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Building resilience to organised crime

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Summary

State-centric approaches to building resilience to organised crime must be complemented with community-based, context-specific responses that challenge organised crime and violence at a local level. Local communities are key elements of the necessary response to the destabilising impacts of organised crime in conflict as well as post-conflict settings. There remains a gap in stakeholder understanding of the elements of community resilience to organised crime, particularly in unstable settings. This report starts to address this gap, by analysing key drivers of community resilience – identified as social capital, community capacity, the role of women, economic capital and infrastructure – in four communities in Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Faso.

Recommendations

- Target public corruption as a key element of building state legitimacy and promoting community resilience to organised crime.
- Address context-specific obstacles to community resilience, commonly including the lack of coordination among resilience actors and the lack of public awareness regarding the local impact of illicit markets.
- Strengthen local governance, including traditional governance mechanisms, and leadership.
- Support better relationships and cooperation among state institutions, local governance mechanisms and local resilience actors.
- Civilian defence groups and other non-state security actors may be operating at the local level. If they are cited by communities as key elements of resilience, support communities in engaging with them and negotiating expectations and rules.



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Organised Crime: West African Response to Trafficking

Introduction

Exploring innovative response frameworks in addressing the relationship between illicit economies and conflict in West Africa is a matter of urgency. Many communities are facing significant threats from conflict actors, and in many areas state-centric response frameworks have had limited success.

The current challenges posed by conflict and illicit markets are immense. West Africa is experiencing unprecedented levels of armed violence – with the period from 2015 being the most violent on record in the region.¹ The *2021 Organised Crime Index* – a tool assessing levels of organised crime and resilience to organised crime – shows that levels of criminality are on the rise in West Africa. This is in line with continental trends, in parallel with a deterioration in state resilience to organised crime in most countries across the region.²

Meanwhile, responses both to conflict and illicit economies have repeatedly proved to offer largely only short-term advantages. In the worst case scenario, they have been counter-productive.

There is growing awareness that state-centric approaches to building resilience to organised crime must be complemented with community-based, context-specific responses challenging organised crime and violence at a local level. Local communities are key elements of the response to the destabilising impacts of organised crime, including in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Yet, while there have been significant advances in methodologies seeking to measure resilience at a state level (including through the ENACT *Africa Organised Crime Index-2021*,³ and The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) *Global Organised crime Index*),⁴ there remain gaps in our understanding of how community resilience interacts with resilience at a state level. Of particular concern is how it interacts in areas plagued by local violence, and where communities are vulnerable to the recruitment of individuals into violent extremist organisations.

Recognising this, the GI-TOC has designed a research stream to explore the elements of community resilience in these contexts, complementing a growing body of evidence exploring ‘bottom-up’ peacebuilding approaches which centre on local conflict resolution.⁵ This report, one element of this work stream, presents the findings of a three-month project to test a framework for analysing resilience to organised crime at a community level in conflict or fragile contexts.

The research consisted of field studies conducted in five West African communities in Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau. Each one of these communities faces different levels of threat from illicit economies and violent extremist groups and exhibits different levels of resilience. The communities were chosen and compared in order to better understand the role of and the interplay among key drivers of resilience in different contexts. The findings of research in four of those communities are presented below.

The study sought to shed light on the following questions:

- How do the drivers of resilience operate at the community level and what are the key factors affecting a community’s resilience to organised crime and violence?
- Which factors enable local resilience to bloom in contexts afflicted by high criminality and instability?
- Which factors act as obstacles to building community resilience to organised crime, including in fragile and conflict contexts?
- What can states and international actors do to build greater resilience at a community level?

This exploratory study was conducted in parallel with a similar study in East Africa, where field studies were coordinated in Kenya and Mozambique.⁶ The two studies are intended to complement each other, building

Urgent action is needed to explore innovative responses to address the nexus between illicit economies and conflict in West Africa



a cumulatively enhanced understanding of the elements of community resilience to organised crime. Both explored community resilience in contexts facing different degrees of security threats – with some communities caught in full-blown insurgencies, others facing urban criminal and gang violence, and yet others faced with significantly lower security threats.

This is a complex work stream of research that would add significant value to bottom-up responses to tackling the harms effected by illicit economies in unstable and conflict-affected areas.

Understanding community resilience

Community resilience is a dynamic process that links a range of adaptive capacities and strengths to respond to various changes, threats, disturbances, or adverse events. It refers to the ability of community members to take meaningful, deliberate, collective action to face a problematic or threatening situation, including the ability to interpret the environment, intervene, and move on.

Community resilience is a measure of the sustained ability of a community to utilise available resources to prevent, respond to, withstand or recover from adverse situations, including organised crime and violent extremism.

Whether a community demonstrates resilience depends on the nature of the threats it faces, the goals it pursues, and the actions it takes



It is related to the community's collective efficacy, ultimately based on the capacity and willingness of community members and their leaders to intervene for the common good. It therefore refers to the collective competency and agency of a community, its 'capacity for concerted actions as well as its ability to solve problems and build consensus towards negotiating coordinated responses'.⁷

Together with the concept of empowerment, the idea of building community resilience can provide the basis for a framework for action. The concepts of empowerment and resilience have much in common. Building resilience and empowering communities can both be construed

as 'iterative processes in which individuals and/or communities recognise an unsatisfying state and develop an intention or goal to do something to change this state'.⁸

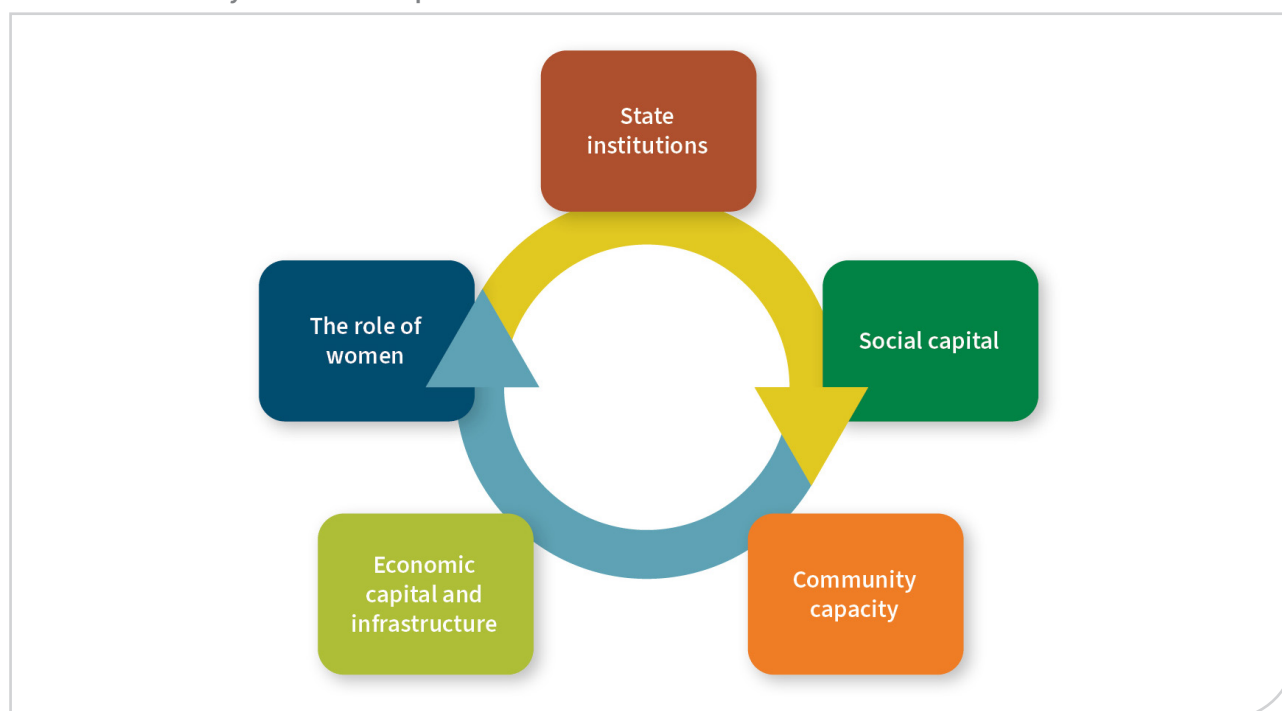
Whether a community demonstrates resilience depends on the nature of the threats it faces, the goals it pursues, and the actions it takes.⁹ A community-resilience approach involves identifying the vulnerabilities and risks faced by communities, as well as the factors that strengthen key actors and structures at the local level and make it possible for communities to take action to withstand these threats.¹⁰

The drivers of community resilience and the factors related to a community's overall vulnerability to organised crime are not yet sufficiently understood. The first step was to design an instrument through which to analyse community resilience in the West African communities. This was done in consultation with the GI-TOC team coordinating a community resilience study in East Africa.

A literature review was conducted of existing material on (1) measuring organised crime, using primarily the GI-TOC *Organised Crime Index*; (2) assessing community resilience; and (3) assessing community resilience in specific contexts: refugee communities, humanitarian crises, natural disasters, climate change, and post-conflict recovery. From this review, we found the most common categories for community resilience across these contexts included social capital, community capital, health and well-being, economic capital, political capital, infrastructure and natural environment.

We prioritised factors that were transferable to the question of building community resilience to organised crime, which meant focusing in more detail on categories addressing society and community, economy and governance. We also drew on previous GI-TOC research and the work of the GI-TOC's Resilience Programme, which had highlighted the importance of considering the role of women in community resilience in the context of organised crime.

Chart 1: Community resilience components



The result was five interrelated drivers, together with additional sub-drivers, of community resilience:

- State institutions: effective state support; governance; safety and security.
- Social capital: community cohesion; social stability; social networks.
- Community capacity: effective local governance and leadership; local security governance; communication.
- The role of women: involvement in governance, economy, responses to illicit economies.
- Economic capital and infrastructure: strength of local economy, availability of resources, physical infrastructure.

The drivers are interrelated and should not be viewed as a prioritised list. Resilience should not be viewed as a static property of individuals, communities or even wider systems. Community resilience is a dynamic process and viewing it as the mere sum of its parts or a set of discrete resilience-promoting capacities fails to capture the complexity of that concept.¹¹ These drivers are not put forward as entirely distinct parameters, but rather as interrelated analytical frameworks helpful for understanding resilience. Resilience is an emergent property – various capacities must be linked and act together to form community agency.¹²

As an emergent property, community resilience is dependent on various factors that interact to enable or constrain resilience.¹³

With respect to organised crime, a community's resilience to organised crime is also a function of its current situation with respect to local illicit markets, its exposure to violence and conflict, and the specific threats posed by organised crime groups.

Method

Selection of countries

The *Africa Organised Crime Index-2021* was used as a filter to select three countries within the Economic Community of West African States affected by medium to high levels of criminality and contrasting levels of state resilience to organised crime. Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau respectively rank 1st, 6th and 7th for criminality in West Africa, and 3rd, 8th and 14th for resilience in that region.

Chart 2: Heatmap of West Africa Organised Crime Index scorings



Selection of communities

Five communities were selected in consultation with local experts on the basis of available information on the organised crime and violent extremist threats they are facing. This selection was motivated by a desire to observe different dynamics and levels of resilience and the expectation that the dynamics of community resilience would vary, together with the nature and seriousness of organised crime and conflicts experienced by the various communities.

In Nigeria, the field study was conducted in Jos and included three distinct sub-city level communities, Dadin Kowa, Nasarawa Gwong and Angwan Rukuba. All three settings are densely populated with similar levels of unemployment and poverty but have exhibited different levels of resilience to communal violence, violent extremism and crime.

In Burkina Faso, a site was chosen at the Radgo gold mining site, Kaya, where a community is dependent on artisanal mining and deeply affected by violent conflicts. Researchers also engaged with the pastoralist community to understand the impacts of illicit economies and armed conflict. However the findings are not included in this report as the community was, in contrast to the others under study, geographically dispersed and therefore not well positioned for comparison.

In Guinea-Bissau, the field research was conducted in Píche, in the Gabú Region, where a diagnostic study on illicit economies in the region had recently been completed and believed by several stakeholders to be facing a threat of religious extremism. In Píche, the field research team worked closely with a civil society organisation, ADIC-Nafaia, which provided assistance with both public consultations and the collection of other data in Píche.¹⁴

Approach

Available information and data on organised crime, illicit markets and violent extremism as well as on the state's response to these threats were gathered for each community and analysed. In addition, local data were collected using a long questionnaire adapted from the instrument developed for the parallel study in East Africa. An interview structure and a list of themes for focus group discussions were also developed.

In each community, the field research started with round-table discussions held in the local language and engaging local participants, including local leaders, community members, and representatives of local organisations and key stakeholder groups. The representation of women in the group was ensured. Discussions covered the five main themes related to the community resilience framework mentioned above, together with a discussion of instances of community agency.

Following the roundtable discussions, and informed by the issues and questions thus identified, more data were collected through semi-structured interviews and small group discussions with key informants, stakeholders and community members. In addition, a long questionnaire was administered to selected key individuals or stakeholder representatives. Where possible, the field work was complemented by direct observation and other informal consultations with local officials.

The field research took place between 15 November and 21 December 2021. The findings were reported separately for each field research site and then analysed and summarised for the present report.

The field research studies were each coordinated over a relatively limited period of time. Greater time spent with the communities would have enabled more participatory approaches and longitudinal data collection as challenges from illicit economies and security threats evolved.

Bolstering synergies between state and community structures can promote effective action against organised crime and violent extremism

Cross-cutting findings

Each of the five identified drivers of community resilience is explored below, and key findings outlined. One manifestation of their resilience is the communities' agency, namely the capacity and willingness of community members to take action collectively. Where individuals and groups exhibit community agency, or collective agency, they can address important interests and demonstrate resilience, provided that the population is able to recognise and articulate common ground.¹⁵

Examining instances where communities have displayed such agency can provide insights into the extent to which the interrelated drivers are combining to engender resilience – as explored below.

Lack of effective state protection

A state-centric approach to fighting organised crime, when pursued in isolation, may deprioritise local contexts, disenfranchise communities and ignore the role they can and must play in countering the negative impacts of organised crime.¹⁶ Strengthening the connections between state structures and traditional community structures can result in more effective actions against organised crime and violent extremist groups.

Moreover, strong ties between customary and statutory systems may help the population understand its vulnerability, encourage it to cooperate with the authorities, and dissuade it from engaging in criminal markets.¹⁷

The long-term community dislocation and structural damage inflicted by organised crime undeniably require a state response. Moreover, when services are provided by effective state or legitimate private sector actors, illegal providers of goods and services may have less appeal within communities.¹⁸ However, the pervasive effects of criminal governance, corruption and compromised institutions sometimes make such a response unlikely and non-state action is required.¹⁹

More fundamentally, when a community is under active threat from criminal or jihadist groups, where protection and support from state agencies is lacking, this undermines its ability to demonstrate resilience and take effective action.

The field studies underscored that the relative absence of effective state institutions and the lack of protection afforded to the community by the state were key elements shaping the community's capacity and agency to counter the negative impacts of organised crime. This was particularly evident in contexts affected by armed conflict.

Support and protection from the state were limited in the five communities studied. In many instances, the state's response to organised crime, communal violence and violent extremism was compromised and ineffectual.

Effective local governance and leadership, security governance and communication are vital pillars in building resilience against organised crime

In some instances – most prominently in the Burkina Faso case studies – state institutions had withdrawn almost completely from the community, as a result of or in anticipation of violent conflicts with armed groups. This created vacuums of state governance, leaving already fragile communities at the mercy of violent criminal or extremist groups.

In most instances, integrity and capacity challenges at law enforcement and justice institutions had eroded the trust and confidence of the population. Across the case studies this essential driver of community resilience was weak, presenting a key obstacle to community resilience.

The field studies underscored the importance of collaboration between state and community structures, both at the level of governance (e.g. customary authority structures engaging with local officials, or feeding information to security forces) and security (including regarding cooperation between state security forces and community self-defence groups).

Social capital

Another major driver of community resilience explored in this study is social capital, with a particular emphasis on community cohesion (diversity; inclusion; exclusion; marginalisation; mobility; social tolerance-intolerance), social stability (population inflow and outflow; unresolved conflicts), social networks, and trust or feelings of belonging or social acceptance. Strong connections between different elements of civil society – such as journalists, activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – can also contribute to community resilience.²⁰

Across the five case studies, Dadin Kowa was the community that stood out because, despite its ethnic diversity and various challenging circumstances, it demonstrated greater cohesion, peaceful social relations, and visible resilience to organised crime. The field studies highlighted how violent extremism weakens existing social capital, thus harming that potential source of community agency and community resilience to organised crime.

Community capacity

Three major components of community capacity are essential to building resilience against organised crime: effective local governance and leadership; local security governance; and communication. Together, they determine the level of collective efficacy and the capacity and willingness of a community to respond pro-actively to organised crime and violence. The differential ability of communities to realise common values and maintain effective social controls²¹ is a major source of variation in responding to violence and crime.²²



Gold miners in Radgo gold mine, Burkina Faso.

The comparison among the five communities highlighted the impacts of violent conflict which, particularly in the Burkina Faso field study, had debilitating effects on communities' capacity, undermining their ability to take action to protect themselves, survive and possibly thrive. Each of the components of community capacity is considered below, alongside cross-cutting findings.

Local governance and leadership

Individual agency and leadership often emerge as important success factors and pathways out of fragility. However, coalitions among local leaders in the shape of local governance structures mitigate the vulnerability of individuals in contexts affected by high crime governance, rendering local governance more resilient over time.²³ Recognising this, it is important to support local governance through incremental interventions that create relationships and coalitions among local leaders.²⁴

The Burkina Faso field study showed that, in the face of significant threats from armed violence and the absence of effective state protection, local leadership, including traditional authorities, sometimes dissipated quickly or lost its ability to act effectively.

Across the communities in Jos, where the state was present and the threat of violence from illicit economies was significant, local governance structures played a key role in shaping resilient responses to illicit economies. Resilience in the face of organised crime was largely dependent on the extent to which local community councils (and civilian security networks where they exist) maintained good working relationships with the state and commanded community support.

Local security governance

Researchers have applied the concept of resilience to describe how communities have coped with multiple insecurities in the face of limited or no state presence.²⁵ The dynamics of community mobilisation and response to perceived and real security threats are complex and fluid, sometimes showing blurred lines between communal defence, criminality, and an ambivalent relationship with the state.

In his research exploring the role of local actors in community resilience in Nigeria, Lar highlighted the organisation of vigilante groups as a key feature of the increasingly prominent role non-state actors play in filling the spaces left by gaps in state presence.²⁶ Vigilante groups may include state officials, ordinary citizens, or citizens with some form of political affiliation or support from the state; consequently, the line between the state and these groups is often blurred.

These community-based armed groups can exacerbate fragility and violence by, for example, preying on communities (violence, predation or extortion) or aligning with other non-state armed groups. However

they can also be engaged to play constructive roles in local communities in weak, fragile or conflict-affected states.²⁷

The field studies underscored the crucial importance of local security governance, particularly in areas where violence has escalated and the state is unable to provide protection. Where state protection was unavailable, vigilante groups were the most common manifestation of perceived community resilience.

The studies drew attention to the complexity of community mobilisation, and the precarious nature of community protection offered by civilian self-defence groups. Communities across the case studies were predominantly positive about the role of self-defence groups in mitigating security and crime threats, perceiving such groups as a key element of community resilience.

Notably – GI-TOC and predominant definitions of community resilience enshrine the importance of non-violence in such approaches. This exposes a key disjuncture between community and external perceptions of resilience and points to better understanding and engaging with self-defence groups as a key theme for further programming and study.

The role of these groups, even if it is initially perceived as an expression of community resilience, can also turn into a community vulnerability or liability. The tracked tendency of many defence groups to ‘turn bad and become threats to the communities they were expected to protect’²⁸ triggers concerns around the central role such groups are playing in communities’ responses to insecurity.

Communication, information and the media

Communication and information have been identified across a range of contexts as ‘a central component of most if not all community resilience models’.²⁹ Spaces for regular and inclusive communication were identified as a key element of community capacity.

Women have been identified as playing a central role in building community resilience to organised crime across a range of jurisdictions



Local media have a key role to play. For example, community radio can be used to facilitate peaceful social dialogue and build trust and resilience between and among different communities.³⁰

The contribution of local media to building community resilience is affected by their relative strength and freedom, the level of access the community and its leaders have to the media and ultimately the level of trust the community places in these media. Community radio stations were particularly emphasised in Pitche, Gabú, where they were a key source of information and operated as a platform for whistle-blowing in relation to corruption and illicit activities.

By contrast, the importance of social media networks, particularly WhatsApp, was underscored in the field studies in Burkina Faso, where they were central to the communities’ ability to mobilise against threats.

The role of women

Women have been identified as playing a central role in building community resilience to organised crime across a range of jurisdictions, including in East Africa, Latin America and the Philippines. Women changemakers can interrupt entrenched cycles of violence and reclaim physical spaces from criminal governance.³¹

The participation of women in local governance structures and decision making varied across the field studies. It appeared to have some correlation with the communities’ ability to mobilise as a whole. For example – within the Nigeria research studies, women’s involvement in leadership and governance structures in Dadin Kowa, which overall appeared to demonstrate higher levels of community resilience, far outstripped that of the other two communities.



Women fill water bottles at the lake to irrigate crops, Koupela, Burkina Faso.

In contrast, in both Nasarawa Gwong and Agwan Rukuba, women complained of being excluded from decision-making, one element of marginalisation and social fracture which appeared to weaken community resilience.

Empowering women's organisations to negotiate and partner with government and local authorities is crucial to sustainable resilience-building initiatives.³² Failing to take into account gender considerations in community resilience programming can expose women to greater risks and vulnerabilities and perpetuate or exacerbate inequalities.³³

Economic capital and infrastructure

Economic capital probably tends to be a facilitator rather than a driver of community resilience. The local employment situation, the ability of youth to be gainfully employed instead of having to leave the community or turn to illicit revenue streams, the community's access to land or natural resources and the relationship between the local economy and local illicit markets are also important factors.

Physical and telecommunications infrastructure may also enable resilience at the community level (e.g., access to food, water, electricity, transportation, safe places for youth, safe places for community groups to meet without intimidation). In turn, instability, violence and conflict disrupt the local economy and, as a result, damage a community's resilience.

In the urban communities of Jos, physical infrastructure – particularly road networks – were highlighted as important factors shaping the ability of the state to respond to criminal violence and consequently to the protection of communities. Across the field studies more broadly, weaknesses in infrastructure often fed into a sense of state abandonment, eroding state legitimacy.

All five communities survive on fragile and largely informal economies where, to differing degrees, illicit markets play an important function. In Pitche, and the Radgo gold mine, illicit economies were central elements of local livelihoods. Here the illicit economy operated as an element of economic resilience and any interventions designed to address the illicit markets would need to be sensitive to that.

Where the role of illicit markets in fostering economic resilience of communities is ignored in designing responses, these can be counter-productive. In areas where violent extremist groups are present, such interventions are particularly dangerous as they can drive recruitment into armed groups.

In the Radgo gold mine, miners cited previous steps by state officials to evict artisanal miners or fraudulent licensing arrangements as central to the erosion of state legitimacy. In Soum province, in the Sahel Region north of the Radgo gold mine, the counter-productive effects of crackdowns on gold mines are clear.

Villagers walk down street in a northern Guinea Bissau town.



Communities appear to have been brought closer to jihadists following counter-terrorism operations in early 2019, during which gold mining equipment and gold were seized by state security forces.

Similarly, in the Est Region the governor ordered the closure of artisanal mining sites in 2018, officially to cut off sources of funding for terrorist groups. Miners turned towards jihadists, who reopened certain mines, like the one at Kabonga.

Providing access to resources the state has forbidden has in some contexts become part of the recruitment strategies of armed groups. For example, in eastern Burkina, jihadist preachers have targeted their sermons at different communities, including those deprived of access to gold deposits.³⁴

Instances of community agency and efficacy

Community agency, or the capacity and willingness of community members to take action collectively, is vital to community resilience. Where individuals and groups exhibit community agency, or collective agency, they can address important interests and demonstrate resilience, provided that the population is able to recognise and articulate common ground.³⁵

Resilient communities have agency and are driven by the desire to see positive changes through their collective action.³⁶ Over time, they engage socially, economically and politically and utilise their economic and other resources.

Individual agency and leadership are important success factors. A community's actual resilience is a function of the ability of individuals to access social resources and local power to influence responses to various threats or adverse events.³⁷ It can be augmented by stability-enhancing governance, locally or nationally, through incremental interventions that strengthen social networks and create relationships and coalitions among local actors.

Community agency took different forms and manifested itself to various degrees in the five communities studied, as explored in further detail in this report. The organisation of self-defence groups is often at the centre of resilience-building activities. In Burkina Faso, the two communities were largely abandoned by the state, without effective local leadership and facing an immediate threat of extremist violence. As a result, they were left with little agency and were taking limited collective action in the face of the threat of organised crime and violent extremism.

In the Gabú Region, the weakness of the police and justice institutions and the general lack of credibility of state institutions and local authorities have not provoked a community reaction because local leaders do not



Hundreds of women march through the streets to protest the killing of women and children and destruction of properties in Jos, Plateau State in central Nigeria on January 31, 2011.

perceive a need to do so. Signs of community capacity and community agency relating to matters considered important by the community can be observed.

For example, in the second half of 2021, in Gabú, 30 kms from Pitche, dozens of community members organised and demonstrated against a regional court sentencing decision relating to a case of theft of motorcycles involving civilians and police officers.³⁸ The sentence handed down to the police officers was perceived to be too lenient. Moreover, a civil society organisation has appealed the sentence.

This indicates that the community is clearly capable of organising and mobilising itself. But it has not done so in relation to illicit markets, as they were not perceived to be external threats, with smuggling part of the economic mainstays of the community.

When focusing on the civic response to organised crime, we are interested in what it is that shapes the capacity and willingness of resilient communities to take concrete action to mitigate the negative effects of illicit networks and organised crime. In some cases, one can observe extraordinary civic responses to the effects of organised crime at the community level.³⁹

In the communities under study, each had to build its own resilience without much outside help. Varying levels of community agency were observed, but it was difficult to determine how this translated into different levels of community resilience.

The organisation of self-defence groups is often at the centre of resilience-building activities in communities

Resilience to illicit markets: case studies

Several aspects of community resilience deserve attention,⁴⁰ including resilience as an internal attribute of a community, as a dynamic and persistent community characteristic (continuity), and as an adaptive capacity to adjust to adversity and counter different threats.

The GI-TOC uses a multi-dimensional framework and a systemic method to analyse the capacities of resilient communities, taking into account their strengths and vulnerabilities, their environment and the nature of the criminal threats they face.⁴¹

The relationship between a community and the illicit markets that have taken hold locally can be very complex. People often act out of a degree of necessity, helping sustain the local illicit trade on the one hand, while being opposed to it or in fear of those involved in it, on the other.⁴² The relationship will vary between different elements of the community, and between different types of illicit markets.

Some markets – such as artisanal gold mining, for example – are likely to enjoy far greater legitimacy than others, such as kidnap for ransom.⁴³ Sometimes, the line between the licit and the illicit has been ‘blurred by decades of systemic corruption, inequality and injustice’.⁴⁴

Vulnerability to organised crime and violence is most extreme in communities affected by a disaster or by conflict. The presence of organised crime in conflict-affected and fragile states is a manifestation of social disorder, economic opportunism, governance deficiencies, and historic hostilities.⁴⁵ Understanding how community resilience can manifest itself in such contexts is therefore particularly important.

The sections below explore the security threats faced by communities, together with the most prominent illicit economies in each area, and outline additional elements of the environment in which the community under study operates. For each community, this forms the basis for an exploration of the interrelated drivers of community resilience, in line with the tripartite structure outlined above, in each specific context.

Nigeria: Jos

Jos presents an interesting case for examining community resilience and fragility. At the sub-city level, in response to the growing insecurity, communities in Jos have demonstrated different levels of resilience to the triple threat of violent extremism, communal violence and crime. Some communities, over the years, have developed distinct mechanisms and frameworks to respond to insecurity, while others have been less responsive. This raises the question of why some communities have demonstrated more resilience than others.

The field study focused on the factors that shape different levels of resilience and fragility in three Jos communities: Dadin Kowa, Nasarawa Gwong and Angwan Rukuba. Each of the communities has an estimated population of between 25 000 and 30 000, and each faces

Chart 3: Jos, Nigeria



A scenic aerial view of Jos city, Plateau State, Nigeria.





A car mart destroyed in the 2008 election violence in Jos.

similar economic and infrastructure challenges. Though similar in many respects, the three communities have demonstrated varying degrees of capacity and resilience in responding to shared threats of communal violence, extremism and crime.

Threat from security and illicit economies

Since 2001, the central Nigerian city of Jos has experienced incidents of communal violence, extremist attacks and a sharp increase in crime. Though there is no official number of casualties, deadly clashes between armed groups from Christian and Muslim communities have resulted in over 7 000 deaths and more than 200 000 internally displaced persons.⁴⁶

The extremist group Boko Haram targeted Jos in a series of bombings between 2010 and 2015, at the peak of the unrest. This further compounded the security situation and exacerbated inter-religious tensions, with Boko Haram attacks repeatedly instigating ‘revenge’ attacks by Christian youth against Muslims.⁴⁷

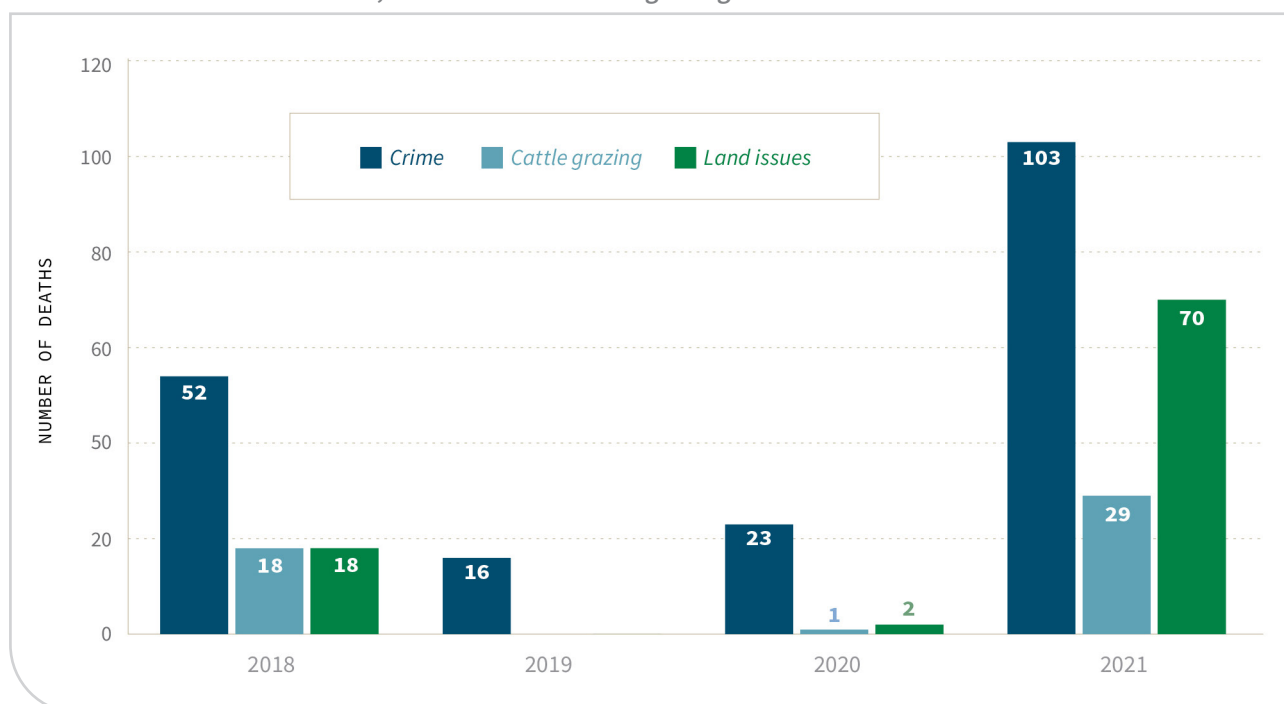
Over the last five years, crime levels have increased in Jos, with a particular resurgence in violence linked to criminal activity since 2021.⁴⁸ State security force responses have been hampered by a lack of equipment and training as well as endemic corruption among elements of the force. Residents of Jos report a major growth in the activities of networks trafficking drugs and arms, and in street gang activity.

The growing insecurity and the inability of state security forces to maintain order have created a security vacuum that has forced citizens to resort to self-help. The residents’ need to defend themselves has fuelled demand for small arms and light weapons, met through arms trafficking networks and illicit artisanal gun manufacturing. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has in turn increased the scale and frequency of violent crime, further entrenching fear and insecurity.

Within the security vacuum created by weak security forces, criminal gangs have flourished with impunity. In Jos’ predominantly Muslim communities, ‘Sara-Suka’ street gangs engage in armed robbery, theft, burglary, rape and, recently, drug trafficking. Known for using knives, swords and machetes to inflict fatal injuries on their victims, Sara-Suka gangs constitute a major security threat to residents of the Muslim-dominated parts of Nasarawa Gwong.

In the predominantly Christian neighbourhoods, cult groups operate with audacity. Once restricted to university and college campuses, groups like Vikings, Black Axe, Aye and Buccaneers started moving onto the streets from 2010, and including more non-university members. These trends accelerated from 2017, shaping current cultist group dynamics. Like Sara-Suka, they engage in armed robbery, theft, burglary and drug trafficking. One key difference between the two types of groups is that while Sara-Suka commonly use knives and machetes, cult groups tend to use more firearms in perpetrating violence.⁴⁹

Chart 4: Deaths related to crime, land issues and cattle grazing in Jos North



Source: Nigeria Watch Data

The situation in Dadin Kowa

Dadin Kowa is an ethnically and religiously mixed community located in Jos South. Its diverse community was formed over the years by successive waves of migration from other areas of Nigeria. There are no official census figures, but the population is estimated to be about 25 000.⁵⁰

The community has a busy street market with shops, stalls and tables of vegetables, grains, spices, and meat as well as shops for groceries, electrical appliances, and pharmacies. There are also food vendors, cobblers and hawkers selling tobacco, sweets and various other items. The street market is the community's main economic base, with most residents involved in some form of trade or shopping there.

Since the onset of large-scale communal violence in Jos in 2001, Christian-Muslim relations in Dadin Kowa have been tense. However, the community has managed to remain nonviolent even when nearby communities have been engulfed by violent unrest. Residents of Dadin Kowa speak proudly about the community's peaceful image. In the words of one resident, 'we're proud to be an example of how to live in peace to other communities'.⁵¹ Peace featuring as central elements of community identity is a common characteristic of communities which have exercised a significant degree of resilience in the face of conflict and crime.⁵²

Though generally peaceful, residents of Dadin Kowa explained that the community is not entirely crime-free. The main criminal groups in Dadin Kowa are engaged in drug dealing and armed robbery. The drug dealing networks are loose, horizontal and without central coordination. Most of the drug dealing businesses are owned and run by an individual or groups of two or three dealers working together. The largest drug dealing network is led by a man in his early thirties assisted by about six people, including three of his relations and three friends.

The armed robbery networks in Dadin Kowa are loose, decentralised and operate in small groups of between two and four individuals. They mainly engage in snatching the mobile phones of community members at gunpoint and sometimes also engage in theft and burglary. Compared to other communities, the scale and levels of crime are lower in Dadin Kowa. A vigilante claimed that sometimes the community does not record a single case of armed robbery or burglary in a whole month.

The situation in Nasarawa Gwong

Nasarawa Gwong is also an ethnically and religiously mixed community. Situated two kilometres north of the city centre, it is a large neighbourhood of between 25 000 and 30 000 residents.

Nasarawa Gwong started as a settlement of a small group of Yoruba migrants from southwest Nigeria who built their homes adjacent to clusters of Afizere and Anaguta settlements during the tin mining boom from the 1920s to the 1940s. Apart from working in the mines, they engaged in trading activities with the Hausa who inhabited nearby neighbourhoods like Gangare and Dilimi.

As mining activities declined at the end of colonial rule, waves of migration within the city and from other parts of Plateau State saw a major change in the demography of Nasarawa Gwong and other neighbourhoods. Berom, Afizere, Anaguta, Amo, Igbos, Hausa and other Plateau groups including Ngas, Mwangavul, Taroh, Goemai and several others came to engage in trading in the emerging street markets that to this day characterise the neighbourhood.⁵³

Despite the efforts of the local vigilantes, explored further below, Nasarawa Gwong remains a community with high crime prevalence. The most prevalent illicit markets in Nasarawa Gwong include drug trafficking and arms trafficking. The drug trafficking networks in Nasarawa Gwong are larger and more sophisticated than the ones in Dadin Kowa. Community members expressed hatred of these economies, while also expressing a sense of helplessness to act against them.

Speaking more specifically about the drug trade, residents expressed concern about growing drug use, while also recognising the profits from the drug market were used to 'pay school fees for [network] family members, and help solve the problems of neighbours and other community members'.⁵⁴ Drug networks are typically made up of a 'kingpin' and anything between five and 10 distributors.

The major drug market in Nasarawa Gwong is located in Congo-Russia, a densely populated slum at the southern edge of the community which is predominantly Muslim, and where the Sara-Suka gangs have a significant presence. At its peak, several years ago, the market used to attract anything between 500 and 1 000 customers a day and up to 200 people openly selling, buying and using drugs at any moment.⁵⁵ Competition between networks, particularly when a new player is seeking to establish themselves, was identified as a major source of violence.

In addition to the drug dealing networks, Nasarawa Gwong is notorious for street gangs. The main street gangs, the Sara-Suka, are made up of young males aged between 13 and 30. They frequently engage in armed

In addition to the drug dealing networks, Nasarawa Gwong is notorious for street gangs that frequently engage in armed robbery



Street view, Nasarawa Gwong, notorious for street gangs.

robbery, snatching mobile phones, laptops and other belongings from members of the public. They also engage in turf wars and clashes among themselves.

Initially, these street gangs only engaged in armed robbery but over the last two years, they have become involved in drug trafficking. This has brought them into direct rivalry and conflict with long established drug trafficking networks.

In the predominantly Christian neighbourhoods of Nasarawa Gwong, cult groups operate alongside the drug trafficking networks. However, clashes between these groups have not been reported. Instead the boundaries between the two are blurred.

The situation in Angwan Rukuba

Angwan Rukuba is a segregated Christian community a kilometre north of the Jos city centre. It has a population of about 20 000 people. Over the last two decades, Angwan Rukuba has been a flashpoint of communal violence and a major hotspot for drug trafficking, armed theft and other forms of crime. These criminal activities enjoy no legitimacy among the community, and growing drug use is perceived as a major harm.

Residents expressed concerns regarding escalating drug use:

‘Drugs have always been sold here but the problem has become alarming in recent years. The young men selling the drugs are very bold and daring and are not afraid of anyone. They sell their drugs in the open and no one speaks against them because they have dangerous weapons.’⁵⁶

Within the recesses of the community where rundown buildings are interspersed by a network of narrow footpaths, a drug market flourishes with young men of between the ages of 13 and 30 years openly selling drugs, including cannabis, tramadol and heroin. To describe the prevalence of the drug trade, one youth leader said: ‘At least one out of every five young men in the community is either a drug dealer or a user or both.’⁵⁷

Residents pointed to a high degree of governance within the drug trade, which includes some large networks, with clearly defined kingpins, known as ‘Bardes’. One such Barde had been known to station elements of the network across the community, instructing network members to report anyone suspicious using mobile phones provided for that purpose.⁵⁸

A community leader noted the growing territorial control of certain networks:

‘There are jungles that are controlled by criminal groups. These places are “no go areas” for ordinary members of the community. Even state security forces and vigilantes have to really prepare before they storm these places. The criminals there are well-armed and ready to use those arms to secure their territory from any external actors.’

The community leader further underscored that such ‘jungles’ carry particular risks for women, and that the power of criminal networks over growing spaces in the city was ‘restricting the movements of residents around the community’. He further identified clashes between drug trafficking networks as a key source of violence.⁵⁹

The Angwan Rukuba community has been torn by communal violence since 2001 and, in 2010, was the site of bombings by violent extremists. During episodes of violence, armed mobs from the community and the adjoining areas mounted a roadblock to stop and attack non-Christian motorists and passers-by. Violence linked to violent extremism has substantially declined and was no longer identified as a major threat by residents.

The mounting of roadblocks and the harassment and killing of motorists in times of unrest is a common practice in both Christian and Muslim neighbourhoods across the city. In the case of Angwan Rukuba, travellers from outside the city using the busy by-pass that runs through the community have been killed or maimed in attacks.

Drivers of community resilience

The three communities in the beleaguered Nigerian city of Jos have demonstrated different degrees of resilience and fragility to communal violence, extremism and crime. Community resilience in Dadin Kowa stood out. The community demonstrates how the configurations and patterns of interactions between various community-based civilian networks can contribute to community resilience.

Each of the identified elements of community resilience is explored below, with the findings compared across communities.

Effective state support and protection

In Jos, the state's responses to security threats fall into four main categories: (1) the deployment of armed forces to stem violence, restore order and apprehend criminals and perpetrators of unrest; (2) the establishment of panels of enquiry to investigate the root causes and consequences of communal violence and recommend solutions for addressing the situation; (3) community policing initiatives and the establishment of civilian vigilantes; and (4) peacebuilding programmes including shuttle diplomacy, mediation and reconciliation exercises.

These responses to communal violence follow a pattern that has become familiar to residents of Jos. The first step when unrest erupts usually involves the deployment of the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps. When the situation proves too overwhelming for these forces, as is often the case, the military is sent in to quell the situation. A curfew is imposed alongside military actions.

Over the last two decades, the government of Plateau State has constituted various commissions of enquiry to investigate the underlying causes of violent conflict and propose measures for tackling it. These investigative committees produced reports and white papers explaining the causes and consequences of the conflict as well as solutions. However, the political will to implement the recommendations is lacking.

The government has instead focused on facilitating mediation and reconciliation exercises that promote peaceful coexistence momentarily but do not tackle the underlying causes of the unrest. As a result, since 2001, communal violence has been recurrent with periods of calm interspersed by episodes of unrest.

Growing criminal activity and associated violence present a pressing challenge to peace and security in the already fragile state of Jos



The frame of a burnt out motorcycle in a house burned down by Fulani herdsman in the Ganaropp village in the Barikin Ladi area near Jos on June 27, 2018.

While incidents of communal violence do not happen with the same frequency that they did a decade ago and extremist bombings have stopped altogether, crime levels have remained high, and – particularly since 2021 – rising. Growing criminal activity and associated violence now present a pressing challenge to security in Jos.

State forces have orchestrated raids and arrests that have led to prosecutions and jail sentences. But it is clear that a more comprehensive strategy is required if crime and its potential for disturbing security and the fragile peace in Jos is to be effectively addressed.

A level of collaboration between state authorities and local councils existed across the communities. However these relationships were markedly stronger in Dadin Kowa. Here, despite the general lack of confidence and trust in government expressed by residents, they praised the efforts of the police in checking crime.

For example, one youth leader commended the police for responding to distress calls in a timely manner:

‘I must say the police are really doing their best in this community. They always respond very fast whenever we call them. Whenever there is a problem or an emergency, the police always come on time. The divisional police officer here is very active and committed and we’re very happy to have him in charge.’⁶⁰

Some of the local leaders consulted reported that the police have been very helpful in the community:

‘We’re lucky to have a very committed and active divisional police officer here. He has been working closely with community leaders, youth and vigilantes to improve the security of the community.’⁶¹

Across the communities, residents stressed the importance of collaboration between state and community structures, highlighting as particularly effective initiatives built on such engagement, including those which bridge ethnic divides.

For example, at the peak of the violent clashes in Jos, a community security arrangement was formed in which Christians were engaged to protect Muslims during Juma’at prayers, and Muslims in turn provided security for Christians during Sunday church services, all in partnership with the local police. According to Onyeozili and his colleagues in their research on community policing in Nigeria, ‘This innovative community policing security model became extremely useful in dealing with security challenges in Plateau State’.⁶²

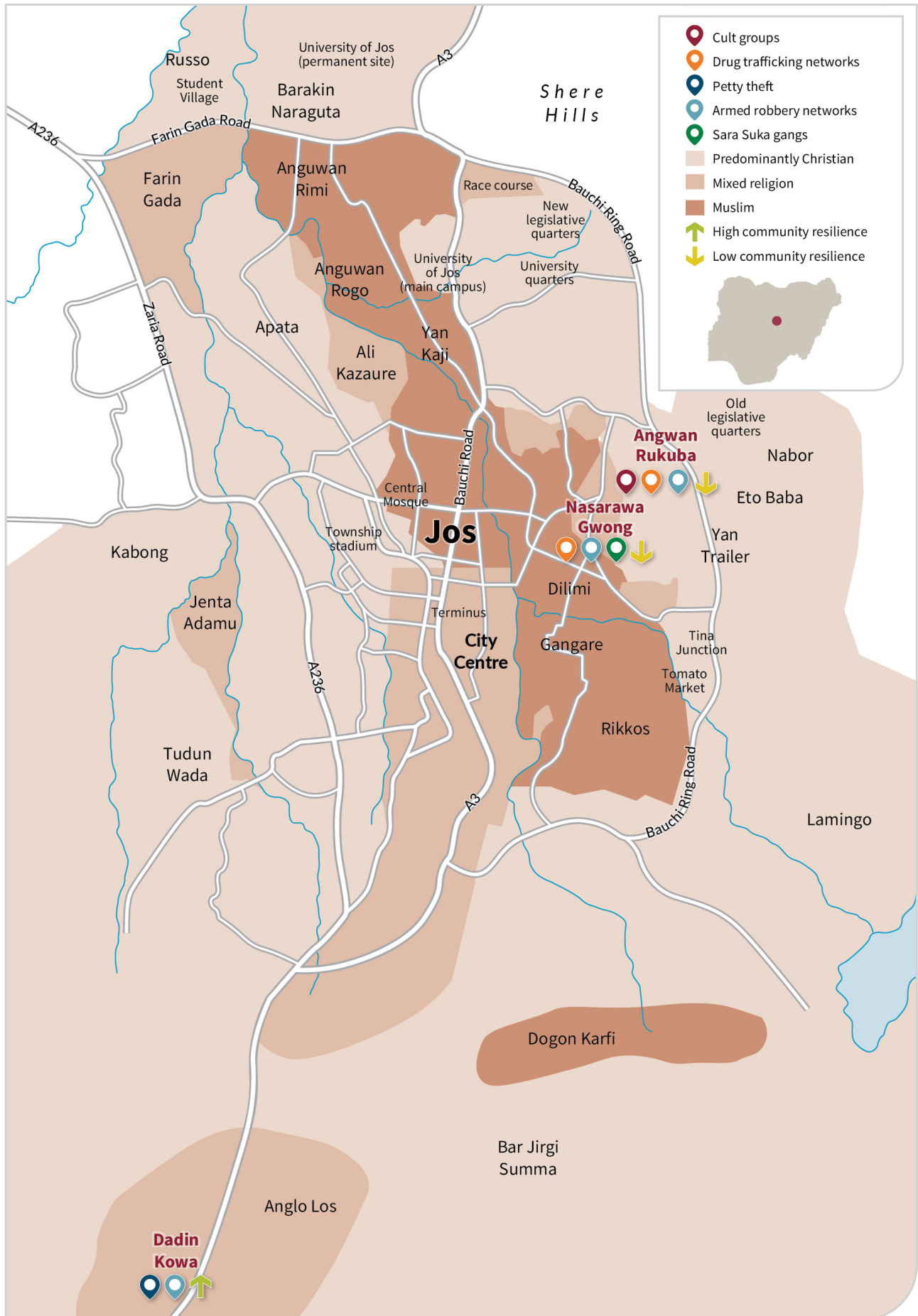
Social capital

Dadin Kowa displayed relatively high levels of social capital in comparison to Nasarawa Gwong and Angwan Rukuba. In Nasarawa Gwong, by comparison, local conflict and rivalries between community leaders have undermined social capital, eroded resilience and engendered fragility.

As detailed above, social cohesion, and particularly religious and ethnic differences, was a key consideration in assessing social capital. In Jos, ethnic identities – and their reflection in religious identities – have been a central component of conflict since its inception in the early 2000s. In a previous study exploring community dynamics in Jos, Madueke observed how Jos’s neighbourhoods were transformed from everyday residential areas to spaces of ethnic differentiation and violence.⁶³

In the heat of the violent clashes that intermittently rocked the city between 2001 and 2015, many neighbourhoods within different areas of the city became segregated and religiously homogenous. Angwan Rukuba is one of such neighbourhoods, where Christian and Muslim communities are geographically distinct. Though these segregated neighbourhoods demonstrated high levels of collective efficacy when it came to mobilising fighters to defend themselves against rival communities, they have not demonstrated this level of efficacy in fighting off crime.⁶⁴

Chart 5: Map of Jos showing territorial spread of criminal networks and religious divisions



In Jos, ethnic differentiation interplayed with criminality, shaping community tensions and resilience. The activities of criminal networks feed into existing intergroup tensions, fuelling communal violence. For example, turf wars between rival gangs are often framed as religious quarrels, animating the tension between Christians and Muslims.⁶⁵

Between 2017 and 2020, there were at least eight separate incidents in which tussles between rival criminal groups were framed by the media as religious conflicts, heightening tensions between Christians and Muslims in Nasarawa Gwong.⁶⁶ Many leading figures across the communities take steps to assuage religious and ethnic tensions – for example, in Angwan Rukuba, religious leaders preach the need to live in peace.

Yet, the analysis of the three communities in Jos corrects simplistic generalisations that attribute the conflict entirely to ethnic differences. (This is in line with findings of widespread research into bottom-up peacebuilding, which found that local conflicts were repeatedly attributed to ethnic heterogeneity, and local peace to ethnic homogeneity, with little supporting evidence.)⁶⁷

While ethnic identities have certainly played a role in shaping tensions and violence, despite the fact that Dadin Kowa and Nasarawa Gwong are ethnically and religiously mixed, and Angwan Rukuba is a segregated Christian community – residents of Dadin Kowa nonetheless enjoyed greater social capital, forging ties across distinct religious and ethnic identities. Strong inter-religious networks and communication channels in Dadin Kowa support peaceful coexistence, and criminality has not fed into intergroup tensions here.

In Dadin Kowa, community members narrated how individuals and groups with extremist views have tried to infiltrate the community in the past, but community members were quick in identifying and sending them out before they caused trouble. For example, the chairman of the traditional ruling council explained how one man tried to persuade him and other members of the council to encourage their youth to take up arms against the Fulani population with whom they had lived in peace for about a century:

‘This was a man from a different community. He came to me several times to persuade me and other Christian members of the traditional council to tell our young men to take up arms and chase out the Fulani from our communities. I immediately knew this was a troublemaker and we did not need him in our midst. I stopped paying attention to him and I didn’t want to see him in the community again.’

The members of the community are aware of the importance of social cohesion to maintain the degree of peace they enjoy. For instance, a cross-section of residents interviewed expressed concerns about itinerant Okada and Keke operators who come from outside the community.⁶⁸ According to one resident, Okada and Keke operators who come from other communities do not understand or approve of the peaceful relationship between Christians and Muslims in Dadin Kowa:

‘These Okada and Keke riders come from other communities where Christians and Muslims do not live in peace like we do in Dadin Kowa. It is difficult for them to understand why a Christian and a Muslim live side by side without fighting. They bring divisive and violent ideologies to pitch Muslims against Christians. But once we identify such these people, we warn them to either change their ways or leave the community.’

The case of Dadin Kowa underscores the importance of viewing ethnicity and religion as important but not determinative elements relevant to social cohesion, and thus the social capital of any given community.

Community capacity

In all three of these Nigerian communities, resilience depends to a degree on the extent to which local community councils and civilian security networks maintain good working relationships and command community support.

Local governance and leadership

Dadin Kowa stood out in terms of the strength of its community capacity, partly due to strong local governance and leadership structures. In comparison to the other two communities under study, Dadin Kowa has a far better organised traditional ruling council. In Dadin Kowa and the greater Kangang community, the traditional council is made up of 26 individuals – the paramount ruler also known as the Gwom, 17 neighbourhood elders known as Mai Angwas, a four-man security team, and the palace driver. Each of the 17 Mai Angwas has a youth leader working directly under him. The council meets weekly to discuss the welfare and security of the community.

By contrast, in Nasarawa Gwong both the traditional ruling council and the youth association are less organised than those of Dadin Kowa. Moreover, the traditional ruling council is divided along ethnic lines and has been disrupted by conflict among its members. As a result of that conflict, there are now two traditional ruling councils – one for the Beroms and another for the Anagutas, each claiming pre-eminence over the other.

One of the traditional ruling councils is made up of eight members – the district head and seven Mai Angwas. The other council also has eight council members – a district head and seven Mai Angwas. Both councils meet once every month to discuss the welfare and security of the community.

In Angwan Rukuba, the traditional ruling council is made up of the district head and six community leaders known as Mai Angwas. Notably the chieftaincy institutions are based on ethnic identity, with each ethnic group having a distinct ‘ruler’. The traditional ruling council meets monthly to discuss the welfare and security of the community. Working directly under the Mai Angwas are the leaders and members of the youth associations. Compared to Dadin Kowa, the youth association in Angwan Rukuba is not as active. Sometimes the members go for up to two months without holding a meeting.

Developing resilience involves promoting inclusiveness and a sense of belonging among all community members



The field studies indicated that inclusiveness in local governance and decision-making adds to community resilience, whereas exclusion and marginalisation increases community fragility. The inclusiveness – or otherwise – of women in leadership structures was one key contrasting element, as explored below.

Developing resilience involves promoting inclusiveness and a sense of belonging among all community members. This is done by including them in decision-making and promoting equal access to distributable resources. Equally important is creating consistent forums for deliberations among different sections of the community (including vigilantes, community leaders, youth associations, women’s associations and residents) and enhancing a good working relationship between civilian security networks and state security forces.

Security governance by non-state actors

The three Jos communities make for an interesting comparison in terms of the local hybrid security arrangements and their impacts.

In Dadin Kowa, two groups are engaged in vigilantism: the Neighbourhood Watch and the Hunters Association of Nigeria (HAN). The Neighbourhood Watch has 284 members while the HAN has 70 members. Both groups are active in fighting crime. They patrol the community every night from 10 pm to 2 am. Between August and November 2021, they raided three suspected criminal hideouts and apprehended four persons suspected to be involved in burglary.

The HAN plays a particularly relevant role in combating armed criminals since its members legally carry firearms. For example, the group chased and arrested a group of three armed robbers who came from outside the community in early October 2021. In another incident, in August, HAN operatives arrested a member of a kidnapping gang.⁶⁹

The vigilantes in Dadin Kowa expressed a strong sense of belonging and community. They spoke proudly about the cooperation and support they received from the residents of the community. Residents usually contribute cash to cover a monthly stipend to the vigilantes. Wealthy individuals also make personal donations to the vigilantes. For example, a local politician that once lived in the community and still owns properties there donated office space to the HAN.

In Nasarawa Gwong, there are over 1 000 vigilantes but only about 300 of them are active. According to the commandant of the local Neighbourhood Watch, the vigilantes have been at the forefront of combating crime in the community:

‘Neighbourhood Watch is the main crime fighter in Nasarawa. The only reason why we have some semblance of peace and order in Nasarawa is because of the bravery of the members of Neighbourhood Watch in apprehending criminals.’⁷⁰

While Nasarawa Gwong has a heavy presence of drug trafficking networks and criminal gangs, the community has demonstrated significant resilience towards communal violence since 2020. Once among the most volatile parts of the city, the community now enjoys fewer flare-ups of communal violence. This is attributed by residents to a degree of collaboration between local councils and state authorities in providing security, with vigilantes and the police on several occasions collaboratively preventing skirmishes and turf wars between criminal gangs from snowballing into communal violence.

In Angwan Rukuba, there are over 300 Neighbourhood Watch vigilantes spread across 15 units, but many of them are not very active. The unit commanders meet weekly and whenever there is an emergency. There are an unknown number of hunters in Angwan Rukuba who also play an important role in the security dynamics of the community.⁷¹

In both Nasarawa Gwong and Angwan Rukuba, vigilantes lamented that they did not receive any cooperation and support from the residents of their community. One vigilante captured this sentiment thus: ‘Many people in the community don’t like us and don’t support us in any way.’⁷²

A member of the Neighbourhood Watch in Nasarawa Gwong, describing the relationship between community members and vigilantes, lamented ‘Members of my community don’t like Neighbourhood Watch’. Another vigilante corroborated this by adding that ‘The drug dealer is more important and more respected in my area than the Neighbourhood Watch vigilante.’ This vigilante further explained that sometimes they are denied office space in the community.⁷³

*Military checkpoint
in Jos.*



In Jos, community resilience clearly correlates with the extent to which local security networks enjoy local support and cooperation from other residents. For example, communities where vigilantes share a strong sense of belonging and community and get material and non-material support from residents tend to be more resilient to security threats.

Some stakeholders suggested that building community resilience in Jos will, among other things, involve boosting the legitimacy of vigilantes and enhancing local support and cooperation with them. However, others pointed to the risks inherent in vigilante and self-protection groups, and the development of many such groups into militias which become part of the security threat landscape across a range of spaces in West Africa, Latin America and in a wide range of different geographies.

The prominence of self-defence groups across the communities makes clear that they cannot simply be ignored in programming seeking to bolster community resilience, and that they are key partners in shaping engagement around illicit economies.

Communication, information and the media

The differences in levels of community resilience across the communities appears linked to the degree of communication between different cross-sections of each community. The significant social capital and community capacity of Dadin Kowa was attributed by residents in part to good communication and information-sharing channels with consistent forums for deliberations among vigilantes, youth groups, community leaders, women's groups and residents.

In Nigeria, 'there is a significant level of distrust between the media and the government, especially law enforcement agencies, resulting in unwarranted arrests, detention and harassment of journalists. Nevertheless, there is still considerable press vitality and freedom.'⁷⁴

Social media is also playing an increasing role in shaping how communities give voice to their concerns. For example, many residents of Jos use Facebook to draw attention to challenges facing their communities. Across different neighbourhoods, including Dadin Kowa, members of youth associations and vigilantes use WhatsApp to communicate among themselves.

The role of women

Women's participation in decision-making differs across the three Jos communities consulted, featuring most prominently in Dadin Kowa, correlating with notable community resilience.

Dadin Kowa stood out regarding the degree to which women are included in decision-making. The traditional council occasionally holds a meeting with leaders and members of the community's women's association. The



Women stall-owners are particularly prominent in Dadin Kowa's market, Jos, Plateau State, March 7, 2021.

women's association meets every month to discuss the welfare of its members and how to contribute to 'the collective wellbeing of the community'.⁷⁵

Women also play a central role in the economy of Dadin Kowa. Many of them are petty traders in the community's street market. The women are involved in thrift collection where they contribute a small amount of cash daily and collect at the end of the month.⁷⁶ There are also thrift collections in Nasarawa Gwong and Angwan Rukuba but these are not as active and well-coordinated as the one in Dadin Kowa.

By contrast, Nasarawa Gwong and Angwan Rukuba exemplify women's exclusion from decision-making at the community level. For example, women in Agwan Rukuba claim that they are never invited to community meetings and are not consulted before decisions are taken. When asked to explain why this was the case, the community leader did not provide a meaningful explanation.⁷⁷ Women in Nasarawa Gwong also lament that they are excluded from meetings and decision-making.⁷⁸ This type of exclusion and marginalisation erodes community resilience and engenders fragility.

Economic capital and infrastructure

In Nigeria, the three sub-city level communities studied in Jos are similar in terms of their economy. They are relatively poor working-class communities with seemingly intractable economic and infrastructure challenges. A very large proportion of the population relies on the informal or extra-legal economy. Employment opportunities are very limited.

For example, a small roadside market is the economic mainstay of Angwan Rukuba. The market has shops, stalls and tables of vegetables, grains, meat, fish and other food items. There are also hawkers and artisans including cobblers, hairdressers, phone repair and electrical technicians. Many of the traders in the market are residents of the community but some come from neighbouring areas. In contrast to the street market in Dadin Kowa, the street market in Angwan Rukuba is much smaller and religiously homogenous.

Among the environmental factors increasing communities' vulnerability to criminal activities across the communities are the lack of streetlights and accessible roads, which are too narrow, complicating access for security force vehicles and enabling criminal actors to easily evade pursuit.

For example, in Angwan Rukuba, the community has no roads suitable for cars or pipe-borne water. The footpaths are narrow and many parts of the community can only be accessed on foot. The only public primary school in the community is overpopulated and lacks the capacity to accommodate all the children in the community. Many parents are left with no other option but to send their children to private primary and secondary schools where the tuition is relatively higher.⁷⁹

A filling station destroyed in the 2008 election violence in Jos.



Infrastructure challenges feed into communities' sense of being neglected by the state. For example, residents of Dadin Kowa lament the lack of state support. Some of the major challenges include a lack of paved driveable roads in some parts of the community. While the parts of the community closer to the highway are paved, roads in the interior are not. Residents have to use dirt roads that are 'full of potholes'.⁸⁰

In addition, most residents do not have access to clean pipe-borne water and have to rely on hand-dug wells and streams.

Though residents of Dadin Kowa seem to enjoy more state support compared to residents of both Nasarawa Gwong and Angwan Rukuba, some of them still think that 'government does not care about their community' and that the 'government is behind many of the problems in the community'.⁸¹

Conclusion

The three Jos communities faced similar challenges from violent extremism, communal tensions, and violent crime. Each displayed elements of community resilience across the interrelated drivers identified.

However, Dadin Kowa stood out as a community where peacefulness had become a particularly integral element of identity, and where the community had notably strong and inclusive governance and security networks. Cumulatively, these had enabled residents of Dadin Kowa to effect greater resilience against the threats faced by the community, resulting in reduced levels of community tensions and consequent violence, and a lower prevalence of violent crime.

Some commentators suggest that geography could play a role in the differing levels of ongoing conflict experienced by the three communities, flagging that Ungwar Rukuba and Nasarawa Gwong lie closer to the traditional hotspot of violence in Jos, while Dadin Kowa is further away from this area.

However – geography alone is insufficient to explain the different trajectories taken by the communities, and the differing extents to which the communities have mobilised against these threats. Illustrating this – a neighbouring community to Dadin Kowa, Hwolshe, has also experienced persistent significant conflict and violence since 2010, with less notable community mobilisation to address it. This continues to place the emphasis for Dadin Kowa's role as an outlier on the elements of community resilience explored above.

Infrastructure challenges feed into communities' sense of being neglected by the state – they rely on hand-dug wells and streams for water



Burkina Faso

Threat from security and illicit economies

Burkina Faso has seen an extraordinary escalation of armed group activity over the last decade, and particularly since 2019, when local armed groups intensified their actions. Incidents of armed conflict more than doubled between 2018 (when there were 253 incidents) and 2019 (when there were 646). A further doubling occurred between 2020 (643 incidents) and 2021 (1 373 incidents).⁸²

Spiralling instability triggered a military coup in February 2022, although the change in leadership has not yet resulted in a material change in approach to addressing the country's security challenges.

The artisanal gold mining site of Radgo is in the village of Soubeiga-Natenga, in the Centre-Nord Region of the country (the Ziga department of the

Chart 6: Radgo gold mine, Soubeiga Natenga, Burkina Faso



Sanmatenga province). The mining site has been in existence for more than 30 years and covers about one square kilometre. The illicit gold market enjoys a high degree of legitimacy among the community, perceived predominantly as an important livelihood, and therefore as a source of resilience, rather than a criminal market against which resilience must be built.

The majority of illicit markets revolve around the gold economy. The system of work at artisanal mining sites promotes gold trafficking. The illegal importation and sale of cyanide, mercury and explosives (commonly known as 'farawi') support mining operations and the gold processing and purification process. Miners are a source of demand for the drugs and alcohol market. Theft of gold, money, motorcycles and other valuables is also an ongoing threat.

To protect against theft, and more recently against the growing security threat, a lot of small arms circulate in the community; many owners of gold galleries, the underground passages in the gold-mining site, own firearms to protect themselves against thieves and bandits. On the site, it is not uncommon to see them carrying firearms under their shirts.

Growing jihadist and bandit attacks on gold mines, particularly since 2017, has rendered them more dangerous,⁸³ only partly mitigated by protection provided by Koglweogo self-defence groups.⁸⁴ In 2020 the Koglweogo were absorbed into the state-created Volunteers in Defence of the Fatherland (VDPs), which receive salaries from the state, and in some cases basic training.⁸⁵

Gold provides a source of revenue for some armed groups, and attacks can therefore be motivated by the desire to take over revenue streams.⁸⁶ Some elements of jihadist groups have reportedly become directly involved in gold mining activity – one resident pointed to involvement in gold panning activities, and coordination of some gold galleries, in the Koumbri area, in Nord Region, as an example.⁸⁷ Criminal gang activities are on the rise, and this is a serious concern for the artisan miners and neighbouring communities.

The security crisis has made some gold mining sites inaccessible, but in other sites mining and an illicit gold market persist in spite of the terrorist threat. A local leader in Soubeiga-Natenga explained: 'We have no other activities. If tomorrow we lose everything, how are we going to feed our families?'

There is a climate of fear within the community. Many gold diggers have already left the community to escape the violent extremist groups; many of them already installed themselves in nearby communities. That insecure situation has led to a substantial loss in income for the artisanal miners who find themselves unemployed and displaced in camps when their village is occupied by terrorists. Some of these miners may be at risk of recruitment by armed criminal groups.

Drivers of community resilience

State responses to insecurity

Jihadism is the most serious threat to the community of the Radgo gold mining site. Yet the government has been largely unable to address the present security crisis. Its response to the rise of extremism has been almost exclusively a military one and to this point has been largely ineffective.

The government has launched an emergency programme for the Sahel in order to provide an economic and social response to the crisis, but its impact is still uncertain. Violent extremist groups are gaining ground, and their growing attacks have driven back the regular forces who are currently entrenched in large urban centres such as Ouahigouya, Kongoussi or Fada N'Gourma. In several localities, the police and gendarmes have fled, leaving the population to their own devices.⁸⁸

Confidence in state institutions is very low. State agencies do not communicate or cooperate with the gold miners. The miners do not feel that they are supported or helped in any way by state agencies. At best they are able to get some support from certain NGOs operating in the field and offering awareness-raising workshops on child labour in the mine and also on environmental issues. However, given the current

insecurity, civil society organisations are constrained, and several NGO leaders are being prosecuted for their political activities.

The trust the miners' community may have had in government agencies was seriously undermined over the years by the perceived corruption of government officials and their role in various incidents when artisanal miners were dislodged and mining sites expropriated in order to develop semi-mechanical mining operations. Local officials and communal leaders are sometimes seen as complicit in actions taken against the interests of the miners and are not always perceived to be acting in good faith.

'We were not involved in the licensing process,' explained a representative of the miners. 'One day, we saw the promoter accompanied by state agents from the municipality in the vicinity of the mine and a few months later we received a notice of eviction within a fortnight.' For him, this is the kind of incident that completely undermines the trust the community may have in the state agents of the commune.

The absence of state security provision was, unsurprisingly given the high degree of conflict, most stark in the communities in Burkina Faso. The largely unmitigated threat from armed groups had drastically undermined previously existing elements of community resilience across the two areas.

Social capital

The Radgo gold mining community is very ethnically diverse. Nearly every local ethnic group is represented. There are around 2 000 workers in the various galleries. While gold miners form informal groups, as the community constantly evolves and fluctuates with the seasons and the sites' extraction potential, the community of gold miners is not particularly structured. Miners are very mobile and move quickly from one site to another, making any durable configuration fragile. Nevertheless, they have representatives at the provincial level as well as at the regional and national levels.

To some extent, everyday informal social communication networks allow the miners to keep abreast of developments in the security situation. Some of them can occasionally come together for awareness-raising meetings, to respond to a health emergency, to manifest their solidarity for injured individuals, or to face a threat of expropriation. The community is capable of mobilising itself in the case of an imminent threat or danger and has been known to work with VDPs to fend off the activities of armed extremist groups.

In the face of growing insecurity, the greatest fear of the Radgo miners is to find themselves one day without access to a mining site

The greatest fear of the Radgo miners is to find themselves one day without access to a mining site. Their solidarity against developers attempting to expropriate or expulse them from various sites is very strong, but the means they have to defend themselves against such intrusions are limited. They can sometimes count on the support of NGOs such as Planetgold, ANEMAS (National Agency for the Supervision of Artisanal and Semi-Mechanised Mining), and other civil society organisations. However, the arrival on site of a semi-mechanised mining company has seriously disrupted the community's stability and capacity.

Community capacity

Local governance and leadership

People officially have access to state justice but the justice process is slow, in some cases corrupt, and often ineffectual. At the community level, leaders are neither appointed nor drawn from the government. Most of the community leaders are recognised as such because of their respectable reputation and seen as responsible for defending the interests of the community.

As for the traditional chiefs, they inherited their status as chiefs by blood ties. They act as leaders who can decide in the event of disputes. They can also banish community members who break the rules of community life.

However, the heads of villages or spiritual leaders are often the first to leave as the presence of armed extremist groups comes closer, because they are the most exposed. Representatives of the gold committee identified a lack of sufficiently strong local leadership as a challenge facing the area.

Local security governance

Local security governance mechanisms have emerged, stepping into the spaces left by state protection and security provision. In Radgo, the community security structures were originally set up to protect illicit gold mining from intrusion. The structures of community resilience reflect the high degree of legitimacy of the illicit gold mining economy.

In the face of growing insecurity, the Radgo gold miners' community set up a vigilance committee within the artisanal mine to prevent and respond to any intrusion by suspicious individuals. A representative of the gold miners explained:

'The committee once spotted two young foreigners and surrounded them. When I was called, I came, and we questioned the strangers to find out who they are and why they are there. After a few hours, we learned that it was two young people who had fled the gold mining sites in the Sahel Region. They came here to work. We released them, but they got scared and didn't stay. They left the same day for another destination.'⁸⁹

The committee can intervene when there are conflicts on the mining site. In such instances, the belligerents are called in to tell their side of the story. If there was no bloodshed, an amicable settlement is reached. But if someone has been injured, the gendarmerie or the police are called upon to follow up on the matter.

Further, committee members emphasised that if they catch a crime suspect, or if there is a security breach, 'we call the police or the gendarmerie to come and get him', rather than dealing with the incident alone.⁹⁰

These vigilance structures, designed to coordinate with state police forces, are common of communities which have displayed high levels of resilience to conflict and the threat of violence from illicit economies. They can be pivotal mechanisms for safeguarding community cohesion.⁹¹

However, in the absence of state security forces to provide the backup, these structures are weakened or forced to arm themselves or to rely on other armed civilian forces which carries its own risks.

As state forces withdrew, it was therefore logical for the gold miners to turn to the Koglweogo, a community self-defence group, which had long played a role in protecting the community from theft and robbery. With the deterioration of the security situation, their help has been enlisted to protect the community against extremist groups, including from attacks on the gold mines.

Since 2020, the Koglweogo has evolved into the VDPs, which receive salaries from the state. However, state support – at 20 000FCFA per person limited to 10 VDP per village – is insufficient. According to Kibsa Sawadogo, one of the VDP leaders of the Centre-Nord Region, gold miners sometimes contribute money voluntarily for VDPs.⁹² Representatives of the committee of the Radgo gold mine identified this financing of VDPs as an 'expression of the solidity of the bonds of the community', clearly highlighting the perceived pivotal role of VDPs in community resilience

The state's weakness in the face of an active threat has eventually forced people to form self-defence groups to defend their villages and their territories. These VDPs were initially good sources of intelligence and occasionally effective in combat. However, over time and due to a lack of adequate training and equipment, several VDPs abandoned their positions under the immediate threat of armed terrorist groups.

The creation of VDPs and the participation in them of civilians in this community as in other parts of the country has had the unfortunate effect of making all civilians more vulnerable to threats and retaliation by extremist groups.



Processing activities by artisanal gold miners, Radgo gold mine, Burkina Faso.

Before the creation of the VDPs by the government, the security threat mainly weighed on the defence and security forces but since then, civilians and soldiers are now both the targets of armed groups. While some groups – such as Jamaat Nusratul Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) – typically avoid harming civilian targets, self-defence groups allied with the state blur the distinction between civilian and state, bringing such groups into danger. This underscores one of the risks contingent in the creation of community self-defence groups, particularly in the face of threat by armed groups.

Communication and media

In Burkina Faso freedom of the press and freedom of speech are limited, and legislative reform has narrowed the ability of the media to report on security issues.

Amendments to the penal code introduced in 2018 has made it possible to sentence and jail journalists when their work is deemed to contribute to demoralising regular forces but do not define what demoralisation consists of.⁹³ For instance, several members of the media have been convicted and imprisoned for communicating information that was later revealed true about the attacks in Solhan in 2021.

The law carries wide-ranging offences relating to coverage of security incidents and jihadist attacks. At this point, media organisations and representatives have not been subjected to violence and intimidation by organised crime or terrorist groups.

In general, the local population has confidence in the Burkinabè media. Local media continue to play an important role in the communities studied. The media are often followed to gain information or confirm information circulating on the web.

SBT, the broadcasting company which manages national television and radio coverage, claims to cover nearly 98% of the national territory.

Community access to the media is sometimes limited by language, as communities where French is not spoken do not have the same access to information or the media as do other communities. However, several community radio stations broadcast from the different regions.

While local media give voice to state and non-state actors in the fight against organised crime, the media's economic base (payment by contributors for the coverage of activities) limits their use by organisations that fight against violent extremism and organised crime.

Although community radio was highlighted as important sources of information, the community's ability to mobilise itself against an immediate threat or to address some local problems is largely dependent on the use

In Burkina Faso, freedom of press and speech is limited, and legislative reform has narrowed the media's ability to report on security issues



Artisanal gold mines have drawn miners from across Burkina Faso, and neighbouring countries. Koupela, Burkina Faso, January 10, 2008.



of social communication networks. One of the most popular tools is WhatsApp as both an information and communication channel. In addition to this, some community members also use Facebook. The social media platforms are used to warn each other of new threats, inform each other of opportunities and connect with each other for meetings.

The role of women

Women were part of the structural scaffolding of local governance mechanisms, albeit occupying a secondary role. They were not, however, prominent in resilience responses to the negative impacts of illicit markets and security, which revolved around self-defence groups.

In the Radgo gold mining community women are predominantly involved in the food trade or play ancillary roles in the gold economy, such as collecting the residues of gold stone to crush and sell. Women are not represented in the Watch Committee but the site has a women's leader called Pagb'naba (head of woman) who is generally responsible for relaying messages during and following committee meetings.

Women have participated in public awareness-raising events organised by NGOs (for example, about child labour), but have not reportedly been involved in actions taken to counter the negative impacts of illicit markets or violent extremism.

Economic and infrastructure

In the Radgo gold mining community, the main pillars of the economy all revolve around the informal mining and trade in precious metals. Employment opportunities include digger, cook, gold washer or site boss. Livelihoods from the gold site have become increasingly precarious – artisanal miners are at constant risk of experiencing extreme poverty.

When they are deprived of the means to participate directly or indirectly in the resource extraction economy, because of expropriation, extortion, corruption, or violent extremism, they are displaced or can become easy targets for recruitment by criminals or violent extremist terrorist groups. The Radgo gold miners' committee representative emphasised a desire for the state to regularise artisanal gold mining, bringing their livelihood into the licit space.

The current heightened insecurity has narrowed the field of opportunities for gold miners, with many losing their sources of income and finding themselves in camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) facing food insecurity. Residents highlighted a number of infrastructural vulnerabilities that exacerbate the vulnerability of communities, including the lack of potable water, forcing miners to walk three kilometres to the nearest well.



Equipment at the Radgo artisanal gold mine, Burkina Faso.

Conclusion

The clear local governance and security provision structures of the community had been to a large extent overwhelmed by the scale of the threat from violent armed groups. Pre-existing structures had predominantly been non-violent, in line with most conceptions of community resilience. They relied on state security structures to enforce local justice – respecting the state’s monopoly on violence.

As the state lost its monopoly on violence, and armed group threats escalated, self-defence groups became increasingly prominent elements of perceived resilience, although they remained unmatched to the scale of threat. The resilience demonstrated by the communities – protecting gold mining activities in Radgo – reflect the high degree of legitimacy of, and economic reliance on, the artisanal informal gold economy.

Guinea-Bissau: Pitche (Gabú Region)

Threat from security and illicit economies

The Gabú Region is located in the north-eastern part of Guinea-Bissau. It is an inland, predominantly Muslim, region that borders Senegal to the north, Guinea to the east and south and the Guinea-Bissau regions of Tombali and Bafatá to the west. The region has three borders of about 300 km between Senegal and Guinea-Conakry that allow a large flow of trade and movement of goods and commodities.⁹⁴

The region has a very strong commercial migratory flow due to the lumos (traditional informal markets). Border control is very weak, for example ‘in the area of the Checheu River, in Boé, where at certain times of the year movements on either side of the banks take place without any supervision’.⁹⁵

The illicit economy in the Gabú Region predominantly consists of the smuggling of goods, counterfeit medicines, forest products and illicit logging. ADIC-Nafaia, a local NGO, estimates that over 60% of licit commodities do not pass through customs, nor are taxed by the state.⁹⁶

Chart 7: Pitche, Gabú, Guinea-Bissau



Children playing in front of a mosque at the village of Mandina Mandinga, Gabú Region, Guinea Bissau, February 7, 2018.



The region has one of the largest reserves of cattle in Guinea-Bissau, which allows massive cross-border movement of people and animals and cattle trafficking to Mali. The region is also a corridor for cocaine and cannabis (liamba) trafficking.⁹⁷ Moreover, the trafficking of so-called ‘Talibé’ children (Islamic pupils) out of the country, mainly to Senegal, has been identified as a problem for many years. The traffickers involved have external links, mainly with Senegal, and also to a lesser extent with Mauritania.

The illicit activity which most concerns the community is the theft of livestock, perceived as a significant source of violence. Illicit logging, in which networks and state officials are involved, is also cause for concern. To a lesser extent, burglaries and robberies committed by groups of young thieves are also of concern, although this is generally not seen as a major public safety issue. There is some artisanal fabrication of firearms (mostly from hunting weapons), but this is not believed to be a significant issue. Some respondents noted incidents of kidnapping in the border areas. However these appeared sporadic.

The illicit activity which most concerns the community is the theft of livestock, perceived as a significant source of violence

The community is not struggling with high-impact criminal activities, and sees the threat from criminal markets as minimal.⁹⁸ The smuggling market enjoys a high degree of legitimacy. The community is often directly or indirectly involved in smuggling, which supplies many of the products needed in the rural agricultural market. In the view of one respondent, ‘It is not known where the illegal market begins and where it ends; there is so much amalgamation that it is difficult to determine where the line between the legal and illegal market is.’

The community is relatively safe and is not presently facing any immediate threat by violent extremist groups. Some Bissau-Guinean academics and political figures believe that the Gabú Region could become vulnerable to violent religious extremism. They point at the arrival of religious sects that did not previously exist in the region and are now establishing mosques in various villages and are advocating for various forms of religious intolerance. However, no violent extremist groups currently operate in the area.

Drivers of community resilience

State responses

Although community leaders did not report being particularly concerned with security or the threat from criminal actors, they did deplore the state’s weak capacity to enforce the law. They believed that the state is

not doing much to counter organised crime and illegal markets. It may be, one of them suggested, that too many state actors benefit from these illicit markets.

‘The community deplores the weaknesses of the state’s capacity to enforce the law and to address growing illicit markets. This weakness perpetuates the problem of impunity and facilitates the corruption of public officials. More rapid enforcement of laws on offenders is needed.’⁹⁹

The state’s response to organised crime or crime in general is seen as very weak and ineffective, favouring those who have the most money. There is a court only in Gabú, the capital of the region, and a Centre for Access to Justice was established in 2020. However, the system remains slow, and corruption endemic.

The perceived passivity of state institutions means ‘there is a tendency for the community to take justice into their own hands’. Traditional authorities, to some degree cooperating with the police, exercise justice at the local level. However, poor resourcing and endemic corruption across the police force damages trust, and traditional authorities do not regularly intervene in illicit economies.

There are instances of state cooperation with community members and NGOs in addressing criminal activity – for instance, the governor’s support in pushing for a trial for the theft of 80 motorbikes, which had been effected with police collusion. But the local population’s confidence in the justice system is very low. Notably, the perceived unfair result of the trial in this case, with police officers receiving penalties believed to be too lenient by the community, resulted in protests by community members and NGOs in Pitche.

Social capital

Pitche is culturally and ethnically diverse, but there are no major cultural or ethnic tensions. In spite of various attempts by politicians to take advantage of ethnic or religious differences, particularly in the run-up to the 2019 presidential elections, ethnic interconnections and relations have remained positive. Respondents noted that residents feel ‘a sense of belonging to a common space’.¹⁰⁰

There is some movement of the population, and migration has led to some flareups in violence. For example, in 2019 and 2020 immigration from Guinea into the areas of the nearby Boé sector triggered conflicts over natural resources (water, fish, felling of trees, pasture land), which were resolved by the displacement of the migrant communities. However, overall population movement was not identified as a key driver of tensions in the community unless it included the movement of poachers or farmers who illegally cut down trees for cultivation. Community groups, of both men and women, have formed around a number of topics, including community-based lending groups that provide mutual support.



Women collecting water, Mandina Mandinga in the Gabú Region, Republic of Guinea-Bissau, February 7, 2018.

Community capacity

Local leadership and governance

In terms of local governance structures, the low degree of trust in state justice means that the community prefers traditional justice mechanisms. While the ‘djargas’ (heads of villages) and ‘régulos’ (traditional authorities in Felupe society, now regulated by statute)¹⁰¹ play a role in conflict resolution, they do not play a significant role in preventing and combating illicit markets, but probably could if a significant threat arose in the community. Islamic governance structures and imams themselves play a role in governance, and in some contexts intervene in cases related to non-compliance with taxation requirements.

Normally, state actors and traditional leaders collaborate with each other and exchange information on security issues. However, it appears that the powers of traditional authorities have been eroded over the years. In light of this, some community leaders are suggesting the authority of these traditional leaders should be established by statute. Further, the willingness of these traditional leaders to defend the interests of the community was cast into doubt by a number of respondents.

Local security provision

The security threat in Pitche is far lower than in the other field studies, and unsurprisingly the local security mechanisms which have arisen to address the risks that do exist are far less structured and prominent. The most emphasised form of local security governance were night watch groups formed among local families in villages where there are cattle to prevent theft.

Communications and the media

In Guinea-Bissau, free press is a constitutional right. In reality, however, there has been growing pressure on national media to avoid critique of the government, including regarding the relationship between elements of the state and illicit markets.

Access to information is difficult. Covering certain subjects, such as organised crime, issues of governance and the influence of the military on politics in the country, brings risks. There have been several recorded attacks on journalists, particularly since early 2020.¹⁰² This environment leads some journalists to self-censor.

Notwithstanding these issues, the people consulted in the Gabú Region felt that their community could rely on the local media, particularly in the form of radio stations. While one nation-wide radio station, Radio Nacional, is present and listened to by some people, community members particularly emphasised the key role of community radio stations which have ‘pretty much replaced the courts and is a whistleblowing space

Group of women and children at a community meeting in the village of Mandina Mandinga in the Gabú Region, Guinea Bissau, February 7, 2018.





Outskirts of city of Gabú, the capital of the Gabú region, Guinea-Bissau.

that the community often uses'. There are three or four radio stations in local languages and they are very active, but they are financially very fragile.

The role of women

In Pitche, women are politically and economically engaged in the community and some women are quite influential, labelled 'opinion leaders in their communities' by Pitche respondents. Although women remain less represented in political engagement, involvement in this sphere is growing.

Some national women's organisations (e.g., The Mother, Renluv, CNAPN, and PPM) maintain contacts with women in Pitche and occasionally hold meetings and awareness campaigns within the community. There were instances when local women mobilised to act collectively against perceived threats from illicit economies. For example, women have been prominent in protesting against the trafficking of children to neighbouring countries under the pretext of providing them with a religious education. Further, women have participated in dialogues convened to discuss concerns around illicit economies relevant to the community in Pitche.

In Pitche, smuggling supports the local economic infrastructure, while cattle rustling is perceived to be a source of violence and conflict

Economic and infrastructure

In Pitche and the Gabú Region, commerce, agriculture and cattle breeding are the main pillars of the local economy, with some small investments of foreign companies (e.g. the solar energy industry). Unemployment is high in the communities, which do not benefit from external financial support, with the exception of a few small development projects supported by NGOs. There is no public lighting, and road conditions are poor.

Conclusion

In Pitche, the smuggling economy was a key element of the community's economic infrastructure, and cattle rustling was the only illicit activity perceived to be a significant source of violence and conflict. Reflecting these varying degrees of legitimacy, the community mobilised to implement neighbourhood watch structures to protect against cattle rustling and engaged with traditional authorities in cases of theft.

Women's participation in economic and political spheres was relatively high, and a range of community structures had been built to support community members in the face of key challenges – predominantly economic insecurity, resulting in the creation of community lending programmes.

Conclusions

This exploratory study starts to highlight key interrelated elements of differing communities' resilience to threats from armed conflict and illicit economies. The study emphasises the fact that building resilience to illicit economies in a conflict-affected community is particularly problematic because of the conflicts' debilitating effects on local safety, the local economy, social capital and social cohesion, and on the community's resources and capacity to take action. It seems that, in such circumstances, helping a community protect itself and address the threat it faces from violent extremist groups is a prerequisite to developing its resilience against illicit economies.

This study confirms the findings of previous research with respect to the blurred lines between communal defence, criminality and even communal violence. In that regard, a priority for research and programming is to explore how inclusive community resilience building initiatives, in contexts where community-based self-defence armed groups have emerged, can engage with such groups and promote their ability to play constructive roles. Research should focus on understanding some of the core factors determining self-defence armed groups' identity and use of violence and their relationship with the community and the state.

The legitimacy, or otherwise, of each illicit economy within the community must be fully understood before seeking to support responses. Where illicit economies enjoy a high degree of legitimacy, and are part of the communities' economic resilience, this must be taken into account before designing interventions, and may determine that developmental rather than law enforcement responses are appropriate.

There are many things that states and international actors can do to build greater resilience at a community level. Individual agency and leadership emerge as important success factors and pathways out of fragility and must be supported. It is also important to support local governance through incremental interventions that create relationships and coalitions among local leaders, resilience actors and the state.

With respect to community resilience to illicit markets and armed conflict, resilience at the community level is linked to national resilience – namely, to state support in providing security. The absence of effective state support in security provision undermines efforts to build local resilience, although some local initiatives emerge nonetheless. Nascent initiatives and projects should be identified and nurtured with a view to engaging the state in their activities, to the extent that is feasible.

Unlike natural disasters, organised crime is not a discrete and local event to which one responds or for which one can prepare. It is a persistent threat with causes and roots reaching way beyond a specific community.

Future studies should focus on what triggers effective community responses once illicit markets are revealed as concrete threats to the community. Identifying communities where notable mobilisation had occurred in the face of these threats, and exploring which characteristics and elements recurred in their make-up, would support such line of further study.

Recommendations

Seeking to draw practical lessons from the study for the purpose of more effective programming, we offer the following recommendations for strengthening the community-resilience approach to countering the negative impacts of organised crime and illicit markets. The recommendations outlined below are to a significant degree interdependent, each reinforcing the other, and any in isolation unlikely to be sufficient.

Further, these recommendations require sustained commitment, considerable resources, flexibility and adaptivity. Crucially they must be locally driven and owned, and tailored to the specific context of intervention. Even if these difficult elements are achieved, the same actions may still not have the same result across different communities. Further research is required to test and deepen these recommendations and to strengthen the understanding of how these may be achieved in practice across a range of different contexts.

- Providing basic protection and security to vulnerable communities facing security threats is a prerequisite to building community resilience against organised crime. In some cases, that may involve improving basic



Artisanal gold mining provides a livelihood to many communities in Burkina Faso.

infrastructure. In other instances, it might involve supporting state initiatives to improve local security and public safety in cooperation with local leadership. Where the state is predatory and a significant element of the security challenge, this is likely to be extremely difficult.

- Effective strategies to address public corruption are key elements of building state legitimacy and promoting community resilience to organised crime. It is necessary to adopt measures to address impunity and corruption at all levels, but especially at the local level, where they undermine the community's confidence in institutions and its willingness to take action to counter the negative impacts of organised crime.
- It is important to support the development of social networks that are aware of and concerned about organised crime and illicit markets, in proportion to the scale of the threat. They can play a crucial informal social control role by affirming shared values and goals, respect for institutional rules, and mutually agreed expectations.
- It is necessary to pay attention to context-specific obstacles to community resilience, including the lack of coordination among resilience actors and the lack of public awareness regarding the local impact of organised crime and illicit markets.¹⁰³
- It is necessary to support local governance, including traditional governance mechanisms and leadership, by building capacity, providing resources and, when necessary, offering them effective protection. Incremental interventions are needed to create relationships and coalitions among local leaders and resilience actors and to support concrete action.
- It is important to support better relationships and cooperation among state governance agencies and institutions, local governance mechanisms and local resilience actors. This includes improving state-citizen relations at the local level based on communication, mutually agreed expectations, transparency and mutual accountability.
- It is possible to improve public safety and local resilience to organised crime by supporting local community councils, traditional leaders and civilian security networks where they exist, and helping them to develop and maintain good working relationships with the state as well as command community engagement and support.
- Where community resilience programming occurs in contexts where non-state security actors have filled the spaces left by gaps in a state presence at the local level, it should include interventions to support communities as they negotiate expectations and rules with civilian defence groups. This will mitigate the risks inherent to such groups and determine how they can legitimately offer effective protection to the community.

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- 54 Interview with community leader in Nasarawa Gwong, 3 December 2021.
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- 56 Interview with community leader in Jos, 3 December 2021.
- 57 Interview with youth leader, 12 December 2021.
- 58 Interview with community leader in Angwan Rukuba, 3 December 2021.
- 59 Residents noted that many community members buy goods on the black market, knowing they are likely stolen, thereby fuelling the trade.
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- 70 Interview with NW commandant, 15 December 2021.
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- 86 See, for example, analysis of the attack on the Solhan mine in June 2021, West Africa, *Risk Bulletin*, Issue 1, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/weaobs-risk-bulletin-1/>.
- 87 Interview with community whistleblower, November 2021.
- 88 VDPs are also facing defeat at the hands of armed groups. For example, on 23 December 2021, one of the largest VDP headquarters in Kanrgo in Kongoussi commune, Centre-Nord region fell following an attack by armed terrorist groups.
- 89 Interview with Sawadogo Sanbyamba, a representative of the gold miners of Radgo.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 See, for example, the case study of Somaliland, where similar community vigilance structures with the support of the government were eventually formalised into an official community policing system. S Autesserre, *The Frontlines of Peace: An Insider's Guide to Changing the World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- 92 Interview with Kibsa Sawadogo, one of the VDP leaders of the Centre-Nord region, November 2021.
- 93 Law N ° 044-2019 / an amending law N ° 025-2018 / AN of 31 May 2018 on the penal code.
- 94 The region is divided into five sectors, Boé, Gabú, Pitche, Pirada and Sonaco. Its capital is Gabú.
- 95 According to respondent to the questionnaire.
- 96 Erosion of the revenue base affects the state's capacity to provide basic services to the population. However – the state in Guinea-Bissau is extremely corrupt, and the extent of will to provide such services, even if revenue was increased, is unclear.
- 97 The cannabis comes mainly from Guinea-Conakry, but some cannabis is also grown locally in ‘tabancas’ (villages).
- 98 Respondents identified violence linked to illicit markets as ‘minimal’.
- 99 Interview with local leader in Pitche, November, 2021.
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- 102 *Global Organised Crime Index–2021, Country Profile–Guinea-Bissau*, GI-TOC & ENACT, 2021, p 5, https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/english/ocindex_profile_guinea-bissau.pdf.
- 103 For example, the community resilience dialogues facilitated through the GI-TOC Resilience Fund provide a significant opportunity for community members to discuss issues and potential action in a safe space that would not exist without external support.

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Cover image:

Women in Kaya, Burkina Faso, kneading millet to prepare food.



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