**Uchaguzi Bila Bilaa: Violence Free Elections in Coastal Kenya**
**Summary of Baseline Findings**

### *Elections in Kenya: a long history of violent conflict*

In post-independent Kenya, violence has been a defining feature of election periods. Since 2007, thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced in election cycles. It is becoming increasingly clear that the months leading up to, and after elections, are some of the most conflict-prone and dangerous periods for the people of Kenya. As such, the 2022 Kenyan elections, results of which were declared on 9 August, were surrounded by general anxiety with expectations of violent election-related conflict.

### *Project Overview*

In light of the increased risk of election-related violence before, during and after the 2022 Kenyan Elections, Search for Common Ground (Search) and its partner organisations (Human Rights Agenda (HURIA), Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI), Kiunga Youth Bunge Initiative (KYBI), Ijara Women for Peace, Tana River Peace, Reconciliation and Development Organisation (TRPRD) began implementation of an 18-month European Union-funded programme.

This programme works together with local-level actors, empowering them to serve as an early warning and intervention mechanism in order to strengthen resilience to election-related violence during the critical electioneering periods, both in the campaign and after the elections have been conducted. The project targets Garissa, Lamu, Tana River, Kilifi, Kwale and Mombasa counties, aiming to respond to increasing election-related tensions and conflicts which often fuel violence and can lead to increases in radicalisation and recruitment by violent extremist organisations.

A Baseline Survey of the "Uchaguzi Bila Balaa: Violence Free Elections in Coastal Kenya" project was conducted by Bodhi Global Analysis (Bodhi) in June 2022, using a mixed-methods approach. In total, Bodhi held 20 Key Informant Interviews with programme staff and partners, 20 Focus Group Discussions with civil society members and representatives, and religious groups, and surveys with 904 respondents from 6 counties.
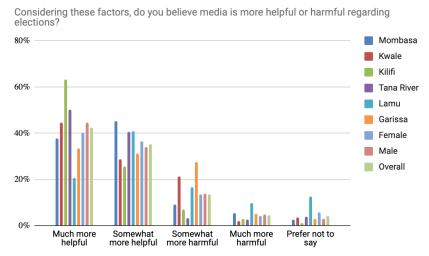
### *Key Findings*

**According to the survey, 16% of targeted community members demonstrated a belief that violence is sometimes necessary to accomplish electoral goals.** However, when asked whether violence would be acceptable/necessary across specific election-related scenarios, the number of respondents who deemed it necessary was higher. This was particularly seen to be the case in Lamu. This suggests that while support for election-related violence is relatively low, there is a need to address attitudes and beliefs that lead to violence in the target counties, Lamu in particular.

**The spread of propaganda and hate speech, especially via social media, remains a significant challenge to communities.** Social media poses a far greater risk than the mainstream media in terms of spreading hate speech, incitement and propaganda that can cause violence. In the discus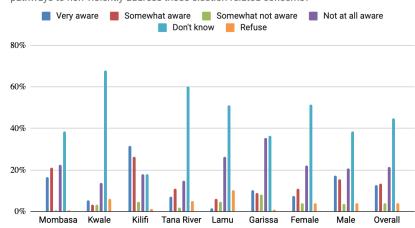sions with community members, social media platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp and TikTok were identified as the biggest drivers of fake news. However, according to the community survey 48% of the respondents reported that they felt well equipped to respond to issues of misinformation and hate speech. Moreover, despite some scepticism, respondents demonstrated strong support for the role of the media in the electoral process. As illustrated in the bar graph, 78% of the overall survey respondents believe that the media is at least 'Somewhat more helpful' than harmful regarding elections. Therefore, the media can play a key role as an agent of positive change.



Considering these factors, do you believe media is more helpful or harmful regarding elections?

**Community members reported a lack of opportunities to address their grievances.** Only 13% reported having such an opportunity. In terms of support to find different avenues to resolve election concerns, 67% of respondents believed that media and outreach activities helped them to identify peaceful methods in addressing electoral related issues.

If you are frustrated with something that happens in the elections, are you aware of pathways to non-violently address those election-related concerns?

Legend: Very aware, Somewhat aware, Somewhat not aware, Not at all aware, Don't know, Refuse

**CSOs and CBOs play a key role in mobilising people to engage in peaceful activities that promote social cohesion and peaceful co-existence among communities in the target counties.** These groups offer support in building the communities' resilience and cohesion through the multiple programmes they undertake, like peace education and support in addressing security challenges through community security committees. The presence of CSOs can make it easier to engage with the local communities. However, they lack the capacity and ability to address challenges, especially those related to electoral conflicts. Moreover, respondents felt that some local CSOs and CBOs have links with local politicians who fund their activities. This has called into question the impartiality of some of the organisations in promoting pathways that address election-related conflict in a nonviolent way.

**Coordination and collaboration between national, county and local level stakeholders in the management of election-related conflict is a challenge.** There is limited sharing of experiences and programmes between different inter-county organisations. In addition to inadequate collaboration, the challenge of limited resources plays a major role in reducing the capacity of some of those organisations engaging in the management of election-related violence.

**The Theory of Change is relevant and appropriate for the current context in the six counties.** There is a strong sense of support for the various mechanisms, opportunities, and channels, both existing and new, that would support community members in mitigating some of the election-related conflicts in their communities. Thus the ToC is viable, providing sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing needs and priorities, and to seize opportunities that arise along the way.

*Key Recommendations*

1. Increase and continue partnership with local CSOs, NGOs and other stakeholders with the aim of capacity building and expanding their networks' reach in addressing election-related conflicts.

2. Increase advocacy and sensitisation to encourage greater participation of women and youth in election-related conflict management processes, especially in Garissa County.

3. Place particular emphasis on programming in Lamu, to address the heightened risk of election-related violence in the County.

4. Increase support for communities, in terms of building skills that will enable them to promote peaceful coexistence through peace committees and civic education on electoral-related conflicts, without the need for considerable external support.

5. Encourage CSOs, NGOs and other stakeholders to collaborate across counties, to avoid duplicating roles and responsibilities, boost their capacity, and increase their coverage and influence.

6. Boost the capacity of traditional and digital media in monitoring and addressing election related hate speech and misinformation.

7. Build a broad engagement with the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission in partnership with local CSOs, NGOs and other stakeholders with the hope of engaging in civic education, in order to make people aware of their voting rights and sensitise them on the role of the IEBC.

8. Improve the early warning system through complementarity with KECOSCE.

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