

## The role of cities in preventing and countering violent extremism in East and West Africa

An assessment report for the Strong Cities Network  
Prepared by the Global Center on Cooperative Security

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### Strong Cities Network (SCN)

Launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, the SCN is the first ever global network of local policymakers and practitioners working together to build social cohesion and resilience to counter violent extremism in all its forms. With a membership of more than 100 cities drawn from every major global region, it is led and facilitated by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD). For more information, visit [www.strongcitiesnetwork.org](http://www.strongcitiesnetwork.org) or email [info@strongcitiesnetwork.org](mailto:info@strongcitiesnetwork.org).



## Introduction

There is increasing recognition among the international community that local officials and practitioners can play a crucial role in addressing conditions that create an enabling environment for violent extremism to thrive. A growing number of cities are developing strategies and initiatives that address radicalization and violent extremism, for example, in Dakar, Senegal; Mombasa, Kenya; or in Bamako, Mali.

Recognizing and building on these efforts, the first SCN Regional Practitioners' Workshop was held in Dakar, Senegal on 9-10 March 2017. The workshop was hosted by the city of Dakar in collaboration and led by the Global Center on Cooperative Security (Global Center) and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD). The workshop brought together city officials and practitioners to share best practice and experience and engage with in-depth training on local action planning for CVE. Participants represented 15 cities from 10 countries across West Africa, the Sahel, and the Greater Horn of Africa: Kousseri and Waza Reserve (Cameroon); Tadjourah (Djibouti); Kwale, Lamu, Mombasa (Kenya); Bamako (Mali); Kiffa (Mauritania); Diffa, Naimey (Niger); Kano State, Lagos (Nigeria); Zanzibar (Tanzania); and Kampala (Uganda).

This assessment report draws largely on the discussions during the two-day Dakar workshop around the challenges, opportunities, and needs for cities and local officials in the region to address the threat of

violent extremism. The report is also informed by research and analysis from both scholarly and practitioners' reports on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in Africa, including a number of previous regional assessments undertaken by the Global Center.<sup>1</sup> The report concludes with a set of recommendations on how cities and local officials can be supported in their P/CVE efforts in the region.

## Violent Extremism in West Africa, the Sahel, and the Greater Horn of Africa

The continent continues to face a number of security challenges, including in Libya, Mali, Nigeria, the Lake Chad Basin, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Primarily through the actions of Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and affiliates, violent extremism poses a threat to security in the region and impedes development and socioeconomic prospects for many countries in the region. Violent extremist groups have transformed traditional and cultural practices and fostered ideas and actions that foment social tensions and intolerance, strain relationships between communities and the state, and constrain the space for dialogue and development. According to the Global Terrorism Index (2016), a number of countries from Africa suffer the highest impact of terrorism, including Nigeria, Somalia, Cameroon, Niger, Kenya, and Mali.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, hard security responses to terrorism and violent extremism continue to dominate across the continent, which can be counterproductive and add to existing grievances against the state when counterterrorism operations disregard rule of law and human rights.<sup>3</sup>

### Greater Horn of Africa

In the discussion of contemporary violent extremism and terrorism, the Horn of Africa figures among the most problem-prone areas. Many observers tend to associate the difficulty facing this region with the collapse of the Somali state and the region's close proximity to the conflict-affected Middle East.<sup>4</sup> One of the long-standing and urgent threat stems from al-Shabaab, the Somali-based extremist group allied to Al-Qaeda. Other threats to stability in the region emanate from separatist movements such as the FRUD-C in Djibouti and Eritrea.<sup>5</sup> While these latter groups are not necessarily extremist organizations per se, there

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<sup>1</sup> See Eelco Kessels, Tracey Durner and Matthew Schwartz, "Violent Extremism and Instability in the Greater Horn of Africa: An Examination of Drivers and Responses," Global Center on Cooperative Security, April 2016, [http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GCCS\\_VIOLENT-EXTREMISM\\_low\\_3.pdf](http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GCCS_VIOLENT-EXTREMISM_low_3.pdf); Global Center on Cooperative Security, Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Community Resilience in the Greater Horn of Africa: An Action Agenda, May 2015, [http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/HoA\\_Action\\_Agenda\\_Low\\_Res.pdf](http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/HoA_Action_Agenda_Low_Res.pdf); Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation et al., Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Community Engagement in West Africa and the Sahel: An Action Agenda, July 2013; <http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Action-Agenda-ENG.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> These countries rank as follows: Nigeria (3), Somalia (7), Cameroon (13), Niger (16), Kenya (19); and Mali (25) Institute for Economics and Peace, "Global Terrorism Index 2016," November 2016,

<http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2016.2.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Anton Du Plessis and Simon Allison, "How Africa Can Win the War on Islamist Militants," *Newsweek*, 18 March 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/africa-terrorism-islamist-boko-haram-al-shabab-aqim-569560>

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Phillips, J (2002) Somalia and al-Qaeda: Implications for the war on terrorism, Background #1526, Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup> See, UN Security Council, Letter Dated 18 July 2011 From the Chairman of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council,

are concerns that “continued oppression of the opposition and lack of democratic reform could lead to potent grievances that may be exploited by violent groups.”<sup>6</sup>

Kenya represents the major commercial hub in the region. Nevertheless, underlying political, social, and economic challenges have contributed to an enabling environment for violence and violent extremism. Kenya’s stability is threatened by al-Shabaab and its sympathizers, whose attacks are increasingly frequent and deadly, coupled with interethnic rivalries, periodically erupting in violence around the election season.<sup>7</sup> Al-Shabaab is also a terrorist threat to Uganda, primarily due to Uganda’s involvement in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In addition, the Lord’s Resistance Army, a rebel movement led by Joseph Kony, constitutes another source of instability in the region and particularly in Uganda. Major terrorist incidents in Uganda include the 2010 twin blasts attack in Kampala in which over 70 people were killed and scores injured.<sup>8</sup>

While it has experienced fewer instances of violence than its conflict-affected neighbors, Djibouti is actively involved in regional counterterrorism efforts. Djibouti’s first notable al-Shabaab terrorist attack occurred on May 24, 2014, when a female assailant detonated her suicide vest and a male attacker threw a grenade and detonated his suicide vest at a restaurant in downtown Djibouti patronized predominantly by expatriates.<sup>9</sup> Al-Shabaab has since expressed its intent to initiate similar attacks against Djiboutian and Western targets in Djibouti.<sup>10</sup>

With the exception of the al-Shabaab US embassy bombing of 1998, Tanzania has not experienced any large-scale terrorist attack. Some small-scale attacks have nonetheless been perpetrated by local groups advocating for the incorporation of Sharia law into the Tanzanian legal framework. Other incidents include a 2014 bomb explosion in Arusha in which 15 individuals sustained injuries, and an ambush by members of a local Islamist militia at a police station in the Geita region.<sup>11</sup> The assailants, who were later apprehended and questioned by police, confessed that the attack was undertaken to secure weapons from the police for future attacks.<sup>12</sup>

## West Africa and the Sahel

While al-Shabaab stands as the predominant group in the Horn of Africa, Boko Haram is considered to be the major threat to peace and stability around the Lake Chad Basin, including northeast Nigeria, Cameroon’s far north and Niger’s Diffa region. The group’s actions have also contributed to one of the gravest humanitarian crises in the region, in which over 10.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, including over 2 million displaced people.<sup>13</sup> Although the group has been operational in Nigeria

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S/2011/433, 18 July 2011, p. 74. [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2013\\_440.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2013_440.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Eelco Kessels et al., “Violent Extremism and Instability in the Greater Horn of Africa: An Examination of Drivers and Responses” April 2016, [http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GCCS\\_VIOLENT-EXTREMISM\\_low\\_3.pdf](http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GCCS_VIOLENT-EXTREMISM_low_3.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>8</sup> “Somali militants claim responsibility for Uganda bombings” CNN. 12 July 2010.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/07/12/uganda.bombings/>

<sup>9</sup> “Deadly attack on Djibouti restaurant” BBC. 25 May 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27561856>

<sup>10</sup> “Al-Shabaab Planning Attacks in Djibouti, Says Foreign Office,” Agence France-Presse, 12 June 2014,

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/12/somali-insurgents-al-shabaab-planning-attacks-djibouti>

<sup>11</sup> “Explosion in northern Tanzania bar injures 15 people” Reuters. 14 April 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-tanzania-blast-idUSBREA3DONI20140414>

<sup>12</sup> “2 killed, 2 injured in Tanzania police station attack” *Finland Times*. 08 September 2014

<http://www.finlandtimes.fi/worldwide/2014/09/08/9884/2-killed,-2-injured-in-Tanzania-police-station-attack>

<sup>13</sup> UN Security Council, “Visiting Mission to the Lake Chad Basin” 28 March 2017, [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-03/visiting\\_mission\\_to\\_the\\_lake\\_chad\\_basin\\_region.php](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-03/visiting_mission_to_the_lake_chad_basin_region.php)

since 2002, it gained worldwide attention in 2014 with the kidnapping of 272 school girls in the northern town of Chibok. The onset of the insurgency was characterized by the direct confrontation between Boko Haram members and security forces. Two years later the group changed its tactics to attacking vulnerable civilians.<sup>14</sup> For example, on June 30, 2014, elements of Boko Haram killed the local chief of the Magdene, in the Mayo Sava Division, who was accused by the group of being an informant for the national security forces.<sup>15</sup>

Bordered by Nigeria in the south, Mali in the west, and Chad in the east, Niger has not escaped the spillover of terrorism and violent extremism from surrounding states. Apart from Boko Haram, another threat stems from AQIM militants in the northwest. Some of the high-profile terrorist incidents in Niger recently include the ambush by Boko Haram insurgents of Nigerien soldiers in the city of Bosso, a small town in the Diffa region, which resulted in the death of 30 Nigerien soldiers and 2 Nigerian soldiers and wounding 67 others.<sup>16</sup> The Diffa region is also dealing with a large influx of people fleeing Boko Haram's violence, with over 130,000 people settling along a paved section of a desert highway.<sup>17</sup> Other regions close to the Malian border like Tillabery and Tahoua have witnessed attacks on army posts and refugee camps by Movement for Oneness and Jihad on West Africa (MUJAO).<sup>18</sup>

Despite the government's efforts to restore peace and order in some parts of the country since the 2012 coup, Mali remains a cradle of internecine strife and violence perpetrated by a number of different groups and movements. Among the most active violent extremist groups in Mali are Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its affiliates, MUJAO, and Ansar al-Dine (ADD). Notably, in November 2015, a group of AQIM militants overtook the Radisson Blu Hotel, in Bamako, where over 100 individuals were taken hostage and 20 others killed. Prior to the 2015 Radisson Blu Hotel siege, terrorist operations were mostly directed towards UN personnel at the United Nations Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Malian security forces and French soldiers deployed since the military intervention in 2013.

While much of the attention has been on northern Mali, there are reports of increasing presence of violent extremist groups that have tried to capitalize on the state's lack of legitimacy in the center of the country, including in areas like Mopti, Ténenkou, Youwarou and Douentza, and the north of the Ségou region, close to the border with Mauritania.<sup>19</sup> This is a worrying trend as a number of violent extremist groups in the Sahel region, including AQIM and Boko Haram, are increasingly "using bases in the countryside to strike at provincial and district centres, often forcing national armies to retreat and local state authorities to abandon immense rural areas" under their control.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the Lake Chad Basin and Mali, Mauritania and Senegal have not been significantly impacted by violent extremism. Nevertheless, there is wariness over the prospects of a spill-over effect. In

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<sup>14</sup> International crisis group, "Cameroon: Confronting Boko haram" Africa Report No 243. 16 November 2016, p. ii <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroon-confronting-boko-haram>

<sup>15</sup> "Boko Haram attacks Cameroon with Kidnapped girls" Aljazeera. 1 April 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/weakened-boko-haram-sends-girl-bombers-cameroon-160331175822717.html>

<sup>16</sup> "Boko Haram attack in Niger 'kills 32 soldiers'" Aljazeera. 4 June 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/boko-haram-attack-niger-kills-32-soldiers-nigeria-160604125912477.html>

<sup>17</sup> Dionne Searcey, "Fleeing Boko Haram, Thousands Cling to a Road to Nowhere," *The New York Times*, 30 March 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/03/30/world/africa/the-road-to-nowhere-niger.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fworld&action=click&contentCollection=world&region=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=sectionfront>

<sup>18</sup> "Niger declares emergency in areas flanking restive Mali," *Enca*, 4 March 2017, <http://www.enca.com/africa/niger-declares-emergency-in-areas-flanking-restive-mali>

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group, "Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?" 6 July 2016, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/central-mali-an-uprising-in-the-making.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> International Crisis Group, "Forced out of Towns in the Sahel, Africa's Jihadists Go Rural," 11 January 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/forced-out-towns-sahel-africas-jihadists-go-rural>

Mauritania, like most places in the Sahel, the threat largely comes from AQIM. Mauritania is recognized as a prominent actor against Islamist extremism both within its borders and across the region, countering the spread of violent extremism in the Sahel. While Senegal has not experienced any incidents of domestic terrorism, the threat of violent extremism is often attributed to the expansion of groups active in neighboring Mali and Nigeria, particularly the influence of Boko Haram and broader radical Islamist threats. There are also reports that small numbers of fighters from Mauritania, Senegal, Sudan, and Chad exist among Boko Haram's ranks.<sup>21</sup>

## Building resilience of African cities to prevent and counter violent extremism

African cities are actively involved in national, regional, and international efforts to build stronger, more resilient cities. Cities across West Africa and the Sahel, with support from UN Habitat, have developed structural plans to address the challenges of rapid urbanization, notably in Yaoundé, Bamako, Ouagadougou, and Abidjan. In particular, the UN-Habitat Safer Cities Program, which was launched in 1996, pursuant to the request of several African Mayors for strategies to combat urban crime and violence, stands out.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the African Forum for Urban Security (AFUS) was launched in November 2015 on the sidelines of the Africities2015 summit in Durban, South Africa. It is envisioned that AFUS would work closely with the United Cities and Local Government Association (UCLG) – Africa and the Africa Union (AU) and its subsidiary bodies “to enhance the role of local authorities as complementary actors to national governments through the development and implementation of regional guidelines on safer cities.”<sup>23</sup>

It is crucial to integrate initiatives and programs aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism in these and other city-level resilience building efforts to reduce the social and economic impact of attacks, while saving resources in the long run.<sup>24</sup> Local authorities can help address the drivers of violent extremism through programming that has explicit secondary benefits of reducing local grievances that contribute to the spread of violent extremism. They can identify early signs of violent extremism in their locales, help in police-community trust building efforts, and facilitate multi-agency prevention efforts that include a “whole-of-city” approach that works with families, community leaders, social workers, and mental health professionals.<sup>25</sup> Local authorities, with support from national governments and civil society organizations, can also develop programs that offer alternatives to alienated youth and others who might otherwise be attracted to violence, for instance, through outreach and reconciliation efforts to “help communal divisions and dispel mutual suspicion” between local and national governments.<sup>26</sup> Local authorities can

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<sup>21</sup> International Crisis Group, “Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State,” March 2016, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/exploiting-disorder-al-qaeda-and-the-islamic-state.pdf>, p. 22

<sup>22</sup> UN Habitat, “Safer Cities Programme,” <https://unhabitat.org/urban-initiatives/initiatives-programmes/safer-cities/>

<sup>23</sup> UN Habitat, “Africa Forum for Urban Safety Launched,” 1 December 2015, <https://unhabitat.org/africa-forum-for-urban-safety-launched/>

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Odierno and Michael O’Hanlon, “Securing Global Cities: Best Practices, Innovation, and the Path Ahead,” Brookings Institution and JPMorgan Chase, March 2017, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/fp\\_201703\\_securing\\_global\\_cities.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/fp_201703_securing_global_cities.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Eric Rosand and Ian Klaus, “It happens on the pavement: Putting cities at the center of countering violent extremism,” Brookings, 1 June 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2016/06/01-cities-countering-violent-extremism-rosand-klaus>

<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group, “Kenya’s Coast: Devolution Disappointed,” 13 July 2016, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/kenya-s-coast-devolution-disappointed.pdf>

also help to build social harmony by shaping peaceful narratives reinforcing a common identity and shared values among citizens.

However, local authorities often feel isolated and sidelined from discussions and decision-making around national security issues, given national governments' monopoly on the use of force, foreign policy, and resilience building. Nevertheless, national governments would do well to ensure local authorities have a stake in security provision and allow them the political leadership and required resources to address the threat based on their local knowledge and understanding of the situation.

Established out of growing international recognition and consensus of the role of local officials in P/CVE, the SCN aims to strengthen their capacity to better understand and address the drivers and grievances that contribute to their community members becoming radicalized and to take corrective steps in this regard.<sup>27</sup> During the two-day SCN Regional Practitioners' Workshop in Dakar, city representatives highlighted various policy developments and innovative programs and initiatives being undertaken at the local government level to address the threat of violent extremism, either directly or indirectly. While some of the local practitioners who participated in the workshop were not directly involved in CVE policy and programming, they contribute in some way to building resilience by tackling drivers of violent extremism in their communities. These include community and youth engagement programs, development initiatives, and promoting civic activism and good governance.

Kenya's devolution in 2010 not only helped to improve service delivery and equity in public resource allocation, but also diluted the political stakes to the creation of local positions with real power.<sup>28</sup> County governments in Kenya, such as Lamu, Kwale, and Mombasa have seized this opportunity provided by the decentralization to create their own CVE action plans and programs. Kwale was the first county to develop a local CVE strategy, which was jointly produced by the office of the County Commissioner and Human Rights Agenda (HURIA), a local civil society organization, and was launched in February 2017.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Mombasa's 'Mothers of Mombasa' program provides support and training for mothers whose children are being targeted for recruitment, whilst the city's 'Blackrock Sports Program' builds soccer fields that offer alternatives for youths, particularly those vulnerable to al-Shabaab recruitment.

A number of cities also focus on youth engagement activities. The city of Dakar's Volunteer Program engages more than 500 young people who are trained as mediators between local neighborhoods, the municipality, and security forces. The program also includes broad-based discussion about terrorism and radicalization across local radio services which has helped the young mediators identify and intervene when they see early warning signs of violence. In Diffa, Niger, leaders are promoting resistance to instability and extremism among youth and generating dialogue among local authorities, communities, and marginalized groups.

Kiffa, the second largest city in Mauritania, has undertaken income generating and poverty reduction programs and youth engagement activities related to religion, culture, and sports in an effort to address some of the conditions that attract or make young people vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist groups. For example, religious awareness and training sessions are facilitated among young people and religious leaders to discuss topics related to fundamentalism. As part of its sports program, the

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<sup>27</sup> Eric Rosand and Ian Klaus, "It happens on the pavement: Putting cities at the center of countering violent extremism," Brookings, 1 June 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2016/06/01-cities-countering-violent-extremism-rosand-klaus>

<sup>28</sup> John Aglionby, "Kenya backs devolution to defuse political tensions," *Financial Times*, 8 January 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/17e8d1c2-a73b-11e6-8b69-02899e8bd9d1>

<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Agenda, "Kwale County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism," February 2017, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314119072\\_Kwale\\_County\\_Plan\\_for\\_Countering\\_Violent\\_Extremism\\_The\\_first\\_of\\_its\\_kind\\_in\\_Kenya\\_by\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Agenda](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314119072_Kwale_County_Plan_for_Countering_Violent_Extremism_The_first_of_its_kind_in_Kenya_by_Human_Rights_Agenda)

municipality has set up a football tournament, the ‘Mayor’s Cup,’ that also incorporates awareness-raising campaigns around various themes such as violent extremism, drug trafficking, and rape.

Local authorities also play an important role in helping to improve national transparency and accountability mechanisms, which helps to strengthen relationships and build trust between citizens and the government (both local and national). For example, in Kano, Nigeria’s second largest city and a major commercial hub, a participatory budgeting approach was implemented to ensure that communities have a say in how government budgets and international donor investments are prioritized based on their needs and concerns.

Civil society also plays an important role in CVE and can help to support city and municipal level in their efforts to build more resilience societies. For example, a Cameroonian civil society organization is working with cities across the country on a campaign called ‘Cameraction for Peace’ to celebrate the country’s vibrant history and cultural diversity and inspire civic responsibility through various means of communication, including media and special events. Youth alliances were also established in Zanzibar, Tanzania, to build the P/CVE capacity of youth and to facilitate dialogue among youth, community members, religious leaders, and local and national authorities.

## Challenges to addressing violent extremism at the local level

While many local officials are enthusiastic about safeguarding their cities against violent extremism and acknowledge their role in this regard, during the Dakar workshop it was highlighted that cities and municipalities are often left out of the discussions on counterterrorism and P/CVE due to the centralized form of governance in many countries and the fact that many national governments continue to believe that they should retain a monopoly over security issues. Participants also noted that national governments are responsible for many issues that drive local grievances in the region, such as underdevelopment, lack of jobs, education, poor governance, and abuses by security agencies. These and other challenges are highlighted below but it should be noted that many of these are not only barriers to P/CVE efforts, but to building sustainable, peaceful, and resilient cities and communities as a whole.

### Weak national and local government structures

Local practitioners at the SCN workshop expressed concern that cities and municipalities across the region are poorly equipped to respond to or prevent the spread of extremist ideology. They noted the limitations and weakness of formal structures and mechanisms required to develop a coordinated and multifaceted response to the threat of violent extremism. The lack of formal structures also limits effective communication between national and local authorities and hinders community perspectives from being reflected into national security policy.<sup>30</sup> For example, the porous border and the state’s persistent absence from the areas around the Lake Chad Basin, along the Mali-Niger border, and in central Mali, has contributed to an environment in which violent extremist groups are able to expand their presence and influence.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, practitioners at the workshop asserted that manipulation and corruption of elected officials weakened public trust in local institutions subsequently playing into the hands of extremist groups’ rhetoric.

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<sup>30</sup> Eric Rosand, “It’s time to use local assets in the global campaign against ISIS,” Brookings Institute, March 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/03/20/its-time-to-use-local-assets-in-the-global-campaign-against-isis/>

<sup>31</sup> International Crisis Group, “Forced out of Towns in the Sahel, Africa’s Jihadists Go Rural,” 11 January 2017, [https://www.crisisgroup.org/search?text=rural&lang=All&daterange=All&datefrom=month=January&datefrom\\_year=2017&dateto=month=January&dateto\\_year=2017&total\\_item=0](https://www.crisisgroup.org/search?text=rural&lang=All&daterange=All&datefrom=month=January&datefrom_year=2017&dateto=month=January&dateto_year=2017&total_item=0)

## Socioeconomic and political grievances

A number of socioeconomic and political factors in the region combine to create an enabling environment that push individuals toward violent extremism. The Boko Haram movement, for instance, was “rooted in the marginalized political economy and structural violence of northern Nigeria.”<sup>32</sup> Across the region, systemic socio-political marginalization and disenfranchisement, limited economic mobility and relative deprivation, institutionalized systems of corruption and patronage, inequality, and limited political or legal avenues of recourse for grievances are compounded by challenges of chronic underdevelopment and weak governance.<sup>33</sup> A lack of socio-economic infrastructure and a tendency on the part of national governments to overlook certain regions make these challenges all the more difficult to address.

Even in countries like Mauritania and Senegal that have not witnessed significant attacks, practitioners expressed concern that a growing number of radical Islamists might seek to exploit these socioeconomic and political grievances and vulnerability of citizens as a way of gaining recruits and support to their cause. Other practitioners pointed out that ideology does not represent a significant driver of violent extremism in the region. For example, city representatives from Cameroon and Kenya noted that many cases of individuals joining violent extremist groups were more akin to human trafficking, with false promises of a job, leaving individual with no choice but to join these groups, often for fear of adverse repercussions on the individual’s family. Additionally, those who join for financial or material benefits may be driven by push factors like poverty, unemployment, or other forms of economic hardship, in addition to environmental and other individual factors.<sup>34</sup>

## Rapid urbanization and youth bulge

An unprecedented acceleration of urbanization is sweeping across the continent, promising significant challenges for already often overcrowded and under-resourced cities. In fact, Africa is urbanizing faster than any other region, with the United Nations estimating that Africa will cease to be predominantly rural by 2030.<sup>35</sup> Added to this is the growing concern over a burgeoning youth population and fear of criminality among the youth, particularly those who feel marginalized, often seen as a potential push factor towards violent extremism. Youth unemployment and idleness was a recurring theme of vulnerability noted by all 15 cities in attendance at the SCN Dakar workshop. For example, in Nigeria, more than 60% of the population is below the age of 35 while in Kenya youth make up the 75% of the 2.3 million currently unemployed.<sup>36</sup> Outside of Kenya’s central region, the unemployment rate is estimated to be two times higher in the coast and three times in the northeast region comparatively.<sup>37</sup> It was noted that in Dakar the unemployment rate is 16% higher than the national average.

## Intercommunal violence

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<sup>32</sup> International Crisis Group, “Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State,” March 2016, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/exploiting-disorder-al-qaeda-and-the-islamic-state.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Eelco Kessels et al., “Violent Extremism and Instability in the Greater Horn of Africa: An Examination of Drivers and Responses” April 2016, [http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GCCS\\_VIOLENT-EXTREMISM\\_low\\_3.pdf](http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GCCS_VIOLENT-EXTREMISM_low_3.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “The Safe Cities Index 2015: Assessing urban security in the digital age,” The economist, 2015, [http://safecities.economist.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/01/EIU\\_Safe\\_Cities\\_Index\\_2015\\_white\\_paper-1.pdf](http://safecities.economist.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/01/EIU_Safe_Cities_Index_2015_white_paper-1.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Nigeria.” Cia.gov. Central Intelligence Agency, n.d. web 03/17/2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

Violent extremist groups are adept at understanding and adapting to local circumstances and have been known to settle down in rural communities and manipulate local intra- and intercommunal tensions.<sup>38</sup> For example, in central Mali and the Lake Chad islands, violent extremist groups have offered protection and other services to local groups and have been able to extend their influence, develop local roots, and recruit new affiliates.<sup>39</sup> It was also reported that Boko Haram's presence in the Diffa region has aggravated intercommunal tensions, leading to deadly conflicts since May 2016.<sup>40</sup> It was also pointed out that long-running ethnic disputes, generally between the Fulani nomadic herders and settled farmers, are among the core drivers of violence, often centred on land disputes. Estimates put the violence resulting from the Fulani conflict as equal in terms of numbers and ferocity to that of Boko Haram.<sup>41</sup> There are concerns that this conflict could be exploited by violent extremist groups like Boko Haram for their own purposes, but there remains no significant evidence in this regard.

## Informal and unregulated religious schools

Practitioners also shared concerns over the large number of informal and unregulated *madrassas* (religious schools), which they claim could be infiltrated by violent extremist elements to promote intolerance and recruit young people to their cause. In cities such as Kano and Kaduna in Nigeria, there are large numbers of boys (*Almajiris*) who have been sent by their families to religious schools to study the Quran but end up being sent by their schools to beg on the streets. Many of them get involved in gangs and may be susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups like Boko Haram, which is known to provide financial incentives to poor and unemployment youth in return for their support.<sup>42</sup>

## Adverse impact of climate change

A number of practitioners noted the impact of climate change as a driver of instability in the region. Failing to adequately protect citizens from hardships and disasters related to climate change can "trigger frustration, lead to tensions between different ethnic and religious groups within countries and to political radicalization."<sup>43</sup> This is particularly true in many parts of Africa that are highly dependent on farming and agriculture or are witnessing heavy urbanization. The Lake Chad Basin, for example, has witnessed significant negative impact of climate change including through water scarcity, drought, desertification, land degradation, and food insecurity. These effects underscore the "need for adequate risk assessments and risk management strategies" by governments and other regional and international stakeholders relating to these factors.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> International Crisis Group, "Forced out of Towns in the Sahel, Africa's Jihadists Go Rural," 11 January 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/forced-out-towns-sahel-africas-jihadists-go-rural>

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> International Crisis Group, "Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-insurgency," 27 February 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/niger/245-niger-and-boko-haram-beyond-counter-insurgency>

<sup>41</sup> Andrew McGregor, "The Fulani Crisis: Communal Violence and Radicalization in the Sahel," Combating Terrorism Center, 22 February 2017, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-fulani-crisis-communal-violence-and-radicalization-in-the-sahel>

<sup>42</sup> Patricio Asfura-Heim and Julia McQuaid, "Diagnosing the Boko Haram Conflict: Grievances, Motivations, and Institutional Resilience in Northeast Nigeria," Center for Naval Analyses, January 2015, [https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/PDF/DOP-2014-U-009272-Final.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DOP-2014-U-009272-Final.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Addressing radicalization and violent extremism through climate action," 14 November 2016, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2016/11/14/Enfrentando-la-radicalizaci-n-y-el-extremismo-violento-a-trav-s-de-la-acci-n-clim-tica.html>

<sup>44</sup> UN Security Council, S/RES/2349, 31 March 2017, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2349\(2017\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2349(2017))

## Recommendations

1. ***Recognize and involve cities and local authorities as powerful partners in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.*** National governments should recognize that cities are strategic partners in addressing violent extremism as they are already implementing a wide range of related initiatives in their communities that seek to address the drivers and grievances that often contribute to violent extremism, such as programs related to social cohesion, resilience building, peacebuilding, and conflict/violence prevention. At the local level, authorities should explore how to best accommodate P/CVE initiatives within these existing frameworks and initiatives. Donors and other stakeholders could support these efforts through the provision of specialized training and capacity building for local authorities, for example. At the national level, governments should include local authorities and community-based organizations in the development of national action plans and strategies aimed at addressing terrorism and violent extremism and ensure that they have the authority and necessary resources for implementation. These efforts could have a larger attendant benefit of helping to formalize or strengthen existing structures and mechanisms between local, state, and national governments to ensure effective communication and coordination.
2. ***Empower, incentivize and support local authorities to work with their communities and civil society on P/CVE initiatives.*** National governments and regional and international stakeholders should work with local authorities to support local initiatives that promote social inclusion and a ‘whole of society’ approach to P/CVE. Increased support should also be given to rural areas where there is growing presence of violent extremist groups. Better integrating these rural areas into the state, for example, through a strong network of elected representatives and traditional leaders, can help these areas to resist violent extremism groups. This could include working with grassroots organizations and supporting outreach efforts and investments in neglected areas and communities that feel marginalized. For example, the SCN model for setting up local CVE prevention networks in MENA offers a possible template for how to coordinate local multi-agency action on CVE in cities with restricted resources.
3. ***Facilitate exchanges among cities, local partners, and donors.*** City to city exchanges (from both within and outside the region) can ensure that valuable experiences, lessons, and good practices are shared among cities. While each country’s local government is structured differently and each city have their own needs and risk profiles, it would be beneficial for local authorities to learn how other cities have been able to develop and implement their P/CVE plans, or how to integrate P/CVE into existing frameworks and initiatives. Additionally, direct exchanges between local authorities and donors can be facilitated to determine their needs and priorities without it being filtered through national governments, thereby allowing for a coherent and bottom-up approach. Evaluation from the SCN workshop found that the majority of participants believed that further regional forums on CVE for cities in the region would help advance local city-based CVE policies and practice to ensure that cities do not have to reinvent the wheel in their own locales and can learn from the efforts of others who share similar local risks and resource challenges.
4. ***Support country-wide P/CVE capacity building training for local authorities.*** Much of the developments around P/CVE at the national, regional, and international levels have not filtered down to local authorities who are crucial partners in any effective strategy to combat violent extremism. Targeted trainings should be developed for local authorities, especially those in cities with medium to high risk profiles, and should include any relevant partners responsible for implementing or integrating P/CVE initiatives, including civil society organizations, private sector, and national government representatives. Local authorities could be trained in conducting local needs analysis and risk assessments for violent extremism and how to develop or enhance local multi-agency structures to undertake P/CVE initiatives. The SCN model for encouraging cities to acts as peers in educating each

other on CVE tools can help overcome the mistrust that exists between local and national governments.

5. ***Leverage educational tools to prevent and counter violent extremism.*** Local authorities should be supported in efforts to develop and implement education programs targeted towards resilience building. This could include working with media outlets or international organizations like UNESCO to develop alternative messages to violent extremist content (both online and offline), or to foster more inclusive societies by engaging communities, especially youth, in initiatives that promote cultural and ethnic diversity. Additionally, given the prevalence of non-formal/informal educational practices in the region, it is important that educational initiatives reach those not in the formal school system, for example, through engagement with civil society organizations, or ensuring that educational campaigns or materials are translated into different languages and dialects. Furthermore, work should be undertaken to encourage and understand what existing powers and regulations local authorities have at their disposal to better engage and professionalize informal education systems (such as madrassas) to deter and disrupt any misuse by extremist preachers who may use them for recruitment or to incite violence.
  
6. ***Bring cities to the forefront of international aid community and development sector projects.*** Cities are often not consulted upon, or invited to design, local international sector initiatives that work in P/CVE. Participants expressed their concerns that much of the donor community's investment in P/CVE efforts does not appear to be working with communities and individuals at risk and fails to adequately connect with existing municipal structures. Encouraging the international donor community to work in closer coordination with cities, both in design and delivery of programs, would help target resources to those most at risk, encourage cities to play a more active role in P/CVE, and increase the sustainability of P/CVE programming. Additionally, national governments could direct World Bank and other donor projects to address the needs and priorities of cities and municipalities, for example, through investments in infrastructure, public health, and environmental protection.