



ELEVATING THE ROLE OF AFRICAN CITIES IN PREVENTING EXTREMISM AND HATE: MAPPING CITY NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Workshop, 31 May – 1 June 2022
Novotel Hotel, Dakar, Senegal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 31 May to 1 June 2022, the [Strong Cities Network](#) (SCN), in cooperation with the African Union's Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (CAERT) and with funding from the European Union (EU), convened over 50 mayors and other local leaders, civil society representatives and senior officials from national governments and multilateral bodies in North and West Africa. Participants exchanged views on how best to support city and other local authority-led efforts for preventing extremist- and hate-motivated violence and polarisation.¹ The multi-stakeholder gathering included officials and experts from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia, as well as UNDP, UN Habitat, UN OCT, UN Women, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the EU Delegations in Ghana and in Senegal, and the US Embassy in Dakar. The workshop was part of a larger [EU-financed initiative to map city-level prevention-related needs and priorities across Africa](#).

Participants were asked to share their perspectives on the threat landscape in the region, existing locally-led for preventing hate, polarisation and extremism that leads to violence; the comparative advantages of cities and other local authorities in prevention, as well as the policies and infrastructure needed to leverage them. Participants further shared their experiences with and understandings of the main challenges that North and West African cities face and how international, regional and sub-regional bodies and networks can support cities to overcome these challenges. From Accra to Dakar, Kano State to Mansakonko, Monrovia to N'Djamena, Ouagadougou to Rabat, and Sfax to Tunis, the workshop benefitted from a range of diverse perspectives on the threat landscape, and the strengths and limitations of existing approaches to preventing and countering the threat.

Below are key takeaways and proposed next steps based on the discussions, which took place under the Chatham House Rule. A more detailed overview of each takeaway and next step can be found in the following two sections.

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily represent those who participated in the workshop nor those of the EU, African Union or the SCN (including its members and its Management Unit).

Key Takeaways:

¹ During the workshop, participants discussed the relevance of a range of sub-national authorities in the prevention space: this included capital cities, remote villages, small towns and county and other regional governments. This summary – and SCN more broadly – uses the term “cities” to capture all of these variations.



1. The extremist threat landscape in North and West Africa is compounded by significant challenges posed by armed gangs, banditry, kidnappings and other forms of violent crime.
2. Porous borders and the consequent ease with which extremists and other armed groups are able to cross borders poses a significant challenge. This is exacerbated by armed conflicts often being concentrated in border communities.
3. Ineffective or sometimes non-existent service delivery and poor local governance were highlighted as key drivers of violent extremism (and other forms of violence and conflict) in the region.
4. Responses to the threat remain overly centralised and securitised, with little to no responsibility devolved from central governments to cities and other local authorities.
5. Local authorities are keen to be involved, however, and see themselves as best placed to convene local actors and to map and analyse local contexts that can better inform local and national responses.
6. The region is littered with oft-redundant multilateral strategic frameworks (e.g., those developed by the UN, ECOWAS or other multilateral bodies) for addressing security-related challenges that then inform national strategies. However, these frameworks are either not informed by local voices, and thus disconnected from “reality in the field”, or are inaccessible and challenging for local authorities to contextualise and apply.
7. Multilateral, national and local frameworks for preventing extremist and hate-motivated violence should be more inclusive of historically under-represented demographics, including youth, women and ethnic and religious minorities.
8. Significant obstacles to national-local cooperation (NLC) on prevention in the region include a lack of trust and consensus between national and local authorities on the nature of the problem (e.g., security vs. social), as well as the absence of mechanisms to facilitate cooperation between the different levels of government. More attention in the region needs to be given to developing inclusive national prevention frameworks and ensuring they are then cascaded down to the local level.
9. Cities in North and West Africa could benefit from capacity building on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), including training to better understand the evolving and integrated threat and how to develop and implement effective local policies and programmes to address it.
10. The SCN can serve as an effective third party to help and connect cities in the region to fulfil their comparative advantages in preventing hate and extremism by providing practical and actionable recommendations, and serving as a bridge between existing frameworks and local application.



Next Steps:

1. The SCN will build on the momentum of this workshop by organising one-to-one virtual consultations with interested participants, to deep-dive into the city-level needs and priorities identified during the workshop. This follow-up action will also be financed by the EU.
2. The SCN should develop a blueprint for enhancing the contributions that local authorities across North and West African can make in preventing extremist and hate-motivated violence and polarisation. This should provide actionable recommendations to foster their leadership in prevention and to enhance NLC.
3. The SCN, including through its proposed West Africa and Sahel Regional Hub, should:
 - a. convene dialogues involving national and local authorities on a country-by-country basis, with the objective of facilitating local-local cooperation, the cascading down of national prevention frameworks into local action and enhancing NLC more broadly, and building the capacity of cities to develop prevention policy and programming;
 - b. ensure cities in both regions are consistently given access to the regional and global prevention ecosystem;
 - c. facilitate greater complementarity and synergies among global, regional, national and local approaches to prevention.



Above: More than 50 representatives from local authorities, national governments, civil society and international and regional bodies convene in Dakar, Senegal for a Strong Cities Network workshop on "Elevating the Role of African Cities in Preventing Extremism and Hate".



KEY TAKEAWAYS – in detail

The Threat Landscape

- 1. The extremism threat landscape in North and West Africa is compounded by significant challenges with armed gangs, banditry, kidnappings and other forms of violent crime.**

Participants from across the region remarked on the importance of situating the landscape of hate and extremism in the context of other forms of violent crime, including armed gangs, banditry, kidnappings, inter-ethnic violence and rape. Speakers observed that these broader threats to community safety facilitate feelings of instability and insecurity that extremist and other armed groups exploit to recruit. Participants also noted that armed gangs and other forms of criminality can serve as entry points into extremist movements. In light of this, participants recommended integrating responses to hate- and extremist-motivated violence within broader community safeguarding efforts.

- 2. Porous borders and the consequent ease with which extremists and other armed groups are able to cross borders poses a significant challenge. This is exacerbated by armed conflicts often being concentrated in border communities.**

Participants commented on the substantial challenges posed by porous borders across West Africa. One stated, for example, that the emerging conflict hotspots in the region are both in tri-border regions (Benin, Niger and Nigeria; and Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo). Further, participants shared that Ghana is currently encircled by challenges emanating from the three countries with which it shares borders: Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, and Togo. Participants noted that, while Ghana has so far been free of terrorist attacks, there are concerns about conflicts in its neighbouring countries trickling into Ghana and exacerbating the domestic extremist threats.

“Porous borders enable the threat to travel between countries”

- *Civil Society Representative*

In some cases, it was noted, border conflicts have also uprooted local populations, sending them across borders into other rural communities. Participants observed that there is already tension between “host” and refugee communities, particularly as a result of competition over land resources, with agriculture the primary source of income in many border towns and villages. This exacerbates the threat, responses to which have been largely security-focused (e.g., arming border authorities with guns). Local governance institutions in border villages and towns have been mostly overlooked in national responses and are generally under-resourced to formulate proportionate responses to this threat independently of the central government.

- 3. Ineffective or sometimes non-existent service delivery and poor local governance are key drivers of violent extremism (and other forms of violence and conflict) in the region.**



Participants observed that, across the region, extremist groups and armed gangs have proven adept at marketing themselves as social service providers in the absence of sufficient provision from the local and national government. By doing so, they more readily gain support, further reduce trust in official institutions, and foster a local populace that is disconnected and distrustful of its officials. Indeed, participants from Nigeria, Cameroon and other contexts remarked that the nature of extremist recruitment has evolved from one that exploits religious belief to one focused on economic survival, where extremist groups offer a solution to the socioeconomic challenges faced by marginalised communities that may feel disenfranchised from and disenchanted with official governance structures and processes.

Participants also expressed concern about the ease with which extremist groups seem able to recruit youth, with one participant claiming such groups seem to know what young people want and need more than the local and national governments do. In this context, participants stressed the importance of making sure local policies and programmes are informed directly by the young people they seek to serve, rather than by assumptions of the needs of youth (see Key Takeaway 7).

Responding to the Threat

4. Responses to the threat remain overly centralised and securitised, with little to no responsibility devolved from central governments to cities and other local authorities.

The workshop underscored that efforts to prevent hate and extremist-motivated violence continue to sit primarily within the remit of national security actors and central governments more broadly. Responses to the challenge have therefore been heavily securitised. For instance, in Cameroon, the government has armed civilians to create community-based forces against extremist groups and armed gangs. Participants noted that this only exacerbates the proliferation of small arms at the local level and promotes vigilantism, which puts the entire community at risk and essentially permits citizens to act outside the rule of law.

Importantly, some participants commented that although prevention has been overly-securitised, we should be careful not to imply a complete desecuritisation of the response to hate, polarisation and extremism. Instead, central and local governments must reimagine what they mean by “security”, understanding that security must be inclusive and ethical in how and for whom it is implemented. Local authorities must be included in security frameworks, and security policies and programmes must serve the entire demographic makeup of a country.

“Security can no longer be state-centric. [We must be] community and people-centred in our approach.”

- *Central Government Representative*



5. Local authorities are keen to be involved and see themselves as best-placed to convene local actors and map and analyse local contexts to better inform local and national responses.

Participants shared that they feel the response to extremism and related threats has been largely reactive. They emphasized the pressing need for a more preventative approach that understands and leverages the role of local authorities. Indeed, discussions throughout the two-day programme showed that city officials in the region *want* to become meaningfully involved in prevention and empowered and capacitated to develop and deploy prevention policies and programmes. Participants recognised, for example, that local authorities and other local actors play a vital role because the threat is increasingly “indigenised” and that local governments, by virtue of their access to local communities, are well-placed to recognise and understand the hyper-local contexts that extremists exploit.

The role of local authorities in conducting contextual analyses that inform national and local frameworks for response was also highlighted. With their access to local leaders and service providers, cities, if equipped with the necessary resources and training, are well-placed to lead mapping exercises, consulting with local actors to chart both the threat and the needs of local actors to respond proportionately.

Finally, participants remarked that local authorities are essential in identifying and giving early warnings of situations that may escalate to violence, but that they must be capacitated to do so and that this requires better coordination and collaboration both across localities and between local governments and the central government. Participants identified central governments and the SCN as potential capacity-builders of cities in the region (see Key Takeaway 9).

6. The region is littered with often redundant multilateral strategic frameworks (e.g., those developed by the UN, ECOWAS or other multilateral bodies) for addressing security-related challenges that then inform national strategies. However, these frameworks are either not informed by local voices, and thus disconnected from “reality in the field”, or are inaccessible and challenging for local authorities to contextualise and apply.

The workshop revealed a significant disconnect between existing multilateral and national-level frameworks and strategies for preventing hate, extremism and/or terrorism, and local application of these structures. Participants remarked that this is due, in large part, to an incompatibility between those frameworks and specific, local contexts, with decision-making around hate and extremism happening primarily in urban centres (e.g., capital cities), and that subsequent policies and programmes are then exported into contexts (e.g., rural) that have entirely different challenges and needs. In many cases, local authorities may feel ill-equipped to contextualise those frameworks, with some participants

“We have policies but there is a disconnect between [those] policies and reality in the field.”

- Civil Society Representative



remarking on the inaccessibility to local actors of multilateral and national strategies for prevention.

In this context, participants stressed the importance of consultations among local, national and multilateral actors. Recognising that extremists exploit hyper-local grievances, and that cities face the brunt of extremist violence and the long-term communal impacts of violence more broadly, participants underscored those national strategies for prevention must be informed by local governments. In this regard, participants suggested that local leaders could be more proactive and innovative, convening actors

“Local government should consider proactively coming together to engage central government... local authorities should map and identify existing resources that can be leveraged for preventing hate and extremism.”

- *Local Government Representative*

in their jurisdiction and engaging officials from other local authorities to outline the roles they envision playing in preventing hate and extremism, and proactively proposing this to central governments rather than waiting for capitals to engage them on this topic first.

7. Multilateral, national and local frameworks for preventing extremist- and hate-motivated violence should be more inclusive of historically under-represented demographics, including youth, women and ethnic and religious minorities.

Despite extremist violence and other forms of social disorder in the region disproportionately affecting women (e.g., gender-based violence, rape) and youth (e.g., extremist/armed gang recruitment), participants observed that decision-making power around responding to these threats lies largely with men. This is partially due to the region’s overly securitised approach to prevention and the historically male-dominated nature of the security sector. Further, participants remarked that many existing youth-focused and/or gender-focused programmes are often based on assumptions of what youth and/or women need, rather than on informed understandings of the specific challenges and needs of each demographic in a given context. To address this, participants recommended the establishment of youth and/or gender “units” or “focal points” in national and local governments in the region.

In addition, following Key Takeaway 6, multilateral and national frameworks should take into account the views of coastal, border and rural localities and include a role for them in implementation. Participants observed that existing frameworks are thus far based primarily on perspectives of the threat that originate from urban centres like the (capital) cities where the national government ministries creating these frameworks are based. It was noted how this ignores the hyper-local context-specific challenges that drive extremism in e.g., rural areas, and neglects the aptness with which extremist groups move between urban and rural areas. In light of the relatively unrestricted movement of extremist groups and armed gangs, such frameworks must also facilitate local-local and national-local information-sharing and collaboration.

8. Significant obstacles to national-local cooperation (NLC) on prevention in the region include a lack of trust and consensus between national and local authorities



on the nature of the problem (e.g., security vs. social), as well as the absence of mechanisms to facilitate cooperation between the different levels of government. More attention in the region needs to be given to developing inclusive national prevention frameworks and ensuring they are then cascaded down to the local level.

The second day of the workshop focused heavily on the barriers to and needs for strengthening NLC for preventing hate and extremism in the region. Among the challenges identified were:

- **A lack of shared goals and consensus on the threat**
Per Key Takeaway 4, responses to the threat remain overly centralised and securitised, with national governments treating extremism primarily as a security issue. Local actors, however, are keen to be involved in preventing and responding to extremism, recognising it as one of many community safeguarding concerns within their remit of responsibility.
 - **A lack of information-sharing infrastructure**
Participants remarked that responses to the threat, especially in the immediate aftermath of violence, are slowed down by insufficient and unclear information-sharing protocols and processes. Participants identified an urgent need for robust protocols that allow for rapid, mutual and ethical information-exchange between local governments, and between local and central governments. Further, participants observed that this should be supplemented with training (e.g., of local actors) to ensure the protocols are implemented properly.
 - **A lack of trust between local and national actors**
Finally, participants identified a lack of trust between central and local governments as another key obstacle to NLC. In some contexts, participants observed that popular local leaders are regarded by central government officials as threats to the “status quo”, for example. There is also limited opportunity for dialogue to build trust between local and national actors.
- 9. Cities in North and West Africa could benefit from capacity building on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), including training to better understand the evolving and integrated threat and how to develop and implement effective local policies and programmes to address it.**

Participants of the workshop commented on the fact that, beyond a mandate to be involved in prevention, cities in the region need training to build their capacity and confidence to be involved. Among other things, training should cover the threat landscape and international good practice for addressing the threat, including, for example, how to build and deploy multi-disciplinary local prevention networks that can help address a range of local concerns. Other areas for development include designing local action plans that are appropriate for the given context and correspond to national strategies for prevention, monitoring and evaluation,



information-sharing protocols and processes, and crisis response. Participants identified central governments and third parties like the SCN and multilateral bodies like the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) as well placed to provide cities with this capacity building.

10. The SCN can serve as an effective third party to help cities in the region fulfil their comparative advantages in preventing hate and extremism by providing practical and actionable recommendations, and serving as a bridge between existing frameworks and local application.

Throughout the workshop, participants outlined ways in which the SCN can enhance local leadership in and ownership of prevention in the region. For example, they suggested that the SCN could convene cities within and across countries in the region; and serve as a bridge-builder between regional/multilateral approaches to prevention, national strategies and frameworks, and local application. As noted in Key Takeaway 9, the SCN was also identified as a capacity-builder of cities, with participants commenting that the SCN is well placed to help cities localise and apply international good practice.

What makes a “Strong City”?

Participants were asked to come up with key components of a “strong” city in North and West Africa. Among those identified were:

- **strong and honest local governance;**
- **innovative and proactive local leadership** that consistently seeks to improve how it serves its people;
- **accessible leadership**, where officials can “talk the talk” of their citizens and are part of the “city identity”;
- **competent local officials** who are equipped to respond to a range of local issues and actively seek to fill skills gaps and thus improve governance;
- stable governance structures that are **representative** of a city’s entire demography;
- clear, consistent and mutual **communication between actors (national – local and local – local)**, including about the roles of each actor and information-sharing about the threat and response.



NEXT STEPS

Based on the key takeaways of the workshop, this section provides a series of next steps that the SCN and other institutions can take to support cities in North and West Africa with realising their full potential as leaders in preventing hate-based and extremist violence.

- 1. The SCN will build on the momentum of this workshop by organising one-to-one virtual consultations with interested participants, to deep-dive into the city-level needs and priorities identified during the two-day programme.**

This will inform a [mapping report](#) the SCN Management Unit is developing with funding from the EU, which will include a series of recommendations for the SCN's and other institutions' footprint and engagement in the region going forward. Findings of this mapping exercise will also directly inform the scope and scale of activities of the **SCN's proposed West Africa and the Sahel Regional Hub**.

- 2. The SCN should develop a blueprint for enhancing the contributions that local authorities across North and West African can make in preventing extremist- and hate-motivated violence and polarisation. This should provide actionable recommendations to foster their leadership in prevention and to enhance NLC.**

Participants of the workshop stated there is a need for **clear and actionable** recommendations for enhancing city involvement in prevention. Some observed that discussions about prevention in the region have rarely led to something practical that different stakeholders – especially at the local level – can then take back to their jurisdiction and apply.

The SCN can leverage the mapping exercise in Next Step 1, and its partners and networks in the region, to address this by creating a roadmap with tangible steps to improve city leadership and ownership in prevention. This could outline why and how cities should be involved and serve as both a manual for local authorities in the region to develop prevention policies and programmes, and as a resource that local authorities can take to their central governments to secure support to realise these policies and programmes. This manual could help address some of the challenges identified during the workshop regarding the overly centralised and securitised approach to extremist violence and the conflation of prevention with counter-terrorism and can empower cities with a clear understanding of their essential role in prevention. This blueprint should also account for smaller, more rural towns and villages (especially those on borders), as well as municipalities where extremism is not, as of yet, a tangible threat.



3. The SCN, including through its proposed West Africa and Sahel Regional Hub, should:

- a. Convene dialogues involving national and local authorities on a country-by-country basis, with the objective of facilitating local-local cooperation, the cascading down of national prevention frameworks into local action and enhancing NLC more broadly, and building the capacity of cities to develop prevention policy and programming;**

By virtue of its global membership and access to the global prevention architecture, the SCN is well placed to build the prevention capacities of local authorities and grassroots actors including through supporting the development of multi-disciplinary and human rights-oriented local prevention infrastructure, engaging youth in a meaningful and sustained capacity, monitoring and evaluation tools and other areas of support. The SCN should also leverage its 6+ years' experience organising city-city exchanges, regional workshops and global summits, to convene cities and other sub-national authorities on a country-by-country basis, helping them implement the above-mentioned blueprint and support them with improving NLC (e.g., through implementing the Global Counter Terrorism Forum's (GCTF) [good practices](#) for NLC, which the SCN helped develop).

- b. Ensure cities in both regions are consistently given access to the regional and global prevention ecosystem;**

Cities in the region should be given more opportunity to inform regional and global prevention agendas. The SCN can serve as a bridge between local action and the multilateral prevention landscapes, elevating the voices of mayors and the perspectives of the cities they lead on the global stage. To do so, the SCN will work with relevant partners in the region to ensure local authorities are invited to, e.g., GCTF West Africa working group meetings, ECOWAS and African Union meetings, UN gatherings, including the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly in 2022, where the SCN will present findings of the aforementioned mapping report.

- c. Facilitate greater complementarity and synergies among global, regional, national and local approaches to prevention.**

While Next Step 3b envisions a role for the SCN in amplifying local voices on the global stage, this step envisions a role for the SCN in serving as a mechanism to facilitate coordination and communication among the regional/multilateral, national and local levels of response. The workshop highlighted a disconnect between multilateral and local actors in the North and West African regions. Participants shared how multilateral frameworks, such as relevant ECOWAS strategies, often do not cascade down to the local level for implementation. In some cases, it was pointed out, this is because of a lack of prioritisation from national government agencies to facilitate this cascading. Where local actors are aware of and do have access to these frameworks, they report finding it difficult to understand and turn them into action. Among other international partners, SCN, including through its proposed West Africa and



Sahel Regional Hub could **help translate global, regional and national prevention-related frameworks and strategies into local action.**

RESOURCES

- [GCTF Memorandum on Good Practices for Strengthening National – Local Cooperation in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism](#)
 - Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#) and [French](#)
- [Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism](#) by the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF)
 - Available in [Arabic](#), [English](#) and [French](#)
- [Multi-Actor P/CVE Interventions Workstream](#) by the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ)
- [Promoting Democracy and Security in Africa: Don't Forget Cities](#) by Daniel Hooton and Eric Rosand
- [The Prevention Project: A comprehensive research programme on the effectiveness of preventing and countering violent extremism \(P/CVE\) projects](#) by RUSI
- [Why Cities Matter? 10 Steps That Cities Can Take to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism](#) by the Strong Cities Network (SCN)
- [Why Local Networks are Key to Preventing Extremism and Hate](#) by the Strong Cities Network (SCN)
- [CT MORSE, an EU-funded coordination project support CT and P/CVE](#) by the European Union (EU).