

## REACHING BEHIND FRONTLINES: PROMOTING EXIT FROM AL-SHABAAB THROUGH COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS

This fact sheet presents findings from the RESOLVE Network research report, "[\*Reaching Behind Frontlines: Promoting Exit from al-Shabaab through Communications Campaigns\*](#)," by James Khalil, Yahye Abdi, Andrew Glazzard, Abdullahi Ahmed Nor, and Martine Zeuthen. This report is based upon research conducted in the context of a Somali state offensive in the Federal Member States of Hirshabelle and Galmudug that generated more territorial gains from al-Shabaab than any other military campaign since the mid-2010s. Such conditions provide fertile ground for disengagement from the insurgents, with many ex-members enrolled into the National Program for the Treatment and Handling of Disengaged Combatants. A core element of this program is its communications pillar, which seeks to promote disengagement through a variety of channels, including radio, television, social media, phone conversations, leaflets, and word-of-mouth. The aim of the research is to inform these campaigns, drawing from interviews conducted in May 2023 with former members of al-Shabaab at the Serendi center in Mogadishu.

For more, see: Khalil, James and Yahye Abdi, Andrew Glazzard, Abdullahi Ahmed Nor, and Martine Zeuthen. [\*Reaching Behind Frontlines: Promoting Exit from al-Shabaab through Communications Campaigns\*](#). RESOLVE Network, 2023.

## KEY FINDINGS

1

While communications heavily influenced exits from al-Shabaab, the common distinction between counter and alternative narratives poorly reflects the content of communications designed to encourage and/or facilitate disengagement from the group.

2

Communications with family members via phone conversations, and from political leaders via radio broadcasts, played a pivotal role in influencing disengagement. Former members of al-Shabaab also played a key role in influencing exit, both via radio broadcasts and through direct contact with current members.

3

When compared with other communications channels, radio broadcasts and phone conversations were regarded as the most influential in decisions to exit al-Shabaab.

4

The National Program hotline appears to have a limited direct impact on al-Shabaab members (although indirect impact cannot be ruled out).

# POLICY CONSIDERATIONS



## **Continue to rely on communications via radio and phone conversations:**

Efforts to reach current al-Shabaab members should continue to primarily revolve around radio and phone conversations. Despite the fact that al-Shabaab restricts access to these channels, these remain by far the most accessible.



## **Continue to leverage political leaders and families as key messengers:**

Political leaders have influenced decisions to disengage by raising awareness of the National Program via radio broadcasts, while family members have helped to encourage and facilitate exit from al-Shabaab via phone conversations.



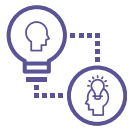
## **Continue to explore the possibility of communications through formers:**

Former members of al-Shabaab achieved influence both through recounting their 'success stories' of disengagement and reintegration on the radio, and by convincing members to disengage directly through private phone conversations.



## **Adopt the revised classification system of communications content:**

Those responsible for communications should adopt a classification system that includes communications designed to motivate disengagement through personal incentives and disincentives, to help frame the design of their campaigns, and as a framework through which to analyze their effectiveness.



## **Increase information flows from former al-Shabaab members to campaign designers:**

Donors and government officials should allow those tasked with designing campaigns to pre-test their planned campaigns through focus group discussions with current former members of al-Shabaab, or allow designers to insert questions about communications into the instruments used to collect data from recent defectors.



## **Conduct additional research with family members:**

Additional research with parents, siblings, spouses, and other family members should focus on their access to channels, the nature of communications on these channels, and which communication 'types' most often influence them to encourage the exit of al-Shabaab members.

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