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From Regional Response to Regional Resilience: A Hard Look at SADC's Security Gaps and the Imperative for Preventive Action

The 28th Ordinary Meeting of the SADC Ministerial Committee of the Organ (MCO) in Salima, Malawi, on 16–17 July 2026, takes place at a decisive moment for regional peace and security. It is the first such meeting after the conclusion of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) in mid-2024 and the withdrawal of the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC) in March 2025. Through these missions, SADC gained significant operational experience in countering violent extremism. However, the missions also exposed the limits of military operations because the gains were uneven, financing was uncertain and insurgencies resurfaced once forces withdrew. This underscores the need to accelerate a shift from reactive responses to preventive measures.

The changing threat environment

This brief argues for a strengthened stand-alone Regional Framework on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE), modelled on the preventive institutional architectures developed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ([ASEAN](#)) and the European Union ([EU](#)). Such a framework would complement SADC's existing [Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Plan of Action](#) by filling the prevention gap in a more actionable manner. The existing strategy is housed within the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, which prioritises military and police responses, an institutional location that makes prevention a rhetorical annexure rather than a core operational pillar. The SADC Regional Counter-Terrorism Centre ([RCTC](#)) is mandated to coordinate regional counter-terrorism and P/CVE efforts, but available public evidence suggests that its operational visibility, funding base and convening power remain limited which raises questions about how effectively it functions as a sustained prevention hub.

The proposed shift is essential because the region's security environment has [changed](#) markedly over the past decade. Early regional efforts focused largely on responding to peace and security crises, with the immediate priority being the restoration of territorial security. Today, violent extremism is more complex, with extremist groups operating through cross-border recruitment networks, digital platforms, terrorist financing and links to transnational organised crime. In view of SADC's recent experience in Mozambique and the DRC, these changes show that while military intervention remains essential in responding to active insurgencies, it cannot by itself address the conditions that fuel radicalisation and extremism. Long-term regional security increasingly depends on prevention, stronger community resilience, effective early-warning systems and coordinated action that tackles the root causes of violent extremism.

From response to prevention

Drawing lessons from [SAMIM](#) and SAMIDRC in Mozambique and the DRC, respectively, it is critical for SADC to transition from reactive crisis response to proactive prevention. Both missions helped stabilise active conflict situations, but they could not eliminate extremist ideology or address the socio-economic grievances that fuelled recruitment in affected countries. Hence, without a prevention architecture, the region risks repeating the cycle of insurgency resurgence seen in Mozambique and the DRC.

Lessons from [ASEAN's Plan of Action](#) (2018–2025), the EU [Knowledge Hub](#) on Prevention of Radicalisation, and African Union DDR-CVE guidance show that prevention frameworks can institutionalise resilience, reduce recruitment, and sustain peace. ASEAN's Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (2018–2025) adopts a whole-of-society approach by operationalising prevention across 19 sectoral bodies, with strong emphasis on deradicalisation and community policing. The EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation and its rehabilitation and reintegration protocols take a [multi-stakeholder approach](#), linking prisons, schools, religious institutions, and nongovernmental organisations within a broader prevention architecture. This kind of approach is still largely absent in the SADC region unless prevention is made a core pillar of its security agenda.

These frameworks, however, are not transferable without substantial qualification. ASEAN benefits from decades of institutionalised cooperation, relatively stable bureaucratic systems and consensus-based decision-making that, while slow, is backed by operational budgets and permanent secretariats. The European Union spends billions annually on internal security and prevention and its [Radicalisation Awareness Network](#) was built over more than a decade of sustained investment and cross-border policy learning.

SADC operates under fundamentally different constraints. The region's security architecture has expanded through defence cooperation, intelligence sharing, policing and peace support operations. However, prevention has not evolved at the same pace as response. It remains fragmented and mission-specific, which makes the region's peace and security gains more irregular and less sustainable. In Mozambique, SAMIM [stabilised](#) Cabo Delgado but it failed to sufficiently consolidate those gains before withdrawal, [leaving a fragile security](#) situation. In the DRC, SAMIDRC became a reactive [high-risk](#) deployment without adequate logistics or financing. Contributory factors to these failures were that the Peace Fund was effectively depleted and both SAMIM and SAMIDRC were sustained through ad-hoc member contributions and bilateral donor support rather than predictable regional financing. Additionally, sovereignty sensitivities ran deep and will likely affect interventions in religious affairs, education curricula, and digital surveillance, all areas that prevention frameworks inevitably touch.

Meanwhile, extremist groups continue to exploit porous borders, online platforms, and socio-economic marginalisation to expand their violent operations, including recruitment and logistics. The [UN Global Programme](#) and the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2016) recommend a range of interventions to counter online radicalisation, including youth empowerment projects and technical support for national PVE action plans.

Policy direction

SADC's 28th Ministerial Committee must seize this moment to institutionalise prevention by building a framework that reduces radicalisation before it escalates. Other regions have already embedded prevention into their security architectures, moving away from reactive securitised approaches toward non-traditional security measures grounded in socio-economic considerations. By adopting a standalone Regional P/CVE Framework, strengthening community resilience, and ensuring sustainable financing, SADC can move beyond crisis management toward long-term resilience.

Specific recommendations for SADC

- Develop a standalone regional P/CVE framework that institutionalises prevention as a core security pillar, drawing on ASEAN's Plan of Action and AU DDR-CVE guidance.
- Strengthen community resilience by investing in partnerships with faith leaders, traditional authorities, and school networks as trusted actors for prevention messaging. This approach can be piloted in selected border districts where extremist recruitment is most active.
- Strengthen civil society and research partnerships by leveraging universities, think tanks, and NGOs for evidence-based policymaking and early warning. This should be formalised through the region's Community of Practice hosted by the SADC Secretariat and linked to civil society's Regional Knowledge Platform on P/CVE.
- Develop a regional digital prevention strategy for online counter-radicalisation. This can draw on UN P/CVE modules, including training youth ambassadors to produce credible counter-narratives.

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