Ensuring a Future of Peace: Empowering Women of Faith to Prevent Conflict

Mothers are often the first to observe the early warning signs of radicalisation in their families. However, they often lack the skills needed to intervene. Women must be equipped and supported in their efforts to prevent their children from joining extremist groups, and also to build their own capacity to reject the influence of extremism and violence.

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Violent extremism is a major concern in Kenya. In Isiolo County, hundreds of missing children were assumed to have crossed the border to Somalia to fight with terrorist group, al-Shabab. Al-Shabab is known to recruit in the county, targeting men between 15-30 years old. This deeply impacts young men in the area and stigmatises the families of missing boys, further exacerbating interreligious tension.

To counter violent extremism and this growing issue of social discord, Religions for Peace’s Interreligious Council of Kenya (IRCK) and the WoFN embarked on a project in 2014 to counter radicalisation in the community.

Community level research identified the drivers of violent extremism: the desire for quick and easy money due to extreme poverty, and the misuse of religion by al-Shabab recruiters were key factors in young men joining al-Shabab. Local leaders and experts began to train religious leaders and the Isiolo WoFN to counter violent extremism.

With their expertise built through the training, faith-inspired women led radio advocacy programs, mentoring young men to help them plan for their future, engage them in interfaith activities and improve their decision-making skills. Key community actors learned to identify signs of radicalisation and the young men were referred to entrepreneurial programmes. The women supported them in identify positive life goals and developing strategies to achieve them. The women continue to use their training to overcome new challenges in the community as they arise.