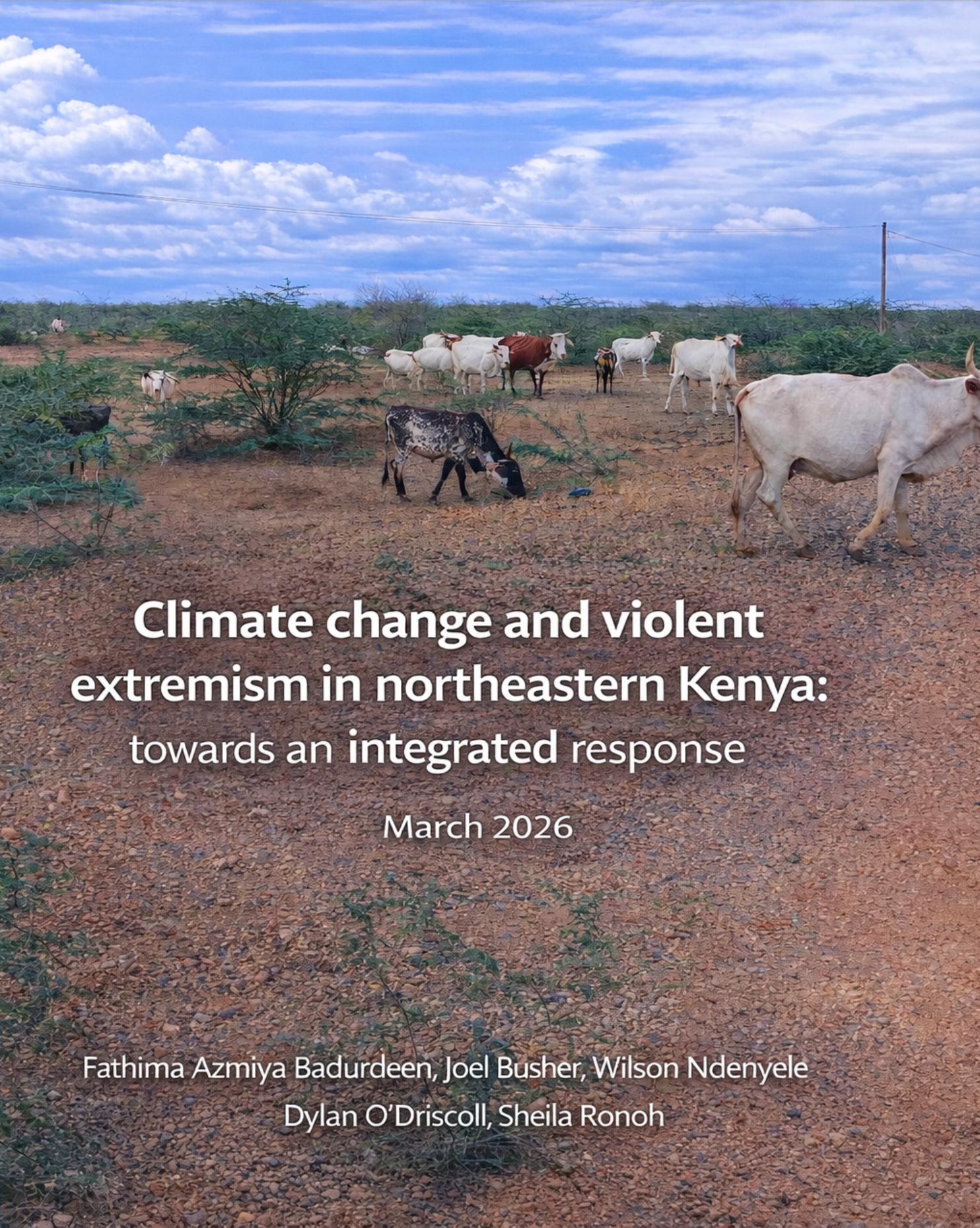




TECHNICAL
UNIVERSITY
of MOMBASA

Coventry
University 



**Climate change and violent
extremism in northeastern Kenya:
towards an integrated response**

March 2026

Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen, Joel Busher, Wilson Ndenyele
Dylan O'Driscoll, Sheila Ronoh

CLIMATE CHANGE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NORTHEASTERN KENYA

Towards an Integrated Response

Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen, Joel Busher, Wilson Ndenyele, Dylan O’Driscoll, and Sheila Ronoh

Centre for Peace and Security

Coventry, March 2026

<https://doi.org/10.18552/CPS/2026/0001>

ISBN: 978-1-84600-135 2

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Correspondence: Dylan O’Driscoll – dylan.odriscoll@coventry.ac.uk
or Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen - fazmiya@tum.ac.ke

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the British Academy for funding this research.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the policymakers and practitioners who contributed their expertise and insights throughout the duration of the project.

We would also like to thank representatives from the County Government of Garissa and the County Government of Wajir, the Wajir Peace and Development Agency, and the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) for their engagement and collaboration.

We also acknowledge the contributions of relevant national ministries, including the Ministry of Interior and National Administration; the Ministry of Public Service, Gender and Affirmative Action; the Ministry of Environment and Forestry; and the Ministry of Defence.

We also thank the management of the Technical University of Mombasa for their institutional support. Thanks also to the civil society organisations in Mombasa for engaging with our work.

Finally, and most importantly, we are deeply grateful to the community members who participated in this research and generously shared their time and perspectives, which were integral to the successful completion of this work.

All views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not constitute an official endorsement by any affiliated institutions.

Acknowledgements	i
Executive Summary	iii
Introduction	1
Approach and Methods	3
Findings: The Links Between Climate Change and Violent Extremism	6
1. LIVELIHOOD DESTRUCTION	7
<i>1.1. Climate-related livelihood destruction forces people to seek assistance or alternative livelihoods, creating opportunities for VE actors to gain influence</i>	8
<i>1.2. Climate-related livelihood destruction forces people into adaptation strategies that can put them at increased risk of contact with, and vulnerability to, VE actors</i>	8
<i>1.3. Climate change increases clan-based resource conflicts, providing opportunities for VE actors to expand their influence</i>	9
<i>1.4. Climate-related livelihood destruction creates an emotional environment conducive to radicalisation and other harms</i>	9
2. INCREASED MIGRATION AND ALTERED PASTORAL MOBILITY PATTERNS	10
<i>2.1. As people engage in increased migration and mobility, they are more likely to come into contact with, and find themselves exploited by or dependent on, VE actors</i>	11
<i>2.2. Increased migration and mobility undermine existing social and family networks that currently provide resilience to VE</i>	12
<i>2.3. Climate-related migration disrupts access to basic services, undermining resilience in the short/long-term and increasing grievances towards the state that can be exploited by VE actors</i>	13
3. CLIMATE CHANGE AS A DRIVER FOR THE BREAKDOWN OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS	14
<i>3.1. Climate-related livelihood loss and migration exacerbate the breakdown of community structures, reducing resilience to VE and other harms</i>	14
<i>3.2. Climate-related livelihood loss and migration disrupts gendered social roles and identities, creating loss of status and/or emotional upheaval conducive to a range of harms, including VE</i>	15
4. EXACERBATION OF GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES	16
<i>4.1. Climate change significantly increases pressure on already weak public services, fuelling grievances directed at the Kenyan state and creating opportunities for VE actors to expand their influence</i>	17
<i>4.2. The presence and activity of VE actors, alongside other sources of insecurity, undermine efforts to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change</i>	18
Conclusion	20
Recommendations: towards an integrated approach to addressing VE and climate change	22
Author Biographies	24

Executive Summary

Climate change and violent extremism (VE) are increasingly interacting in complex and mutually reinforcing ways across vulnerable regions. In northeastern Kenya, recurrent droughts, flooding, and resulting livelihood destruction are unfolding alongside sustained activity by Al-Shabaab. Climate stress and insecurity are interwoven dynamics that shape everyday life, governance, and prospects for stability.

This report presents findings from qualitative fieldwork in Garissa County and Wajir County, focusing on how climate change may increase vulnerability to VE, and how VE, in turn, constrains adaptive capacity to climate change. The findings demonstrate how climate change acts as a threat multiplier, intensifying economic precarity, social fragmentation, psychological strain, and institutional weaknesses that create openings for extremist recruitment and influence. At the same time, insecurity generated by VE actors undermines government and community adaptive capacity, producing a reinforcing cycle of fragility.

Drawing on 16 focus group discussions (130 participants), 18 key informant interviews, four policy/practitioner workshops, and validation workshops with communities in Garissa and Wajir, and policymakers/practitioners in Nairobi and Mombasa, the study identifies 11 pathways linking climate change and VE. These cluster around four key causal elements: (1) livelihood destruction; (2) increased migration and altered mobility; (3) breakdown of social systems; and (4) exacerbation of governance challenges.

1. Livelihood destruction

Pastoralist and farming economies in northeastern Kenya face cumulative erosion from droughts and floods. This livelihood destruction creates four specific pathways to VE:

- **Economic desperation:** Collapsing income makes people vulnerable to VE actors offering wages, food, or loans as alternative livelihoods.
- **Risk-laden adaptation:** Searching for pasture in contested zones or migrating to urban centres exposes individuals to active recruitment networks.
- **Resource conflict:** Scarcity of water/pasture fuels inter-communal tensions, which VE groups exploit by mediating disputes or taking sides.
- **Emotional strain:** The loss of livestock and the identity/dignity tied to it, as well as the inability to provide, creates an emotional environment centred on hopelessness and shame that VE actors take advantage of.

2. Migration and altered pastoral mobility

Chronic and acute climate change events are driving increased displacement and mobility, creating three specific pathways to VE:

- **Exposure to VE actors:** People moving through remote spaces with limited state presence are more likely to encounter VE actors. When formal aid is absent, VE actors may provide support to establish control.
- **Social disruption:** Moving away from traditional community structures weakens informal social and family networks.
- **Service gaps:** Displacement often limits access to services, reinforcing VE narratives of state abandonment, and increasing reliance on alternative systems of support, which might include VE actors.

3. Breakdown of social systems

Environmental shocks are unravelling the social fabric that historically formed part of community resilience through two pathways:

- **Erosion of community:** Widespread asset loss prevents communities from sustaining traditional safety nets, leading to social isolation and a loss of community dignity. The loss of livestock also leads to the loss of a number of sociocultural traditions, weakening the community.
- **Role disruption:** Climate change disrupts social roles and identities, creating loss of status and/or emotional upheaval conducive to a range of harms. This allows VE groups to provide an opportunity to regain authority/status.

4. Governance challenges

Climate shocks exacerbate the gap between state capacity and community needs, creating two pathways:

- **Perceived neglect and governance vacuums:** Inadequate or delayed emergency responses deepen long-standing grievances regarding marginalisation and exclusion. VE actors gain legitimacy by filling this void.
- **The fragility cycle:** Climate stress increases insecurity, while insecurity prevents the delivery of the very adaptation programmes and opportunities needed to build resilience.

The findings demonstrate that climate adaptation and preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) cannot be addressed in isolation. Integrated approaches are essential. Cross-sector coordination between climate, peacebuilding, and security actors is critical. Without such integration and coordination, there is a real risk that well-intentioned programmes will generate unintended negative consequences, and that opportunities to exploit valuable synergies will be missed.

Recommendations:

1. **Formally recognise climate change as a critical security issue to trigger the multi-agency coordination necessary for high-impact outcomes:** Our research clearly demonstrates the intersection between climate change and VE. Accordingly, we recommend formal recognition of climate change as a critical security issue to catalyse the "whole-of-society" and multi-agency/integrated responses required for effective mitigation. Such recognition would pave the way for the other recommendations set out below.
2. **Build interconnected P/CVE and climate adaptation architectures:** Kenya has taken the important step of having climate change units in each ministry. It has also taken the important step of having national and county-level P/CVE action plans that are able to effectively coordinate P/CVE work across Kenya's diverse communities. Currently, however, P/CVE county action plans and climate adaptation strategies operate independently of one another. Given their deep mutual impact, consideration should be given to how local and national P/CVE action plans and climate adaptation strategies can feed into one another throughout their life cycle, facilitating complementarity and allowing for shared knowledge and combined funding streams.
3. **Ensure climate adaptation interventions are sensitive to insecurity:** Our research findings demonstrate that the insecurity caused by VE significantly undermines the adaptive capacity of communities. Community members repeatedly demonstrated to us

how climate adaptation is only possible when it is secure enough to utilise the adaptation opportunities available. Therefore, to develop sustainable and realistic outcomes, climate adaptation interventions must a) work in insecure areas, and b) make sure that programming is accessible despite insecurity.

4. **Embed conflict analysis within climate adaptation interventions:** Our research demonstrated that assistance often only reaches some communities, which inadvertently exacerbates communal conflict and fuels VE narratives of marginalisation. Making conflict analysis mandatory for all climate adaptation interventions would help to mitigate the risk of such programmes inadvertently exacerbating, or creating, conflict and VE risks.
5. **Recognise and address climate-related trauma in climate adaptation and P/CVE interventions:** The scale of the trauma caused by cumulative acute climate events was ever-present in our engagement with communities. We know that such an emotional environment creates vulnerabilities to radicalisation. Therefore, it is important to recognise the extent of this trauma and to ensure it is addressed through trauma-sensitive climate adaptation and P/CVE programming.
6. **Recognise livelihood dignity within livelihood interventions:** The scale of the impact of climate change on livelihood loss is immense, and it is imperative to diversify livelihoods with climate-resilient options. Strengthening livelihood resilience through sustainable climate adaptation and P/CVE policies is vital to disrupting climate-induced recruitment pathways. However, our research demonstrated the significant cultural and emotional weight placed on traditional economic practices, such as livestock, and how its loss is a key driver of VE risk, making it essential that interventions also focus on fostering more climate resilient traditional economic practices.
7. **Climate adaptation and P/CVE interventions should pay particular attention to the mitigation of displacement-related VE risks:** Migration interacts with multiple processes highlighted within the report. It is therefore essential to prioritise interventions that limit climate-induced migration through addressing the root causes. While strengthening livelihood resilience can reduce the necessity of migration, P/CVE efforts must also prioritise limiting displacement through targeted climate interventions. In cases where migration is unavoidable, P/CVE can be strengthened by offering support that limits contact with VE actors, sustains existing social networks, and maintains consistent access to services to reduce opportunities for VE actors to exploit vulnerable populations.
8. **Climate adaptation and P/CVE interventions should pay explicit attention to preventing or mitigating the breakdown of existing social structures:** The scale of the breakdown of social structures due to the impacts of climate change is considerable. This creates several vulnerabilities to VE, including undermining the community's adaptive capacity, and leaving individuals more vulnerable to VE recruitment. As part of efforts to respond to both climate change and VE, it is important to invest in monitoring and understanding the effects of climate change on social structures and develop approaches that counteract and mitigate them.
9. **Responses to climate change and VE should be sensitive to gender, age, and other social characteristics:** The climate-related vulnerabilities to VE differ across a number of social characteristics. Therefore, for programming to be successful, efforts to understand and respond to the interaction between climate change and VE must recognise how these are shaped by gender, age, and other social characteristics. Ensuring that these diverse perspectives shape the implementation lifecycle is vital for creating sustainable, high-impact outcomes.

Introduction

There is a growing consensus that climate change and its associated impacts are exacerbating security challenges, including those associated with violent extremism (VE).¹ This is particularly the case in areas that are both especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and are characterised by underlying social and political instability.²

To date, however, our understanding of the relationship between climate change and VE is still in its infancy.³ While there is growing evidence that increased climate pressures can fuel VE activity,⁴ our comprehension of the causal pathways through which climate change and VE can interact remains underdeveloped.⁵ Much of the research that does exist is either primarily theoretical,⁶ provides correlation rather than causation based on comparing separate climate and VE datasets, or is grounded in broader conflict data.⁷

Where there does appear to be agreement is around the view that climate change is most likely acting as a “threat multiplier”.⁸ Rather than generating new threats, climate change exacerbates existing pressures. This means that the causal pathways between climate change and violent extremism are likely to be complex and shaped to an important degree by the wider social and political context.⁹ To develop an effective understanding of these causal pathways, therefore, requires research that engages with the knowledge and perceptions of people with direct experience of climate change and VE, and how these phenomena are intersecting on the ground.¹⁰ To date, however, such research is in short supply.

This report presents findings from a study designed to help address this gap in our understanding. Focusing on the interactions between climate change and VE in two counties in northeastern Kenya – Garissa and Wajir – the study had three main aims:

1. To examine the pathways through which climate change might contribute to the increased risk of VE.

¹ Osei Baffour Frimpong, ‘Climate Change and Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin: Key Issues and Way Forward’, Washington, DC: Wilson Center (2020) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/climate-change-and-violent-extremism-lake-chad-basin-key-issues-and-way-forward>; Halvard Buhaug, Nina von Uexkull. Vicious Circles: Violence, Vulnerability, and Climate Change. *Annual Review Environment and Resources*, (2021), 46:545-568. Katharina Nett and Lukas Rüttinger, ‘Insurgency, terrorism and organised crime in a warming climate: Analysing the links between climate change and non-state armed groups’, Adelphi Climate Diplomacy Report. (2016) <https://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/insurgency-terrorism-and-organised-crime-warming-climate>. Jeremiah O. Asaka, Climate Change - Terrorism Nexus? A Preliminary Review/Analysis of the Literature, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, (2021) 15 (1): 81–92.

² Eelco Kessels, Tracey Durner and Mathew Schwartz, ‘Violent Extremism and Instability in the greater Horn of Africa: An examination of Drivers and Responses’, Global Center, (2016) <https://globalcenter.org/resource/violent-extremism-and-instability-in-the-greater-horn-of-africa/>

³ Sameul Henkin, Marcus A. Boyd, Madeline Romm, ‘A Climate of Terror? Part 1: Approaches to the Study of Climate Change and Terrorism’, START (2022) https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/Climate_Change_Overview_FINAL.pdf

⁴ Joshua M. Regan and Sean K. Young, Climate Change in the Horn of Africa: Causations for Violent Extremism, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, (2024), 16 (2): 185–211.

⁵ Solomon Njenga, ‘Climate Change as a catalyst for violent extremism in East Africa’, Mashariki Research and Policy Centre, Nairobi, (2025) <https://masharikirpc.org/climate-change-as-a-catalyst-for-violent-extremism-in-east-africa/>

⁶ Thomas Renard, Heated terror: Exploration of the possible impacts of climate change on the causes and the targets of terrorism. *Les Cahiers du RMES*, (2008), 5(1): 15-53. Stefanie Mavrakou, Emelie Chace-Donahue, Robin Oluanaigh, and Meghan Conroy, The climate change–terrorism nexus: a critical literature review, *Terrorism and political violence*, (2022), 34 (5): 894-913.

⁷ Nett and Rüttinger, Insurgency, terrorism and organised crime in a warming climate.

⁸ Patrick Huntjens and Katharina Nachbar, ‘Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier for Human Disaster and Conflict’, *The Hague Institute for Global Justice* (2015), <https://thehagueinstituteforglobaljustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/working-Paper-9-climate-change-threat-multiplier.pdf>; Renard, Heated terror.

⁹ Andrew Telford, A Climate Terrorism Assemblage? Exploring the Politics of Climate-Terrorism-Radicalisation Relations, *Political Geography*, (2020) 79: 102-150; Ayesha Siddiqi, Climatic disasters and radical politics in southern Pakistan: the non-linear connection, *Geopolitics*, (2014), 19(4): 885-910. Ole Magnus Theisen, Climate Change and Violence: Insights from Political Science. *Curr Clim Change Rep*, (2017), 3: 210–221; Buhaug and von Uexkull. Vicious Circles.

¹⁰ Florian Krampe et al., ‘Climate Change and Peacebuilding: Sub-Themes of an Emerging Research Agenda’, *International Affairs*, (2024), 100:3.

2. To examine how VE activity might affect efforts to adapt to climate change.
3. To generate a series of evidence-informed recommendations about how we can move towards an integrated approach¹¹ of climate-sensitive efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) and VE-sensitive climate change adaptation.

Garissa and Wajir were selected as field sites because they have been significantly affected by both climate change and VE. Both counties have experienced major drought and flooding episodes in recent years, which have devastated livelihoods, exacerbated food insecurity, and contributed to widespread displacement.¹² They have also been particularly vulnerable to VE, due to their position on the highly porous Kenya-Somalia border and a long history of social and political marginalisation and conflict that extends across colonial and post-colonial periods. For more than a decade, significant Al-Shabaab activity in these counties has intersected with other conflicts, including clan-based and resource conflicts.¹³ Recent years have seen an intensification of this activity.¹⁴

The report draws on data from 16 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 18 key informant interviews (KIIs) across the two counties. These methods are described in further detail below.

Based on the analysis of this data, we identified 11 pathways through which climate change impacts and VE are interacting with one another. For the purpose of this report, we associate these pathways with four key causal elements that appear to be playing a central role in the interaction between climate change and VE:

1. Livelihood destruction
2. Increased migration and altered pastoral mobility patterns
3. Breakdown of social systems
4. Exacerbation of governance challenges

The findings are specific to Kenya and, more precisely, to Garissa and Wajir. Emerging research in other parts of East Africa, West Africa, and Southeast Asia indicates, however, that similar dynamics might be developing in other geographic areas, and particularly conflict-affected areas.¹⁵ Further research examining the interactions between climate change and VE across different geographies is urgently required.

The next section describes the approach and methods adopted for this study. That is followed by the findings and conclusion, and a set of recommendations.

¹¹ Dylan O'Driscoll, Otilia Anna Maunganidze, and Markus Mayer. 'Addressing Fragility through Integrated Peacebuilding'. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2025). <https://doi.org/10.55163/QUUG2710>; Hendrik Bursee et al., 'Lasting Solutions to Fragility Depend on Peacebuilding', Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, (2025) <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/2025giz-en-lasting-solutions-fragility-peacebuilding.pdf>; Christopher Hockey and Michael Jones, 'Preventing Violent Extremism: Integration Amid a Funding Crisis', RUSI, (2026) <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/insights-papers/preventing-violent-extremism-integration-amid-funding-crisis>

¹² Oxfam Canada, 'Life in Drought Affected Wajir, Kenya', (2023). <https://www.oxfam.ca/story/life-in-drought-affected-wajir-kenya/>; Kyilah Terry and Aishwarya Rai, 'Amid Record Drought and Food Insecurity, East Africa's Protracted Humanitarian Crisis Worsens', Migration Policy Institute (2023), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/east-africa-drought-food-insecurity-refugee-migration>

¹³ Gayatri Sahgal et al., 'Clan Conflict and Violent Extremism in the North-Eastern Counties of Kenya', RUSI, (2019). <https://rusi.org/publication/conference-reports/clan-conflict-and-violent-extremism-north-eastern-counties-kenya>

¹⁴ ACLED, 'Special Report – Kenya Somali Border: Rising Al-Shabaab Threat in the wake of ATMIS drawdown', (2023), <https://acleddata.com/report/special-report-kenya-somalia-border-rising-al-shabaab-threat-wake-atmis-drawdown>. ACLED, 'Special Report: Kenya-Somalia: Assessing Al-Shabaab's threat to the Region as Somalia Joins the East Africa Community', (2023), <https://acleddata.com/report/special-report-kenya-somalia-assessing-al-shabaabs-threat-region-somalia-joins-east-africa>

¹⁵ Geoffroi Montpetit, 'A Path to Security: Renewing Relationships within and Beyond the Sahel', Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, (2024) <https://institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/a-path-to-security-renewing-relationships-within-and-beyond-the-sahel>; Kheira Tarif, 'Climate Change and Violent Conflict in West Africa: Assessing the Evidence'. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, (2022), <https://doi.org/10.55163/VHIY5372>; Christopher Jaspardo and Jonathan Taylor, 'Climate Change and Regional Vulnerability to Transnational Security Threats in Southeast Asia'. *Geopolitics*, (2008), 13: 232-256; Adam Latif, 'Climate Change and Radicalisation: A Case Study of Indonesia', (2024), <https://hir.harvard.edu/climate-change-and-radicalization-a-case-study-in-indonesia/>

Approach and Methods

As indicated above, the study adopted a case study-based approach, using FGDs and KIIs to explore local knowledge and perceptions of the interactions between climate change and VE. Such approaches are suitable for engaging with the causal complexity that we anticipated and building understandings and responses from the bottom up.

The project comprised four phases. These were designed to enable the study to reflect and adapt to policy and practitioner understandings of the problem, and to emerging insight into local knowledge and understanding in the two field sites.

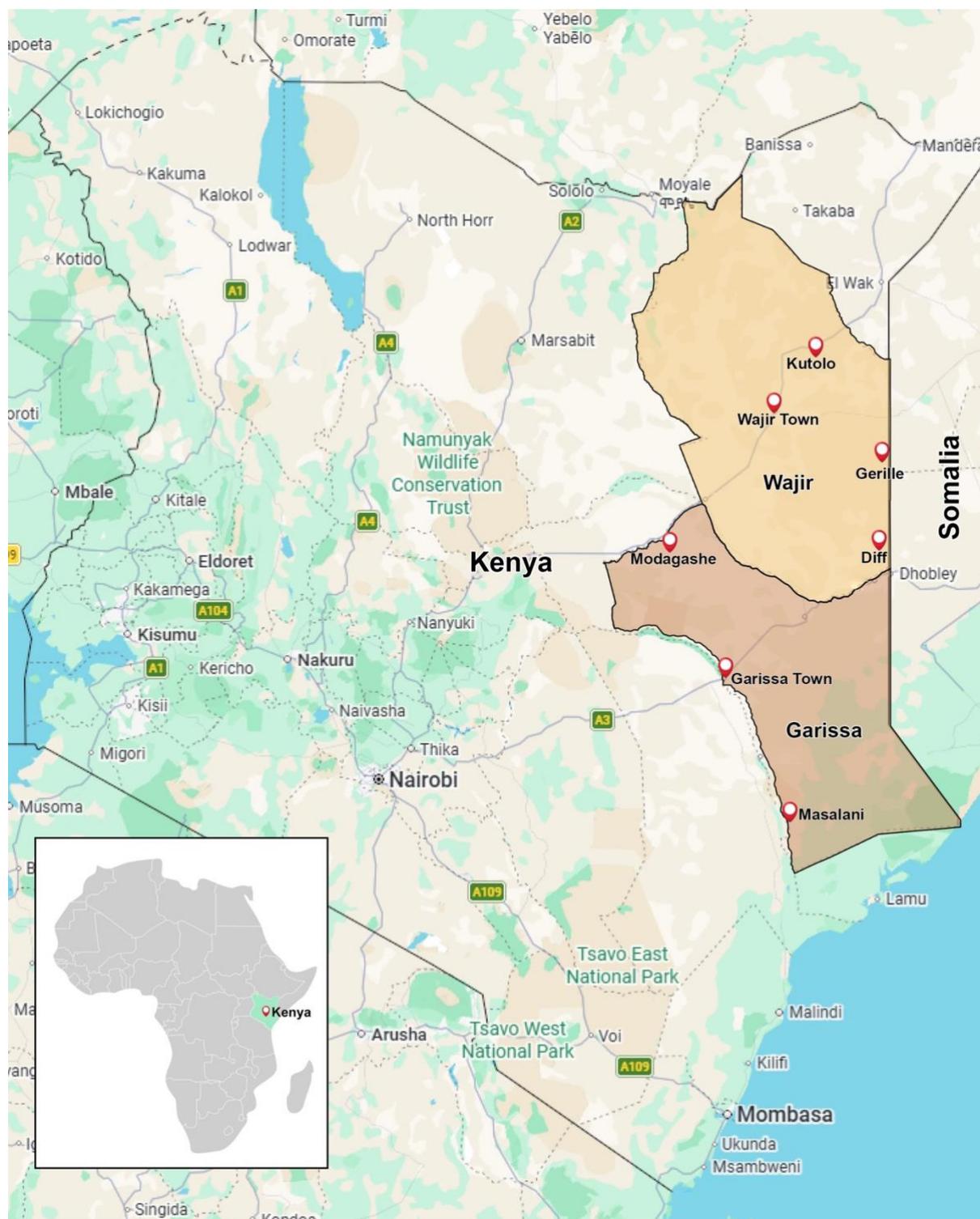
Phase 1 comprised policy and practitioner workshops in Nairobi (x2), Garissa (x1), and Wajir (x1), with a total of 103 participants. These workshops, which took place in June 2025, convened policymakers and practitioners from local, national, and international state and civil society organisations working across relevant policy areas, including P/CVE and climate change specifically, as well as peacebuilding, development, and security and justice more broadly. The workshops used a series of activities to generate insight about the current understanding among policy and practitioner communities about the relationship between climate change and VE, and the key evidence requirements for these communities. This was used to develop themes and questions for the FGDs. The respective county workshops were also used to identify specific local areas (sub-counties) for the FGDs.

Phase 2 comprised a total of 16 FGDs conducted across Garissa (x8) and Wajir (x8), and 18 key informant interviews (6 in Garissa; 12 in Wajir), during July and August 2025. Separate FGDs were conducted with youth, women, men, civil society representatives, and religious leaders to facilitate open discussion.

In Garissa County, FGDs took place in Garissa town, Modogashe, and Masalani, with a combined total of 66 participants (see Map 1). Modogashe and Masalani are predominantly inhabited by the Borana and Somali communities, whose primary livelihood is livestock rearing, including cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys. This pastoralist region frequently experiences drought. In Wajir County, FGDs were held in Wajir town, Kutolo, Diff, and Gerille – Wajir South. Across Wajir County, the FGDs included a total of 64 participants (see Map 1). The county is mainly inhabited by the Degodia, Ogaden, and Ajuran clans, who also rely on livestock rearing.

To understand participant experiences and perceptions of climate change, we asked them about what, if any, changes they had observed in weather patterns. To understand participant experiences and perceptions of VE, we asked them about VE without using terms such as “Al-Shabaab” or “terrorists”. Recognising the sensitive nature of the study, we did this partly so as not to close down conversations and to ensure the safety of members of the research team. We also did this to enable participants themselves to articulate who, from their perspective, comprise VE actors, as previous research has indicated that local interpretations of “VE” can vary considerably.¹⁶ Some participants did refer to Al-Shabaab, others referred to Al-Shabaab as “Arsenal”, while others used more neutral terms such as “the group” or “groups across borders”. From the context and content of their comments, it is clear however that most of the references to VE and relevant synonyms within the FGDs and interviews were referring to Al-Shabaab and their associated networks.

¹⁶ Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen, Sahla Aroussi, and Michaelina Jakala, Lived Realities and Local Meaning-Making in Defining Violent Extremism in Kenya: Implications for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Policy and Practice, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, (2023), 16 (1): 1–22.

Map 1: Research sites

Phase 3 focused on data analysis. The research team conducted thematic coding of the FGDs and KIIs. Each FGD and KII was independently coded by two team members, who subsequently met to discuss and finalise the coding. A shared, regularly updated, live code-book facilitated consistency across the team. Regular meetings were held to review and edit the codes. Upon completion of coding for all FGDs and KIIs, the team convened to identify themes and sub-codes, and, where appropriate, to subdivide codes and assign them to relevant themes.

Based on this analysis, we developed initial descriptors of the interactions between climate change and VE. We compared these initial descriptors with leading theoretical frameworks of radicalisation, making particular use of Kruglanski and colleagues ‘3N’ – networks, narratives, needs – framework.¹⁷ This enabled us to assess the theoretical credibility of the relationships identified through the analysis. We also used this to refine our descriptors of these processes. Both coding and analysis benefited from the multidisciplinary makeup of the team, with researchers specialised variously in climate justice, contentious politics, governance, peacebuilding, and radicalisation to VE all able to generate unique insights by drawing on their fields of expertise.

Phase 4 comprised of validation workshops (a total of 127 participants). We presented findings back to the communities for feedback in Garissa and Wajir in January 2026, and to policymakers and practitioners for feedback in Nairobi and Mombasa in February 2026.

¹⁷ Arie Kruglanski et al., The Making of Violent Extremists, *Review of General Psychology*, (2018), 22:1: 107-120.

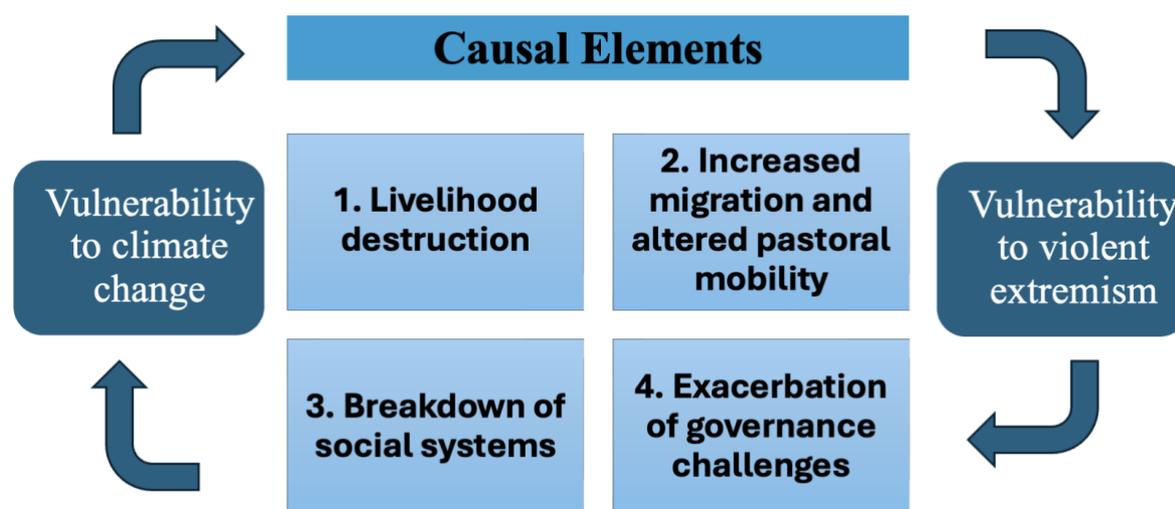
Findings: The Links Between Climate Change and Violent Extremism

As set out above, we identified 11 pathways through which climate change impacts and VE interact with one another. These pathways are described across the four sub-sections below. We understood a ‘pathway’ to comprise an ordered sequence of steps linking the phenomena of interest: increased/decreased vulnerability to climate change and increased/decreased vulnerability to VE. We sought as far as possible to minimise the number of pathways described, enabling us to provide the most simple and clear account possible. Some pathways do overlap, however. This is to be expected given the complex causal relations between these phenomena.

Throughout the analysis, we sought to identify pathways running both ways between climate change and VE, i.e., we were interested in evidence of how climate change was exacerbating issues around VE, and vice versa.

Analysis of these pathways identified four key causal elements that are central to the interactions between climate change and VE: livelihood destruction, increased migration and altered pastoral mobility, breakdown of social systems, and exacerbation of governance challenges (see Figure 1). Our primary aim was not to assess the relative weight of the causal elements, but to provide as full an account as possible of the interactions between climate change and VE.

Figure 1: Causal elements



Based on the existing literature and the policy and practitioner workshops in Phase 2, we expected to find that livelihood destruction, increased migration, and the exacerbation of governance challenges comprised key causal elements. We did not anticipate how prominent the breakdown of social systems would be.

For this report, we group the 11 pathways by what we see as the dominant causal elements in those pathways. The individual pathways are introduced in the sub-sections below:

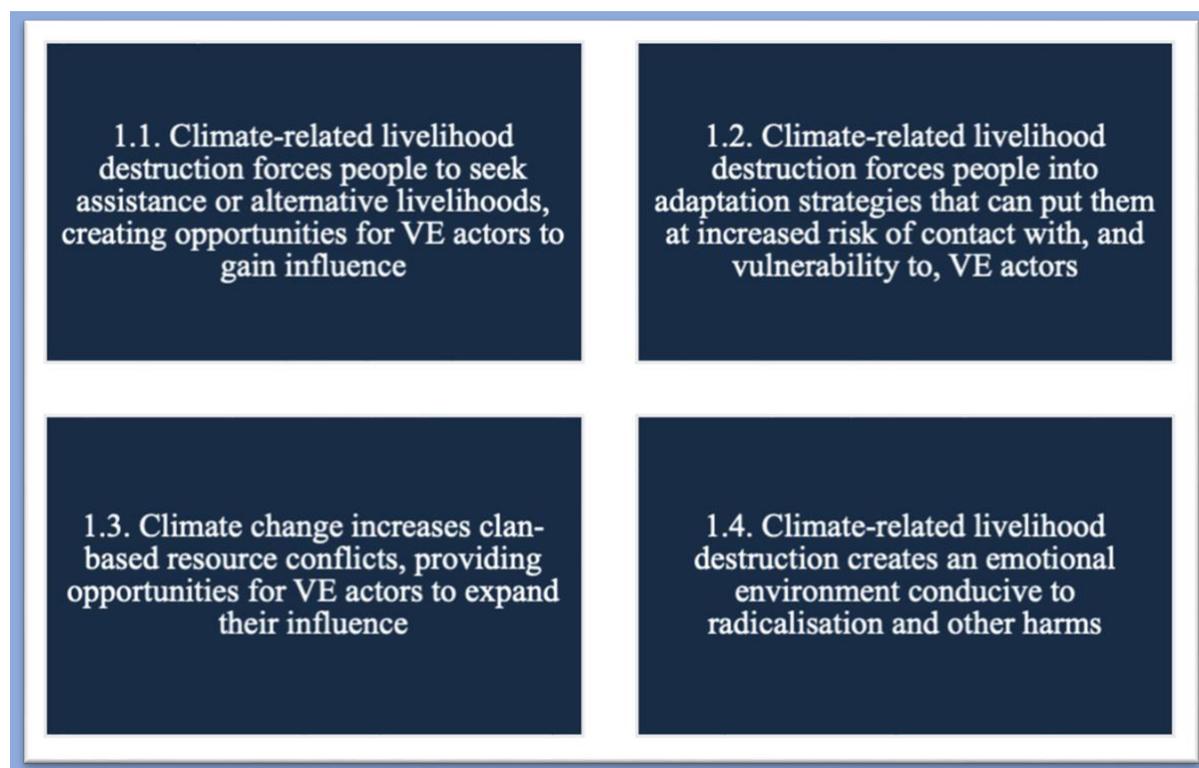
- four related primarily to livelihood destruction
- three related primarily to increased migration and altered pastoral mobility patterns
- two related primarily to the breakdown of social systems
- two related primarily to the exacerbation of governance challenges.

Before describing these pathways in detail, it is important to note the extent to which all the research participants perceived climate change to be real and something that was affecting them. Throughout the project, we did not encounter anybody sceptical about whether the climate is changing.¹⁸ Participants described both chronic change, such as increased heat, delayed onset of rains, and increasing unpredictability of weather patterns, and acute climate events, such as flash floods. While participants acknowledged that these regions have long faced challenging climatic conditions, they consistently stated that the challenges have intensified significantly in recent years. It is therefore beyond doubt that climate change is a lived reality for people living in these areas.

1. Livelihood destruction

Discussion of the significant damage that climate change is causing to livelihoods dominated the FGDs and KIIs. Increased temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns are combining with drought and flash flooding to cause significant harm to livestock due to diminished grazing, damaged fodder plots, disease outbreaks, and drowning.¹⁹ The same climate change impacts are also undermining agricultural production. The widespread destruction of livelihoods is felt particularly keenly in communities that depend largely on livestock and have limited adaptation capacity. As one climate event follows another, the effects are cumulative. In some cases, this creates opportunities for VE actors to recruit and, more generally, expand their influence in the area. We identified four main pathways through which climate-related livelihood loss contributed to the VE threat picture (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Livelihood destruction pathways



¹⁸ We asked participants only about whether they believe the climate is changing and how. We did not ask them about what they perceive to be the causes of such change.

¹⁹ Issa Hussein, 'Rain turns deadly in Garissa, killing over 500 livestock'. The Eastleigh Voice, (2025), <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/news/234478/rain-turns-deadly-in-garissa-killing-over-500-livestock>

1.1. Climate-related livelihood destruction forces people to seek assistance or alternative livelihoods, creating opportunities for VE actors to gain influence

In a context in which livestock products, such as camel, cattle, and goat meat and milk, make up a major share of household economies and nutritional security, the depletion of livestock is forcing people to seek assistance or alternative livelihoods. The same can be said for farmers involved in subsistence and commercial agriculture, who, as crops fail due to climatic shocks, are unable to recover and have limited alternative livelihood options.

As people seek assistance and alternative livelihoods, their desperation, paired with a lack of alternatives, creates opportunities for VE actors to step in. The research participants described how such actors, in some cases, offered alternate employment opportunities, particularly to young men. They also described how, on some occasions, they would offer financial or livelihood assistance, particularly during periods of acute stress, thereby gaining influence and fostering support.

Box 1: Livelihood destruction and VE engagement

When they look for job opportunities, they could get enticed by these groups with promises of better jobs. Due to desperation, they find a way to get jobs. Mostly, we hear is getting into these networks for jobs or livelihood-related. [FGD with youth, Wajir, July 2025]

Climate change has silently created fertile ground for extremism. When the land dries up, animals die, farms fail, and people go hungry, especially the youth, they become desperate. Al-Shabaab knows this and exploits it. They offer food, money, and what seems like “purpose” to young boys who feel abandoned by their own government. [FGD with women, Diff, July 2025]

So, these groups can exploit vulnerability of poverty or unemployment and distribute food or other incentives. So, this does buy community support. Some individuals become sympathisers for these organisations. [FGD with youth, Wajir, July 2025]

We’ve seen cases where young men are promised a salary of 30,000 or 40,000 shillings per month just to join. Imagine a mother struggling to feed 6 children, and one of her sons is offered that money in Somalia, he will go. Climate stress has made our boys feel they have no value at home, and Al-Shabaab gives them a false sense of belonging. [FGD with women, Diff, July 2025]

1.2. Climate-related livelihood destruction forces people into adaptation strategies that can put them at increased risk of contact with, and vulnerability to, VE actors

Climate-related livelihood destruction, combined with the lack of other livelihood opportunities, forces people into adaptation strategies that are creating opportunities for VE actors. When men and boys are forced to travel further and leave home for longer periods to seek suitable water and grazing for their livestock, this can bring them into contact with VE actors who might offer assistance and/or engage in forms of coercion in order to recruit them to their network.

At the same time, women and girls who are left behind, and also have to travel ever further to get water for their families and animals, are also more vulnerable, creating opportunities for VE actors either to extract support or resources through threats and intimidation, or to build support by offering protection.

Livelihood destruction is also contributing to push a growing number of boys and young men towards towns, where they often hang around outside shops, making them easy targets for VE recruiters. Another livelihood adaptation strategy is to marry off young girls so that there are fewer mouths to feed, which VE actors also take advantage of.

Box 2: Adaptation strategies and VE contact

Men too face pressure. Our responsibility is to provide for the family, but when the animals die, when pasture is gone, it is painful. Many men are forced to move with the herds for weeks, leaving women alone at home. [FGD with men, Modogashe, July 2025]

Our people move to follow water and pasture, and sometimes these routes expose them to extremist groups. [Interview with CSO worker, Wajir, July 2025]

Boreholes are very far, so you can get raped and things. So, these people give protection, so they win you lovingly. Like state is not giving you protection. So, they will come to help the system to collect water, you know, things like that. So, it is a plus point. [Interview with local leader, Wajir County, July 2025]

When livestock die and farms dry up, they see no opportunity here. They find idle boys hanging in the towns, frustrated and hungry, and tell them that their suffering is because of injustice, corruption, and neglect by the government. They wrap their message in religious language to sound convincing. Without proper guidance, some youths believe them and end up in violent groups. [FGD with religious leaders, Wajir, July 2025]

1.3. Climate change increases clan-based resource conflicts, providing opportunities for VE actors to expand their influence

Climate impacts lead to a decline in pastureland and increased pressure on local ecosystems, especially in drought-prone areas. This is intensifying resource conflicts, which often run along clan lines. In Garissa and Wajir, conflicts often centre on water and grazing access and use. VE actors benefit from the dynamics created by resource conflict, strategically utilising the chaos and heightened insecurity to expand their influence. They exploit these conflicts in a number of ways, including taking one side, instigating an increase in violence, or acting as mediators.

Box 3: Resource conflict

When climate shocks happen, there is a conflict that normally arises. Through the borderlines, within the communities. That causes the resource-based conflict. Because when resources are scarce, conflict may arise. Because of the migration of the pastoral communities. [FGD with CSOs, Garissa, July 2025]

They are becoming more frequent and more aggressive. When too many herders bring their animals into a small area, the local community starts to complain that the pasture is being used up quickly. And because everyone is under pressure from the drought, patience runs low. A simple misunderstanding over a watering point or a grazing path can easily turn into a fight. We've heard of clashes between groups, especially during the last two dry seasons over who has the right to use certain rangelands. [FGD with men, Kutulo, July 2025]

Whenever conflict arises Al-Shabaab benefits... They arm some groups, protect others, and chase away people who don't cooperate with them. They also take advantage of droughts. When people lose livestock and feel hopeless, Al-Shabaab steps in. [Interview with local leader, Garissa County, July 2025]

Climate change has indeed contributed to violence. Competition over scarce pasture and water pits has caused deadly clashes between clans... Extremist groups also exploit these grievances, framing them as injustice and calling for revenge. This mixture of climate stress and extremism creates insecurity for all. [FGD with religious leaders, Wajir, July 2025]

1.4. Climate-related livelihood destruction creates an emotional environment conducive to radicalisation and other harms

Our research made clear the scale of trauma caused by successive and cumulative acute climate events. The destruction of livelihoods and the lack of alternative opportunities create feelings of hopelessness within communities. Participants described these as playing out differently for men and women, young and old, but the findings leave no doubt that climate-related livelihood destruction is having a devastating emotional toll across these communities.

Among young people, and especially among young men, this is causing an emotional environment that can be particularly conducive to radicalisation, as well as other harms. The research participants highlighted the idleness of youth and how the inability to provide for one's family or even start a family due to the loss of livestock and lack of livelihood opportunities creates feelings of low self-worth, hopelessness, and shame. This opens up the pathway towards radicalisation as the emotional burden drives people towards riskier choices, including joining VE groups, which are among the few actors offering opportunity and purpose.

Box 4: An emotional environment conducive to VE and other harms

Climate resilience isn't just about food or water; it's about dignity. When people feel dignified, they do not sell their souls to extremists. [FGD with women, Diff, July 2025]

There's a direct link between climate vulnerability and recruitment into violent extremism. When young people feel abandoned, with no jobs, no hope, they become soft targets. Groups promising opportunity or purpose step in. We've seen this many times. [FGD with CSOs, Garissa, July 2025]

Radicalisation grows in this emptiness. The boys are not joining these groups because they are evil; they are joining because they are empty. [FGD with women, Modogashe, July 2025]

Many men are struggling to cope with the loss of livestock and their identity as providers. Feelings of failure and helplessness have led to increased instances of stress, depression, and internal displacement, with some turning to alcohol or irregular migration as an escape. [FGD with women, Kutulo, July 2025]

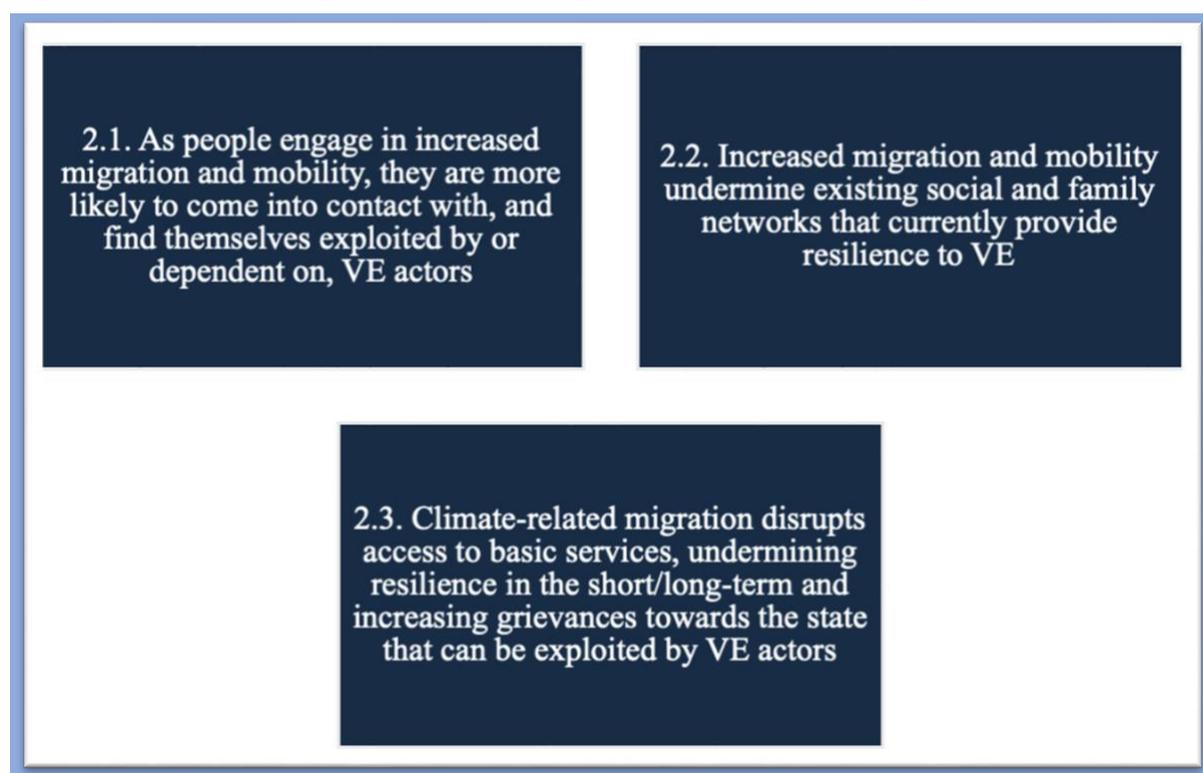
We were herders. Now we are nothing. Some of us are ashamed to go home empty handed. [FGD with men, Diff, July 2025]

2. Increased migration and altered pastoral mobility patterns

Drought and flooding exacerbate the precarious livelihoods of community members. As communities experience livestock loss or unproductive land due to climate impacts, some people are forced to seek alternative livelihoods, sell livestock, or migrate to new localities. Herders are travelling ever greater distances with their animals in search of suitable grazing and water, causing them to be away from home for longer periods. In some cases, whole families are moving. Porous borders have facilitated widespread climate-exacerbated population displacement.²⁰ As climate-induced migration becomes a coping or adaptation strategy, this can create vulnerabilities to a range of harms, including VE.

It is important to emphasise that not all people involved in such migration engage with or become sympathetic to VE actors. Indeed, some of the participants highlighted the risk of securitising pastoralists and turning them into a suspect community. The point, however, is that increased mobility associated with climate breakdown is creating opportunities that are sometimes exploited by VE actors. We identified three pathways through which climate-related migration can intersect with VE (see Figure 3).

²⁰ Research and Evidence Facility, 'Circular refugee returns between Kenya and Somalia: a rapid review', (2020), <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/files/2020/12/REF-Rapid-Review-Circular>Returns.pdf>

Figure 3: Increased migration and altered pastoral mobility patterns pathways

2.1. As people engage in increased migration and mobility, they are more likely to come into contact with, and find themselves exploited by or dependent on, VE actors

The research participants described four main types of mobility: increased pastoral mobility as herders – usually men and boys – travel ever-greater distances to find suitable temporary grazing and water for their livestock; individual migration to urban areas, usually by young people, and particularly young men, in search of alternative livelihoods; individual migration with the aim of reaching Europe, usually by young people, and particularly young men; and the displacement of whole families. Each of these forms of increased mobility were described as putting people at increased risk of contact with VE actors, who can turn this to their advantage.

The journeys undertaken by pastoralists, and sometimes whole families, take them into more remote and less secure areas. Here, in the relative absence of state actors, VE actors often operate. After travelling long distances across insecure routes, these people are particularly vulnerable. During such journeys, it is common to lose possessions and animals, arriving in new places with severely depleted resources and few social contacts. VE actors capitalise on this situation. One of the main ways they do this is by stepping in to provide assistance. This assistance comes with attachments, however. Even if people know this, their desperate position forces them to accept, putting them under the control of VE actors.

Participants told similar stories about those who move from their communities to towns in search of work. Here, uprooted from their existing families and wider social networks and looking for new opportunities, they can again come into increased contact with VE actors and can be easy targets for VE recruitment.

Box 5: Migration and contact with VE actors

When families move with animals to insecure areas, they come into contact with these groups. Sometimes the extremists bring water or food during hard times, but it is not kindness. It is control. If you accept their help, you cannot refuse them later. It is a trap that climate change has opened wider. Some youth get recruited, and it's not easy for us women to monitor their changes. [FGD with women, Masalani, July 2025]

Some who join these networks are those who have migrated here for jobs from other areas of Garissa. So, in search of a job, you can get trapped in these groups. Offers to survive the town life, like free food or space to live, or means for livelihood, can be enticing for youth. [FGD with youth, Garissa, July 2025]

When people are displaced by drought, they move around. In that chaos, it's easy for groups like Al-Shabaab to find new sympathizers, especially when they act like they are helping [FGD with men, Gerille, July 2025]

In the rural areas, where there is a lot of isolation, it does happen openly, because people can radicalise in the open and never get caught. Lack of police presence and surveillance in these areas is a key factor. So, these groups can exploit vulnerability of poverty or unemployment, and distribute food or other incentives. So, this does buy community support. Some individuals become sympathisers for these organisations. [FGD with youth, Wajir, July 2025]

2.2. Increased migration and mobility undermine existing social and family networks that currently provide resilience to VE

Social and family networks are often not only a vital source of material support, helping people navigate everyday as well as acute challenges, but also of emotional support, purpose, and belonging. They can provide an important protective factor against a range of harms, including VE.²¹ Another effect of increased migration and mobility, however, is the weakening of these existing networks.

As men are away from the home for longer periods, they can become isolated from their existing networks, which in turn can deprive them of crucial forms of material and emotional support and make them more likely to seek support through alternate networks. As noted under *Pathway 2.1.*, this can be exploited by VE actors, among others, who play upon the desperation of isolated individuals. Participants highlighted that even when men return, the hardships they have experienced and the often deep sense of loss that these hardships engender negatively affect their engagement with their families.

When men are away for long periods, women and women-headed households become targets for VE actors and other actors seeking to exploit the situation. More broadly, women find themselves trying to fulfil multiple household roles and often struggle to cope. When women migrate with their children, they face dangers such as diseases, gender-based violence, harassment, and hunger. In some contexts, protection becomes a necessity for survival. This creates opportunities for VE actors to step in to take the place of family and social networks that would normally offer support and protection, opening a pathway towards VE support, recruitment, and radicalisation.

²¹ Arie W Kruglanski, Jocelyn J Bélanger, and Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization: Needs, Narratives, and Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Box 6: Migration undermining existing social networks

We also worry about our families. When the men migrate with the animals, the women and children are often left behind with limited food, water, and no means of income. That separation causes stress. And if the journey takes longer than planned, some of them end up moving entirely and setting up in makeshift shelters near urban centres. These new settlements have their own set of problems, like drug abuse, crimes, prostitution, human trafficking, or even joining terrorist groups. [FGD with men, Kutulo, July 2025]

Before, our families had balance. Men herded animals nearby and came home every evening, while women cooked, fetched water, and cared for children. Now that the balance is broken. Men spend weeks or months away following pasture deep into Isiolo or Garissa. Women are left behind to carry the whole weight of the family. I have become both mother and father to my children. I fetch water, collect firewood, cook, and nurse sick children while also trying to protect our hut from floods or wild animals. When my husband comes back, he is exhausted and silent, and he does not even see what I have done to keep this family alive. This new life has stretched us women until we are almost breaking. [FGD with women, Modogashe, July 2025]

Some do migrate with their animals to better pasture lands. Often, they may get new friendships and assistance in these localities. Radicalisation can happen in these spaces. Or desperation makes them feel that these networks provide protection and care for their desperate situations. Some youth never return; they settle among these extremist networks. [FGD with women, Garissa, July 2025]

2.3. Climate-related migration disrupts access to basic services, undermining resilience in the short/long-term and increasing grievances towards the state that can be exploited by VE actors

A further way in which climate-related migration is exacerbating vulnerabilities to VE is through the way it disrupts access to basic services. Migration, particularly into areas where the state's presence is weak or non-existent, constrains access to basic services. In the case of rural-urban migration, the dramatic increase in the population in these areas puts strain on already stretched service provision, often resulting in those who migrate being denied these services. A recurring theme in the FGDs and KIIs was about young people being forced to drop out of school. Research participants also spoke at length about the lack of access to veterinary services, medical assistance, and emergency aid.

This lack of access to basic services creates vulnerabilities in different ways, in the short and longer-term. It becomes a further driver of marginalisation, particularly for young people for whom their lack of formal education can seriously undermine their current and future opportunities. This, in turn, can make them more susceptible to influence from VE actors. Indeed, participants observed that VE actors already aim to prevent schooling by targeting teachers, as they see it as an ideological and recruitment obstacle.

Limited access to basic services creates opportunities for VE actors to step in and provide alternate systems of support. As noted above, such support comes with strings attached.

Limited access to basic services also becomes a source of grievance. Throughout the FGDs and KIIs, a recurring theme was abandonment by the state. Such grievances play into the hands of VE actors seeking to encourage and mobilise negative feelings directed at the Kenyan state.

Box 7: Migration and poor access to services

Here, where Al-Shabaab is active, we're neglected. There are no mobile vet clinics, no food drops, no shelter support after floods. [FGD with women, Kutulo, July 2025]

Clinics also become out of reach. In the camps, if a child falls sick, you have to walk for kilometres to get a painkiller. My niece gave birth under a tree during the floods no nurse, no midwife, not even clean water to wash the baby. [FGD with women, Diff, July 2025]

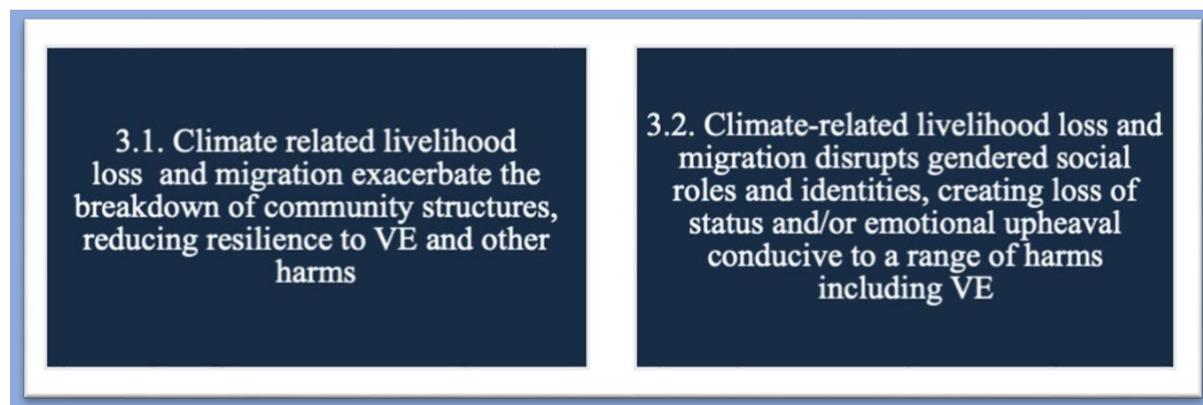
When we migrate, health becomes a luxury. Even pregnancy care is gone. I gave birth under a tree once, with only my neighbour to help. No midwife, no clean tools. It's just survival. [FGD with women, Gerille, July 2025]

Education suffers the most. Children are withdrawn from school when families move or split up. Some children follow their parents to the grazing zones, and they end up missing school for months. Others are forced to help with herding or collecting water in new areas, especially if the mother is also struggling alone. For those who settle near towns hoping for services, the schools are already overcrowded and not equipped to handle the sudden increase in pupils. [FGD with men, Kutulo, July 2025]

3. Climate Change as a Driver for the Breakdown of Social Systems

Climate change has social consequences, including the breakdown of social systems. It is impacting traditional ways of life, straining family dynamics, weakening community support systems and traditional coping mechanisms, leaving some people increasingly isolated and vulnerable, and intensifying psychological distress. The negative impact of climate change on social systems, communities, and individuals is immense. Research participants spoke repeatedly about feelings of loss of dignity and shame, and mental trauma and suicide emerged as critical concerns. VE actors can take advantage of these breakdowns in social systems. We identified two main pathways through which climate-related breakdown in social systems is affecting the VE threat landscape (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Breakdown of the social system pathways



3.1. Climate-related livelihood loss and migration exacerbate the breakdown of community structures, reducing resilience to VE and other harms.

Rising climate change-induced poverty affects community welfare and diminishes existing practices that traditionally strengthened social cohesion and protected people against economic shocks.²² The repeated destruction of livelihoods due to climate impacts deprives community members of the resources to assist and share with others, breaking down traditional community coping mechanisms. In doing so, it also damages the broader sense of community and dignity.

²² Edward B. Barbier and Jacob P. Hochard, 'The Impacts of Climate Change on the Poor in Disadvantaged Regions', *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy*, (2018), 12:1: 26-47.

This is making people vulnerable to a range of harms, including VE, as VE actors exploit the fact that people are looking for assistance from anyone who will provide it.

The loss of livelihoods due to climate impacts also inhibits social functions. Livestock has a number of socio-cultural functions, such as dowry payments, household and individual honour, household assets, conflict resolution, and plays a role in traditional ceremonies.²³ The loss of livestock breaks down these socio-cultural elements, weakening communities. Again, this provides VE actors with opportunities to help with cultural functions such as dowries, thereby expanding their influence.

Established systems of authority are also coming under pressure. Participants highlighted, for example, how elders are losing influence both as a result of their loss of economic resources and because traditional knowledge, particularly around livelihoods and weather patterns, was increasingly seen to be ineffective. Where community elders are no longer seen to fulfil their traditional roles, their authority diminishes. Communities break down, and other people, including VE actors, have opportunities to position themselves as leaders.

Box 8: Breakdown of social systems

These struggles affect the entire community's dignity. Weddings are smaller because no one can afford to slaughter animals. Funerals are harder because people have little to contribute. Even social bonds are weakened, because when your neighbour comes asking for milk or sugar, you have nothing to offer. Our economy is not just about money; it is about sharing. When livestock die, that sharing disappears, and we become poorer not only in wealth but also in spirit. [FGD with men, Masalani, July 2025]

These disasters [droughts] break our social bonds. When a man loses his home or his herd, he depends on others. But when everyone around you is also affected, no one has the strength to help. In 2019, I asked a neighbour to lend me maize flour after losing several goats. He told me, "Brother, I have nothing left myself." That is how floods and droughts have turned neighbours into strangers. [FGD with men, Masalani, July 2025]

Our sense of community is dying. Before, when one family suffered, others brought milk or maize. Now no one has enough even for their own children. We have stopped visiting each other because no one wants to see the shame of empty pots. [FGD with women, Modogashe, July 2025]

You can't get married as you need dowry to marry. All your dowry is lost because the animals were the dowry. So out of desperation, you may reach these extremist networks for jobs or opportunities. Most often, they could fall victim to these networks and may not even know they are part of these networks. [FGD with women, Garissa, July 2025]

Elders feel the pain differently. They used to be respected as guides of the community, because they knew the seasons and could predict when rain would come. Now, the rains fail or delay, and even elders say they no longer understand the signs of the sky. This makes them feel powerless, because their wisdom does not carry the same weight as before. [FGD with youth, Wajir, July 2025]

3.2. Climate-related livelihood loss and migration disrupts gendered social roles and identities, creating loss of status and/or emotional upheaval conducive to a range of harms, including VE

As set out under *Pathway 1.4*, one of the ways that climate change is exacerbating vulnerabilities to harms, including VE, is by creating an emotional environment conducive to such harms, comprising desperation, shame, and loss of hope. One of the drivers of this emotional environment is the way climate-related livelihood loss and migration are transforming social relations, often in ways that entail sudden and devastating loss of status and/or emotional upheaval. In Kenyan border communities engaged in pastoral livelihoods,

²³ Madison Jansen and Madina Yunis Mahat, 'Climate (im)mobility, gender and conflict: a look inside pastoralist communities in Garissa County, Kenya', Humanitarian Practice Network, (2024), 84(9). <https://shorturl.at/6vFE8>

women traditionally look after household needs, including fetching water, providing food for the family, keeping livestock, maintaining kiosks (shops), processing dairy milk, and also growing seasonal crops, while men manage the herding of goats, camels, and cattle. These customary roles can be altered when livelihoods are affected by climatic shocks. When traditionally male-dominated livelihoods collapse, or men are forced into adaptation strategies that entail prolonged absence, women take up responsibilities that were previously carried out by men, such as managing small grazing activities and providing food and protection to their families.

Where women have taken on roles traditionally reserved for men, including the provision of food and safety for women and children, this brings shame to men. Reports of depression were widespread in the data. As men become desperate to provide for their families and regain their status, VE actors can exploit this, particularly as men who lose their animals also question their value in a society that sets worth based on livestock.

At the same time, women often described the increase in work in their households as affecting their physical safety and mental well-being. They may have to walk extra miles to gather water from boreholes during droughts, and when the men are unable to provide during harsh weather conditions, women may also find themselves having to look for means for feeding their children. The increased burden and the lack of protection offered as men leave make them more susceptible to acquiescing to or supporting VE actors.

Box 9: Breakdown of established roles and identities

I remember the long dry spell of 2019. We had to walk almost 40 kilometres with our animals, hoping to find grass near Ijara. By the time we arrived, our goats were so weak they could barely stand. One of my sons fainted on the way because he had not eaten properly. That experience showed me how climate change has stripped away our dignity. We are men, supposed to provide, but we found ourselves helpless. [FGD with men, Masalani, July 2025]

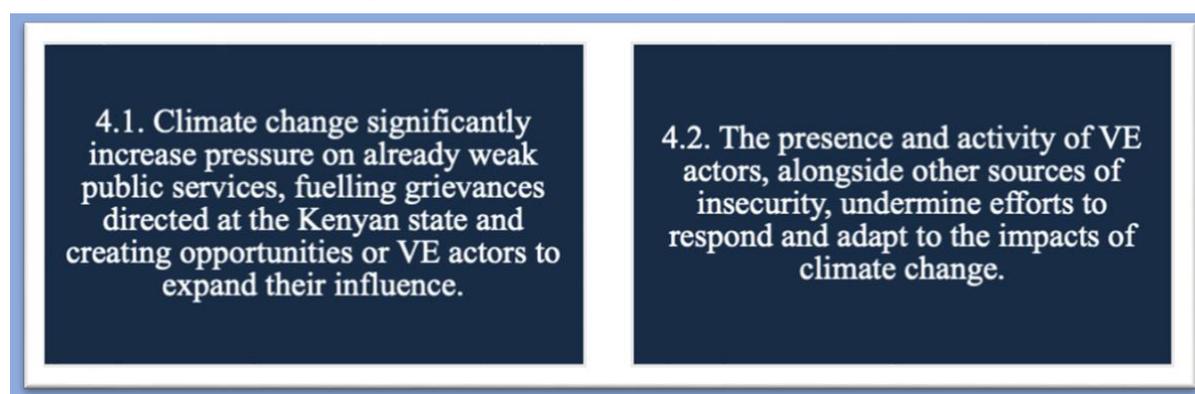
Before, a man could provide steadily, and the wife managed the home. Now, when animals die, women sometimes take small jobs in town, like selling milk, tea, or even charcoal. This is new. It changes family roles, because men feel ashamed when their wives are the ones bringing food. [FGD with men, Modogashe, July 2025]

In our culture, a man without animals is seen as a child, no matter his age. [FGD with men, Masalani, July 2025]

Although we don't use the word "depression" in the community, the signs are there. Men sleep all day, avoid conversation, or resort to chewing miraa, drinking, or gambling. This is their way of coping with failure, the failure to provide, to protect, to lead. [FGD with women, Diff, July 2025]

4. Exacerbation of Governance Challenges

Garissa and Wajir face long-standing governance challenges. These are areas where many residents have long lacked access to basic services, including health, education, agricultural and veterinary services, and where the Kenyan state has struggled to provide security in the face of ongoing insurgency and organised crime. Climate change is exacerbating these governance challenges. Climate change puts additional stress on the population and increases both the number of people requiring government assistance and the types of assistance required. Climate change-related weather events can also diminish the access of state actors to some areas, while at the same time, their access to these areas can be constrained by the presence and activity of VE actors and associated insecurity. The exacerbation of these governance challenges is creating opportunities for VE actors. We identified two pathways through which climate change and VE further exacerbate governance challenges (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Exacerbation of governance challenges pathways

4.1. Climate change significantly increases pressure on already weak public services, fuelling grievances directed at the Kenyan state and creating opportunities for VE actors to expand their influence

The northern and northeastern regions of Kenya face multiple challenges, including unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, disease outbreaks, resource conflicts, and the persistent activity of transnational VE groups. Beyond the main towns, the ability of the Kenyan state to deliver services to address these challenges is very limited.

Climate change significantly increases the pressure on these already weak services. Climate impacts have decimated livelihoods, homes, roads, and other infrastructure, driving increased need for livelihood support, relief services, health, and veterinary services across shifting geographic locations. During and in the aftermath of acute climate events, the challenges are magnified as access to these areas is further limited by flooding and damaged infrastructure.

The exacerbation of gaps in service provision creates opportunities for VE actors in two ways. First, these gaps, or delays, in service provision are a focus of significant anxiety, frustration, and grievance. In a region in which narratives of marginalisation within the Kenyan state are widespread and historically embedded, these frustrations can easily be integrated into and add further fuel to such narratives. This creates opportunities for VE actors who play upon such feelings of exclusion and marginalisation, and argue, often using religious language, that the state is weak or indifferent to the needs of peripheral communities.

Second, where there are gaps in service provision, VE actors sometimes step in, strategically providing assistance, security, and/or alternative governance systems in order to expand their influence.²⁴ Research participants described, for example, VE actors providing emergency relief, fixing water points, offering conflict resolution or armed support during resource conflicts, and providing support to and accompanying women in unsafe areas during periods of intense hardship. They were clear, however, that this was not “charity” but “control”.

²⁴ Florian Krampe and Cedric de Coning, 'Climate Change, Environmental Peacebuilding, and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism', in Cedric de Coning, Rui Saraiva, and Ako Muto, eds. *Resilience, Peacebuilding, and Preventing Violent Extremism* (London: Routledge, 2025): 186-206; Ashton Kingdon, 'The Darkest Shade of Green: Climate Change, Terrorist Organizations, and the Battle for Environmental Legitimacy', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (2025): 1-32.

Box 10: Gaps in service provision, narratives of marginalisation and alternate governance

Some people say the government has cursed this place by forgetting it. They say we suffer because leaders treat us like we are not part of Kenya. Sometimes I also believe that. How else can you explain this much neglect? [FGD with women, Modogashe, July 2025]

When support finally comes, it's often through local politicians distributing relief unevenly. Some families get food, others don't. There's no system. It's who you know. Veterinary services, crucial during drought recovery, are absent. [FGD with men, Gerille, July 2025]

Another case was when extremist preachers targeted young herders, telling them that their suffering was because of injustice and abandonment by the government. These vulnerable youths listen because their hunger and hopelessness make them desperate for answers. Climate change has therefore not only destroyed livelihoods but has also created openings for dangerous alternatives. [FGD with religious leaders, Wajir, July 2025]

When violence happens over pasture or water, we also feel justice is slow. Sometimes two groups clash, and instead of quick intervention, security forces arrive after days. By then, animals may already have been stolen, or people injured. When cases are reported, there is rarely follow-up, and that sends a message that pastoralist lives are not valued like others. [FGD with men, Modogashe, July 2025]

They fix water points. They give food when no one else does. But it's not charity it's control. And the community knows that if you say no, you are a target. When you have no animals left, no land, and your family is hungry you keep quiet and accept. [FGD with men, Gerille, July 2025]

The militant group strategically fill the gap where state presence is minimal, offering basic services in exchange for silence or allegiance. [FGD with women, Kutulo, July 2025]

4.2. The presence and activity of VE actors, alongside other sources of insecurity, undermine efforts to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change

Research participants reported two ways in which the presence and activity of VE actors inhibit efforts to respond and adapt to climate change. The first is by inhibiting local practices of adaptation. The presence and activity of VE actors create a context of insecurity that significantly increases the risks associated with mobility. This places important constraints when mobility is often a key part of adaptation strategies, e.g., moving with livestock to other areas for pasture or to other water points, or travelling further afield to collect water or fuel.

The second way that the presence and activity of VE actors undermine responses to the effects of climate change is by making it increasingly difficult for the Kenyan state to penetrate some communities. Research participants repeatedly commented on how state actors either were not present, or were in effect segregated from, communities. This further weakens the delivery of services, particularly during, and in the immediate aftermath of, acute climate events. This, in turn, further benefits VE actors, who profit from this insecurity, and the relative absence of the Kenyan state to pursue territorial ambitions, control community structures, and establish informal systems of governance. In this way, climate impacts and the presence and activity of VE actors exacerbate each other.

Box 12: VE and reduced capacity to adapt to climate change

We can't access support services or even move freely to look for water or pasture because of the Al-Shabaab threat. There are places where you can't go, even if water or grazing is there. You fear for your life. [FGD with women, Kutulo, July 2025]

The government and NGOs avoid this area. They say it's too dangerous. And maybe it is, but we still live here. We still suffer. When food aid is dispatched, it often doesn't reach the interior villages due to security risks. [FGD with women, Kutulo, July 2025]

We don't want war. We just want the presence of people in uniform who protect, patrol, and listen. That alone would make women feel safer. Now, we live between silence and fear. [FGD with women, Gerille, July 2025]

Before, at least we could count on a vet visiting once in a while. Now, no one dares to come. The animals die silently, and we bury them ourselves. [FGD with women, Kutulo, July 2025]

Sometimes we hear there's help, but it only reaches Wajir town. By the time help arrives, it's too late. [FGD with men, Diff, July 2025]

Floods and droughts have become part of our lives but so has fear. We no longer just worry about water or pasture. We worry about our safety. We live in a place where help cannot reach, and yet we are expected to survive. [FGD with women, Kutulo, July 2025]

Young men can't farm, can't move freely with animals, and can't start businesses. So, they begin to believe that nothing good will ever come if they stay. [FGD with women, Kutulo, July 2025]

Conclusion

As set out in the introduction to this report, while researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have observed that climate change and VE *appear to be* interacting with one another, to date, there has been very little research into *how they are interacting* in areas affected by climate change and VE.

The findings set out above help to address this gap in knowledge and understanding in three ways. First, in terms of how we conceptualise the relationship between climate change and VE, the findings support the basic idea that **climate change is best understood as a “threat multiplier” for VE**. Climate change does not create new threats but exacerbates existing threats and undermines the ability of communities to respond effectively.

The findings make clear, however, that **this is not a one-way relationship. VE also undermines efforts to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change**. As such, increased vulnerability to climate change and VE can become mutually compounding. Research, policy, and practice should therefore focus on the two-way interactions between these phenomena and the feedback loops through which this happens.

Second, the findings provide **new insight into the key causal elements that shape the interaction between climate change and VE**. Based on the existing literature and our initial engagement with policymakers and practitioners, we anticipated that *livelihood destruction, increased migration and mobility, and exacerbated governance challenges* would comprise important causal elements. This study has also highlighted the importance of the *breakdown of social systems* in the interaction between climate change and VE. Whether driven by livelihood destruction, displacement, or competition for dwindling resources, the impacts of climate change severely damage the social networks, bonds, systems, and order that sustain communities. The breakdown of these social systems undermines communities' adaptive capacity, leaving individuals and communities less resilient to VE and to the effects of ongoing climate impacts.

These four underlying causal elements interact with one another. For example, livelihood destruction is a key driver of increased migration, which in turn contributes to the breakdown of social systems and exacerbates governance challenges. None of the four can, however, be simply reduced to a sub-component of the other causal elements. This helps to highlight the causal complexity in the interactions between climate change and VE. It also provides valuable insight into the range of possible intervention points.

Third, the findings provide a far more granular understanding than we currently have of how these causal elements operate, giving us important new understanding about **the specific pathways through which climate change and VE interact**.

As expected, the findings confirm that environmental degradation creates conditions favourable to radicalisation, and that the negative impacts of climate change on household economies and social support systems are an important part of this. However, the findings go beyond standard economic analyses, or analyses that focus primarily on resource conflict, to reveal how the loss of traditional livelihoods, such as livestock, undermines individual and community dignity and how this is contributing to the increased risk of VE. Climate change and the hardships associated with it are inflicting a profound emotional toll. This is increasing vulnerability to a range of harms, including VE, and is a causal pathway that requires serious attention in order to develop sustainable responses to the joint challenge of climate change and VE.

Our findings highlight how livelihood destruction and climate-driven displacement place already weak public services under greater pressure, and also undermine traditional social systems that have historically helped to foster resilience to a range of shocks. The combination of service gaps and faltering traditional support mechanisms creates opportunities for VE actors to build support and expand their influence through a combination of assistance, coercion, and the development of alternative systems of governance. This is particularly the case in northeastern Kenya, where VE actors can take advantage of widely held and historically embedded public perceptions of social and political marginalisation.

Our findings show that chronic insecurity undermines adaptation to climate change and long-term planning. Indeed, adaptation initiatives themselves can become focal points for communal conflict if they are not conflict-sensitive, creating opportunities for VE actors. As such, this research further challenges the efficacy of purely technical climate adaptation strategies,²⁵ and emphasises the importance of integrated approaches to addressing climate change impacts and VE.

Finally, it should come as no surprise that the pathways linking climate change and VE are not only deeply gendered but also significantly shaped by other social characteristics, including age, livelihood, and social position. Effective understanding of and responses to the interaction between climate change and VE requires intersectional approaches.

²⁵ Krampe et al., 'Climate Change and Peacebuilding'

Recommendations: towards an integrated approach to addressing VE and climate change

The interactions between climate change effects and VE are cumulative and compounding, generating both immediate and long-term effects. This research gives us new insight into the underlying causal elements that shape these interactions and the pathways through which they can interact. It makes clear that effective climate change adaptation in areas affected by VE must move beyond technical solutions and account for these security dynamics to ensure realistic implementation. Security is a prerequisite for effective adaptation, not just a by-product of it. It also makes clear that in places that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, P/CVE efforts cannot afford to ignore how climate change can exacerbate VE and cognate harms. Approaches that integrate P/CVE and climate adaptation are more likely to be effective than those that treat them in isolation.

In this section, we make nine recommendations about how to move towards an integrated approach to addressing VE and climate change.

Given the need for integrated approaches, the recommendations are deliberately broad and are directed at a range of policymakers and practitioners currently working across relevant policy fields.

1. **Formally recognise climate change as a critical security issue to trigger the multi-agency coordination necessary for high-impact outcomes:** Our research clearly demonstrates the intersection between climate change and VE. Accordingly, we recommend formal recognition of climate change as a critical security issue to catalyse the "whole-of-society" and multi-agency/integrated responses required for effective mitigation. Such recognition would pave the way for the other recommendations set out below.
2. **Build interconnected P/CVE and climate adaptation architectures:** Kenya has taken the important step of having climate change units in each ministry. It has also taken the important step of having national and county-level P/CVE action plans that are able to effectively coordinate P/CVE work across Kenya's diverse communities. Currently, however, P/CVE county action plans and climate adaptation strategies operate independently of one another. Given their deep mutual impact, consideration should be given to how local and national P/CVE action plans and climate adaptation strategies can feed into one another throughout their life cycle, facilitating complementarity and allowing for shared knowledge and combined funding streams.
3. **Ensure climate adaptation interventions are sensitive to insecurity:** Our research findings demonstrate that the insecurity caused by VE significantly undermines the adaptive capacity of communities. Community members repeatedly demonstrated to us how climate adaptation is only possible when it is secure enough to utilise the adaptation opportunities available. Therefore, to develop sustainable and realistic outcomes, climate adaptation interventions must a) work in insecure areas, and b) make sure that programming is accessible despite insecurity.
4. **Embed conflict analysis within climate adaptation interventions:** Our research demonstrated that assistance often only reaches some communities, which inadvertently exacerbates communal conflict and fuels VE narratives of marginalisation. Making conflict analysis mandatory for all climate adaptation interventions would help to mitigate the risk of such programmes inadvertently exacerbating, or creating, conflict and VE risks.

5. **Recognise and address climate-related trauma in climate adaptation and P/CVE interventions:** The scale of the trauma caused by cumulative acute climate events was ever-present in our engagement with communities. We know that such an emotional environment creates vulnerabilities to radicalisation. Therefore, it is important to recognise the extent of this trauma and to ensure it is addressed through trauma-sensitive climate adaptation and P/CVE programming.
6. **Recognise livelihood dignity within livelihood interventions:** The scale of the impact of climate change on livelihood loss is immense, and it is imperative to diversify livelihoods with climate-resilient options. Strengthening livelihood resilience through sustainable climate adaptation and P/CVE policies is vital to disrupting climate-induced recruitment pathways. However, our research demonstrated the significant cultural and emotional weight placed on traditional economic practices, such as livestock, and how its loss is a key driver of VE risk, making it essential that interventions also focus on fostering more climate resilient traditional economic practices.
7. **Climate adaptation and P/CVE interventions should pay particular attention to the mitigation of displacement-related VE risks:** Migration interacts with multiple processes highlighted within the report. It is therefore essential to prioritise interventions that limit climate-induced migration through addressing the root causes. While strengthening livelihood resilience can reduce the necessity of migration, P/CVE efforts must also prioritise limiting displacement through targeted climate interventions. In cases where migration is unavoidable, P/CVE can be strengthened by offering support that limits contact with VE actors, sustains existing social networks, and maintains consistent access to services to reduce opportunities for VE actors to exploit vulnerable populations.
8. **Climate adaptation and P/CVE interventions should pay explicit attention to preventing or mitigating the breakdown of existing social structures:** The scale of the breakdown of social structures due to the impacts of climate change is considerable. This creates several vulnerabilities to VE, including undermining the community's adaptive capacity, and leaving individuals more vulnerable to VE recruitment. As part of efforts to respond to both climate change and VE, it is important to invest in monitoring and understanding the effects of climate change on social structures and develop approaches that counteract and mitigate them.
9. **Responses to climate change and VE should be sensitive to gender, age, and other social characteristics:** The climate-related vulnerabilities to VE differ across a number of social characteristics. Therefore, for programming to be successful, efforts to understand and respond to the interaction between climate change and VE must recognise how these are shaped by gender, age, and other social characteristics. Ensuring that these diverse perspectives shape the implementation lifecycle is vital for creating sustainable, high-impact outcomes.

Author Biographies

Dr. Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences, Technical University of Mombasa, Kenya. She is also a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Religion, Culture and Society, University of Groningen, Netherlands. As an ethnographer, she has more than fourteen years of experience working on violent extremist movements, with a particular interest in recruitment dynamics for violent extremist movements and human trafficker-smuggler networks. She has also been a practitioner and researcher working in the field of countering violent extremism and peacebuilding in the Horn and East African region and Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka, India, and Indonesia.

Prof. Joel Busher is Professor of Political Sociology at the Centre for Peace and Security, Coventry University. His research examines the escalation and inhibition of political and targeted violence, the dynamics of mobilisation against minoritised groups, and the enactment and effects of efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.

Dr. Wilson Omalenge Ndenyele is a lecturer in the Department of Social Sciences at the Technical University of Mombasa where he coordinates the undergraduate Bachelor of Arts Degree in Conflict and Security Studies (BACS). He holds an MA in Peace and Conflict Studies, European University Centre for Peace Studies, Stadtschlaining, Austria and PhD in development studies from the Technical University of Mombasa, Kenya. Dr. Ndenyele's broad research interest is in natural resource conflicts. More specifically, his research focuses on large scale land issues and the extractive mining industry in the Tana River and Kwale Counties respectively.

Prof. Dylan O'Driscoll is a Professor of Peace and Conflict at the Centre for Peace and Security (CPS), Coventry University. He is also Associate Senior Fellow at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). His work bridges academia and policy and focuses on the drivers of conflict and pathways to peace.

Sheila Ronoh is currently a PhD Candidate at the Centre for Peace and Security, Coventry University. Her PhD focuses on youth engagement for climate and sustainability in Kenya and Uganda. She has experience in portfolio management at GIZ Kenya, where she was responsible for leading the Corporate Sustainability Handprint process. In addition, she is a member of the Kenya Climate Change Working Group and actively participates in the Youth and Marginalised People thematic group. Her research interests include youth political participation, climate change and environmental activism in the global south.