MAURITANIA

MALI

NIGER

CHAD

SUDAN

ERITREA

SENEGAL

NIGERIA

BURKINA
FASO

POLICY

BRIEF

ON EMERGING ISSUES AND THE DYNAMICS
OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA AND
THE SAHEL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

T his policy brief gives insight into the conceptual and contextual issues and concerns about violent extremism in Nigeria and other parts of the Sahel Region. The aim is to present a wide range of policy options and actions that can effectively respond to the emerging dynamics of the prolonged extreme violence in the region. It brings together results from reviews, including desk and literature, interviews and perspectives on the emerging dynamics of Violent Extremism. It highlights the impact of climate change, political instability, poverty and other socio-economic challenges on preventing and countering violent extremism. It discusses how the factors have shaped the scope of vulnerability and determined the emerging humanitarian landscape. Most importantly, it presents policy options available to governments, non-governmental organizations, actors, stakeholders, states, local and international communities to respond to impacts of the violence on political stability, peace and security in the region. The question is how the infernal hell in Sahel Region can be extinguished. The answers are in this briefing paper!

1.1. OVERVIEW

The Sahel region, as defined by the United Nations strategy (UNISS), covers Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria. The region has been under the grips of insurgent groups that have inflicted enormous destruction and pain on people living in the region. Their impact is evident in massive displacement of people from their homes and communities, destruction of livelihood and social and economic infrastructures, abduction of women and girls and loss of lives.

The region has witnessed conflicts that have led to massive displacement of people.

Climate Change has also increased the occurrence of these conflicts.

The impact of climate change in the region is huge. Agriculture is the mainstays of the region, engaging large chunks of the population. Farmers play important role in the agriculture value chain. They face a lot of challenges, importantly, coping with impact of climate change and biodiversity loss have been difficult for them in

the last few years. Food security is threatened. This, among others have contributed to the unsavory state of security in the area.

The consequential forced and irregular migration in the countries that make up the region, is already leaving behind footprints of severe ecological violent conflict at home as well as imposing additional burden on border security in other places. This Policy Paper interrogates contextual factors, emerging Issues and Changing Dynamics of Violent Extremism in the Sahel, particularly, and the Nigeria side.

This policy brief articulates the contextual variables that are present in the landscape, conceptual understanding of terms and implications of the changing dynamics on security, peace and stability in the region.

It analyzes the socio-economic, political, and environmental factors contributing to the evolving dynamics of violent extremism by scrutinizing emerging trends in violent extremism, including changes in tactics and impacts. It present insights to the linking of climate crises to the emerging dynamics of violent extremism; Why it explains the conceptual and contextual issues and factors reconstructing the landscape, it shifts focus to vulnerability risk reduction and policy options to enhance resilience, support communities and promote peace, security and stability in the Sahel region, including Nigeria.

1.2. KEY CONCLUSION

The climate of violent extremism that had endured for over a decade in the Sahel has been worsened by extreme poverty, debilitating impact of climate change, aggravating food insecurity and brazen political instability that has led to unconstitutional change of government in the Sahel states of Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger, which consequently led to the bifurcation of ECOWAS and emergence of Alliance of States of Sahel that is Russia backed. This is a sad commentary to a region ravaged by terror violence that desperately need great measure of integration and cohesion to fight in unity, countering violent extremism. The impact of this dynamics on humanitarian spaces is negatively humongous. The main attraction of this brief is that policy options responding to these challenges are proposed for necessary actions. There is hardly any real evidence that one can lay hands on validating the success of preventing and countering violent extremism as the situation continues to degenerate. The

concepts of preventing and countering violent extremism have changed significantly and have imposed new duty of holistic approach on actors and humanitarian practitioners to understand the contexts and the emerging dynamics before a profoundly sustainable and durable solutions can be provided.

1.3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

There is shared concerns about the state of security and violent extremism in the Sahel region. Failure in responsibility to protect is obvious. The prevalence of hunger and malnutrition in all the States of the Sahel Region is a palpable indicator and evidence of widespread food insecurity. It describes to a degree the negative impact of climate change. The drying up of Lake Chad and the increasing desertification in the Sahel are determining factors in the acute hunger and malnutrition ravaging the region leaving a large number of the population in the loops of vulnerability, food insecurity and poverty. This further enrich the pool where terrorists recruit their members. The emerging dynamics of preventing and countering violent extremism is significantly influenced and shaped by the shrinking humanitarian space and expanding dimension of ungoverned territories, degenerating security landscape, unable and unwilling state actors and relentless non-state armed actors. Other factors include climate change and ecological issues with consequences such as intractable conflicts, food insecurity, poverty and radicalization to violent extremism.

There is also the new waves of political instability and destabilization, militarization and weakening of sub-regional organization with dire consequence on multilateral agreement and commitments to prevent and counter violent extremism together,

1.4. SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The main requirement of policy is finding the political will to implement it. These recommendations provide a guidance to how to address the emerging dynamics in preventing and countering violent extremism in the Sahel region, including Nigeria.

- Institutionalization of Early Warning and Early Action System as a Prevention and Countering Model

- Building Alliance against the new waves of Radicalization to Violent Extremism. Nigeria is a leading member of ECOWAS, yet a sovereign country. It must see beyond its membership of the sub-regional organization and prioritize the issue of security of its people by entering into multilateral agreements with other countries in the Sahel Region, particularly the contiguous countries so as to present a common front against terrorism.

- Socio-Economic Measures: Put in Place Decision-Making and Action-Taking Frameworks in Relations to Poverty, Insecurity and human capital Thresholds-These include aggressively addressing crises of aggravating poverty, poor human capital rating, poor social and health care and the raging scandalous insecurity. The priorities such as intervention plan in the areas of education, health care, nutrition and food security, protection, economic empowerment and poverty alleviation, addressing gender and social injustices significantly and substantially.

- Develop country-level and multi-country strategies and plans for Good Governance Political Stabilization

- Climate Change Adaptation. Climate change is a serious threat to prosperity and development in the Sahel Region. The impact is that more people are being pushed into poverty with vulnerability reinforced. This offers veritable pool for recruitment of terrorists. There is need to include climate impact analysis in the development plans for the Sahel states. The purpose should be to pull out frameworks relevant to adaptation, focusing on how to help communities and people understand their vulnerabilities and what to do to reduce them. This will enhance the capacity and capability of communities and people for adaptation.

Overcoming terror violence in the Sahel can only be achieved by the cooperation and commitment of the States, which is currently challenged by division and disunity.

Also the need to strengthen regional, national, institutional, community and epistemic linkages with climate change regime, a critical aspect in the new waves of vulnerability may not be achieved without unity and alignment of institutions. This would continue to impact negatively on the counter strategy.

2.0 CONTEXTUAL ISSUES AND EMERGING DYNAMICS

T he Sahel region presents a complex mix of poverty, violence, food insecurity and outright poor governance, with one reinforcing the others to create arguably, the worst case of humanitarian and security crises.
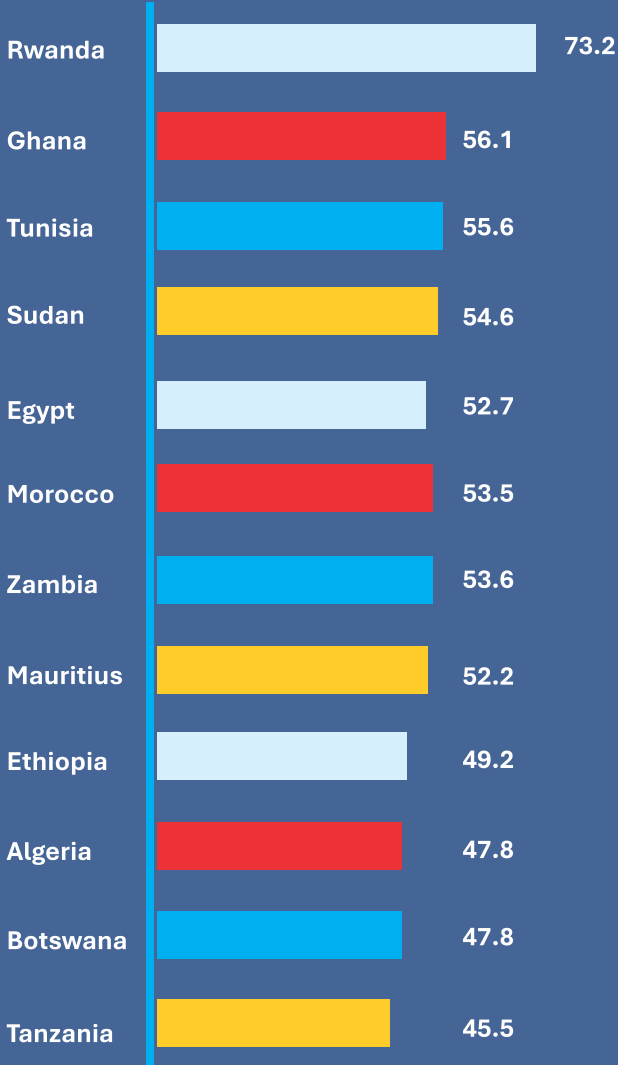
The continuing spike of extreme violence and violent extremism nave weakened governance in the region and the states in the region have virtually collapsed, with responsibility to protect left undischarged. Terrorist Organizations such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM)- Boko Haram, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP) among others , in the last decade have wrecked havocs in the region with horrendous mass killings, large scale displacement, disruptions to livelihood activities and creating conditions for anarchy across the region with dire consequence to destabilizations. There is preponderance of mass murder, kidnapping, rape, abduction, hunger, starvation and ineffective security architecture to defend and protect in the Sahel.

Burkina Faso, a country in the Sahel is ranked first on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) for 2024, Mali is third, Nigeria is eighth and Niger is ranked 10 on the Global Terrorism Index of 2024. Deaths in the Sahel constituted 47% of the global total of terrorism deaths in 2023(Global Terrorism Index (GTI), 2024).

The global terrorism report declared the Sahel region as the most terrorized region in the world, worse than the Middle East. None of the countries in the Sahel meet up with the criteria of being considered safe in Africa.

Countries with highest safety index in Africa in 2024

Country	Safety Index
Rwanda	73.2
Ghana	56.1
Tunisia	55.6
Sudan	54.6
Egypt	52.7
Morocco	53.5
Zambia	53.6
Mauritius	52.2
Ethiopia	49.2
Algeria	47.8
Botswana	47.8
Tanzania	45.5

In recent times, the poverty level has increased due to climate change, conflict and disaster and with each re-inforcing the other. These occurrences have increased crime rate, including cattle rustling in the countries in the Sahel including; Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and other parts. The statistics is frightening. The World Bank in its newly released Nigeria Development Update report stated that the official percentage of poor Nigerians jumped from 40.1 per cent in 2018 to 56 per cent in 2024 "with growth proving too slow to outpace inflation, poverty has risen sharply.' The report acknowledged an increase from 115 million in 2023 to 129 million in 2024, which means that 14 million Nigerians have become poorer this year (World Bank, 2024). The combined population of other countries in the Sahel is not up to the population of Nigeria, the most populous country in the Sahel region.

In Nigeria, 2023, Inflationary rate stands at 21.91 percent, away from the 21.47 percent in November 2022 (NBS, 2023) but in June 2024, the inflation rate increased to 34.19% in Nigeria (NBS, 2024). One hundred and thirty three(133milion) people are also battling with multidimensional poverty; entangled with poor health care, lack of education, poor standard of living, increasing exposure to environmental hazards including living in hazardous areas (NBS,2023).

In Burkina Faso, more than 40% of the population is living below the national poverty line. Burkina Faso was ranked the 184th out of 191 countries in the 2021–2022 HDI report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023). Inflation Rate in Mali averaged 1.42 percent from 2015 until 2024, reaching an all-time high of 17.50% in 2022 (Institut National de la Statistique, Mali ,2022). It is worthy of note that from the HDI report of the United Nations Development Programme, that there is no country in the Sahel region that does not have at least 40% of its population living in extreme poverty.

Ecological conflict triggered by the vagary of climate change is everyday occurrence in theare. The challenge is to understand the notions and nature of vulnerability and the policy options that can be projected to support risk reduction, enhance adaptive and transformative capacity of people and community so as to overcome consequential and resultant potential shocks that could pose threats now and in future.

Climate change is an existential threat in the Sahel and Nigeria. The drying up of Lake Chad has triggered food insecurity, deepened poverty and reinforced violence in the region. It has added to the burden of the poor and the vulnerable.

Climate change and violence continue to reinforce each other. This continues to hinder anticipatory adaptation because of climate of terror and insecurity that keep on retrenching farmers from their farms, crippling the capacity of agriculture to reverse the wheels of food insecurity and extreme poverty.

The preponderance of armed non state actors has weakened the capacity of the states in the region to protect and to secure. The states are failing and hardly is anything nearing governance going on. State of anomie have emerged with collapsed systems and structures that can hardly respond to needs and welfare of the people. Insecurity has rendered the region derelict, with spikes in crime and criminalities, lawlessness and wholesale anarchy.

It is clear that there is no way one can analyze the violent extremism in the Sahel, including Nigeria without dwelling on the issues of the political economy of war. The landscape is being shaped by political and economic interests of actors, state and non-state actors who have found in the violence an advantage to pursue their own personal or group interests. The altruistic interest is lost in a political economy context where people have built fortune around the opportunities provided by the circumstances of prolonged extreme violence; perpetuating the war and managing it in a way that aligns with their personal economic and political interests. The war and its management have become greed trips to fortune land. The Sahel has become an accountability free zone, where transparency and accountability have become casualties. There is need for broader conversation on new strategy that will sufficiently cover all emerging issues and dynamics; including climate change, poverty, political instability, regional disunity among others, so as to enhance the states' responsibility to protect and secure.

EMERGING DYNAMICS

The emerging dynamics of preventing and countering violent extremism is significantly influenced and shaped by the shrinking humanitarian space and expanding dimension of ungoverned territories, degenerating security landscape, unable and unwilling state actors and relentless non-state armed actors. Other factors include climate change and ecological crises with consequences such as intractable conflicts, food insecurity, poverty and radicalization to violent extremism.

There is also the new waves of political instability and destabilization,

militarization and weakening of sub-regional organization with dire consequence on multilateral agreement and commitments to prevent and counter violent extremism together.

If Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism were difficult before now, the disintegration of ECOWAS and the exit of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso from the G-5, group committed to working together to respond to the orgies of terrorism has made it much more difficult. Working together by the contiguous countries is the easiest way to counter the infernal machine of terrorism. An absence of any strategy on how to come together and defeat terrorism represents a predictable failure.

Today, like African Union (AU), ECOWAS has become jokey euphemism for association of rulers who care more about regime protection than building unions of people for peace and development in its jurisdictions. Anti-people's response to Mali, Niger and Burkinafaso crises could precipitate humanitarian concern that will worsen situations and conditions of other countries, particularly Nigeria' (Olajuyigbe Gbenro,2024).

This fear was shared by Security Council Report: Forecast on the Sahel and West Africa, July 2024

The report asserted that 'the security situation remains dire in parts of the Sahel, particularly the Liptako-Gourma tri-border region of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The three countries, led by military juntas that came to power through coups d'état, created the Alliance of Sahel States or l'Alliance des États du Sahel (AES) in September 2023. In November 2023, Burkina Faso and Niger quit the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S), which they had formed in 2017 with Chad, Mali, and Mauritania to combat terrorism and organized crime; Mali withdrew from the G5 Sahel in June 2022. The three AES countries later announced on 7 March that they were creating a new joint force to fight terrorist groups'

It is now clear, based on the decision to quit the G-5 that the causes of humanity and humanitarian priorities are being subdued by the rulers for political exigency and expediency. There is continuous proliferation of arms in the Sahel through the activities of armed groups, terrorists and political actors.

POLICY OPTIONS

- **Institutionalization of Early Warning and Early Action System as Prevention Model.** Given the magnitude and the complexity of violent banditry and insecurity in the Sahel states, there is need in each country for local initiative that will be effective in responding to internal threats and addressing community level protection and security needs. These include need for stakeholders and security sector consultation to ensure risk information is comprehensive and includes indigenous knowledge, local information and national level data. Communities and local people must be trained on how to identify and evaluate activities that increase risks. The need to integrate local risk management plans and warning messages into wider security architecture action plan that incorporate Early Warning and Early Action System cannot be overemphasized.

- **Building Alliance against the new waves of Radicalization to Violent Extremism.** Nigeria is a leading member of ECOWAS, yet a sovereign country. It must see beyond its membership of the sub-regional organization and prioritize the issue of security by entering into multilateral agreements with other countries in the Sahel Region, particularly the contiguous countries so as to present a common front against terrorism.

- **Socio-Economic Measures:** Put in Place Decision-Making and Action-Taking Frameworks in Relations to Poverty, Insecurity and human capital Thresholds- These include aggressively addressing crises of aggravating poverty, poor human capital rating, poor social and health care and the raging scandalous insecurity. The priorities such as intervention plan in the areas of education, health care, nutrition and food security, protection, economic empowerment and poverty alleviation, addressing gender and social injustices significantly and substantially. How far could the countries in the Sahel go with economies witnessing deepening poverty? What happens to the ever increasing population getting sunk in the widening pool of poverty? Could this be a veritable recruiting ground for terrorist groups? Would a young person have involved in doomed insurgency or war if s/he has assurance of decent live in a Just Society? Would the States in the Sahel ever begin to address Human Security concerns that are turning 'citizens' against their state? Is it not yet time to address the danger posed by the widening gap between the rich and the poor?

These are questions that socio-economic intervention must resolved. Without equivocation, there is need for governments and other stakeholders to re-strategize on ways of improving the livelihood of the people so as to reduce their vulnerability. Providing opportunities for people to learn alternative skills must be explored. In doing these, there is a compelling need to prioritize women and youth, who are the most vulnerable groups. Pro-Poor policies and development agenda must be urgently and vigorously pursued in order to establish socio-economic foundations of long-term peace and human security

- **Develop country-level and regional-level strategies and plans for Good Governance Political Stabilization.** Instituting Security Governance should be the starting point toward good governance. In order to establish political framework of long-term stability and security, people must be engaged and involved in their own security and the concern for human security must be uppermost. This is because when you ensure human security, threat to national security will be minimised if not eliminated. It should be noted that this ideal of Security Governance should include the Review of Regional and global agreements and cooperation in a way that will improve our border security without offending citizens of other states, especially those of contiguous states.

- **Climate Change Adaptation:** The prevalence of hunger and malnutrition in all the States of the Sahel Region is a palpable indicator and evidence of widespread food insecurity. It describes to a degree the negative impact of climate change. The drying up of Lake Chad and the increasing desertification in the Sahel are determining factors in the acute hunger and malnutrition ravaging the region leaving a large number of the population in the loops of vulnerability, food insecurity and poverty. This further enrich the pool where terrorists recruit their members.

  Climate change is a serious threat to prosperity and development in the Sahel Region. The impact is that more people are being pushed into poverty with vulnerability reinforced. There is need to include climate impact analysis in the development plans for the Sahel states. The purpose should be to pull out frameworks relevant to adaptation, focusing on how to help communities and people understand their vulnerabilities and what to do to reduce them. This will enhance the capacity and capability of communities and people for adaptation.

CONCLUSION

The climate of violent extremism that had endured for over a decade in the Sahel has been worsened by extreme poverty, debilitating impact of climate change, aggravating food insecurity and brazen political instability that has led to unconstitutional change of government in the Sahel states of Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger, which consequently led to the bifurcation of ECOWAS and emergence of Alliance of States of Sahel that is Russia backed. This is a sad commentary to a region ravaged by terror violence that desperately need great measure of integration and cohesion to fight in unity, countering violent extremism. The impact of this dynamics on humanitarian spaces is negatively humongous. The main attraction of this brief is that policy options responding to these challenges are proposed for necessary actions. There is hardly any real evidence that one can lay hands on validating the success of preventing and countering violent extremism as the situation continues to degenerate. The concepts of preventing and countering violent extremism have changed significantly and have imposed new duty of holistic approach on actors and humanitarian practitioners to understand the contexts and the emerging dynamics before a profoundly sustainable and durable solutions can be provided.

Security and inclusive development must be responsive to context and able to adapt to new conditions and requirements; as the context changes and so the dynamics. The need to focus on and understanding the shrinking humanitarian space and expanding dimension of ungoverned territories, degenerating security landscape, state actors and non-state actors, the impact of climate change, political instability and weakening of sub-regional organization with dire consequence on multilateral agreement and commitments to prevent and counter violent extremism together is necessary. Responding to the challenges highlighted with the recommended policy options is imperative!

REFERENCES

HDI report of the United Nations Development Programme ,UNDP, 2021–2022

Institut National de la Statistique, Mali ,2022

Institute of Economics and Peace; Global Terrorism Index(GTI), 2024

Olajuyigbe Gbenro; ECOWAS of Tyrants, Vanguard, January 30, 2024

Olajuyigbe Gbenro; Tyranny Web (Opinions on Power, People & Cynical Society);Amazon, 2022

Olajuyigbe Gbenro; Youth Inclusion in Politics and Governance: Pragmatic Strategy for Preventing Violent Extremism in Nigeria, ActionAid Policy Brief, 2022

Olajuyigbe Gbenro; Policy Brief On Policy Options In Responding To Nigeria's Ecosystem Of Violence, ActionAid, July 2021

Olajuyigbe Gbenro; Leadership Failure, Cause Of Nigeria, Africa's Crises, Independent, February 12, 2020

Olajuyigbe Gbenro; Receding Citizenship, Intruding Identities and Nigeria's Complex Crises: Closing Response Gaps!;aPolicy Briefing Paper, ERAI, 2018.

Olajuyigbe Gbenro; Humanitarian Imperative: Subjects of Rights, Not Object of Charity (Re-constructing humanitarian Action in Nigeria); a Policy Briefing Paper, ERAI, 2018.

Security Council Report: Forecast on the Sahel and West Africa, July 2024

Statement by the UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Gilles Fagninou, 28 May 2024

World Bank; Nigeria Development Update report,2024

#TogetherForPeace