



Countering Al-Shabaab Propaganda and Recruitment Mechanisms in South Central Somalia

UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE MISSION IN SOMALIA

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Preface

Empowered communities play a key role in challenging, delegitimizing and reducing support for extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab. Achieving lasting peace and stability in Somalia requires the support and engagement of local communities and a Somali-led, Somali-owned approach.

In surveying the programs that have been implemented to date, it is clear there is a need to foster a more bottom-up approach to countering violent extremism, with a focus on the communities and actors most directly affected by or engaged with extremist activities. The following report, produced by UNSOM's Strategic Communications and Public Affairs Group, presents the findings of a study undertaken to identify the roles community members – in particular religious leaders, youth, parents, teachers and members of civil society – can play in countering and preventing violent extremism.

With these findings in mind, anti-extremism programs can be developed that empower and support community efforts. Programs and prevention strategies can be developed in partnership with communities, with the goal of strengthening resilience and building the capabilities of communities and community service organizations (CSOs) against Al-Shabaab.

This study focuses in particular on strategies for countering youth recruitment into Al-Shabaab, as well as countering Al-Shabaab propaganda. Communities can provide key insights into what anti-extremism messaging is most effective and appropriate. Communities themselves may hold the most useful tools for creating opportunities and shaping the values of at-risk youth.

UNSOM encourages a multidimensional approach to countering violent extremism. By highlighting the issues, ideas and approaches that community members raise, this report places community members' voices front and centre.

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Section I: Introduction

A. Background

Somalia has been at war since 1991, when clan-based warlords overthrew dictator Siad Barre and then turned on each other. This civil war led to the collapse of the rule of law and governance structures. This situation became a breeding ground for radicalisation and militia groups who gained control of parts of the country. The most significant of these groups is Al-Shabaab, a terrorist group linked to Al-Qaeda.

The Al-Shabaab terror group launched activities that have maimed, killed and threatened the lives of thousands of Somali citizens. Findings from recent studies^{1,2,3} commissioned by the United Nations in Somalia (UNSOM) indicate that Al-Shabaab causes fear and panic among citizens through ruthless killing of suspected informers. This has had a negative effect on the level of community participation in peace initiatives. In addition, Al-Shabaab uses a vigorous propaganda campaign to lure youth and other vulnerable groups to their membership and build community support.

With the coordinated assistance of the United Nations and other players, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has initiated activities aimed at restoring peace and stability in the country, including the National Programme for the Treatment and Handling of Disengaged Combatants. The programme oversees four Rehabilitation Centres in different parts of the country. In addition, Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo has offered an amnesty plan that provides support for Al-Shabaab combatants who disengage from the group. These programs enable ex-combatants to acquire civilian status and gain skills for sustainable income generation.

Because local Somali communities are most directly affected by Al-Shabaab's activities, UNSOM has commissioned a study to support and inform the United Nations, the FGS and the international community in the development of programs and campaigns in partnership with local communities. Such programs would strengthen community resilience and build the capabilities of communities and community service organizations (CSOs) against Al-Shabaab. This report presents the findings of this study.

B. Objectives

The main objectives that guided this qualitative study were:

- To hear from the people of South Central Somalia about best practices for combatting Al-Shabaab in their communities.
- To understand the challenges communities face in their fight against Al-Shabaab.
- To identify what support the international community and Somali government can provide to communities in their efforts to address violent extremism and develop prevention strategies.
- To gain a broad understanding of how Al-Shabaab has affected the lives of Somalis on a day-to-day basis.
- To assess respondents' attitude toward the rehabilitation of disengaged combatants.

Additional objectives were:

- To identify how different demographic groups (parents and teachers; civil society representatives and professionals; religious leaders; and youth) envision their role in combatting Al-Shabaab.

The data for this study was collected through focus groups and one-on-one interviews in Mogadishu, Baidoa and Kismayo. Respondents included parents and teachers due to their influence on youth; professionals and members of civil society because of their role in peace and security matters; religious leaders due to their widespread influence and distinctive perspective on Al-Shabaab's religious rhetoric; and youth, who are the main target for Al-Shabaab recruitment. A detailed description of the methodology and data collection tools is included in the annexes.

¹ United Nations in Somalia, *Citizens' Perception of Peace and Stabilization Initiatives in Somalia*. (2015).

² United Nations in Somalia, *Citizens' Participation in the Peace Process in Somalia*. (2015)

³ United Nations in Somalia, *Voices of Al-Shabaab: Understanding former combatants from the Baidoa Reintegration Centre*. (2016)

Section II Detailed Findings

A. Participants' demographic information

A total of nine focus groups and three individual interviews were conducted over the course of 2016. Study respondents included both male and female respondents aged between 21–65 years. The table below summarizes the demographic characteristics of the respondents in each location.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Group category	Location	Respondent Code	Age	Marital Status	Level of Education
Parents, teachers and civil society	Baidoa	ABA	33	Married	Secondary level
		MAH	32	Married	Primary level
		AA	30	Married	College level
		ANI	25	Single	College level
		IM	28	Married	Secondary level
		II	56	Married	Primary level
		AAH	26	Married	Secondary level
Youth (male)	Baidoa	MM	42	Married	Secondary level
		AK	27	Single	Secondary level
		AAD	22	Single	Secondary level
		MAU	24	Single	Secondary level
		HA	23	Single	Secondary level
		HAB	20	Single	Primary level
		SS	24	Single	Secondary level
Civil society / professionals	Baidoa	MB	25	Married	University graduate
		AIM	22	Single	Secondary level
		MH	34	Married	Secondary level
		MS	40	Married	Primary level
		HB	46	Married	Secondary level
		HA	38	Married	Secondary level
		AYA	65	Married	No formal education
Parents and teachers	Kismayo	HAL	35	Married	University student
		MAD	28	Married	University graduate
		SM	35	Married	Secondary level
		HD	25	Married	Primary level
		SH	40	Married	Secondary level
		EH	25	Single	Primary level
		AY	45	Married	Secondary level
Parents and teachers	Kismayo	HA	50	Married	Primary level
		HAE	45	Married	Secondary level
		FA	37	Married	Primary level

Youth (male)	Kismayo	MA	22	Married	Secondary level
		FD	22	Single	College student
		YM	19	Single	Secondary level
		FJ	26	Married	Primary level
		RM	27	Married	Primary level
		MAD	28	Married	Primary level
		AM	29	Married	Secondary level
		AA	20	Married	College student
Civil society representatives	Kismayo	IAN	32	Married	Secondary level
		FDA	40	Married	Secondary level
		ONA	34	Married	Secondary level
		MAH	38	Married	Primary level
		OAA	32	Married	Primary level
		MSF	25	Married	Secondary level
		AMB	37	Married	Secondary level
		MAG	36	Married	Secondary level
Youth (female)	Mogadishu	UMO	21	Single	University graduate
		WAM	23	Married	University graduate
		MMM	24	Single	University graduate
		NMA	*NS	Married	College graduate
		FAG	24	Single	University graduate
		FAS	23	Married	University graduate
		SSA	26	Married	University graduate
		FQS	26	Married	University graduate
Civil society / professionals	Mogadishu	AM	34	Married	University student
		AHI	28	Single	University graduate
		ASH	38	Married	College level
		MH	27	Single	University graduate
		YA	32	Single	University graduate
		HB	26	Married	University graduate
		SOM	27	Single	University graduate
		AI	36	Married	University graduate
Parents, teachers and civil society	Mogadishu	MH	36	Married	University graduate
		BY	42	Married	Secondary level
		MO	47	Married	Qu'ranic school
		MM	25	Married	Secondary level
		FAA	29	Married	Secondary level
		MA	32	Married	University graduate
		AN	*NS	Married	College level
		AA	37	Married	Secondary level
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS					
Sheikh	Baidoa	ASI	57	Married	Secondary level
Sheikh	Kismayo	AMA	48	Married	*NS
Sheikh	Mogadishu	SMSA	38	Married	Secondary level

*NS - Not specified

Most of the study respondents were residents of the study regions (Kismayo, Baidoa and Mogadishu). They had varied marital status and levels of education, from primary school level to university level. More than half of the professionals, civil society and parents had either secondary or university education.

B. The state of Somalia and attitudes toward the government and foreign assistance

In order to establish context for respondents' attitudes toward Al-Shabaab and efforts to counter them, discussions initially focused on the current state of Somalia and attitudes towards the federal government and international assistance.

Many respondents acknowledged that the country had vast mineral resources and manpower potential. However, since the fall of Siad Barre more than 25 years ago, the country has faced insecurity, political instability, civil wars and a general lack of peace and order. As a result, the economy has suffered, citizens have little education and poverty and unemployment are rampant. The majority of respondents said that the biggest deterrent to Somalia's development was the insecurity caused by frequent Al-Shabaab attacks. A youth respondent in Baidoa characterised Al-Shabaab as "the worst of all."

Respondents agreed that the country has faced a perennial leadership crisis. They frequently described leaders as "selfish" practitioners of corruption and nepotism who are subject to foreign influence. The government is seen as having weak institutions and poor governance structures, and its most critical institutions (such as health and education) are "dormant" and ineffective.⁴

The biggest problem that we have is poor governance, the citizens are tired of perennial fighting and the current government is the worst. – Civil Society/ Professionals, Mogadishu

Respondents also stated that the country was disunited because of federalism and clannism. Numerous respondents said that the 4.5 system of governance was problematic and should be reconsidered. Different ideologies amongst clans were said to cause perennial conflict and misunderstandings.

Many respondents went on to say that Somalia faced political interference from foreign countries, and that most of the foreigners were in the country "for their own interests." When asked about the assistance

offered by these countries, many respondents acknowledged that Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran had contributed to development in infrastructure, health and education. These countries were mentioned favourably.

However, the neighbouring countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and Djibouti, as well as Western countries and the United Nations, were seen primarily in a negative light. Although these entities were in Somalia as part of the African Union (AU) effort to restore peace and order and provide humanitarian assistance, respondents believed that they had not achieved much. A civil society representative in Baidoa said that he had not seen any "tangible progress" due to these countries being in Somalia, and other respondents agreed that they had expected more.

The international community, United Nations, the AU have...improved security in many towns, but still some towns need to be secured and liberated from Al-Shabaab. The international community has not fully supported Somalia as we expected from them. – Parents/Teachers/Civil Society, Mogadishu

Several respondents also faulted particular international assistance efforts; food aid, for example, was said to sabotage farming in Somalia. And some respondents expressed the outlook that foreign countries in Somalia operated only for their own benefit.

The entire world is in Somalia, but every country is here under its own interest. None is sincerely helping Somalia. – Youth (male), Baidoa

⁴This data was collected prior to the electoral process and the election of President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo.



C. Attitudes toward Al-Shabaab

Respondents were asked to assess the overall effects that Al-Shabaab had had on their communities, and the ways in which the community both supports and condemns the group.

Effects of Al-Shabaab

Respondents' overwhelmingly reported that Al-Shabaab had negatively affected their communities. Al-Shabaab has killed people, confiscated property, performed abductions, forced marriages and created a culture of fear and mistrust. The group has also negatively affected the economy, education and religious life. Despite a history of violence and political unrest in Somalia, respondents view the presence of Al-Shabaab as a particularly acute and intractable crisis; the shiekh interviewed in Baidoa assessed the time of Al-Shabaab as one of "unending war."

Youth reported the highest incidences of physical intimidation by Al-Shabaab. One youth in Kismayo reported that he had been beaten by Al-Shabaab members for playing football on the beach, and another reported that his hand had been broken for doing business when it was time for prayers.

Yet the effects on youth go well beyond direct physical confrontation. Because youth are the primary targets for recruitment (see Section D, below), Al-Shabaab has a vested interest in limiting other opportunities for youth. They fear that pursuing higher education or seeking government work will make them targets.

We are in difficult times for the Somali youth. They can't study in the universities because they fear being killed, and after their education they can't seek employment in the non-governmental organizations, the Turkish government or the Somali Government for fear of being killed. – Civil Society/Professionals, Mogadishu

After students finish secondary school they can't travel with their academic certificates to look for university because they will be arrested by Al-Shabaab. They don't want Somali youth to prosper in life. – Youth (male), Kismayo

Limiting opportunities for youth increases unemployment and further hobbles the economy. Al-Shabaab has negatively impacted businesses by extorting bribes and taxes; those who fail to pay are threatened with physical violence or property damage. Farmers, too, are forced to give over some of their yield to Al-Shabaab as *zakat* (annual money given for charity).

We are aware that Al-Shabaab has every person's number in this town. Those doing business are forced to pay monthly dues or else their businesses will be destroyed. People pay because of fear for their lives. – Youth (male), Baidoa

In addition, the constant threats by Al-Shabaab have created a “brain drain” as professionals have fled the country in search of jobs. And members of the Somali diaspora are reluctant to invest in the country for fear of their property being destroyed. NGOs who might otherwise invest in development share this reluctance as well.

Many respondents also spoke about the culture of mistrust that Al-Shabaab has created in their communities. This mistrust exacerbates other challenges, such as youth unemployment; because Al-Shabaab is associated with young people, employers are often suspicious of hiring youth. Young people seeking employment are required to prove their non-membership by going through a series of security screenings and attending interviews with their parents.

This mistrust also worsens the state of security within communities. People don't know who is an Al-Shabaab supporter and who is not, even within one's own family. Community members are therefore fearful of sharing information about impending attacks, because they don't know who to trust and fear retaliation.

Trust and understanding each other has gone after this group was formed. No one trusts the other. Even if you want to pass information of a danger that will kill many people, I don't know who to trust. – Youth (female), Mogadishu

Al-Shabaab has affected the lives of people in our society by creating conflict and misunderstanding between family members. They gave guns to children so that they kill their parents. There is continuous conflict in the family. No one will accept and trust the other as a family member. – Parents/Teachers, Kismayo

The level of mistrust within communities is not to be underestimated. Even during the course of the focus groups, respondents expressed wariness about expressing themselves truthfully. They were fearful that Al-Shabaab supporters might be planted in the groups, or that members might somehow find out that they had been part of the discussion.

I can't even trust my colleagues within this room, some might be your friends but at the same time working for Al-Shabaab. – Parent/Teachers/Civil Society, Mogadishu

I am really uneasy in this discussion. Some time back we had a similar discussion with military officers to discuss security issues, and I was called by an Al-Shabaab leader who threatened me. – Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

Al-Shabaab has negatively affected religious life in the country, too. They operate in the name of Islam, demanding strict religious adherence and making liberal use of the term “infidel” to describe their enemies. Yet the group also promulgates what many respondents see as “misinterpretations” of Islam. By using religion to justify their actions, many feel that Al-Shabaab has given Islam a bad name.

Al-Shabaab has affected our lives by making people understand religion very badly. Some people have now started to hate the religion. Others are accused of being infidels yet all have the same religion. They have misrepresented religion. – Parents/Teachers, Kismayo

Al-Shabaab instilled fear in the people, there is no freedom of worship, and you will be beaten for not praying or not going to the mosque. – Youth (male), Kismayo

Only the sheikh in Baidoa assessed Al-Shabaab's influence on religion positively. He noted his approval that the group has enforced women's wearing of the veil, as well as their influence on youth piety.

Several respondents allowed that areas of the country under Al-Shabaab control were relatively secure, peaceful and economically stable, and characterised by a lack of inter-clan conflict. But despite these few acknowledgments of positivity, respondents' overall attitude was that Al-Shabaab had had detrimental effects on their communities.

These guys' good work has been overtaken by their bad reputation. They have affected the lives of the young ones by making them soldiers, ruining their education, making a lot of women widows by killing their loved ones and leaving the areas in poverty and ignorance. – Youth (female), Mogadishu



Community support for Al-Shabaab

Respondents identified numerous sources of community support for Al-Shabaab. Yet the majority of this support was seen to be coerced, rather than stemming from a shared ideology.

Respondents described how Al-Shabaab forced people to provide financial support through bribes, ransoms and taxes. For example, *zakat* is collected by traditional elders and forwarded to the group. Those who rebel against this face the prospect of property destruction or death.

Al-Shabaab can't exist without the support of the community, but I am sure that 100% of the community members who support Al-Shabaab are not doing it willingly; it is out of threats from the group. — Sheikh, Mogadishu

However, despite the coerced nature of their support, some respondents still held community members responsible for helping to maintain the group. Businessmen, from individually operated *matatu* drivers to major corporations based outside Somalia, pay fees to Al-Shabaab in order to keep operating securely. Some noted that these motivations were “selfish,” placing their own economic well-being over that of the community.

Al-Shabaab has two categories of main supporters: internal and external supporters. For internal support they collect taxes at Bakara market [the biggest market in Somalia, located in Mogadishu]. They also get great support from the mobile telecommunications companies. Prestigious hotels pay taxes to them unwillingly out of fear and for business protection. — Civil Society/ Professionals, Mogadishu

A number of respondents tied support for Al-Shabaab to the country's unequal distribution of resources and to the government's inability to provide for its people. There were recurrent comments that the ethnic minorities felt marginalised from the clan-based power-sharing deal that forms the FGS. This marginalisation provides an opening for Al-Shabaab to exploit.

In Kismayo there are clans that feel left out by the Federal Government of Somalia and because of that they support Al-Shabaab. — Sheikh, Kismayo

Al-Shabaab uses the marginalised card. They empower the marginalised communities so that they can cooperate with them rather than cooperating with the government which marginalised them. They were promised leadership roles in the group if they got less in favor with the government. — Youth, Baidoa

The government was also faulted for indirectly influencing Al-Shabaab support among youth. Because the government holds youth in such high suspicion, government soldiers tend to single out youth for victimisation, and Al-Shabaab capitalises on these youths' desire for revenge.

Community condemnation of Al-Shabaab

When asked to share instances when the community has spoken out to condemn Al-Shabaab, respondents reported that public condemnation is scant or nonexistent due to widespread fear and the pervasive culture of mistrust. But this lack of action does not mean that community members do not harbor private resistance to the group.

These guys are everyone and everywhere. If you decide to condemn them publicly you will be killed. ... Everyone hates them but keeps quiet. – Youth (female), Mogadishu

Some respondents were able to recall instances when community members did speak out; however, each act of resistance was followed by swift retaliation. One respondent recalled the time Al-Shabaab bombed a university graduation, killing many graduates and other attendees. Community members mobilised in response to this attack, and were subsequently killed as well.

Some respondents – youth, in particular – placed responsibility for condemning Al-Shabaab on the government. While it may not be safe for individuals to speak out, the government has a broad reach, as well as the protection of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) behind it. And some believed that a strong community response could not come until the government became stronger and more equitable.

The day we have a stable and just government...is the time people in unity can fight against Al-Shabaab. – Youth (male), Kismayo

Key findings

The discussion above indicates an overwhelmingly negative perception of Al-Shabaab's effect on local communities and the country as a whole. Respondents cited numerous negative effects that the group has wrought on their communities, including:

- Physical intimidation, violence and property damage.
- A decrease in youth employment opportunities, due to anti-youth discrimination.
- A pervasive culture of mistrust amongst community members.
- “Distortion” of Muslim religion.

However, while the majority of community members do not support Al-Shabaab's ideology and tactics, they refuse to condemn the group – and sometimes end up supporting them – due to fear for their lives and lack of options. The discussion also suggests that the federal government's perceived failings are in part to blame for Al-Shabaab's continued influence.

**“
...they collect taxes at Bakara market. They also get great support from the mobile telecommunications companies. Prestigious hotels pay taxes to them unwillingly out of fear and for business protection.”**

- Civil Society/Professionals, Mogadishu

D. Al-Shabaab recruitment and messaging

The study assessed respondents' perceptions of how Al-Shabaab recruits and communicates with potential members, as well as what messages the group communicates and what media it uses. Their responses provide a broader understanding of Al-Shabaab operations and activities at the community level and set the stage for respondents' ideas about countering Al-Shabaab, as discussed in Sections E and F below.

Recruitment targets

Respondents identified youth aged 10–15 years as Al-Shabaab's primary recruitment targets. Their young age ensures that they have not yet developed the ability to “determine right from wrong,” as a Baidoa youth respondent put it. Specifically Al-Shabaab targets uneducated, unemployed youth with the promise of good pay, free Islamic education and marriage.

There are boys we used to know who were at a low level in the community, sleeping on the streets but after joining the group their status has been uplifted; they were given phones, 300 dollars and married to beautiful ladies, who were coerced into the marriages. — Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

They also target other vulnerable populations. Women are often recruited, because they may attract less attention than men and can thus more easily carry out suicide explosions. Women may also be used to entice male recruits.

Respondents also noted the vulnerability to recruitment of people in communities marked by inter-clan strife. Al-Shabaab may offer protection from an enemy clan, or even work to eliminate clannism in certain areas.

However, respondents noted that more privileged groups were also targets for recruitment. Educated doctors, engineers and professionals can provide their services to the group. And, a youth respondent in Mogadishu noted, more privileged youth may join to gain the protection of Al-Shabaab.

Recruitment messaging

Al-Shabaab is known for its use of forceful recruitment tactics, such as kidnapping. Youth respondents, in particular, displayed an intimate knowledge of these tactics.

For every family that has more than three boys above 11 years, two of them will be forcefully recruited. — Youth (male), Kismayo

Many respondents also discussed how Al-Shabaab relies on religious rhetoric to lure in new recruits. Recruits were enticed through the promise that joining Al-Shabaab would guarantee their entry to paradise. The group often labels those who disagree with them as “infidels” or “apostates,” causing vulnerable individuals to doubt their own religious beliefs.

Despite the group's religious rhetoric, when asked whether Al-Shabaab used religious leaders or religious teachings to spread their message, the majority of respondents responded in the negative. This seeming contradiction points to many Somalis' desire to distance “their” Islam from the distorted version of the religion promulgated by Al-Shabaab. Respondents believed that the religious leaders they followed would never spread the group's message. Instead, they noted that Al-Shabaab has its own religious leaders who spread the group's ideology through their teachings.



“

Al-Shabaab also puts forth prominent messaging that focuses on a critique of the Somali government and of foreigners in Somalia.

”

Al-Shabaab ideology is vague. It is not religious ideology and it will perish with time. – Parents/Teachers, Kismayo

Al-Shabaab also puts forth prominent messaging that focuses on a critique of the Somali government and of foreigners in Somalia. The former are branded as “infidels,” while the latter are said to be stealing the country’s natural resources for their own gain. They also capitalise on the broadly-held anti-Western and anti-foreign sentiments summarized in Section B, above.

They use irresponsible comments from Western leaders to show that their governments are against Islam. For example, they recently used Trump’s campaign speech on Islam to recruit members. – Youth (male), Baidoa

They call local NGOs “kafirs” [non-believers/infidels] and economic saboteurs for distributing food aid when farmers’ own food is ready for harvest. – Youth (male), Kismayo

Several respondents noted not only the content but the manner of the group’s messaging. A Baidoa youth described their manner of speaking as “eloquent” and savvy, using adept speakers of multiple language and *anashiids* (Arabic songs) to spread their message. The group also incorporates Somali history into its messaging, exploiting historical antipathies to bring in new recruits.

In the 2006 war with Ethiopia they recruited many university students who were later killed in the line of duty. The youths were enticed by being given emotional stories about the 1977 war with Ethiopia and from then Ethiopia is perceived as enemy of Somalia⁵. – Civil Society/Professionals, Mogadishu

Recruitment tactics and media

Respondents offered a broad range of methods used by Al-Shabaab to contact new recruits. They give out free phones, which they then use to communicate. They are also subject to the influence of friends and family members who are already part of the group. Some respondents discussed *douras* (public meetings), which feature stirring lectures and sermons that culminate in calls for audience members to step up and fight in the name of their religion.

⁵ The war in 1977 was a military offensive by the Somali government of Siad Barre against Ethiopia over the territorial control of the Somali Regional State within Ethiopia. With Soviet support, Ethiopia inflicted a heavy defeat on the Somali army. In 2006, the Ethiopian army invaded Somalia to support the Transitional Federal Government in Baidoa and to end the Islamic Courts Union’s (ICU) control of southern Somalia. While the operation was successful in driving the ICU out of major cities, Al-Shabaab, an offshoot of the ICU, has since used this Ethiopian invasion to mobilise Somalis against the Somali government and foreign troops.

Some respondents suggested that youth are recruited through their *madrasa* (religious school). Yet this proved to be a point of contention, speaking again to the conflictual feelings Somalis face over Al-Shabaab's deployment of Islam. In the Youth focus group in Baidoa, one respondent stated that "the one who organised the previous explosion was a *madrasa* teacher," while another respondent countered, "I think *madrasa* teachers are innocent and they can't recruit their students." This argument speaks to many respondents' desire to distance Islam as they know it from Al-Shabaab's religious rhetoric.

Respondents also noted that Al-Shabaab requires current fighters to recruit additional members by any means they can. New recruits frequently apply pressure on friends and family to join. This tactic ensures the rapid growth of the group, and speaks to the coercive means through which the group ensures that growth.

Nearly all respondents noted Al-Shabaab's reliance on social media and the Internet for getting its message out. The group uses Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and websites like *alfurqan.net* and *somalimemo.net*, as well as Radio Andalus to spread its rhetoric locally. They use Internet sites to post videos of their attacks on government and foreign troops, often hyperbolizing their prowess in these confrontations. They also use pre-recorded videos of members having a lavish lifestyle (before committing suicide attacks).

For a month, they were posting about the fallen soldiers from Kenya in El-Adde and the Ugandan soldiers from Janale to show that Al-Shabaab is mighty and the other soldiers are cowards. – Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

They pre-record videos of suicide bombers feeling happy, wearing expensive clothes and driving expensive and classy vehicles. – Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

The international media was a frequent target of critique, as well. International television networks such as the BBC and Al Jazeera were seen as giving members of Al-Shabaab an additional platform to spread their message. Even if the broadcasts were intended to cast the group in a negative light, respondents still saw their airing of video from Al-Shabaab as a form of publicity.

Key findings

There are five main modes that Al-Shabaab uses to recruit people into their organisation:

- Direct recruitment of groups like women, unemployed youth and other vulnerable populations. Social and economic incentives are often utilised to entice recruits.
- Forced recruitment including abduction, threats and forcing parents to give up one son.
- Third-party recruitment using friends and relatives (peer pressure).
- Media publicity, using propaganda messaging on social media, radio and the Internet.
- Religious persuasion, based on preaching from religious leaders and radicalised *madrasa* teachers.

“ New recruits frequently apply pressure on friends and family to join. This tactic ensures the rapid growth of the group, and speaks to the coercive means through which the group ensures that growth. ”

E. Countering youth recruitment into Al-Shabaab

Personal and communal initiatives

The study asked respondents to consider what particular role they might play in combatting youth recruitment into Al-Shabaab. This portion of the discussion began by asking each respondent to consider how people like him or herself are influential in society. Members of focus groups that included parents and teachers discussed their personal influence on their children and other parents. Youth talked about creating activities such as football and trips to education centres to occupy vulnerable youths' time, implying their ability to foster peer relationships. Civil society representatives and professionals discussed how they might parlay their role as businesspeople into reducing youth unemployment. The sheikhs noted their religious influence over youth. Even as they assessed their individual roles, respondents recognised that countering youth recruitment would necessarily be a communal effort.

It is important for the sheikhs, parents and women to join hands to stop youth radicalisation. – Parents/Teachers/Civil Society, Baidoa

Education – both formal and informal – was named by all groups as a key strategy. Many respondents said that they would work to raise awareness amongst those close to them about the ills of Al-Shabaab through face-to-face interactions. Volunteers could sensitise communities at public forums or privately at their homes, helping them to correctly interpret the Qu'ran. Parents could prioritise the education of their own children. One civil society representative in Kismayo said that he could see himself raising awareness by becoming a “street activist” – if he was provided with adequate security.

Respondents from youth, civil society and parent/teacher groups also discussed using social media to raise awareness.

I can use social media by posting about the ills of the Al-Shabaab and posting good information about the country, like how the country is progressing in various sectors such as agriculture, education and health, so that youth can feel the goodness and the purpose of having a Somali government. – Parents/Teachers/Civil Society, Mogadishu

I can use YouTube and Facebook to share the evil acts of terrorism and at the same time call for Somali unity. This message I will share with all my friends. – Youth (female), Mogadishu

Respondents across all groups also cited the importance of free formal education as a key to liberating society from the vice of Al-Shabaab, suggesting that if children were educated, they would be better able to make informed decisions and better choices concerning their future.

Creating opportunities for **employment and recreation** was another frequently cited strategy. As noted above, many youth are drawn into Al-Shabaab due to unemployment, which creates both an economic need and an excess of leisure time. Many respondents discussed the importance of increasing job opportunities, as well as supporting recreation centres and youth football leagues.

I used to be a football coach and if the government could become secure I will start an initiative to train the youth to play football, and in that way, I will make them busy. – Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

Respondents also discussed the importance of improving security through **community policing**. Community members frequently have knowledge of Al-Shabaab activity that they could share with authorities to prevent attacks. Establishing strong and secure community policing procedures requires government support.

The government should take responsibility to protect those who give out information on Al-Shabaab. We should have a community policing system and the police should have a good relationship with the community to gain their support. – Parents/Teachers/Civil Society, Baidoa

In addition to providing improved security, respondents spoke of other strategies that the **government** could adopt to counter recruitment. The FGS could aid in job creation and the equitable distribution of resources. The government could pay its soldiers better, so that youth would not be swayed by Al-Shabaab's higher salaries. Youth could also be involved in the government decision-making process, in order to feel that their interests were being served.

If we can elect transformative leaders, that will create employment; if we create 2,000 to 3,000 jobs I think Al-Shabaab will not have an opportunity to recruit, and it will end with time. – Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

The best channel is to empower the government soldiers. Currently, they are not regularly paid, and thus they might decide to work for Al-Shabaab, who is paying \$1,000 dollars. – Parents/Teachers/Civil Society, Baidoa

Many respondents also called for the government to work towards a more equitable society. They again brought up the 4.5 power-sharing system as a key source of inequity and thus an engine for disaffection and radicalisation of marginalised people.

There must be an equitable share of the Somali resources so that those marginalised don't see themselves as less fortunate. – Parents/Teachers, Kismayo

Notably, relatively few respondents brought up the role of the international community in countering youth recruitment. Only one respondent, from the Civil Society/Professionals group in Baidoa, called for support to come from outside the country.

Anticipated challenges to countering Al-Shabaab recruitment

Respondents anticipated significant challenges to countering Al-Shabaab recruitment. Many expressed fear that they or their family members would be killed or abducted for speaking out, or that they'd risk property damage. If they spoke out despite these fears, they might face a negative community response, due to the culture of mistrust that Al-Shabaab has created. Respondents were concerned that they could become isolated from other community members who feared the consequences of associating with a known organizer against the group.

People would stigmatise you for speaking out against Al-Shabaab and no one will want to associate with you so that they may not be targeted. – Parents/Teachers/Civil Society, Mogadishu

This culture of fear and mistrust was seen as perpetuated by a lack of security. Despite their enthusiasm for increased community policing, for example, respondents expressed fear that they would face consequences for reporting Al-Shabaab activity. Many respondents felt the government bore the responsibility for providing increased security.

Despite the significant challenges cited by all, many respondents spoke passionately about taking up the cause. They emphasized the importance of the community coming together to present a unified front against Al-Shabaab.

If I were to report an incident to the police, I don't have confidence and trust that the policeman won't leak the information to Al-Shabaab, and I could be killed.

– Parents/Teachers/Civil Society, Baidoa

It's really difficult to talk about Al-Shabaab issues without protection from the government. It's important you keep quiet just to save your life. – Youth (male), Kismayo

While many of the challenges expressed were seen as endemic and multi-faceted, some respondents pointed to more readily surmountable barriers. Several noted a lack of material support for anti-Al-Shabaab efforts, and were able to come up with the particular resources they'd need to pursue this work.

I will need vehicles and income to support the activity. Medical insurance in case I get injured, economic and moral support. – Sheikh, Baidoa

Despite the significant challenges cited by all, many respondents spoke passionately about taking up the cause. They emphasized the importance of the community coming together to present a unified front against Al-Shabaab, taking up the same level of resolve as their enemy.

This duty won't be easy unless you take risks. Don't say you fear being killed, because Al-Shabaab are also not afraid of being killed. If you die, we replace you with someone else and the mission continues. – Youth (female), Mogadishu

If people unite to oppose Al-Shabaab, we will gain community support. We need to have confidence and trust and we can wipe out Al-Shabaab from our midst.

– Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

Key findings

Respondents cited the following areas as opportunities to counter youth recruitment into Al-Shabaab:

- Education (formal and informal, religious and secular)
- Job opportunities and recreation
- Community policing
- Government involvement

They anticipated challenges to these efforts in the following areas:

- Fear of violence and property damage
- Community mistrust
- Lack of government-provided security
- Lack of material resources

Note: Few respondents brought up the role of the international community in countering youth recruitment. Only one respondent called for support to come from outside the country.

F. Countering Al-Shabaab propaganda

As noted in Section D above, Al-Shabaab uses a broad range of propaganda and media to recruit followers and spread their influence. Respondents offered numerous concrete strategies for countering this propaganda, and emphasised the importance of different sectors of society working together.

We should counter Al-Shabaab from all corners. We need to unite and create platforms for the religious leaders, traditional leaders and youth to educate the population against the group. – Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

Respondents noted that religion should play a key role. Because much of Al-Shabaab's ideology is based on "misinterpretations" of Islam, respondents emphasised **the role legitimate religious scholars must play in countering their propaganda**. This sentiment was particularly strong among groups that included parents, teachers and civic society representatives, who argued that religious leaders must "clarify and refute" the Al-Shabaab ideology. And a civil society representative in Baidoa specifically cited Sheikh Nuur Baaruud Gurhan⁶ as an example of a religious leader who counters and condemns Al-Shabaab on a daily basis. Respondents called for religious leaders to spread their teachings in *madrasas*, mosques, at social gatherings and on social media.

Since they have religious leaders who sanctify their ideology we need to counter by using local religious leaders that will teach the youth the positive side of religion. – Parents/Teachers/Civil Society, Mogadishu

Given Al-Shabaab's widespread use of the Internet and other media to spread their propaganda, respondents, particularly youth and religious leaders, called for the government to **restrict the group's access to these media tools**. Several respondents noted that Twitter handles associated with the group had been deactivated, yet they eventually resurfaced on the platform. Respondents also claimed that international media had a responsibility to stop giving Al-Shabaab a platform.

We blame and condemn the international community for failing to delete Al-Shabaabs' Facebook, YouTube and websites. We should give those media blackouts. Their spokesmen speak to media directly such as Al Jazeera.

– Youth (male), Baidoa

Traditional Somali culture was also seen as having a role to play in combatting Al-Shabaab recruitment. Respondents noted that Al-Shabaab is imposing a strict code of conduct, such as the banning of traditional music and dancing, that stands in opposition to the cultural values and norms of Somali society. The systematic assault on Somali values and culture should be ascribed central importance in countering Al-Shabaab propaganda. Relying on traditional forms of entertainment, communication and community rituals could create a sense of national and cultural unity against the group.

We need to empower the Somali poems, songs and customs to condemn the group and also teach the youngsters their responsibility to protect their culture from the group. – Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

Exposing hypocrisy with the Al-Shabaab power structure may also form an entry point for countering Al-Shabaab propaganda. Respondents frequently discussed a split between the Al-Shabaab leadership and the majority of their combatants, who come from the vulnerable populations described above. Several respondents suggested, for example, that those in leadership roles deserve to be punished, while regular combatants should be rehabilitated and welcomed back into the community (see Section G, below, for elaboration).

We can ignite their minds about the fact that Al-Shabaab wants us to go to paradise, but the leaders are not ready to explode themselves. Why they are not ready to go the front lines of the war and fight? – Parents/Teachers, Kismayo

⁶ Sheikh Nuur Baaruud Gurhan is a spokesperson of the Somali Religious Leaders Council, a pro-government organisation. He is based in Mogadishu and reportedly a member of Dam-ul Jadiid, a group which is affiliated with Muslim Brotherhood. Publicly denouncing Al-Shabaab, the Sheikh teaches *tafsir* (exegesis, explaining different meanings of the Qur'anic verses) on Somali National TV and various radio stations.

Key findings

Respondents saw numerous openings for countering Al-Shabaab propaganda. Key strategies included:

- Spreading accurate religious teachings.
- Government restriction of Al-Shabaab's use of social media and a decrease of their presence in international media.
- Promoting traditional Somali culture and highlighting Al-Shabaab's systematic assault on Somali values and culture.
- Exposing hypocrisy within Al-Shabaab.

“

We should counter Al-Shabaab from all corners. We need to unite and create platforms for the religious leaders, traditional leaders and youth to educate the population against the group.

”

- Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa



G. Attitudes toward rehabilitation and reintegration

The majority of respondents felt positively toward efforts to integrate disengaged Al-Shabaab combatants back into their communities. Respondents expressed that this welcoming attitude was central to Somali values.

It is my responsibility to welcome the defectors to my homestead, so that they can feel comfortable living within our midst. – Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

Across all groups, respondents emphasised that ex-combatants must be rehabilitated before rejoining their communities. They suggested “clearing methods” to “erase” Al-Shabaab doctrine from their minds. These methods might include trauma counselling, as well as access to entertainment and diversions that they were never afforded when they were younger.

Respondents also emphasised the importance of education as part of rehabilitation, particularly around “the true values and teachings of Islam,” though secular and vocational education was mentioned as well. Respondents emphasised the importance of

providing skills that would assist returnees in gaining employment. Several respondents also suggested that ex-combatants and their families receive financial support, so that the former could concentrate on rehabilitation before worrying about meeting the needs of their families.

A minority of respondents set the bar to reintegration even higher, suggesting that defectors should be cleared by the Criminal Investigation Department, or even be tried as criminals in a court of law. Several expressed fear that defections could be disingenuous. But only a few dissenters took a hard line against welcoming disengaged combatants.

Being in Al-Shabaab is like living with HIV, which has no cure; I can't dare to accept him back. – Youth (female), Mogadishu

Overall, those who advocated harsher penalties for defectors were countered by other respondents who argued that such penalties would disincentivise defection.

Rehabilitation Centres

The vast majority of respondents supported the idea of transitional facilities for disengaged combatants, such as the Baidoa Rehabilitation Centre. Many respondents called for more facilities to be created. They also said that the facilities should be easily accessible and secure, to protect them from Al-Shabaab attacks.

I really support such centres because they help to deradicalise the youth, give them a new life and teach them skills that will later benefit the society. Such centres should provide Islamic teachings and be available in all towns for ease of access by disengaged fighters. – Parents/Teachers, Kismayo

“ Engage the community in the centres so that the healing process starts and trust is rebuilt. ”



Respondents who were aware of the rehabilitation centres spoke positively about them, saying that they had reformed former Al-Shabaab combatants. They reported that former members were now empowered, financially independent and were leading successful lives.

The current centres should be increased because the one that we have serves the whole of Bay, Bakool and Gedo regions. We have a group of many disengaged youths who were fully reformed after they were taken to the centre. – Parents/Teachers/Civil Society, Baidoa

Respondents said that these facilities should provide attendees with the resources to “start life afresh.” The facilities should offer trauma and spiritual counselling, education on factual religious doctrine and teach income-generating and vocational skills, as well as financial literacy.

Respondents’ positive opinion of transitional facilities was evidenced in their desire to raise awareness about the facilities and provide them with additional financial resources. Youth, in particular, were enthusiastic about the expansion of these and similar rehabilitation programs.

We should welcome the youth, buy phones for them so that they can contact their friends and colleagues who are still in the group to defect. We should record and show the public what rehabilitation looks like. We should create hotline numbers which Al-Shabaab members who defect can call when they want to disengage from the group. – Youth (male), Kismayo

Respondents also emphasized the need for communities to be engaged with the facilities, so that all could have a stake in the rehabilitation process.

Engage the community in the centres so that the healing process starts and trust is rebuilt. – Youth (female), Mogadishu

“ We should welcome the youth, buy phones for them so that they can contact their friends and colleagues who are still in the group to defect. We should record and show the public what rehabilitation looks like. We should create hotline numbers which Al-Shabaab members who defect can call when they want to disengage from the group.

- Youth (male), Kismayo

Key findings

- The majority of respondents support the integration of ex-combatants into their communities, after adequate rehabilitation.
- Awareness about the transitional facilities should be raised and the programme should be expanded to other towns.
- Facilities should offer trauma counselling, as well as religious, secular and vocational education. They should also offer financial support.
- Facilities should engage with the communities in which they’re located.

Section III

Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Summary of findings


Participants in the study expressed a strongly negative view toward Al-Shabaab and its effects on their communities and the country as a whole. They saw the group as deeply entrenched, and found the current state of community resistance to be virtually nonexistent. However, respondents were able to envision what role they and their communities might play in future efforts to counter Al-Shabaab, and to articulate the support and conditions necessary for such efforts.

Al-Shabaab operations

Al-Shabaab targets youth, women and children (15 years and below) for recruitment because they are more susceptible to their propaganda and are easy messengers for carrying out attacks. Their main means of communication to their target audience includes interpersonal interactions (in person and over mobile phone), social media, radio and international television. Some recruiting occurs at mosques, *madrasas* and other public gatherings.

Al-Shabaab entices their target audience with promises of lucrative lifestyles, better pay and better life after death. They misinterpret scripture and persuade people that they are fighting for their religion. Al-Shabaab also appeals to Somali nationalism. They seek to strengthen their legitimacy by highlighting the 2006 Ethiopian invasion of Somalia. The group's narrative of foreign and "infidel" occupation has continued to represent a powerful rallying cry to mobilise Somalis against the Somali government and foreign troops.

Al-Shabaab receives support from businesspeople, politicians, diaspora members and private telecommunication companies. However, much of this support is offered out of fear of repercussions. Some communities have recognised the brutal nature of their operations, and support for the group has been gradually waning.



***““ We need to empower the Somali poems, songs and customs to condemn the group and also teach the youngsters their responsibility to protect their culture from the group.*””**

- Civil Society/Professionals, Baidoa

Respondents supported the reintegration of disengaged combatants into their communities. They believed that reintegration should be a gradual process to allow the community to monitor, build trust, forgive the ex-combatants and welcome them as reformed members of society.

Countering youth recruitment into Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab has historically been successful in recruiting youth to the group. To successfully degrade the capabilities of Al-Shabaab, it is necessary to put an end to youth recruitment. Education and recreation programs and increased job opportunities would provide significant alternatives to Al-Shabaab for vulnerable youth. Additionally, both religious leaders and ordinary citizens believed in their ability to raise awareness in their communities about the ills of Al-Shabaab, while also noting that they felt unable to do so for fear of Al-Shabaab retaliation. Increased community policing would result in more secure communities. The government should also create employment opportunities for youth and ensure equitable distribution of resources across all clans and other marginalised people.

Countering Al-Shabaab propaganda

Al-Shabaab's propaganda rests on religious rhetoric, criticism of the government and international community, savvy use of social media, glorification of their military prowess and lucrative incentives for joining the group. This propaganda can be countered through the spread of accurate religious teachings, government restrictions on the group's use of social media, the promotion of traditional Somali culture in juxtaposition to Al-Shabaab's attempts to obliterate local values and culture, and the exposure of hypocrisy within Al-Shabaab.

Attitudes toward disengaged combatants and transitional facilities

Overall, respondents supported the reintegration of disengaged combatants into their communities. They believed that reintegration should be a gradual process to allow the community to monitor, build trust, forgive the ex-combatants and welcome them as reformed members of society. Respondents were strongly in favor of the transitional facilities, and called for raised awareness about and even expansion of the programme.

B. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, it is clear there is a need to foster a more bottom-up approach to countering violent extremism, with a focus on the communities and actors most directly affected by or engaged with extremist activities. Programs and prevention strategies should be developed in partnership with communities, with the goal of strengthening resilience and building the capabilities of communities and community service organizations (CSOs) against Al-Shabaab.

Developing a strong counter-narrative has significant potential to disrupt the local support that is critical for Al-Shabaab's recruitment activities and overall survival. To accomplish this, however, it is necessary to minimize the "footprint" of international actors ("infidels" and "invaders"), and, where possible, delegate implementation to local actors perceived as legitimate by local communities. Fostering greater engagement of local actors would prevent Al-Shabaab from exploiting a usual narrative of foreign occupation, while simultaneously demonstrating a willingness to respect and re-affirm traditional cultural and religious values.

One of the anticipated challenges in countering Al-Shabaab recruitment and propaganda will be assuring the security of people involved in these counter-Al-Shabaab activities. The FGS and all stakeholders need to ensure security and safety of all engaged in these activities, as well as foster trust between communities and the government.

Specific recommendations include the following:

- Mirroring the strategy employed by Al-Shabaab, every "success story" of the government institutions and Somali security forces—from the establishment of community policing centres, to the reconstruction of schools—should be leveraged to articulate a comprehensive counter-narrative conveying hope to the people and building their confidence in the government.
- Every attempt should be made to draw a constant divide between the religious subjugation and rigid code of conduct imposed by Al-Shabaab, and the revival of traditional Somali culture (poems, music, etc.) and create a sense of national and cultural unity against Al-Shabaab.
- Expose the hypocrisy of Al-Shabaab, particularly their leadership structure and expectation that poor, low-level members are often expected to become suicide bombers.
- Build the capacity and support of moderate religious scholars to play an important role in countering Al-Shabaab propaganda and refuting false religious teachings.
- Create safe channels for community members to speak out against Al-Shabaab publicly, yet anonymously, to ensure safety and protection from Al-Shabaab reprisal (for example, radio programs with audience call-in segments where callers can remain anonymous).
- Build the capacity of Somali citizens to develop their own messaging and campaigns to counter Al-Shabaab and to unify community efforts through training programs for CSOs and other groups.
- Provide training and support to local media that encourages ethical reporting on Al-Shabaab that highlights the "reign of terror" they impose on communities, and emphasises a human dimension (reporting on the individuals killed and the toll their deaths take on families and communities) to undermine local support for the group.
- Provide workshops and training to local media on the issue of safety and the security for working journalists.
- Develop programmes that provide education, livelihood and recreational opportunities for youth who may otherwise be idle and vulnerable targets for Al-Shabaab recruitment.
- Provide opportunities for community members to engage with the rehabilitation centres for disengaged combatants so the community has a stake in the process and can be part of a reconciliation and healing process that builds trust.



Annexes

Annex I: Research design

Methodology

The survey employed a qualitative research methodology which involved focus group discussions and in-depth, one-on-one interviews that provided a platform to carry out direct observations and discussions with respondents.

Focus group discussion guides design process

The focus group and interview guides design process followed the approach outlined below:

- a. Designed alongside the key intended research objectives.
- b. Using the key messaging areas identified, research questions were developed covering each of the thematic areas. The research questions developed were of three types:
 - Knowledge questions
 - Perception questions
 - Behavioural questions
- c. This being a qualitative survey, all questions were open-ended.
- d. The discussion guide was categorised into sub-sections under the following five broad themes:
 - Demographic questions
 - Al-Shabaab operations
 - Countering youth recruitment in to Al-Shabaab
 - Countering Al-Shabaab propaganda
 - Evaluating the rehabilitation centres in Baidoa

Each section of the discussion guide was designed purposefully to capture information relating to several of the key messaging areas identified during the review of documentation relating to the proposed communication campaign.

Sampling methodology

To cater to a diverse range of ages, the study targeted youth, civil society representatives/professionals, parents, teachers and religious leaders. The focus groups and interviews were used to ensure a more personalised approach and to ensure that tangible feedback and information were gathered.

The target respondents were spread across gender and age. A total of 72 respondents participated in the focus group discussion and 3 religious leaders in the interviews. The sample distribution was as follows:

Method used		
Focus Group Discussions	Sample Size	9 focus group discussions
	Sampling methodology	Purposive – civil society representatives, professionals, parents and youth
	Population universe	Somali adults, aged 18 and above living in the Baidoa, Kismayo and Mogadishu
	Respondent type	Youth
		Civil society/professional
		Parents and teachers
	Area of study	Baidoa, Kismayo and Mogadishu
	Number of respondents per	8 members
Interview language	Somali	
Key Informant Interviews	3 Religious leaders, one in each town	3 interviewers

Quality control measures

Very high quality control measures were employed to ensure the highest possible integrity of obtained results/data. Qualified and seasoned moderators and note-takers undertook this survey and utmost confidentiality was exercised during the process. The data collection was audio recorded and detailed notes taken.

Limitations of methodology

Qualitative research has limitations due to its design. The data itself is subjective and represents the opinion of each speaker in a particular context at a particular moment. Data should therefore be interpreted with caution, especially where statements appear grossly overstated.



Annex II: Study instrument

Objectives

Main objectives of the study

- To hear from the people of South Central Somalia about best practices for combatting Al-Shabaab in their communities.
- To understand the challenges communities face in their fight against Al-Shabaab.
- To identify what support the international community and Somali government can provide to communities in their efforts to address violent extremism and develop prevention strategies.

Good morning...afternoon...evening, my name is We want to discuss with you about your current life. This is not an investigation, but just an open discussion on how we can all help to make Somalia a peaceful and prosperous country once again.

I would like to assure you that your identities will not be revealed at any point. Therefore, any information you give us today will be handled with utmost confidentiality. Please remember that, in this discussion we do not have any right or wrong answers; you should therefore feel free to contribute your true opinions and experiences. It is important that everyone contributes to the discussion, and we would request that one person talks at a time to give everyone a chance to express their views.

MODERATOR NOTE: Discuss questions exhaustively and use rapport/projective techniques to get information. Please record the sessions and take as many notes as possible.

Introduction

(10 min)

- Before we begin, let us quickly get to know a little bit more about each other. Can you share with me a little bit more about yourself?
- Your background, where were you born? Marital status?
- Family of origin?
- Clan?
- Age?
- Where did you attend school?
- What level of education did you attain?
- Where have you lived in the past five years? Probe for whether they have returned from diaspora or not.
- Do you have a family?
- What do you do for a living?

Ice-Breaker

(5 min)

- I would like us to talk about Somalia. What ails us as a country? LIST DOWN ON A FLIP CHART ALL RESPONSES
- Do we need assistance as a country? Why?
- Who has come to our help? How have they helped?
- Are there situations which we need assistance? Which ones? Why?
- Are there situations which don't need assistance? Which ones? Why?

Al-Shabaab operations

(20 min)

- I would like us to talk a little bit about Al-Shabaab. It may be uncomfortable to talk about it openly, but we assure you this information will be strictly confidential and cannot be used in any way to victimise you.
- In your own experience, how has Al-Shabaab affected life in your area? Has Al-Shabaab affected life for the better or worse? Why?
- In which ways (if any) does your community (or some of its members) support Al-Shabaab? Who in particular? Why do they support them?
- Are there instances your community has come out strongly to condemn or support the activities of Al-Shabaab? When? Where? What prompted them?
- How does Al-Shabaab recruit their combatants? Probe for methods of recruitment.
- Who do they target? Why this target?
- How do they lure them in?
- How do they communicate to their targets about the arrangements?
- Who helps them to recruit youth? Why so?
- Do they give any incentives to those who aid them in the recruitment?
- What incentives? How often?
- Do they use any media to recruit or build support for Al-Shabaab?
- Which medium? Which specific channels?
- What kind of messages do they send that ensure successful recruitment of people in to Al-Shabaab? Do they:
 - Criticise the FGS?
 - Criticise foreign people/bodies/institutions?
 - Spread propaganda about the services they provide to the community?
 - Do they threaten or frighten people into joining or supporting Al-Shabaab?
 - Do religious leaders or others use religious teachings to try to build support for Al-Shabaab or to recruit people? If so, how (through Friday sermons, radio programs, etc.)?

Countering youth recruitment in to Al-Shabaab

(20 min)

- In what ways are people like you influential in the society?
- In what ways can you influence the youth not to join Al-Shabaab?
- What channels do you use to influence society?
- How do you apply your influence? Is it through public talks? Do you use officials who are in power? Any other ways of influencing the community?
- Can you personally play a role in preventing more youth from being recruited in to Al-Shabaab? How would you do this? What support would you require to do this? Any risks?
- Would your community be supportive of strategies to influence the youth not to join Al-Shabaab?
- What do you think would be the most appropriate steps to counter Al-Shabaab recruitment in your area?
- What are some of the challenges that you might face in trying to counter Al-Shabaab recruitment?
- What support would you need to ensure that your participation brings positive outcomes/results?

Countering Al-Shabaab propaganda

(10 min)

- We understand that Al-Shabaab uses propaganda as a way of marketing themselves to the youth.
- What such propaganda do they use? LIST ALL MENTIONED.
- What are the most effective ways to counter this propaganda? Why?
- Any methods that can work? Have they been tried before?
- Who would be the most effective person/institution to counter this propaganda? Why? What would be their specific role?

Evaluating the transitional facilities

(15 min)

- Let's now talk about rehabilitation of disengaged Al-Shabaab fighters. What should be done with them? Where should they be taken?
- How do you personally feel about having former Al-Shabaab fighters who have been rehabilitated coming back to live in your community and reintegrate?
- How can the community support their reintegration? What challenges will there be?
- Have you heard about the transitional facilities? Is Al-Shabaab aware of them?
- What do you think about them?
- What benefits do these facilities provide?
- Do you personally support these facilities? Why?
- What should the facilities improve on?

Wrap-Up

- Is there something else you would like to contribute to our discussion today?
- Finally, what message would you send to the UN in Somalia about how the United Nations can assist in countering the threat of Al-Shabaab?

Thank you

