

# **Study to Examine the Influence of Contemporary Islamic Ideologies in Kenya: Lamu and Tana River Counties**

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## About REINVENT Programme

Reducing Insecurity and Violent Extremism in the Northern and Coastal Regions of Kenya (REINVENT) is a 5-year programme that aims to enhance Kenyan capacity and capability to address inter-communal conflict, weak community-police relations, violence against women and girls (VAWG), violent extremism and election related violence. We support the continued advancement of police reforms to improve the management, oversight and accountability of the police force. Our programme is led by Tetra Tech International Development and delivered in partnership with the Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies (RUSI) and the Danish Demining Group (DDG). We build on the experience of delivering the Jamii Thabiti Programme (2014-19), also known as the Kenya Improving Community Security Programme (ICS), and expand FCDO support across more counties. We support new areas of work including conflict sensitivity, pastoral livelihoods and combating violent extremism.

The impact of the REINVENT programme will be "improved community safety and security as measured by effect on inclusive and equitable development, investment and service delivery in Kenya." The outcome will be "improved state and non-state actors' collaboration in a mutually accountable and inclusive manner to respond effectively to root causes of violence".

The outputs are:

1. Accountable and effective police (and other security agencies) addressing community security, violent extremism and election security.
2. Strengthened agency of women and girls in peace, safety and security.
3. Intra and inter institutional commitment to address the root causes and drivers of conflict.
4. Knowledge and evidence generated and utilised to enhance community and institutional learning and adaptation.

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# Contents

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Acknowledgements	4
Key Terms	5
Executive Summary	6
Introduction	9
Objectives of the Study	10
Research Methodology	11
Demographic Information of Participants	13
Background to the Study	15
Research Findings	21
I. History of Islamic Movements in Lamu and Tana River Counties	21
II. Evolving Nature of Islamic Education in Lamu and Tana River Counties	24
III. Influence of Returnee Religious Scholars, Institutions and Charities	27
IV. Islamic Schools of Thought, Jurisprudence and Movements	30
V. Intra and Interfaith Interventions	39
Conclusions	43
Recommendations	48
References	50
Annexes	55

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# Key Terms

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<b>Bida</b>	Innovation in Islamic beliefs or worship
<b>Daawa</b>	The act of calling or inviting people to embrace Islam
<b>Deen</b>	Religion or belief of a Muslim
<b>Duksi</b>	Traditional Qur'anic school among the Somali
<b>Fikh</b>	Islamic jurisprudence, the theory and philosophy of Islamic law based on the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH)
<b>Hadith</b>	The record of the sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH); used as a major source of religious law after the Quran
<b>Hadramaut</b>	A region in southern Arabia, present-day Yemen
<b>Ilm</b>	Knowledge
<b>Madrassa</b>	Formal Islamic education system
<b>Kafir</b>	'Disbeliever', 'unbeliever' or 'infidel'
<b>Madhab</b>	The school of thought in Islamic jurisprudence (Fikh)
<b>Masjid</b>	Mosque
<b>Salafiyya</b>	Puritanical movement developing in several parts of the Muslim world.
<b>Sharia</b>	Islamic law
<b>Shiism</b>	A branch of Islam. Here Muslims believe the leadership of the community belong to Ali and his successors after Prophet Muhammed (PBUH)
<b>Sufism</b>	A mystical form of Islam, a school of practice emphasizing specific values, rituals and practices
<b>Sunnah</b>	Sunnah or Sunna is the legal customs and practices of the Islamic law.
<b>Tabligh</b>	A Sunni Islamic missionary movement
<b>Takfir</b>	The action or practice of declaring that a fellow Muslim is no longer a Muslim as he/she does not adhere to the essential practices or tenets in Islam.
<b>Umma</b>	Community of believers in Islamic faith
<b>Wahhabism</b>	Refers to a conservative Islamic creed emanating from Saudi Arabia

# Executive Summary

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The focus of this research is on unpacking contemporary religious movements within Muslim populations in the Kenyan counties of Lamu and Tana River. The study seeks to understand the impact of various religious movements amongst the Muslim populace in these two counties. It explores religious leaders' experiences of the changes within conventional schools of Islamic thought and jurisprudence as well as the advent of contemporary movements. The study considers how religious leaders engage with broader religious debates and trends within different schools of Islamic thought, emerging Islamic jurisprudence and contemporary Islamic movements shaping the religious domain in Lamu and Tana River.

## Overall Findings

Both global and local influences play prominent roles in contemporary Islamic movements in the counties of Lamu and Tana River.

Most of the contemporary Islamic movements are transnational in nature and include Tabligh Jamaat, Hizb ut Tahrir, Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaat Answare Sunnah and Salafi Jedida. These movements are not necessarily clearly identifiable in the community under their specific names or groupings. Nor is their spread always visible. Most are Sunni and are vaguely distinguished from one another based on theology and practice.

Different local and global Islamic movements infiltrate these areas due to the presence of a large Muslim population and existing socio-economic and political grievances. Most international movements are localized using ideological tenets playing on local grievances and changes.

Sunnis form the majority in these counties, with the Shia a minority. Some Sunni groups or movements are labelled, sometimes inaccurately, as 'Salafist' or 'Wahhabist.'

Lamu County has been at the centre of Islamic education in Kenya and the eastern African region, due to the presence of Riyadhha mosque and the influence of the Hadramy Alawi (Hadramaut) networks of Yemeni Sufism and associated scholars. External influences in Lamu County also include that of Oman through the Tariqa order.

Islamic education in Tana River County has been influenced by scholars educated mainly in Lamu and Mamburi. Some were also educated at madrasas in Garissa.

Since the 1980s, Lamu and Tana River have been influenced by returnee scholars and funding from the Gulf. Returnee scholars brought with them reforms on Islamic education that had a bearing on changes in the Islamic culture. The new scholars, educated predominantly in Saudi Arabia, often criticised the existing scholars for their religious innovations (bida). While there were no conflicts within Madhabs, there were tensions between two groups labelled as Hanbali (returnee scholars from Saudi Arabia) and the Shafi (Riyadha Scholars) or between Sufism and Wahhabism. Particular terms like Wahhabi were used in a derogatory way to describe the scholars who stuck to the rigid interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah.

During this research, most scholarly respondents were of the opinion that intra-faith tension increased due to individual interpretations of the Quranic text rather than the differences in the Madhabs. Tensions between Islamic groups such as Shias, Sufis and Wahhabis were evident in both counties. Tensions were often exacerbated during events such as the moon-sighting for the month of Eid ul Fitr, or during Maulid festivals. Coexistence between these groups was also found in mutual support for communal activities.

## Recommendations

### FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS:

1. Comprehensive context assessments must be conducted prior to the initiation of religious or ideologically-oriented P/CVE interventions. Such assessments must take account of local understandings of different Islamic movements and the spaces these occupy in the target community. With this context established, it will be possible to design locally relevant ideologically-oriented P/CVE interventions. At the same time, this knowledge will shape understanding of how extremist recruiters exploit local grievances along Islamist narratives which facilitate a radical milieu conducive for extremist networks.
2. CVE interventions must subsequently adapt to the existing and changing dynamics of the local contexts. They must also recognise external influences, such as the impact of socio-economic developments in Somalia on specific Islamic movements in Lamu and Tana River.
3. Programmes should seek to enhance existing cultural tenets which foster respectful dissent amongst the different Muslim denominations and schools of thought. The initial context assessment should promote the importance of conversation, debate and argument for better community decision-making. This might include providing opportunities for Muslims to engage in discussions and movements that deal with Islamic marginalization at the local and international levels.
4. CVE programmes in these counties should focus on intra-faith interventions as a priority. Religious peacebuilding should bring religious scholars together based on their shared values, rather than seek to unify the different madhabs. Knowledge of the different Madhabs must be differentiated from the evolving Islamic movements to understand violent extremism in CVE interventions.
5. Practitioners must comprehensively assess the credibility of any religious leaders before involving them in their programmes. This will necessitate understanding the local spheres of influence of the religious leaders. Acceptance may differ from one area to another. In one location, it might be a madrasa teacher and in another it may be an Imam or a Muslim businessman that has the acceptance and respect of the local population. Hence, a yardstick for evaluating leaders based on levels of religious education attained may be futile in communities that have their own ways of interpreting religious leadership and attributing respect.
6. Intra-faith CVE interventions must explore how Salafism can be embedded within transformational change along with Sufism and other groups. This will necessitate that programmes are designed to appreciate shared values rather than focusing on one specific madhab or school of thought at the expense of another.
7. Programmes should consider conducting community awareness programmes within specific hotspots<sup>1</sup> in the two counties, focusing on identifying preachers or recruiters who use religious dissemination processes or play a role in funding religious education. Efforts should be made to ensure that leaders selected by the CSOs are locally respected and maintain credibility in their respective communities. These selections should not be focused only to government spokespersons.
8. The risks faced by religious leaders working in the field of countering violent extremism must be acknowledged by CVE programmes. This will necessitate providing adequate safeguards for religious leaders working in 'at risk' areas. Working in areas prone to suspicion and fear has cost the lives of religious scholars and leaders. Adequate risk management measures and mechanisms should be incorporated into CVE and peacebuilding programmes.

### **FOR THE GOVERNMENT:**

1. Enable opportunities for Islamic integrated school system which blends Islamic knowledge and secular education. A way forward will be to facilitate curriculum development with blended Islamic knowledge and secular education, and then propose measures to evaluate the impact.
2. Undertake a needs assessment looking at the state of Islamic education in Tana River and Lamu counties. This should include a review of methods of delivery such as teaching Arabic through the respective Hadiths and the contexts in which specific verses of the Quran evolved. By institutionalizing Arabic within an Islamic curriculum, misinterpretations of Quran verses will be less likely.
  - Consider ways to secure an effective gatekeeper function to co-ordinate and monitor a well-structured system of governance for Islamic NGOs and charities in the two counties. This should be established in collaboration with the public, as well as with Muslim institutions.
  - Provide measures to create awareness around both intra- and inter-religious conversions. Establish institutions to facilitate conversations where the convert is equipped with knowledge from credible sources. Here, religious leaders should take charge in enabling converts to access knowledge and help them to understand the religion. The Government's role in this regard should be limited to avoid further strengthening extremist organisations' narrative that the Kenyan State is trying to dictate the lives of Muslims.
  - All government organs should engage in a two-way communication process with CSOs to enable timely information flows on pertinent issues concerning recruitment trends, methods and messaging – both online and offline.

### **FOR DONORS:**

1. Facilitate avenues for alternative sources of funding in collaboration with locally recognized Muslim institutions to prevent Islamic educational institutions and charity organizations from accepting assistance from extremist entrepreneurs. The facilitation process needs to first acknowledge that the process of collaboration is not an easy task. Firstly, there might not be an appropriate local actor. Secondly, the donor may hold biases based on their own positionalities. Moreover, there is no single universally accepted Islamic religious institution that can cater to the needs of all different schools of thought or emerging Islamic movement. The prevailing diverse context entails collaboration and consensus in decision-making in issues of religion, taking the diversity of local communities into account.
3. Fund educational opportunities and scholarships in collaboration with locally recognized Islamic educational institutions to educate women on Islamic theology so they can further their active roles in both the private and public sphere.
4. Engage in systemic capacity building of CSOs in collaboration with locally recognized Muslim Institutions. Most CSOs working in CVE lack evidence-based strategies for interventions in religious peacebuilding. Capacity building is needed to improve understandings of local religious issues and specific religious tenets. This will improve efforts to counter radical texts and propaganda.
5. Stimulate research to understand the motivations of individuals in promoting violence within groups, and how this differs to group motivations in extremist networks. Further research is also needed to understand group dynamics within and between different Islamic movements in order to contextualize 'violence'. It is too simplistic to only focus on the differences in Madhabs in CVE interventions.

# 1. Introduction

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The research focused on Lamu and Tana River, investigating contemporary religious movements within Muslim populations. The objective of the study was to understand the effect of contemporary religious movements within the Muslim populace in Lamu and Tana River, more specifically the religious leaders' experiences of the changes and development of the conventional schools of Islamic thought, jurisprudence and the advent of new religious movements.

The study explored how religious leaders engage with broader religious debates and trends within different schools of Islamic thought, emerging Islamic jurisprudence and the contemporary Islamic movements which shaped the religious domains in Lamu and Tana River counties. The study also determined the influence of certain religious leaders, their effectiveness and their approaches in the promotion and prevention of radical forms of Islamic schools of thought, emerging Islamic jurisprudence and the contemporary Islamic movements. The study reviewed the impact of religious leaders from various schools of thought and Islamic movements. It then looked at how they interacted with the mainstream Muslim leadership. The focus was on how and why the dynamics have changed, and to assess if there are observable geographical and demographic trends.

The study findings are intended to inform the national knowledge-base and can be used to guide county-based activities focused on the religious pillar of the County Action Plans (CAPs) in each county. Further, the study will guide the design of capacity building programmes to support religious leaders under the CAP in each county, as well as inform the county-level steering group of the CAPs. As such, the impact of the study was for the REINVENT programme and beyond. The study is qualitative in nature and the primary data was collected by interviewing religious leaders in the two counties, including in both rural and urban settings, and covering multiple different religious branches and influences.

## 2. Objectives Of The Study

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**Main objective:** To develop an understanding of contemporary trends in Islamic schools of thought, jurisprudence and movements particularly in relation to VE and P/CVE.

Sub objectives:

1. To identify the role of Islamic education, returnee scholars, institutions and charities in specific Islamic movements;
2. To examine the historical, political and socio-economical context which give rise to different trends of Islamic schools of thought and religious movements in the study area;
3. To identify the impact of Islamic schools of thought, religious movements and leadership in P/CVE and peacebuilding efforts.

### 3. Research Methodology

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The study commenced with desk research on the history of religious changes in the coastal region with a particular emphasis on the two research locations: Lamu and Tana River. This included the types of schools, influential religious leaders, background of theologians and political changes in relation to Islamic movements in post-colonial and contemporary times.

A qualitative research design was used in the study. At first, the researcher used selection criteria for a purposive sampling of participants who were to be the key respondents for the study with the following characteristics:

- Knowledge of the religious waves of change in the locations (Salafism, Wahhabism, Sufism, and other trends);
- Different schools of thought;
- Different educational backgrounds from outside (Saudi, Sudan, Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt or other) who can provide a perspective on external influences on the phenomenon studied.

Participants were mostly Imams, Madrasa teachers, religious scholars and other people with the relevant expertise to answer the research questions. Some female religious leaders were actively selected to ensure their perspectives on the religious schools of thought and changes were incorporated. The researcher subsequently selected several participants – assessed to have a depth of understanding of the religious movements – for further interviews and discussions. The interviews assisted in exploring areas of concern regarding the spread of ideologically driven violence. The methodology helped the researcher understand the religious influences present in each location, the origin of the school of thought, the influence of a particular religious education, and how international religious waves have been accommodated/used/misused in the local context. All these areas were studied whilst appreciating the social, political, cultural and historical context of the place.

After a test of the interview guide in Mombasa, the researcher purposively selected 20 participants: 10 from Lamu County and 10 from the Tana River County. Selection was based on their specific schools of thought and religious movements (Sunni, Shia, Salafi, Wahabi) and their ability to respond to questions in relation to the objectives of the study. Next, an additional 10 participants were selected from the two counties based on evolving trends in Islamic movements. The researcher also met a few other participants (seven) who were knowledgeable on the religious waves but who did not want to comment in detail due to their affiliations. Most of these discussions were recorded as field notes. Further, individual reports from the research team members and meeting notes further enhanced the study. The research team comprised four members. Two members covered each county, due to their previous experiences working in the county. The research also considered gender dynamics in trying to understand the impact of the changes in the lives of Muslim women.

A few challenges are worth highlighting due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Firstly, some religious leaders did not comment on specific religious waves due to fear. Others gave very superficial comments and responses. It took time to build trust with such individuals. Second, some religious leaders were hostile to the exploration of specific sensitive waves – especially Wahhabism – and accused the research team of lacking knowledge on the reasons behind such religious movements. Third, some participants felt that the research team members were being used as part of a ‘Western’ project in order to destabilize the Muslim communities. Fourth, it was important to understand the political divisions among religious leaders and their representative institutions or networks. Their answers were often shaped by such affiliations. For example, religious leaders sometimes presented institutionally expected answers to the questions rather than their personal views and opinions. There was also a tendency among religious leaders to ask the researcher to meet specific religious leaders on specific questions.

The emerging data was thematized and analysed by the lead researcher with inputs from the research team. Finally, the findings were validated with a religious scholar knowledgeable in religious theology.

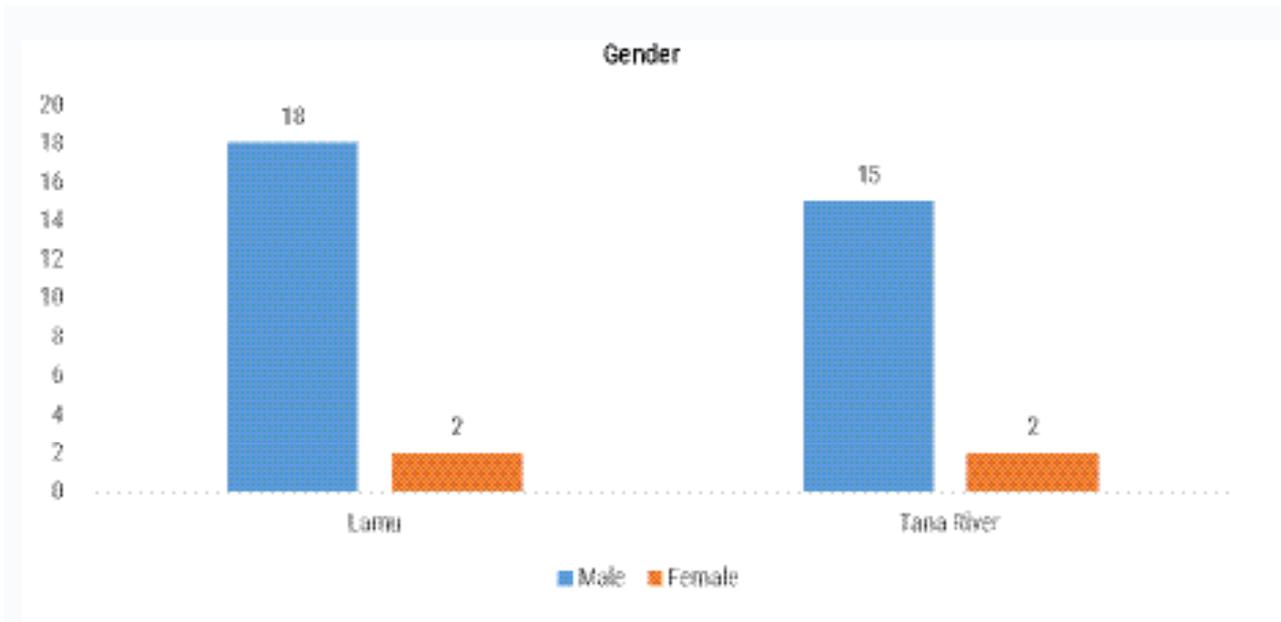
## **Risk management strategies for the study included:**

- i. Interviews were conducted in spaces comfortable to both the researcher and the participants. A neutral space was used in agreement with the participant e.g.: their offices, houses, coffee shops or madrasa. The participants were reimbursed transport and meals costs incurred.
- ii. Research team members included those who originated from the counties, studied or had prior work experience in those counties, hence it became easier to use existing networks to reach potential participants for the study. The research team utilized networks they had already worked with, making it easier to build contacts via known community gatekeepers. Later a snowball technique was used to reach relevant personnel, based on a purposive sampling process;
- iii. The names of the participants were not included in the report, and participant identities were only shared with the data collection team and lead researcher. A consent form specified the anonymous context, which assisted greatly in the trust building process and hence the sharing of information. The researcher and the research team were drawn from public universities, and this further assisted in building trust with the participants.
- iv. Participants were mostly contacted in advance and background studies were conducted prior to the physical interview. The lead researcher held all records of the meetings conducted. This included any meetings which needed a second follow-up interview etc.
- v. The research team members underwent training on risk management prior to the field work. The research was framed as a study into religious influences via understanding different schools of thought, hence it was not perceived as a study on violent extremism. As a result, most data derived related to an overall context of changes among Muslim communities rather than the topic of violence alone.

## 4. Demographic Information Of Participants

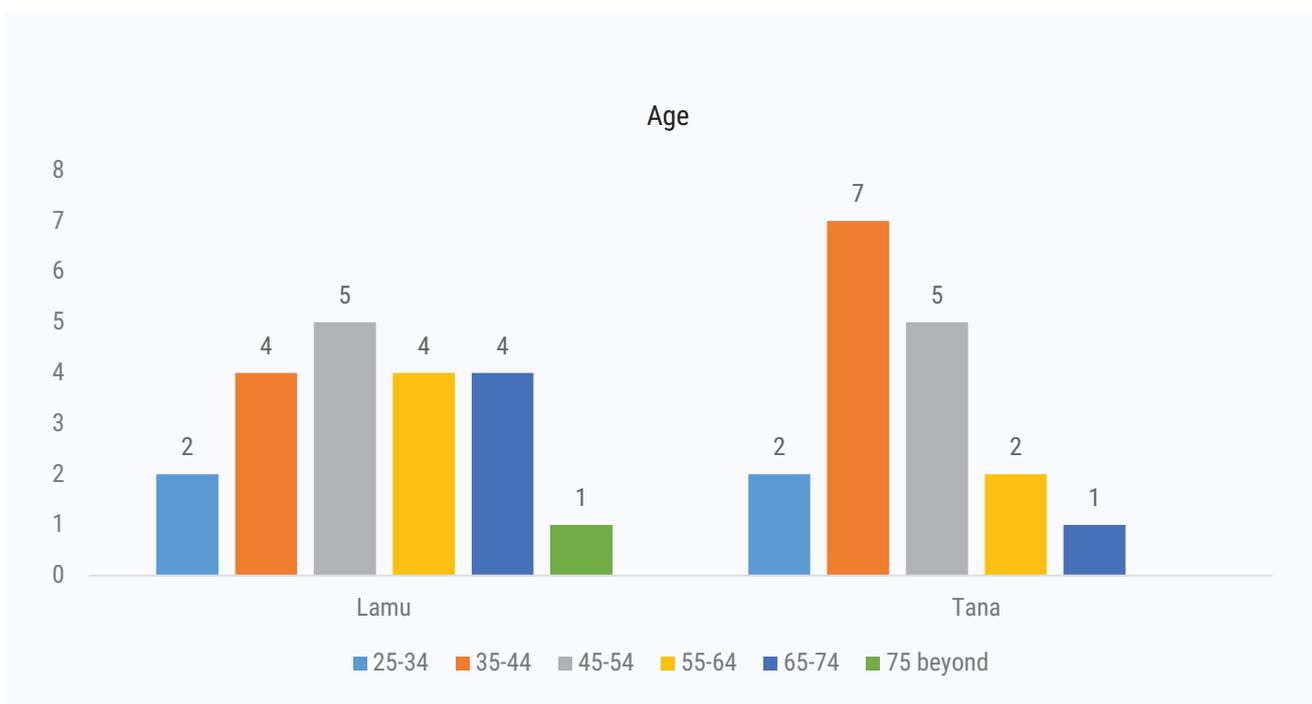
This section provides a brief overview of the participants selected for the study. Gender, age, ethnicity, profession and education were all considered. The nature of the study involved selecting Muslim participants knowledgeable in Islam and the various schools of thought or those who had an Islamic education from outside the country. Altogether, the study had only four female participants among 37 participants. There were 33 male participants. The numbers broadly reflect the gender disparities in acquiring Islamic education in the counties.

### 4.1. Gender



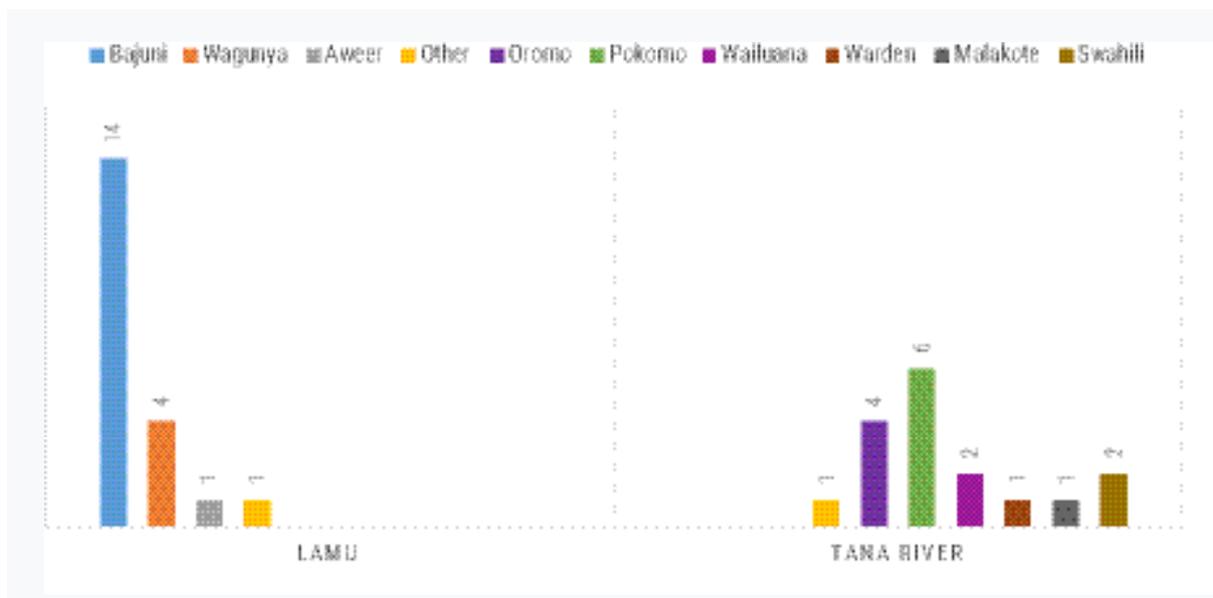
### 4.2. Age

The age cohorts of the participants were as follows:



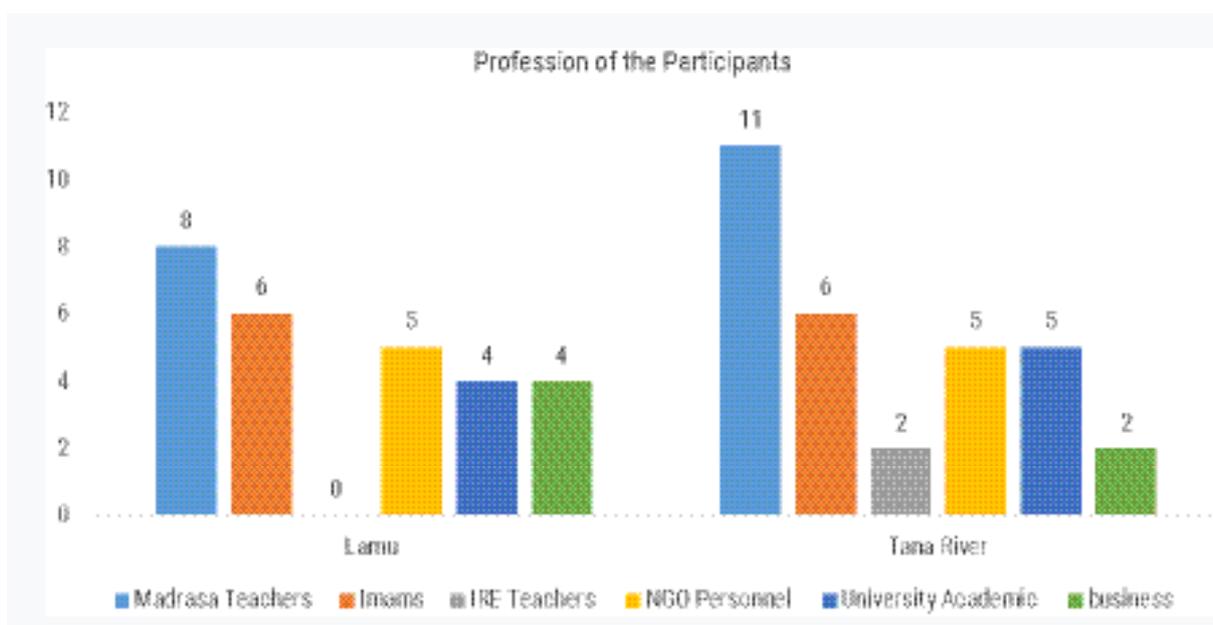
### 4.3. Ethnicity

The ethno-linguistic distribution of the participants were as follows:



### 4.4. Professional Status

The profession of participants from Lamu were as follows:



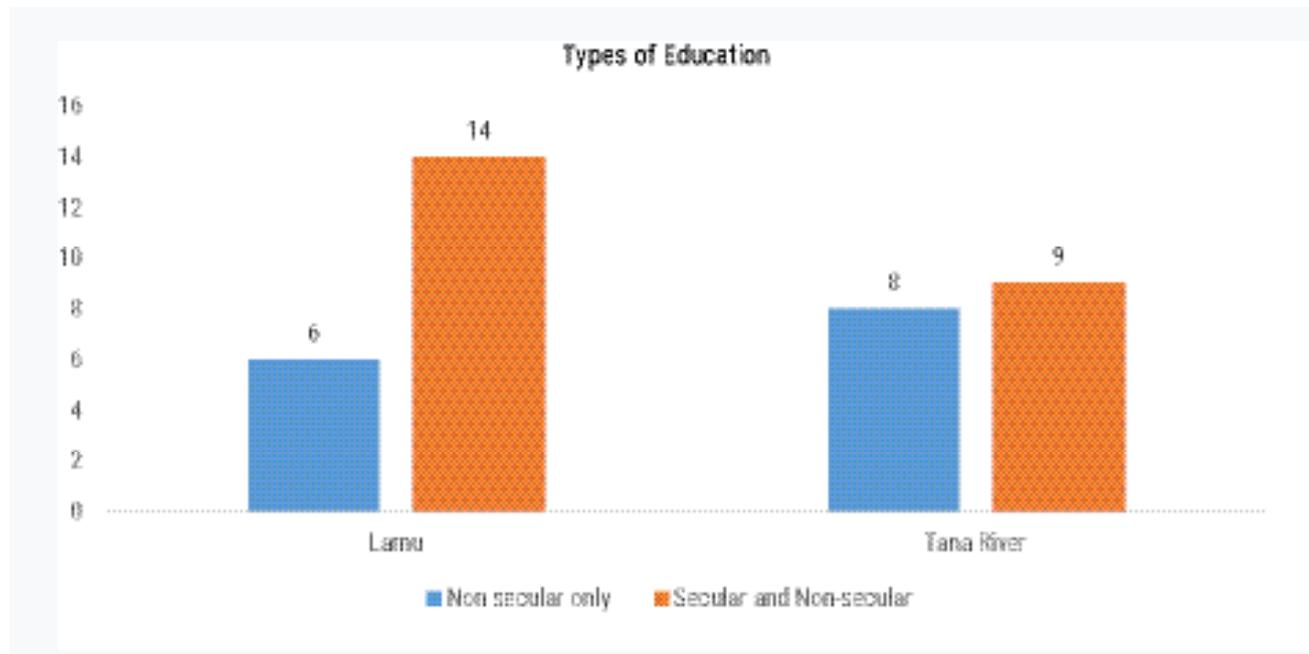
Lamu County: Madrasa teachers (n=8); Imams (n=6), NGO personnel (n=5); Business personnel (n=4); Academics associated to secular educational institutions (n=4).

Tana River County: Madrasa teachers (n=11); Imams (n=6), NGO personnel (n=5); IRE teachers in secular schools (n=2); Business personnel (n=2); Academics associated to secular educational institutions (n=1).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>These are multiple responses as some participants have one or two more careers or positions.

## 4.5. Education Levels of the Participants

Secular and Non-secular Education Level



Those participants from Lamu County with an Islamic education all obtained their primary and secondary educations at Madrasas or Duksi (n=12). Three participants had pursued an Islamic education up to degree level, one to Master's level and three to PhD level. Participants in Lamu explained the following institutions as key for their Islamic education: Madrasas in Chundwa, Mambriui, Lamu, Mombasa had played a role in their primary levels. Some proceeded to Thanawi in Lamu and Mahdi in Kisauni. Most participants had obtained their education from Madrasa al Najah, Riyadhha, or Kisauni Islamic Institute, as they were the most recognized institutions at that time. A few had undergone higher studies at the Medina University; Azhar University in Cairo; the Institute of Islamic Studies in Khartoum; Omdurman Islamic University; or the International Islamic University of Malaysia.

Among those participants from Tana River County with an Islamic education, all had a primary and secondary education (n=14). Three participants had Islamic education who had degree level. Participants from Tana River County noted the following institutions as key for their Islamic education: Madrasas in Bura, Kipini-West, Bokoni, Mambriui, Lamu, Gedi, Kikambala, Tarasaa, Machakos and Mombasa had played a role in their primary education. Some proceeded to Thanawi in Garissa, Mambriui, Lamu or Mahdi in Kisauni. Some even attended Duksi in Marsabit or Garissa. Most participants had obtained their primary and secondary education from the Kisauni Islamic Institute, as it was the most recognized institution at that time. A few had degrees from the Medina University and the Institute of Islamic Studies, Khartoum.

## 4.6. Areas of Influence of the Religious Leaders:

Areas of influence included their place of work. For the Lamu County religious leaders the areas included the following: Chundwa, Mtangawanda Village, Pate Village, Shela, Lamu Town, Amu, Lamu Island and Mpeketoni, Other areas beyond the county included: Kisauni Islamic Institute, Kikambala, Malindi, Mombasa and Nairobi. The areas of influence for the Tana River County religious leaders were as follows: Tarasaa, Kikambala, Borobini, Bokoni, Madogo, Manyangakolora, Bura, Garsen, Onkolgo, Obo Village, Hola, Chevele, Bura, Tara, Hirimani. Other areas beyond the county included Matuga, Kwale, Mandera, Makueni and Kikambala.

## 5. Background To The Study: Islam In Kenya

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This section will comprise the spread of Islam in Kenya, activism and reforms with regard to political Islam in Kenya, Islamic movements, reforms and the existing violent trends of movements associated to Islamism in the Coastal region of Kenya, with a focus on Lamu and Tana River.

Islam had spread into Africa by the mid-seventh century A.D, a few decades after Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) moved with his followers from Mecca to Medina in the Arabian Peninsula. Africa's contact with Islam can be traced to when a small group of refugees fled Mecca to seek refuge in Ethiopia (Habash), a region led by a Christian king in 613 CE. Later large numbers of people migrated, who were mainly the Companions of the Prophet. This group of people stayed for fourteen years until 629 CE (Conn, 1978; Kettani, 1982; Schacht, 1965). Since then Africa has received many waves of Muslim immigrants as refugees and traders migrating from the Arabian Peninsula and Persia. Between the eighth and ninth centuries, these Arab travellers and traders as well as the African clerics began spreading Islam along the eastern coast of Africa and spreading to western and central Sudan (Department of Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, 2000). There is no one single flow to explain how Islam spread in East Africa. Hence, it is more appropriate to consider Islam in Africa in terms of multiple histories rather than a single unified movement.

In Kenya, the coastal region was marked by an Islamic model of governance during the precolonial era. The influence has been from the Omani, Al-Busaid dynasty, a form of Islamic sultanate. Said bin Sultan al-Busaid's (1806-56) influence spread from the capital of Zanzibar to the coastal strip of Kenya and Tanzania (Salim, 1983; Brennan, 2008). In Kenya, the Zanzibari hegemony spanned over Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu as well as parts of Sabaki North Bank, Chonyi, Kauma, the Bajun areas in Kiunga and some Digo lands. These areas were governed by agents of Omani descent such as the governors (Liwalis), lieutenants (Mudirs) or Court Judges (Kadhis) who served mostly the interests of the Arabs (Aldrick, 1988; Loimeier, 2013). These governors secured political control via compelling submission of indigenous leaders. Their power was aided by the notion of a superior racial class based on the fact that the governing elites were Omani Arabs. This reveals that coastal Kenya had a long tradition of Sultanate influence prior to becoming a British protectorate (Mwakimako, 2003; Ghai and Ghai, 2013). Arab influence spanned from mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. The local structures remained even during the period of British imperialism. While the European powers divided Africa in the 1880s, the rule of Sultan Barghash bin Said (1870-88) saw to the Arab dominance in the coastal regions under the colonial system. Barghash succeeded in safeguarding the sultanate's sovereignty by arranging for British protection recognized by Zanzibar as a 'protected Arab state' under an 1895 treaty (Abdulkadir, 2010). The historical coastal strip (mwambao) was a part of the Zanzibar sultanate (2,116 square miles that extends from Kipini to Vanga in the South and stretching inland from the coast for ten nautical miles) (Mwakimako, 2003). This treaty was a contentious issue which shaped coastal and Muslim politics in the region. It continues to do so through political activism narratives such as that propagated by the Mombasa Republican Council as well as Islamist narratives (Badurdeen, 2019).

During the British colonial period, freedom of religion for the Muslims were unhindered, nor was there any extra effort made to encourage Islam. The Liwalis, Mudirs and Kadhis were on the colonial administration payroll and the sultan was not consulted on appointments or regulations. The emergence of Muslim groups opposing the British administration revealed the dissatisfaction of the Arab Muslims over the administration of the coast (Ndzovu, 2008). Christian missionary activities and colonial policies were seen to be favouring Christians to the disadvantage of Islam. This also shaped the education context, where missionary evangelism and education went hand in hand. Since the 1920s, expansion of Christianity was seen outstripping Islam in the interior rural regions of the coast (Ndeda, 2009). Kenyan Muslims – especially Arab Muslims – became a minority group. This evidenced the emergence of a strong separatist tendency where the allegiance was to the Busaidi Zanzibar sultanate. The 1950s marked the rise of African nationalism, the momentum of which ultimately led to Kenya's independence from the colonial regime in 1963 (Ndzovu, 2014). Along with this independence, coastal Muslims fronted the idea of secession which continues to date in the MRC and Islamist narratives alleging that the coast has been discriminated against by successive governments in the post-independence era (Badurdeen, 2012). Islamists have also alleged that Muslims are discriminated against in a Christian majority country.

However, not all from both non-Muslim and Muslim African politicians on the coast were willing to embrace the idea of secession. They feared that unification with Zanzibar would imply being under Arab rule and would mean

continued subordination for groups who saw themselves as indigenous. These segments of the coastal population preferred union with the rest of Kenya rather than leadership from the outside whether it be the British or the Zanzibar sultanate. On the other hand, others believed that leadership was going from the British-Christian government to the upcountry Christian leaders (Willis and Gona, 2013; Prestholdt, 2014). This context became the backdrop for narratives often floated by the MRC, political activist movements and some Islamist networks regarding 'up-country' people stealing jobs and privileges which were intended for the Coasterians. Some suggested that 'up-country non-Muslims' were trying to deprive the local Muslim communities of power and privileges. Ethnic differences within Muslims culminated in the creation of many coastal Muslim associations from the 1950s onwards. The need for a national Muslim body gave rise to the creation of SUPKEM in 1973 – a supreme council to be in charge of managing Muslim affairs nationally. However, internal rivalries within the council weakened its authority as some claimed it to be a coastal dominated platform rather than a national organization and saw it as compromised by the Government in Nairobi (Kinyua, 2014). Global events such as the Iranian revolution as well as influences on Political Islam from Saudi Arabia and Egypt shaped this era. The creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran made Muslims realize that Islam could be a model for running nations. The defeat of the Russians by the Mujahideen in Afghanistan gave further hope and formed a desire amongst Muslims in Muslim-majority countries to live under the Shariah (Islamic law).

## **Emergence of Political Salafism in Kenya**

The emergence of political Salafism in Kenya is fundamentally linked to the liberalization of Kenya's political sphere in the early 1990s. The 1990s mark a significant turning point for Muslim politics or political Islam in Kenya. President Moi embarked on the multiparty system in 1992. The dictatorial tendencies of President Moi affected the entire country with the regime implementing repressive measures towards opposition movements. Many young activists took advantage of the political freedom that came with the re-emergence of multi-party politics and the amendment of the Section 2(A) of the Constitution of Kenya in the political system to form the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) (Moller, 2006; Oded, 2002). Muslim scholars (imams, ulama, sheikhs) who are traditionally trained and professionals educated in the secular-formal institutions took leadership of the movement. The organization of Muslim activism along the Kenyan coast was driven by longstanding economic and political grievances targeting the post-colonial state. In the late 1990s the initiators of the IPK formed new organizations including the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK) and the National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF) (Elischer, 2019). IPK differed from SUPKEM as the movement wanted to make a more direct political impact. It wanted to be recognized like any other political party in Kenya. This was a political activist type of movement for Muslims, spearheaded by Sheik Bailala who used his network of mosques and known Imams to support his political programmes (Kresse, 2009). Despite being unregistered, the IPK carried out their activities as a party. This youthful new leadership was seen as force for nationalist politics in comparison to the already existing Christian unions. During this period, Muslims worked side by side with the Christian clergy in posing a real challenge to Moi in the coast region. However, there were periodic tensions over various issues such as the perceived legitimacy of Kadhi courts as legal authority rather than Kenyan Law (Moller, 2006).

Globally, the period between the 1970s and the 1990s was a time of great Islamic revivalism where many other countries embarked on different political activism projects. This was greatly aided by trainings from Saudi Arabian educational and charitable institutions through Saudi-trained religious personnel (ulama, sheikhs and imams), the Islamic publications of books and other reading materials, the circulation of audio tapes of religious sermons and prompts to Islamize every-day life. This was also the time when new Muslim players came onto stage with the influential Tabligh (Tabliqs). These Tabliqs attracted many Muslim youth to join them. They were products formed as a consequence of learned scholars from Saudi universities, especially the Islamic University of Medina. These students, upon their return championed a stricter puritan form of Islam and challenged the traditional Muslim scholars understanding of Islam (Chande, 2008). Saudi Arabia gave scholarships to many young Muslims from across the world, including many from East Africa, to counter the rising influence of Iran. Saudi trained scholars returned from around 1985 and started teaching in madrasas and preaching a so-called correct version of Islam (from Saudi) in mosques in the form of Friday sermons (Khutbas) and darsas (Islamic lectures). Sheikhs and Imams showed their prowess of the Quran, Arabic language and Hadith (traditions of the Prophet) in these Darsas (Lynch, 2011; Moller, 2006). Similarly, other influences such as Shiism were also present, along with a blend of different teachings from elsewhere. For example, Sheikh Nassir, a scholar, used many of the theological teachings of Said Qutub for his Ramadhan sermons in Mombasa. Initially a Sunni, Nasser later adopted Shiism in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and he spread his teaching to many parts of Kenya (Ndzovu, 2014).

Sheikh al-Amin al-Mazrui is regarded as the pioneer of reform within Sunni Islam in eastern Africa. Though the reform activities were not labelled as Salafist, his works demonstrate a deep inclination towards Salafism and a focus on puritanical Islam free from religious innovations (*bid'a*). The scholar called for Islamic reforms denouncing local practices in the region as cause for social and economic backwardness. Sheikh al-Amin's influence can be seen in the spheres of law (Sharia), education and social transformation of the Muslim community in eastern Africa (Mraja, 2011). His legacy can be felt among his students who popularized his reforms after his demise in 1947 and his book *Hadithul Mukhtar* describes the basis of analysis for Salafi-reformation that could be propagated through the Sunnah. Sheikhs Muhammad Kasim al-Mazrui (1912-1981) and Abdullah Saleh Farsy (1912-1982) epitomized a group of Sheikh al-Amin's students who strengthened this reformist discourse throughout the end of the 20th Century.

## The Salafi-Wahabi Trend in Kenya

Meanwhile, a few of the scholars and Islamic leaders encouraged a very different approach to Muslim politics in Kenya, mainly in Muslim dominated areas such as the coast. Reports suggest that extremist Hanbali Islamist doctrine expanded on the Coast in the 1990s with Al Qaeda operatives such as Fazul Mohammed and Wadih el Hage (Osama bin Laden's Lebanese personal assistant) moving to East Africa to take charge of Al Qaeda's activities (Kantai, 2013). Radical Islamist clerics such as the late Sheikh Aboud Rogo, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Rimo and Sheikh Abu Bakr Sheriff Ahamed (Makaburi) strengthened their doctrine on the Coast, northern Kenya and other parts of the country by recruiting jobless youths in marginalised areas. In the 1990s and 2000s, few extremist preachers used mosques as centres of political debate and mobilisation. These preachers interpreted the particular socio-economic or political problems facing the youth and the peripheral regions (coast and the north eastern) by indicating that they were direct victims of discrimination - evidence of systematic discrimination against Muslims. They further presented the plight of Muslims as an international and not simply a national struggle; evoking events in Somalia, Palestine or the Gulf. The discontent of many young Muslims encouraged an escalation of the radical content of sermons in many mosques (Willis and Mwakimako, 2014).

Existing Salafi Wahhabi waves have espoused Takfirism to further strengthen their goals for a pure form of Islam. Takfirism is a minority ideology which endorses violence and in particular advocates the killing of other Muslims declared to be unbelievers (*kuffar*). Justification for Takfirism is attributed to 'words and deeds with direct quotations from the Qur'an and the Sunna, which are the sources of Islamic law (Shari'a), as well as by citing historical precedents such as the Khawarij movement and Ibn Taymiyya's *fatawa'* (Badar, Nagata and Tueni, 2017: p.132). Further, these groups defend their actions in legal terms with the 'misinterpretation or misuse of the Islamic legal and enforcement tools such as *hisba* and *fatwas'* (p. 132). In Kenya, the article 'The Jihad in Kenya: Understanding Al-Shabaab Recruitment and Terrorist Activity inside Kenya – in their own words' by Speckhard and Shajikovci (2019) identifies that recruits go through Shariah trainings to learn Al-Shabaab's Takfiri interpretation of Islam. The article 'Kenya's Jihadi Clerics: Formulation of a "Liberation Theology" and the Challenge to Secular Power,' by Ndzovu (2018) describes Jihadi clerics' allegiance to Takfirism. For example, in Kwale, Sheikh Rimo's sermons and work exhibited words and actions of denouncing (*takfir*) Muslims who in his interpretation had allegedly deviated from the 'pure or true form of faith'. The cleric was an activist-reformist teacher who criticized the pluralist mixture of Islamic and indigenous Digo cultural practices that characterized the local community in Kwale (Ndaru, 2017; Ndzovu, 2019).

International or transnational waves of Islamist extremism further propelled individuals to use or manipulate existing religious schools of thought to mobilize individuals for violent extremist movements and acts. This was further aided by the implications of international politics on the domestic situation. This includes the Global War on Terror strategies which came from the 'West' and were co-opted for use in the Kenyan context along with strategies and policies in which Muslims were labelled as suspect communities (Badurdeen, 2018a). The anti-terrorism bill in 2003 was said to resemble the American Patriot Act which has aroused controversy even within America itself and Kenyan Muslims perceived it as especially targeted at them. Other major acts include the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2012 and the Security Amendment Act 2014 (Badurdeen, 2018b). Ndzovu (2018) highlighted three factors in the genesis of extreme Salafi ideas of violence: the appearance of Salafists (Wahhabi) in Kenya among the Ansari (the protectors of the tradition of Prophet Muhammad), mainly in Kwale, was heralded as those with extreme religious views; the increasing number of Muslims returning as scholars from the Middle East – mainly Saudi Arabia who had been exposed to Wahhabi teachings; and, the insurgency in Somalia, spearheaded by the Al-Shabaab bringing together Muslims from different nationalities as part of a global Islamic movement with a collective vision for an Islamic State.

## Socio-political Context and Violence Linked to Islamist Movements in Lamu and Tana River County

Kidnappings in 2011 in Lamu marked one of the main triggers for the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) intervention in Somalia. In September 2011, a British couple on a holiday were attacked on Kiwayu Island in the Lamu Archipelago. The woman was kidnapped, but her husband was killed. Three weeks later, a French woman was kidnapped from Manda Island (Nyagah, Mwangi and Attree, 2018). While Kenya's intervention in Somalia had been planned before these kidnappings, the incidents along Kenya's border with Somalia provided the trigger for the launch of Operation Linda Nchi (protect the country) by KDF in October 2011 (Lind, Mutahi and Oosterom, 2015).

Next, the Mpeketoni attack on 15 June 2014 marked a heinous event when 47 people were killed during one night in the town of Mpeketoni on mainland Lamu. A group of armed men launched the attack targeting male non-Muslims in Mpeketoni, chanting Islamist slogans. The next day, 15 other people were killed in a nearby village. On 23 June, another village was attacked. Attacks were also carried out in Hindi and Gamba (Tana River County) on 23 July 2014. Some of these locations – in particular Mpeketoni – were mainly populated by Kikuyus, Kenya's largest ethno-linguistic group primarily inhabiting Central Kenya and largely viewed by Lamu locals as outsiders (Willis and Mwakimako, 2014). On 19 July 2014, a bus travelling on a road between Malindi and Lamu was attacked killing 7 passengers. In the short span of five weeks Lamu and nearby areas witnessed over 100 killings (Al Jazeera News, 2014). Many residents fled from their houses and were displaced due to fear. Propaganda released by Al-Shabaab nine months later showed the attacks being celebrated and alleged that the operations had been launched to avenge the Kenyan government's actions in Somalia (Nyagah, Mwangi and Attree, 2018). Many killed were non-Muslims Kikuyus. The attacks also revealed al Shabaab's manipulation of ethnicity and religion, with propaganda messages claiming that land in the Mpeketoni area belonged to the majority Muslim population, and had been stolen or grabbed by non-Muslim outsiders (McGregor, 2017). Such messages were used as a strategy to entrench divisions and mobilise support for local politics regarding local issues. They were based on existing grievances connected to controversial land allocations made in the 1970s, when agricultural plots were given to outside communities, mainly from central and western Kenya. Then-President Jomo Kenyatta allocated public land to people from outside Lamu, the up-country settlers, mainly from the Kikuyu ethnic group. Also a Kikuyu, the President was accused of distributing positions and land ownership on an ethnic basis. The new comers from outside Lamu were awarded title deeds to land that historically belonged to those said to be autochthonous to Lamu: the Mijikenda, Bajuni, Sanye, Boni and Swahili. Over decades, with new outsiders coming in, Lamu has become a county where nearly 50 per cent of the population is assessed to be non-indigenous (Nyongesa, 2017; Butime, 2014). These ethnic identity issues have had implications in voting, as the new migrants can vote as a block during elections.

The Government security response to the Mpeketoni attacks in 2014 was slow due to insufficient coordination and equipment. However, the increasing frequency of attacks necessitated an increase in security which culminated in Operation Linda Boni in early 2015 (Horn Institute, 2017). There were mixed responses on the Operation Linda Boni in Lamu. Some – including those in the tourism sector, the Kikuyu community and other non-Muslims – felt safer with the KDF presence. Most KDF personnel were non-Muslims and they likely related easily with the non-Muslim communities in Lamu. Muslim women raised concerns over the discriminatory checks on them. The Boni or Aweer were the main ethnic groups in the Boni forest area. The imposed curfew affected their livelihoods and cultural activities of many in Lamu County. The economy was hit hard. Those who depended on fishing were especially affected after a ban on night fishing. The need for fishing permits from the Kenyan Navy, the requirement to carry identity cards at all times and the many security checkpoints changed the lifestyles of the Lamu people. Arrests, detentions and constant checks raised serious concerns according to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC) (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Issues affecting Lamu have occasionally spilled-over into Tana River County (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The county is relatively secure in comparison to its neighbours, especially Lamu and Garissa. Very few lethal Al-Shabab attacks have been recorded in the county itself. However, it faces challenges from mobilization and recruitment and is reported to have served as a hiding ground for militants after attacks in other counties (Tana River County Action Plan). In August 2017, two motorists were shot dead in an attack by Al-Shabab militants in Lango la Simba area, Tana River County. The attack followed shortly after another further east along the Garsen-Lamu road in which gunmen opened fire on two vehicles (Ombati, 2017).



Similarly, in January 2020, the Tana River County police commander, Fred Ochieng, reported that 11 wounded young Al-Shabaab suspects were found in a thicket in Kilengwani in the Tana Delta. He noted that the 11 militants, suspected to be Al-Shabab operatives, were speaking in Kiswahili. They had moved into the Boni Forest (Xinhua, 2020). This announcement came after Al-Shabaab militants had raided Camp Simba on Manda Bay Island, a joint US-Kenya military base. Security was strengthened after locals spotted six armed men in Bula village. Police Commander Ochieng said the suspects were seen crossing the River Tana from the Garissa side and travelling to Lagbadana village by boat (Daily Nation, 2020).

Recently, the government has been more flexible in its approach to counter-terrorism. The September 2016 National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) reinforced the importance of prevention and counter radicalisation in addition to more 'hard' security – or 'counter terrorism' – approaches. At least on paper, the focus has been on the building the resilience of communities, countering extremist messages, engaging with young people and dealing with broader inter-community grievances as well as alternative livelihoods. The County Action Plans (CAPs) marked another milestone as most of the CVE planning has been devolved to the respective counties. The CAPs focussed on the local driving factors of violent extremism and proposed local solutions for implementation.

The NSCVE and the CAPs have highlighted the religious pillar as an important component in CVE. This is mainly because of the religious factor being a connector and divider among many violent extremist movements. Even in the countering of Islamist extremist movements, religion plays a vital role in mitigation. However, the religious pillar in the CAP has to be dealt with caution as intra-religious divides among Muslims need to be considered for effective rolling out of religious based interventions to countering Islamist violent extremism. CVE strategies have also attempted to rally Sufis in the struggle against extremism however such a move requires consensus. The government must be aware of the potential pitfalls as they try to embrace Sufism as a platform for dialogue and action. Without considerable sensitivity, such a move could be seen as government interference in Muslim affairs and an effort to design a 'correct' form of Islam, which has the potential to deepen sectarian divisions and alienate non-violent Salafis (Abdi, 2015).

## 6. Research Findings

The findings are documented in five sections. Section I looks at the background of the spread of emerging contemporary Islamic movements in Lamu and Tana River County. Section II comprises the evolving nature of Islamic education in the two counties. Section III explores the influences of returnee religious scholars, institutions and charities in the spread of emerging Islamic movements. Section IV describes the contemporary Islamic schools of thought, jurisprudence and movements in Lamu and Tana River County, and Section V details the existence and challenges of intra/interfaith interventions in the two counties with regard to peacebuilding.

### I. History of Islamic Movements in Lamu and Tana River Counties

#### Lamu County and Islamic Movements

Lamu County is located on the north coast of Kenya and borders Tana River County to the southwest, Garissa County to the north and Somalia to the northeast. The south of the county borders the Indian Ocean. The County comprise the mainland and Lamu Archipelago. Administratively, the county has two constituencies – Lamu West and Lamu East. The county has ten wards, 23 locations and 38 sub-locations. The majority of Lamu’s population is Muslim (Regional Pastoral Livelihoods Resilience, Kenya 2020). The main economic activities are fishing and tourism, mining and crop production. Like many other coastal counties, landlessness, poverty, under-developed infrastructure, poor social service provisions negatively affect the county (Lamu County Government, 2018). The Old Town on Lamu Island is a UNESCO world heritage site that draws many visitors to the county (UNESCO, 2020). The Lamu Port South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor is a mega project conceived to be the second transport corridor providing a port, railway, new highway and oil pipeline linking Lamu with South Sudan and northern Kenya. The project also includes the promises of a resort city, airport and oil refinery in Lamu. However, most of the project still remains confined to paper with significant progress only made in the port construction (Human Rights Watch, 2018; Watkins, 2015).

Historically, Lamu boasts of a rich trade network during pre and post-colonial eras. The region was under the control of Portuguese (1506 to 1652) and then the Omani protectorate which assisted Lamu locals in resisting Portuguese control (Kithi, 2008). Lamu had relative stability under the Omani protectorate with flourishing trade and the strengthening of Islam through the construction of religious institutions (Curtin, 1985; Curtin, 1982; Ghaidan, 1971; Ghaidan, 1974). In the mid-19th century, Lamu came under the influence of the sultanate of Zanzibar (Brennan, 2008). In 1885, Wituland came under German control. In 1890, under the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty, Lamu and Kenya came under British colonial rule until Kenyan Independence in 1963 (Ylvisaker, 1978). However, Lamu County maintained its relative autonomy compared to other regions of the country. There is no one single flow to explain how Islam spread in Lamu. Hence, it is more appropriate to consider Islam in Lamu in terms of multiple histories rather than a single unified movement. A participant explained this as the presence of several theories on how Islam entered Lamu.

*The history of Lamu can be classified in three ways. First, is that history was written by western scholars. These scholars studied history as a general subject rather than specific thematic areas. They view the advent of Islam as a historic event, where they perceived migration of Muslims from Saudi Arabia to Habisha (Ethiopia). Second group believed that Islam spread due to a purposive reason, where Muslims performed Hijra and sought to spread Islam through daawa. Third, are the local theories on the spread of Islam in Lamu. It was believed that the Lamu people have a lineage with the Sharifs who related to the descendants of the Prophet Muhammed (Sal). Here it was believed that the Sharifs and Auliyaas [saints] had a direct impact on the initiation and spread of Islam. I believe, in my opinion, Islam spread with the early migrants to Africa and the Lamu archipelago and trade had a greater impact in the spread of religion.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-32.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-21.

Lamu retained its important status as a significant centre for Islamic education and Swahili culture. A good example is the annual Maulidi and cultural festivals celebrated in Lamu (Bang, 2015; El-Zein, 1974). Some attributed the Sufi order as a contributory factor in promoting and expanding Islam from Lamu to the rest of the coastal region and beyond:<sup>4</sup>

*Lamu was the place for Islamic education and the Sufi order [Tariqa] assisted in the spread of Islam. The government gave the Sufi movement all freedom of expression. The Sufis were not a threat to the colonial government. I can ascertain that the Sufis helped in spreading Islam in the region, and the movement of scholars from one village to another enabled strengthening the Sufi movement in the coastal region of Kenya.*<sup>5</sup>

The Riyadhha Mosque in Lamu is the longest functioning mosque and Islamic educational institution in the Swahili world. It has provided both basic Islamic education to children and higher learning (Islamic law, Quranic exegesis etc.) to advanced students. The Riyadhha, with its branches in other parts of the region, has come to epitomize East African Islam. The impact of the Riyadhha on Islamic intellectual history is crucial in understanding the spread of Islam in East Africa. The institution educates children from the Lamu archipelago as well as students from other parts of the East Africa region (Bang, 2015; Kresse, 2018). Most of the Riyadhha scholars went from one village to another teaching Islam. The Maulid attracted many followers. Mosques and madrasas were built in Lamu and beyond. *'Slowly the Riyadhha scholars influence spread to the entire Lamu population, and far as Mombasa, Somalia and Tanzania.'*<sup>6</sup>

Lamu was pivotal as a religious centre for many centuries producing many eminent scholars such as Sheikh Feisal bin Ali al-Lamy (1838–1918); Sayyid Abdurrahman As-Saggaf (1844–1922); Sheikh Kale bin Bwana Mkuu (d. 1918) and Habib Saleh Jamal al-Layl (d. 1936), who became influential on the East African coast (Farsy 1972). These scholars included both indigenous people who were Swahilis and the offspring of Arab immigrants, some of whom purportedly believed they descended with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), thereby gaining the title sayyid or sharif (Ashraf families). By the twentieth century, Lamu had several Ashraf families specialising in religious teaching, commerce and craft. Jamal al-Layl is one of the Ashraf families that settled in Lamu during the nineteenth century and augmented the grandeur of the town as a centre of spiritual excellence.<sup>7</sup> Habib Saleh Alawi Jamal al-Layl (1853–1936) was pivotal in this endeavour. He was the son of a Comorian mother and an Arab father from Yemen. His first visit to Lamu was in 1870, when he studied under local scholars and later founded the Riyadhha Mosque College in 1900. By the time of his death in 1936, Riyadhha Mosque College had become influential in East Africa as a centre for learning and pilgrimage (Bang, 2015).

Lamu is considered a space of orthodox Sunni belief and practice. However, opinions of interviewees were two-fold. Some Sharifs claimed that they were Sufis while others denied any connection to Sufism in their rituals and practice. Maulidis and the maulidi festival shaped the Islamic culture. Sufism has existed largely as local practices in Lamu – the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, the performance of dhikr, a congregational salutation at the end of prayer, the use of drumming instruments, and prayers to local saints.<sup>8</sup> The Swahili people gather outside the tomb of a local saint, al-Habib Swaleh – a leading Sufi in Lamu. A cloth covering al-Habib Swaleh's tomb is usually replaced by a new one during each maulidi festival (Olati, 2014).

The Sufis argued that their rituals created unity in Lamu, while some of the Wahabi influencers objected to Maulid or the use of instruments in Lamu mosques and other non-Islamic performances during the Maulid festival. Lamu Sufi religious leaders dismissed the complaints by stating that the Maulid celebrated a tradition of inclusion,<sup>9</sup> and had the ability to attract new converts while maintaining positive relations with non-Muslims (Goldsmith, 2018).

<sup>5</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-45.

<sup>6</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-17.

<sup>7</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-31.

<sup>9</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-41.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-5.

## Tana River County and Islamic Movements

Tana River County is named after the Tana River, with the major ethnic groups including Dagodie, Ogaden, Pokomo, Orma, Wardey and Gadsan. The largest town is Hola. There are seven constituencies: Bangale, Bura, Garsen, Galole, Kipini, Madogo, and Wenje. The county struggles with periodic drought, erratic rainfalls and floods in some areas. Ethnic clashes between the Pokomo and Oromo is evident during seasons of drought and during elections (Kagwanja, 2003). On 22 August 2012, 52 people were killed in ethnic violence in Tana River County between the Orma, Wardey and Pokomo groups (Human Rights Watch, 2013). In Tana River County, ethnic conflicts dominate more than religious conflicts.<sup>10</sup>

In most areas of Tana River County, the geographical distribution of religions is often quite marked, as for example among the Pokomo, where the Pokomo of the upper Tana River tend to be Muslim and the Pokomo of the lower Tana River tend to be Christian. However, religious identities are not rigidly exclusive. Religious changes have taken place gradually and over long periods of time. In the north, migration was responsible for the spread of Islam. In the 1980s a number of men migrated from upper Pokomo to Chara in lower Pokomo County and traded with Muslim traders at Kau. Under the influence of these Muslim traders some of the men became Muslims.<sup>11</sup> In 1910, when they returned back, they began to spread Islam in upper Pokomo region. Kau was a crossroad village – a major place for trade and the harbouring of ships coming from the coastal towns (Sperling, 1988). It is not a surprise then that Kau was the home of the Nabahani sultanate during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and, as such, an important trade hub for the region, inhabited by a Muslim Pokomo community, the majority of whom are farmers, fishermen or traders (Coret, 2019). The Orma in Tana River County are predominantly Muslims. The Orma are semi-nomadic herders and representatives of the once powerful Oromo (Galla) nation of Ethiopia and northern Kenya. They are related to the Borana and other Oromo groups living in northern Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia. Ormas had moved into the Tana area by 1850. In the late 19th Century the Orma were forced by Ogaadeen (Ogaden) Somali to migrate farther south into Kenya. They are at home now along the river, from the rich delta area of the lower Tana to the drier western Tana area. They live near the river in the dry season, and move further inland to the west in the rainy season (Turton, 1975). Most Muslims from Tana River inherited their religion from their forefathers.<sup>12</sup> Most forefathers were traditionalists who converted themselves due to their associations with Arab traders.<sup>13</sup>

In Tana, the emergence of mosques and madrasa has impacted the African traditional religion as traditional communities were transformed into an Islamic society, a fact which proved to have a great impact on the local traditional community as some cultural practices were considered as shirk (polytheism).

*Sheikh Said Songoro and Sheikh Wario were main individuals from Tana River for the spread of the Islam movement in Tara, in Tana River. So Islam spread because of our forefathers' initiatives. We even stopped some of our traditional practices such as using specific medicine and cultural rituals for the sick. We learnt that it was shirk (polytheism).<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-1.

<sup>12</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-37.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-7.

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-10.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Religious Leader, KI-17.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.

## II. Evolving Nature of Education in Lamu and Tana River Counties

### Islamic Education in Lamu County

In Lamu, and other parts of the East African Coast, Islamic education was influenced by the following: social stratification, ideological debates among the Sunni and Shia forms of Islamic movements (Tariqa), proliferation of madrasa educational institutions, influence of Muslim scholars from Hadramaut (South Arabia), Zanzibar and Comoro Islands, the Indian ocean trade on the East African coast and the struggle for political power among clans in Lamu, Malindi and Mombasa. Islamic education was offered informally in mosques in Lamu, Malindi and Mombasa by visiting Muslim scholars who came into the towns from Saudi Arabia, Zanzibar and Comoro islands.<sup>15</sup> Some of these scholars lived in the towns for a period of six months to one year before moving out into other countries. Students who came from affluent families followed the teachers from one location to another until they mastered advanced Islamic education. Students who could not bear the expenses would stay and wait for other visiting Muslim scholars to gain more knowledge on various aspects of Islamic education. This non formal Islamic higher education was not structured. It was based on the textbooks which a scholar had in his possession and had mastered.<sup>16</sup> Prior to the formation of the Riyaadhi Lamu Mosque College, students from Kenya who were interested in pursuing higher Islamic education had to travel to Egypt, Hejaz and Hadramaut to qualify as scholars. Students who sought traditional higher education outside Kenya included personalities such as Seyyid Abubakar bin Abdul-Rahman Al Hussein and Sheikh Ali bin Abdallah bin Nafi Al Mazrui (Pouwell, 1987).

A number of Muslim movements influenced Islamic education and reforms in the Coast. They were the Qadirriya, Alawiya, Shidiliye and the Saliya. Each of these movements pursued new interpretation of Islamic law, traditions and theology and were triggered by the ideological rivalry among the movements. The pursuit for interpretations led to a search for knowledge to legitimize the principles and values of these movements. The Alawi teachings revolved around saint worship. The Qadiriya emphasized that it was only the Quran that was the basis of Islamic religion and education. The authority of the Quran superseded the hadith in the interpretation of Islamic values and practices. The Shadiliya emphasized Islamic revivalism. The Saliya opposed saint worship and use of instruments such as the tambourine in Islamic worship (Martin, 1969; Nabende, 2016).

During the colonial era, Missionary schools modelled on Christian values were established across coastal Kenya. Once Colonial rule was set up across the coast, Islamic education lost its legitimacy in relation to the demands of the job market. Participants explained how Lamu grappled with upholding Islamic education within the secular education system. English Language was seen to dominate with the secular education system. Gradually, in the late 1970s, the Arabic language was losing value in the colonial administration, where education was driven to facilitate the administrative system and youth prioritized English language for advancing careers.<sup>17</sup> One participant explained that some Sheikhs even forbade the secular system, saying it was haram (forbidden) and emphasized that Arabic was the language of the Quran. He further highlighted that 'Islamic manuscripts were in Arabic and young people did not know Arabic to understand them.'<sup>18</sup>

In the coastal towns of Lamu, Malindi and Mombasa Islam was deeply entrenched and there was widespread passive resistance towards Missionary schools.<sup>19</sup> The response often involved seeking scholarships for their children to pursue higher Islamic education abroad (in Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Malaysia, Pakistani or Indonesia).<sup>20</sup> Muslims in coastal Kenya also set up civil society organizations to advocate for the establishment of local Islamic educational institutions to offer Islamic higher education to their children (Hashmi, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-45.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-18.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-18.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-21.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-17.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-22.

*The Gulf connection liberalized education for all those who could not access Islamic education. Islamic education was concentrated on a few eminent families and was clan based. Therefore, the coming on new educated scholars from the Middle-East assisted in the spread of Islamic knowledge. The building of new madrasas, made Islamic education available for many others who were left out. A number of students got educated under these Sheikhs and longed for scholarships to go abroad.<sup>21</sup>*

Social stratification played a role in the access to wealth and education. Wealth and education were the determinants of membership into a prestigious social class. Nabende (2016: 197) explains that

*'rich families and clans such as the Mazrui of Mombasa and the Maawi of Lamu controlled access to higher Islamic education. The members from lower classes could not access this education. Their clans were associated with links to Prophet Muhammad (MPUH) and thus made it clear that higher Islamic education was for the aristocratic class. There was thus a competition by every Muslim to access higher Islamic education so as to gain entry into the prestigious class in the coast'.<sup>22</sup>*

Children from better-off families – mainly of Arab origin – had a better chance of leaving the country for study abroad. Most of the Africans relied on the existing local educational institutions. The Riyadh Mosque College became famous in catering to the needs of the local Muslims and was structured along the similar Riyadh Mosque college of Hadramaut in Saudi Arabia. It incorporated rituals and traditions of Muhammadal-Hibshi (Nabende, 2016). The Lamu Riyaadha Mosque College admitted students from the Oromo, Giriama and the Pokomo African societies to pursue Islamic education giving opportunities for everyone rather than confining it only to Arabs (Bang, 2015). The Islamic reform movement which began in Egypt had far reaching effects on the growth of higher Islamic education. The reform movement aimed at introducing science and technology in Islamic education. It also advocated for introducing innovations in the delivery of Islamic education in the Muslim world. This impacted the madrasa, curriculum, scholars who disseminated Islamic education and the students who attended these madrasas at the coast.<sup>23</sup> Islamic education was also affected with the decrease in state patronage for education. Hence most Madrasa had to self-finance their institutions and hence relied on the community funds or funding organizations for their survival.<sup>24</sup>

## Islamic Education in Tana River County

The late renowned Muslim scholar Sheikh Umar Dimah (d.2006) was responsible for the Islamization of a majority population in Galole constituency and beyond. Born in 1906, he went to the Lamu Riyadh Mosque Madrassa Institution in 1920 and graduated in religious education.<sup>25</sup> His teachers were the then Grand Sheik Habib Swaleh, Sheikh Ahmed Badawi, among others. By the early 1930s Sheikh Umar Dimah was given Ijaza by his scholars and allowed to go back to Tana River County for Daawa activities. Other influencers from Tana River have included his students Sheikh Awadh Dololo, Sheikh Said Kidanga and other contemporary scholars such as Sheikh Salim Umar Dimah, Sheikh Muhammad Ali Doyo (Khatwat), Sheikh Abdul-Qadir Ali, Sheikh Abu Bakar Salim and Sheikh Abdul Rashid Awadh, among others (Saidi, 2016).

The first modern madrassa was established in Kipini in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the Lamu Riyadh Grand Madrassa institution but could not spread Islam appropriately due to a lack of penetration into the interior. Kipini is an old town on the shores of the Indian Ocean and close to the Lamu archipelago. It is a multi-ethnic town comprising of the Bajunis, Boni and Pokomo. The Shariff Muslim scholars from Lamu Riyadh Grand Mosque of the Jamalullaili Yemenite clan have been credited for the introduction, propagation and expansion of Madrassa institutions in the whole of Tana River County and mostly were from the Sufi order (Saidi, 2016). Hence majority in Tana River County called themselves as belonging to the Ahl al Sunna Wal Jamaah, following the Tariqa order.<sup>26</sup>

The introduction of Islam and the Madrassa institutions met with a lot of challenges. The first attempt to construct a mosque in the village Masalani in the 1930s was resisted by both the traditionalists and Kidjo (Pokomo decentralised form government). In fact, after a few months, the mosque was torched by unknown persons. Another was constructed. The greatest challenge was the introduction of Islam to those native to the area. The traditional elders opposed the move while the young generation were more willing to accept the new faith. A conflict ensued between the young new converts and the traditional elders especially when the former wanted

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-7

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-7.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-1.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-20.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

to destroy and remove the Ngaji, a huge drum kept in the River Tana to which people made sacrifices. A confrontation broke out and the Muslims managed to take out the Ngaji and destroy it in front of all the people. Another challenge was competition from Christian missionaries backed by the British colonial government (Saidi, 2016). Apart from these factors, religion in the county has been influenced by Garissa and Isiolo in the north-east and north, as well as by Kilifi and Lamu from the south-west and south-east. Learning from different institutions has brought in diversity as well as conflicts in Tana River County. Where, those who studied in madrasas in Garissa followed a strict interpretation of the Quran and Hadith. Hence there were divisions among people in the mosques as they attended for their daily prayers:

*Most of the madrasas in Garissa adhered to a strict interpretation of the Quran and Hadith. When these students came to Tana River, they found it difficult to agree with the other scholars. Even today, you see these disagreements in Garsen. People from one mosque refraining to go to another mosque or prevents followers to go to other mosques (mosques that practice Maulid). The question is which most you go during the Azan, because we have to go to the nearest mosque. Some do only go to specific mosques.<sup>27</sup>*

Both Tana River and Lamu Counties grapple with funding for Islamic education. Most teachers are poorly paid, and they rely on community support for teaching religion. With dwindling number of Muslim charities, much less emphasis has been placed in the madrasa systems. Also, issues have risen in the attempts taken by the government on having an agreed curriculum for madrasa education. This has necessitated many Muslim groups to agree on a set of common values while adhering to their own schools of thought.<sup>28</sup> Further, priority for secular education has focused less attention for Islamic education. However, the movement for integrated schools where secular and Islamic education is merged has been seen as important in the region.<sup>29</sup>

### III. Influence of Returnee Religious Scholars, Institutions and Charities

There were contesting views amongst interviewees in Lamu and Tana River County regarding the experiences of returnee Islamic scholars – an emerging class of Islamic elites trained in Saudi, Sudan, and Egyptian theological universities –, their role in educational initiatives and the reconfiguration of Muslim theology with regard to Islamic movements. This has implications in the theological discourse of Islamic religious movements at the coast. The interviews and a significant literature review revealed the following themes on returnee Islamic scholars: changes in the ways that Islamic scholars conceptualize and rationalize local politics and Muslim life in a pluralistic society where Muslims are a minority and the returnee scholars' educational influence on the formulation of Muslim culture in Lamu.

Countries where scholars received their education are fully situated in the spheres of Shi'ism or Sunnism and its proliferation. Most Shia scholars received religious education from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and some from Yemen. Most returnee scholars were engaged in institutions which spread 'Shiism' as well as in community development endeavours. The Swafa Mosque, Al Safa Center and the Swafa Integrated School (secular and Islamic education) are pivotal in the spread of Shiism in Lamu. Al Safa in Lamu was sponsored by the Ahlul Bayt Foundation, a Shia organization which carried religious educational activities in Matondi, Mombasa and Malindi. Sheikh Abdillahi Nassir from Mombasa and Sayyid Aidarus Alwy famously known as Mzee Mwinyi, was influential in the spread of Shiism in Lamu. Overall, in Kenya the Aga Khan Foundation and Burhani Foundation has played a role in integrated education endeavours.<sup>1</sup>

Most Sunni scholars received their education in Sudan, Egypt, Uganda, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan and Malaysia. In the 1970s and the 1980s Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman and Kuwait played a prominent role in providing scholarships for higher studies in the Gulf region. Gulf petro-dollars funded education, and the building of Islamic institutions in many of the developing world.

Many students from Lamu received scholarships from the mid-970s onward. There was a surge in demand for such studies as often a foreign education provided scholars with a higher social positioning in their home communities. Scholarships also provided the lower and middle classes with an opportunity for higher education outside the country, based on their merit as well as favouritism of specific religious scholars also educated in foreign universities. After education, these scholars came with knowledge and funding from their institutions which facilitated the spread of their religious thought and specific waves. Prior to the 1970s most of the students only had opportunities to travel and study based on the social class of their family or the finances of the Arab World.<sup>2</sup> Now, with new opportunities in education, there was also a surge in the need for madrasas and mosques for the new scholars. The specific divisions among the scholars necessitated new institutions which would accommodate their newly received knowledge. Changes were evident after the global war on terror began, with greater surveillance on religious institutions. Scholarships were increasingly offered by Sudan. The conflict in Yemen has contributed to the impetus for education in countries like Sudan and Uganda.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the new scholars returned with changed thinking patterns as shaped by their respective foreign institutions. This contrasted with the old knowledge and practices. Most Salafist scholars condemned and viewed the old teachings of Tariqa practices (Sufism) as *bida'* (innovations) incompatible with traditional Islam (Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammed SAL). Some were against the Maulidis, praying for the saints or the dead as well as practices of witchcraft. These changes were viewed by the some communities as contradictory to the ways in which they had lived for a long period of time. Thus, people labelled the new scholars as 'Salafi' or 'Wahabi' or 'petro scholars.' There was very little or no change in the Madhab, as it was new religious waves coming from the Gulf countries or the Azhar University in Egypt. The changes were more associated with the individual interpretations of the Quran and the Hadith.<sup>4</sup>

Islamic educational institutions such as the Mambroi Islamic Centre, Riyadha Islamic Centre and Kisauni Islamic Centre were pivotal in Islamic education. Most of these institutions suffered the setback of declining funding from the Gulf countries. The lack of funding [due to surveillance on charities] resulted in a drop in scholarship opportunities for students from these institutions, resulting in some being unable to finance their studies. For

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1 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.  
 2 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-22.  
 3 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-2.  
 4 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-20.

example, the Kisauni Islamic Institute received funding from Saudi Arabia and was one of the main institutions for Islamic education in the East African region. Students came from Tanzania, Uganda and the Comoros. When funding was curtailed by the government and Saudi Arabian charities, the institute could not fund the lecturer's salary, provide boarding facilities for students nor free scholarships. The Institute struggled to keep up with the changes now depending on student fees.<sup>5</sup>

## The Influence of Non-Governmental Organizations and Charities

In Lamu County, the following Muslim charities and NGOs played an important role in Islamic education and development: African Muslim Agency, World Assembly for Muslim Youth (WAMY), Lamu Muslim Youth, Ahlubaty Charity for Shia, the Council of Imam's and Preacher in Kenya (CIPK), the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), and the National Union of Kenya Muslims. Participants also highlighted that charities such as Al Haramain, Al Muntada, Islamic Relief Organization, Kuwait Organization for Quran and the Libyan Organization for Tahfidhul Quran have been active as charities helping in the development of the Kenyan populace. A participant explained that, *'hardly could we find local organizations advancing the course of Islam in Lamu without Arab connections.'*<sup>6</sup>

In Tana River County, participant highlighted the following Muslim charities and NGOs that had played an important role: Galole Muslim Association, Tana River Islamic Charity Project Trust, African Muslim Agency, World Assembly for Muslim Youth (WAMY), the Council of Imam's and Preacher in Kenya (CIPK), the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), the National Union of Kenya Muslims, Young Muslim Association, the Tana Council of Sunni Faith, Islaha Islamia and the Islamic Relief Organization.<sup>7</sup>

There is also a reliance on individuals for assistance due to the lack of organisations providing funding to these Muslim communities. Individuals such as Sheikh Umal (HASS Petroleum Company) have been profoundly important in providing charities and development to Tana River County. Similarly, Sheikh Salim bin Ahmad and Twahir Sheikh Said (TSS) have provided charities and development to Lamu County. The reliance on individuals for assistance and funding is increasing due to a lack of Muslim funding organizations in the two counties.

Since the September 2001 attacks and changes in the West, scrutiny on Muslims charities and NGOs has increased. Surveillance on mosques and NGOs has affected financial flows and the development of Muslim communities. As in many areas, mosques in Tana River County play a pivotal role in regulating the zakat (alms) system of Muslim society, where zakat is distributed among the poor members of the area. These mosques coexist side by side with CBOs acting together to address needs in education and healthcare, resolving communal issues and implementing other poverty alleviation projects. Now due to scrutiny concerns even waqf (permanent charities or money kept as a trust to support specific causes) are becoming difficult as concerns are raised that such activities might be linked to the funding of terrorist activities.<sup>8</sup> Even in Lamu County, there is a diminished trend of Muslim aid organizations within the global war on terror landscape. For example, Al-Haramain Foundation based in Saudi Arabia appeared in the UN Security Council sanctions list after it was charged with involvement in activities against state security after the 1998 Bombings in Nairobi (United Nations Security Council, 2018). Since then, their work has been destabilized and has worked at a minimum. Most Gulf oriented charities have been under surveillance lists and some even banned. Muslim scholars who were employed in these charities and associated with local projects lost their employment. Some constructions like madrasas and the Muslim Centre in Hola in Tana River were halted due to the cease of funding.<sup>9</sup> The closure of Muslim funding facilitated few non-Muslim aid institutions to take a lead in development issues in Muslim dominant regions.<sup>10</sup>

Some participants also highlighted that Shia networks have become stronger as they have better financing means and implement development-oriented projects in the localities. For example, the Ahlul Bayt Foundation, a Shia organization, is very active in Lamu. The Shias are viewed as a passive theological movement trying to convert the others (mainly Sunnis) via development oriented projects. It was suggested that they do not get involved in local politics. Their influence is seen in the development of madrasa curriculum as well as in promoting

5 Field Notes, discussion with Research Team.

6 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

7 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-5 and KI-8.

8 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-7.

9 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-9.

10 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-18.

integrated education systems appealing to the populace.<sup>11</sup> Bilal Muslim Mission also carried out health clinics, teacher training programmes and developed education material helping all Muslims regardless of their religious affiliation. Hence some view the Shias as a threat in promoting their ideologies via the education system and their development initiatives such as the Aga Khan Foundation or the Bilal Muslim Mission where they convert Sunnis through a passive methodical pathway. Some alleged the government and Western countries were assisting the Shia and Sufi funding networks as buffers to curtail the Salafist and the Wahabi waves.<sup>12</sup>

Media opportunities with radio and television channels or via cable television in Lamu allow individuals to access channels such as Al-Huda TV, Azam TV, Iqra FM Radio Salaam and Radio Rahma. This facilitates avenues for discussion and debate on issues with regard to Islam, concerning theology, the Muslim Ummah or contemporary local and global political concerns. The emergence of institutions like Umma University and the RAF International University has also provided opportunities for Kenyans to study Islamic education in Kenya, within an integrated education system.<sup>13</sup>

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11 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.

12 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-23.

13 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-4 and KI-19.

## IV. Islamic Schools of Thought, Jurisprudence and Movements

A meaningful understanding of Islamic movements based on activism, reformism, revivalism and extremism entails contextualizing the socio-political environment allowing the specific movements to thrive during specific periods of time. Assessing the perceptions of scholars in Lamu and Tana River counties enables an appreciation of the many facets of the coastal politics and transnational waves of Islamist movements in the region and beyond. These changes redefine intra-religious conflagrations and the phenomenon of violent extremism as well as peaceful co-existence. This section is divided into two sections based on the research findings. The first section describes the Islamic schools of thought present in the research areas, and the second assesses emerging Islamic movements based on reformism and revivalism.

### Islamic Schools of Thought

In Lamu and Tana River Counties, the majority of the Muslims are Sunnis and belong to the Shafi Madhab practiced by Swahili and other Muslims. Most who belong to the Shafi Madhab are Sufis, under the Tariqa School of order. The Tariqa movement believes in mystical learning and spiritual practices propounded by Habib Swaleh Alawi Jamal al Layl. Most of the early scholars belonged to this group of Tariqa, and many had their origins in Oman. Sunni Asians mainly from India and some from Pakistan living in Lamu belonged to the Hanafi Madhab. A minority of Shias are also present in the two counties, mainly from the Ithna Asheri branch and a few were from the Ismailia branch. There are also those who belonged to the Hanbali Madhab, who were mainly from or associated with the religious practices of Saudi Arabia and other countries from the Gulf.<sup>14</sup>

### Sufism and Wahhabism

The majority from the Shafi Madhab practiced Sufism. This has historically been the dominant Muslim branch in Lamu. Maulidi festivals, Dhikrs, saint and shrine worship and the use of musical instruments during festivals focused on mysticism and bida' (innovation). These have been important traditions since the time of their founder Al-Habib Swaleh in Lamu.<sup>15</sup>

The Wahhabi wave mainly attributed themselves to the Hanbali Madhab (as Hanbali Madhab was influential in the Gulf countries) which gained momentum from the 1980s onwards with the arrival of returnee scholars from the Gulf. Some of these scholars vehemently opposed the Tarika order and Sufism, as they believed bida' (innovations) represented a new invention and was not found during the Prophet Muhammed (Sal) times or the times of the Salafs (the first three generations after the Prophet Muhammed (sal)).<sup>16</sup>

In Lamu and the Tana River Counties, the Wahabi movement was spearheaded by scholars who returned from universities in Saudi Arabia and Egypt bringing with them changes in religious values and practices in the region. This necessitated new mosques and new madrasas for the Saudi educated scholars.<sup>17</sup> Conflicts emerged between the two group (Sufis and Wahabism), and the movement was viewed positively and negatively by scholars based on their allegiance. Most western scholars highlight this tension as Hanbali versus Shafi in the Lamu context. However, participants noted that there were no contradictions in the Madhab but on the different Islamic movements based on individual interpretations of what they believed as right and wrong.<sup>18</sup>

One respondent declared the following:

*In Pate Island, Lamu, we only had the Sufis. The coming of the scholars from abroad, you will now find Wahabi madrasas which teach books from Saudi Arabia with Hanbali madhab and not Shafi madhab. I can say these scholars coming up with their thoughts is different from the Sufi we know, hence we have a lot of divisions in the community with different opinions, preaching and mosques. One would say this is halal, the other would say it is haram.*<sup>19</sup>

14 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-44.

15 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.

16 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-39.

17 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-32.

18 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-39.

19 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.

Most Sufi adherents called themselves Ahl al Sunna Wal Jamaah [adherents to the Sunnah and the community or followers] – a term preferred to being called Sufis and formed the majority of the Sunni denomination. However, this is a misrepresentation as Ahl al Sunnah Wal Jamaah represents all four of the orthodox schools of Sunni thought. Hence it is possible to be Sufi and belong to the Ahl al Sunnah Wal Jamaah, but the latter term encompasses all four Madhabs.

Among the Sunnis, the Sufis and Wahhabis often contradicted each other in simple acts of worship such as on how to pray, qunut during Fajr (morning) prayer, or on ablution issues apart from the main concerns arising from innovations or bida.<sup>20</sup> Some scholars from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan have critiqued the practices of bida innovation. Many who had returned from their studies in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt or elsewhere use their elevated positioning as Imams and teachers to critique innovatory religious practices such as Maulid. These individuals may even verbally abuse one another.<sup>21</sup> Apart from this, a participant explained the increase in religious activities to counter different schools of thought. The Wahabi sheikhs may organize events to critique the Sufis, or the vice versa. Similarly, Sufis may organize events to oppose the Shias.<sup>22</sup> Some participants even explained the need to look at these difference in the schools of thought as an opportunity, where it allows Muslims to learn the religion, *'read different schools of thought or ideologies and also critique specific sheikhs who may hold controversial views.'*<sup>23</sup>

Often conflicts brew in relation to the month of Ramadan over the dates for the start and end of the month of fasting. The month closes with the celebration of Eid ul Fitr (Festival of Breaking the Fast). The lack of a single Muslim authority brings contentious issues in agreeing on dates based on sighting of the moon in both Lamu and Tana River counties. Islamic scholars and leaders remain divided in making decisions on the visual sighting of the moon (Hilal) based on their affiliated religious values and practices.<sup>24</sup> If one sees the hilal in the night (a slight crescent moon), the next day is supposed to mark the first day of Ramadan and thus the first day of fasting begins. One group adheres to the sighting of the moon from their respective local region, while those who are affiliated to the Saudi religious institutions follow the Saudi moon sighting application. Those who believe in the local moon sighting, often contest the Saudi version, associating the Saudi version as based on astrological calculations which is more an administrative calendar of the Saudi government (Ummul-Qura). This they believe is against the traditional moon sighting. Again, those who follow the moon sighting by local mosques remain divided on which mosque to follow, as there have been divisions among mosques and their followers.<sup>25</sup> The Ahl Sunna Wal Jamaah or Sufis have relied on the Chief Kadhis authority to announce the start and end of the fasting month. This brings a way of uniting the Muslims on agreeing the dates for the fasting month. However, some disagree on the Chief Kadhis authority in the moon citing context.<sup>26</sup> Efforts by some Islamic scholars in the region have sought to end these tensions over the moon sighting by stressing that it should not be a priority as long as people tolerate each other based on their differences in their views and perspectives.<sup>27</sup>

Portraying Wahhabis as a violent group minimizes the scope for involving them in peacebuilding activities. There has been a tendency to look at them with suspicion with regard to Islamist terrorism. Looking at this group beyond the Wahabi creed is important if they are to be part of local development initiatives as well as to create a cohesive community respecting their views and beliefs. First, the terms Wahhabi and Salafist are externally coined and found their way to Lamu and Tana River in the background of the Global War on Terror after 2001.<sup>28</sup> Prior to this period, community members labelled those who subscribed to Salafism or Wahhabism as 'very religious,' 'strictly religious,' 'petro scholars,' or 'rigid followers of Saudi scholars.'<sup>29</sup> Since the 2000s these groups have been framed within the context of the counter terrorism discourse as in need of intervention, serving to entrench divisions (Badurdeen, 2018).

20 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.

21 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-33.

22 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

23 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-18.

24 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-7.

25 Research Field Notes, Discussion with the Research Team and Islamic Education academics.

26 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-7.

27 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-7.

28 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-23.

29 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-8.

*Wahhabis or Salafists are labels and terms coined by the West. Western interventions to contain violence needed someone or some group to be blamed or framed. So they frame a group or person, so that it is easy for them to intervene. The Global War on Terror made this easier, where you finish a group and label them. Very little do you the West know who they [Wahhabi] are, or their origin or the specific context the Wahhabis operate in. So the term Wahhabi is seen as a group of extreme values and are often clustered as evil among the Muslim communities where you need to intervene to prevent terrorism. Labels have consequences. It can drive people to become violent as they navigate surveillance.<sup>30</sup>*

Secondly, one must consider that labelling under the tag of Wahhabis or Salafist during counter-terrorism interventions has potentially severe consequences. People may be forced into isolation or living hidden lives as they try to navigate surveillance measures. In itself, this may push such individuals towards the use of violence.

*Some who do not subscribe to the Tariqa order [Sufism] is habitually labelled as a Wahhabi. I do not agree with Bida, and hence keep away from innovations. It is the way I feel and no one had forced me into it. I have friends who are deeply involved in Maulids and I coexist with them. Even my wife and her family subscribed to Maulids and I never opposed her or her family when they attended Maulid events. Since I shun away from Maulid events, and preferred to attend a specific mosque, I was automatically labelled as a Wahhabi. Initially, I didn't care. But after the Mpeketoni terrorist attack, there was surveillance on me and had to undergo constant checks and scrutiny from the police. Even though I was known in the community as a religious leader, I often became subjected to being checked constantly. I did not care being checked, but being labelled did have an impact as some community members shunned away from me. Others, who were constantly labelled lived hidden lives.<sup>31</sup>*

Third, is to look at the peaceful nexus of co-existence between scholars who are associated with Wahhabism and other Muslim intra-faith groups. Within the contemporary history of Islamic education in Lamu, there are Wahhabi linked scholars who have been peacefully trying to improve education and equity within communities. In recent times, scholars such as Sheikh Ahmad Msallam has been involved in teaching students Islam in Madrasas in different locations. All these scholars have addressed concerns with regard to bida controversy, the sighting of the moon during Eid and Islamic reforms in a peaceful manner.<sup>32</sup> There are even examples of collaboration between the Wahhabi-linked and Sufi adherents who come together to carry out harambees for the building of Sufi mosques and madrasas in Lamu.<sup>33</sup> Medina scholars – such as Sheikh Harith Swaleh (1948-2008) – have made important strides in spreading Islamic education in order to bring positive contributions to religious education and development. Swaleh was based in Kizingitini, a remote village in Lamu with his influence traversing as far as Mozambique.<sup>34</sup>

### **Shi'ism in Lamu and Tana River Counties**

Shi'ism or Shias form a minority of the Muslim population in Lamu and Tana River Counties. Most of the Shias belong to the Shia Ithna Asheri sect and a few to Khoja Ismailia. Shia's received religious education from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and some from Yemen. Most returnee scholars of the Shia denominator were engaged within institutions which spread 'Shiism' as well as in community development endeavours. The Swafa Mosque, Al Safa Center and the Swafa Integrated School (secular and Islamic education) are pivotal to the spread of Shiism in Lamu. Al Safa in Lamu was sponsored by the Ahlul Bayt Foundation, a Shia organization which carried religious educational activities in Matondi, Mombasa and Malindi. Sheikh Abdillahi Nassir from Mombasa and Sayyid Aidarus Alwy famously known as Mzee Mwinyi, was influential in the spread of Shiism in Lamu. Overall, in Kenya the Aga Khan Foundation and Burhani foundation has played a role in integrated education endeavours.<sup>35</sup>

Very few differences were observed among the Shias, as they often operated together as one community. A participant attributed that the only difference was from where they were funded for their religious and community development activities: *'Very rarely are the possibilities of seeing differences in the Iranian Shias versus the Lebanon Shias, where the global politics of the Shia versus the Shia Crescent movement is visible. It is more a funding issue in Lamu, as most funding which the Shias benefited came from Lebanon.'*<sup>36</sup>

30 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-23.

31 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-44.

32 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-18.

33 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

34 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.

35 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.

36 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-20.

Globally, Shi'ism spread following the Iranian 'Khomeini Revolution' (Thaurathul Khomeini) and has had an impact in Kenya as well. Women started to wear the Hijab in Shia ways. The movement spread all over world. Similarly, in Kenya, there were some Sunnis getting converted to Shiism. Opposing the Shia movement, the Wahhabis were gaining momentum as a movement in the late 1980s.<sup>37</sup>

Shias were also viewed with caution by the Sunnis. The Sunnis labelled the Shias as passive groups trying to convert the Sunnis using development initiatives rather than aggressive campaigns using education and cultural events.<sup>38</sup>

*Collaboration and conflicts among the two Islamic denominations were visible just as amongst any other religious groups. Some explained the coexistence among the Shias and Sunni populace as follows: 'There is no religious interference between groups. We find Sunni pupils learning in Shia integrated schools. We see other Muslim communities attending Shia events and health facilities. This shows that not all see the other group as an enemy.'*<sup>39</sup> *There are also times when Wahhabi-linked and Sufi members have come together to oppose the Shias groups: 'I have seen Sufis and Wahhabi collaborating to oppose the Shias. Some of the Sufis and Wahhabi explained Shias as being influential in using strategies to convert Sunni to Shi'ism using community development initiatives and education programmes in Lamu.'*<sup>40</sup>

## Reformism and Revivalism in Islamic Movements

Different local and global Islamic waves find their way into Lamu and Tana River Counties due to the presence of a large Muslim population, existing socio-economic and political grievances among Muslim communities. Most international movements are based on local grievances and changes. Existing Islamic movements as highlighted by participants were as follows: Tabligh, Hizb ut Tahrir, Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaath Answare Sunnah and Salafi Jedida.

### Tabligh Jamaat Movement

The Tabligh Jamaat Movement is a transnational Sunni movement which began in India in 1926 led by Maulana Muhammed Ilyas. The movement emphasized the need for Muslim education opportunities within western imperialist India. The Tabligh Jamaat movement's presence was seen in Kenya in the 1950s, with groups visible against the imperialist powers often contesting the Islamic education system versus the western education. In Kenya the introduction of the Tabligh movement was mainly by the Pakistani Jamaat Tabligh groups. Even today the movement has been active in attracting followers through a door-to-door movement. Specific mosques give them space and invite them for congregation.<sup>41</sup>

*The Tabligh activists are required to commit themselves to the movement for either 40 days per year or three days per month. Some Saudi scholars were attracted to this movement from Mombasa and Lamu. The movement had their own materials for teaching and relied on reading books and personal communication. The focus was Islamization in the long term and the movement was open for Sufis – Salafi or Wahabi – or any other group. The movement was more focused on theological matters rather than local politics. They engaged in politics only if it was of building a mosque or madrasa. They do not deal with non-Muslims, hence it cannot be placed as a movement for Muslim conversions. It was more a movement for guiding Muslims in the right path.*<sup>42</sup>

Women played an active role in this network as they have their own women groups and positioning in the daawa work inviting other Muslim women to religious congregations:

37 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-22.  
 38 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-22.  
 39 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-23.  
 40 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-22.  
 41 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-37.  
 42 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-2.

*We have two strong branches when we talk about the Tabligh movement in the Coast. Once is when they come from Tanzania, where they have a strong Markaz in Ukunda. Others are mainly connected with the Makadara Mosque and comprise the Asians [Pakistani and Indians]. The Pakistani and Indian groups have even women groups. They might come with their wives, and the gender presence is strongly felt in Daawa activities. These women in Tabligh groups have one-to-one personal communication or do communicate to larger gatherings of female members in the community.<sup>43</sup>*

The movement provides young people guidance on religion, and keeps youth away from alcohol, drug abuse, gangs, crime and violence:

*Tabligh groups go all the way from Lamu to Mombasa, or from Mombasa to Lamu. They pass various cities and are self-funded and has immense support from the community. Often rich members sponsor others in the group. They often stay in mosques or venues provided by well-wishers. They play a very important role in rehabilitating young people who are involved in drug or substance use, by helping young people to embrace religion well and shun evil practices. In some areas they have also helped young people to move away from extremist behaviours and movements by helping them to understand Islam better.<sup>44</sup>*

In Tana River County, the Jamaat Tabligh has facilitated the spread of Islam in many remote areas with their preaching. Most of the Tabligh groups have foreign members (Indians, Pakistanis, Tanzanians) and use local members to translate religious teachings into local dialects.

*The presence of Jamaatul Tabligh movement can occasionally be seen and felt in Tana River. The Sheikhs who normally come from India and Pakistan visits Tana River. They always have a local sheikh who could translate for them either from English or Arabic to Swahili. They are seasonal. They come from time to time. I can say that their presence has assisted in the spread of Islam. When they usually visit households, they often talk to them on issues regarding Islam.<sup>45</sup>*

*Tabligh had a great impact in the spread of Islam in Tana River. Since my grandfather's times, I have been exposed to the Tabligh movement. My grandfather went all the way till Malawkote. He is a religious leader in Hola. The Tabligh movement spread here in the 90's. There is no specific branch and most members of the movement are foreign scholars and preachers.<sup>46</sup>*

The Tabligh groups sometimes face criticism. Incidents reveal that it can be exploited by other groups for individual gain or for extremist purposes.

*Some other groups use Tabligh movement to recruit young people for extremist causes. This is when we have individuals who have ulterior motives of recruiting youth for extremist Islamist movements. There was also a case of drug use and sale via a particular Tabligh group member. It is few bad members who often use the Tabligh movement for their personal greed. But Tabligh movements have been for many years an effective way in spreading the Islamic faith via daawa and helping young people to remain in the right path.<sup>47</sup>*

### **Hizb ut Tahrir**

Hizb ut Tahrir, meaning the Party of Liberation, is a transnational movement with a global approach aiming to re-establish a caliphate for the Muslim Ummah (community) and the Shariah. The movement was founded in 1953 as a political organization in Palestine. The movement has an outreach in more than 50 countries with active study circles. Some countries have banned the movement while others have not. The movement rejects the use of violence and focuses on the unification of all Muslim countries under the restoration of a caliphate. Members contribute to the movement and there is an organised leadership structure with a constitution. In Kenya, the movement has a strong structure and knows the responsible members in specific counties with each member having clearly demarcated roles.<sup>48</sup> The movement engages in local and global campaigns and is very active online, as well as through community awareness efforts. For example, contemporary Hizb ut Tahrir campaigns include 'On the Building Bridges Initiative

43 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-41.

44 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-37.

45 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-33.

46 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-10.

47 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-33.

48 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-47.

Taskforce (BBI) and Punguza Mizigo (Constitutional Amendment) Initiative: Confirmation of Failure of the Democratic System of Guesswork'; 'Freedom of Expression: Another avenue insulting the Prophet Muhammed (Sal)'; and 'Pornography watching addiction is affecting society and marriages.'<sup>49</sup>

The movement is very active and hosts circle studies and discussions in Lamu.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the movement has activities in Tana (Hola and Bura) and is 'active during elections. As they would have posters on against western democracy, asking people not to vote.'<sup>51</sup>

In Tana River County, the Hizb ut Tahrir were mainly present during events such as Eid celebrations:

*We have Hizb ut Tahrir, which is a movement coming from Mombasa. They have their presence in Tana River. They occasionally attend Tana River to have their teachings. They preach in mosques and sometimes organize gatherings for their programmes. Mainly they believe in the revamp of Islamic leadership in Kenya. Occasionally they have active public forums. For instance, during Eid celebrations, they would gather in praying grounds with banner trying to enlighten the umma on what is happening in other Muslim countries.*<sup>52</sup>

The official movement does not promote violence at all. However, the Hizb has been labelled a violent group on occasions when individuals have penetrated the movement for personal gain or to promote their violent activities. Further, the movement is critiqued based on the practicability of its calls for a caliphate. The movement is said to have provided 'a utopian ideology but did not clarify existing structures during implementation, as their emphasis was only a caliphate, but how it was administered is unclear.'<sup>53</sup> In the Hizb ut Tahrir constitution, segregation of gender is fundamental as specified in the Shariah. Women can vote and vie for positions, but such positions should not necessitate ruling over men. Non-Muslims are well taken care of in the constitution, as emphasized in the Muslim caliphate but are subject to special taxes and may not hold leadership positions.<sup>54</sup>

### **Muslim Brotherhood**

The Muslim Brotherhood (Jama at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin) is evident in major urban centres in Kenya (Nairobi and Mombasa) but also has some followers in counties such as Lamu. The Muslim Brotherhood is a Muslim transnational network, which gains its impetus from Egypt, Sudan and Somalia. The movement encourages Muslim youth to hold key positions in the government and policy making. The movement is most influential among university and elite youth. Whilst it is largely peaceful and rejects violence, the movement seeks top political seats within the state apparatus for Muslims. It thus focuses on the Islamisation of the State where it coexists with the present governance system, eventually working towards a caliphate. Ultimately, the ambition is to bring all Muslims (Sunnis) under one banner, and the Brotherhood is therefore seen by some as a unifying movement for all Sunni Muslims.<sup>55</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood movement also relies on the daawa system. At present the movement is spearheaded by campaigns on social media platforms.<sup>56</sup>

Speeches by scholars such as Prof. Yusuf Al Qardawi and politicians such as Omar Al Basheer from Sudan have been well received by youth in Kenya who are followers of the movement. Social media has been pivotal in the expansion of this movement, but members of the group rarely convey that they are part of the movement. The movement has been very attractive in Sudan and Somalia, hence Kenyan scholars from Sudan have been well associated with this movement. For example, some students of famous Islamic Institutions such as Al Munawara College have been affiliated with this network.<sup>57</sup>

The movement was active in Kenya in the early 2000s where pamphlets were distributed in universities and colleges in Nairobi and Mombasa. At inception, most Somali and Kenyan Somali youth were attracted to the movement due to the Muslim Brotherhood's presence in Somalia (Harakat Al Isla). Later, the drive behind this movement in Kenya came from the Kenyan scholars educated in Sudan. Now, followers are observed in many towns but live discreet lives. The movement was evident in Lamu with many young people showing interest in the movement. This was seen with the increased viewership and interest in books and videos of Hassan Al Bana and Sayyid Qutb. However, the researcher did not encounter any responses on the Muslim Brotherhood movement from Tana River County.

49 Field Notes, Discussion with Religious Leader, KI-47 on the Hitzbut Tahrir website and awareness messages.

50 Interview with KI-20

51 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-2.

52 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-33.

53 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-33.

54 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-47.

55 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-47.

56 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-32.

57 Field Notes, Discussion with Religious Leader, KI-32.

### **Answare Sunnah or Ansari Sunnah**

There is also the presence of Ansari Sunnah members in communities in both Lamu and Tana River. Members are difficult to identify as they are often categorized by others as 'Wahabis'. As this Wahhabi label is seen as derogatory by some elements of the community, Ansari members live hidden lives.<sup>58</sup> It is only when minor conflicts erupt that people are able to identify them as Wahabi or as Ansari Sunna groups. These members often live in closed neighbourhoods and run their own mosques or madrasas:

*Here in Lamu, in some villages I have heard the Ansari Sunnah groups have mosques with names of religious groups like Madrsatul Hanifiya, Masjid Muhammad ibn Abdil Wahab, Masjid Answar Sunna; those are Sunni names, when you come to Sufi [areas] you will find Habshi Mosques.<sup>59</sup>*

*I don't think we have any group in Lamu which has any conflict with non-Muslims. All I know is that people are staying with non-Muslims peacefully. We have Sufi and Answare Sunna or Wahabi. Everyone manages his or her business. They don't have any problems with non-Muslims. The killing of non-Muslim in Lamu's Mpeketoni area was not from Lamu people but from the Al-Shabaab movement from Somalia. And all Muslims in Mpeketoni stood with the non-Muslims during the Mpeketoni attack. Everyone knows Lamu is a difficult area. Buses could not operate without police escort and main targets were radical groups and most were not from Lamu.<sup>60</sup>*

A respondent highlighted that groups or movements like Answare Sunnah are not only peculiar to Kenya, but are also present in countries such as Tanzania, Nigeria and several Asian countries where communities try to emulate the practices which existed during the times of the Prophet Muhammed (Sal) and which minimized inequity:

*Answare Sunna are groups [sects] consider themselves as groups defending the sunna. They trace their beliefs to the time of the Prophet Muhammed (Sal) and consider themselves as helping the Prophet when he emigrated from Mecca to Medina during Hijra. They promoted a puritan form of belief system based on the strict adherence of the Quran and Sunnah and opposed bida. They often form their own communities, trying to help one another and lay a strong emphasis on Islamic education rather than secular. Some members even consider secular education as haram. They ground their children in strict interpretation on Islam and may prevent secular education. Women have demarcated roles in the house and men in the outside [public]. Initially, these types of movements were very much visible against the imperialist missionary schools which advocated secular education with little emphasis for Islam. Later these communities again were revived when Medina scholars advocated for similar changes against bida and pushed for reforms on monotheism and puritanism. If you look at most of the places where these communities thrive, you will see deprivation and marginalization, where these communities blame on the western educated leadership. They believe that if leadership was based on the ideal tenets of Islam, there would be an equal society.<sup>61</sup>*

A respondent further explained that these groups can be misused by other extremist movements due to the group's strict adherence to a rigid belief system:

*'They have their own madrasas and mosques where sheikhs often use to recruit young members of the Answare Sunna groups for extremism. Often poverty and ideology come to play. Often statement like the following vibrate in these youth: "you are poor, because you want to be a good Muslim in a Christian country." Hence these groups are ripe for extremist leaders to thrive. The closeness of the communities with little exposure to the outside world, also makes them live with hostility to other communities – whether the other communities are Muslims or non-Muslims.'<sup>62</sup>*

In Tana River, a respondent highlighted the presence of Answare Sunna members in Kipini. The impact was felt both positively and negatively:

58 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.

59 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-20.

60 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-20.

61 Field Notes, discussion with Religious Leader, KI-19.

62 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-20.

*We also have Jaamathul Answari Sunnah. This group is mainly localized. Sheikhs [who] graduated from Madina are leading this group here in Tana River. The main message of this group is bid'ah, where they try to caution the ummah from innovation. Most Muslims were originally traditionalists, and some embraced Ahl Sunnah Wal Jamaah. This contrasted the beliefs of the Answari Sunnah groups. However, the presence of the Answari Sunnah group has been felt in Tana River both positively and negatively. Positively because they have assisted the ummah to understand religion based on the Quran and Hadith as the main sources. They have tried to convince people that some traditions and rituals that were used were wrong in Islam. I say sometimes the group has been negatively felt because Jaamathul Answari Sunnah has been associated with dividing Muslim communities. I say this because they have been trying to counter the traditional religion and beliefs in Tana River. Hence there is friction between the group and the local community. The groups have tried to spread Islam in the region but also created divisions.<sup>63</sup>*

### **Salafiyya al-Jadida**

Salafiyya al-Jadida or the new Salafists are the new scholars from the Salafi wave who describe themselves as future oriented scholars and contrast the Salafi al-Qadima (past oriented). These movements came to prominence after 9/11 (September 2001). However, their presence was felt in the mid-1990s. These scholars from the new wave refuted the thoughts and lectures of the old Salafists and emphasized a rigid interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah. The scholars and the followers found many wrongs in the other forms of schools of thought. This is a transnational movement which is religious and political, however localized within certain contexts in Kenya. The movement derives its inspiration from the Saudi Scholar, Rabi al-Madkhali. At present, the impetus for this movement is mainly from the Yemeni context, as often the extremist followers encourage followers to wage Jihad in Yemen. Members were active in Mombasa and the coast between 2010 and 2015. However, with increased surveillance the members dispersed with small groups now active in different counties.<sup>64</sup> Only two members confirmed their presence in Lamu, while none were identified in Tana River County. This is mainly because the groups remain hidden and often categorized under the Wahhabi umbrella. A majority fear these groups due to their extreme nature. Members have an affinity to specific mosques, but today remain extremely hidden:

*Few years backs there were well labelled mosques for these preachers, but after the government crack-down, they are discrete and you may find members mingle in different mosques. Their sermons can be very extreme. Most often they promote Jihad in Yemen, asking young people to join them. Since 2013, 2014 onwards the movement extreme members promoted the need to join ISIS and strengthen the Jihad in Yemen.<sup>65</sup>*

However, it should be noted that members in this group, just like the Wahhabis, are divided into three:

- i. the quiet ones who focus only on theology;
- ii. the ones who focus on theology and politics, and take the form of activists;
- iii. the extreme minority faction, who may be involved in violent acts and are categorized as jihadists.

The movement believes in regime change and the establishment of strong Islamic leaders to govern Muslim lands. The old Salafists promoted more dialogue and patience while the newer group advocated overthrowing leaders if they are corrupt and incapable of bringing equity. They believed that if a ruler is bad, even if he is a Muslim, he is labelled a kafir (Takfir). Some factions of this group believed in Jihad against such Muslim leaders in the form of violence and revolution. Allegations of Takfir were also made against other Muslim groups who did not subscribe to the new Salafist outlook. The Salafiyya al-Jadida conflicted with other Wahhabi extreme factions over the control of youth groups for ISIS versus the Al-Shabaab recruitment. Al-Shabaab thrived on manipulating differences between Salafi-Wahhabi groups. This divide is visible in recruitment pathways for Islamist networks.<sup>66</sup> The lack of clarity in the Salafiyya al-Jadida groups makes it difficult to understand their objectives or modus operandi. They operate clandestinely.

63 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-33.

64 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-47.

65 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-33.

66 Field Notes, discussion with the research team.

### **The Umma Muslim Wave**

The Umma Muslim wave emerged among the Kenyan Muslims of Arab African descent is seen in Kwale, Lamu, Tana River and Kilifi. The wave has been politically embedded in inequity since the pre- and post-colonial periods, with African Muslims in Kenya looked down upon. The wave is based on racism rather than religion, with African Muslims seeking to ascertain their rights as an Umma (community). This discrimination is seen during Maulidi celebrations and in educational establishments as well as in mosques where Arabs or Asian Muslims feel uneasy standing together with the Swahili Muslims or are derogatorily termed as 'blacks.'

*We see this discrimination in Maulid functions, where planning, organizing and even seating arrangements are made by the Arabs. They feel they are superior, and discriminate the Africans. Also some Pokomo and Digos are treated inferior in educational institutes run by Bajuni's in Lamu.*<sup>67</sup>

The movement intends to bring unity among Muslims in terms of equity with regard to employment, education and land issues in the coastal region of Kenya. Many other movements – such as Al-Shabaab and the Mombasa Republican Council – have made use of associated grievances to garner support or to recruit 'Coasterians'.<sup>68</sup>

### **Gulen Movement**

Finally, there are also visible traces of the Gulen movement. This is an educational wave of a Turkish brand of Islam and is prevalent in Nairobi, Mombasa, Malindi and Lamu. This Sunni movement borrows some influence from Sufi practices. Founded by Fethullah Gulen, it is more of a political, cultural and civic movement rather than a religious movement. However, it uses religion delicately in education, with associated institutions open to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Light Academy Schools, for example, are linked to the Gulen movement. Apart from education, the movement is very active during Eid celebrations where sadaqa and zakaat play an important role. Most movement members engage in food distribution via Qurbani meat distributions (the Eid ul Adha meat sacrifice events and distribution). They play an active role in building the Gulen movement in Kenya.<sup>69</sup>

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67 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-12.

68 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-12.

69 Field Notes, Researcher discussion with Religious Leader, KI-42.

## V. Intra and Interfaith Interventions

Differences among Islamic movements entail the need for intra-faith, interfaith and peacebuilding interventions. This necessitates identifying influential religious leaders and specific locations which need interventions, identifying the important role of religious leaders in the CVE space, identifying common values for intra-faith interventions and clearly articulating the role of women in religious peacebuilding.

Global changes have impacted Islamic education. For example, positive effects are seen in the spread of Islamic knowledge via technology. However, improved information flows can also have a negative impact on youths. Information might contradict the morals of the local society, and the circulation of large quantities of information can make it more difficult to determine between 'right' and 'wrong.' This is a huge challenge for young people trying to find themselves an appropriate Islamic education amidst different schools of thought as well as the emergence of new movements. Global changes in Islam can lead to a culture where young people place less emphasis on Islamic education due to an apparent need for secular education.<sup>70</sup> This secular education often contradicts parental views, and families may insist on both a secular and religious education for their children as a result of the fear of losing moral values and religiosity.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, global trends can lead young people to become closer to religion, trying to find guidance from religious leaders, whom they feel are right or appropriate for them. A participant expressed this as follows, *'we also see a trend among youth towards the quest of finding the "right Islam" or the "right preacher or scholar," as these youth feel modern global trends are eroding Islam.'* Most young people with only secular education and with the urge to learn Islam find themselves internet sheikhs or peers who may promote different versions of the Quranic ayahs or hadith. Often, these new or different versions can make young people subscribe to ideologies detested by their own parents and communities.<sup>72</sup>

There is desire for intra and interfaith dialogue among religious leaders. This is because violence and extremist tendencies among youth are increasing due to the lack of knowledge or the tendencies of young people to be used for extremist purposes. Different ideologies attributed to religion play a role in pushing young people towards violence. Many changes in Islamic teachings are visible in Lamu and Tana River with graduates arriving from different universities County. Further, global trends in Islamic thought are evolving with new movements emerging. For example, Saudi Arabia's political environment is changing and local scholars with Saudi education or funding are impacted by these changes. A participant explained that very few interfaith activities are visible in Lamu and most religious leaders are seen to adhere only to government protocols.<sup>73</sup> Some global trends in Islamic thought are being misused. The surge of new religious leaders with insufficient knowledge on the madhabs is seen as a problem in the community. Further, the belief that non-Muslims are conspiring to control or destabilize Muslims through peacebuilding interventions also minimizes opportunities for interfaith interventions.<sup>74</sup>

Religious leaders also highlighted many challenges. They pointed out that the vacuum for religious education was due to the lack of well-educated scholars on the madhab. Therefore, the lack of scholars means only a few scholars are available to guide youth on a 'moderate path.' A major reason cited was the lack of funding for Islamic education, hence religious leaders are poorly paid and unable to sustain themselves in Tana River and Lamu counties. A sustainable solution proposed included the Waqf system distributed to Sheikhs, which allows them some way of sustaining themselves. Trust issues in money management has weakened this system.<sup>75</sup>

The need for reforms in religious education and religious peacebuilding is often equated with change in religious thought. These Islamic movements focused on changing religious thoughts and principles and often end up creating more divisions rather than focusing on religious peacebuilding and development.<sup>76</sup> The loss of credibility of Muslim organizations in spear-heading changes in Islamic education due to corruption and greed was seen as detrimental, as there was an apparent lack of proper leadership in the Muslim community.<sup>77</sup>

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70 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.  
 71 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-41.  
 72 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-8.  
 73 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-19.  
 74 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-17.  
 75 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-17.  
 76 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-21.  
 77 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

A participant explained that unity among different Islamic factions is discussed with little emphasis on the topic of tolerance. There is a need to focus on common values, rather than on differences. It is obvious that the aspect of tolerance is least discussed in theological debates. A focus on tolerance in intra-faith interventions will eventually lead to unity among Muslims and non-Muslims alike.<sup>78</sup>

Highly surveilled mosque and madrasa premises have displaced people from venues that in the past proved vital for promoting constructive discussions. There is a need for reformist ideas and debates. Again, the word reformist is equated as radical, a word used with caution within Muslim circles. Dissent movements are automatically labelled as extremism, and the members as extremists. It was viewed that these terms were defined by outsiders ('Westerners') and Muslims were marginalized further to the point of having their thoughts and words suppressed.<sup>79</sup>

Other challenges which have influenced development in Muslim communities was a need for Islamic banking. Often debates centre on expanding Islamic finance practices in Lamu. The existing banking systems do not fully exercise the practice of Islam. The research suggests a need for Islamic insurance and Islamic lending institutions based on Islamic laws as well as a revamp of Islamic financial systems such as Zakat, Sadaqah and Waqf.<sup>80</sup>

Intra and Interfaith interventions in minority dominant Muslim communities often intersect with governance and marginalization issues. Marginalization must first be dealt with for a fruitful religious peacebuilding process.<sup>81</sup>

In-depth knowledge in Islam is vital for Intra-faith interventions. The lack of knowledgeable sheikhs and scholars in this field hampers opportunities for intra-faith interventions. Rather than the attempt to focus on unifying the madhabs, there is undeniable need to concentrate on the common values among the different schools of thought, aiming for intra-faith dialogues and interventions.<sup>82</sup>

Identified hotspots that need interventions in intra and interfaith conflicts as highlighted by the participants in Lamu were: Chundwa, Bargoni, Gamba, Pate, Siu, Faza, Mtangawanda, Kiangwe, Shela, Boni Forest, Lamu Town – Amu, Lamu Island and Mpeketoni. Identified hotspots that need interventions in intra and interfaith conflicts as highlighted by the participants in Tana River included the following: Tarasaa, Borobini, Bokoni, Bula, Gafuru, Makere, Witu, Ozi, Moa, Kilelengwani, Madogo, Manyagakolora, Bura, Garsen, Onkolgo-Garsen, Sera, Sheli – Garsen, Obo, Hola, Chevele, Bura, Tara, Hirimani, Matengeni, Wema.

### **Gender and Intra-Interfaith Opportunities**

The study found a consensus on the importance and active roles played by women in Islam. Women's pivotal positions in religious activities were seen in their roles as religious teachers and in daawa activities. The study comprised opinions of four women ustadhas (female religious leaders), and their prominent positions in teaching Islamic education and as community change agents for youth.

*Muslim women are playing a very important role all over the world. My wife is a Quran teacher and is involved in many daawa activities. In Lamu, women were not recognized in the past for their daawa activities. Now, gradually they are recognized. We have the Nasiha Group in Lamu; they have built their own madrasa. Women are active at the middle and local levels. They engage in doing small activities like seminars for ladies and for youth. Their roles as mothers help in improving young people's lives. However, very few are educated. Very few are scholars with comprehensive knowledge in the madhabs and Islamic though.<sup>83</sup>*

*In Lamu, we had very active women who played pivotal roles in religious activities such as daawa. For example, Habati Mwalimu, and Habati Mwana Abbas, have contributed to daawa activities as well as building madrasa and mosques. They were in the front line. So these are clear examples to show that Islam has not forbidden women to engage in religious activities. This was evident since the Prophet Muhammed (Sal) times, where Aisha (RA) played important roles in Islam.<sup>84</sup>*

78 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-20.

79 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-47.

80 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-31.

81 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

82 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-31.

83 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-17.

84 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-20.

A respondent explained that the new changes promoted through the Gulf Islamic education system brought in rigid forms of practice with regard to clothing and culture for women in the public sphere.

*Women have many prominent roles in Islam. It is these extremist groups which do not allow women to engage in activities such as trade, politics etc. There are extreme groups that have a rigid stand on what women should do. Most of us were affected by the changes which occurred in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis combined Islamic Sharia and their culture, prohibiting women in the public sphere. Now things are changing in Saudi as well. However, some Saudi scholars brought in strict interpretations, and this has affected the women in some households in Lamu. What I can add is that we have to do a lot of research about our women in Islam and what empowered women can contribute to the religion and the world. We have to empower women politically, economically, socially, technically, legally and so on.<sup>85</sup>*

There has been a gradual positive change of women playing a role as usthadas; however, the number remains low. Opportunities for women on Islamic education remain rare, hence there are only few women with a firm grounding in Islamic theology. However, there is a positive shift in Islamic education for women.

*In the past, we had challenges in women's Islamic education due to the lack of opportunities. But these days we have a focus towards educating girls. We have training institutions for women which have been opened up in Lamu and Mambrui. Girls learn in these institutions and they come back with their knowledge. They become teachers in Madrasas. We are now happy that we have some lady scholars in Tana River compared to the past.<sup>86</sup>*

Islamic movements such as the Hizb ut Tahrir emphasize gender segregated roles. However, some movements have women playing an important role within segregated norms as identified by a participant who analysed the role of women in the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Cairo and highlighted that the active role of women in the public sphere could be emulated in Lamu:

*Women are supposed to be in the front line to save this religion [Islam]. For example, there are many important female Sahabiyat [companions] of the prophet. I have learnt a lot on the role of women in society, and Islam does not forbid women to engage themselves in public activities. In Cairo, we could hear very active ladies like Zainab Al-Ghazali who was active in the Muslim Brotherhood. Even in Lamu, ladies play an important role in Islamic movements, however they are less visible.<sup>87</sup>*

Women play a very important role in darsas in the Tabligh movement. The women go with their husbands to support their roles or may even form women groups. They are able to access many other women and families, as Muslim women are comfortable only if the discussions are with fellow Muslim women:

*Tabligh groups make their journeys for daawa, going from one village to another. They sometime involve women groups when they go to very rural places when they stay for a very long time [40 days]. Sometimes when they stay at mosques, women are vocal as they speak using the public address system and do have the ability to reach out to many. In that way, they are able to enlighten people on Islam.<sup>88</sup>*

Ustadhas need to be involved in religious peacebuilding efforts, especially in P/CVE. They are less visible in P/CVE efforts, yet they could be valuable contributors to interventions. In particular, research shows women shaping community and family values at home or during madrasas; the ability to identify the early signs of radicalization and encourage other women and girls to promote counter-narratives and engage with local communities to report any signs of radicalization among the people. Ustadhas can be mentors in the community, and also take part in inter- and intra-religious approaches to help counter violent extremism in their communities. Their knowledge in specific madhabs and Islamic thought is needed to counter radical Islamist ideology. Further, at the micro level the role of women as mothers and wives was emphasized by religious leaders in both Lamu and Tana River counties.

85 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-21.

86 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-8.

87 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

88 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-12.

*Women need to be learned in Islamic education. As a mother and wife she can be better placed to guide the family. Most often, women learn from their husbands or sometimes from their sons. Sometimes, tendencies are high for women to be misguided if the husband or son are associated with specific extremist teachings. If she is knowledgeable, she could guide her family as well as play a role in the community in countering various misinterpreted versions of Quran ayahs and hadiths. Even women's roles as ustadhas are very important. Most girls prefer to study under female ustadhas. The better trained ustadhas means the more knowledge being disseminated in the community, especially among women. There is a need for women to engage in religious peacebuilding. In Muslim communities, women are better placed to talk to girls, women and even boys. So, religious education is important. Very few girls get scholarships to study Islam. Families don't emphasize girls' education too, as priority is for boys in Islamic families.<sup>89</sup>*

The lack of emphasis on women ustadhas in Tana River County was clear. A lady ustadha explained her religious position and impact in the community as follows:

*I am an ustadha and am also teaching in a high school in Bura. I started teaching even before I completed my diploma. I teach IRE Arabic. But I am not employed by the government. In leadership positions, I lead the Muslim students Muslim Society. In my village, education levels are normally very low. Because I am a woman I started teaching female and male students. I am also a female role model, as girls feel they should get educated like me. Women can get leadership position if they are well trained. In the past, girls finished class eight and then they were married off. But nowadays there is emphasis from the girls and some families to help their daughters study. I also empower girls, and send the message to their families and the community on the importance of girls being educated in both religious and secular education. Nowadays there is bit of progress for women to organize themselves and attend gatherings and carry out discussions among themselves. However, the aspect of women to have certain positions in religion is still pending - we are still not there.<sup>90</sup>*

89 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-6.

90 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-6.

# Conclusions

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The populations of Lamu and Tana River counties are predominantly of the Islamic faith. The counties also host Christians, traditionalists and a minority practice other religions. Inter-religious conflicts are rarely reported in these counties. Christian-Muslim tensions may be visible after terrorist attacks or during elections, driven by political entrepreneurs who use religious sentiments to mobilize supporters in the counties. For example, tensions after the Mpeketoni terrorist attacks in 2014 was fuelled by Al-Shabaab sympathizers who were not native to these areas. Local Al-Shabaab sympathizers were mobilized along ethnic-religious local cleavages and based on land issues.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Orma-Pokomo conflicts in Tana River County during election periods (2012-2013) were based more on ethno-linguistic divisions – and economic practices – than inter-religious conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

For some, Lamu County has been at the very centre of Islamic education in Kenya and the East African Region, due to the Riyadhha mosque and associated scholars. Omani influence is predominant, with the Tariqa order also practiced in the county. Islamic education in Tana River County has been influenced by scholars educated mainly in Lamu and Mambui. A few were educated in madrasas located in Garissa. Since the 1980s, the two counties have been influenced by returnee scholars and funding from the Gulf counties to introduce Islamic reform on education that has had a bearing on Islamic culture. The new scholars, educated abroad mainly in Saudi Arabia, often critiqued the existing scholars for their religious innovations (bida). While there were no conflicts within Madhabs, the tension between the two groups was interpreted as a dispute between Hanbali (returnee scholars from Saudi Arabia) and Shafi Madhabs (Riyadha Scholars) or Sufism versus Wahabism. Particular terms like Wahabism have been used in a derogatory way to describe the scholars who adhered to a rigid interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah.<sup>3</sup> Most religious scholars interviewed were of the opinion that intra-faith tension rose mainly due to individual interpretations of the Quranic text rather than the differences in the Madhabs. Incidents of collaboration between Islamic groups such as Shias, Sufis or Wahhabis were evident in the two counties, as well as tension. A scholar from Lamu described such tension as 'normal' due to differences in groups and among individuals, which are prevalent just as in many other religions.<sup>4</sup> Tensions are often exacerbated during events such as the moon-sighting for the month of Eid ul Fitr, or during Maulid festivals. Coexistence between these groups is also found in each other supporting communal activities.<sup>5</sup>

## Summary of findings

### Locating madhabs in Islamist extremism

There are four Sunni madhabs in Islam: Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali and Maliki. These madhabs are firmly established as schools of thought in Islam. Most jurists align themselves with a particular madhab. Among the religious leaders interviewed, most emphasized that the differences in the origins (founders) of the madhabs or the madhabs did not have any bearing on the existing intra or interfaith conflicts in Tana River or Lamu County. On rare occasions, madhabs were seen in practices such as marriage, divorce, daily prayers and in commercial transactions. The differences were on how madhabs were used by followers in intra-faith tensions.<sup>6</sup> Tensions were evident between the scholars educated abroad in the Middle-East and those who obtained their education at Riyadhha in Lamu or other local institutions. This opposition was sometimes termed as Hanbali versus Shafi. However, the conflict was not on the schools of thought per se, but on specific practices which had evolved among the followers of these schools.<sup>7</sup> Most interviewed did not even credit the conflicts to the madhabs, but to specific teaching which evolved along with modern history (Iran-Shiism, Saudi Wahabism, Middle-Eastern power politics, oil politics, Global War on Terror (GWOT) etc.). Some even commented that it was only a few local religious leaders who were knowledgeable in the madhabs, hence there was no bearing of the madhabs in the intra-faith tensions.<sup>8</sup> A participant also highlighted the need to view madhabs as a tool to generate tolerance rather than conflict, where the original founders of these madhabs have shown acts of compassion towards the other. Complications emerge when individuals have insufficient knowledge on the madhabs or when individuals

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1 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-46.  
 2 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-4.  
 3 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-18.  
 4 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-17.  
 5 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-23.  
 6 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-17.  
 7 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-23.  
 8 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-16.

try to merge madhabs with the Islamic movements. The evolving Islamic movements are more political than religious (Hizb ut Tahrir Salafi Jedida, Muslim Brotherhood), where the struggle for power was highlighted in these movements, as most movements emphasize the Muslim marginalization narrative.<sup>9</sup> Reforms and revolution are core tenets in these movements which attracts Muslim young people who believe that change is needed for their marginalized plight.<sup>10</sup>

### **Contextualizing Muslim marginalization that breeds violence.**

Global and local influences play a prominent role in contemporary religious movements in Lamu and Tana River counties. Most of the contemporary religious movements are transnational, with the exception of the Muslim Umma wave. The Muslim Umma wave is best interpreted as a local movement based on existing racism and localised ethnic politics in the region rather than a religious movement. Different local and global Islamic waves find their way into Lamu and Tana River due to the presence of a large Muslim population, and existing socio-economic and political grievances among Muslim communities. Most international movements find a home in these historic local grievances and quotidian challenges. Existing Islamic movements as highlighted by participants included the following: Tabligh, Hizb ut Tahrir, Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaath Ansari Sunnah and Salafi Jedida. Most of the movements are Sunni based and have a thin line of separation with each other based on theology and practice. It can be difficult to understand these movements and their spread as most are simplistically labelled by the community as Salafism or Wahhabism.

Muslim marginalization and grievances become core in international and local, religiously-driven conflicts. Violent extremists harp on Muslim marginalization to mobilize communities. Muslims being marginalization are strongly advocated among some movements, who promote themselves as saviours of the Muslims to appeal to the Muslim communities. For example, transnational movements such as the Al-Shabaab recruitment thrives on specific individuals and groupings which prescribes to the new Salafi groups (Salafi Jedidah). Specific individuals utilize these movements to exploit issues on Islamic marginalization and grievances to formulate ideological narratives which blend with the local context. For example, not all Salafis or Wahhabis in Lamu or Tana River County are violent.<sup>11</sup> Nor is the theology they embrace completely embedded in violence. Influencing these communities in an attempt to prevent radicalization and violence entails knowledge of the local socio-political and economic context rather than only focusing on the specific content of jihadi beliefs. Hence, an individual in the community becoming an extremist or jihadist depends on the resonance with the local context made by jihadi scholars and radical entrepreneurs.

There is a need for space to engage in dissent. This entails opportunities to be provided for Muslims to be engage in discussions and dissent movements. The closure of spaces and movements such as mosques (opening only at specified times for prayers only), as well as fear due to surveillance has pushed individuals to discuss pertinent issues of religion and politics in hidden avenues. This breeds room for extremists to thrive in these contexts, where they have the grievied individuals and the opportunities for them to have discussions in hidden locations.<sup>12</sup>

### **Differentiating violence, extremism and activism in Islamic movements**

The local and transnational Islamic movements have been driven by global issues of Muslim marginalization, gaining momentum mainly after the GWOT policies and strategies after September 2001. Competition, coexistence and collaboration are visible among these groups. According to respondent, it was believed that some groups competed over the recruitment of individuals for their respective movements in Lamu and Tana River County. A respondent highlighted that there was also collaboration among these groups as most movements envisioned the process of Islamisation or a caliphate using the daawa system. CVE interventions need to acknowledge these movements, their differences and similarities when working in these areas. There is a need to understand each group and its own dynamics in contextualizing 'violence' to navigate the terrain of extremism and violent extremism. Clustering all movements under one label as 'Islamists' may hinder efforts at countering violent extremism and minimize the scope for activism.<sup>13</sup>

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9 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-43.

10 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-31.

11 Field notes, discussion with Research Team.

12 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-8.

13 Interview with Religious Leader, KI - 43.

At a strategic level groups differed completely on their approaches to propaganda, operation and recruitment. All movements refrained from advocating violence. However, it was suggested by two participants that individual members of these movements were able to exploit difference to propagate extremism for their individual purposes. In-depth knowledge of these movements will enable the identification of specific ideological tenets which promote violence, or contexts where Takfir is used.

### **Dwindling funding for Islamic education breeds opportunities for extremist entrepreneurs**

Counter-terrorism policies as a consequence of the GWOT has affected funding channels which curtailed the outreach of Islamic education. A lack of funding from the State for Islamic institutions has led to a reliance on individual funding for madrasa upkeep, salaries for teachers or boarding fees for students. Often, individual funding came with hidden motivations and provides scope for recruitment to extremist networks.<sup>14</sup> Proselytizing by Islamic NGOs, daawa, or invites to non-Muslims to join the faith, were viewed as tied to transnational and the anti-Western agendas of Muslim countries. Islamic NGOs that do not portray themselves as secular bear a particular burden of proof. These NGOs need to prove themselves as devoid of any Islamist agenda. The suspicious environments in which charities and NGOs operate has made peacebuilding efforts difficult in these counties. The closure of many NGOs and charities affected development initiatives.

In Tana River County, there is also reportedly a brain drain of Islamic scholars who migrate to the urban centres of Nairobi and Mombasa due to a lack of opportunities within the county. Most often, the counties relied on individual funding. Sometimes, individual funding came with hidden motivations. The scope for recruitment to extremist activities via these individual networks were visible in both Lamu and Tana River. As a result, the probability of extremist entrepreneurs penetrating these communities is assessed to be high.<sup>15</sup>

### **A governance model for Islamic NGOs**

The suspicious environments in which charities and NGOs operate has made peacebuilding efforts difficult in Tana River and Lamu counties. Islamic NGOs that do not portray themselves as secular, bear a particular burden of proof to prove themselves as devoid of Islamist agendas. The closure of many NGOs and charities has evidently affected development initiatives in both counties. As a result, the probability for extremist entrepreneurs to penetrate these communities is high under the guise of assisting community members. There is a need for a well-structured system that will be balanced, which will not include extreme vetting or a system that facilitates individual corruption.<sup>16</sup>

### **Incorporating Salafism in transformational change**

Intra-faith interventions must be considered a priority, to bring together different denominators for the purposes of unity based on common values rather than focusing on the unification of madhabs. The Islamic education curriculums should be based on common values taking into consideration the involvement of all denominations. Again, this entails local experts and knowledge in designing programmes based on common values rather than a central approach.<sup>17</sup>

The move needs to be aimed at intra-faith relationship-building which will be sustainable. Movements based on jihadism are embedded in strains of Salafism. However, theologically Salafism is not inherently violent. Salafism is diverse, and often has been open to radical interpretation. Wahhabism, on the other hand, has always been associated with violence. There is a need to use examples of the peaceful and diplomatic trajectories of religious leaders in Islamic education, such as the Madrasatul Badawy of Kizingitini, which have made a substantial contribution towards Islamic proselytizing. Similarly, in Lamu, two local Salafi madrasas such as Al Farsi and Hanifiya has engaged in building peace via Islamic education among the Sufis and the Salafi populations.

The trend for CVE interventions to counter the theological content of extremist Salafi networks has been to rely on Sufism. Such reliance means that Sufism is often labelled 'good' and Salafism as 'bad.' Such an approach can lead to divisions between Islamic groups. The innate nature of Salafism is attractive

14 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-12.

15 Field Notes, Discussion with the Research Team.

16 Interview with Religious Leader, KI – 18.

17 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-5.

to young people who perceive an idealist version of Shariah governance, revivalism, reformism and revolution against contemporary forms of leadership. Hence to tap youth, CVE interventions need to navigate how Salafism can be embedded in transformational change along with the Sufi groups. The move needs to consider sustainable intra-faith relationship building.<sup>18</sup>

### **Curriculum and integrated schools in Islamic education**

The Islamic education curriculums should be based on common values taking into consideration the involvement of different Muslim denominations. Again, this entails local experts and knowledge in designing programmes based on common values of the different sects in specific localities, rather than forced approaches from Mombasa or Nairobi. In Lamu, Islamic religious education varies from being Shia, Salafi or Sufi oriented. Hence a common curriculum is not a possibility. However, harping on common values will make the curricula more acceptable to the institutions. Further, Integrated Schools are seen as a way forward to blend secular and Islamic education in the two counties. Most parents are interested in a mixed system where children got an opportunity to study secular and Islamic education from a younger age.<sup>19</sup>

### **Women and girls in the Islamic theological space**

Women are playing an active role as community change agents, as Islamic religious teachers and in daawa activities. While their contribution is recognized, there is less emphasis on women in formal Islamic education. Where Islamic knowledge has been emphasized, discussions on Fikh al Nisa (jurisprudence of women) has only centred on the acts of worship, purity, the role of women and marriage. Women's contribution must also be considered key in P/CVE interventions, beyond their roles as mothers and wives. More educational and scholarship opportunities for women in the Islamic theological knowledge and discourses can assist them towards prevention efforts against violent extremism.

### **The importance of Arabic in the entire discourse**

Many participants revealed that Arabic is not well institutionalized in the education system.<sup>20</sup> The Quran was revealed in Arabic, and Arabic becomes the discourse when discussing Islam. Even the hadith which originated at that time was written down in Arabic. Variations were evident in the interpretations even during the time of the early preachers. However, according to the participants, the dearth of scholars in the Arabic language and theological interpretations has led to many misinterpretations of the Quranic verses and the madhabs. Different scholars interpret differently and this can lead to conflict. According to the participants, the majority do not have a grasp in the madhabs. Most of the religious scholars engaged in interpretations have little Arabic knowledge or lack the necessary understanding of Islamic history to understand the style and modality of Quranic verses, the hadith and interpretations of the madhabs.<sup>21</sup>

### **Influence of Islamic religious education and Islamic movements from Somalia**

Due to its proximity, Lamu County is influenced directly from Somalia. Hence specific socio-economic changes in Somalia can influence the county. This includes trade links, kinship relationships as well as religious education. Historically, Lamu's Islamic religious scholars have played a pivotal role in spreading the religion in Somalia. Similarly, there are cases where religious scholars have brought in manuscripts and knowledge from Somalia. For example, the late Sheikh Harith had a library in Kizingitini which comprised Islamic books and manuscripts from Somalia.<sup>22</sup> Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood also gained impetus from Somali influencers. However, the media and the influence from Egypt and Sudan has also played a big role in the promotion of the Muslim Brotherhood ideals in Lamu. Extremist movements such as Al-Shabaab also spreads across the borders due to trade, criminal-drug networks and other cultural relationships with Somalia.<sup>23</sup>

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18 Field Notes, Discussions during the Research Team meetings.

19 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-33.

20 Interview with Religious Leader, 16, 32.

21 Interview with Religious Leader, 32.

22 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-33.

23 Discussion with Research Team.

In Tana River County, direct Somali influence is much less visible. However, the county has been influenced by religious disseminations from scholars from Lamu, Garissa and Mandera where many students gain their religious knowledge. All three counties border Somalia and it is highly likely Somali teachings thus infiltrate Tana River. Specific settlements such as Madogo, Bura and Hola were highlighted by participants as having received religious disseminations from Garissa. Proximity means that Tana River parents also consider Garissa as an option for religious education.<sup>24</sup> Participants highlighted the need for regulation of the Madrasa curriculum and institutions as critical across both Lamu and Garissa. There was consensus that religious education and sermons in specific locations needed regulations to monitor specific religious institutions. Most of these institutions were individually owned madrasas with the lack of regulations and relied heavily on madrasa teachers from outside the community. A lack of regulation provided opportunities for individual interests and ultimately the potential for extremist teachings.<sup>25</sup>

### **Intra- and inter-religious conversions**

Historically there have been religious conversions across these two counties, and this should be considered relatively normal in a society that adheres to the concept of freedom of belief. According to the participants, in both counties there has been a considerable number of individuals who converted to Islam. In the two counties, there have been cases of conversions to Islam both from traditional African belief systems and Christianity.<sup>26</sup> Many converted to Islam in the months of Ramadan that breaks with the festival 'Eid al Fitr' and Eid al Adha (feast of the Sacrifice). Participants suggested that the high rate of conversions during the Eid months were mainly associated with the higher interactions among Muslims and the wider community during these times.<sup>27</sup> To an extent, inter religious conversions were visible and were not considered as cause for alarm. However, the problem relies in regulating conversions as many converts did not know the real Islam, according to respondents. The new converts are said to fall prey to individuals who may come up with their own versions of the religion. The suggestion was that these individuals are therefore vulnerable to extreme tenets of violence.<sup>28</sup> There are a few initiatives providing certification for Muslims during conversions, like that offered by SUPKEM. Additionally, a few institutions have historically played a role in helping converts learn Islam. However, with dwindling funds, these institutions grapple with keeping the upkeep of their institutions.<sup>29</sup> There is a need for an organized structure and institution to help new converts learn a regulated content of Islamic knowledge.

Intra-religious conversions were less visible as individuals do not pronounce their conversions directly, but such changes may be evident from the mosque they attend, the groups they follow and some practices they adhere to. Intra Islamic conversions become a concern when followers prescribe to specific Islamic movements or specific individual teachings that may prescribe to tenets of violence.<sup>30</sup>

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24 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-24.

25 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-11.

26 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-8.

27 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-11.

28 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-9.

29 Field Notes. Discussion with the Research Team.

30 Interview with Religious Leader, KI-43.

# Recommendations

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## FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS:

1. Comprehensive context assessments must be conducted prior to the initiation of religious or ideologically-oriented P/CVE interventions. Such assessments must take account of local understandings of different Islamic movements and the spaces these occupy in the target community. With this context established, it will be possible to design locally relevant ideologically-oriented P/CVE interventions. At the same time, this knowledge will shape understanding of how extremist recruiters exploit local grievances along Islamist narratives which facilitate a radical milieu conducive for extremist networks.
2. CVE interventions must subsequently adapt to the existing and changing dynamics of the local contexts. They must also recognise external influences, such as the impact of socio-economic developments in Somalia on specific Islamic movements in Lamu and Tana River.
3. Programmes should seek to enhance existing cultural tenets which foster respectful dissent amongst the different Muslim denominations and schools of thought. The initial context assessment should promote the importance of conversation, debate and argument for better community decision-making. This might include providing opportunities for Muslims to engage in discussions and movements that deal with Islamic marginalization at the local and international levels.
4. CVE programmes in these counties should focus on intra-faith interventions as a priority. Religious peacebuilding should bring religious scholars together based on their shared values, rather than seek to unify the different madhabs. Knowledge of the different Madhabs must be differentiated from the evolving Islamic movements to understand violent extremism in CVE interventions.
5. Practitioners must comprehensively assess the credibility of any religious leaders before involving them in their programmes. This will necessitate understanding the local spheres of influence of the religious leaders. Acceptance may differ from one area to another. In one location, it might be a madrasa teacher and in another it may be an Imam or a Muslim businessman that has the acceptance and respect of the local population. Hence, a yardstick for evaluating leaders based on levels of religious education attained may be futile in communities that have their own ways of interpreting religious leadership and attributing respect.
6. Intra-faith CVE interventions must explore how Salafism can be embedded within transformational change along with Sufism and other groups. This will necessitate that programmes are designed to appreciate shared values rather than focusing on one specific madhab or school of thought at the expense of another.
7. Programmes should consider conducting community awareness programmes within specific hotspots<sup>1</sup> in the two counties, focusing on identifying preachers or recruiters who use religious dissemination processes or play a role in funding religious education. Efforts should be made to ensure that leaders selected by the CSOs are locally respected and maintain credibility in their respective communities. These selections should not be focused only to government spokespersons.
8. The risks faced by religious leaders working in the field of countering violent extremism must be acknowledged by CVE programmes. This will necessitate providing adequate safeguards for religious leaders working in 'at risk' areas. Working in areas prone to suspicion and fear has cost the lives of religious scholars and leaders. Adequate risk management measures and mechanisms should be incorporated into CVE and peacebuilding programmes.

## FOR THE GOVERNMENT:

1. Enable opportunities for Islamic integrated school system which blends Islamic knowledge and secular education. A way forward will be to facilitate curriculum development with blended Islamic knowledge and secular education, and then propose measures to evaluate the impact.
2. Undertake a needs assessment looking at the state of Islamic education in Tana River and Lamu counties. This should include a review of methods of delivery such as teaching Arabic through the respective Hadiths and the contexts in which specific verses of the Quran evolved. By institutionalizing Arabic within an Islamic curriculum, misinterpretations of Quran verses will be less likely.
  - Consider ways to secure an effective gatekeeper function to co-ordinate and monitor a well-structured system of governance for Islamic NGOs and charities in the two counties. This should be established in collaboration with the public, as well as with Muslim institutions.
  - Provide measures to create awareness around both intra- and inter-religious conversions. Establish institutions to facilitate conversations where the convert is equipped with knowledge from credible sources. Here, religious leaders should take charge in enabling converts to access knowledge and help them to understand the religion. The Government's role in this regard should be limited to avoid further strengthening extremist organisations' narrative that the Kenyan State is trying to dictate the lives of Muslims.
  - All government organs should engage in a two-way communication process with CSOs to enable timely information flows on pertinent issues concerning recruitment trends, methods and messaging – both online and offline.

## FOR DONORS:

1. Facilitate avenues for alternative sources of funding in collaboration with locally recognized Muslim institutions to prevent Islamic educational institutions and charity organizations from accepting assistance from extremist entrepreneurs. The facilitation process needs to first acknowledge that the process of collaboration is not an easy task. Firstly, there might not be an appropriate local actor. Secondly, the donor may hold biases based on their own positionalities. Moreover, there is no single universally accepted Islamic religious institution that can cater to the needs of all different schools of thought or emerging Islamic movement. The prevailing diverse context entails collaboration and consensus in decision-making in issues of religion, taking the diversity of local communities into account.
3. Fund educational opportunities and scholarships in collaboration with locally recognized Islamic educational institutions to educate women on Islamic theology so they can further their active roles in both the private and public sphere.
4. Engage in systemic capacity building of CSOs in collaboration with locally recognized Muslim Institutions. Most CSOs working in CVE lack evidence-based strategies for interventions in religious peacebuilding. Capacity building is needed to improve understandings of local religious issues and specific religious tenets. This will improve efforts to counter radical texts and propaganda.
5. Stimulate research to understand the motivations of individuals in promoting violence within groups, and how this differs to group motivations in extremist networks. Further research is also needed to understand group dynamics within and between different Islamic movements in order to contextualize 'violence'. It is too simplistic to only focus on the differences in Madhabs in CVE interventions.

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# Annex 1

## - Interview Guide on Contemporary Influences in Islam in Tana River County and Lamu

### Demographic Data

- a. Name: (if willing to give)
- b. Age:
- c. Gender:
- d. Islamic Education: Which schools (primary, secondary, and colleges/university) did you attend?
- e. Secular Education: Primary/Secondary, Tertiary
- f. Profession: What is your profession? What job are you doing now? Briefly can you tell us your employment trajectory?

### Semi Structured Questions

1. To start with, kindly share with me your own life history: Where were you born? Where did you study, to what levels and what did you study? Under which religious scholars did you obtain your esteemed knowledge of Islam? Family life? Current teaching and/or religious leadership positions? Muslim organizations affiliated to or leading in the region/area? Any other achievements that you wish to share? What are some of the key things that influenced the trajectory of your life?
2. Tell me about the history of Islam in this area in particular and the region in general. Tell me about how Islam spread within and from this region to neighbouring regions. Where and how did scholars and teachers of religion study or go to seek knowledge in the old times? Which religious leaders and movements and charities played critical roles in spread of Islam in modern times? How successful and influential is the faith in people's lives today? Give appropriate examples if possible. What has influenced the religious developments in the area over the years? Are there noticeable religious changes in the area over the years? If, so what are they and how have you experienced it? How
3. Are there different madhahib (schools of Islamic jurisprudence) or Muslim groups that co-exist in this region? How unified is the Muslim community in matters of jurisprudence and community leadership? What are the global influences? How are madhahib manifested in everyday life, do each own their own religious and educational institutions or co-share with each other if any? Which madhahib or religious interpretations if any are influential in this region? What accounts for such influence and why? How do different doctrinal groups relate with each other and the non-Muslim population or persons? What are the influential local and national Muslim faith-based organizations and bodies that are active in this region? Tell me briefly the nature and distribution of madaris (sing. madrasa) in the area.
4. Describe to me some of the major theological and contemporary debates that religious scholars including yourself are concerned with and interested in sharing with the umma. How do these debates impact on your sharing of ilm (religious knowledge) with your students and the larger Muslim community in the region? Some of the themes that require your perspectives include the role of women, relations between secular and religion world/politics, interfaith relation, religion and violence, the status of religious education in the world, global trends in Islamic thought. What are your positions on these issues?
5. Describe to me the future of religious reformism and revivalism in the area in the coming years. What are religious scholars doing or planning to do in this regard? What are the challenges religious scholars and umma face in term of adherence to the faith in these uncertain times? How are these challenges manifested in the society today? What are some of the possible solutions to these challenges? Given your position, what specifically do you plan to do and how do you wish these challenges be addressed?

6. According to your opinion, where do most religious scholars get their education? Which countries do they go for higher learnings? Can you briefly describe the ways in which these scholars get opportunities to go for Islamic studies abroad? In your view, has these travel abroad studies helped in strengthening Islam in the region/locality? How has it helped? In your opinion, do you view these scholars who have learnt from abroad, bringing in changes within their respective schools of thought? If so, what are these changes?
7. In your view, what are the potentials for intra-faith dialogues and how do you think it needs to be done? Probe: which schools of thought should be involved and why? How can we bridge different schools of thought based on common values? What do you think are the common values which we can harp on, for intra-faith dialogues? In your view, how can we use teachings of prominent scholars for peacebuilding? Eg: Name of the scholar, background, why do you think his teachings are affective in peacebuilding/interfaith dialogues?

## Annex 2

### – Research Information Sheet

Assalamu Alaikum. My name is Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen / Research Team member: .....

The aim of the research is to understand the contemporary history of Coastal Kenya in Lamu and Tana River County. The title of the research is 'Influence of Contemporary Islamic Ideologies in Lamu and Tana River Counties,'

#### **Your Involvement:**

The reason you have been invited for the interview is because I feel you may have relevant and interesting knowledge and experience on the subject which could prove to be extremely useful. The interview will be a very informal chat between the two of us. The interview will be semi-structured which means that there are a few questions set out by myself, though the interview will take a natural course depending on what is felt to be of importance. The project will document local history in report formats for future references and better understanding of our society which will be shared with you. This research is supported by researchers from the Technical University of Mombasa, Moi University and the Royal United Services Institute. Due to the prominent position religious leaders play in our society, we feel that you are the most appropriate and qualified person to start this discussion with. The questions are intended to obtain your opinion on the subject areas. Whatever information you may provide us with will be used only for research purposes. You are free to ask any question regarding this survey and not to respond to any question you feel uncomfortable with. The interview will take approximately 1 and a half hours to complete and your participation is entirely voluntary.

#### **Confidentiality:**

Interviews will be recorded and fully transcribed. You are free to decide if you do not want your interviews to be recorded. All the recordings will be stored on an external hard drive and these, along with the hard copies of the transcriptions, will be kept in a safe and locked environment with the researcher. Access to the external hard drive and hard copies of the transcriptions will only be accessible to me, and the Research Lead. No names will be mentioned throughout the interviews and all referrals for respondents, such as yourself, within the research report and in other relevant publications or presentations. For example, pseudonyms or the form of Respondent 1 (R1), Respondent 2 (R2), for example. Locations, times and any other identifying factors will also remain anonymous, if you may wish to be so.

#### **The Results:**

The data from this research will be used for:

1. The Research Report.
2. Academic research papers and presentations.

If you would like to be made aware of future results and outcomes of the research, and where you can find copies of the report and any relevant publications or presentations, please write down your address/email address in the relevant section of the attached consent form.

## Contact Information

If you would like more information on the research or for any other query please contact:

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