. The region's youth are also reading blogs, Facebook entries, and Twitter messages written by their peers about current events and politics.

Participants expressed some reservations about online content and young people's use of social media. They observed that information posted to online forums is sometimes inaccurate, negative, and promulgated by radical groups. One strategy that could be employed to counter negative or false information is for governments to disseminate positive and factually accurate messages. Government public relations officers can promote these types of messages by participating in social media and posting information

to online forums. These efforts demonstrate a government's commitment to transparency and willingness to engage young people using their preferred methods of communication.

Nevertheless, participants expressed mixed views about the role of government in monitoring and potentially limiting young people's access to online information. Younger participants tended to feel strongly that the Internet should remain an open space where ideas are exchanged freely. Other participants, particularly those representing security sector institutions, expressed skepticism about the positive potential of the Internet in light of the region's historic and contemporary vulnerability to violent extremism, and remained open to the possibility of regulating online content. Although participants' views about the Internet and social media varied, they agreed that the issue would increase in importance as youth Internet use increases across the region.

## **FOSTERING MULTI-SECTORAL RESPONSES TO YOUTH RADICALIZATION**

The political, socioeconomic, and individual factors that drive violent extremism in East Africa are varied, making it difficult for counter-radicalization practitioners to arrive at a single, universally applicable approach to preventing youth radicalization. Security sector institutions are important actors in counter-radicalization efforts, but cannot singlehandedly address the myriad upstream factors that cause young people to embrace violent extremism. Instead, an "all-hands-on-deck" approach is needed that incorporates actors from across sectors, including security institutions, civilian government ministries, and civil society organizations. Building trust across sectors is challenging but integral to creating a counter-radicalization network that is comprehensive and effective.

Participants first acknowledged the need for governments to promote interagency cooperation when approaching youth radicalization issues. Youth ministries should coordinate their activities with security-related government institutions, such as the police, gendarmerie, army, and intelligence agencies. Security institutions must likewise remain in contact with non-defense related agencies, such as education, health, and labor ministries. Fostering interagency cooperation requires political leaders to build political will within their governments to address youth radicalization issues. Participants recognized that this is challenging in light of competing priorities and limited budgetary resources, and suggested that external assistance might prove helpful to meeting their financial needs for youth programs.

Public institutions must also be willing to reach out to and work with civil society groups. Participants suggested that governments take the first step in promoting cross-sectoral collaboration by convening dialogues between public institutions and NGOs, religious groups, businesses, community associations, recreational clubs, sports teams, and other civil society groups. Government officials admitted that they are occasionally suspicious of the motives and goals of civil society organizations. Similarly, civil society organizations expressed hesitation about partnering with government officials, fearing that their neutrality and independence might be compromised should local communities view their organizations as extensions of the state. As they dialogued about youth



radicalization, participants agreed that governments and civil society organizations should gain an appreciation for the other's priorities, constraints, and strengths. In many ways, the *Preventing Youth Radicalization* workshop was a preliminary exercise in building these kinds of cross-sectoral relationships and enhancing trust.

Participants also noted that because youth radicalization is a transnational challenge, cross-sectoral collaboration needs to include actors from other countries and regional organizations. The idea of enlisting one of East Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) or the African Union (AU) to launch a recurring regional youth forum was proposed. Such a forum would build on previous youth summits organized by East Africa's RECs and the AU, and would assemble young scholars, rising political party leaders, celebrities, athletes, DJs, entrepreneurs, and other youth representatives to communicate the difficulties faced by young people and propose solutions to their challenges.

Ultimately, workshop participants from across sectors, including security institutions, government ministries, and civil society groups, recognized that the drivers of youth radicalization are extremely diverse and virtually impossible to address by any single sector alone. Despite their differing organizational cultures, they agreed that cross-sectoral cooperation is necessary in order to successfully counter youth radicalization and capitalize on the productive potential of East Africa's young people.

## **SOMALIA AND YOUTH RADICALIZATION**

Throughout the workshop, radicalization challenges emanating from Somalia were of special concern to participants and were raised frequently. Somalia's protracted conflict and its impact on neighboring countries have created vulnerabilities that the al-Qaeda-linked group, al-Shabaab, is exploiting among the region's youth.

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and neighboring countries' military campaigns in Somalia are squeezing al-Shabaab and cutting it off from its internal resources. Al-Shabaab's battlefield losses may have the effect of increasing its efforts to replenish its ranks with recruits and resources drawn from neighboring countries. Participants noted that al-Shabaab's future depends on its ability to find new members, and that the group is searching for young recruits in many places, including among East Africa's Somali diaspora communities and non-Somali youth. It has placed recruiters along East Africa's coast and in urban centers, where young people encounter the political, socioeconomic, and individual factors that participants identified as drivers of radicalization. Al-Shabaab's religious and political ideology attracts young people in these areas by providing them with a strong sense of identity, purpose, and community. In addition, the group offers financial incentives that meet young people's immediate needs, while promising additional financial rewards for later service.

As al-Shabaab looks for new recruits in neighboring countries, participants highlighted the potential for Somali diaspora communities to assist in countering the group's appeal.

East African Somali populations, especially those in neighborhoods of large cities like Addis Ababa, Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Mombasa, and Nairobi, have experienced the negative consequences of al-Shabaab's activities and often strongly oppose its objectives. In particular, Somali youth in the diaspora are producing music, art, and poetry that encourage their peers to reject al-Shabaab's ideology and to pursue peaceful solutions to their country's problems. These cultural expressions serve as powerful counter-narratives that civil society organizations and governments should encourage when possible.

Participants nevertheless underscored the struggles that diaspora Somalis face when trying to integrate into their host societies. Participants acknowledged that fear of terrorist attacks, news of piracy, and the burden of large refugee camps have decreased sympathy for Somalis and resulted in discrimination. Al-Shabaab recruiters prey upon the feelings of otherness and marginalization created by these circumstances to enlist Somali diaspora youth to their cause. Participants highlighted the need for civil society organizations to reach out to Somali diaspora youth and for their governments to adopt inclusive policies that decrease the likelihood of diaspora radicalization.

In addition to assisting with counter-radicalization efforts in their host countries, Somalis in the diaspora may also play positive roles in political developments inside Somalia. Diaspora Somalis follow current events in Somalia closely and remain in contact with family and friends there via mobile technology and remittances. Participants recommended that East African governments and civil society organizations, along with their international partners, support activities that empower Somali diaspora communities to constructively engage with their peers in Somalia.

Participants acknowledged that the security challenges stemming from Somalia require both short- and long-term strategies to promote stability and build state capacity. They expressed their solidarity with their Somali counterparts and resolved to work together to combat al-Shabaab's exploitation of the region's youth.

## CONCLUSION

### *Recommendations and the Way Forward*

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The *Preventing Youth Radicalization* workshop demonstrated the extent to which radicalization in East Africa is a multifaceted and complex challenge. Over the course of the workshop, participants proposed a number of recommendations aimed at bolstering the capacity of governments and civil society organizations to counter radicalization among the region's youth.

As East Africa's youth population grows in size and political importance, already representing the majority of the population in the region, participants highlighted the need to make strategic investments in youth-oriented services, foremost among them education. Education services that provide young people with the skills needed to enter an increasingly modern and globally connected marketplace are vital. In a similar vein, vocational training is important to providing the region's youth with employable skills, and it should be extended equally to young men and women. Education presents young people with a variety of life options and is a critical first line of defense against many of the socioeconomic factors that may lead to youth radicalization.

Another method of strategically investing in young people is to encourage their business activities. Participants recommended that governments extend annual competitions that award start-up business capital to young entrepreneurs. They also suggested that governments work with financial institutions to increase the flow of capital to young businesspeople, perhaps by subsidizing or underwriting loans to young entrepreneurs.

Participants acknowledged that extending financial services to East African youth is challenging because many of them live and do businesses in the informal sector. Although businesses in the informal sector do not generate tax revenue and sometimes attract criminality, they are enormous sources of youth ingenuity and entrepreneurship. When properly harnessed, informal youth workers may serve as stronger drivers of employment and economic growth. States should find creative ways to promote these types of businesses and progressively incorporate them into the formal economy.

Participants also recommended that East African governments properly invest in youth-oriented agencies, especially youth ministries. They highlighted the need to integrate youth perspectives into government by hiring young civil servants and creating recurring youth forums to listen to young people's concerns.

They also acknowledged that while governments have important roles to play in offering the right blend of public services to discourage young people from joining radical groups, civil society organizations are equally if not more important. Civil society groups, such as religious organizations, community associations, recreational clubs, sports teams, and others, serve as a primary line of defense against radical ideologies. They are capable of interacting with individual young people in ways that public institutions cannot. For this reason, participants suggested that governments and external donors support mentoring programs carried out by civil society groups. They also advocated for enabling regulatory

environments that allow civil society organizations to operate and interact with young people.

The workshop featured a number of discussions about East Africa's cultural norms and the possibility of shifting them to reflect new socioeconomic realities as well. Participants noted that achieving culturally recognized adulthood is challenging because it requires young people to have a steady income, to establish a home, and to marry. If the concept of adulthood remains static, radical groups may exploit it by offering young people adult-like status through positions of responsibility, purpose, and financial compensation.

Participants also encouraged each other to observe and engage East African youth culture, which reflects young people's aspirations and frustrations. Youth culture can serve as a useful indicator of young people's vulnerability to radicalization, and it offers opportunities for peer role models to disseminate counter-narratives. Participants recommended that governments and civil society organizations validate young artists by supporting the commercial architecture needed to mass produce and distribute their music, film, poetry, and other artistic expressions.

Participants acknowledged that youth culture is being increasingly disseminated via cell phones, text messages, social media, and the Internet. In East Africa, the prevalence of texting and youth-run FM radio stations present key channels for counter-radicalization practitioners to engage youth and to project positive alternatives to violent extremism.

A cross-cutting theme throughout the seminar was the placement of Somalia in East Africa's security landscape. Somalia's chronic instability and the activities of al-Shabaab pose a unique and pressing challenge to the region. East African youth are vulnerable to al-Shabaab's recruitment strategy and must be constructively engaged by civil society organizations and governments in order to resist the movement's radical ideology. Participants expressed resolve to work with their Somali counterparts, both in Somalia and in the diaspora, to counter the violent extremist threats emanating from the country and to find durable solutions to its longstanding political challenges.

As the workshop drew to a close, participants renewed their commitment to working together to counter youth radicalization and expressed interest in taking the workshop recommendations back to the countries and organizations that they represent. They were encouraged to remain in contact with ACSS via its alumni network and to share lessons and experiences with one another as they conduct counter-radicalization activities.