The first Strong Cities Network (SCN) Regional Practitioners’ Workshop of 2017 took place on 9-10 March, hosted by the City of Dakar, Senegal. The event brought together 50 participants, including local frontline CVE practitioners from 15 cities drawn from 10 countries across East and West Africa.

Over two days, participants demonstrated the importance of stronger regional dialogue on local CVE initiatives, highlighting the role of civil society actors, greater municipal coordination of local activities, and the need to strengthen vertical cooperation with national governments. Taking these discussions forward, cities outlined their current challenges, risk profiles and core local partners as part of an in-depth practical session on developing local action plans.

The following cities were represented:

- **Cameroon**
  - Kousseri
  - Waza Reserve
- **Djibouti**
  - Tadjourah
- **Keyna**
  - Kwale
  - Lamu
  - Mombasa
- **Mali**
  - Bamako
- **Mauritania**
  - Kiffa
- **Niger**
  - Diffa
  - Naimey
- **Nigeria**
  - Kano State
  - Lagos
- **Senegal**
  - Dakar
- **Tanzania**
  - Zanzibar
- **Uganda**
  - Kampala

The workshop was also joined by representatives from the City of Kristiansand, Norway, and the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV), based in the City of Montréal, Canada. Kristiansand will later this year host a practitioner delegation from Mombasa, Kenya under an SCN city exchange programme as part of a wider programme of bilateral cooperation on CVE and youth engagement facilitated by the SCN. Montréal will also host practitioners from Dakar, Senegal for a week-long SCN city-to-city exchange programme on developing local CVE initiatives.

The conference was opened by Mr. Abou Ba from the Department of Dakar, Mr. Moussa Sy, Deputy Mayor of the City of Dakar, and Ms. Rebecca Skellett, the SCN Manager.

Conference welcomes were followed by a scene-setting introductory session led by Eric Rosand, Director of The Prevention Project, and Ifeoma Okali from Lagos, Nigeria. Both speakers outlined the role of cities and civil society actors in working beyond the parameters of national security and counter terrorism agendas, developing local capacity...
and coordination at municipal levels, whilst acknowledging wider political, religious and economic sources of conflict across the region.

It was highlighted that 50% of Senegal’s urban population live in Dakar, which amounts to 0.04% of the country’s territory. With 66% of the city’s population younger than 30, and an unemployment rate 16% higher than the national average, the municipality faces complex challenges that centre on youth, urban living and developing a sense of neighbourhood. Dakar’s Volunteer Programme, involving 500 young people as mediators between local neighbourhoods, the municipality and security forces, combined with a broad-based discussion about terrorism and radicalisation across local radio services has helped raise awareness and put in place early detection and prevention measures while building trust between police and communities.

The afternoon took a closer look at the existing best practice programmes operating across the region. Mombasa’s progress on a CVE and neighbourhood agenda was discussed, with a focus on youth engagement and community outreach activities, including sporting initiatives and the recently launched ‘Mothers of Mombasa’ programme.

It was emphasized that socioeconomic drivers, including youth unemployment, were key drivers that contribute to an enabling environment for youth to become radicalized or join violent extremist groups. In response, cities like Kiffa, Mauritania and Zanzibar, Tanzania have focused their efforts on youth engagement.

International perspectives were provided by the Montréal Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence, and the City of Kristiansand, Norway, highlighting important lessons, including the Montréal radicalisation hotline and Kristiansand’s use of existing crime prevention structure, ensuring strong multi-agency coordination and making use of existing institutional expertise.

Taking this forward, the second day focused exclusively on interactive sessions around developing local action plans for each of the cities present, drawing on the experience and needs assessments of frontline practitioners. Outlining a basic three-step model, participants were asked to identify specific local risks, covering (a) individuals; (b) ideologies; (c) institutions; and (d) areas/hotspots, before mapping core local stakeholders and partners, distinguishing between those over which there is direct municipal control and those led or administered at other levels, and exploring ways in which municipalities can establish greater overall coordination.

Feeding back on local risks in Niger, practitioners drew attention to radicalization among graduates that exploit the poor theological resilience of other youth groups, whilst widespread manipulation of elected officials weakened local institutions. Attention was also drawn to support for Boko Haram among specific ethnic groups represented in government ministries. A lack of separation of extremists and former rebel groups in prisons was also seen as a core risk to further radicalisation. Drug trafficking and human trafficking were identified as key areas of overlap forming a nexus around serious/organised crime and the growth of violent extremism.

In Senegal, recent growth in non-extremism related crime was identified as a primary concern for urban areas, though practitioners said they had a good awareness of local groups active in these areas. Uneducated and marginalised youth were identified as a key at-risk constituency, with dual vulnerability to both radicalisation and urban crime, as both victims and perpetrators. It was further suggested that there is increasing government
knowledge of financing of mosques and religious institutions by specific groups vying for control. Institutional funding was also raised as a critical risk by practitioners from Cameroon, as well as growing worry over the spread of informal madrassahs which gain large youth following without any certification or formal process. The Lake Chad basin was identified as a core area or hotspot at risk, with communal violence exacerbated by Boko Haram militancy. Prisons were again identified as a key weakness, with prisoners kept together with no separation regardless of offence, raising risks of recruitment to violent extremist causes among prisoners serving unrelated sentences, very often for petty theft. A lack of socio-economic infrastructure and a tendency on the part of national government to overlook the Far North region made these challenges all the more difficult to address.

In Kenya, Al-Shabaab recruitment, focused especially along the border with Somalia, but affecting communities further south, was identified as the core risk. Practitioners pointed to an exploitation of personal circumstances and grievances among individuals targeted by recruiters, as well as deceptive tactics used to lure young people into violent extremism often on the pretext of employment agencies, to take one example.

In Uganda, the growing sectarian narrative of violent extremism in and around Kampala was highlighted, with criminal gang leaders identified as core individual risks, exploiting a youth population largely within the 17-30 age bracket. Political violence, linked to political parties was also identified as a core risk, drawing on and exacerbating extremist threats. Areas suffering extreme poverty, criminal activity, high unemployment, pervasive youth idleness, and a lack of access to social services were seen as core hotspots for the incubation of violent extremism and radicalisation.

In Kano State, Nigeria, practitioners pointed to long-running ethnic disputes confined to specific groups and associations being core drivers of violence, often centred on land disputes. This continued a theme raised by the majority of practitioners regarding the use and control of public space as both a key risk and a critical means of addressing violence. Nigerian practitioners also shared concerns over increasing sectarianism and informal religious institutions, often meaning very young children are removed from family and education environments, placed in informal institutions and made vulnerable to recruitment by Boko Haram.

Practitioners from Zanzibar, Tanzania, pointed to activity by paramilitary groups, growing political tensions drawing on religious arguments, the spread of hate speech and messaging on public notice boards and online/social media/ instant messaging platforms. Core at-risk groups most susceptible to the divisive rhetoric focused on male youths aged 14-30. A further cause of concern for many cities was the creation of informal madrassahs, established randomly often without oversight and led by self-appointed theologians; institutions appear to be a central player in stoking tensions and adding to cycles of retribution and retaliation between different groups.

All practitioners took part in guided discussions, drawing comparisons between circumstances, challenges and prevention initiatives in their respective cities and local areas, before identifying a comprehensive list of partners – at both national and local levels – that could play a role in CVE activities design to mitigate the specific risks they identified in their city. Discussions around youth engagement strategies and ways in which municipalities in various global and regional contexts have used youth populations as effective partners in CVE and building local resilience helped practitioners identify how some of these lessons could be adapted to address specific
local risks. Participants then discussed how partners could be identified to mitigate core risks and what the role of the municipality could be in matching partners to risks and introducing effective mitigation and prevention in initiatives. Representatives from the Dakar office of UNESCO gave a comprehensive overview of their work across the region in working on programmes both supporting counter extremism initiatives, and those working on broader violence prevention initiatives, showing how municipalities could work more effectively with the education sector.

At the close of the workshop, each city had identified core local risks, drawing up a full risk profile covering ideologies, individuals, institutions and specific local hotspots and identifying key partners and stakeholders and how practical, achievable steps could be taken to introduce targeted mitigation initiatives.