

The GLOCEPS

Weekly Influential Brief

Research and Analysis in Security and Defence Pillar

Challenges to reintegration of women foreign terrorist fighters in Kenya

Dr John Mwangi
Denis Muniu



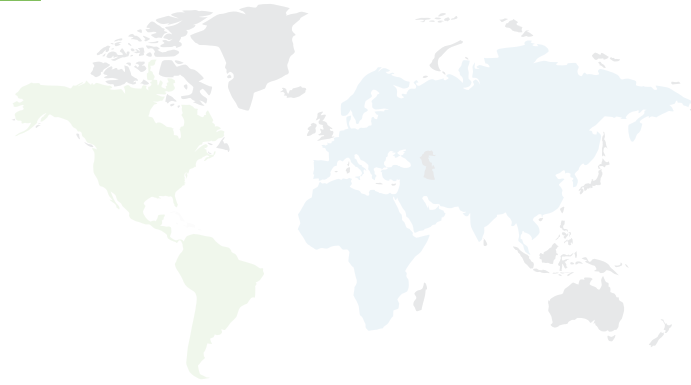
Photo Credit: somaliland.com

Executive Summary

Women Foreign Terrorist Fighters (WTFs) returning to their home countries after associating with terrorist organizations abroad present security threats nationally, regionally, and globally. The reintegration of returning WTFs in Kenya continues to experience challenges related to stigmatization and awareness, psychosocial support and legisla-

tion. A gendered approach to reintegration will cater for the specific needs of the returnees. This brief recommends, among others, a multi-agency approach to raising public awareness on the reintegration of WTFs, enhancing collaboration with the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the provision of psychosocial support and a review of existing legal and policy guidelines.





Context

Kenya hosts about 1500 Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF) returnees who continue to pose a threat to national security. While 20% of FTFs in Kenya are women, only 17% of them are under various reintegration programmes. In 2014, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2178 recognized the global risk posed by the returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and called on states to institute legal measures to prevent suspected FTFs from entering or transiting their territories. Similarly, Resolution 2396 of 2017 addressed threats caused by FTF returnees, particularly those who had travelled to Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. The suggested measures included border control, counter-extremism, information sharing, prosecution, and reintegration of returning

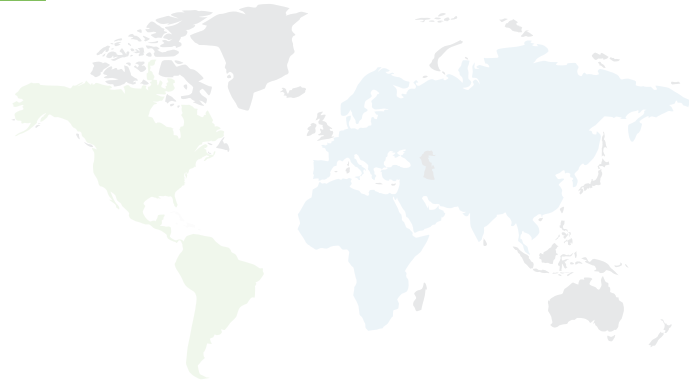
FTFs in compliance with domestic and international law.

The dire reintegration situation in Kenya is augmented by the existing legal and policy gaps, inadequate psychosocial support and community stigmatization of the women returnees. It is evident that the 2016 National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) and the County Action Plans developed for the same, have not effectively addressed the reintegration of WFTFs. In recognition of the fact that women and children affiliated to FTFs returning from conflict may have served as supporters and perpetrators of terrorist acts, the need to develop county-specific and all-inclusive reintegration strategies is critical.



Photo credit: dw.com





Key Issues

The following issues are pertinent in the reintegration of returning WFTFs.



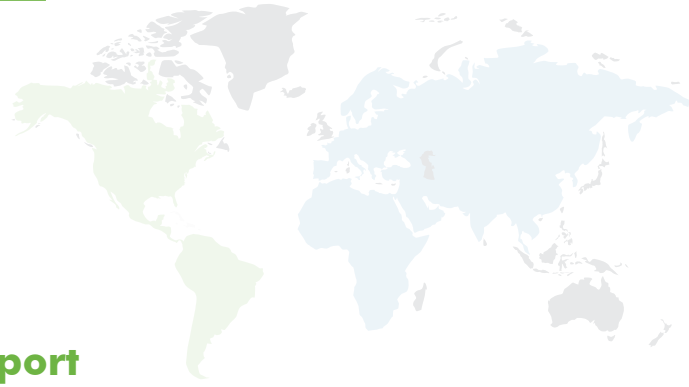
Photo Credit: socialistsanddemocrats.eu

Stigmatization and public awareness

The status of WFTFs in the community is generally stigmatized and the lack of public awareness of their plight negatively affects the reintegration process. There are fears that returnees might subject their communities to extra surveillance from the government and contaminate other members of the community, including their families. The situation is exacerbated by existing societal norms and stereotypes. While women are generally viewed as non-violent actors and peaceful caregivers, their involvement with terrorist organizations is viewed as contravening traditional norms leading to communities' shaming. The NSCVE outlines the need for community engagement to curb stigma.

However, it does not incorporate a gendered perspective thereby neglecting the specific challenges and needs of women and girls. When these women are stigmatized chances of them returning to conflict theatres are high. This is detrimental to the reintegration process. Lessons from Libya confirm that the media is very critical in reducing community stigma. For example, the Libyan Women's Forum has helped shape public opinion through televised debates on women and violent extremism. There is therefore a need to strengthen the role of the media as a critical player in shaping the public's perception of violent extremism and the role of communities in the successful reintegration of women returnees.





Psychosocial support

There are inadequate psychosocial support structures for WFTFs in Kenya, yet the helpline is an integral component of the successful reintegration of returnees. The focus is on men returnees since they are viewed as the key perpetrators of violent extremism. The lack of a gendered system adversely affects the reintegration process since these women have distinct emotional and health needs. The UNSCR 2242 of 2015 calls for the increased involvement of women in peace and security. It acknowledges that women and children are victims of gender-based violence in Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) which deprive them of their human rights. When women experience

violent extremism, whether as victims, supporters, or perpetrators this results in trauma. For instance, Kenyan women in Al-Shabaab are treated as sex slaves and domestic servants while counterpart Somali women are handled with strict moral codes. Other psychosocial challenges facing WFTFs include unwanted pregnancies and mental health issues in addition to community stigma. Moreover, the lack of adequate skilled mental health counselors and disengagement experts, alongside infrastructure, financial resources, and the human capacity for sustainability, undermines the reintegration efforts.



Photo Credit: unmissions.org





Legal framework for FTF returnees

The lack of a comprehensive legal and policy framework in Kenya's Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2012 negatively affects policies and reintegration initiatives of FTF returnees. While POTA describes an FTF as a non-Kenyan entering or passing through Kenya for purposes of committing terrorist act within the country or elsewhere, it does not consider Kenyan citizens who travel to other states to commit terrorist activities as FTFs. The UNSCR 2178 of 2014, however, defines FTFs as individuals who travel to states, other than their own, to commit terrorist activities. The Kenyan deficiency is reflected in the NSCVE and the subsequent County Action Plans that exclude policy frameworks for management of WFTFs. The policy framework does not explicitly address the peculiarity of women in developing FTF policies at the local and national levels. Even though, an amnesty and reintegration programme was initiated by the Kenyan government for the Al-Shabaab FTF returnees in 2015, the lack of adequate protection led

to their assassination by the terror group.

Most programmes of FTFs returnees have been managed by the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) under the Madrid Guiding Principles of 2015 on curbing the flow of FTF. While the CSOs are very critical in ensuring the successful reintegration of FTFs, the lack of a clear and inclusive legal reintegration framework predisposes the CSOs to legal and security risks. The key women-led community-based CSOs supporting the reintegration of WFTFs in Kenya include Sisters without Borders and Advocacy for Women in Peace and Security Africa (AWAPSA). UNSCR 2242 of 2015 underscores their vital role in the promotion of peace and security. However, the CSOs continue to face a number of bureaucratic challenges as they have to seek clearance from National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) to operate the reintegration programmes. The restrictions imposed on their engagement with the returnees subsequently affect the efficiency of the programmes.





Conclusion

The successful reintegration of WFTFs in Kenya continues to be impacted upon by stigmatization and public awareness; psychosocial support and a lack of adequate legal and policy framework for the returnees. This calls for a multi-agency approach to mainstream gender awareness in reintegration initiatives for returning FTFs.



Photo Credit: essec.edu

Recommendations

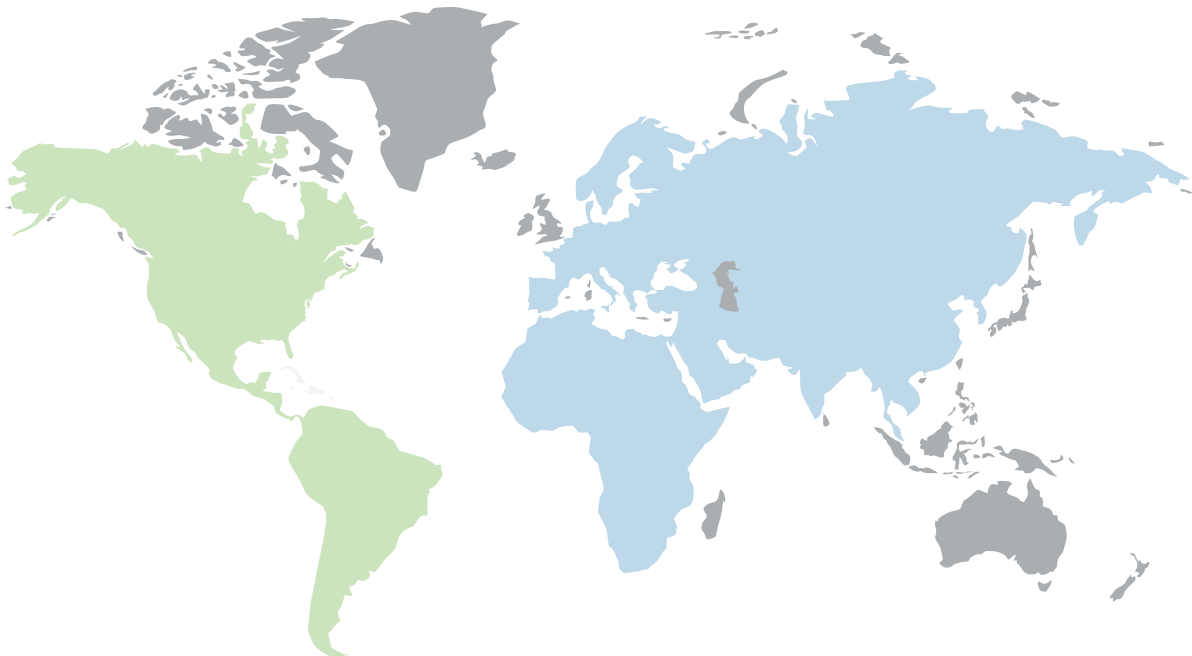
The following recommendations are offered:

1. NCTC should:
 - a) Review the NSCVE to include a policy framework on the reintegration of WFTFs.
 - b) Revise the CVE County Action Plans to include gender-sensitive provisions on the reintegration of WFTFs.
 - c) Mainstream women in the development and implementation of county-specific reintegration programmes and policies.
 - d) Intensify mutual engagements with CSOs to eliminate bureaucratic challenges in the management of WFTF returnees reintegration programmes.
2. The National Assembly should amend POTA to include provisions on the management of Kenyan FTFs returnees in accordance with UNSCR 2178 of 2014.
3. The Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government to;
 - a) Intensify public awareness on the reintegration of WFTFs with a focus on reducing stigmatization.
 - b) Enhance collaboration and partnerships with the CSOs in the provision of psychosocial support for women returnees.





The GLOCEPS, Weekly Influential Brief brings to policy makers precise incisive analyses of policy issues and events locally, regionally and globally. The priority is on topics that have a bearing on Kenya and beyond and are themed on defence and security; diplomacy and foreign policy; public policy, ethics and governance; strategic interests and transnational crimes; and development. We invite contributions from experts with policy opinions centred on any of the five pillars. Give us your thoughts and feedback through info@gloceps.org



THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY
(GLOCEPS)

Research | Knowledge | Influence

Off Kiambu Road, Nairobi Kenya
P.O. Box 27023-00100, Nairobi.
Telephone: 0112401331
Email: info@gloceps.org
Web: www.gloceps.org

