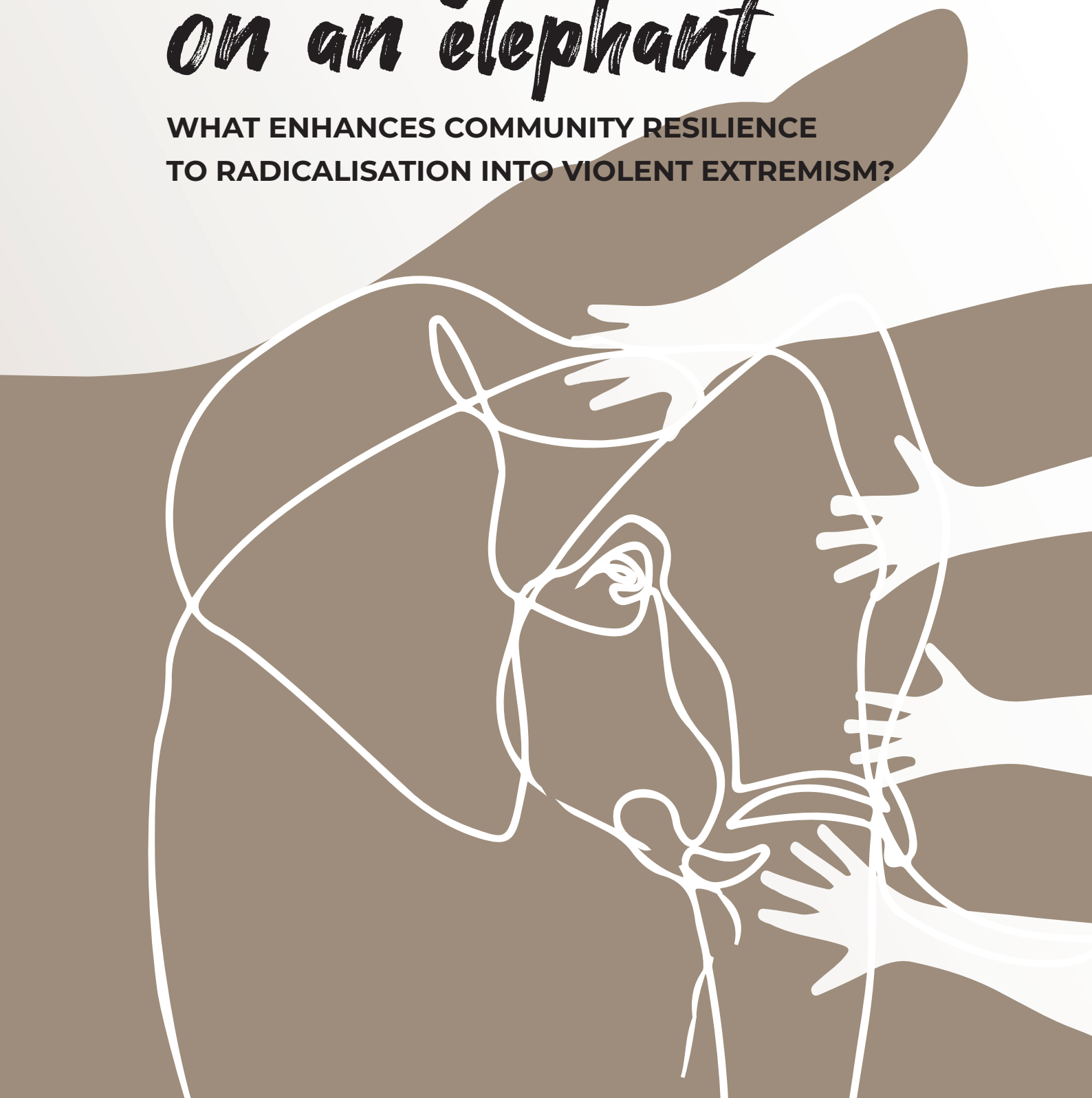
European Commission

unicri
United Nations
Interregional Crime and Justice
Research Institute

Many hands on an elephant

WHAT ENHANCES COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO RADICALISATION INTO VIOLENT EXTREMISM?



Many hands on an elephant

What enhances community resilience to radicalisation into violent extremism?

Findings from the project
on countering radicalization
and violent extremism in the
regions of Sahel and Maghreb

DISCLAIMER

The opinions, findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of nor endorsement by UNICRI, the United Nations, the European Union or any other national, regional or international entity involved. The designations employed and presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The contents of this publication can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

Contents of this publication may be quoted or reproduced free of charge by non-commercial entities and organisations for non-commercial purposes, provided that the source of information is acknowledged. UNICRI would appreciate receiving a copy of the document in which this publication is quoted.

©UNICRI, October 2020

ANY FEEDBACK ON WHAT YOU HAVE READ?

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this report, please email us at unicri.cveprogramme@un.org

COPYRIGHT

United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)
Viale Maestri del Lavoro, 10, 10127 Turin – Italy
Tel: +39 011-6537 111 / Fax: +39 011-6313 368
Website: www.unicri.it
E-mail: unicri.publicinfo@un.org

Design by Bologna Antonella, Turin - Italy

Foreword

Violent extremism remains a persistent threat to peace and stability in the Sahel and Maghreb regions. It continues to cause death, injury and the destruction of property, disrupting the lives of ordinary citizens in the process. Nearly 6,000 people have lost their lives in ongoing conflicts between 2015 and April 2020 in nine countries of the regions, namely: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger and Tunisia. The Sahel region was particularly badly hit, with Burkina Faso and Mali seeing a marked increase in attacks since 2018, while, in the Maghreb region, many youth were radicalized and left their country to join the ranks of foreign terrorist fighters.

In 2015, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), with the generous support of European Commission Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), launched the *Pilot Project on Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism in the Sahel-Maghreb* – an ambitious project that sought to work with civil society organizations in nine countries of the region in order to pilot and evaluate small-scale interventions of varying nature, scope and duration. The ultimate goal of this Pilot Project was to better understand what works and what does not work in terms of strengthening the resilience of local communities to radicalization and violent extremism.

After five years of implementation, with more than 80 interventions, more than 500 activities and more than 23,000 individuals involved, UNICRI and DG NEAR are proud to present the results of this research. Not only does this represent an effort to organize and share a large amount of primary data collected, but it is also a way to share the main lessons learned and provide evidence-based recommendations to the international community to help inform more effective future interventions.

Violent extremism is a phenomenon that is difficult to define and therefore to counter. In this regard, UNICRI adopted a practical approach, focusing the analysis on the grievances reported by local communities and on the drivers described as critical in pushing young people to join violent extremist groups. Not surprisingly, all the grievances refer to structural social, political or economic issues and, hence, require long-term developmental solutions. However, through this Pilot Project, several civil society organizations developed tools and approaches that aided them in sidestepping the struc-

tural factors whilst identifying other solutions to successfully address specific aspects of different grievances. Working with youth-at-risk and teaching them non-violent means of expression or positive alternative methods to channel expectations, including through theatre, art and sport activities, are examples of the many different types of interventions explored through the Pilot Project.

Despite our learnings and insights, the challenge remains to define, implement and coordinate an effective and long-term course of action, where governments are the primary actors and civil society and communities are key partners. Local knowledge to identify local grievances, and local ability and intuition to devise made-to-measure solutions have proven to be essential and necessary factors. Building on communities that – despite all – are resilient remains our strong commitment in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism, both in the Sahel and Maghreb regions and beyond.

UNICRI and DG NEAR look forward to sharing the lessons learned during this highly rewarding Pilot Project as widely as possible, to inform the international community on more efficient programming and to ultimately contribute to improving the daily lives of millions of people.

Henrike Trautmann

Acting Director for the
Neighbourhood South

DG NEAR
European Commission

Antonia Marie De Meo

Director

UNICRI

Table of contents

Foreword iii

Acknowledgements vi

Blind men and the elephant vii

Executive summary viii

CHAPTER I Many hands, one elephant 1

1.1 Introduction: The elephant in the room 1

1.2 Arriving at the notion of community resilience 10

1.3 Terminology 11

1.4 UNICRI project 13

1.5 Methodology 16

1.6 Limitations 20

CHAPTER 2 Touching the elephant 23

2.1 What: community grievances 23

2.2 Where: context is everything 46

2.3 Who: the people at the centre of it 52

2.4 How: intervention approaches and types 55

2.5 Who did it: agent of change 63

CHAPTER 3 Many elephants, same room 67

3.1 Conclusions 67

3.2 Success stories 69

3.3 Trials and errors 72

3.4 Good practices 74

3.5 Lessons learned 77

3.6 Recommendations 93

Bibliography 99

Acknowledgements

This report has been produced thanks to the generous support of the European Union. It has been written by Tamara Neskovic, Monitoring and Evaluation Analyst, with the guidance of Manuela Brunero, Programme Officer. UNICRI would like to acknowledge the contribution of numerous reviewers and commentators. Special thanks go to Tijani el Kerim, Wydiane Djaidi, Marco Farucci, Leif Villadsen, Elena Dal Santo and Carlotta Zenere. Special appreciation goes to Antonella Bologna and Beniamino Garrone for the graphic design.

UNICRI is grateful to its local partners, grass-root organisations, who have been open for a continuous exchange, supported UNICRI's request for information and have shared pictures taken during their activities.

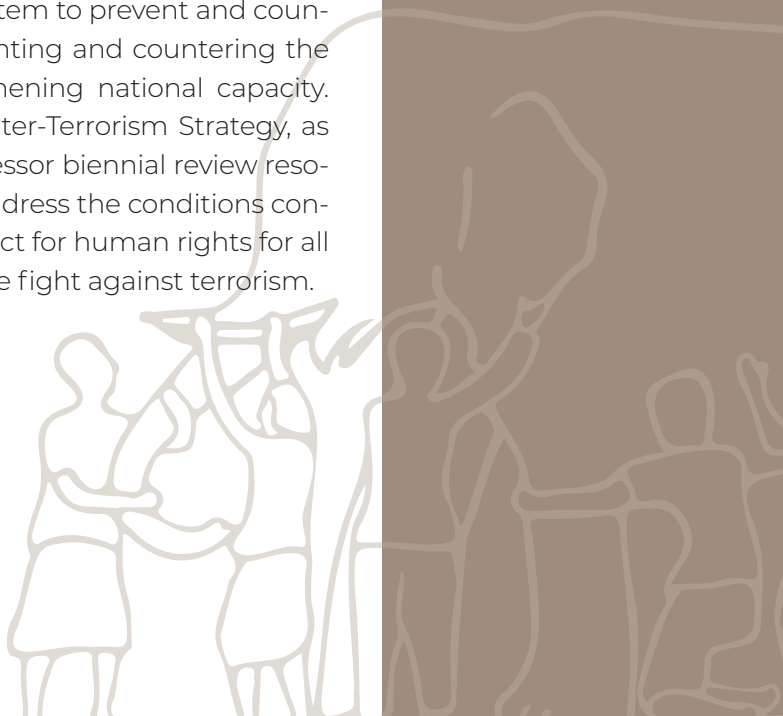
About UNICRI

UNICRI has been working with the countries in the regions of Maghreb and Sahel since 2009. In line with its mandate, it has assisted the governments and the international community in tackling the threats that organised crime and terrorism pose to peace, security and sustainable development. The assistance is fostering just and efficient criminal justice systems, the formulation and implementation of improved policies, and the promotion of national self-reliance through the development of institutional capacity.

As a member of the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact of the United Nations, UNICRI contributes to the implementation of coordinated and coherent efforts across the United Nations system to prevent and counter terrorism. It supports Member States in preventing and countering the appeal of terrorism and recruitment by strengthening national capacity. UNICRI supports the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, as per General Assembly resolution 60/288 and successor biennial review resolutions, with particular attention to measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.

Author

Tamara Neskovic



Blind men and the elephant

A poem by John Godfrey Saxe (1816 – 1887)

It was six men of Indostan,
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approach'd the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, -"Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear,
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approach'd the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," -quoth he- "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," -quoth he,-
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said- "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," -quoth he,- "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

MoRaL

So, oft in theologic wars
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean;
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

Executive summary

The age-old story narrates of six blind men who gathered around an elephant with a task to understand what kind of a living creature was in front of them. Aided by their hands and touching different parts of the animal, each of the men comes up with an answer which, to him, holds a fair share of certainty: the thing in front has to be a wall, a spear, a snake, a fan, a tree, a rope! And not unsurprisingly, "each was partly in the right and all were in the wrong!"[1]

The story was quite ingeniously used by a non-governmental organisation from Chad, during a training course on conflict prevention and management. The course was attended by young people at risk of social exclusion and recruitment by violent extremism. Just like the proverbial elephant, violent extremism is a phenomenon difficult to define and counter, with everybody who endeavors to do so risking to be "partly in the right" and fair share in the wrong. Yet, that exact complexity and shapeshifting demands attention and action if its devastating consequences are to be prevented. Nearly 6,000 people have lost lives in ongoing conflicts in the period from 2015 to April 2020 in nine countries of the regions of Sahel and Maghreb - Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. Sahel region was particularly badly hit, with Burkina Faso and Mali seeing a marked increase in the attacks since 2018, with 2019 and 2020 being their most destructive. Worse even, a single region within Mali, the region of Mopti in central Mali, bordering Burkina Faso, suffered from 496 attacks in 2019 alone, with some villages attacked six times during that single year. While the countries in the Maghreb have on the overall managed to contain attacks by non-state armed groups, they have been dealing with the challenges posed by the young people being radicalised into violent extremism and leaving their country to join the ranks of foreign terrorist fighters. Between 2013 and 2017, nearly 2,000 Moroccans and at least 4,500 Tunisians have travelled to Libya, Iraq and Syria to join the fights there.

Predominantly hard-security measures have been used to fight violent extremist and other non-state armed groups, as demonstrated by high increases in the national military spending for all nine countries. In the period 2015-2019 they have spent on average a tenth of their budgets on military, and at times as high as one fifth of their overall national budget.[2] Most of this investment has been spent on conventional warfare such as heavy equipment, ignoring the asymmetric nature of the conflicts afflicting the countries which calls for agile special forces, effective intelligence and civilian-military cooperation. However, there is a growing global consensus on the need for a different approach, in particular the need to understand what attracts young people to join violent extremist groups in the first place so as to prevent their radicalisation and better counter or contain the threat of terrorism. The hard-security measures, such as armed suppression, do not engage with

- 1 John Godfrey Saxe, *Six blind men and the elephant*
- 2 This was the case of Chad in 2016. The information is sourced from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

the specific circumstances that may lead to radicalisation into violent extremism – they address the consequences, not the causes of those circumstances. As such, implemented alone, they cannot be expected to have durable, long-term results.

Recruitment is a complex process that tends to exploit both objective grievances, historical injustices and social marginalisation present in a community and highly personal vulnerabilities of its members. In order to counter the appeal of groups that use violence as their strategy for communication and advocacy, a long-term peace-building approach is needed, one that seeks to create a tightly-knit community. A strong 'social tissue' can make a community more resilient to harmful influences.[3] Countering this violent appeal also requires that aggrieved members of the community be given attention, for instance by teaching them non-violent means of expression or alternative methods for channeling legitimate grievances and expectations. Aggressive and malicious stresses on a resilient community may thus weaken its social tissue, but not irreparably damage it, allowing the community to bounce back.

Within this context, considerable efforts are being made by the international community and local actors in affected communities to better define the threat of violent extremism and formulate conceptual frameworks for designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating interventions to more adequately address it. UNICRI commenced its work in this domain in 2015, when it launched a project on ***Countering radicalisation and violent extremism in the regions of Sahel and Maghreb*** with the support of the European Union. The project aimed to supplement the existing body of research with tested and evidence-based observations on what works and what does not work in terms of making the communities more resilient to violent extremism.

What was unique about this project?

The UNICRI project on ***Countering radicalisation and violent extremism in the regions of Sahel and Maghreb*** had a most unique opportunity to implement an incredible number of projects, 83 in total, different in scope, size, duration and local implementing partners in nine countries of the African continent. The projects worked at the community level, which tend to be most affected yet generally overlooked by policies which are likely to focus on finding nation-wide solutions. The nine countries have shared and continue to share a number of historical, political, economic, social, and cultural linkages, yet, each is unique in its own constitution of these factors. Each of them has developed different strategies to deal with the threat presented by the radicalisation into violent extremism. The same national strategies have at times impacted local communities in different ways, depending on their location, distance from the capital, and own set of economic, political and cultural factors, creating different, possibly even diverging views of national efforts.

The 83 projects were implemented by 31 not-for-profit and civil society, media, women and youth association over a five-year period.[4] They engaged over 22,350 people from communities mostly affected by or at risk of radicalisation to violent extremism and conflict in general, be they urban, rural or nomadic.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

- 3 Umberto Galimberti, *I miti del nostro tempo,* Universale Economica Feltrinelli (2013)
- 4 The average duration of projects was 18 months.

Among them were members of 15 ethnic groups mainly from the Sahel.

Thus, by comparing grass-root projects and their extremely different contexts, UNICRI has had a unique opportunity to observe first-hand and better understand what works and what does not work in terms of enhancing resilience to radicalisation to violent extremism at the local level, learning a number of relevant lessons along the way. A mixed-method approach was applied to extracting and comparing primary information, without an initial theory expected to be proven with regards to what constitutes vulnerability, which groups should be considered most at risk, and which communities should receive support.

The project included the following phases:

- Selection of local partners from the civil society in the nine countries with a capacity to supplement ongoing efforts while providing novel, perhaps previously not considered solutions to the identified problem of violent extremism;
- Provision of support to successfully implement and conclude grass-root projects, while gathering data, observing variables, and formulating conclusions as to the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability;
- Final evaluation based on collected evidence and input from grass-root partners.

Why this report?

This report is part of the concluding phase of the project, and represents an effort to organise and share a great amount of primary data received primarily from grass-root organisations through reporting, field surveys and visits. Its intended primary audience are practitioners in the field, who will be able to fully appreciate the complexity of the issue they are dealing with. The report offers a possibility to make comparisons between grievances across the countries and the two regions. It lists frequently encountered problems in implementing this type of sensitive projects at the level of communities, shares strategies employed to overcome them and offers an honest evaluation of possible success and not so successful stories.

However, the report represents an important source of information also for policy-makers as it demonstrates the consequences of some policies which, while made with best of intentions, have unexpected and occasionally even adverse effect. The report argues that the complexity of the phenomenon of violent extremism calls for nuanced local knowledge and for engaging local stakeholders in policy-formulation, ensuring thus their commitment to implementation.

Structure of the report

The report is divided in three chapters. The first chapter presents the effect the violent extremist, and other armed, groups have had on nine countries. It introduces the UNICRI project and the methodology it used for monitoring and evaluation. Terminological complexities that followed this project from its outset are elaborated along with reasons for applying a community-based approach when dealing with radicalisation into violent extremism. Limitations of this report are also enumerated.The second chapter shares an analysis of the primary information with regards to:

1. Reported community grievances;
2. Geographical, political and social contextualisation of the projects;
3. People that were at the centre of the projects;
4. Projects' intervention approaches and types;
5. Operational differences between the grass-root organisations that implemented the projects.

The final chapter offers conclusions, observed more or less successful stories, and good practices. The section on lessons learned is rather extensive with its ten lessons and ambition to advocate for *sine qua non* features of any similar future project. The report concludes with the three most relevant recommendations, which have intentionally been kept to the minimal possible number given our desire to promote their serious consideration and application.

Main findings

In attempting to find an answer to the question of what motivates people, most often young, to associate themselves with groups that use violence, the interaction between (a) the context which formed those people and (b) forces at play within that context revealed itself as the most relevant variable.

The regions of Sahel and Maghreb, and the nine observed countries have many things in common and many that set them apart. The two regions have trade contacts going back thousands of years, important sources of cultural, political and economic exchanges. The countries comprise huge youth populations that are largely unemployed and with weak prospects of gaining an employment. They are often living in traditional, at times hierarchical societies, which in Sahel considers them social minors (*cadets sociaux*) with difficult, if any, access to either hereditary or elected power and decision-making mechanisms, nor an awareness of how those mechanisms operate and knowledge to make use of them. Women, nomadic pastoralists, refugees, and internally displaced represent other marginalised groups that are frequently discriminated against and excluded from the decision-making processes.

The government is perceived as weak, or practically absent from more remote areas, and when present, it is often perceived as unaccountable. In particular in the Sahel, when taking action, it is perceived as favoring a more conventional approach involving hard-security measures against armed groups over investments in economic development, education, health and transport infrastructure.[5] Access to justice and the rule of law, either provided by the state or in Sahel by traditional authority, is in short supply. The present educational infrastructure is considered widely insufficient, frequently absent from remote areas where Koranic schools are often the only educational institution. The schooling is still based on the old colonial model, unadjusted to the needs of the local populations nor the labour market. Koranic schools meanwhile tend to be outside of the state system, unsupervised but also unsupported, leaving their staff, in their own right inadequately prepared, to improvise curricula and textbooks. Environmental degradation increases pressures over available natural resources, which are frequently at the center of disputes in Sahel.

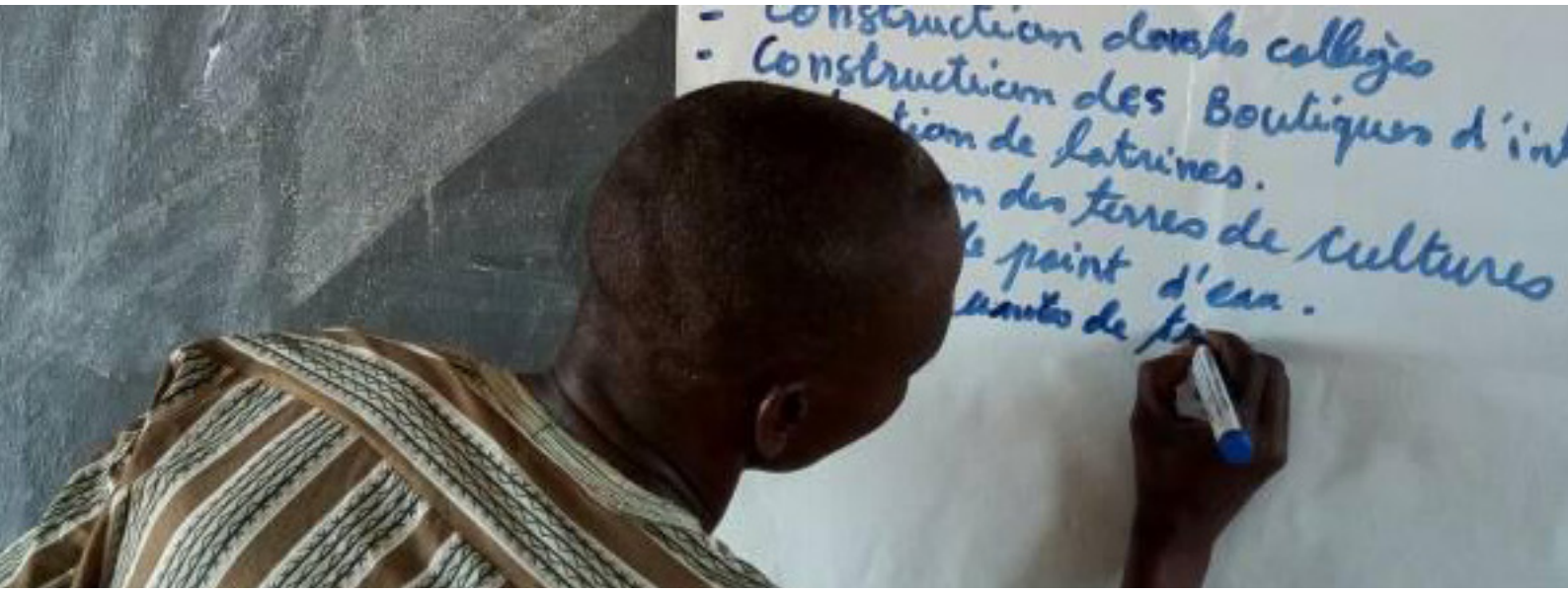
These very real grievances are structural in nature, concrete and actionable. Their number is finite. While answers grass-root organisations and community members gave for the typology of grievances corroborate each other across communities and countries, their manifestations are very much time and place-specific. It is thus important to understand the local context and have as complete knowledge of conflict dynamics and its actors as possible to avoid reinforcing the injuries

5 In the case of Mali, the latter investments are called for in the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation for Mali resulting from the Algiers Process, signed on June 2015, Chapter 13, Art. 38 and Annex 3 on economic, social and cultural projects.

suffered in the past: location, history, wider geopolitical issues, tribal relations, environmental degradation, migration, and access to mechanisms of justice.

The more the analysis of underlying grievances and actors is specific and granulated, the more it requires a developmental, not only a hard-security focus. Violent extremism and conflicts in general are only one, the most violent and thus most visible and attention-grabbing, expression of local populations' frustrations. The choice between violent extremist or organised crime group, political or ethnic militia is, in the majority of cases, a matter of opportunity not of substance. Most people though, despite their legitimate grievances, avoid the violent recourse or extending support to armed groups of any provenance.

Put in such perspective, the communities that UNICRI worked with through grass-root organisations are indeed resilient. Resources directed to treat their deep-seated frustrations would be more effective then resources spent on hard-security measures only, which treat violent consequences of those frustrations. Such an approach would undercut the efforts of armed groups, be they political, ethnic, religious or criminal, to propagate their solutions to the populations' grievances and obtain recruits. It would avoid deepening the existing grievances, as funding hard-security measures alone risks giving extended powers to security forces that are poorly governed, trained and prepared to fight the insurgency.



An effective approach to making the communities more resilient to radicalisation into violent extremism or any type of violence would have the features summarised in the following table

WHERE	WHAT	WHY	HOW	FOR WHOM	BY WHOM
Areas underserved by government services[6]	Issues perceived and reported as causing popular frustrations – cases of injustice, discrimination etc.	Instill the sense of importance along with respect and recognition of legitimacy of harbored grievances	Raise general awareness of the roots of the problems by using culturally sensitive and inclusive terminology and messages that resonate with the population – i.e. religion	Vulnerable, disenfranchised disheartened communities[7]	Grass-root organisations, associations pursuing long-term vision, whose projects demonstrate perseverance and resilience on the path to achieving their vision
Areas that are remote, difficult to reach and isolated, feeding the sense of isolation and distance from the decision-making centers	Critical thinking	Instill the ability to apply reason, recognise manipulation, distinguish facts from opinions, causes from consequences and limit impulsive reactions	Encourage openness and free discussion of contentious issues allowing for frustrations to be channeled into positive action	Youth, women, people with disabilities, pastoralists, farmers, nomadic communities, refugees, internally displaced persons	Grass-root organisations and associations organic to the marginalised communities, with clear values, earned trust and reputation, led by persons of integrity and with great social capital
Areas suffering from environmental degradation as a precursor for possible future contestations	Civic engagement in democratic processes	Empower the communities to solve problems or seek long-term solutions, build their confidence	Teach or establish processes and mechanisms for addressing grievances through frequent instances of engagement over a longer period of time		Government agencies positively viewed by the general population and vulnerable communities in particular
Areas suffering from ongoing conflicts or targeted by armed group recruiters[8]	Social cohesion	Foster inclusion and social cohesion of different segments of the population at community level without prejudice[9]	Encourage participatory processes inclusive of community's diverse groups		

- 6 Such as capitals' and big cities' suburban areas.
- 7 They can be former slaves, chronically unemployed young men, discriminated-against ethnic group members, former combatants - the designation will always be context-dependent.
- 8 Presence of recruitment efforts can be used as an indicator of strong grievances present in the given community, which are exploited by armed groups.
- 9 Be they women, ex-combatants or religious actors.

Several other factors also demonstrated particular importance, becoming critical lessons learned in the process, namely:

- **The role of religion:** Religion in itself was not considered a threat by any of the grass-root organisations. Evidence collected shows that actors aligning themselves with a radical reading of Islam tend not to be violent. Knowledge of Islam reinforces one against interpretations provided by recruiters. Further evidence confirmed that when religious teaching is inadequate and religious knowledge incomplete, it is easier to use it to serve nefarious purposes. The religion has an important role in the lives of people living in marginalised communities of the nine countries: imams play a role of community leaders, educators and news communicators; Koranic schools are often the main educational institution; mosques serve as community-gathering point; the religious teachings and philosophy inform the behavior of community members. As such, the religion has to be considered as an element that permeates the daily lives of community members and incorporated into the design of assistance programmes.
- **Half of populations are female, half of participants are not:** Women represent the segment of communities' population that has been consistently neglected to include on equal terms in the projects. The importance of including them was nominally recognised, yet numerous obstacles to guaranteeing their numerical equality with male participants have been reportedly encountered. The observed positive examples suggest that women are in the best position to reach women, in particular in initial stages. Identifying the right local partners to facilitate their participation is another way of sending women, and their families, the right message. Promotional events to explain the project were also helpful for creating the trust as well as supporting women associations *per se*. It is important to understand the obstacles faced by both projects to including women and by women to joining.
- **The concept of borders:** Borders have different meanings to citizens of different countries. Some are used to the idea of long-established borders demarcating an arbitrary area. Others instead may operate in ecological habitats, the borders of which are more dependent upon climatic conditions than man-made movement restrictions. The closing of such borders for security reasons may directly clash with traditional nomadic lifestyles of these areas, jeopardising sustenance.

Recommendations

Following five years of implementation of a comprehensive approach in nine countries, if lessons learned are to be condensed in three take-aways from the UNICRI intervention, it would be the three recommendations below, with the acceptable risk of being partly in the right and partly in the wrong, exactly as the blind men of the poem that inspired the title of this report.[10]

RECOMMENDATION **1**

The state needs to lead efforts that address root causes of grievances leading to radicalisation into violent extremism in collaboration and dialogue with community-based actors

RECOMMENDATION **2**

Any solution has to be informed by a sound knowledge of local and wider political, economic, social and cultural dynamics

RECOMMENDATION **3**

The solutions have to be designed as long-term processes geared towards building more inclusive and tolerant societies

10 John Godfrey Saxe, *Six blind men and the elephant*

Many hands. one elephant

CHAPTER I

1.1

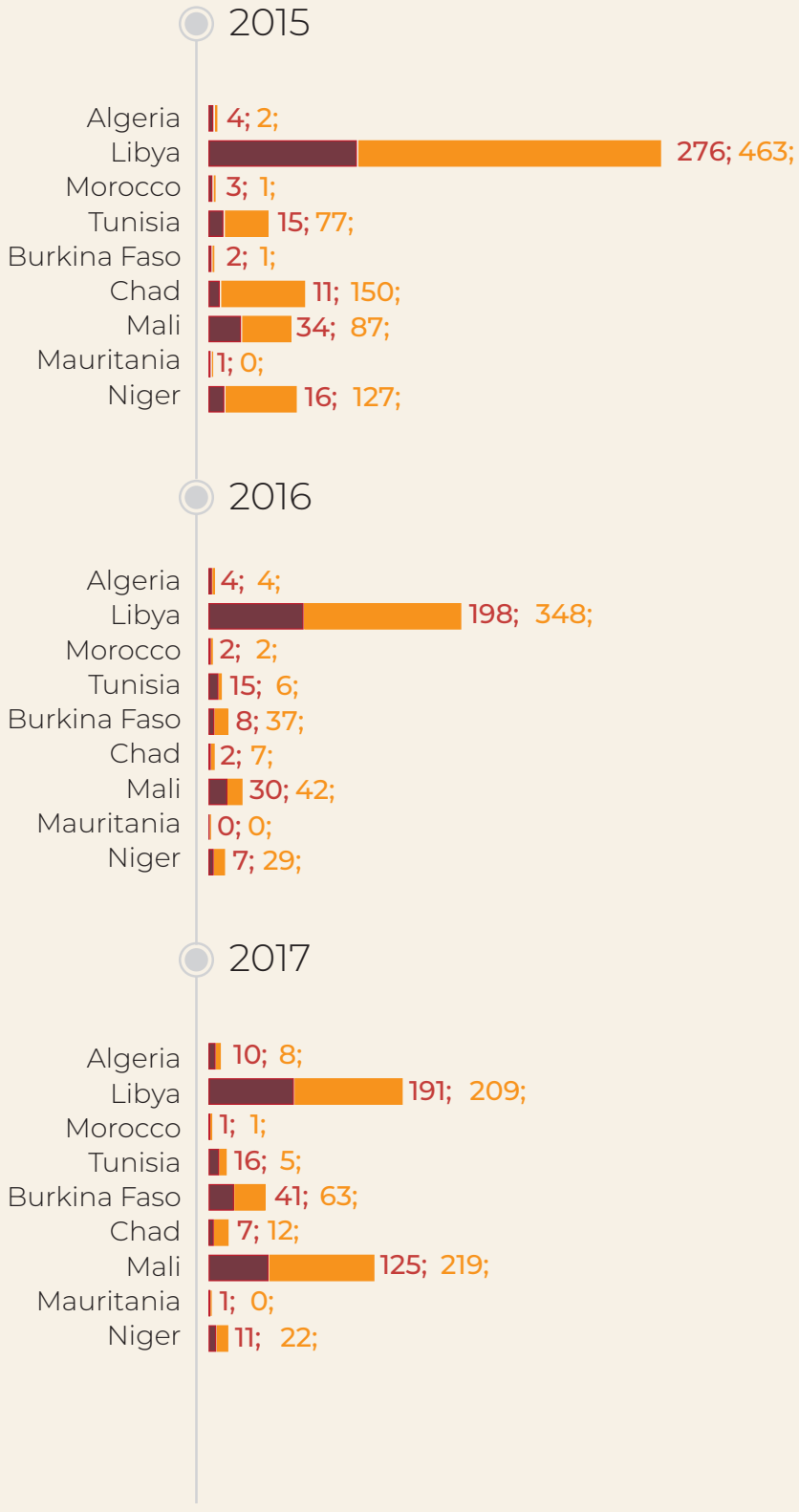
Introduction: The elephant in the room

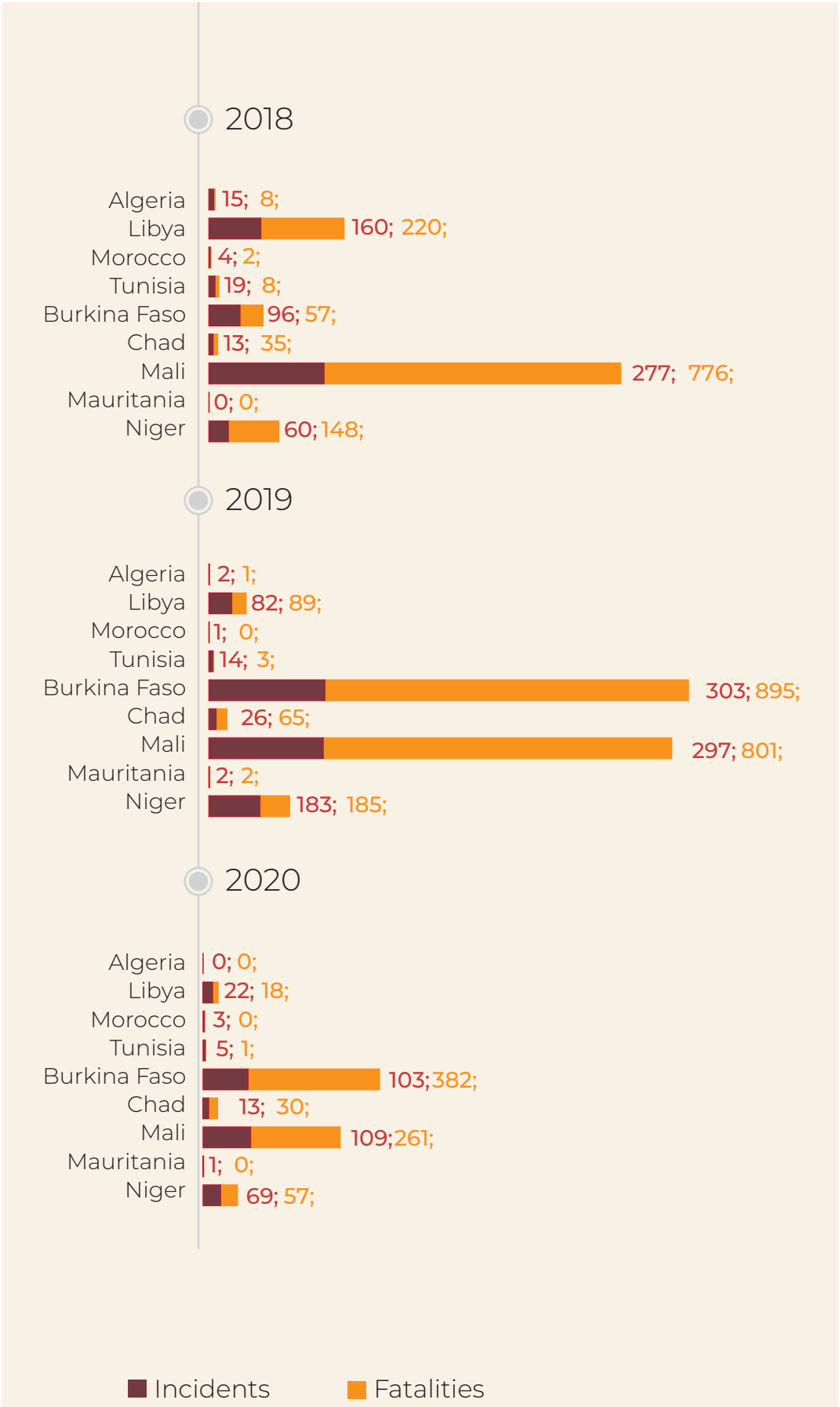
All states wish nothing more than to create conditions in which their citizens feel that they belong, where they identify with the state, recognising it as their own. For these feelings to exist, the citizens, be they men or women, need to have their fundamental rights respected, and their dignity and the sense of worth intact. The state is there to guarantee these values, to provide peace and security, justice and the possibility to better one's standards of life.[11]

For many countries, the achievement of this goal, while worth pursuing, is made complicated by a myriad of circumstances, many of which are beyond their control. In the case of a number of countries in the regions of Maghreb and Sahel, the colonial heritage, geography, climate change, and a multitude of ethnic groups with distinct traditions need to be reconciled with the relatively young state-building process and the resulting pains of weak governance and corruption.

11 Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger even cite the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights in their constitutions. Hannum, H., *The UDHR in national and international law*

Number of incidents and fatalities per country over the period January 2015 - April 2020




2018
Algeria 15; 8;
Libya 160; 220;
Morocco 4; 2;
Tunisia 19; 8;
Burkina Faso 96; 57;
Chad 13; 35;
Mali 277; 776;
Mauritania 0; 0;
Niger 60; 148;
2019
Algeria 2; 1;
Libya 82; 89;
Morocco 1; 0;
Tunisia 14; 3;
Burkina Faso 303; 895;
Chad 26; 65;
Mali 297; 801;
Mauritania 2; 2;
Niger 183; 185;
2020
Algeria 0; 0;
Libya 22; 18;
Morocco 3; 0;
Tunisia 5; 1;
Burkina Faso 103; 382;
Chad 13; 30;
Mali 109; 261;
Mauritania 1; 0;
Niger 69; 57;
Incidents
Fatalities

The states' elemental goal of ensuring peace and security is compromised by vested interests of many different groups, some of which have resorted to the use of violence to thus get their demands heard, be they legitimate or otherwise.

In the period from 2015 to 2020[12], this violence has continued to disrupt the lives of ordinary citizens, with lives of as many as 6,000 people from Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger and Tunisia taken away by non-state armed groups,[13] their affiliates, violent extremist groups, cells or lone actors. Countless more have been affected by continuous, at times repeated, attacks on towns and villages - 2,910 attacks during the same period. The attacks, beyond human losses and injuries, damaged infrastructure, disrupted local economy and the already-compromised delivery of services, instilling fear and insecurity in the local populations. Ever greater number of innocents were pulled into the whirlpool of conflict, criminality, poverty, frustrations and hopelessness.

Sahel region was particularly badly hit, with Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger witnessing the greatest toll on the civilian lives. Despite expectations that national and international efforts at stabilisation would manage to, over time, bring relative calm, the countries have continued to be shaken by violent attacks, complicated by protracted conflicts, competition over accessible land and water, and the adverse effects of climate change.[14] The number of attacks in these countries saw a marked increase since 2018, with 2019 and 2020 being the most destructive. In Burkina Faso, 73% of all attacks perpetrated since January 2015 took place in the last 16 months, resulting in a death toll of 1,277 – 89% of all deaths in this period. In Mali, 800 people died in nearly 300 attacks perpetrated in 2019 only. The region of Mopti, in central Mali and bordering Burkina Faso, suffered the greatest number of them – 496 attacks, 72% of all attacks perpetrated in Mali in 2019. The region had 140 villages targeted by armed groups, with three villages - Bandiagara, Bankass and Yoro - attacked six time in the course of the year. The attacks continued unabated in the first four months of 2020 with 88 direct attacks on civilians, 15 cases of abductions and eight landmine explosions taking away 261 lives.

What complicates the situation further is that these attacks were perpetrated by armed groups with diverse claims, from violent extremist to ethnic to political militia, making any attempt at a strategy for peace-building and reconciliation all the more difficult. It is estimated that some 134 such groups were involved in the attacks in the nine countries in the period 2015-2020, 18 which were violent extremist groups or their local affiliates.[15]

During the same period, the countries of Maghreb, with the exception of Libya, have been relatively successful in containing attacks by armed groups. There have been 35 attacks in Algeria, 14 in Morocco and 85 in Tu-

- **12** The period considered is from 1 January 2015 to 30 April 2020.
- **13** There is no internationally agreed definition of non-state armed groups. The Additional Protocol 2 to the Geneva Conventions on the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts defines non-state armed groups as "dissident armed forces or other organized armed groups which, under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of a territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations (...)".
- **14** *The Sahel - "in every sense of the word a crisis"*, IPP Media, 11 June 2020
- **15** These have included, among others, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, Ansaroul Islam, Boko Haram, Katiba Macina and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) database, *Platform for disaggregated data collection, analysis and crisis mapping.* The data were extracted in May-August 2020.

Illustration 1: Number of incidents and fatalities per region.

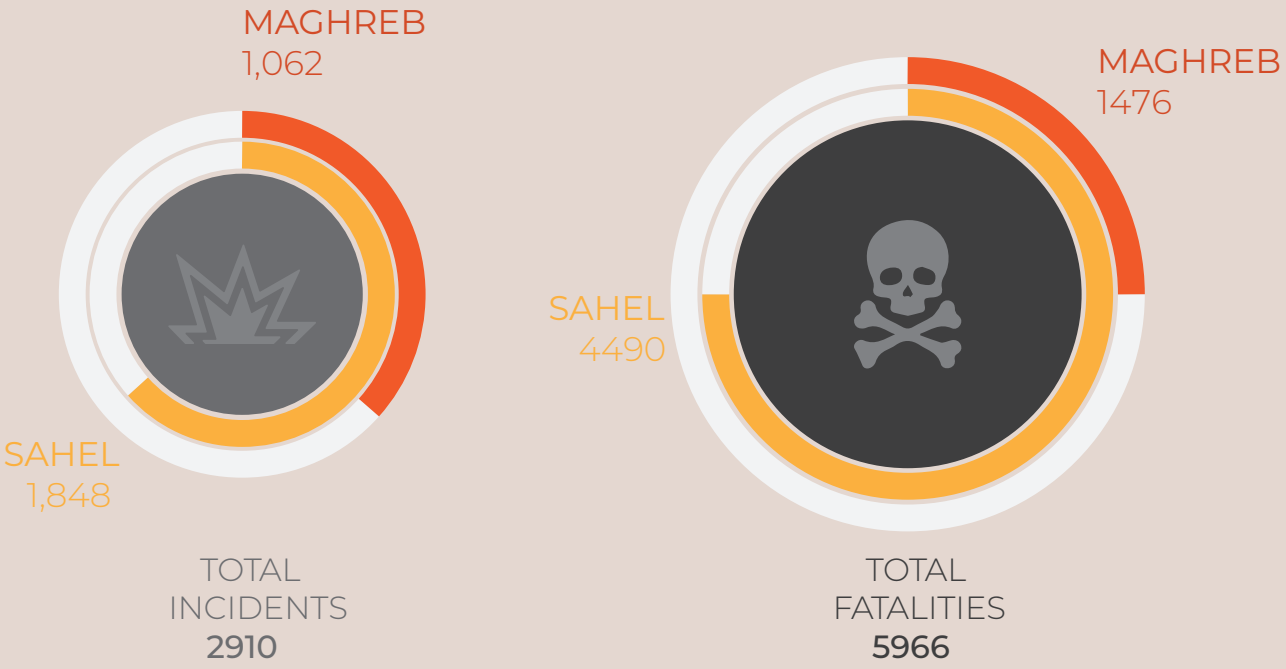


Illustration 2: Incidents and fatalities per country

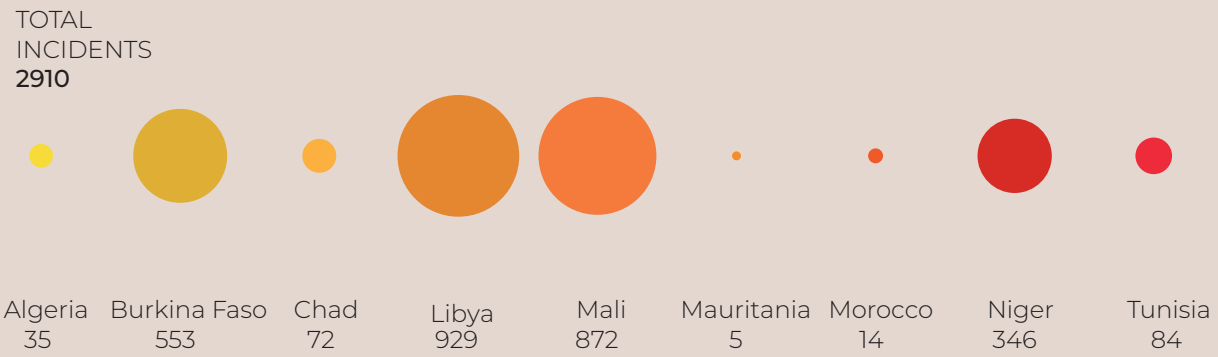
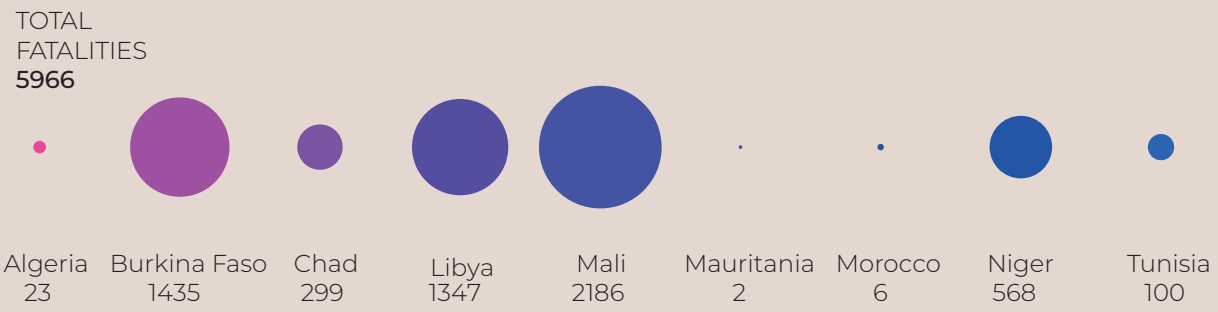


Illustration 3: Incidents and fatalities over selected years in nine countries.



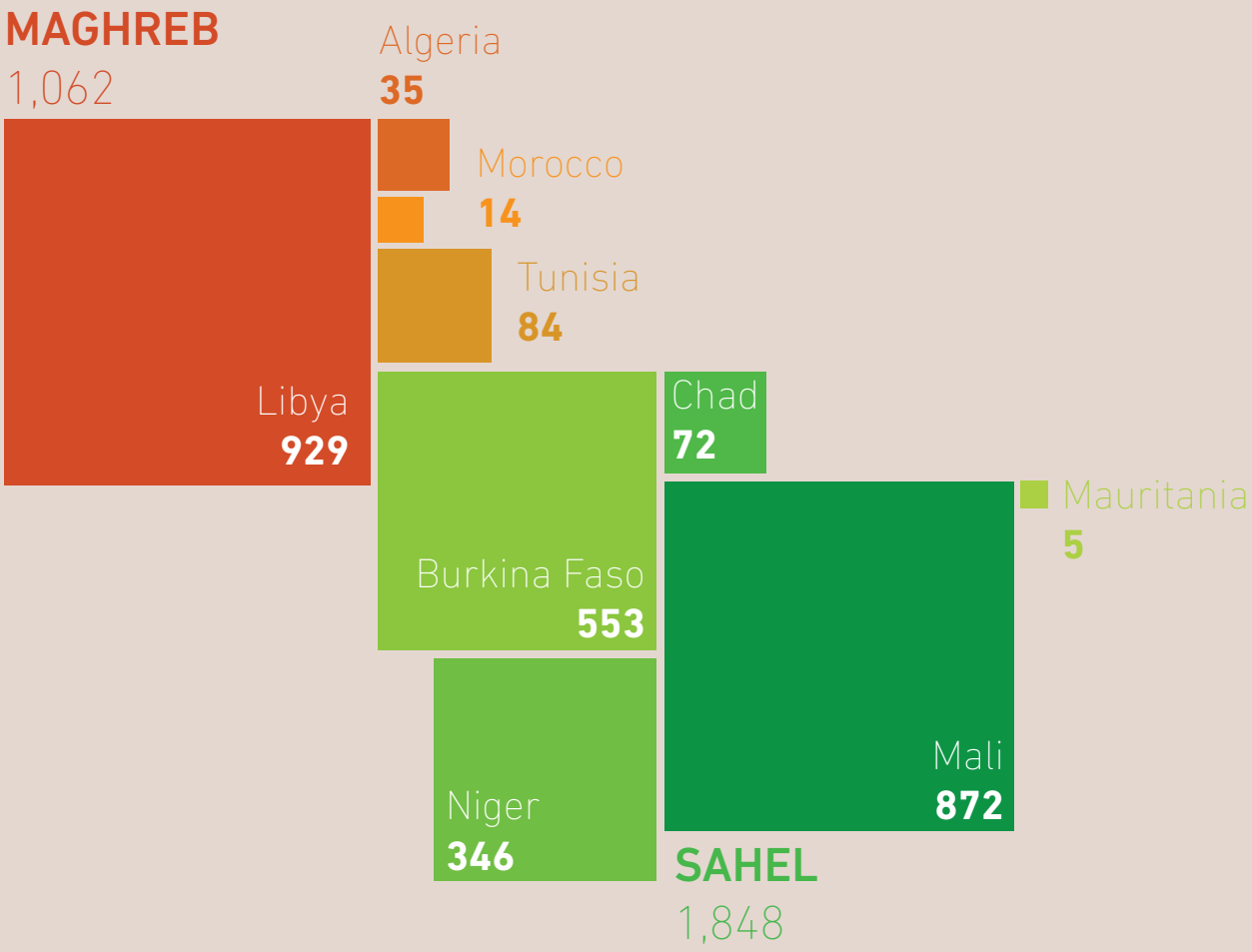
nisia, many of them without any fatalities and an overall downward trend. Instead, many of the young people that got radicalised to violent extremism chose to leave their country and join the ranks of foreign terrorist fighters. A trend that is far from recent as fighters from Tunisia and Morocco were among the combatants in Afghanistan during 1980s, in Bosnia during 1990s and in Iraq during 2000s.[16]

Based on data from the official authorities, 1,664 Moroccans travelled to the Syrian Arabic Republic and Iraq between 2013 and 2017 to join jihadi groups, mainly the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh). Among them were 378 children and 285 women.[17] In addition, 300 Moroccans traveled to Libya to join the fight there.[18] Meanwhile, Tunisia appears to have contributed the highest number of foreign fighters during the same period. The figures have varied, going as high as 7,000 departees to the Syrian Arabic Republic and Iraq,[19] before being revised to around 3,000 by the Tunisian authorities.[20] In addition, up to 1,500 Tunisians are believed to have joined extremist groups in neighboring Libya. The numbers remain unprecedented, not least considering the additional 27,000 Tunisians who have been prevented from traveling to Libya and Syria[21]. While many of these fighters remain abroad, a significant number have returned to their home country. Official estimates place the number of Tunisian returnees between 800 to 1,000 by March 2018. There is no official information available about the timeframe of their return as they were allowed to go and return freely during the 2012-14 period.[22]

The number of civilian casualties in Libya speaks of an altogether different reality. The country is still torn by a civil war, with different factions causing destruction and death. The number of attacks perpetrated by armed groups during the period 2015-2020 is highest for any of the nine countries – 929, majority of which were committed by politically motivated militias. Only in 2019 the number of incidents and deaths caused by armed groups started to register a reduction.

- 16 Renard T., *Returnees in the Maghreb: Comparing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Egmont Paper 107, April 2019
- 17 Based on data from the Moroccan Ministry of Interior and the Central Bureau of Judiciary Investigation (Bureau Central d'Investigation Judiciaire, BCIJ)), a special unit in charge of terrorism-related activities, quoted in the article by the European Eye on Radicalisation.
- 18 The figure is as of 2018. Zelin, Aaron Y., *The Others: Foreign fighters in Libya,* Policy notes, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (2018)
- 19 According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- 20 Renard T., *Returnees in the Maghreb: Comparing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Egmont Paper 107, April 2019
- 21 Ibid
- 22 Zelin, Aaron Y., *The Others: Foreign fighters in Libya*.

Illustration 4: Incidents per region and country 2015-2020*



Initially, the response to the security challenges posed by armed groups has focused strongly on armed suppression. Armed conflicts have led to an overall increase in the national military spending in absolute terms along with a consistently high share of government spending on the military compared to other sectors. Between 2015 and 2019, nine countries spent on average one tenth of their budget on military, from as high as one fifth of their overall budget on the military (Chad in 2016), to as low as 5.2% (Burkina Faso in 2017). Also, with the exception of Morocco and Tunisia, the share of military spending was extremely volatile from year to year, with significant increases or decreases. Comparatively, the military spending of countries such as France and Italy is on average 3.3% and 2.7% respectively, with year on year difference of 0.1% and 0.4% respectively.

Illustration 5: Share of military spending 2015-2019

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2015-2019 difference
Algeria	13.7%	15.3%	15.4%	14.5%	15.5%	1.8%
Libya	-	-	-	-	-	-
Morocco	10.5%	10.5%	10.6%	10.5%	10.3%	0.0%
Tunisia	7.8%	8.2%	7.1%	6.9%	7.0%	0.1%
Burkina Faso	6.1%	5.4%	5.2%	7.9%	9.0%	2.9%
Chad	11.0%	21.1%	14.8%	17.2%	14.0%	3.0%
Mali	11.3%	11.6%	13.2%	13.9%	10.8%	-0.5%
Mauritania	8.4%	10.3%	10.4%	11.2%	10.7%	2.3%
Niger	-	8.3%	9.3%	8.5%	6.2%	-2.1%
Average	**9.8%**	**11.3%**	**10.8%**	**11.3%**	**10.4%**	

Algeria's military spending in 2019 was the highest in North Africa, and Africa as a whole, raising almost continuously since 2000.[23] The governments of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, have, in absolute terms, doubled their military spending since 2013.[24] Whereas Burkina Faso (22 per cent) and Mali (3.6 per cent) continued to increase their military budgets in 2019, military spending fell somewhat in Chad (–5.1 per cent), and significantly in Niger (–20 per cent).[25] Most of this funding is, however, spent on conventional warfare, such as heavy equipment, ignoring the asymmetric nature of the conflicts afflicting the regions, which calls for agile special forces, an effective intelligence strategy and efficient civil-military action.[26]

International community has matched these efforts with offers of funding, operational and human resources to the affected countries to fight the insurgencies, stabilize the situation and stem the recruitment and outflow of for-

- 23 The total of 10.3 billion US dollars in 2019. Tian, N., Kuimova, A., da Silva D. L., Wezeman, P.D., Wezeman, S. T., *Trends in world military expenditure 2019*, SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2019
- 24 *The Sahel - "in every sense of the word a crisis"*, IPP Media, 11 June 2020. Tian, N., Kuimova, A., da Silva D. L., Wezeman, P.D., Wezeman, S. T., *Trends in world military expenditure 2019*, SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2019
- 25 Tian, N., Kuimova, A., da Silva D. L., Wezeman, P.D., Wezeman, S. T., *Trends in world military expenditure 2019*, SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2019
- 26 Kone, H., *Sahel militaries need better governance to face the terror threat*, Institute for Security Studies, 26 February 2020

eign terrorist fighters.[27] The United Nations, for instance, has provided a policy framework, operational support and manpower to the strengthening of the national capacity to deal with the terrorism and violent extremism as well as help the countries in their counter-insurgency and stabilisation efforts.[28]

However, the armed conflicts continue to be one of the main drivers of insecurity, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa. Given the limited and very temporary success of the implemented, extremely costly, security measures, an understanding has matured over time that reliance on security-only responses fails to take notice of, address or remove the causes that feed these armed groups with a steady influx of fresh recruits and supporters. The hard security measures and armed suppression do not engage with the specific circumstances that lead to the radicalisation into violent extremism. They address the consequences, not the causes of those circumstances, and as such – if implemented alone - cannot but have very ephemeral, short-term results.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

- 27 The following military operations are presently active in the Sahel region:
  - G5 Sahel brings together five countries in the Sahel-Saharan strip: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. G5 Sahel is an institutional framework that has been promoting since February 2014 regional cooperation in security matters (and development) between its member countries.
  - Operation Barkhane, led by the French Armed Forces, has succeeded Operation Serval in August 2014 by expanding its geographic focus. The force, with approximately 4,500 soldiers, is spread out between Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. It is headquartered in N'Djamena, Chad's capital, with bases in Niger, in northern Mali and more recently in central Mali near the border with Burkina Faso. The operation has an annual budget of nearly 600 million euros and is the largest France's oversees operation.
  - France's Special Operations Task Force for the region, Operation Sabre, is in Burkina Faso.
  - The United States leads Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership, intended to increase the counter-terrorism capacity in Mali, Niger, Chad and Mauritania. It encompasses 15 countries participating in annual training exercise, Flintlock. The US has Special Forces' contingents in Mali and Niger.
  - The European Union has two Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions in Mali and one in Niger. In Mali, these are the EU Training Mission (EUTM), which provides training for the Malian armed forces, and the EU Capacity and Assistance Programme (EUCAP) mission, which focuses on police and internal security forces. The EUCAP mission in Niger has since 2016 focused much more on migration, whereas the two missions in Mali remain focused on counterterrorism training, core military and police capacity building, and improving awareness of human rights. The EUTM in Mali has around 600 soldiers from 20 EU Member States.

  European Council on Foreign Relations, Mapping armed groups in Mali and the Sahel, May 2019. The North Africa Journal. Public relations office, French Armed Forces Headquarters, Press Pack Operation Barkhane, February 2020.
- 28 Since July 2013, the UN has been providing troops to contain insurgency in Mali and guarantee the implementation of the 2015 Algiers Accord. Presently, the United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) counts 15,072 personnel from 60 countries, divided between military, police and civilian staff. The mission is established to keep the peace in Mali's northern regions, but its operations have expanded toward Mopti and elsewhere in central Mali as insecurity in these regions has grown. European Council on Foreign Relations, *Mapping armed groups in Mali and the Sahel,* May 2019.

1.2

Arriving at the notion of community resilience

The understanding that any meaningful response to the instability caused by non-state armed groups has to take into consideration the specific context in which these groups operate and recruit, is a result of numerous studies and articles published since 2001. This body of research on causes of radicalisation into violent extremism has helped shape the knowledge that real grievances, historical injustices and social marginalisation lie at the heart of the problem. In parallel, international agencies and non-governmental organisations have devoted significant efforts to addressing the root causes and to creating counter-narratives to reduce recruitment and delegitimize extremist propaganda. This understanding has matured into political actions, such as the Malian 2015 agreement on peace and reconciliation, and most recently, a *communiqué* issued following January 2020 summit hosted by France, calling for the Sahelian states' return to conflict-affected areas and an increase in development assistance.[29]

Yet, what exactly works and what does not is yet to be understood in a definite and evidence-based manner. The search for this understanding starts with questions.

What motivates a person to decide to associate himself or herself with a group that uses violence to make its demands considered? Faced with the continued stream of news reports on lives lost and the adverse effects of attacks on local communities, why do young people continue to join armed groups? Is there a way to prevent them from doing so? What would make them consider less drastic alternatives to addressing the grievances they must be harboring? What would those alternatives be? What kind of support should be offered to make that person resilient to radicalisation into violent extremism?

It is impossible to predict whether a person, despite many injustices suffered and in the presence of real grievances, would consider violence as a legitimate tool to right a wrong. Radicalisation is a dynamic process influenced not only by personal insights, perceptions and logic, but also by the context in which that person lives, his or her interactions with the community and the lived consequences of the policies of a state. Thus, it may be more important to consider what efforts would make a community more resilient to stem radicalization into violent extremism of its, predominantly young, members. It becomes important to consider at what level support should be directed: individual, community, national, or some combination of the three.

In 2015, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) launched a comprehensive effort to find answers to these questions. The approach was to pilot interventions of different nature, scope and duration in nine countries of the regions of Sahel and Maghreb, working with civil society associations and not-for-profit organisations who would define the risk of radicalisation into violent extremism at their operational level, be it regional, national or community-level, and propose strategies for mitigating it. The approach allowed UNICRI to support and study practical, innovative and sustainable measures as well as those that struggled to make a difference, learning important lessons in the process.

■ 29 The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, *G5 Sahel – Pau Summit – Statement by the Heads of State (13* January 2020)

1.3
Terminology

One of the first lessons has been an understanding of the difficulty of defining in absolute terms the very concepts the project had been structured to measure.

The notion of 'radicalization' is used to convey a process by which an individual adopts increasingly extremist beliefs and aspirations.[30] The process may, under certain conditions, lead to different forms of extremis, including religious extremism and, even further, to violent extremism, in many of its forms. The Arabic language, for example, has a whole spectrum of terms describing the process of religious radicalisation, calling for extreme care when defining and communicating these concepts.[31] Most people that get radicalised do not join violent extremist groups[32] and those that join violent extremist groups are not necessarily well versed in the matters of religious, or for that matter, political ideology.[33] As such, "radicalisation" or "extremism" are used to describe non-violent activity and, as any opinion or belief, shall not be considered problematic in themselves. Actual violent conduct, or adherence to violent extremist groups, calls for measures to counter it.[34]

When it comes to terrorism and violent extremism, any notion of these concepts needs to be contextually appropriate. Defining with any precision these phenomena in absolute terms is practically impossible for the nine observed countries, each consisting of a multitude of ethnic groups and languages,[35] many of whom do not have an equivalent for the terms in their languages. The United Nations emphasizes that "[d]efinitions of 'terrorism' and 'violent extremism' are the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law. To be classified as terrorism, actions must be designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target."[36] Violent extremism can, in general terms, be considered an ideology that harnesses and weaponises religious or other cultural identities as instruments to justify and further violence against the "other". It is the use or support of violence to achieve political, ideological or religious goals, fostering "hatred which might lead to inter- or intra-community violence".[37] Violent extremists at times target individuals and communities who do

- 30 UNOCT Reference Guide for Developing National and Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism, September 2018
- 31 *Mutadayin* denotes pious believer, *multazim* the one who feels under a religious commitment, *ikhwani* a member of Muslim brotherhood, *islahi* reformist, *u7uli* fundamentalist, *Salafi* follower of the conservative reform movement, *Wahabi* follower of the Saudi theological doctrine, and *mutatarif* extremist *and jihadi* for combatant. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Perception study on the drivers of insecurity and violent extremism in the border regions of the Sahel.
- 32 International Alert, *If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel*, June 2018
- 33 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Journey to extremism in Africa: Drivers, incentives and the tipping point for recruitment*, 2017
- 34 UNOCT Reference Guide for Developing National and Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism
- 35 Ibid
- 36 Ritchie, H., Hasell, J., Appel, C., Roser, M., Terrorism, *Our world in data*, July 2013
- 37 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report on best practices and lessons learned on how protecting and promoting human rights contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism*, United Nations General Assembly, 21 July 2016, A/HRC/33/29, para. 17

not adhere to their beliefs and ideology, even if they share their religious background.[38]

As already mentioned, there is no internationally agreed definition of non-state armed groups. The Additional Protocol 2[39] to the Geneva Conventions40 on the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts defines non-state armed groups as "dissident armed forces or other organized armed groups which, under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of a territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations (...)". For the purposes of this report, such groups are referred to as non-state armed groups or simply armed groups.

In enhancing community resilience, it is important to understand what a community is, another highly contextualised concept. In some cases, a community implies an administrative organisation, such as neighborhoods at the outskirts of Nouakchott in Mauritania or Tangier in Morocco. In others, the community aligns itself with the sense of community felt by a particular group, such as the Soninke tribe, which occupies large swaths of land stretching across the borders of Mauritania into Mali and Senegal. However, irrespective of the distinction, it is clear that those involved always have a clear sense of what the community represents and what it means to them.[41]

Finally, psychologists define resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress.[42] It is the ability to withstand, adapt to or recover from adversity. This does not mean that a resilient person or community will not experience difficulty or distress. It implies the possibility of learning, with time and intentionality, behaviors, thoughts and actions that help the person or community withstand, adapt or recover from adversity. In the case of resilience to violent extremism, it represents the act of community or an individual deciding not to join or support violent extremist groups, distancing itself from the views and actions of such groups.

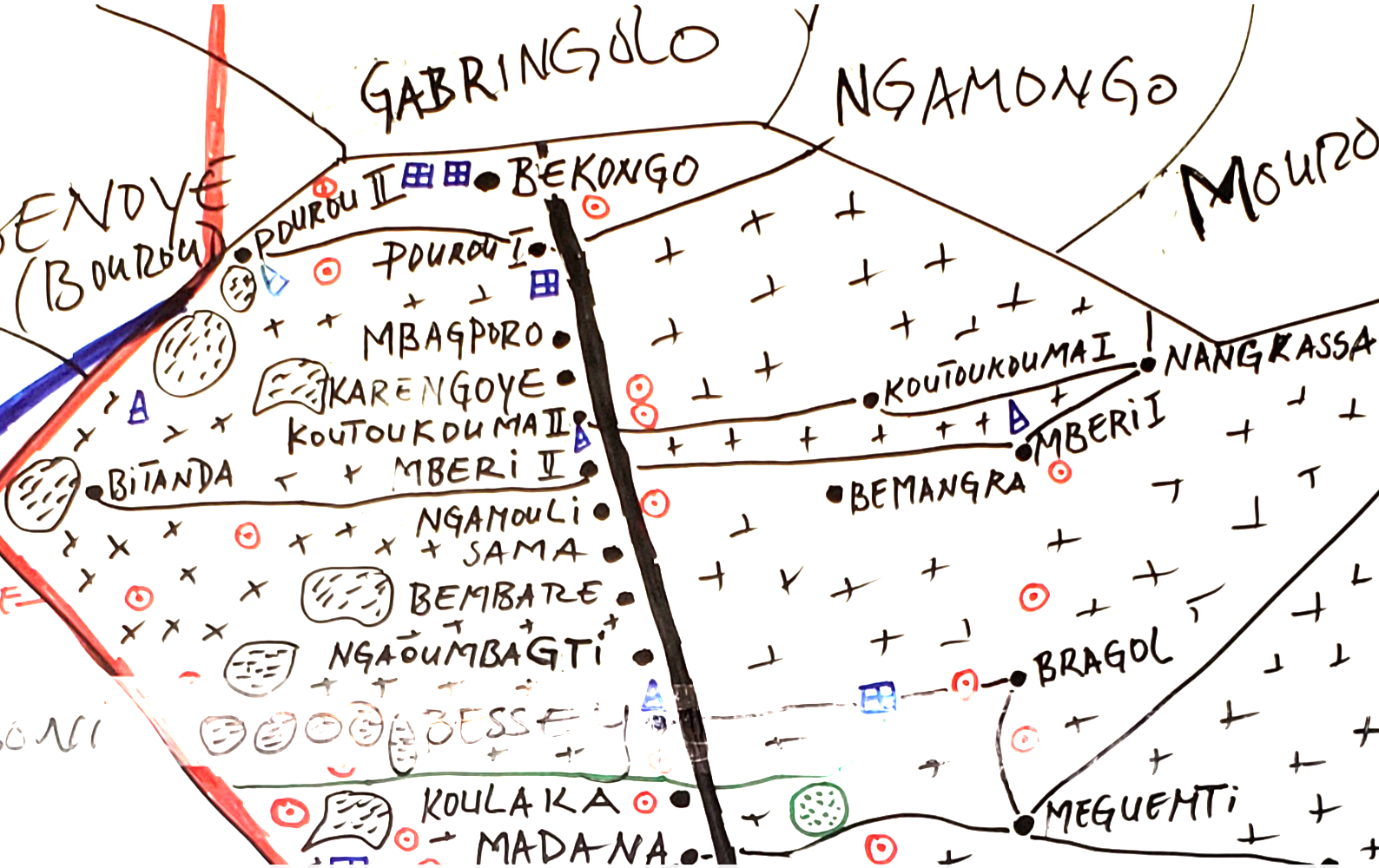
- 38 International Alert, *If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel*, June 2018
- 39 Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts of 8 June 1977
- 40 The Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949.
- 41 In administering a survey, UNICRI asked questions related to "community" without identifying what it should mean for the person interviewed. During the survey testing, at the end of interview, UNICRI asked interviewees to define what community meant for them. It observed that it meant different things depending on the question (i.e. ethnic group, national belonging, university community), and that the person interviewed never reported the term being ambiguous nor felt unable to define what it meant to her/him.
- 42 American Psychological Association

1.4

UNICRI project

UNICRI project on countering radicalisation and violent extremism, implemented from July 2015 to December 2020, supported 31 organisations working at grass-root level to implement 83 large-, medium- and small-scale projects. The projects were selected through three public calls for proposals, inviting not-for-profit and civil society organisations, and media, youth and women associations involved in conflict prevention, conflict mitigation, democratic citizenship, and local community empowerment in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, and Tunisia to apply.[43] All projects were expected to be directly or indirectly relevant to enhancing resilience to violent extremism.

Initially, preference was given to projects that were regional in nature, planning on implementing activities in more than one country. This consideration was guided by the knowledge that many armed groups operate in border areas, taking advantage of the porosity of borders in the conflict affected areas.



43 UNICRI received and evaluated 229 applications from nine countries for the three calls:
- 85 applications for the call for applications from Maghreb, published in June 2016;
- 41 applications for the call for applications from Sahel, published in August 2016; and
- 103 applications for the call for applications from both regions, published in July 2018.

PROJECTS

10 REGIONAL

3 MAGHREB

7 SAHEL

73 COUNTRY-SPECIFIC

48 MAGHREB

25 SAHEL

Distribution of 73 country-specific projects

Maghreb **48**

Sahel **25**

ALGERIA	LIBYA	MOROCCO	TUNISIA	BURKINA FASO
1	1	15	31	1

A set of administrative criteria ensured that the organisations had demonstrable ethical principles and the capacity to run internationally-funded projects of certain scope, value and duration.[44] The average duration was two years. A diversity in contracting modalities allowed for 3.3 million US dollars to support a wide range of interventions. In terms of their budgets, UNICRI supported large, medium-scale, small-scale and micro projects:

Project type	Budget in US dollars	Number of projects	In percentages
Large	200,000 - 500,000	4	5%
Medium-scale	20,000 - 65,000	40	48%
Small-scale	10,000 – 20,000	25	30%
Micro	≤ 10,000	14	17%

CHAD **9**

MALI **2**

MAURITANIA **4**

NIGER **9**

44 The administrative criteria applied for vetting out organisations included previous experience in running similar projects, sound financial management record and personnel capacity. Sample guidelines for grant applicant are available on **UNICRI website**.

Aside from these general criteria, UNICRI avoided to:

1. **Define which communities or which particular groups within communities should be considered at risk of radicalisation into violent extremism;**
2. **Indicate preferences for certain at-risk geographical locations over others;**
3. **Define which grievances constitute a risk for radicalisation into violent extremism and would need addressing, irrespective of them being categorizable as push, pull or personal factors;**
4. **Suggest how the perceived grievances should be addressed and groups at risk engaged.**

In other words, UNICRI did not set out with a ready theory to prove. It did not delineate a clear approach for grass-root organisations to follow in their implementation of projects. General substantive criteria expected the organisations to possess some previous experience in conflict prevention and mitigation, democratic citizenship and community empowerment in the areas they proposed to support. The organisations were expected to be operational while not necessarily headquartered in the nine countries.

Such an approach allowed UNICRI to support projects which offered a context-specific analysis of local conflict dynamic, grievances and groups at risk, targeted extremely diverse groups of stakeholders and were implemented in different political, social, economic and geographical environments. With the local organisations fully in charge of implementing the projects in nine countries, the role of UNICRI has been that of monitoring, administrative and financial backstopping, communication, information gathering, analysis and evaluation.

1.5
Methodology

The intervention of UNICRI over the five and a half years has been interested in understanding the context in which radicalisation to violent extremism happens in communities across nine countries. Furthermore, it was important to grasp the kind of mechanisms at play that allow communities to deal in a peaceful manner with cases which have the potential to instigate its aggrieved actors to resort to violence or to joining armed groups as a means of finding a resolution. In examining what enhances resilience of a community, UNICRI, in the spirit of investigation, did not start from a theory or a hypothesis, trying to prove or disprove it through data collection and observation. Instead, UNICRI relied on local knowledge and perceptions of what the grievances are and local ability and ingenuity to find ways to address those grievances in the most feasible and appropriate manner,

respecting local circumstances, culture, mores, and traditions.

One of the research studies carried out as part of the UNICRI intervention[45] suggests that persons who join violent extremist groups often tend to accumulate grievances, reaching some sort of a breaking point. The persons appear to be able to resist the pressure or tension created by difficulties, but in the absence of resolution, or the possibility thereof, to either one of those over an extended period of time, there comes a point beyond which some persons do not see any viable alternative to responding in extreme fashion, rejecting their communities with accumulated complexities, historical, systemic injustices and impotence, and choosing a simple solution to a whole set of problems.

While recurring to violence cannot be justified in any circumstance and acknowledging that this process applies only to an extremely limited number of persons, UNICRI intervention was interested in efforts that manage to revert this process and (re)integrate such persons into the community by showing ways for peaceful resolution. The measure of success was negative – not rejecting the community, not joining armed groups. Given the difficulty of measuring this, the project looked instead at the capacity of projects to change perceptions of at-risk community members towards armed groups, perceptions of community leaders and other influential persons, the degree of optimism they shared for a peaceful resolution of grievances and their role in it, any durable mechanisms possibly set up to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution, and any good practices of use of such mechanisms.

During the period 2018-2020, UNICRI devised the following mixed-method approach to extracting information that could help in understanding what constitutes vulnerability, which community or population group is at the greatest risk and how best to improve their resilience:

1. Content analysis: Data was extracted from all material related to the projects, produced by UNICRI or shared by organisations implementing projects in nine countries. This included project descriptions; notes on meetings and teleconferences; quarterly and event reports on progress in carrying out activities, encountered challenges, including experienced threats and security issues, and communication strategies; and substantive material, such as handbooks, training material, research studies, natural resource maps, advocacy campaign material, agendas, and speaking notes produced by local organisations. Lists of event participants were used to extract and compare biographical data, including age, gender, faith, ethnicity, location and profession. Articles from the press on the projects and those published by the organisations on their social media channels were used to better understand the extent to which participants felt free to discuss issues related to violent extremism or associate their activities to the topic. Photos and videos of events and participants were collected to better understand diversity of the audience and their views. An overwhelming amount of document has been received, of which, on average, 20 documents per organisation were analyzed, bringing the total number to nearly 600 for 31 organisation.
2. Participant survey: Together with local organisations, UNICRI developed a questionnaire consisting of 44 questions, with 29 multiple-choice and 15 open-ended

45 International Alert, *If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel*, June 2018

questions. Thirty-eight questions were mandatory and the remaining five optional, developed specifically to correspond to the needs of a project in Chad, dealing with access to natural resources. The questionnaire investigated personal grievances, and participants' perceptions on security, and security providers, on persons of authority at community level, violent extremism, religion, their level of optimism, and land distribution and access. A set of questions investigated views on the status of women and the young people in the communities. Terminological imprecision in relation to what constitutes violent extremism was taken into account, allowing organisations to precise the terms during interviews.

The questionnaire was shared with seven organisations implementing projects following the third call for proposals, namely in Chad (two projects), Mali (two projects), Morocco (one project) and Tunisia (two projects).[46] Five organisations administered the questionnaire to their participants, 278 people in total, in the period between October 2019 and July 2020:[47]

- Chad - 189 respondents;
- Mali – 54 respondents;
- Morocco – 12 respondents;
- Tunisia – 23 respondents.

The organisations covered all 44 questions, including those investigating perceptions on natural resource distribution.

3. Field missions and interviews: Regular field missions were organised to observe the conduct of activities. Evaluation meetings were held to administer semi-structured interviews with the staff of local organisations and project participants on their perceptions on the threat posed by violent extremist groups to their communities, possibilities for peaceful conflict resolution, their view of themselves as agents of change and the projects' effect on their perceptions, attitudes and behavior. Eighteen monitoring (Burkina

46 One of the lessons learned from implementing projects from the first and second call of proposals was the importance and the need for more systematic data collection on (general) profiles and perceptions of participants. Data collected and insights arrived at during the implementation of these projects helped in designing the questionnaire. For instance, the questionnaire was developed in collaboration with the grass-root organisations, promoting a participatory approach.

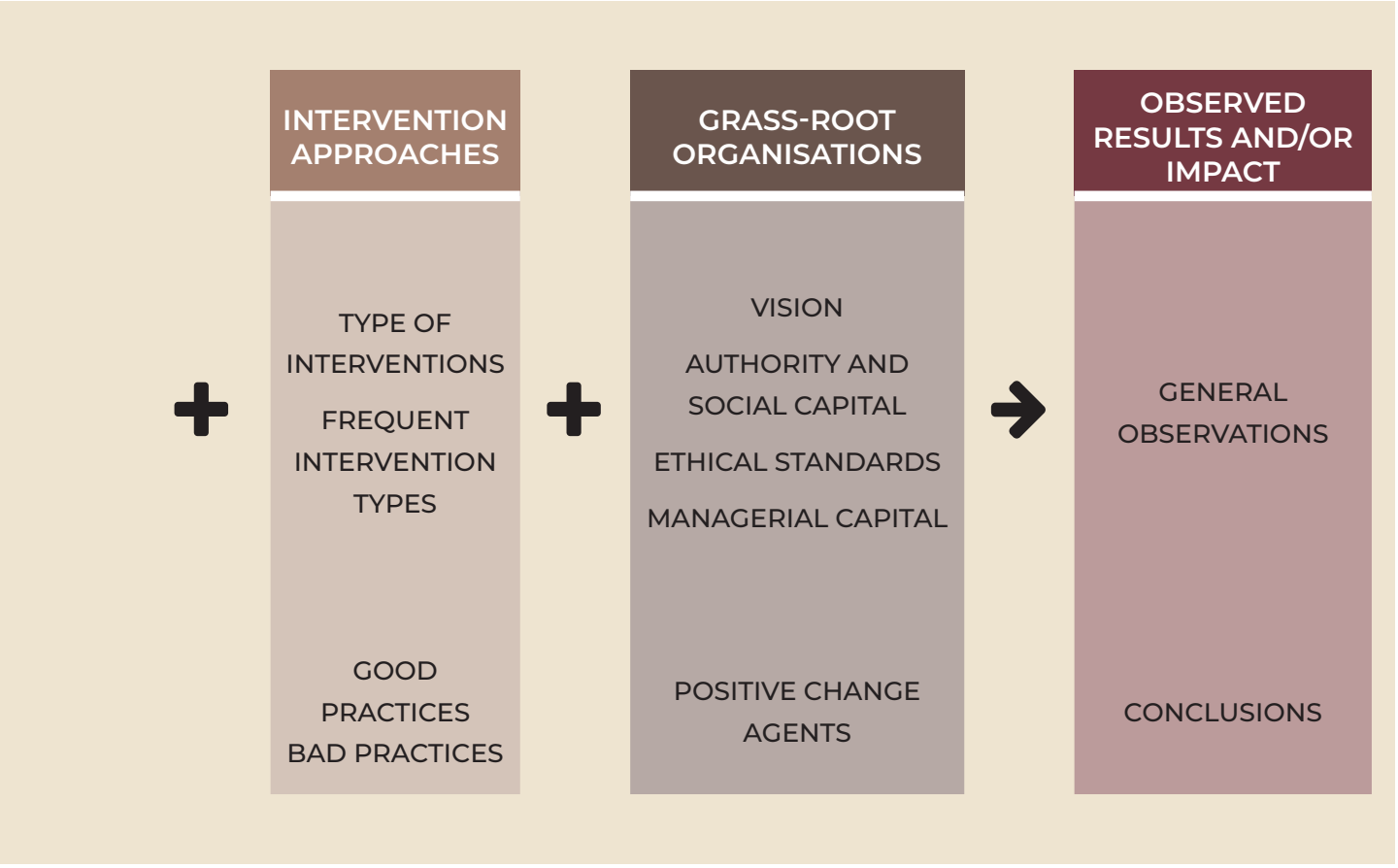
47 In Chad, the interviews were carried out in the period between October to December 2019, and in February 2020. In Tunisia, the interviews were administered in December 2019. In Mali, the interviews took place in the period from April to May and in July 2020.

Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Tunisia), three mid-term (Mauritania, Tunisia) and two end-of-project evaluation (Tunisia) missions were conducted. During the two evaluation missions to Tunisia in 2019, 41 people who participated in four projects were interviewed, including Koranic and high-school teachers, imams, representatives of imams' union, civil society activists, and university students.

4. Desk research: Literature review of documents available in the public domain was used to supplement insights arrived at through the analysis of primary sources. Data extracted from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) database[48] on armed groups' incidents, fatalities and incident locations were used for better contextualising projects.

The analysis took place from 2018 to 2020. This report is an effort at making sense of the large amount of primary data collected during the process in establishing the following:

1. Local stakeholders' analysis and illustrations of **conflict dynamics**, involved parties, community grievances, perceived



48 Platform for disaggregated data collection, analysis and crisis mapping, available at https://acleddata.com/#/dashboard.

injustices and personal vulnerabilities. This included information on the history of a conflict, political context, geographical coverage and environmental changes. When it comes to the parties involved, attention was paid to their profile, gender, age, ethnicity, faith, level of authority and involvement in conflict. For the purposes of this report, UNICRI did not distinguish between grievances reported directly by the participants or elaborated by local organisations based on their experience of working in and with the communities in question. Both groups are understood to be constituent elements of the local communities with views reflecting those of their communities.

2. This information was compared with the **intervention approaches** chosen by the local organisations to address the identified grievances. Attention was paid to the type of conducted activities, their frequency within or across projects or countries, participation patterns and any nuances depending on the context, organisations' preferences or the type of stakeholders.

   The authority enjoyed within the community,[49] vision, declared ethical standards, statements and actions of **grass-root organisations** implementing projects. Their social capital along with managerial acumen, analytical and administrative capacities were carefully observed, considered indispensable in any effort at enhancing community resilience as parties dedicated, in some cases for years, to peaceful conflict resolution. Particular attention was paid to the involvement and the role of women within these organisations as well as the leadership capacity of persons in managerial positions.

1.6
Limitations

The main difficulty has been in having surveys administered to all relevant stakeholders at the start and at the end of each project in order to observe perceptions and their change over time, as the projects worked on setting up conflict resolution mechanisms or addressing grievances. Projects being relatively short, disposing with limited financial and human resources, and dealing with risks involved in traveling repeatedly across areas possibly under threat of an armed attack, this has been greatly inconsistent. Moreover, the surveys administered in Morocco were shared with UNICRI in a different elaborated form, precluding more granular comparisons between the countries.

To this inconsistency of data collection is added the difficulty of collecting biographical data on direct beneficiaries so as to be able to complete the picture on their gender and age distribution, and establish the extent to which they adequately represent their communities, as well as how this data relates to their perceptions. This could have helped in better understanding possible biases in the grass-root organisations' designs and approaches, in particular with regards to the involvement of women, different ethnic and religious groups.

The greatest bulk of information came through the grass-root organisations. This information can reasonably be expected to be colored by their views, analyses and experiences, or the lack thereof. The effort to counter this included wider desk-top research, field missions to monitor the conduct of ac-

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ 49 As discerned from their network of contacts and influence with traditional and official authorities, demonstrated by the authorities' response to invitations to participate in project activities, campaigns, and events.

tivities and interview stakeholders first-hand. This notwithstanding, one has to accept that a certain amount of bias has managed to sift through into this report's findings.

Additionally:

- Number of projects per country has not been set in advance. This has resulted in different number and size of interventions per country and different level of detail received describing the context and grievances.
- Desk-top research did not include legal review. It was restricted to elements of the context directly relating to grievances reported by grass-root organisations. It is probable that more information could have been collected to better contextualise those reports, such as for instance the relationship between the reported economic hardship on one hand and available resources, climate change and relevant government policies on the other.[50]
- The projects did not deal with individuals. The interventions worked with types of individuals within selected communities that are perceived as marginalised or disenfranchised.
- It was possible to carry out evaluation field missions to Tunisia only. Missions to carry out semi-structured interviews with stakeholders of projects completed in 2019 were planned to Mauritania, Chad, Morocco, Niger and Mali in the first half of 2020. All were put on hold" due to travel restrictions imposed following the advice of the World Health Organisation.[51]
- Media review included sources reported by grass-root organisations, either platforms managed by them or independent media coverage, supplemented by desk-top research on media coverage in English and French. As such, it excluded reporting in Arabic unless such coverage was indicated by the organisations.

Given the UNICRI interventions' focus on communities, the reports detailing interviews and discussions with local populations, and topics of debates, training courses, workshops, radio programmes all point out to structural problems at the root of community grievances. They relate to push and pull factors, rather than personal factors, albeit these must undisputedly play a role.

Finally, personal insights, such as those presented in this report, cannot but be informed by authors' personal biases, professional, cultural and educational backgrounds. Efforts have been made to reduce this to a minimum by consulting other published research and subjecting the findings to a wide internal review and discussion.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

- 50 It was indicative that grass-root organisations from certain areas of Chad, for instance, were dealing with youth issues within the context of extractive industries' operations (oil).
- 51 The outbreak of coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19) was declared as public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organisation 's Director-General on 30 January 2020.

Touching the elephant

CHAPTER 2

2.1

What: community grievances

What motivates a person to decide to associate himself or herself with a group that uses violence to make their demands considered? Based on perspectives and perceptions of grass-root organisations and their projects' participants on the root causes of ongoing conflicts, violent incidents and community tensions, reported during the period 2017-2020, community grievances can be organised in 21 categories. The main source of information has been the content provided by grass-root organisations through regular quarterly reports, supplemented by more specific substantive material, as specified above in ssection 1.5. Methodology, point 1. Content analysis.[52]

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ 52 See page 16.

These grievances encompass political, security, legal, educational, economic, environmental, social, cultural and religious issues, as follows:

Good governance	**1.** Absence of state structures and support; **2.** Weak governance, with certain groups of population unrepresented, or even disenfranchised, at both national and the level of their communities, where power is still transferred following the principle of heredity; **3.** Lack of trust in state institutions, who are seen as acting in an unfair or abusive manner; **4.** Restricted freedoms of information, expression and assembly;
Security	**5.** Security compromised by armed rebel groups, including their criminal activities; **6.** Crimes committed by national security forces with impunity; **7.** Lack of trust and cooperation with the security forces;
Rule of law	**8.** Unequal access to justice with unresolved disputes over natural resources; **9.** Judiciary operating with limited resources and legal insecurity; **10.** Legal clientelism;
Education	**11.** High levels of illiteracy and an outdated educational system; **12.** Inadequate and unregulated religious education; **13.** Untrained, and unskilled labour force;
Economy	**14.** Lack of employment opportunities, particularly among the young population; **15.** Obstacles and restrictions to income-generating activities;
Environment	**16.** Access to land and water compromised due to climate change;
Social justice	**17.** Unequal treatment and discrimination against some ethnic groups; **18.** Discrimination against marginalised groups, including women, unemployed young men, former slaves, nomadic herders, refugee communities, and people with disabilities; **19.** Unfair, and at times unclear, distribution of natural resources;
Culture	**20.** General depletion of cultural landscape, including customs and traditions; and
Religion	**21.** Tensions between more recent and traditional religious practices.

Not all of the reported grievances were given equal weight and attention across nine countries. The table below offers an overview of where each one of them was considered a priority and the share of projects reporting that particular issue is a priority. In most cases, projects portrayed a complex, even if certainly far from complete, picture in which communities are dealing with more than one issue. This means that at a national level, a country like Mauritania is expected to deal with as many as twelve issues, each considered a priority by at least one project. The same number of issues was reported for Tunisia; however, 31 projects of varying sizes were implemented in Tunisia addressing these twelve issues, compared to only four in Mauritania. The greatest number of grievances were reported in Mali, 19 in total, with religious tensions and the lack of standardised religious education not reported as aggravating factors in the areas covered by seven projects operating there.

In terms of their relative weight, the greatest number of projects, one third of 83, addressed the issue of **discrimination against marginalised groups**. The issue was considered a priority in Morocco, Tunisia, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, but was not addressed in Algeria, Libya, and Burkina Faso. **Weak governance** was another issue of reportedly high relevance as one quarter of the projects worked on this matter in seven of nine countries – Algeria and Burkina Faso being the exceptions. The underlying requirement for good governance – **freedoms of expression and assembly** - was reportedly compromised, to varying extent, in all of the nine countries. This was in fact the only issue that was reported as common to all of the countries the projects worked in.

In Sahel, access to land and water is of great priority for all countries the projects worked in. Additionally, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali reportedly suffer from depletion in available natural resources as a result of climate change. None of the projects in Maghreb addressed this issue.

Table 1: Reported grievances' geographic coverage and relative importance

	Algeria	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia	Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Mauritania	Niger	Percentage of projects addressing the issue
Discrimination against marginalised groups										36.10%
Weak governance										24.10%
Restricted freedoms of expression and assembly										14.50%
Depletion of cultural landscape										10.00%
Unequal access to justice										9.60%
Discrimination based on ethnicity										8.40%
Insecurity caused by violent conflicts or criminality										8.40%
Lack of income generating opportunities										7.20%
Unfair distribution or unequal access to natural resources										6.00%
Lack of income-generating skills										6.00%
Limited access to education										4.80%
Lack of standardised religious education										4.80%

	Algeria	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia	Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Mauritania	Niger	Percentage of projects addressing the issue
Absence of state										4.80%
Lack of institutional accountability										4.80%
Lack of trust in security forces										4.80%
Lack of accountability of security forces										3.60%
Access to natural resources compromised due to climate change										2.40%
Religious tensions										2.40%
Income-generating opportunities curtailed										1.20%
Judicial insecurity										1.20%
Legal clientelism										1.20%

Based on project documentation, a picture of varying level of detail can be pieced together for most, if not each, of the reported grievances. This information, assembled together along with specific examples provided by the grass-root organisations, is shared here below, organised per policy area and, to the extent possible, in the order of their relative importance as demonstrated by the number of projects that reported the issue. No information that did not come from the grass-root organisations was used in the sections below. As such, the below descriptions of grievances may appear at times as not giving the full picture of challenges that some of these communities are facing. The decision to include only information from primary sources in this section has been made in order to be able to form an understanding of how the communities themselves perceive the problems they are faced with. Where relevant, commentary and additional information have been offered in footnotes.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MARGINALISED GROUPS

More than one third of all projects (36.1%) focused on social and political inequality, marginalisation and/or stigmatization that vulnerable groups face on a daily basis. These groups reportedly include women, youth, nomadic and cattle breeding communities, former slaves, women and men with disabilities. They enjoy insufficient legal protection, making them vulnerable to abuse.

Within traditional, mostly rural, communities, there is strong social polarization between the land-owning aristocracies and social minors (*cadets sociaux*). The latter represent men between 15 and 35 years of age, without a source of income and unable to marry and have a say in community decisions. In a number of rural communities throughout Sahel, such as the regions of Mopti in Mali, Sahel in Burkina Faso and Tillabery in Niger, a small number of families descended from the traditional chieftaincies monopolise the power. While in some cases these traditional authority structures manage to keep in check tensions within and without communities, this becomes more of a challenge in the communities whose main economic activity is pastoralism.

Furthermore, the society in the Sahel region is in some cases still divided into castes, such as the Fulani and the Soninke communities, with enforced bans on inter-caste marriages a manifestation of the omnipresent customary hierarchies. There is still a strong bias against former slaves, such as Heratttins in Mauritania, who often lack identity papers. The situation creates tensions within villages, at times even violent clashes, as former slaves' caste is challenging their position in the society and requesting to eradicate the practice of slavery[53]. As an example, a hotbed of tension has been created following a conflict linked to slavery-acknowledging practices between residents of Modibugu in Hodh El Gharbi region in Mauritania.

In some cases, men choose to leave their communities to look for jobs in the cities or even outside the country. They move to the capitals' overpopulated suburban areas, already plagued

■ 53 Slavery in Mauritania was abolished in 1981, criminalized in 2007 and designated as a crime against humanity under the 2012 constitutional reform. However, the practice is still spread and according to the 2018 Global Slavery Index, more than two in every 100 people - 90,000 in total - live as slaves.

by illiteracy and high levels of unemployment. Mosques and preachers' messages represent the only institution that sets the tone in these communities. In Mauritania, disenfranchised population of Nouakchott's suburban areas are frequently targeted by terrorist recruiters. A similar situation is present in certain neighborhoods of the port city of Tangier in Morocco.

Some of these men leave behind women, who are alone in raising children and building the sense of community and social cohesion. While still marginalised within the community life, their importance is growing as they are becoming de facto heads of families. For instance, with the emigration of males from the Soninke communities, which occupy vast territorial expanse of Mauritania, Mali and Senegal, the Soninke villages are becoming emptied of labor power and traditional authority. The role of educators and guides for the coming generation is left vacant, with the young people left to their own devices, neither integrated into the community work or traditional system of instruction, nor part of the state-run educational system.

The women left behind as well as the women interest groups in general are met with wide-spread neglect. They, including young women, are often victims of violence, including sexual harassment.[54]

Finally, as a result of protracted conflicts, there are both internal mass movements of people as well as those spilling over the border into neighboring countries. Due to its central location, the region of Mopti in Mali has become the largest transit point for internal mass movements, whereas many move to Niger. Menaka, in Mali, due to its proximity with Niger, has become the place of return for Malian refugees coming back from Niger. The situation creates challenges in integrating returnee communities within the host communities, with the accompanying risk of alienation and marginalisation.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ 54 Gender-based violence represents a great problem, especially in Mali, even though the projects that worked in Mali specifically did not address or report this issue. For instance, the report of the Panel of Experts on Mali, established pursuant to UNSCR 2374 (2017), states that "Between January and October 2019, 1,708 cases of sexual violence have been reported in the north and centre of Mali, and 734 cases, or 43%, have been perpetrated by armed actors. National defense and security actors make up 8% of cases of sexual violence, while 36% of cases have been committed by armed groups. Owing to the general environment of insecurity and context of impunity owing to weak security institutions, some cases of rape and sexual violence have been perpetrated by members of the communities as well." Instead, projects in Maghreb worked on this issue.

These socially marginalized groups tend to display greater sympathy for the discourse and practices of violent extremist groups.

DISCRIMINATION BASED ON ETHNICITY

The Sahel area is characterized by the Sahelian strip made up of ten countries each with a high number of ethnicities and languages. Certain ethnic groups are socially and politically marginalised or discriminated against. They do not enjoy equal rights, equal representation in public institutions, equal access to state services nor fair treatment and protection by the laws. If in place, laws protecting cultural diversity are reportedly not always enforced. The audio-visual media do not give them, nor their distinct cultures, equal attention. Education is not offered in the languages of these ethnic groups.

In Mauritania, minority linguistic communities are reportedly not fully integrated into the educational and the media landscapes. The national media offer at most one hour of daily programming in the languages of their communities despite the audio-visual laws in place guaranteeing representation. Education is not adjusted to the needs of these ethnic groups, with the university education in particular outdated - still reportedly following the French system put in place during the colonial period. Furthermore, the state methods of ensuring security through law enforcement is reported as crashing against the traditional ways of settling conflicts, which allows parties a possibility to save face, safe-guarding values and pride of the Soninke community in particular (refer to example). This feeds the perception among the minority ethnic communities, such as Soninke, Wolof and Pulaar, that the state is trying to assimilate them into the mainstream (Arabic) culture.

Furthermore, both in Mauritania and in Mali there is a perceived bias against nomadic or semi-nomadic communities, such as Fulani.[55]

■ 55 There is evidence of bias experienced by communities other than Fulani in these countries, most notably Tuareg.

Example

In Mauritania, following the establishment of a vigilance committee in Modibougu, a conflict broke out within the Soninke community. A mission set out to reconcile the parties and restore "social cohesion and harmony". It was composed of the project manager and regional representatives of the Soninke communities from Guidimakha, Gorgol, Baaxunu at Hodh Ech Charghi along with a representative of the region concerned (Kingi) in Hodh El Gharbi.

This form of representation is in keeping with the Soninke tradition of involving neighbors in order to put strong pressure on the belligerents, especially through joking and banter so as "to bring them to better feelings". After formal opening procedures, a discussion with the notables of the family that heads the village ensued. Traditional chiefs stated that the conflict started with the refusal by members of the caste of slaves to use the expression "the share of slavery" during a marriage ceremony. The expression is used in marriage ceremonies when nobles distribute gifts to the various castes of society: blacksmiths, shoemakers and slaves. The conflict that erupted ended with wounded and arrests on both sides. A member of a different Soninke tribe, allied with the traditional chiefs, approached the gendarmerie and offered to mediate to restore calm.

Negotiations that followed centered around the requests to, one hand, banish the slave practices, and allow autonomy and access to the chiefdom to the anti-slavery camp members, and, on the other hand, to maintain the tradition, the status quo, and respect for traditional chiefdom.

After several hours of negotiations, the villagers signed an agreement with the mayor and the gendarmerie, which stipulated prohibition of all slavery, release of all detainees, caring for the injured and maintaining the leadership in the traditional family. In the view of the project manager, the agreement only allowed the parties to stop the hostilities and take shelter in psychological trenches: "En effet les deux parties ont décidé de s'ignorer et de casser tous les liens de solidarité tissée depuis des générations et de se regarder en chiens de faïence."

UNFAIR AND, AT TIMES, UNCLEAR DISTRIBUTION OR UNEQUAL ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES

The Sahelian strip is distinguished by the scarcity of rains and pastures causing recurring inter-communal conflicts between herders and farmers. The land is either not fairly distributed, with immense wealth accumulated in the circles of power, or else its division or transhumance corridors not clearly or well-marked. In some cases, access to land or watering holes is contested or obstructed. In general, women cannot inherit land. Due to pressures on available land and water, herders are increasingly using areas that are off limits, such as natural reserves and elephant habitats, the very same areas used by local tribes for sourcing non-timber material.

In Mali's Mopti region, Fulanis compete for resources with Dogon, Bambara, and Tuaregs. In Niger's Tillabery region, Daoussakhs frequently clash with Fulani over resources. In Burkina Faso's Gourma region, clashes erupt between local tribes and herders who herd cattle of the rich from the capital. In 2016, Mauritania's Supreme courts' 38% of cases were reported to be related to land disputes.

GOVERNANCE

WEAK GOVERNANCE AND POOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

One quarter of the projects (24.1%) identified weak governance as one of the main community grievances. Poor citizen participation in the countries' political processes is largely perceived as one of the main weaknesses, mainly due to a low awareness of their role and responsibility in the functioning of democratic institutions. Coupled with weak foundations for human and civil rights' respect, large groups of population remain politically unrepresented or disenfranchised. The states are centralised, with power not devolved to regional and local levels. This is coupled with the hereditary transfer of power still in place at the level of tribes and villages, further nurturing the sense of exclusion.

In the case of Libya, as reported by one of the grass-root organisations working there, the political agreement signed in the Moroccan city of Skhirat (the Skhirat Agreement) on 17 December 2015 laid out a roadmap for peaceful political transition. However, the agreement did not manage to solve the crisis of legitimacy and dualism of state institutions. The country is lacking foundations for resilient democracy, and respect for human rights, resulting in a crisis of democratic values and lack of confidence in institutions.

RESTRICTED FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

Freedoms of expression and assembly remain reportedly restricted in pretty much all of the nine countries, with 14.5% of the projects identifying it among the factors compromising community resilience. In North Africa, transformation of government-owned media into independent public service is slow across the countries, with political interference, general threats of intimidation, pressure and control often reported. There are approximately 10,000 journalists, organised in five unions. Unions and their members face challenges to their professional and social rights. In Libya, journalists are targets of horrific violence, many of whom now operate from Tunisia and under constant fear of repercussions. In Algeria, press freedom has seen a flagrant degradation. The country was ranked 134th in the world press freedom index in 2017, five places down from 2016. In Morocco, the journalists' situation has improved since 2011, but challenges remain, including censorship, lack of financial means, and marginalization of the private press. In Tunisia, however, freedom of the press has been strengthened following the revolution of 2011. Today it is reportedly free, albeit challenged by the strong presence of the state.

In the region of Sahel, a union of credible journalists is struggling to form, much needed for protecting their social and professional rights, and representing them in the context of legislative and regulatory changes that have been affecting the media sector in the past few years. In Mauritania, freedom of the press has made significant progress. The media has multiplied, including private media. In 2017, there was a decline in the arrests of journalists. Mauritanian Journalists' Syndicate and the Association of Mauritanian Journalists have been somewhat successful in defending the journalists' rights and independence. However, the country has also witnessed the closure of two out of three private channels due to in imposition of heavy taxes by the authorities.

Overall, journalists are in an economically difficult situation that is compromising their independence and objective reporting. They suffer restrictions on the media space, with not so uncommon deprivation of their liberty.

To this situation is added a general lack of dialogue opportunities and a civil society space compromised by restrictions on the freedom of expression and a chronic lack of funding opportunities.

ABSENCE OF STATE

Many of the grass-root organisations agree that the sub-Saharan region is experiencing predominantly administrative and political management problems resulting in a significant deficit in (good) governance, justice and equity. In the Sahel, states are experiencing difficulties while exercising their sovereign and, in particular, security management missions, many of which are presently provided by the international community. Regional and local powers are unable to provide essential services and access to livelihoods. At times, the situation is further complicated by widespread corruption and nepotism. These conditions nurture a sense of abandonment among the local population, undermining the possibility for devising a national vision for peace. The absence of state has opened the way for armed militias to offer services, such as justice, protection, and order, challenging and competing with the state in its basic functions.

As already mentioned, the Mopti region in Mali has, due to its central position, become the largest transit point for internal mass movements of people between the north and the south. Every time a violent conflict erupts in an area of the region, there are massive movements of people towards safer areas in the country or to the neighboring countries. The state is neither able to provide protection and basic services to these people nor mitigate the conflicts. Exploiting this, armed criminal and in particular violent extremist groups have set-up training camps in Mopti for youths ready to join.

In Niger's Tillabery region, the security forces are, as reported by grass-root organisations, not intervening to protect Fulanis from abuses inflicted by Daoussakhs. Negligence and indifference of the authorities have been reported as a source of frustrations.

LACK OF TRUST IN INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The state authorities are reportedly engaging in unfair or abusive conduct, including corruption, misuse of financial resources, clientelism. In Niger, similar situation is reported, with government officials and members of parliament viewed in a very negative light by the general population. In Mali, shadow political groups are allegedly thriving on the profits of trafficking in arms and drugs. In Tunisia, there is a perception that government officials are engaged in cases of corruption. These perceptions lead to a distrust in government institutions and elected officials, along with an increasing sense of impotence.

CULTURE

In an environment already challenged by lacking economic opportunities, the young women and men are reporting a general lack of cultural initiatives to engage with. Some ethnic groups reported fears of having their traditional culture and heritage threatened by the majority groups' cultural and religious norms. For instance, in Mauritania, the Soninke population feel that their traditional culture is threatened by the mainstream Arabic culture as well as more conservative interpretations of Islam. They cite the example of their women needing to cover themselves in public spaces in a "correct" manner and to wear thick, black robes. The Soninke community fears that the more conservative Islamic precepts would become the norm at the expense of their own culture.

GENERAL DEPLETION OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

RULE OF LAW

Unresolved disputes over access to land and/or water are frequently cited as being at the root of inter-communal conflicts in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger. In addition, cattle rustling feeds inter-ethnic polarization. For instance, Fulani villages are at risk from the Dogon and Bambara farmers in the Mopti region of Mali, and from the Daoussakh herders in the Tillabery region of Niger. The violent extremist groups position themselves as protectors. By offering order and resolution to cases, they win over the trust of local communities. In Tillabery region, those who take up arms are often reportedly greeted as heroes when they return to the village, attracting respect and acclaim.

In the countries of Maghreb, the reported problems are related to the unaddressed cases of torture, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. Women in particular are frequently reported as not having access to justice.

UNEQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

JUDICIARY OPERATING WITH LIMITED RESOURCES AND LEGAL INSECURITY

The judiciary is reportedly operating with limited resources and in precarious working conditions. In the context of counter-terrorism, another challenge is also represented by criminal legislation's definitions of terrorism.

LEGAL CLIENTELISM

The cases of legal clientelism and partiality of justice are perceived as creating more frustrations than violent extremism.

SECURITY

INSECURITY CAUSED BY VIOLENT CONFLICTS AND CRIMINALITY

While majority of the grass-root organisations delved into the causes of violent conflicts, seven turned to the fact that the insecurity created by the protracted conflicts, be they due to violent extremist activity or inter-community tensions, and accompanying criminality becomes un underlying factor in its own right.

In Mali, a peace agreement between the government and Tuareg rebels was signed on 24 April 1995, with its anniversary celebrated nationally every year.[56] However, the institutions in charge of promoting national reconciliation and dialogue, such as the Conseil National de Dialogue Politique (CNDP), the Mediator, the Commission Nationale de Dialogue Sociale (CNDS) and Conseil Supérieur de la Communication (CSC),

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ 56 The Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation for Mali resulting from the Algiers Process was signed on June 2015. Similarly, its implementation appears to be difficult with very little progress made since.

have purportedly become passive, powerless, and dysfunctional. Armed groups that are signatories to the agreement have free rein to indulge in all kinds of robbery, banditry, theft and trafficking. The situation has given rise to a shadow political economy thriving on the profits of trafficking, particularly aggravated in the border areas by trafficking in drugs and arms. One such area between Mauritania and Mali is exactly where the Soninke population is mostly present, already affected by ethnic discrimination. Similar situation marks the area within Tunisia on the border with Algeria, where violent extremist activity converges with criminality.

LACK OF TRUST IN SECURITY FORCES

The reports from grass-root organisations suggest that security forces operating in conflict areas are poor in communicating with the local population. The local population is not aware of the mandates of different security actors nor why they should be cooperating with either national security or foreign armed forces. This feeds rumors, suspicions and misunderstandings. Certain ethnic groups, Fulani among others, tend to be poorly represented within the national security and defense forces, which enhances their hostility towards the forces. The involvement of foreign armed forces is negatively perceived as having the security issues in the hands of strangers, whereas G5-Sahel is considered inefficient in dealing with insecurities in Sahel compared to ECOWAS' community policing system. Consequently, citizens are not volunteering information on suspicious activity or persons to security forces, directly undermining the success of their operations.

This lack of trust and cooperation is easily and frequently exploited by violent extremist groups. In Niger, in the village of Boni Peul, violent extremists are allegedly applying downright fantasy in turning the local population against the contingents from France, the United States and other European countries, saying that "the tale of jihadism was invented to better control them".

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY OF SECURITY FORCES

Armed conflict and occupation of northern Mali in 2012 had dramatic and lasting effect on social cohesion. In 2013, violence spread to central regions of Mopti and Segou. However, some heavy-handed military actions by national and international security and defense forces, in some cases combined with a perceived bias against Fulani and other minority communities, have shattered trust and ultimately the possibility of a meaningful dialogue. Cases have been reported where young men have been targeted by security forces as potential jihadists due to the inability of the forces to distinguish between ethnic affiliation and ideological alignment. State of emergency with extended discretionary powers of the security forces has often led them to allegedly engage with impunity in criminal behavior, such as ill-treatment, abusive behavior, sexual violence against women or men, arbitrary arrests, extortion, and extrajudicial killings.

In both Mali and Burkina Faso, national security forces are perceived by villagers as threatening peace and security. Their systematic abuse of women is reportedly inspiring desire for revenge. During the battle of Konna in the region of Mopti in 2012, women were reportedly among the main victims of the security forces' operations - raped, abducted, and forcibly married. Human rights organisations have corroborated such allegations of cases of torture, enforced disappearances and summary executions involving military in the Mopti region.[57] In Niger's Diffa region, the situation is reported to be the same as in Mopti in terms of cases of abuses. However, despite the absence of wide-spread abuses by the security forces in this region, there is a wide-spread perception of them happening.

In the Burkina Faso's Sahel region, the government passed a decision to secure the area by sending in large numbers of young, inexperienced soldiers. The communities reported cases of mistreatment and abuse, with the army assaulting every-

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ 57 Including by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, which as recently as in June 2020 published that "589 killed in central Mali so far in 2020 as security worsens". The statements reads that "So far this year, the Human Rights and Protection Division has documented 230 extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions attributed to members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF) in the central regions of Mopti and Ségou. Forty-seven of these killings, which occurred in five incidents in March 2020, are attributed to Malian Defence and Security Forces presumably acting under the command of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel). Instances of enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, arbitrary arrest, and the destruction of several properties have also been documented."

one indiscriminately. They reported being more scared of the security forces than the jihadists.

The violent extremist groups in some cases protect local communities from security forces' abuse. In other cases, young Fulanis from villages see the extremist groups as their only defense against suspected complicity between the army and other ethnic groups organised into militias. Violent extremist groups at times exploit these perceptions to convince young Fulanis from the north Tillabery in Niger that the enemy is not Tuaregs but the state.

ECONOMY

LACK OF INCOME-GENERATING OPPORTUNITIES

General lack of economic opportunities, high youth unemployment and abundance of unstructured time are perceived across both Maghreb and Sahel as sources of insecurity, frequently greater than the terrorist threat itself.

Lack of money prevents young men from the central Sahel communities from marrying, and crossing the threshold to adulthood. They remain the so-called social minors (*cadets sociaux*) and risk social marginalisation. Armed groups, including organised crime groups, operating in the areas hit by economic hardship or dire poverty offer young recruits financial or material resources, helping them earn social recognition.[58] In the Gourma region, armed groups reportedly offer as much as 30-50 US dollars a day. In Niger, the majority of young people from Boni in the Tillabery region are unemployed, whereas extremist groups offer resources, such as weapons, motorbikes and fuel, the value of which is more symbolic and status-related than economic. Young armed bandits drive around on motorbikes, well dressed and well fed.

In Mauritania, 44% of the rural population lives in extreme poverty. In the regions of Gorgol, Brakna and Tarza, extremist groups and traffickers take advantage of the difficult situation

■ 58 In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, there are indications suggesting that armed groups, and in particular violent extremist groups, are involved in artisanal and small-scale gold mining. Reid, G., Gold Rush: Artisanal mining, crime and militancy in Africa, S-RM, 29 January 2020. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Gold at the crossroads: Assessment of the supply chains of gold produced in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, 2018.

to establish a foothold. Poverty and lack of income-generating activities push the young to migrate towards the cities, which are already overpopulated and exposed to criminality. Consequently, there is a high rate of unemployment among disenfranchised population of Nouakchott's suburban areas, in particular Sebkha, Ksar, Arafat and El Mina, which are frequently targeted by violent extremist groups' recruiters.

Many Tunisian youths agree that unemployment, lack of opportunities, and marginalisation are the main reasons for the young people becoming susceptible to radicalisation. The youths from the Kasserine and Le Kef regions find the lack of development and work opportunities as main sources of insecurity, rather than the terrorist threat. The unemployment rates in these regions are much higher than the national average. Unemployed graduates with higher education are estimated at 31.2% of the population. The population had high expectations from the revolution, but has been disappointed by the post-revolution Tunisian government. Many blame the media for exaggerating the threat from terrorism and stigmatizing their regions.

INCOME-GENERATING OPPORTUNITIES CURTAILED

In Niger, following a violent attack which caused the death of six defense force members, the state closed six rural markets in the Abala region and a border with Mali. It further signed an agreement with one of the armed groups of Mali, the Azawad Salvation Movement (MSA), to ensure the security of the area. In Chad, the security measures included the evacuation of Lake Chad and the ban on access to certain production areas, a situation that tipped economic prosperity to the humanitarian catastrophe, and contributed to the massive departure of rural youth to support the terrorist movement.

Heavy security measures have an extremely negative impact on the local populations' ability to engage in income-generating activities. Closed markets, whole areas or borders as a result of conflicts and violent clashes affect drastically local population with an unclear effect on armed criminal groups. Such restrictions present barriers to migration routes for labour in areas where migration is considered a natural phenomenon, result of poverty and socio-economic exclusion. Some of the local participants expressed their view of the European countries as being unjust in dealing with migrants and criminalising migration for labour.

EDUCATION

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Mauritania and Niger, have seen an explosion of Koranic schools. These schools fill in the vacant space created by the absence of the official educational structures, but are not in a position to create labor force with reliable income-generating skills. The students leave Koranic schools with some form of religious education, frequently lacking basic literacy. The lack of technical qualifications leaves them without any possibility for professional integration apart from teaching Koran. However, as it is difficult for many of them to be employed by a mosque, many opt for teaching Koran without pay. Without an employment, they are a risk group easily targeted and mobilized by the jihadists. This is particularly true for the overpopulated suburban areas, such as those of Nouakchott in Mauritania - Sebkha, Ksar, Arafat and El Mina. Neighborhoods like these are plagued by high rates of unemployment, low levels of literacy and poverty, and frequently targeted by jihadist recruiters.

UNTRAINED AND UNSKILLED LABOUR FORCE

As mentioned above, a number of countries have seen efforts by Koranic schools to offer education in areas where state has been unable to create a suitable infrastructure (Sahel) or to social groups that are in a weaker position to access state education (for example in Tunisia). The countries, particularly in Sahel, suffer from a lack of educational infrastructure, most of all schools, well trained and well-paid teachers. Educational systems still tend to be based on an outdated, colonial model that is not well suited to the local contexts. Furthermore, educational programmes are rarely culturally appropriate, offered in languages of minority ethnic communities or adjusted to nomadic communities.

LIMITED ACCESS TO EDUCATION

In Mali's region of Mopti, literacy is 40% among population of 2,037,330 consisting of ethnic groups of Bambara, Dogon, Bozo, Fulani and Tamashek. The only paved road in the region leads to Boni, a village and a capital of a rural commune consisting of 32 villages and a population of 29,741. The village has both state and Koranic schools, rare in a region where many villages can at best boast a Koranic school. It therefore comes as no surprise that many women from the region, generally not allowed to go to schools, express desire to marry a Muslim religious leader and teacher (*marabout*) or a Koranic teacher in order to be able to learn from them.

The situation is not very different for Niger. In the region of Tillabery, there is virtual absence of state education. When offered, it is of poor quality, with fewer than one student in 50 finishing elementary school. In Mauritania, villages and bigger cities' suburban areas have a high rate of illiteracy, in particular among youths. The education is rarely offered in languages and cultures of ethnic minority groups, such as Soninke, Wolof and Pulaar, making them ill-prepared for the labour market, feeling excluded and easily targeted by violent extremist groups' recruitment.

In the Sahel region, the additional problem is that the educational system is not adapted to transhumant communities. While the situation is different in Maghreb countries, young people in Tunisia identify poor quality of education and its inability to instill critical thinking as one of the reasons for the youths' susceptibility to radicalisation.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NOT STANDARDISED

Despite the increasing number of Koranic schools, in particular across the Sahel region, knowledge of religious texts is rather limited. This is due to poor resources available to Koranic schools, many of which operate outside an official system, without either a curricula or a textbook, resulting in a low quality of instruction, bordering indoctrination. Functioning as informal structures in many countries - outside of institutional supervision, without legal status, state funding and a standardised curricula - it is up to Koranic school teachers to improvise their teaching to the best of their knowledge and ability. Koranic school students thus learn the practices of Islam in a completely liberal educational system that is beyond control of competent authorities. The teachers themselves are in a precarious position due to the informal nature of their employment, and education. As the schools tend to be attached to mosques, the teachers (many of whom in Tunisia are women) depend on imams who, in their own right, have not undergone official education and in some cases can't even read. The education imams receive does not include democratic values nor basic awareness of legal provisions as they relate to the respect for human rights and gender equality. As such, their sermons usually lack respect for women's right, reinforcing exclusion.

The lack of standardised, formal religious education often leads to Koranic schools' willingness to accept funding that comes from foreign powers, especially in Niger and Mali. It can also lead to closed-minded interpretation of religious texts. The Islamist discourse is employed to challenge the authority, both traditional and formal. In cases, such as in some of the Sahelian states, where traditional and religious authorities support and enjoy support from a clientelist governance system, it is easy for the moralising discourse of radical clerics to strike a chord with disheartened youths and encourage questioning. Such as, for instance, questioning of the practice of traditional chiefs in some of Niger's villages to allegedly exercise their right to sleep with anyone's wife with the blessing of a Muslim religious teacher (*marabout*). Other reports suggest instead that radical preachers operating in the villages of the Mopti region in Mali directed their radical discourse against marginalised groups, such as landless people, poor herders, former slaves, Koranic school students (*talibes*).

Religious ideology can thus be used as an opportunistic cover, a branding strategy, in many ways for grievances that are more fundamental but less often expressed, including anything from a break from hierarchy, tradition, or a quest for independence. A rise in radical religious discourse has been observed in Sahel, especially among the young people. However, evidence collected shows that actors aligning themselves with a radical reading of Islam tend not to be violent. The areas over which institutionalized radical religious movements exert their influence tend not to overlap with the territorial influence of violent extremist groups.[59]

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ 59 International Alert, If victims become perpetrators: *Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel*, June 2018

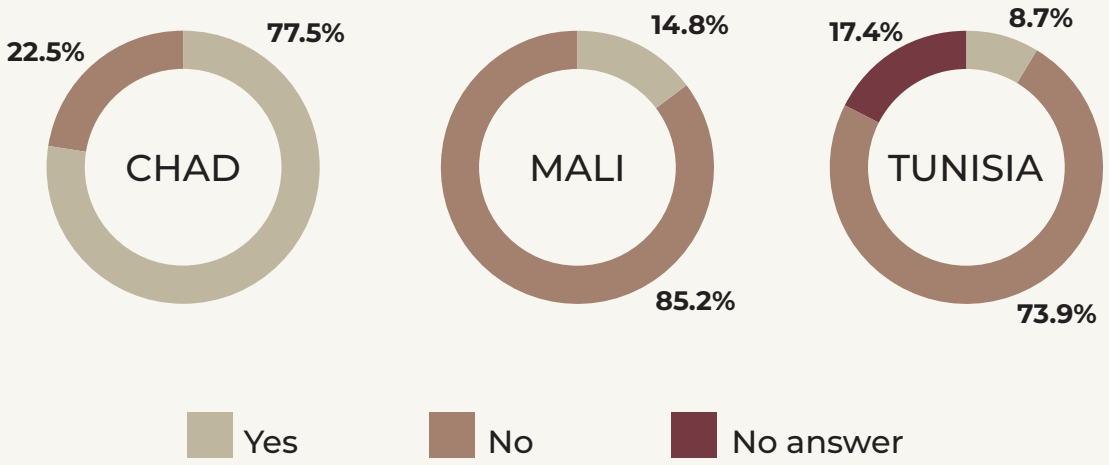
ENVIRONMENT

ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES COMPROMISED DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

In the sub-Saharan Africa, the availability of natural resources is increasingly compromised due to climate change. Natural resources are declining, with desertification of areas previously used for grazing or farming. The degradation of natural resources is leading to impoverishment of certain areas in particular, such as the vast Gourma region in central Mali and north-western Burkina Faso or the province of Logone Occidental in Chad. The situation intensifies clashes between herders and farmers, as well as between them and elephant poachers as all encroach upon areas previously off limits, such as elephant habitats and natural reserves.

Indeed, most of the surveyed participants from Chad (77%) have been or know someone who has been in a conflict related to access to agricultural areas or livestock farming. Comparably, the number of people involved in land conflicts is much lower in Mali (17%) and Tunisia (12%), if still significant.[60]

HAVE YOU, OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW, EVER BEEN PART OF A CONFLICT RELATED TO ACCESSING AGRICULTURAL AREAS OR LIVESTOCK FARMING?



60 In Mali, the survey was administered in the communities of Tessalit in the region of Kidal in northern Mali. The region borders Algeria and Niger. In Tunisia, the interviewees came from Kasserine.

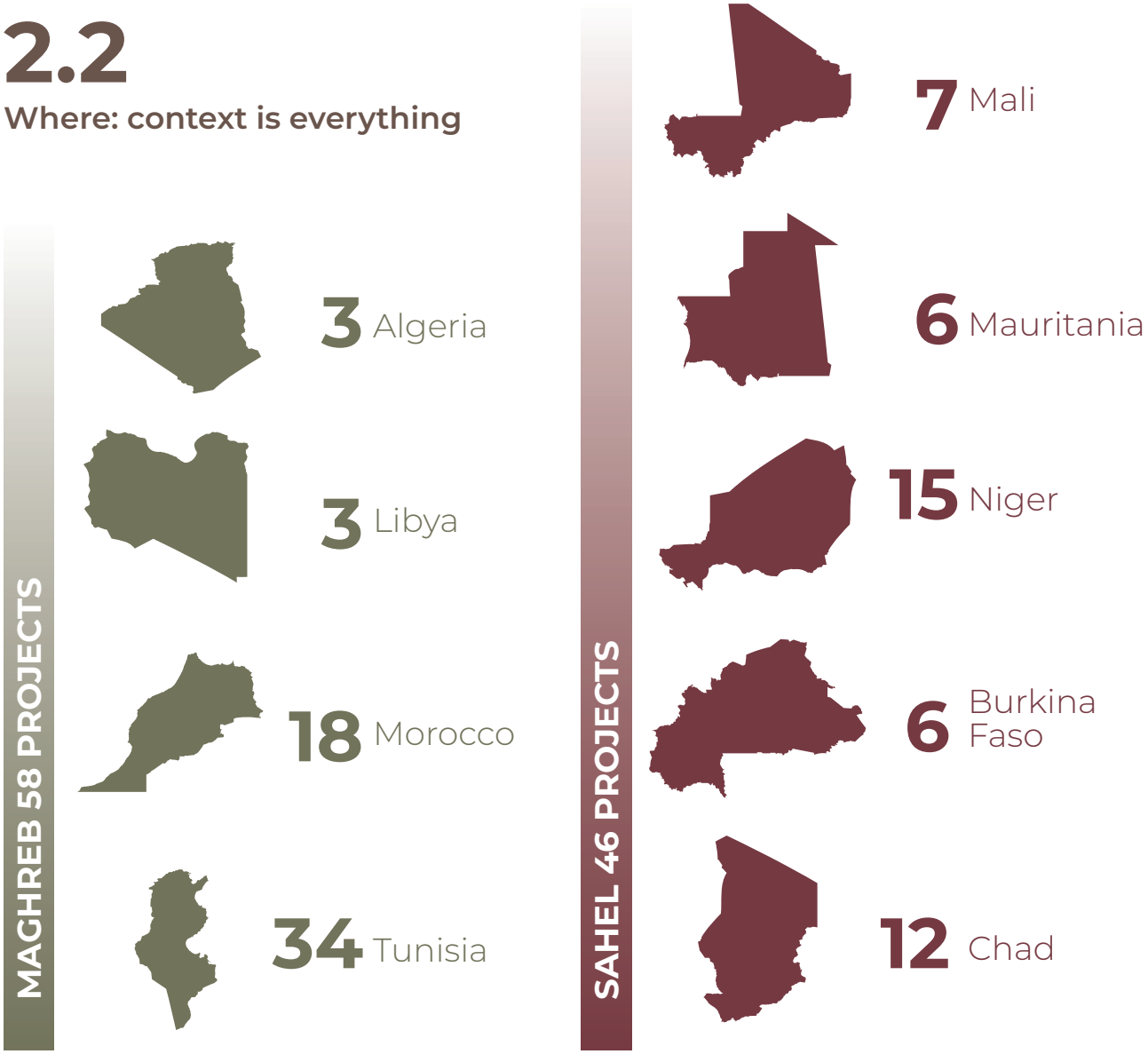
RELIGION

Two of 31 grass-root organisations reported religious tension building up as old traditions of ethnic groups come clashing with modern, more rigid interpretations of Islam. For instance, the forces of modernisation are going against the grain of the Soninke cultural heritage. In its milder forms it is demonstrated as a requirement for women to cover their body "correctly" and wear thicker, preferably black clothes in order to conform to the precepts of Islam. However, the Soninke community sees in these recommendations an insidious activity that uses Islamic pretext to undermine their tradition. In some cases, the religious irredentism has reportedly engaged in more heavy-handed activities such as destruction of crops and pastures, with the effect of intimidating local populations.

RELIGIOUS TENSIONS

Once again, all of the above grievances have been reported to UNICRI by either grass-root organisations or their local stakeholders, and efforts have been made to address nearly all as part of the projects. However, UNICRI could find no evidence of efforts made to deal with two issues, namely legal clientelism and the conditions in which the judiciary is operating.

2.2
Where: context is everything



The overall geographical distribution of the projects, regional and national, was as follows[61]:

The number of projects as well as their size varied across the nine countries. The table of grievances suggests that communities reported same or similar structural issues being at the core of insecurities and ongoing conflicts. Freedoms of expression and assembly are reported as curtailed in all nine countries, with other issues overlapping to a greater or a lesser extent. However, there are crucial differences between the countries as well as within the two regions separated by the vast expanse of the Sahara desert.

This issue of borders in Sahel and Maghreb, and more widely, of administrative organisation of vast territories with scarce resources continues to obstruct the relatively young

61 The table includes ten regional projects, which were implemented in more than one country. Such a project is counted for every country the grass-root organisations worked in.

state-building process of these countries, marked by high number of ethnicities and languages. The states have not managed to firmly establish their authority over the whole territory nor found a way to reconcile with the traditional authority of rural societies of Sahel in particular. The relationship with former colonising countries is in some cases highly sensitive and tense, indicating the pains of establishing a firm national identity and the need for affirmation. Despite the challenging environment, thanks to the improvements in health provision and decrease in at-birth and infant mortality, the societies have been experiencing a strong demographic growth, with an overwhelming majority of the young people. They are home to a population of 181.9 million, half of which are women – 49.9%, and more than half are under 24 years of age – 55.3%. Population density is 35 per km^2 with Morocco the most densely populated of the nine countries. The differences between the two regions though become obvious here. In Maghreb, most of the people live in urban areas, their median age is 30 years and population density is 45 per km^2. In Sahel, most people leave in rural areas, they are 17 years' old on average, with a density of 26 people per km^2. Niger has the youngest population across both regions, only fraction of which lives in urban settlements (16.5%).

Country	Land Area km^2	Population million	Density per km^2	Median Age	% Youth	% Women	Literacy (15 years and above)	% Urban Population	% Unemployed
Algeria	2,381,740	43.1	18	29	44.4%	49.5%	81%	73.0%	11.7%
Burkina Faso	273,600	20.3	76	18	64.8%	50.1%	41%	31.0%	6.3%
Chad	1,259,200	16	13	16.6	67.4%	50.1%	22%	23.3%	1.9%
Libya	1,759,540	6.8	4	28.8	44.4%	49.5%	86%	78.2%	18.6%
Mali	1,220,190	19.7	17	16.3	67.0%	49.9%	35%	44.0%	7.2%
Mauritania	1,030,700	4.5	5	20.1	59.0%	49.8%	53%	56.9%	9.5%
Morocco	446,300	36.5	83	29.5	43.1%	50.4%	74%	63.8%	9%
Niger	1,266,700	23.3	19	15.2	69.2%	49.7%	31%	16.5%	0.5%
Tunisia	155,360	11.7	76	32.8	38.1%	50.4%	79%	70.1%	16%
	9,793,330	**181.9**	**35**	**22.9**	**55.3%**	**49.9%**	**56%**	**50.8%**	**8.97%**

Source: 2019 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Population Division, Worldometer.info. Unemployment data are sourced from International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database, elaborated by the World Bank in June 2020. Data for literacy are taken from the World Bank, sourced from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Data for Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Morocco and Niger are from 2018. Figures for Chad are from 2016, Libya from 2004, Mauritania from 2017 and Tunisia from 2014.

If one looks closer at the youth population of these countries, a majority of them are under 15 - an average of 37.6% of the total population of the nine countries, and double as many as those between 15 and 24 - 17.7%.[62] Moreover, literacy among the young people aged 15-24 is consistently higher than the rest of the population for each of the nine countries. The biological determination of youth combined with its social definition implies that the youths in Africa, as much

■ 62 There is a difference between the UN designation of youth and that what is considered young in Africa, as also recognised by UNESCO, where the youth category frequently integrates those until 34 years of age.

as anywhere else, need to possess a certain social status and a level of experience in order to pass the threshold of adulthood. In Sahel in particular, this group is reportedly poorly educated and poorly skilled, with both regions suffering from high rates of unemployed young people. The African Union has set 35 years of age as the upper limit for its youth.[63]

Country	Population	% Youth Under 15	% Youth 15-24	% Youth Total	% Literacy among the youth	% Unemployed youth
Algeria	43.1	30.6%	13.8%	44.4%	97%	29.5%
Burkina Faso	20.3	44.7%	20.1%	64.8%	58%	8.3%
Chad	16	46.8%	20.6%	67.4%	31%	3.1%
Libya	6.8	28.1%	16.2%	44.4%	100%	50.5%
Mali	19.7	47.3%	19.7%	67.0%	50%	14.7%
Mauritania	4.5	39.9%	19.1%	59.0%	64%	14.8%
Morocco	36.5	27.0%	16.1%	43.1%	98%	22.1%
Niger	23.3	49.8%	19.4%	69.2%	40%	0.6%
Tunisia	11.7	24.2%	13.9%	38.1%	96%	36.3%
	181.9	37.6%	17.7%	55.3%	70%	19.99%

Source: 2019 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Population Dynamics. Youth unemployment data are sourced from International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database, elaborated by the World Bank in June 2020. Data for literacy are taken from the World Bank, sourced from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Data for Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Morocco and Niger are from 2018. Figures for Chad are from 2016, Libya from 2004, Mauritania from 2017 and Tunisia from 2014.

On the other hand, the population above 65 years of age is at most 10% for these countries, such as Algeria, however usually up to 5%. And yet, being traditional societies, these are the groups that tend to hold the authority and power.

In other words, the countries comprise huge youth populations that are largely unemployed and with weak prospects of gaining an employment. They are often living in traditional, at times hierarchical societies, with difficult, if any, access to either hereditary or elected power and decision-making mechanisms, nor an awareness of how those mechanisms operate and knowledge to make active use of them.[64]

- 63 African Union Commission, African Youth Charter, May 2000
- 64 Hereditary transfers of power at community level may have offered an element of predictability and stability. The introduction of democratic elections (in Mali to the very least) has contributed to the upsetting of traditional relationships between different classes of societies, creating tensions and even leading to conflicts. Diamond, J., Collapse: How societies choose to fail or succeed, 2005. AZHAR, *Rapport de recherche sur les causes des conflits intercommunautaires a Tessalit*, 2020.

Islam represents an important feature of all of these countries, with over half of their population declaring themselves as Muslim and legal systems of half of them observant of Sharia in certain of its aspects. Constitutional provisions in five of the countries recognise Islam as the religion of the state, expecting state institutions to behave in a manner that is compatible with Islam. This is the case will all four countries in Maghreb and in Mauritania, with the constitution of Mauritania allowing only Muslims to be citizens. Consequently, public schools in these countries include obligatory religious instruction, whereas in Algeria and Mauritania even private schools are required to adhere to national curricula. In Morocco and Tunisia, private schools are allowed more freedom in deciding whether to include religious curricula. In all remaining Sahel countries, the state and religion are separated, even if only as recently as 2018 in Chad. Religious instruction is not allowed in public school in Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali, and mostly not done in Niger. Here as well private schools have more freedom, with religious groups allowed to operate private schools in Chad and Mali.[65]

	Islam state religion	Declared as Muslim	Dominant school	Other denominations
Algeria	Yes	99%	Sunni (Maliki)	Christians, Jews, Ahmadi Muslims, Shia Muslims, Ibadi Muslims (province of Ghardaia)
Burkina Faso	No	61%	Sunni	Roman Catholic (19%), Protestant (4%), indigenous beliefs (15%), atheist or other (less than 1%).
Chad	No	52%	Sufi Tijaniyah	Protestant (23.9%), Roman Catholic (20%,), animist (0.3%), other Christian (0.2%, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses), no religion (2.8%), unspecified (0.7%)
Libya	Yes	97%	Sunni	Ibadi Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Baha'is, Ahmadi Muslims, Buddhists
Mali	No	95%	Sunni (Sufi)	Christians (two-thirds Roman Catholic, one-third Protestant), indigenous beliefs, no religious affiliation
Mauritania	Yes	99%	Sunni	Shia Muslims, non-Muslims, Christians, Jews[65]
Morocco	Yes	99%	Sunni	Shia Muslims, Christians, Jews, Baha'is
Niger	No	98%	Sunni	Shia Muslims, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Baha'is, indigenous beliefs, animists
Tunisia	Yes	99%	Sunni	Christians, Jews, Shia Muslims, Baha'is, non-believers

Within this general context, the grass-root organisations implemented the projects in areas that were frequently exposed to high levels of insecurity, inter-community tensions and conflicts. These were the same areas where the violent extremist groups operate and the G5-Sahel joint force Barkhane force and MINUSMA are active[67]. In fact, the incidents

- 65 US Department of State, 2019 Report on international religious freedom. However, this distinction is less clear in practice. In Mali, the government relied on religious leaders to gain foothold in the northern parts of the country following the 2012 uprising. Struggle for Mali, The Guardian, 2015
- 66 Based on unofficial estimates.
- 67 See footnotes 21 and 22 for more information on these operations.

UNICRI
INTERVENTIONS

TERRORIST
INCIDENTS

caused some activities to be postponed, cancelled or rescheduled to a different location.

Moreover, distribution of projects' intervention areas within a country varied – in some cases, the projects focused on few select areas of greatest insecurity and need, in others they were more evenly spread across the country. This was suggestive of the type of problem they addressed. Those more selective in their targeting were more oriented towards conflict prevention and mitigation, indicative of the immediacy of involvement.

In Burkina Faso, the activities engaged communities in four out of 13 administrative regions, Centre, Centre-Nord, Est and Sahel. All of these regions suffered from attacks during the implementation period, the number of which went from 10 in the Centre region to 254 in the Sahel region. In Tunisia, activities of 33 projects were implemented in all 24 governorates, engaging both urban and rural communities. Among these were the mountainous communities of the Kasserine governorate, which suffered from 41 attacks in the period from 2015 to 2020, 20 of which took place in 2017 and 2018, the same time the projects were in implementation. March 2018 saw clashes between the military and armed groups in the Kasserine mountains in west Tunisia, the area where one of the projects was offering arts and crafts lessons to the youth from rural communities.

Within the countries, with the exception of Algeria and Libya, both urban and rural populations were engaged. Ten projects worked specifically with rural populations, such as school students from the mountainous communities of the Kasserine governorate in Tunisia; nomadic communities of Mauritania's regions of Trarza and Brakna close to the border with Senegal; or tribes living in the arid expanses of the Gourma region stretching across the border of Mali and Burkina Faso. Nine projects were designed to benefit urban populations specifically. Their interest lay with the overpopulated, suburban areas of major cities or ports, such as those of Nouakchott in Mauritania, Sirte in Libya or Tangier in Morocco.

2.3

Who: the people at the centre of it

Based on information received from the field 22,350 people took part in various events and 1,863 of them benefitted from capacity-building activities.

The projects worked predominantly with and for the benefit of the young people. The grass-root organisations defined a specific group to target, taking into consideration the age of people frequently recruited by violent extremist groups and the areas where these groups' recruiters look for new members. UNESCO defines "youth" as persons between the ages of 15 and 24, recognising that this category is fluid and can change between countries and regions. The latter was the case with the nine countries, where the concept of maturity varied across the regions and cultures, revealing socially and culturally contextualized differences. As such the grass-root organisation worked with children and young people from the age of five to 35.

The following categories of young populations were engaged in activities:

- Kindergarten children,
- Elementary school children,
- Koranic school students,
- High-school school students,
- University students,
- Working-age, mostly unemployed people between 24 and 35 years of age.

They included the young people living in dire poverty, street kids, school drop-outs, unemployed and working young men and women at risk of being targeted by violent extremist groups' recruiters. Among them were former slaves, members of tribes, farmers, nomadic herders, refugees, internally displaced and returnee youths, prison inmates and civil society activists. Some of them had negative prior experience with law enforcement, having been subjected to violence or arrests.

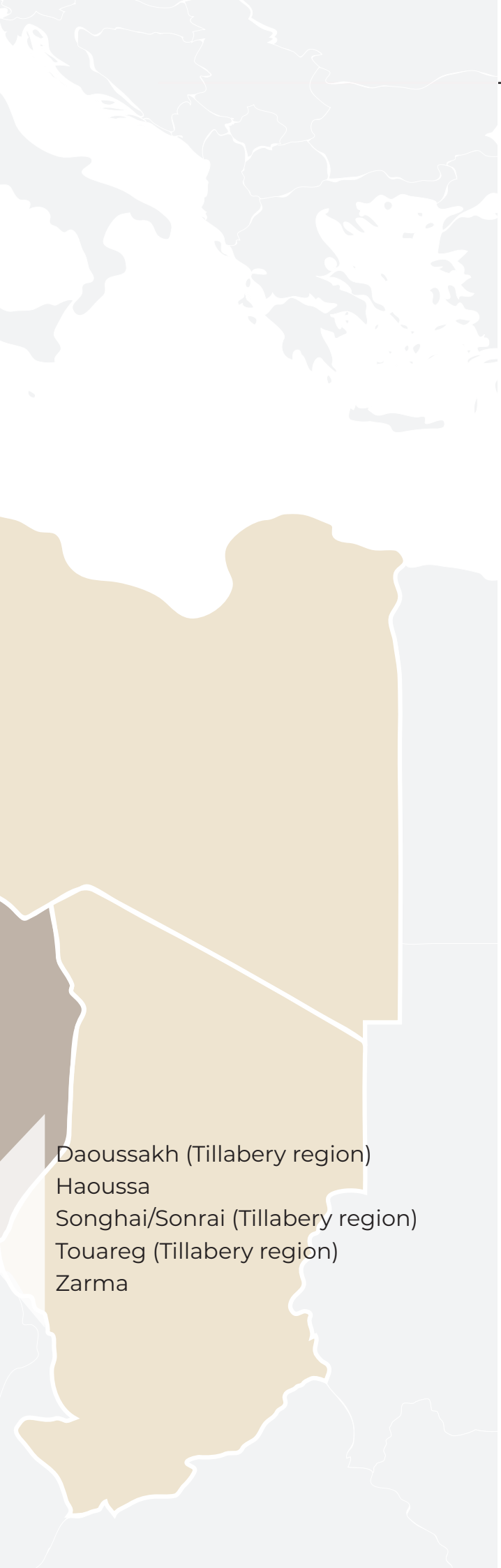
Strong efforts were made to reach out to and engage women of different categories and all age groups, in particular among the young population. They included school-age girls, adolescent unmarried and women with young children. A number of them had been victims of violence. One project worked specifically with rural women with disabilities. A few projects worked for the benefit of women exclusively.

All projects made efforts to engage female population with a target of having women as 50% of participants of all activities. The success in achieving this target was varying, in many cases poor, especially in Sahel. One of the frequently cited difficulties was ensuring female participation in activities involving arts, public demonstrations or led by male professionals. In more than one instance, families expressed reluctance to allow their daughters to participate. In few other cases, male participants expressed discomfort in participating in activities involving groups of mixed gender. This compelled grass-root organisations to come up with different mitigation strategies. For instance, activities led by women had an initial advantage at securing participation of other women. All projects that succeeded in securing female participation reported positive results without exception. However, stereotypes of the roles and perceptions of women in a society prevailed, in particular in the Sahel region, where well-intention efforts of grass-root organisations ended at times by falling back on highly stereotyped and limited representations of women.

Overall, focus on securing female participation was inconsistent. This was clear already from the modest efforts invested in reporting the share of women who were involved in activities – of 23,350 participants, supposedly only 2,186 were women, less than 10%. This was particularly evident in projects which targeted marginalised groups already difficult to reach, such as nomadic cattle breeding communities, tribal communities living in remote areas considered terrorist hotspots, or refugee camps rendered inaccessible due to imposed security restrictions on movements. In these, and similar, very traditional environments, where gender divisions are more strongly expressed, the efforts to secure the desired number of participants came at the expense of numerical gender equality. This imbalance will though surely compromise the sustainability of efforts given the increased peace-building potential of efforts that more positively reflect composition of a community, including in terms of gender. A number of grass-root organisations indicated that the outspoken messages of peace by female members of the community can act as a strong deterrent to violent extremist recruitment.

Community leaders represented another category frequently involved in the projects. They included members of the community with authority, influence or potential to address or better channel perceived grievances. These were both secular and religious authorities coming into contact with at-risk youths such as teachers from public and Koranic schools, educators from formal state structures and the civil society, tribal leaders, imams and preachers. Another group included opinion makers, such as television, on-line and radio journalists, and journalist unions and associations. A relatively small number of projects involved public officials, municipal, regional or national.

Overall, 15 ethnic groups were included in the projects: Amazigh, Bambara, Bozo, Daoussakh, Dogon, Dozo, Fulani, Haoussa, Pulaar, Songhai, Soninke, Tamashek, Touareg, Wolof and Zarma. Majority, ten ethnic groups, are from Mali, and four of them, Fulani, Daoussakh, Songhai and Tuareg, were also included in projects conducted in Burkina Faso and Niger.



2.4

How: intervention approaches and types

Reported grievances were not given equal attention and treatment by the projects. The grass-root organisations, when elaborating the roots of local conflicts, canvassed a wide picture of what inhibits their communities from reaching a permanent peaceful settlement. They described what in their views were the main issues, a description that UNICRI complemented with reports on views of other members of the community who took part in project events.

Depending on their reach and limitations in terms of influence, social capital and networks, previous experience, capacities, resources, time, and motivation, the grass-root organisations designed approaches and enacted measures to address their community's grievances. Over 400 events took place as part of different strategies to boost resilience.

One can discern differences in these strategies in terms of the projects' target audience (direct or indirect beneficiaries), and intended goals (short or long-term).

Depending on their audience

- Direct approach: One third of the projects (33%) worked **directly** with members of the affected communities. These projects were designed to reinforce individual critical thinking, a sense of dignity and recognition by offering better prospects for the future through education and employment opportunities. They promoted social cohesion through activities that brought together members of the community in sports and cultural events. They centered on individual betterment or greater civic, social, political and security awareness, at times combining these two aspects, but in any case leaving it up to thus empowered members of the community to initiate action. In the case of few projects this has happened, with trained primary beneficiaries establishing associations for better channeling their political demands, setting up private practices to improve their livelihoods, or cooperating with institutions in charge of security provision.

Examples

In Niger's region of Diffa, local authorities reported improvements in collaboration with local population thanks to the efforts to raise local populations' awareness on the need to collaborate with security forces. The awareness campaign included distribution of a guidebook on collaboration with security forces along with a radio play broadcasted in three local languages on three Nigerien radio stations. The play staged a security case based on local circumstances and experiences. Nigerien security and defense forces reported that they were able to prevent an attack by Boko Haram thanks to alerts by the local population.

Moreover, former Boko Haram members reported that they were able to benefit from the understanding of the local population following workshops that encouraged local population to allow reintegration of demobilised former combatants into communities. The workshops promoted an understanding among the local population of the need to allow reconverted former combatants to become full members of the communities, including to learn a job-specific skill and seek employment.

In Semmama, in Tunisia, a group of unemployed young women attended vocational training courses that allowed them to learn different crafts and skills, such as hair-dressing and rosemary oil distilling. They decided to set up in their home a rustic hairdressing salon, with the blessing of their father who even bought some materials out of his pocket. This gesture, small as it may seem, represents a significant mental breakthrough in an otherwise traditional community.

In Sbiba, in Tunisia, a few students, after attending weekend workshops on painting murals, created "The Junks", a group engaged in painting spaces in their cities to give them a different image. The walls started to be the voice of a generation willing to shape its present and future, and The Junks managed to obtain few contracts to paint the walls of local institutions. They also went on to organise a break-dance festival in Sbiba, the first of its kind in this Tunisian city.

- Indirect approach: One quarter of the projects, 26%, worked with indirect beneficiaries at **community** level, supporting already established civil society associations to improve their advocacy efforts and assistance delivery. Their focus was on reinforcing the network of secondary level, intermediary, beneficiaries, to be able to continue to provide or improve their assistance to primary at-risk beneficiaries.

Example

The civil society organisations operating in Morocco's port city of Tangier received support in identifying and addressing the root causes of youth radicalisation into violent extremism. This enabled the already operating organisations to advance social inclusion of young people from marginalised neighborhoods targeted by violent extremist recruiters, while harmonising and standardising their approaches. The support also encouraged the organisations' closer cooperation with public authorities working on the same issues.

While no grass-root organisation worked exclusively with **government institutions**, a number of them insisted on their participation in initiatives involving civil society associations. Six grass-root organisations brought together civil society and national authorities in order to systematically address identified grievances. They worked on removing systemic discrimination of women or ethnic groups, institutionalising civic education, or enhancing civic participation of disenfranchised groups in municipal decision-making.

- Mixed approach: Greatest portion of projects, 40%, **combined** the two approaches. They empowered individual members of the communities through capacity building, encouraging their association or civic engagement in a more structured manner. The training courses were geared towards imparting skills that can serve as a resource to the whole of communities, not just its individual members. Many of these projects worked on establishing consultative or mediation community structures operating on a voluntary basis to remove the sources of potential local conflicts or de-escalate situations of tension. Others worked with or through already existing structures, such as local committees, youth houses and clubs, reinforcing their positions of authority within communities and reinvigorating their operations through new membership or tools.

Example

Local islamic committee of Zafai in N'Djamena in Chad, after taking part in awareness raising activities, was able to recognise behaviors and acts that could inspire or lead to violent extremist acts. The local committee reported to the central Islamic affairs committee references made to the war in Afghanistan by local preachers, which were considered as inciting to violent acts. The central committee considered these reports, and dismissed five imams as a result.

Within this group of projects, three grass-root organisations promoted participatory approach to local authorities' planning and delivery of services, such as local budget preparation, or educational institution's after-curricula activities with young people from vulnerable communities. By so doing, they encouraged community members' closer cooperation and familiarity with municipal authorities. Finally, one project involved community members, the civil society and the local governance structures for transparent management of public resources.

Depending on their goals, the projects combined different types of activities in order to:

1. Instruct,
2. Advocate,
3. Raise awareness, or
4. Gather information, research and analyse.

Instructional activities

In an effort to instruct, the grass-root organisations organised training courses, remedial teaching, vocational training courses and workshops. Remedial teaching and vocational training were offered to the young people of primary and secondary school-age in Mauritania, Niger and Tunisia. These are the three of four countries[68] that reported the lack of access to education and income-generating skills as a source of instability.

The most widely used method ware training courses, delivered as a series of lectures on a particular, context-specific skill to 547 participants. These included:

- Advocacy and leadership,
- Civic education,
- Position of women in religious discourse, democratic and legal culture,
- Debating skills and managing debate clubs,
- Conflict analysis, including gender sensitive conflict analysis,
- Non-violent approach to conflict management and resolution,
- Strategy development,
- Critical thinking,
- Job search techniques, and
- Social media and cyber crime.

Remedial teaching consisted of classes in Arabic literacy, French language and geography for primary school students. It was held in Mauritania for 380 children from Nouakchott's suburbs over one-year period. In some cases, the classes were supplemented with civic education and moderate Sufism teaching.

Vocational training courses involved young people without income-generating skills. They included courses in plumbing, electricity, carpentry, floor tiling, horticulture, rosemary oil distilling, hair-dressing, handicrafts in wicker, glass, clay and plaster, elephant reserve conservation and radio programming. A total of 971 youths from Tunisia, Niger and Mauritania took part in these courses, which lasted from two days to three months. In Tunisia, vocational training courses for 234 youths, held over weekends, were complimented with mural painting, break-dance, henna tattoos and photography.

68 The fourth country was Mali.

Another wide-spread activity were workshops, joint-learning through discussion and exercises. It was employed in nearly all countries, with 33 workshops involving 785 participants.

Advocacy campaigns

Ecological and health campaigns, sporting events and music shows were often organised in communities with diverse social and ethnic composition as a means to bring their members together, mobilise them around a common cause and advocate social cohesion. Most of such events took place in Sahel and were introduced with messages of peace and tolerance. Public debates and meetings with public authorities were organised to advocate for ethnic minority recognition and better representation in the state-owned media.

Raising awareness

Theatre and radio programmes proved effective communication tools for sensitising the general, and in particular rural and young, population, bringing the topics closer to them. In Tunisia, street theatre performances – based on real experiences of their young amateur actors and highlighting the perceived attraction of violent extremist groups and the role of women in creating a modern state based on tolerance – toured the cities across the country, raising awareness and initiating debates. The theatre performances used public space in an innovative way to open up topics given less attention or ignored in such spaces. The debates continued on social media platforms, raising great interest in both the topics of the plays and the local association which produced them. Theatre play development and staging, along with art classes, were frequently used in Tunisia for engaging high-school students in discussion and contemplation on controversial issues, such as the use of internet as a tool for recruitment or peaceful means of conflict resolution.

In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, grass-root organisations worked with local writers and radio stations on producing a radio play in six local languages to inform on action to be taken to report suspicious activities to local police or security forces. In Mali, the grass-root organisations used radio to produce a series of programmes in Bambara and Tama-

shek. On one hand, the radio programmes informed on the situation of refugees in the Mopti region, the security situation and risks in the Mopti city and its school environments, as well as violence committed during conflicts. On the other, these programmes suggested ways to respond - from how to identify causes and consequences of a conflict, to tools for conflict transformation and resolution, to active listening, and to the roles model citizens, women and young people can play to better manage conflicts. In Niger, a radio programme was produced for the young refugees from Mali stationed in Tabarebare and Abala camps of Tillabery region. The programme raised awareness on the importance of collaboration between refugees and the security and defense forces, the role of parents and camp chiefs in preventing the youths from joining violent extremist groups, along with the limits of traditional authority over camp newcomers, and peaceful cohabitation between refugee and the host populations.

More traditional forms for raising awareness included public conferences and debates on all of the locally relevant topics, including the causes and consequences of violent extremism, terrorism, violence against women, clandestine immigration, refugee situation, active citizenship, religion, women and security forces, participatory local government and position of minority ethnic groups.

Information-gathering, research and analysis

Ten studies were completed investigating root causes, dynamics, stakeholders and their perceptions of conflicts and instability in Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Niger and Tunisia.[69] They combined desk-top research and interviews, and were in most cases carried out by grass-root organisations as means to inform and fine-tune project implementation strategies.

A number of activities from either of the four categories above, when well planned and executed, frequently served more that one purpose.

- Vocational training courses for instance frequently served also an important **social purpose**: they helped to bring together and connect the young people of similar age from different communities, encouraging them to create new social bonds outside of their immediate communities. In the case of young people from Nouakchott's suburban areas enrolled in a horticulture course, the time spent attending the course meant time away from overpopulated suburban areas where violent extremist groups recruited new members. For young people from Tunisia's northern cities, participation in youth debate clubs, in addition to teaching them debating and critical thinking, also allowed their free time to be structured while connecting with their peers.
- Advancing the **values** of the grass-root organisation, and even the organisation itself: On more than few occasions, the people involved in a project, choose to ei-

69 Two of the studies are publicly available: International Alert, *If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel*, June 2018; and Raineri, L., *Dogmatism or pragmatism: Violent extremism and gender in the central Sahel*, International Alert, June 2020. Other studies are available upon request from UNICRI.

ther continue supporting or even associate more formally with the grass-root organisation organising activities, wishing to maintain their association with the values that the organisation in questions was advocating for.

Finally, depending on their choice of audience and the approach to obtaining their goals the grass-root organisations were likely to use one of the following approaches:

DIRECT APPROACH + RAISE AWARENESS: GENERAL AWARENESS

Orchestrating debates, discussions and other widely-participated community events to raise general awareness of a problem and possible solutions until a critical consensus-building mass has been reached. This critical mass awareness is viewed as necessary for advocating change, in particular policy change with responsible institutions.

OR

MIXED APPROACH + RAISE AWARENESS: SYSTEM CHANGE

Engaging institutional decision-makers from the outset, while leading community-level action. The organisations would advocate with and raise awareness of both parties until such a moment has been reached when the step towards the change is all but the necessary and the most logical next step to take.

This was the case of projects dealing with environmental issues in Chad, where there is reportedly insufficient awareness among the general public on how the consequences of climate change affect their lives and lead to tensions and conflicts between tribes, and between pastoralists and farmers.

In Tunisia, one project worked with Koranic school teachers to raise their awareness of constitutional provisions, as well as with the union of imams and the government agencies in charge of religious matters. The efforts were geared towards better embedding democratic principles and universal values in the Tunisian society, in particular communities centered around mosques and Koranic schools.

DIRECT APPROACH
+
INSTRUCT:
GROWING LOCAL LEADERS

Training young people, selecting those with leadership skills, empowering and encouraging them to devise, organise and lead on their own local initiatives that address identified grievances. The expectation is that the opportunity to exercise leadership under controlled conditions would translate into a norm for these young people to take action.

OR

MIXED APPROACH
+
INSTRUCT:
PURSUING LARGER MISSION

Training young people and encouraging them to lead local initiatives addressing the identified grievances in a manner that is consistent with the grass-root organisation's larger mission and approach. These young people do not enjoy free rein in identifying approach that best suits them, however they are able to grow a sense of belonging to a greater cause for positive societal change.

In Mali, a group of young people were selected from marginalised villages to be trained on conflict analysis, gender sensitive approach to conflict analysis and conflict resolution, and leadership skills. Among the trained youths, those with most developed leadership skills were identified and granted small budget to design and lead activities in their communities, giving them visibility and establishing themselves as potential local leaders.

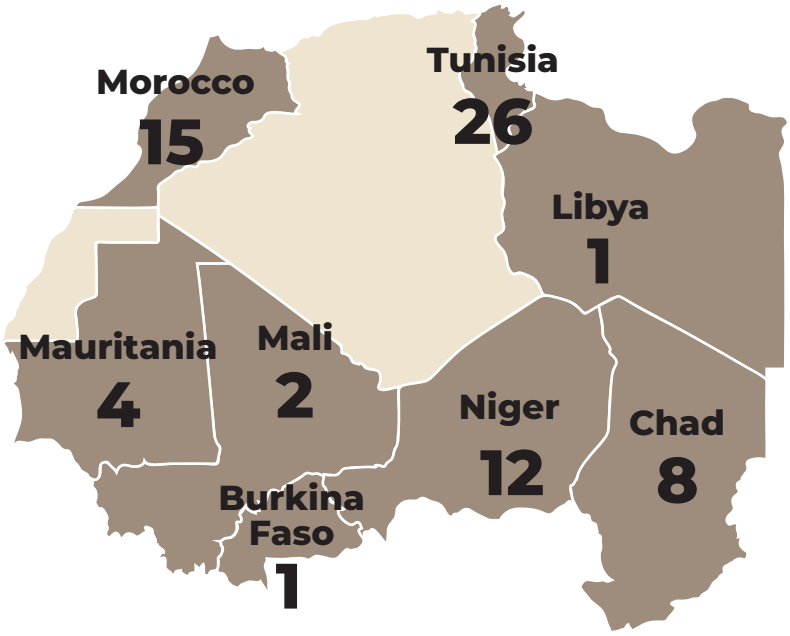
In Tunisia, one youth-led organisation has profiled itself as a hub of future civil society activists. They selected young people for an intense training course in active citizenship, critical thinking, peaceful conflict resolution and the use of art for mobilising communities and encouraging questioning. All young men and women who completed the training were automatically granted membership of the organisation, which acted as a great motivator for them to carry on with civic engagement along the already tested path.

2.5

Who did it: agent of change

Among the grass-root organisations that implemented the projects were civil society, media and women's' associations, trade unions, local foundations, and international non-governmental organisations operating at the community level, or their locally established and led branches. Based on the location of their headquarters, there were 69 local and eleven international non-governmental organisations.[70]

LOCAL
69 organisations



INTERNATIONAL
11 organisations

Country	Number	Country of operation
Belgium	2	Libya, Tunisia
Denmark	1	Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia
France	1	Algeria
Italy	1	Morocco
Spain	2	Morocco, Tunisia
Switzerland	1	Chad, Niger
United Kingdom	1	Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger
United States of America	2	Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger

■ 70 Three organisations worked on two projects each: one worked in Chad and two in Tunisia.

Having a mixture of local and internationally-headquartered organisations allowed UNICRI to analyse possible differences in the approach as a consequence of their experience and understanding or interpretation of the local culture. The observed aspects included the authority these organisations enjoyed in local communities, vision, declared ethical standards, statements and actions. Their managerial acumen, analytical and administrative capacities were evaluated. Efforts were made to ascertain the role of women, if any, in these organisations.

For instance, the international organisations demonstrated overall to be better versed in problem analysis, project design and management. They had good knowledge of the local complexities, were careful to carry out stakeholder interviews and complete conflict and baseline analysis prior to launching activities engaging the local populations. Competence, commitment to success and confidence have been well demonstrated. These organisations applied a participatory and inclusive approach, allowing the communities to devise conflict mitigating and peace-building activities. A number of them, but not all, had years of experience in pursuing the cause with the very same communities.

More often than not, they relied on local staff members to execute activities, in particular in areas most at risk. Prudence required limited exposure of non-local staff in activities that had to do with violent extremism or ongoing conflicts in areas that are remote, isolated and where armed groups operate. In such circumstances, the international staff risked becoming an easy target. Moreover, local staff members were essential for establishing a relationship of trust with local communities, encouraging their participation in project events and acting as cultural interpreters.

The local organisations frequently demonstrated difficulties in responding to project

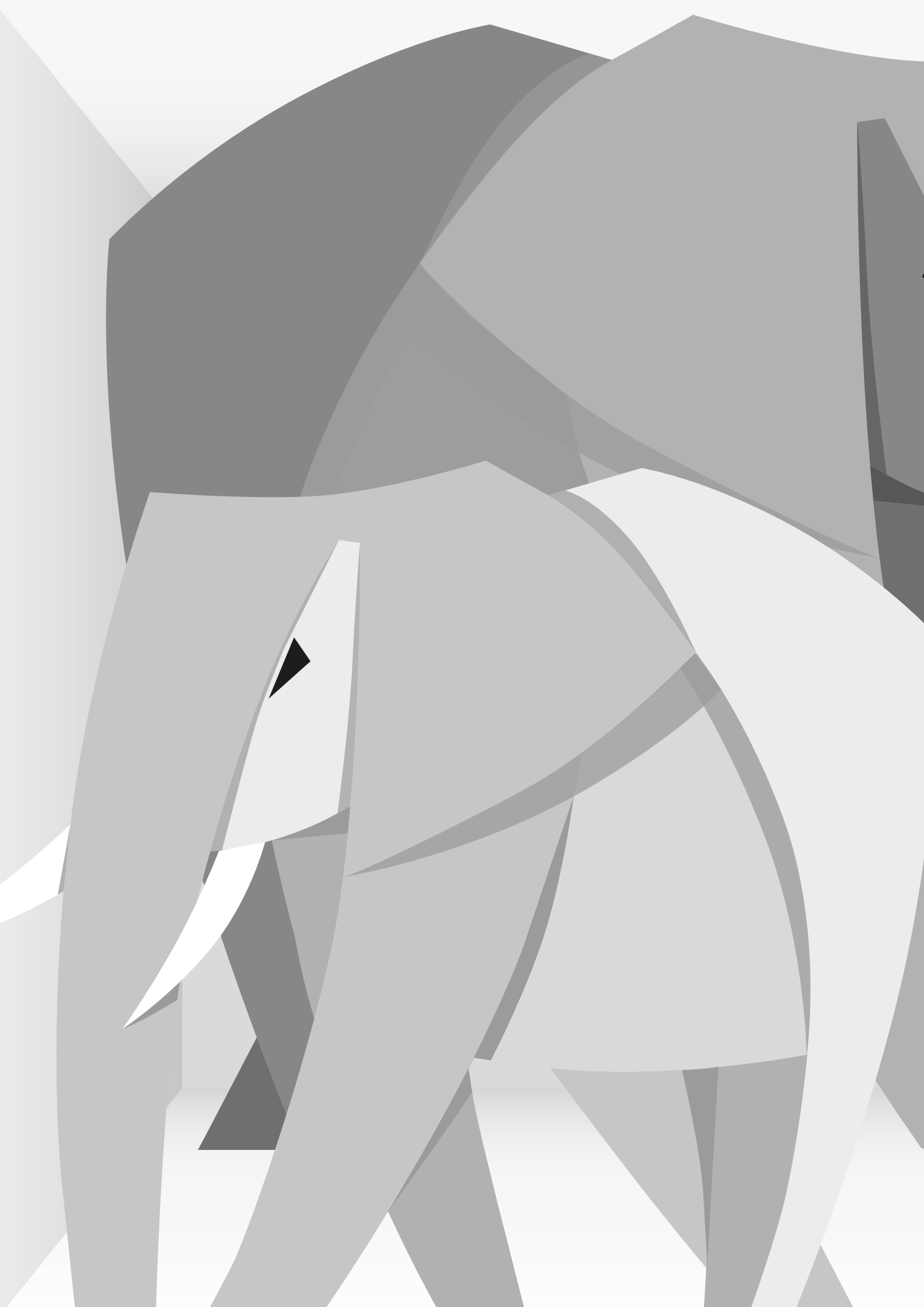
management expectations, in particular in meeting reporting requirements. Some of them had limited experience of collaboration with international funding organisations. They compensated for this lack of administrative and management sophistication with strong commitment, continued presence on the ground and well-established networks. By engaging in activities dealing with local conflicts and violent extremism, they have, occasionally, put their reputation at stake, requiring a fair amount of diplomatic skill to articulate problems in their communities without producing adverse effect or deepening polarisations. They also stood to lose from a not-so-well perceived association with international funding on such a sensitive topic.

The local organisations frequently relied on strong, well-connected, well-established, influential and charismatic leaders, who were often the founders and had extensively worked on building the community trust.[71] This kind of leaders had substantial social capital and the organisations' work was part of their long-term vision to make a change, which communities recognised and appreciated. However, such organisations risk losing the position of influence they have built in their communities should there be a change of leadership.

As can be expected, only a fraction of 31 organisations was either led by women or had women in managerial positions.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ 71 Erdberg Steadman, L., Moix, B.: *How civil society can help prevent violence and extremism*, United States Institute of Peace, 6 June 2019. Also, a founder of one grass-root organisation in Maghreb displayed a great deal of ingenuity. Originally from one of the countries from Maghreb, he is using management and fund-raising skills refined during years of living in Europe. He manages to successfully mobilise resources from European countries for the activities of his civil society association back in Maghreb.



Many elephants. same room

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Conclusions

Going back to the main question this report, what motivates people, most often young, to associate themselves with groups that use violence to make their demands heard and considered? In attempting to find an answer to this question, the interaction between (a) the context which formed those people and (b) forces at play within that context revealed itself as the most relevant variable.

The countries of the two regions, Sahel and Maghreb, have many things in common and many that set them apart. The two regions have trade contacts going back thousands of years, important sources of cultural, political and economic exchanges. The general context is rendered more specific by the voices of people who took part in the UNICRI intervention. Asked to identify causes of instability and insecurity in their communities, they have declared these to be rooted in discrimination against and exclusion from the decision-making processes of the most populous groups, namely the youth and the women, followed by exclusion of other marginalised groups such as nomadic pastoralists. The government is per-

ceived as weak, or practically absent from more remote areas, and when present, it is often perceived as unaccountable. When taking action, it is perceived as favoring a more conventional approach involving hard-security measures against armed groups over investments in economic development, education, health and transport infrastructure, which would directly benefit local populations.[72] Yet the states' security forces are poorly trained to deal with insurgencies and local population, especially when it comes to the respect from human rights, they are reportedly heavy handed and acting with impunity.

The population is largely left without a possibility to channel their grievances. They report widely present repression against freedom of information as well as of assembly, curtailing their access to media channels or forms of, even loose, civic organisation into grass-root political interest groups. Environmental degradation increases pressures over available natural resources, which are frequently at the center of disputes in Sahel. Access to justice and the rule of law, either provided by the state or by traditional authority, is in short supply, obstructed either by centuries' old power structures of hierarchical tribal organisations or by the legal system operating without resources, in legal insecurity or else on the basis of clientelism. General lack of economic opportunities, high youth unemployment and abundance of unstructured time are perceived across both Magreb and Sahel as sources of insecurity, greater than the terrorist threat itself. The present educational infrastructure is reported as widely insufficient, frequently absent from remote areas where Koranic schools are the only educational institution. The schooling is still based on the old colonial model, unadjusted to the needs of the local populations, in particular nomadic, nor the labour market. Koranic schools meanwhile tend to be outside of the state system, unsupervised but also unsupported, leaving their staff, in their own right inadequately prepared, to improvise curricula and textbooks.

It becomes easy to see how weak governance, coupled with economic hardship, endured injustices and lack of recourse leave little space for maneuver to local population, more than half of which are young and eager to improve their social status in a society that considers them for instance as social minors (*cadets sociaux*) in Sahel. They, in particular those from remote areas, further away from the state's or regional administrative centers, cannot hope that the government, frequently encountered only through its security arm, is able to provide them with viable alternatives. Faced with little to no options to improve social standing, it is easy to slide towards extremism, national, ethnic or religious. The choice between violent extremist or organised crime group, political or ethnic militia is, in the majority of cases, a matter of opportunity not of substance. In other words, faced with the continued stream of news reports on lives lost and the adverse effects of attacks on local communities, young people continue to join armed groups as they have nothing to lose. They may gain even - become a part of a bigger group of peers on a joint quest for adventure, significance or both. The other remaining alternative is to leave - migrate to the nearest city, the country's capital, neighboring country, across the continent or the sea.

The communities that UNICRI worked with through grass-root organisations are in-

72 In the case of Mali, the latter investments are called for in the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation for Mali resulting from the Algiers Process, signed on June 2015, Chapter 13, Art. 38 and Annex 3 on economic, social and cultural projects.

deed resilient. Only a minor fraction of their members opts for violence and a complete break with the social contract. The problem with making these communities more resilient is the obvious gap between the nature of their grievances and the approach of projects such as the ones implemented as part of UNICRI intervention. The very real grievances are structural in nature: they point to problems of governance, education, economy, security, whereas the effort mounted has been through grass-root organisations from these communities' civil society. It can thus be expected that more sustainable measures can be put in place either through continued, persevering and committed work of the grass-root organisations pursuing societal change until such time as the governmental structures take up their cause, or through their rapprochement early on and collaboration with the administrative structures.

3.2

Success stories

A few organisations did just that. Through their advocacy efforts they have succeeded in entering into formal agreements with governmental agencies. Such agreements are expected, although not guaranteed, to expand upon and perpetuate the progress made with local communities, making the established mechanisms and processes durable.

Libya	Thanks to an agreement signed with the Ministry of Education, elementary school curriculum will integrate teaching on active citizenship. The manual has been produced by a local organisations and used in a series of workshops with civil society activists.
Niger	Koranic schools in Niamey, Zinder, Maradi, and Diffa received 2,000 copies of a manual on Islamic arguments, promoting peace, non-violence and civic values. The teachers in these schools have previously not used any particular textbook for the instruction. In addition to the manual, they received training in its use from the local grass-root association devoted to improving the standards of non-formal education. Teachers from schools not included in the project asked to receive copies of the manual.
Tunisia	The Ministry of Religious Affairs signed a partnership agreement in February 2018 with a local foundation devoted to improving democratic culture, in particular through supporting trade unions. The agreement expressed formal support to the foundations' ongoing work with the union of imams, enhancing their knowledge of constitutional provisions and civic values, in particular the respect for women's rights.
Mauritania	The Ministry of Islamic Affairs acknowledged the efforts of two local organisations on promoting tolerance among the young people from marginalised rural areas.

In the case of a number of other projects, the messages promoting civic values disseminated by the grass-root organisations have been adopted by the participating youths, imams or women, and made their own. These projects publicly addressed issues considered off-limits, offered novel approaches to dealing with or thinking of sensitive issues, sparked reflections on previously unconsidered topics or connected issues that had seemed unrelated.

Tunisia

Seventy-five young men and women from nine cities across Tunisia came together and produced street theatre plays on radicalisation, the joining of violent extremist groups and the position of women in the Tunisian society. They were brought together and trained by a civil society organisation ran by their peers, young men and women. The theatre plays were performed throughout the country, in public spaces before most diverse audiences. All were based on real stories, taken from the lives of their performers. Given their topics, the plays provoked debates and public discussions, in which the acting young men and women freely engaged. The discussions continued on the social media, creating somewhat of a hype, and leading many other young people to reach out to the organisation and ask to be part of their next theatre training camp and performances.

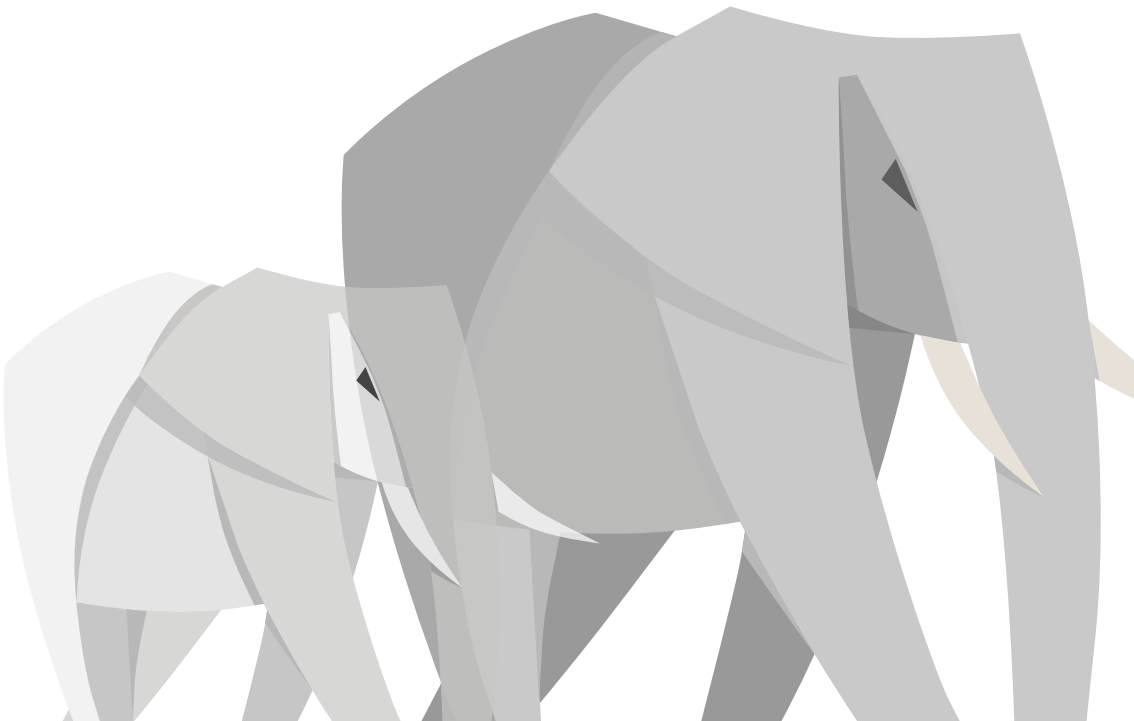
The training camp that preceded the staging of street performances has been the key to the success of the organisation - apart from drama classes, it taught participants civic engagement, critical thinking, living with diversity and non-violent activism. It allowed the participants to gain new skills, learn ways to channel their grievances in a peaceful manner as well as become themselves members and full-fledged activists of the civil society organisation. Thus empowered and supported, many of the participating young men and women continued their civic engagement and few even decided to set up associations in their communities across Tunisia, passing on their skills and motivation to peers.

Morocco

Young Moroccan from a wealthy family was reportedly radicalised into violent extremism via social media over 21 days. Students from a high-school in Guercif, a town in the north-west of Morocco, used this story to develop a school theatre play to contemplate the ease with which the youths can fall victims to the messages of radicalisation. The play entered a theatre competition of the Guercif province in February 2018 and won, qualifying for the regional competition in Oujda. The initiative was led by their high-school teacher, who was inspired following a training he had attended as part of the UNICRI programme. Given its effectiveness, the teacher decided to stage the play with other of his classes, refining its message. His plan is to have the play, presented in Arabic, tour the province of Guercif.

Mali

In the Gourma region, cohabitation between local tribes and elephants inhabiting the natural reserve on whose border the tribes live is precarious. The elephants are victims of trafficking and poaching, their migratory routes altered due to climate changes. Local tribes use the elephant habitats for timber, whose depletion makes the habitat more prone to bush fires, and destruction, aggravating the effects of global warming for both people and animals, frequently causing conflict between the tribes over resources. An international non-governmental organisation worked with local tribes, helping them develop charts and understand elephant movements as well as their importance for the environmental preservation. They helped these communities come up with alternative economic means, such as non-timber forest product harvesting and eco-guardianship. Local communities agreed upon a charter on using the shared space, keeping the inter-communal conflicts at bay. Moreover, the engaged eco-guardians learned to patrol the natural reserve, build breaks against bush fires and report to state rangers on activities suspected to lead to elephant poaching. None of them left their job, nor joined extremist groups present in the area.



3.3
Trials and errors

There were instances where the efforts of the grass-root organisations did not come to bear fruit within the life-time of the projects. While all projects encountered challenges of some kind, few projects suffered from challenges that put a significant strain on their implementation, compromised their strategy or their possibility to capitalise on the gained momentum. There were different reasons for this, and looking at cases with less-than-expected outcomes allows main discriminatory elements to be identified.

Insufficient preparation: Stakeholder analysis not (properly) carried out

As mentioned in the previous section, only the engagement and commitment of (governmental) institutions at the appropriate level (national, regional, local) can ensure durability of launched initiatives in a systemic way. Their involvement though is time-consuming. There is a need to advocate for a particular cause and the reasons for which government resources – financial or personnel – should be allocated.

Strategy of one project in Tunisia foresaw cooperation with and reinvigoration of youth houses, government structures present at the community level across the country, largely left inactive or in disrepair. Making them operational (again) in remote communities would make a difference between the youths left to their own devices and the youths engaging in meaningfully designed after-school activities at a safe place with their peers. Obtaining authorization from the government ministry in charge took over a year, the period during which the two-year project was effectively on hold.

Another project in Tunisia engaged school-age youths from the remote rural communities set in mountainous areas near the border with Algeria, the sites of armed groups activities. The arts and crafts courses offered on weekends in conjunction with vocation training created great interest among these youths, some of which traveled great distances on the back of the mules to join their peers and some of more entrepreneurial ones used to skills acquired to start up new small businesses after the project. However, without arrangements made with local authorities or associations to take over the organisation of such weekend activities, they simply ceased at the end of the project.

The zest of overcommitting: Conflict analysis and theory of change not elaborated	Given a large number of grievances of local communities, their complexity, interconnectedness and urgency, it is at times frustratingly difficult to design a strategy that addresses a single or few of the issues. At-risk communities are frequently remote, marginalised, starved of resources, and lacking opportunities for meaningful engagement of young people. One project in Mauritania held an impressive number of diverse activities, engaging different community groups. It produced a guidebook on peace education; held debates with journalists, university students, women, imams, and the general population; organised remedial teaching for elementary school kids; offered vocational training for elementary school drop-outs; staged concerts, training events, and ecological campaign days. The topics covered sanitation, hygiene, journalism, education, sport and music. The short duration of the project did not allow for relationships established during the project to be consolidated or for messages to be adequately received and acted upon. The sheer ambition, not coupled with a more-nuanced conflict analysis, failed to channel the positive energy for change into a well-connected and structured enough project design.
Internal inconsistencies: The relationship between the bigger and the smaller picture	Involving women in fully meaningful way remained a challenge for many projects. The projects would elaborate excellent indicators for measuring women's engagement in separate activities, but failed to capitalise on the women's newly imparted skills and confidence within the confines of the relatively safe project environment. One project taught female preachers on their constitutionally guaranteed rights, enabling them to become trainers for imams on this topic. However, these female preachers were not engaged as trainers in a follow-on course for imams on constitutionally guaranteed rights of women.

Pushing the envelope too far: The importance of being a fine judge of place and time

Religion plays a notable role in the lives of many citizens of the nine countries, the majority of which declare themselves as Muslims. However, religion remains a sensitive topic, as of yet insufficiently open for healthy criticism and debate.

One project pressed this sensitive spot a tad too strong. A youth house, hosting free debates among the young people, devised a system whereby its young participants proposed and then selected debate topics in a fully open and transparent way, relying on the social media in the process. One of the proposed topics touched upon the organisation of religious life of the community, based on the news item announcing the closure of a Koranic school due to an alleged case of sexual abuse. The youths proposed to debate the pros and cons of re-opening of the school, but had to cancel it upon intervention of municipal authorities. The resulting drop in enthusiasm among the group led to some young people abandoning the debate club.

3.4

Good practices

Certain elements kept repeating across the projects. Irrespective of the approach, whether it was vocational training, cyber-crime workshops, radio plays, culture evenings or political debates, a number of standard elements were shared across the projects. Three in particular were prevalent and included religious teaching, civic education and critical thinking.

One such rather predominant feature was the inclusion of **religious teaching** to underpin and reinforce messages. As a matter of fact, the incorporation of religious teachings was the main distinguishing feature between projects ran by grass-root and international non-governmental organisations. Both worked with the same categories of social groups, in the same general areas, applying the same techniques. The local organisations incorporated religion organically in their project designs as the most prevailing cultural element of these communities, whereas the international organisations never considered religion as a cultural element to be reflected in their designs and material.

If one looks at particular approaches applied by both groups, this distinction becomes more obvious. For instance, both groups used training courses to teach community representatives techniques for conflict analysis. The local organisations would include references to Islamic teachings to better illustrate certain points. Their examples would frequently be sourced from Koran or refer to the actions or words of the Islamic prophet Muhammad (*hadiths*). This has never been the case with the projects implemented by international non-governmental organisations.

INTERNATIONAL	LOCAL	
APPROACH	APPROACH	RELIGIOUS REFERENCES
Conflict analysis training course	Conflict analysis training course	Reflections of and references to Islamic teachings
Encouraging active citizenship through teaching civic values and enhancing awareness of constitutional provisions.	Encouraging active citizenship through teaching civic values and enhancing awareness of constitutional provisions.	Connecting the civic values to the values expressed in Koran and Hadith, records of traditions or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Such approach reflects the central position of religion and its leaders in the lives of local populations, in particular those living in remote, rural areas and among their more marginalised or disenfranchised communities. In such communities, the mosques are one of the central gathering points: visited at least once a week, for Fridays prayers, or serving as public spaces for community gatherings. Imams in such communities perform numerous roles – they are preachers as well as community leaders, educators and news sources.[73]

By not ignoring the prevailing cultural code of these communities, the projects were able to use the same narratives espoused by the violent extremist groups for the opposite effect. The violent extremist groups invoke the language and value system contained in the teachings of Islam to point out the way out of a system, which in their view has been compromised by the political and social injustices. They use the language of religion to promise the obtaining of recognition, inclusion and self-worth. The local grass-root organisations used the same language and references to send messages for the opposite effect, namely, that the change can be made by not revoking the social contract. They acted so cognizant of the proximity of religion to the hearts and minds of local communities and its power as a societal glue for many of the communities' diverse groups.

STRUCTURAL GRIEVANCES + PREVAILING CULTURAL CODE (RELIGION)

This approach has not been applied with intention. The reports and work-plans shared with UNICRI elaborating the conduct of activities bear no reference to the importance of using religion as a communication vector. Clear religious reference is though incorporated in nearly all technical documents produced by these organisations for the benefit of their audiences: guidebooks, training manuals and power point presentations, remedial teaching textbooks, examples elaborated during workshops and school exercises, messages broadcast during sports events and radio programmes. This could be attributed

■ **73** With Mali offering a case in point – Melly, P., M*ahmoud Dicko: Mali imam challenges President Keita*, BBC, 27 June 2020

to a relatively rigid structure of standard project management documents produced for the attention of an international community perceived as secular and based on Western culture's rational thought.

Furthermore, local grass-root organisations more frequently and with greater ease involved religious institutions in their activities and strategies. Imams and imams' unions, female preachers, Koranic school teachers and students, religious leaders were frequently invited to events, in particular in Sahel. Initiatives involving religious leaders included dignitaries of all confessions with a voice in a community, be they Wahhabi, Sufi, Catholic or Protestant. Interestingly, in cases where international organisations provided training to local youth on universal values of respect for human rights and gender equality, and empowered them to devise and carry out peace-building activities, these youth leaders involved religious leaders in the activities and relied upon the values of Islam when disseminating the messages further. Religious leaders indeed remain powerful local influencers in communities raised, in the absence of structured education, on the teachings of Islam.

STRUCTURAL GRIEVANCES + PREVAILING CULTURAL CODE (RELIGION) + CIVIC EDUCATION

Civic education was the second prevailing element of the projects across the Sahel and Maghreb. The grass-root organisations produced textbooks on active citizenship, organised debates and public conferences to teach the history of democracy, citizens' rights and obligations, including engagement in democratic processes. In some cases, this was highly topical, such as in Mauritania ahead of presidential elections in 2019. In other cases, it seemed more part of a general initiative across the two regions of Africa to better inform populations on democratic processes, best suited for dealing with their grievances. In Niger, local associations used the process of municipal budget development as a test case for including marginalised groups and introducing them to the benefits of a participatory process. In Tunisia, municipal youth clubs organised debates on current affairs topics voted in by its members.

STRUCTURAL GRIEVANCES + PREVAILING CULTURAL CODE (RELIGION) + CIVIC EDUCATION + CRITICAL THINKING

Closely related to civic education was teaching critical thinking**.** Majority of training sessions on civic education, citizenship participation, democratic processes, constitutional provisions, and universal values integrated some form of critical thinking in their curricu-

la. Female preachers, Koranic school teachers, and young civil society activists in Tunisia, university students from Niger, journalists from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, and the youths from nomadic tribes in Mauritania were expected to analyse their station in life and try to identify avenues for non-violent recourse for situations of conflict and injustice. In the case of youth debate clubs organised across Tunisia's marginalised provinces, young people were asked to analyse and debate current affairs topics. The interviewed young civil society activists from Tunisia credited such sessions for changing their minds and realising that political ends could be achieved through non-violent means, whereas before violence seemed to them the only possible option.

3.5
Lessons learned

Finally, is there a way to prevent people from joining violent extremist or any armed group?

What this UNICRI project suggests is that there is - there are indeed many ways to do so. The grievances that vulnerable communities across nine countries of Sahel and Maghreb have presented are concrete and actionable. Moreover, the analysis of data on armed conflict and definitions of armed groups from the ACLED database suggests that armed groups frequently overlap in their objectives, tactics and operational territories. It is rather difficult to distinguish violent extremist groups from politically motivated or identity-based militias. Those formed along extremist religious demands tend to side with certain ethnic groups, at times offering protection from abusive state security forces and winning their trust and support. Other armed groups may act in order to satisfy specific political demands, yet are often impossible to detach those demands from their ethnic background or religious affiliation. For instance, solidarity among Fulanis takes precedence over possible ideological or theological coherence. Groups aligning themselves with Al-Qaida may have demands that put them in competition with groups adhering to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, yet they may maintain links based on common interests.

What remains the same across these groups is their engagement in violent recourse to grievances that are structural in nature, irrespective of these being weak governance, poor security governance, lack of economic opportunities, lack of education and professional training, or lack of rule of law and social justice. The differences between them fade away before the single common feature – engagement in violent conflict as means to an end. The armed groups simply represent many versions of the same struggle.

Moreover, the number of grievances is finite. Answers grass-root organisations and community members gave when asked about what compromises their security and stability corroborate each other across communities and countries.

Apart from this, grievances are time and place-specific. While there are some general patterns, it is important to understand local context, the forces at play and the mechanisms that push or pull people to take up arms. What is at the source of the specific inter- or intra-community disputes? Is it land division, access to water or centuries' old class and slavery structures? What do age, gender, confession, ethnic, tribal or political affiliations reveal about the present conflict? What is its genealogy? It is important to have as complete knowledge of conflict dynamic and its actors as possible to avoid reinforcing the injuries suffered in the past. For instance,

a case brought before a local conflict mediation committee set up in the Sahel communities involved land dispute between farmers and nomadic herders. The land, initially owned by the farming community, was unfairly appropriated by a local strongman. Yet the case revealed that initial land distribution may not have been fair either, and that land ownership was in fact a concept introduced in western Africa only with colonialism. So, location, history, wider geopolitical issues, tribal relations, environmental degradation, migration, and access to mechanisms of justice all intersecting in an archeology of personal stories told from different points of view.[74]

What this intervention's findings suggest is that dealing with violent extremism and conflicts in general requires a wider, or rather deeper, approach. The more the analysis of underlying grievances and actors is specific and granulated, the more it requires a developmental, not only a hard-security focus. Violent extremism and conflicts in general are only one, the most violent and thus most visible and attention-grabbing, expression of local populations' frustrations. The cases of Tunisia and Mali indicate that their outburst can just as well lead to revolutions or protests.[75] **Most people though, despite their legitimate grievances, avoid the violent recourse nor do they extent support to armed groups of any provenance**. Resources should be directed not only to hard-security measures to treat violent consequences of deep-seated frustrations, but mainly on addressing those frustrations first. Such an approach would undercut the efforts of armed groups, be they political, ethnic, religious or criminal, to propagate their solutions to the populations' grievances and obtain recruits. Moreover, such an approach would avoid deepening the existing grievances, as funding hard-security measures and conventional warfare alone risks giving extended powers to security forces that are poorly governed, trained and prepared to fight the insurgency.

As such, **development and human rights issues listed here need to be treated as directly linked to security issues.**

- 74 Archeology of stories, a concept presented by David Grossman, an Israeli author, in an interview with the Serbian *Vreme* weekly, 30 June 2016: "Because what has been remembered is only part of one story and can be remembered in a different way. Every story always has another story within that can be told differently. This is what we call human archaeology: story under story under story." Also mentioned in the interview with Five Books online portal: "And now, years after my first reading of this book, I can see that behind every human story is another and yet another...this is the human archaeology."
- 75 Protesters in Mali state that corruption, mismanagement of economy and disputed legislative elections have led them to the streets in June 2020. Harding, A., *Mali coup: UN joins global condemnation of military takeover*, BBC, 20 August 2020. These claims echo those of participants in the UNIRI intervention when indicating that bad governance and economic issues are at the root of their grievances.

An effective approach to making communities more resilient to radicalisation into violent extremism or any type of violence should have the features summarised in the following table:

WHERE	WHAT	WHY	HOW	FOR WHOM	BY WHOM
Areas **underserved** by government services[75]	Issues perceived and reported as causing popular **frustrations** – cases of injustice, discrimination etc.	Instill **the sense of importance** along with respect and recognition of legitimacy of harbored grievances	Raise general awareness of the **roots** of the problems by using culturally sensitive and inclusive terminology and messages that resonate with the population – i.e. religion	Vulnerable, **disenfranchised** disheartened communities[76]	Grass-root organisations, associations pursuing long-term **vision**, whose projects demonstrate perseverance and **resilience** on the path to achieving their vision
Areas that are remote, difficult to reach and isolated, feeding the sense of **isolation** and distance from the decision-making centers	**Critical** thinking	Instill the ability to apply **reason**, recognise manipulation, distinguish facts from opinions, causes from consequences and limit impulsive reactions	Encourage **openness** and free discussion of contentious issues allowing for frustrations to be channeled into positive action	Youth, women, people with disabilities, pastoralists, farmers, nomadic communities, refugees, internally displaced persons	Grass-root organisations and associations organic to the marginalised communities, with clear **values**, earned trust and reputation, led by persons of integrity and with great social capital

- 76 Such as capitals' and big cities' suburban areas.
- 77 They can be former slaves, chronically unemployed young men, discriminated-against ethnic group members, former combatants - the designation will always be context-dependent.
- 78 Presence of recruitment efforts can be used as an indicator of strong grievances present in the given community, which are exploited by armed groups.
- 79 Be they women, ex-combatants or religious actors.

WHERE	WHAT	WHY	HOW	FOR WHOM	BY WHOM
Areas suffering from **environmental** degradation as a precursor for possible future contestations	**Civic** engagement in democratic processes	**Empower** the communities to solve problems or seek long-term solutions, build their confidence	Teach or establish **processes** and mechanisms for addressing grievances through frequent instances of engagement over a longer period of time		Government **agencies** positively viewed by the general population and vulnerable communities in particular
Areas suffering from ongoing **conflicts** or targeted by armed group recruiters[77]	Social cohesion	Foster **inclusion** and social cohesion of different segments of the population at community level without prejudice[78]	Encourage **participatory** processes inclusive of community's diverse groups		

Seeking knowledge and nuanced understanding

For all of the above reasons, the key tool for designing projects of this, and any kind, is **knowledge**. Understanding the context, conflict dynamics, aggrieved parties, other actors, and local culture are all equally important to avoid reinforcing harm already inflicted. For instance, measures such as the closing of borders are of limited effect when it comes to restraining the movement of armed groups, which can pay their way through. Their consequence on local nomadic populations instead can be drastic economically, deepening frustrations. Such policies that militarise borders and close down legal routes to migration only make people more reliant on smugglers.[80]

Moreover, while extensive, the list of identified grievances is pretty much applicable to any of the locations under observation. The difference is in the relative weight and importance of individual grievances within a given context and how they combine with other frus-

■ 80 More legal and safe routes would lessen the risks and harms experienced by migrants, reduce profit for human smugglers and make the industry less attractive to organised crime. Lucia Bird, *Movement should be safe for migrants*, Institute for Security Studies

trations. For instance, the sub-Saharan area is struggling with massive problems caused by climate change. It would appear though that the scale of the problem in certain areas of Chad in particular is reaching levels that are difficult to contain, and has been treated as a matter of urgency by the grass-root organisations working there.

Without local knowledge, such matters are difficult, if at all possible, to discern. In order to better understand the indigenous culture, traditions and customs, it is important to rely on local people who enjoy trust of their community. The knowledge gathered need to cover all points of unity and divergence between different interest groups distinguished by their age, gender, faith, ethnicity, social class or professional occupation. The example of how banter is often used by the Soninke people in Mauritania to defuse tensions between conflicting parties illustrates this well, along with the pains of evolving the traditional forms of the societal organisations into one that is more inclusive and equitable.

Intimate knowledge of local circumstances is important for better understanding potential obstacles to entry, no matter how inconsequential they may appear at the first inspection. Is there anything that participants are not saying either due to their sense of pride or else because it is "hiding" in plain sight to the uninitiated to the local customs and mores? Many behaviors and expectations may be implicit in local culture, and, if unacknowledged, could potentially deepen frustrations.

Example

A civil society organisation from Nouakchott organised horticulture classes for the young people from the suburban areas of the city, frequently targeted by violent extremist groups' recruiters. Twenty-five signed up, but were struggling to show up on a regular basis. Following frequent cases of absenteeism, the organisation inquired with the youths and discovered that they could not cover the cost of transportation to come to the Institute where the classes were held. The organisation decided to cover these costs, recognising also the additional value of these youths' creating new social connections.

The difficulty of pursuing a single goal

Each of the communities the projects worked with reported more than a single issue at the root of their grievances. Tribes living in the areas bordering Mali and Niger face poverty, political and social exclusion, security challenges and adverse effects of climate change. The resulting migratory flows are their answer to the search for economic opportunities and security, which in their turn make both those leaving and those staying behind more vulnerable to pressures. The same combination of problems plagues the Gourma region spreading from Mali into Burkina Faso, or the mountainous areas of Kasserine in Tunisia. The situation of the first is further aggravated by environmental pressures of desertification. The situation in the Kasserine area is also affected by the negative media attention, exacerbating vulnerability by stigmatising the region.

Consequently, a notable number of grass-root organisations tried to cover everything possible within a single project: from vocational training to improving hygiene standards to developing guidebooks for peace education to holding debates with journalists, imams and women to organising social events. They were responding to a sense of urgency by using every opportunity that presents itself to address as many issues as possible. For these organisations, addressing one issue is not going to remove vulnerability, making the community more resilient to messages of radicalisation. The community will continue to ail from other equally relevant deficits, easily tipping its balance over.

Hence, there is a need for a coordinated effort of diverse civil society organisations which are pursuing different strategies and serving different needs of their communities, yet united by a unique vision of their future society built on the values of inclusion, fairness and equality. A case of vibrant local civil society such as the one in Tunisia can illustrate the point. In Tunisia, UNICRI was able to observe the aggregate effect of benefits brought about by different local grass-root organisations with well-articulated visions and providing for the needs of different groups and sub-groups. Many of them focused on empowering young people to be actively engaged in public and economic life. Others focused on helping the religious community establish its position within a secular society. Yet all promoted democratic values, tolerance and peace-building.

Another possibility would be to offer capacity building training to the local civil society organisations on the theory of change in order for them to better channel limited resources. The grass-root organisations would greatly benefit from such technical capacity-building, coupled with mentoring in logical framework development and project reporting. A time-consuming exercise, yet worth the investment. It would require time to be made during implementation of projects for positive feedback loops in order to embed positive practices with the local organisations. The approach would further empower trust-worthy grass-root organisations with clear values and principles.[81] Once international support and funding closes, such organisations will stay in the areas of intervention to continue their advocacy work in communities, enriched by their experience of collaboration and exchange with international know-how and worldview.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ 81 The approach has been tested during the UNICRI intervention based on observations made during the implementation of projects following the first two calls for proposals. The representatives of UNICRI and the seven grass-root organisations' implementing projects as part of the third call for proposals had working sessions on logical framework and reporting requirements leading to informative exchanges greatly appreciated by all sides.

Resilience of grass-root organisations

The change is local and can only be brought about by the members of the community. The examples of organisations in Tunisia who persevered attacks on their credibility as well as physical attacks on their premises demonstrates this. They demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity, continuing to pursue their long-term vision and be vocal about their values. Such a stance earned them credibility among their audiences. In the case of one such organisation in Tunisia, working with youth from marginalised communities, the way in which the organisation has managed to recover from each of the attacks were frequently cited as a source of inspiration by the youths. They looked up at the members of the organisation as their role models, feeling encouraged to follow the example.

For projects such as this UNICRI intervention, whose long-term objective is to touch upon the core values of the societies, making them more inclusive and tolerant, it is critical to identify potential local champions of change and the extent of their influence. Their involvement makes any effort more effective. While it is difficult to know and involve all the relevant local actors of importance and influence, it is important to make as many of them aware of the process and offer them a role that is suitable to their level of authority and capacity to contribute to change.

The figure of authority

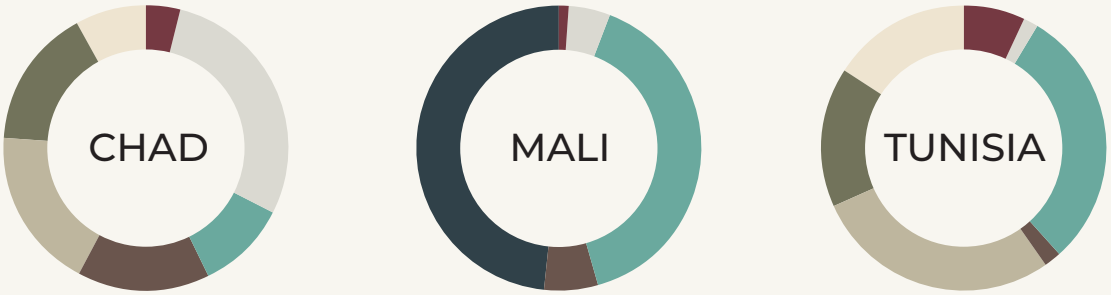
Young people from Tunisia, when asked about the effectiveness of counter-narratives to radicalisation into violent extremism, expressed skepticism. They highlighted the importance of the mouth-piece. They found it difficult to trust that the body or person engaging in advancing counter-narratives is not having a vested interest. In some cases, such a perception can cause more harm than good.

An example from Mauritania confirms the importance of perceptions. A civil society organisation led by its founder, a 78-year old, former mayor of Nouakchott and a former school inspector, worked with youth from suburban areas of Nouakchott, organising two-year long professional training in practical skills such as plumbing, carpentry, and floor tiling. The courses offered an alternative to these young boys who may have otherwise been caught in the extremist messaging of armed groups' recruiters operating in the suburbs. The good reputation of the grass-root organisation's leader in the community, which saw him motivated by altruism, ensured that young boys remained engaged in the classes during the two years' period.

One can however observe differences between the communities in terms of who is considered as having the authority to help the community members to resolve local problems. The survey suggests that in Chad,

people tended to trust more traditional leaders, followed by family and friends, and the civil society. In Tunisia, police would be the first instance for reporting issues, closely followed by family and friends. In Mali, the situation is different. The people answered by saying that they would report problems to the international security forces, most of them specifying that it would be UN or MINUSMA. However, even higher number of them indicated turning to violent extremist groups – 74% of respondents from Mali.

IF YOU HAVE PROBLEMS IN YOUR COMMUNITY, WHO DO YOU APPROACH?



- Armed groups
- Civil society representatives
- Media/journalists
- Family/friends
- Religious leaders
- Traditional chiefs/leaders
- Police, international forces
- Elected local authorities

Personal resilience

The importance of independence in arriving at conclusions, of being able to tell facts from fiction and of knowing that there are alternatives to violent reactions are critical in building personal resilience. Teaching critical thinking has been considered as a key approach to achieving this by many grass-root organisations across the countries. Even the projects dealing with hygiene or vocational training looked for ways to integrate modules or exercises on critical thinking, empowering participants to develop own arguments.

The importance of involving the youths

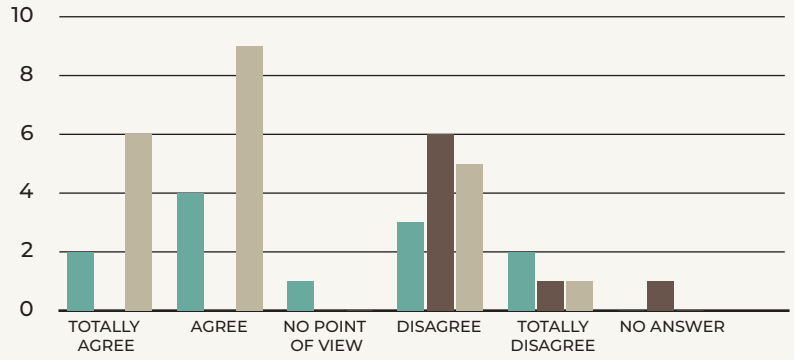
Given the demographic profile of the nine countries, it is only natural that most of the interventions sought to better integrate the young population. They have been involved in all kinds of activities, including educational and vocational training, creation of economic opportunities in rural and urban settings, workshops on intergenerational dialogue, activities boosting media and information literacy, sport and music events, artistic performances such as art, crafts, street theatre and radio plays, workshops developing life skills such as teamwork, leadership, conflict management, critical thinking, and tolerance. They received micro-funding to lead small community projects and participated in civic education sessions.

Based on the received feedback as well as observations, the most successful activities involving the young people have been those driven by their peers along with those that empowered the youths to make decisions and lead local initiatives. It is important to encourage young men and women to develop a vision for their future that is wider than their community. That vision is best arrived at through debates based on values and principles of dignity, self-worth, recognition and emancipation. Today's youths of these countries are the future leaders and voters. The establishment and promotion of social justice depends on them. However, they lack opportunities in societies that consider them social minors to learn and exercise the skills they will need in the future. While substantial majority of the interviewed community members from Chad and Tunisia, believes that the opinions of the youths are respected (57% and 80% respectively), an even greater majority of community members from Mali (83%) disagrees that that is the case.articular those aged 26-35 It thus makes sense to support and fund youth-run organisations, instead of discriminating against them based on their age and perceived lack of experience or credibility. Notwithstanding all the difficulties they are facing in their communities, this segment of population, be it in northern or in sub-Saharan Africa, remains unabashedly optimistic as to their future, the future of their countries and the possibility for change.

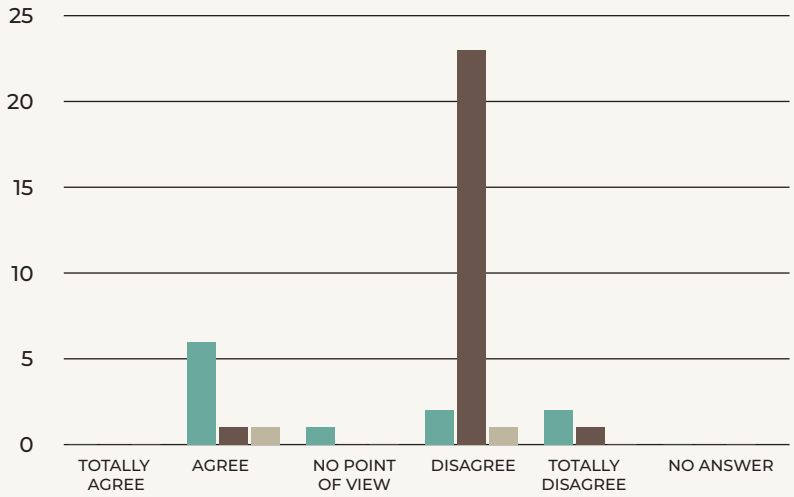
They survey shows that the young people's optimism about their capacity to make a positive contribution to the life of their communities positively affects other members of their community. The optimism in the possibility of the young people to make a change is shared among all of the surveyed participants from Mali and Tunisia (100%), and nearly all from Chad (97.5%).[82]

■ 82 Majority of respondents from all three countries were under 35 years of age: all from Tunisia, 61% from Mali and 57.5% from Chad.

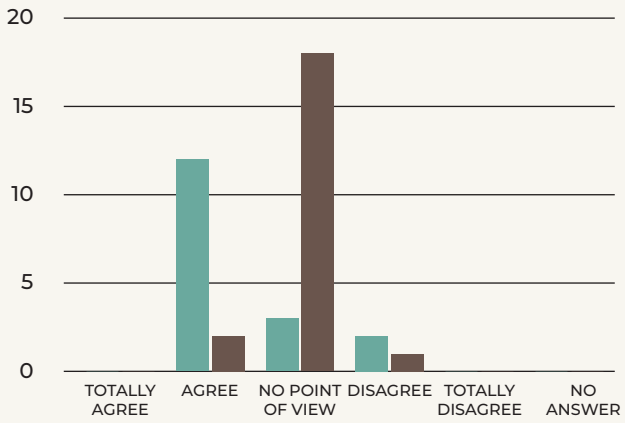
DO YOU THINK THAT THE OPINIONS OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE RESPECTED BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS?



People of 15-25



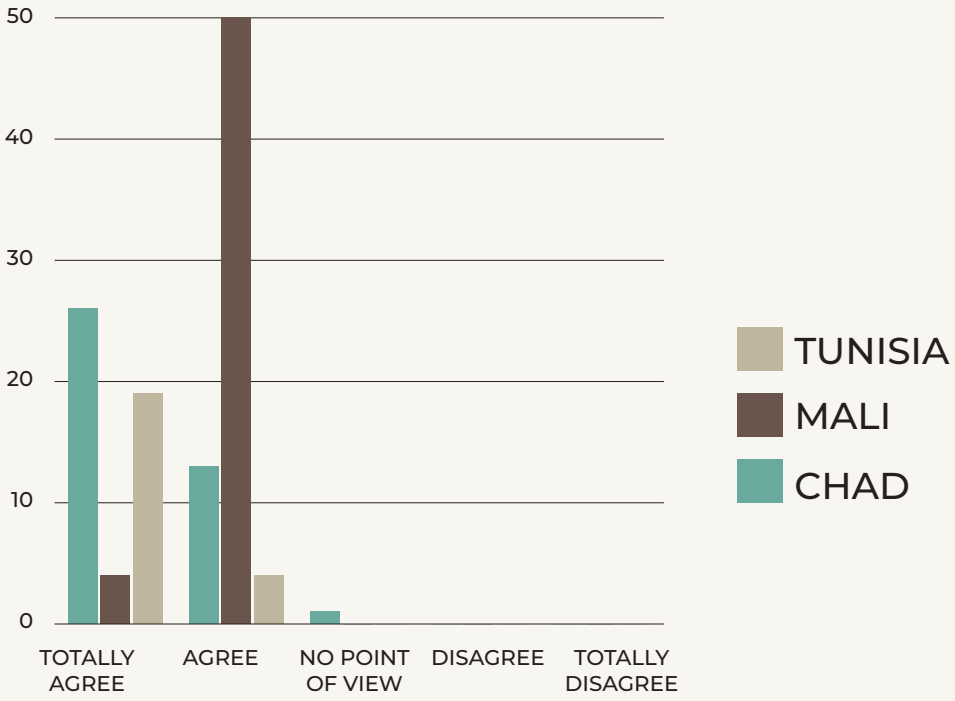
People of 26-35



People of 36+

TUNISIA MALI CHAD

DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE LIFE OF YOUR COMMUNITY?



Half of population is female - half of project participants were not

Women represent the segment of population of the communities that has been consistently neglected throughout the projects. The importance of including them was always nominally recognised, yet numerous obstacles listed to guaranteeing their numerical equality with male participants. It is important to understand the obstacles faced by projects to including women as well as obstacles faced by women to joining the projects. In certain communities, such as the rural communities of Tunisia, young men shunned opportunities to work with women, feeling uncomfortable. In other cases, women were not allowed by their families to join activities led by men or in which women were expected to participate in public events.

Yet women are perceived as powerful players in peace initiatives. Neglecting to engage women is *de facto* neglecting to engage half of the population. Identifying the right local partners to facilitate their participation is one way of sending women, and their families, the right message. The observed positive examples suggest that women are in the best position to reach women, in particular in initial stages. Promotional events to explain to the families and wider social networks the purpose and type of activities the project wishes to organise were also helpful as they contributed create the trust and enable the

participation of women. Supporting women associations has been another way to do so.

From the practical point of view, it is important to keep gender-disaggregated data in order to understand to what extent gender parity has been achieved. For instance, a great number of women in the audience of projects in Sahel was frequently reported as indicative of women having been equally engaged. Yet, at a closer inspection, it was evident that their engagement has been largely limited to being part of an audience. Keeping the data helps to confirm or dispel such perceptions.

Beyond the purely numerical aspect of looking at the percentage of participating women compared to that of men, the data needs to look at:[83]

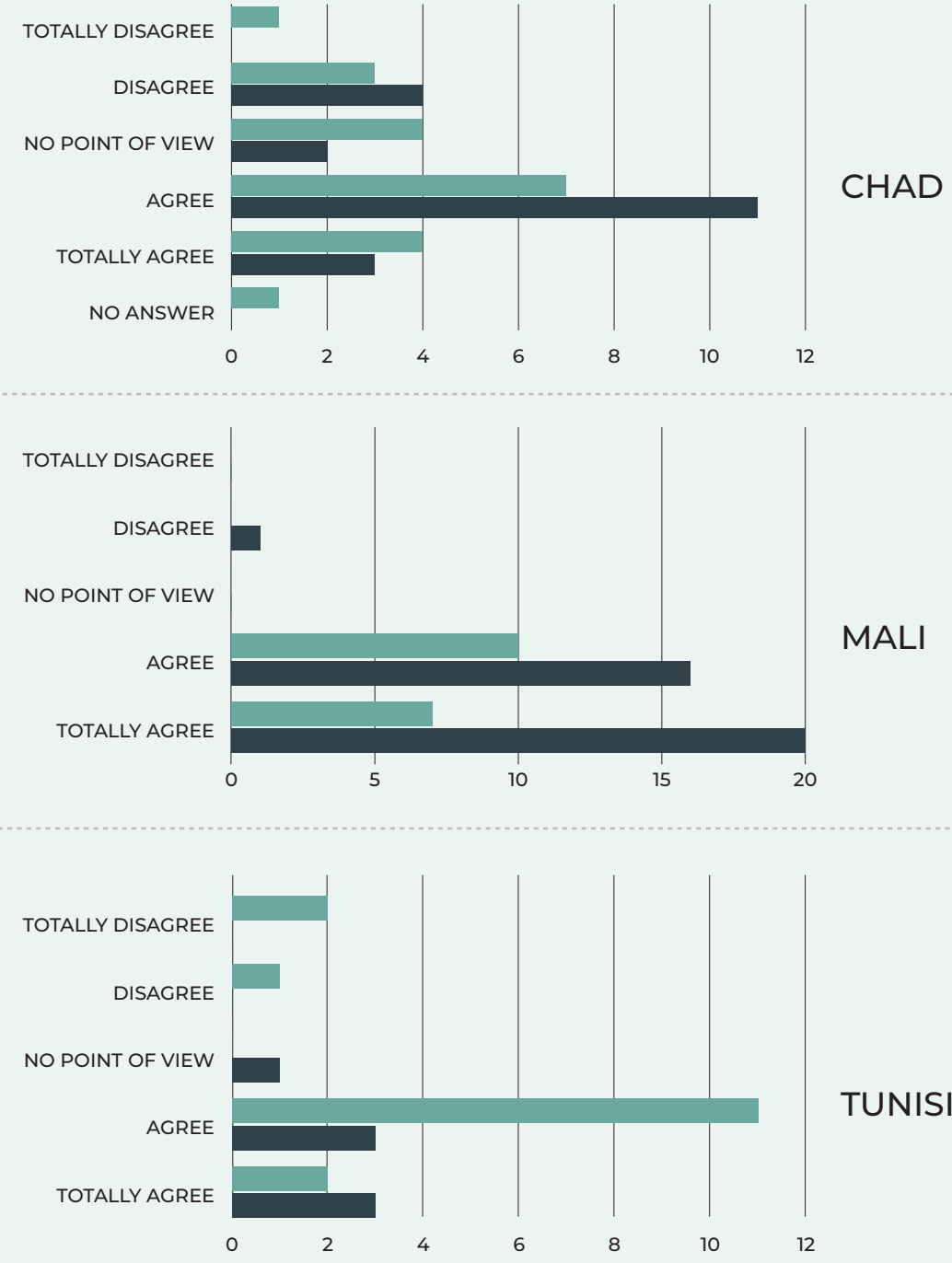
- The role of women in the projects: Are they passive or active participants? Do they feature as members of audience or are expected to contribute own ideas and proposals? Do they feel comfortable to express their views? Are their views and ideas considered?
- The presence and role of women in grassroot organisations: Are there any women among the staff of the organisations? In what positions? How many are in decision-making and operational positions as opposed to occupying supporting roles of assistant and accountants?

The extent of controversy surrounding the participation of women in the public sphere is well demonstrated by the survey results. Whereas majority of survey respondents from Chad, Mali and Tunisia thought that views of women are respected in their communities, they in principle expected women to ask for a permission to participate in community life. Male respondents were more often of the opinion that women should ask for a permission, with only a fraction of them accepting that they do not need one. The situation is most dramatic in Tunisia where majority of respondents were young women and still of the opinion that they need a permission. Going a step further and inquiring whether women should be concerned with the matters of governance, half of respondents (49.5%) thought that they should. The numbers in favor were highest in Tunisia (78%), divided in Chad and lowest in Mali, where less than a half though that governance issues concerns women (37%). Thus, if women are not supposed to participate in the communities' public sphere freely, it remains uncertain how they are expected to engage with the matters of governance. The contradiction may be indicative of societies undergoing transition in their values, still elaborating the best way to translate those values into practical actions.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ **83** Lisa Schirch argues the same in her article on eleven African innovations in peace-building: "Too often women's peace networks have gone unrecognised, creating a perception that there is an absence of women's leadership for peace. Lisa Schirch, *11 African innovations in peace-building,* 17 April 2019

DO YOU THINK WOMEN'S OPINIONS ARE RESPECTED BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS?



Religion and religious establishment

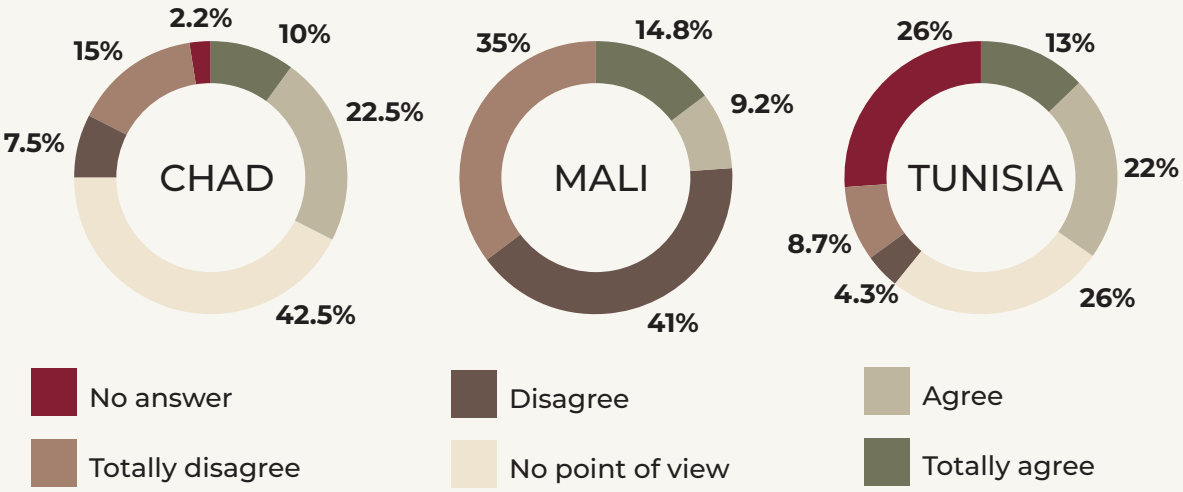
Religion in itself was not considered a threat by any of the grass-root organisations. None of the organisations framed religion and its teaching in these terms. Evidence collected by one project shows that actors aligning themselves with a radical reading of Islam tend not to be violent. The areas where institutionalized radical religious movements exert their influence tend not to be the same areas of territorial influence of violent extremist groups.[84] Knowledge of Islam reinforces one against interpretations provided by recruiters. Evidence collected by another project confirmed this by looking at the opposite - when religious teaching is inadequate and religious knowledge incomplete, it is easier to use it to serve nefarious purposes.[85]

In many communities, Koranic schools offer the only option for children from marginalised groups to get access to some form of education. In many areas of sub-Saharan Africa, they are the only institution offering basic education. In the case of many communities of Maghreb, they are the more affordable educational establishment for several families. Their presence is indicative of a need and desire for education and, in the vacuum frequently left by formal educational system, they act as a substitute. However, the extent to which Koranic school students manage to integrate well in the society varies from community to community. Based on the survey results, the prevailing impression in Mali is that it is difficult for them to be well socially included (75%), whereas the opinions in Tunisia and Chad are divided - one third thinks that they are and most either does not know or disagrees.

Similarly, mosques and their preachers' messages represent at times the only institution that sets the tone in the community. As such, there is a need to co-opt religion, Islam in the case of most of these countries, into assistance programmes.[86] The religious population of these countries is rather large, whereas the percentage of their radicalised members is comparatively small. One should appeal to the larger population that is oriented towards peace-building**,** instead of allowing this minority group to hijack the development agencies' agenda. As part of the UNICRI programme, grass-root organisations frequently invited imams and Koranic school preachers to debates, conferences, and workshops as both the audience or active participants. Koranic schools were targeted as an object of inquiry, topic for debates or destinataries for textbooks and guidebooks. The grass-root organisations did so by combining religious messages with civic values of equal rights and gender equality. Thus, instead of allowing armed groups to exploit the spiritual discourse for framing political grievances in a narrow sense that advances their causes or justifies their political acts, the grass-root organisations (re)appropriated the spiritual

- 84 International Alert, *If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel*, June 2018
- 85 Ahmed Tlili Foundation for Political Culture, *Les ecoles coraniques "KOTTEB"*, Rapport de synthese, 2019-2020, May 2020".
- 86 Also brought up in a study carried out by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Radicalization, violence and (in)security: What 800 Sahelians have to say, Perception study on the drivers of insecurity and violent extremism in the border regions of the Sahel*, (Executive summary), 2016.

DO YOU THINK STUDENTS OF KORANIC SCHOOLS ARE SOCIALLY INCLUDED AFTER THEY FINISH THEIR STUDIES?



discourse in constructive discussions about those political grievances.[87]

Governance

Many projects of different nature incorporated training on citizenship and equal rights in their projects. Their training was addressed to the general population, young men and women, as well as more specifically to civil society activists, imams, Koranic school teachers and journalists. It was geared towards teaching the rights as enshrined in these countries' constitutions and laws. Furthermore, the grass-root organisations in Sahel frequently engaged in establishing dispute resolution, mediation and early warning committees across the communities of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

These remarkable efforts indicate that democratic deficit is a deficit of knowledge and structures. There is a general lack of civil education accompanied by a lack of political participation and the resultant exclusion from the political processes. The latter is frequently stated as a grievance, yet it is in the power of the very same people that declare this an injustice to correct it. Only, by not being intimate with the knowledge of the mechanisms of democracy they are unable to per-

87 Kisiangani, E., Comparing Somalia's al-Shabaab and Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army: A toxic mix of religion, politics and violence, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Paper 229, December 2011." The paper confirms that the insight that religion is exploited by groups to advance their causes, to justify or explain the political acts and recruit is not novel. The spiritual discourse is used as a medium for framing political grievances.

ceive their role and take the suitable course of action. They are left outside of the system of governance without any means to influence it to achieve the social justice they call for.

The grass-root organisations took upon themselves to advance the state-building process, empowering citizens with the knowledge of how to influence the systems of governance in order to contribute to remove systemic injustices and discrimination. They engaged in building alternative mechanisms and structures for adjudicating cases of disputes. It is clear though that civil society cannot do it alone. The state has to assume its share of responsibility and address as priority the political grievances that nurture popular frustrations and can be easily exploited by violent extremist and armed groups. The groups have emerged out of specific circumstances, which, if not removed or addressed, will continue to give them reasons to exist.

Security forces

Finally, the security forces, as the armed branch of the government need to be seen within the wider context of socio-political factors in which the violent extremist and other armed groups operate. For good or bad, their actions become part of that context. As reported by grass-root organisations, their excessive and discriminatory use of violence indeed in some cases puts them in the eyes of communities on the same operational level of those armed groups. The difficulty of understanding the nuances of their purposes has been reported.

A number of interventions in Sahel sought to enhance the trust of the local populations into the security forces in order to encourage reports of suspicious activities. Their focus was on educating the local population on the role and mandate of the security forces in an effort to change their perceptions of these actors. However, these efforts are one sided and do not preclude the serious need for reforming the forces by, to the very least, training them on accountable conduct and communication with local population and media, and diversifying their recruitment base. Military governance is a major problem affecting the uniformed corps in most Sahelian countries. Each year, parliaments approve substantial security and defense budgets for the operation of the forces and the purchase of military equipment. Yet, human resource administration in the Sahelian armies, their recruitment, posting and promotion, doesn't always meet the criteria of transparency and competence. Democratic control and oversight of the security forces need to be reinforced, with security challenges framed in broader humanitarian and development terms. [88]

■ 88 Kone, H., *Sahel militaries need better governance to face the terror threat,* Institute for Security Studies, 26 February 2020. Ngari, A., *Niger and Mali should reconcile justice and military responses to terrorism*, Institute for Security Studies, 5 August 2020.

3.6
Recommendations

"It takes a lot of courage to fight biases and oppressive regimes, but it takes even greater courage to admit ignorance and venture into the unknown. Secular education teaches us that if we don't know something, we shouldn't be afraid of acknowledging our ignorance and looking for new evidence. Even if we think we know something, we shouldn't be afraid of doubting our opinions and checking ourselves again. Many people are afraid of the unknown, and want clear-cut answers for every question. Fear of the unknown can paralyse us more than any tyrant. People throughout history worried that unless we put all our faith in some set of absolute answers, human society will crumble. In fact, modern history has demonstrated that a society of courageous people willing to admit ignorance and raise difficult questions is usually not just more prosperous but also more peaceful than societies in which everyone must unquestioningly accept a single answer. People afraid of losing their truth tend to be more violent than people who are used to looking at the world from several different viewpoints. Questions you cannot answer are usually far better for you than answers you cannot question."

Yuval Noah Harari, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century

Following five years of implementation of a comprehensive approach in nine countries, many lessons have been learned, the most relevant of which are elaborated in the section above. They are to be condensed in the three recommendations below, with the acceptable risk of being partly in the right and partly in the wrong, exactly as the blind men of the poem that inspired the title of this report.[89]

The recommendations are intended both for policy makers and practitioners working in the field in their designing of wide policy approaches or specific projects. The recommendations are purposefully formulated in a way so as to be applicable to both groups of professionals, intentionally concise and condensing the key features of the findings. The hope is that this utter simplification and condensation should enable them to be considered.

■ 89 John Godfrey Saxe, *Six blind men and the elephant*

RECOMMENDATION 1

THE STATE NEEDS TO LEAD EFFORTS THAT ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES OF GRIEVANCES LEADING TO RADICALISATION INTO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN COLLABORATION AND DIALOGUE WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ACTORS

STATE HAS TO BE INVOLVED

The nature of conflict – ideological, political or territorial - fades away in the presence of legitimate grievances that find expression in violence. Structural conditions that motivate individuals to join armed groups need to be addressed, thus removing sources of tensions or at least establishing mechanisms and processes that can address them in an inclusive manner.

However, the issues being overwhelmingly structural, the state is the only actor that can address them in a sustainable way. The civil society can support the state efforts, compensating in some cases for its inability, or unwillingness, to extend its services over the whole of its territory. The state can and should engage other local actors of influence in its efforts, such as traditional chiefs and religious authorities. Given the difficulty of removing grievances in any foreseeable future, it is important that the state is seen as making positive efforts, cutting off the possibility of radical groups to using societal problems as part of their mobilisation and recruitment strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 2

ANY SOLUTION HAS TO BE INFORMED BY A SOUND KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL AND WIDER POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS

KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL DYNAMICS

Differences between and within the countries are great, with many forces at play that ought to be considered. The countries may be experiencing same problems, but these will be having different manifestations depending on the context, making it difficult to formulate simple conclusions. This complexity can only be approached thorough knowledge and understanding of wider political, economic, social and local circumstances, cultural heritage, previous efforts and their effect. There are many tools that can be used for advancing knowledge when designing suitable projects and for matters as complex they should be suitably applied.

Automating collection of comparable data across communities throughout implementation of projects allows for easier comparison and drawing of conclusions that may not be so obvious at first.

Questionnaires are a powerful tool for exploring the presence and development of critical thinking skills, the ability to discern facts from fiction, and perceptions of the effectiveness of state or violent extremist groups in advocating for societal changes. Views of one person can be ephemeral, yet the views of a community are more stable over time and can overpower the strength of an individual person to think independently. Measuring how views of a multitude on critical topics change over time can offer important insights into the effects of projects as well as wider societal interventions. Even the most modest tools for detecting changes in perceptions and observing the direction of such changes can offer critical knowledge for better understanding local community. One study carried out as part of the UNICRI programme arrived at the same conclusion that local perceptions of the violent extremism need to inform any successful assistance programme and take into consideration local sensitivities.[89]

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

■ 90 *International Alert, If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel*, June 2018. Also brought up in the study carried out by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Radicalization, violence and (in) security: What 800 Sahelians have to say*, 2016.

RECOMMENDATION 3

THE SOLUTIONS HAVE TO BE DESIGNED AS LONG-TERM PROCESSES GEARED TOWARDS BUILDING MORE INCLUSIVE AND TOLERANT SOCIETIES

LONG-TERM PROCESSES RATHER THAN SHORT-TERM RESULTS

DThe projects made a choice between engaging with at-risk groups or else supporting the establishment of processes, structures and mechanisms that engage at-risk groups. For instance, some interventions offered remedial classes to elementary school children, teaching them literacy, and helping them pass exams so that they can continue their schooling. The projects did not however work with schools where these remedial classes had been offered, ensuring that such a programme continues for the next generations of students.

In countering violent extremism, it is more effective to focus on actions that build a better, more inclusive and tolerance societies, where individuals feel respected for who they are not what they have or do not have. United communities are resilient communities. There are no solutions that are able to equally well address grievances existing in nine countries, nor within a country, as these countries represent a tapestry of ethnicities, cultures, belief and traditions. However, grievances being predominantly structural in nature, it will take time to have them addressed and removed.

As such, it makes more sense to focus on advocating the establishment of general processes and mechanisms, and teaching critical actors the tools to make those processes and mechanisms work. Tools such as non-violent conflict resolution mechanism and inclusive problem solving. As part of the UNICRI programme, best effects were produced by grass-root organisations that prioritised continued direct engagement with smaller groups of community members over a longer period of time. Armed with knowledge, local community members were more than able to design and fine-tune context-specific solutions.

This approach suggests a preference for the community as a whole at the expense of working for the benefit of its individual members. The focus is on building social bonds and civil responsibilities as a prerequisite for creating a society that is healthy and safe. Social structures disintegrate without social bonds.

Bibliography

African Union Commission, *African Youth Charter*, May 2006

Ahmed Tlili Foundation for Political Culture, *Les ecoles coraniques "KOTTEB"*, *Rapport de synthese*, 2019-2020, May 2020

American Psychological Association, *Building your resilience*, 2018

Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), *Platform for disaggregated data collection, analysis and crisis mapping*, https://www.acleddata.com/

Asmi, R. C., *Trade and Conflict: The Case of the Arab Maghreb Union*, University of Tunis El Manar, Topics in Middle Eastern and African Economies, Proceedings of Middle East Economic Association, Vol. 20, Issue No. 2, September 2018

Auteserre, S., *On the frontlines of peace: The unlikely people who are getting it right*, March 2019 (book manuscript)

Autesserre, S., *The Crisis of Peacekeeping, Why the UN Can't End Wars*, Foreign Affairs, January/February 2019

Autesserre, S., *Three flawed ideas are hurting international peacebuilding*, The Washington Post, 15 March 2017

Autesserre, S., *Here's what Congo can teach the world about peace*, The Washington Post, 19 October 2016

AZHAR, *Rapport de recherche sur les causes des conflits intercommunautaires a Tessalit*, 2020

Batrawy, A., Hinnant, L., *Leaked ISIS documents reveal recruits have poor grasp of Islamic faith*, The Independent, 26 September 2016

Benchemsi, A., *Morocco, the Kingdom of Unfinished Reforms: 20 years of human rights progress and setbacks under Mohammed VI*, Human Rights Watch, 5 August 2019

Bird, L., *Movement should be safe for migrants*, Institute for Security Studies, August 2020

Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Radicalisation, violence and (in)security: What 800 Sahelians have to say*, *Perception study on the drivers of insecurity and violent extremism in the border regions of the Sahel, Executive summary*, 2016

Chelin, R. P., *From the Islamic State of Algeria to the Economic Caliphate of the Sahel: The transformation of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*, Terrorism and Political Violence, June 2018

Cheyes, S., *Thieves of state, Why corruption threatens global security*, Norton, 2015

Ciric, S., *David Grosman u Beogradu - Nijansa je kljucna rec*, Vreme weekly, 30 June 2016

United Nations Security Council, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), *CTED Trends report: Gender dimensions of the response to returning foreign terrorist fighters. Research perspectives,* February 2019

Craven-Matthews, C. & Englebert, P., *A Potemkin state in the Sahel? The empirical and fictional in Malian state reconstruction*, African Security, 11:1, 1-31, 2018

Day, J. & Kleinmann, S., *Combatting the cult of ISIS: A social approach to countering violent* extremism, The Review of Faith & International Affairs, 15:3, 14-23, August 2017

Diamond, J., *Collapse: How societies choose to fail or succeed*, 2005

Dufka, C., *Burkina Faso's atrocities in the name of security will help terrorists' ranks*, The Washington Post, 12 June 2019

ESRI Terrorist Attacks, https://storymaps.esri.com/stories/terrorist-attacks/?year=2016

European Council on Foreign Relations, *Mapping armed groups in Mali and the Sahel,* May 2019

European Parliament, *Report on findings and recommendations of the Special Committee on Terrorism*, 2018/2044(INI), 21 November 2018

French Armed Forces Headquarters, Public relations office, *Press Pack Operation Barkhane,* February 2020

French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, *G5 Sahel – Pau Summit – Statement by the Heads of State,* 13 January 2020

Gallimberti, U., *I miti del nostro tempo,* Universale Economica Feltrinelli, 2013

Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949

Global Terrorism Database, https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

Global Slavery Index , *Country data - Mauritania*, 2018

Harding, A., *Mali coup: UN joins global condemnation of military takeover*, BBC, 20 August 2020

Hedayah and Curtin University, *Countering Violent Extremism: Developing an evidence-base for policy and practice*, 2015

Hannum, H., *The UDHR in national and international law*, Health and Human Rights, 3(2):144-158, 1 Jan 1998

Institute for Security Studies (ISS), *Preventing extremism in West and Central Africa: Lessons from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria*, 2018

International Alert, *If victims become perpetrators: Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel,* June 2018

International Alert, *Dogmatism or pragmatism? Violent extremism and gender in the central Sahel,* June 2020

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch

IPP Media, *The Sahel - "in every sense of the word a crisis",* 11 June 2020

Jaffer, N., *In extremis*, Aeon, 19 July 2018

Jaffer, N., *Teenage terrorist aren't lost forever. Even ISIS recruits can be reintegrated into society, if the approach is right*, Foreign Policy, 28 February 2019

Kisiangani, E., *Comparing Somalia's al-Shabaab and Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army: A toxic mix of religion, politics and violence*, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Paper 229, December 2011

Kone, H., *Sahel militaries need better governance to face the terror threat*, Institute for Security Studies, 26 February 2020

Lagneau, L., Barkhane/FC-G5S: D'une ampleur inédite, l'opération Monclar a neutralisé un "grand nombre" de jihadistes, Zone militaire opex360.com, 27 March 2020

Mattei, C. & Zeigler, S., *Evaluate your CVE results: Projecting your impact,* Hedayah, July 2018

Melly, P., M*ahmoud Dicko: Mali imam challenges President Keita*, BBC News, 27 June 2020

MINUSMA, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, https://minusma.unmissions.org/en

Ngari, A., *Niger and Mali should reconcile justice and military responses to terrorism*, Institute for Security Studies, 5 August 2020

The North Africa Journal

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Gold at the crossroads: Assessment of the supply chains of gold produced in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger,* 2018

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2018), *The role of civil society in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism: A focus on South-Eastern Europe*

Paquette, D., *Destroying a fragile peace, terrorists wreak havoc in West Africa*, The Washington Post, 1 October 2019

Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law applicable in Armed Conflicts, 8 June 1977

Ranstorp, M., *RAN Issue Paper: The Root Causes of Violent Extremism*, Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Centre of Excellence, 4 January 2016

Reid, G., *Gold Rush: Artisanal mining, crime and militancy in Africa,* S-RM, 29 January 2020

Renard T., *Returnees in the Maghreb: Comparing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia,* Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Egmont Paper 107, April 2019

Republic of Mali, *Agreement for peace and reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process*, June 2015

Ritchie, H., Hasell, J., Appel, C., Roser, M., *Terrorism*, Our world in data, July 2013

Rosand, E., Winterbotham, E., Jones, M. Praxl-Tabuchi, F., *A roadmap to progress: The state of the global P/CVE agenda*, The Prevention Project and Royal United Services Institute, 2018

Roy, O., *Le jihad est aujourd'hui la seule cause sur le marché*, Liberation, 3 October 2014

Roy, O., *In search of the lost Orient, An interview*, Columbia University Press, 2017

Roy, O., *Who are the new jihadis?*, The Guardian, 13 April 2017

Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance, *Gender analysis of conflict toolkit*, July 2016

Schirch, L., *Eleven African Innovations in Peacebuilding*, 17 April 2019

Smith, S., *Fuga in Europa, La giovane Africa verso il vecchio continente*, Einaudi, 2018

Souris, E., Singh, S., *Want to Deradicalize Terrorists? Treat Them Like Everyone Else*, Foreign Policy, 23 November 2018

Erdberg Steadman, L., Moix, B., *How civil society can help prevent violence and extremism – and what the international community can do to support it*, United States Institute of Peace, 6 June 2019

Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States, *Preventing extremism in fragile states: A new approach*, United States Institute for Peace, February 2019

Tesfaye, B., *Critical Choices: Assessing the effects of education and civic engagement on Somali youths' propensity toward violence*, Merci Corps, November 2016

Tian, N., Kuimova, A., da Silva D. L., Wezeman, P.D., Wezeman, S. T., *Trends in world military expenditure 2019*, SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2019

U.S. Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, *2019 Report on international religious freedom*, 2019

UK Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) network, Women for Women International, Amnesty International UK, Saferworld and Womankind Worldwide, *Beyond consultation: A tool for meaningfully engaging with women in fragile and conflict-affected states,* March 2019

Ulph, S., *Boko Haram: Investigating the ideological background to the rise of an Islamist militant organisation*, 2013

United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict,* 2018, Washington, DC

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, June 2019

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Journey to extremism in Africa: Drivers, incentives and the tipping point for recruitment*, 2017

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) & International Alert, *Improving the impact of preventing violent extremism pro-*

gramming: A toolkit for design, monitoring and evaluation, 2018

United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy,* A/RES/60/288, 8 September 2006

United Nations General Assembly, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, Report of the secretary-General*, A/70/674, 24 December 2015

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report on best practices and lessons learned on how protecting and promoting human rights contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism*, United Nations General Assembly, 21 July 2016, A/HRC/33/29

United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), *Strengthening efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism: Good practices and lessons learned for a comprehensive approach to rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders*, February 2018

United Nations Office for Counter-Terrorism, *Reference Guide for Developing National and Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism,* September 2018

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *589 killed in central Mali so far in 2020 as security worsens – Bachelet,* 26 June 2020

United Nations Security Council, *Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and extended pursuant to resolution 2432 (2018) (S/2019/636),* 17 August 2019

United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2354 (2017), Threats to peace and security by terrorist acts, 24 May* 2017

United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2396* (2017), *Threats to peace and security by terrorist acts,* 21 December 2017

Vergani, M., Iqbal, M., Ilbahar, E. & Barton, G., *The three Ps of radicalisation*: *push, pull and personal. A systemic scoping review of the scientific evidence about radicalisation into violent extremis,* Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, September 2018

Watling, J., Raymond, P., *The struggle for Mali*, The Guardian, 25 November 2015

World Health Organisation, *Statement on the second meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee regarding the outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)*, 30 January 2020

Zelin, Aaron Y., *The Others: Foreign fighters in Libya,* Policy notes, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2018