The intersection between socioeconomic conditions and youth radicalisation

Implications for programming in the G5 Sahel countries
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Rome, 2022
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This report was produced by Leigh Mayhew, Aoife McCullough, Sherine El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, Mary Allen and Simon Levine from ODI as part of the FAO project Building resilience in the Sahel Region through job creation for youth, funded by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) of the Federal Government of Germany.

Coordination and technical guidance to the development of the report was provided by Ms Francesca Dalla Valle, Programme Officer at FAO’s Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP) and Coordinator of the project.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Rachel George (ODI) and Audu Bulama Bukarti (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change) for their peer review, and also to the various other contributors to the report for their inputs, suggestions and overall support to the project: Dalia Abulfotuh, (FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa), Clara Park (FAO Regional Office for Africa), Mohammed Bengoumi (FAO Subregional Office for North Africa), Madi Savadogo (FAO Burkina Faso), Hilaire Nare Mallah (FAO Chad), Issa Keita (FAO Mali), Seriba Konare (FAO Mali), Oumou Niang (FAO Mauritania), Bachir Maliki (FAO Niger) and Peter Wobst (ESP).

Many thanks are also extended to Máximo Torero Cullen, FAO’s Chief Economist, and Benjamin Davis, FAO’s Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP) Director, for their final review of the report.

Thanks go also to Marco Fiorentini (ESP) and studio Pietro Bartoleschi, to Ruby Cowling and Valerie Geiger at vtype.co.uk for the copyediting and data visualisation, and to Beatriz Guimarães Almeida (ESP) for her overall support.
# Acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFD</td>
<td>Agence Française de Développement</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQMI</td>
<td>Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMA</td>
<td>Coalition des Mouvements de l’Azawad</td>
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<td>Enabel</td>
<td>Belgian Development Agency</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</td>
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<td>GATIA</td>
<td>Group d’Autodéfense Tuareg Imghad et Allies</td>
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<td>GIZ</td>
<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organisation for Migration</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISGS</td>
<td>Islamic State in the Greater Sahara</td>
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<tr>
<td>LuxDev</td>
<td>Luxembourg Agency for Development Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAECI DGCS</td>
<td>Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>Mouvement Pour le Salut de l’Azawad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUJAO</td>
<td>Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>P/CVE</td>
<td>Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNV</td>
<td>Netherlands Development Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCCD</td>
<td>United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification</td>
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<td>UNICRI</td>
<td>United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute</td>
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Executive summary

This report provides an evidence-based analysis of the drivers of youth radicalisation in the Sahel, and distils what this means for programming which aims to address that concern. Ongoing conflict has meant that the drivers of violence in the region have become a pressing issue both for those within the region and for those outside. Armed groups have proliferated and have been able to recruit from local populations, leading to concerns as to why people – especially young people – may join such groups in the Sahel.

The phenomenon of young people joining armed groups is, of course, not unique to the Sahel. Young people, particularly young men, are frequently identified by government and non-government agencies as ‘at risk’ of radicalisation. Resources have been invested into trying to address the underlying drivers of youth radicalisation, often through programming under the labels of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) or Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE). Such approaches tend to categorise ‘at risk’ individuals based on certain socio-economic profiles. In particular, connecting both poverty and unemployment to radicalisation has been a popular assumption among policymakers, based on arguments that poverty and unemployment both generate grievance-based motivations and lower the opportunity cost for engaging in political violence. In response, P/CVE programming often includes the provision of economic alternatives and skills-based training in a bid to dissuade young people from joining armed groups.

However, the findings of this report challenge this framing. Based on a review of over 50 studies on radicalisation in the Sahel and the evidence from P/CVE programming implemented in the region, we found that the drivers of radicalisation in the region are geographically specific and therefore need to be considered spatially, rather than aiming to produce a ‘typical’ profile of youth that are vulnerable to radicalisation. In fact, the profiles of combatants and reasons for joining an armed group vary to such an extent that it is difficult to determine overall patterns of individuals or groups that are at risk of being radicalised. Furthermore, rather than simply being the choice of an individual, the decision to join an armed group can be tied to wider community expectations, meaning that, to be effective, programming must consider why whole communities, and not just individuals, may support violence.
These findings support wider critiques that P/CVE programming can advance too narrow an understanding of the drivers of radicalisation and the experiences of certain population groups, and that individual factors in isolation rarely explain the radicalisation of an individual. This report aims not only to uncover how socio-economic conditions interact with political dynamics to produce environments conducive to youth radicalisation, but also to provide recommendations on how FAO can tailor regional employment programmes so that they contribute towards reducing radicalisation.

The evidence within the report has generated the following key learning points for programming that seeks to address youth radicalisation in the Sahel:

**Drivers of radicalisation dynamics in the Sahel are geographically specific.** This applies not only to differences between countries, but also sub-regions within the Sahel. Therefore, it is important to consider radicalisation dynamics spatially, rather than as a pre-defined list of push and pull factors. The dynamics that lead to radicalisation very often involve socio-economic factors interacting with locally specific political factors.

**Women experience, participate and combat radicalisation in ways that warrant closer attention and examination.** While the literature covering the Sahel acknowledges that women in the region do engage with armed groups, this does not always translate into sustained engagement within P/CVE. Programming often includes ambitious targets for the involvement of women, but policymakers may need to consider different activities or a separate programme to engage women and address their needs.

**The state can be part of the problem but is also critical in addressing the drivers of radicalisation.** Although the P/CVE programming reviewed highlighted that buy-in from the state was critical to a sustainable long-term impact, it is clear that state actions and policies are also contributing to radicalisation in the Sahel. Therefore, working with the state requires an understanding of how it is influencing radicalisation and which parts of it can be realistically influenced.

**Common framings used to address and counter radicalisation processes can be ill-suited to the Sahel.** The focus of radicalisation can often be centred around individual pathways. However, evidence from the Sahel shows that joining an armed group is more about collective mobilisation linked to the community than a simple individual choice. Therefore, asking why a wider community supports violence may be a more accurate way of understanding radicalisation in the Sahel.
The devil is in the programmatic details. The very fact that there is no single ‘risk’ profile for radicalisation means that programming needs to consider a variety of pathways and profiles which lead to people or communities joining or supporting an armed group. Programming will need a large enough scope to account for different profiles and circumstances, as these variations mean people and communities will react to programming in different ways.

Consistency and a long-term vision are necessary to reap the rewards of a counter-radicalisation programme. Evidence shows that short-term interventions, including P/CVE programming, may struggle to change the deeper structural conditions which contribute to radicalisation in the Sahel. Therefore, programming that targets youth radicalisation through employment schemes will need to think beyond the provision of opportunities and numbers trained, and consider how they can contribute to the wider economic development that would be conducive to creating long-term economic stability for young people.
Violence and insecurity continue to impact the lives of those living in the Sahel. Conflict in Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger has seen the proliferation of armed groups in the region. Some of these, while local in their outlook and makeup, fall under the umbrella of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State, raising international concern about the spread of a ‘global jihad’ (de Montclos, 2021). Elsewhere, the Boko Haram insurgency and its splinter group the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) continue to affect those living in the Lake Chad region. Even in states such as Mauritania, which have avoided the levels of violence seen elsewhere in the region, individuals have joined armed groups in the region (Boukhars, 2016). These dynamics have led to the concern that part of the population of the Sahel region is becoming increasingly radicalised (CHD, 2021). In particular, youth are identified as a demographic at risk of radicalisation, partly due to a lack of opportunities including employment (Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, 2020). According to the UN, high rates of youth unemployment, along with factors such as lack of access to public services, poverty and inequality and poor governance capacity, contribute to youth being at risk of engaging in terrorism and criminality (United Nations, 2018).

The issue of young people joining armed groups is not unique to the Sahel. There is statistical evidence to suggest that societies experiencing ‘youth bulges’ are at greater risk of political violence, including armed conflict and acts of terrorism (Urdal, 2006). For some, the link between the two is partly due to the inability of a labour market to absorb high numbers of young people – leading to frustration, and providing grievance-based motives for individuals to commit political violence (ibid.). Lack of opportunity may be another factor. Faced with limited economic opportunities and the threat of poverty, young men are presented with a reduced opportunity cost of joining an armed group (Collier, 2000). More recent studies
have suggested that while the range of age groups committing acts of terrorism may be broad, young men are often overrepresented (Weber, 2019). Youth may represent a certain life stage, wherein the decline in family influence coincides with new peer influences and a search for greater purpose, leaving them vulnerable to networks where they could become radicalised (Wallner, 2021).

Globally, a response to the issue of youth radicalisation has been to target its underlying drivers through tailored development programming, often administered through Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) programming (Schomerus et al., 2017). Such programming can be focused on identifying individual risk factors. In the Sahel, factors such as age, education level and employment status have all been used to identify target groups for P/CVE programming (McCullough and Schomerus, 2017). In general, the focus on youth’s vulnerability to political violence has meant that P/CVE programming has centred around youth empowerment and providing economic alternatives and skills-based training (Mercy Corp, 2015; Wallner, 2021).

However, such programming has drawn criticism for advancing far too narrow an understanding of the drivers of radicalisation and the experiences of particular population groups, resulting in programming that has little impact or – worse – creating further risks of radicalisation (Wallner, 2021; Mercy Corp, 2015). Programming targeting youth radicalisation is criticised for being over-reliant on identifying and trying to treat individual risk factors (Wallner, 2021; Mercy Corp, 2015). Such an approach is based on assumptions rather than evidence (Mercy Corp, 2015), and ignores the fact that individual factors alone rarely explain the radicalisation of an individual (Wallner, 2021; McCullough et al., 2017). Instead, programming is encouraged to consider how multiple factors – including both driving and deterrence factors – influence the process of radicalisation (Wallner, 2021).

Therefore, categories of people should be placed within a wider context to understand the relationship between individual circumstance and wider structural conditions, which may be more influential in determining the risk of violence than individual profiles (McCullough et al., 2017). In practice, programming is urged to move away from a single focus to a more integrated approach; one which ties programming on areas such as employment to wider issues such as inter-community peacebuilding and feelings of injustice (Mercy Corp, 2015).
The aims of this study are therefore twofold:

First, to provide a critical analysis of the intersection between socio-economic conditions and youth radicalisation in the G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger) by drawing on the latest evidence within the literature and P/CVE programming.

Second, to support the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) project *Building resilience in the Sahel Region through job creation for youth – Bridging the humanitarian–development nexus in the context of fragility*. Through creating decent employment opportunities for rural youth, the programme aims to contribute to stability within the region. This study aims to provide FAO with insights into how they can address youth radicalisation through the project or similar youth-focused interventions. The study has therefore been designed to be practical in nature, providing programme staff and practitioners at large with evidence and recommendations that can support them during programme design and implementation.
The intersection between socioeconomic conditions and youth radicalisation
Implications for programming in the G5 Sahel countries
Our approach and methodology

A qualitative approach, combining a rapid evidence assessment (REA) and a ‘light touch’ programme review, was adopted during this report. This approach facilitated a better understanding of current thinking on the intersection of socio-economic factors and radicalisation in the region, and the extent to which policy and programmatic interventions have hitherto been able to address drivers of radicalisation. This section features more details on the methods used to develop the study.

2.1. Rapid evidence assessment

The rapid evidence assessment (REA) covered both academic and grey literature, and involved assessing the quality of each study to ensure that the report’s conclusions were based on reliable evidence. In terms of time frame, the REA excluded literature published before 2016. This date was selected as ODI had already undertaken a similar task which had covered the literature up to 2016; this REA sought to capture new theories and dynamics on radicalisation that were not previously covered, and to base the literature review on the most up-to-date evidence. However, some exceptions were made for studies that fell outside this date but had not previously been reviewed, and which were considered important by the team.

1 Our methodology has been adapted from Hagen-Zanker and Mallett (2013) and Cramer et al. (2016). See Annex 1 for details.
2.2. **Light touch programme review**

The ‘light touch’ programme review sought to contribute a critical analysis of what has and has not worked in programmes seeking to prevent radicalisation in the Sahel. The review focuses specifically on programmes that included a focus on youth employment and on increasing the resilience of communities to radicalisation as part of their theory of change. The review is intended to identify ways through which FAO can usefully tailor its programmes and initiatives to generate youth employment and income-generating activities that contribute to countering radicalisation in the Sahel.

A qualitative approach was selected for the programme review, combining a review of programme reports and evaluations with interviews. This approach aimed to achieve a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges experienced by programme staff and practitioners at large in conceptualising and implementing the programmes selected for this study. It would also offer deeper insight into broader contextual considerations relating to the implementation of counter-radicalisation programmes that focused on decent employment and resilience. The review examines how programmes have gone about tackling radicalisation and the lessons learned, exploring how programme staff perceive the links between youth radicalisation and employment, including how they compare with what has been written in the literature, and finally, to contextualise the programme’s findings within the literature on radicalisation in the Sahel.

2.3. **Definitions**

There is no agreed single definition of radicalisation. However, in its broadest sense, radicalisation is described as the process by which ideological views – which can be either religious or non-religious – become more extreme, to the point where violence is considered justifiable to achieve one’s ideological aims. While the process of radicalisation may proceed to violence, an individual may hold extreme views without resorting to acts of violence (McCullough and Schomerus, 2017; Schomerus *et al.*, 2017).

Radicalisation can often be associated with armed groups whose political objectives are based on a religious ideology. For this study, the focus is on armed groups who are defined as both secular and non-secular. This approach is particularly important in the Sahel, where there are armed actors representing various political ideologies. Alliances between groups are often built on pragmatic decision making; they often break down and new alliances form. This can lead to a blurring between
groups defined as jihadist or non-jihadist (Desgrais et al., 2018). Armed groups can redefine themselves in order to seek advantageous positions, which, in some cases, has led to those groups previously classed as jihadist re-classified as non-jihadist (Haugegaard, 2017). Focusing on a single category would therefore be a misrepresentation of armed group dynamics in the Sahel, and the study considers radicalisation in relation to all types of armed groups in the region.

2.4. Geographic scope

In terms of geography, the study is restricted to the G5 Sahel countries and northern Nigeria. This was built on the theory that radicalisation is a context-driven process and that there was a need to capture dynamics applicable to the geographies that would be covered in the FAO project *Building resilience in the Sahel Region through job creation for youth*. Although northern Nigeria falls outside the G5 Sahel countries, the Boko Haram insurgency affects the Lake Chad region, impacting regions inside both Chad and the Niger.

The number of articles covering each region across the Sahel is uneven, with northern Nigeria and the Liptako-Gourma region appearing more frequently within the research than Mauritania and Chad. This is understandable, as there was a much higher frequency of conflict events involving armed groups in these regions. Nevertheless, this is useful to bear in mind as it means that the dynamics in northern Nigeria and Liptako-Gourma are more heavily represented in this literature review.

2.5. Limitations

Although the research team aimed to capture as much of the literature as possible, the methodology employed to find and shortlist literature (see Annex 1) will inevitably mean that some studies will have been missed. Literature that focused on the drivers of radicalisation was prioritised, as this was the most relevant. Furthermore, due to time frame and resources, the research team could only review a certain percentage of the studies shortlisted. In total, 52 papers were reviewed, from which was selected the most relevant literature focusing on the drivers of radicalisation. However, having been able to identify common themes across the literature reviewed, the research team are confident that the majority of the major radicalisation dynamics in the G5 Sahel countries have been captured.
The study is divided into three core sections and a conclusion. **Section four** provides an overview of the literature. **Section five** is a stocktake of the literature on socio-economic conditions and their intersections with youth radicalisation in the Sahel which was assessed as part of the REA. It identifies key insights emerging from the review. **Section six** is a review of two counter-radicalisation programmes in the Sahel and an analysis of what has worked, as well as shortcomings and limitations. The report closes with **section seven** providing six key learning points and a set of recommendations for FAO’s engagement in counter-radicalisation through a focus on employment and the creation of livelihood opportunities.
The intersection between socioeconomic conditions and youth radicalisation

Implications for programming in the G5 Sahel countries
An overview of the literature

To get an overview of the level of evidence for various drivers of radicalisation in the literature, each article and report assessed under the REA has been coded according to the drivers of radicalisation identified, weighting them for their quality. Through weighting, a hierarchy of drivers of radicalisation was developed: drivers that were mentioned most frequently, and in high quality articles/reports, scored the highest. As it was clear that a specific complex of dynamics played out in each region that was particular to that region, the research team promote a move away from attempts to identify the ‘key drivers of radicalisation in the Sahel’. Instead, the research team advocate thinking about drivers of radicalisation in the Sahel spatially, recognising that a different combination of drivers is evident in each region. Furthermore, noting the variety in reasons for joining armed groups and in the profiles of individuals who joined, the literature review shows that it is less a question of what type of person becomes radicalised, and more about the factors that coalesce to motivate people to join armed groups.

Based on the literature, a configuration of drivers of radicalisation is presented for each of the four major regions that have experienced a high frequency of conflict events involving armed groups over the last six years: central Mali, northern Mali, the Liptako-Gourma region and northern Nigeria/Lake Chad basin in Figure 1. Although central Mali is often included in the Liptako Gourma triangle, we separated it out to show that, while there are linkages between what happens in central Mali and the Liptako Gourma region, there are also different dynamics playing out.
Figure 1. Drivers of radicalisation identified in the literature 2015-2021, by region

Notes: Interpreting the data on the drivers of radicalisation identified in the literature by region: The score for each driver of radicalisation is based on the number of articles/reports which identified that driver, weighted by the quality of the report (See Annex 1 for details). The number of articles/reports reviewed was 8 for central Mali, 10 for northern Mali, 12 for the Liptako-Gourma region and 15 for northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin.
The literature reviewed included four broad methodological approaches to identifying drivers of radicalisation. The first is to interview former members of armed groups (e.g. Mercy Corp, 2016; Mercy Corp, 2017; Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020; van der Heide and Coleman, 2020). A second approach is to use perception surveys where support for violence is used as a proxy for radicalisation (e.g. Katz, 2020; McCauley et al., 2020). A third approach focuses on what local people consider to be the drivers of radicalisation (e.g. the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Humanitarian Dialogue reports published on five Sahelian countries). A fourth approach uses a political economy approach to examine the regional or local economic and political factors that incentivise people to set up or join an armed group (e.g. Raineri, 2020a; Bøås, 2015; Benjaminsen and Ba, 2018). It is important to recognise the strengths and limitations of each of these approaches.

Studies that interview former members of armed groups provide the most insights at the individual level, but some are done in the context of a prison, or internally displaced persons (IDP) camp – contexts where the armed group is no longer legitimate. There is a strong likelihood that interviewees will frame his/her narrative of how he or she joined in the light of this fact. Studies also revealed that individuals may be reluctant to share the whole truth out of fear of being stigmatised by the community or prosecution for their engagement with armed groups (Mercy Corp, 2016).

The second method offers insights into the degree to which armed groups are supported by the wider community. In certain parts of Mali, locals viewed particular armed groups as ‘defenders’ or ‘liberators’ (Benkirane, 2016). This is important, as several studies assert that in many rural areas counter-radicalisation programmes should focus not on individuals who decide to join an armed group but rather on communities that offer support and resources to those groups (Mercy Corp, 2017). However, this method is not without its challenges. McCauley et al. (2020) found that even in situations where it’s possible to measure support for an armed group within a community, the longer the research group spend in the area, the less likely people are to express their support, for fear of retribution.

The third approach provides a local perspective on radicalisation which may be quite different from the perspective of the international community. At the same time, local people may be biased in their thinking about people who join armed groups and more likely to attribute their decision to join to individual factors rather than

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2 To be more exact, the proxy used was ‘support for violence for social or political causes’ – or, in Katz’s study, ‘support for democracy and military dictatorships’.
structural factors. Indeed, Botha and Abdile (2017) showed how the perceptions of community religious leaders\textsuperscript{3} about the drivers of radicalisation differed from those of former members.

Finally, studies that take a political economy or political ecology approach tend to examine factors at the community or regional level that provide the conditions for armed groups to flourish. As these studies do not focus on the individual, they tend to identify a smaller range of factors but are critical in showing how a particular set of factors interact.

\textsuperscript{3} These religious leaders were unaffiliated with armed groups.
The insights gained from the review of academic and grey literature on drivers of radicalisation in the Sahel are structured around the seven points outlined below.

5.1. **Six key radicalisation dynamics are occurring across the Sahel**

The literature presents a diverse collection of radicalisation drivers that cluster around certain geographically specific dynamics. These dynamics have been categorised focusing mainly on the political economy or political ecology of each area. Of course, across all areas, there are common reasons why people join, including being forced, through marriage, or through being inspired by the idea of an Islamic state. While each dynamic has been associated with a particular area, it should be noted that two or more of these dynamics can occur alongside each other.

1. **Land and dysfunctional state institutions**: In the areas where this dynamic is observable, the insurgency is linked to frustration with state institutions that manage land/pasture access and a demand for more equality, justice and political representation from lower-class pastoral groups. In central Mali and parts of Burkina Faso, the courts fail to resolve land disputes due to corruption but also conflicting customary and statutory systems, while the forestry service is widely perceived as predatory (Benjaminsen and Ba, 2018; Rupesinghe and Bøås, 2019). In Tillaberi, the state is perceived as neglecting pastoralists’ rights and supporting sedentary farmers (Bøås et al., 2020; Djontu and Gatelier, 2017). Belonging to an armed group may offer protection, or armed groups can offer the means (e.g. training; weapons) for communities involved in land disputes to protect themselves. Armed groups also administer justice via mobile courts,
which is seen as more efficient and fairer in their rulings than the state judiciary system (Benjaminsen and Ba, 2018; Boås and Rupesinghe, 2019; Boås et al., 2020). In the Lake Chad region, the dynamic is slightly different in that lower-class pastoral groups are not resisting elite groups. What is similar is that state institutions fail to recognize and manage pastoralist needs. When the Nigerien state evacuated the Lake Chad shores in 2015, Peul and Yedina started to pay taxes and support the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) in order to regain access to grazing areas (Kohler, 2021).

2. Need for protection: This dynamic is most keenly observable in central Mali, Tillabéri, Borno and Adamawa. In central Mali, a number of militia groups have been established by communities to protect themselves against jihadist armed groups. Many of these groups receive support from the state (Tobie and Sangaré, 2019) and indeed in some cases, provide protection for state representatives (ibid.). In rural areas in Borno and Adamawa in northern Nigeria, many communities felt pressurized to demonstrate support for Boko Haram for fear of being accused of supporting the Nigerian military (Botha and Abdile, 2017). A similar dynamic was observed in Tillabéri (Boås et al., 2020). Attempts to include Fulani within the national army gained little response, out of fear that the community would face reprisal attacks from the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) for siding with the government.

3. Contraction of formal sector, leading to an increase in the number of people working in precarious jobs in the informal sector: This dynamic is evident in Maidaguir and Zinder. In Nigeria, liberal policies have resulted in fewer public sector jobs and increasing numbers of educated youth seeking employment in the informal sector. This increases competition for low-paid jobs and makes it more difficult for those with lower levels of education to compete (Meagher and Hassan, 2020; Sambe et al., 2018). This increased competition, informality and job precarity leads to higher levels of frustration which armed groups can tap into, positioning these groups as a way to fight the system.

4. Rural to urban migration, leading to groups of young people needing a network that provides access to jobs and protection: This dynamic was observed in Kano, Kaduna and Zinder. As it becomes increasingly common for young people to engage in either seasonal migration from rural to urban areas or more permanent migration, young people need to access a network (Last, 2020; Sambe et al., 2018; McCullough and Diwaker, 2019). Radical groups can function as a network for some migrants.
5. The search for new values of social justice and a rejection of the authority of traditional leaders: This dynamic is evident across many urban and peri-urban areas across the Sahel, including Noukchott, Kiffa (Baba Ahmed and Lam, 2016), Kidal, Timbuktu, Diffa (Pellerin, 2017), Agadez (McCullough et al., 2017) and N’Djaméne (UNDP and Humanitarian Dialogues, 2016a). This is often expressed through involvement in reformist Islamic movements, but sometimes also through support for armed groups. The emphasis on anti-corruption and equality for all of reformist armed groups appeals to many from the lower socio-economic classes, as well as idealistic youth from the middle classes. However, it should be noted that the majority of people who join reformist Islamic movements do not support violence. The overlap in narratives between reformist Islamic movements and jihadist armed groups produces both reinforcing and weakening effects for violent extremism. While some members of reformist Islamic movements passionately contest what they see as the misuse of Islam by jihadist armed groups, others are sympathetic to their cause.

6. Control of trafficking routes and artisanal goldmining: In Kidal, Gao and to a certain extent Timbuktu, Tuareg and Arab groups with links to Mauritanians, Algerians and members of the Polisario vie to control trafficking routes through Mali. Although there are many factors leading to the establishment of armed groups, Ansar Edine, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), now disbanded, are especially associated with this competition over lucrative routes (Raineri and Strazzari, 2015; Bøås, 2015). The securing of artisanal goldmining sites in the Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso also attracts armed groups. On occasion, state agents collaborate to provide security. However, armed groups also operate independently of the government. In Kidal, the Coalition des Mouvements de l’Azaward (CMA) tax mining operations in return for providing security. In Soum, northern Burkina Faso, jihadist armed groups have helped miners secure disputed mining sites. In Tillaberi, the Niger, vigilante groups have been formed to combat criminal groups targeting miners (ICG, 2019a).
5.2. **Women experience and engage with armed groups in a distinct way that warrants closer attention**

Although evidence suggests that men are more likely to carry out acts of violence or become members of armed groups (Weber, 2019), the evidence within the global literature is clear: women do engage with armed groups. Importantly, this engagement should not be considered passive or simply forced (OCSE, 2019). This view is perpetuated by traditional views of women as mothers or carers, which is counterintuitive to the idea of women as perpetrators of violence (Praxl-Tabuchi, 2019). However, the evidence shows that, globally, women perform a number of roles relating to armed groups, ranging from cooking for and clothing combatants to recruitment and fundraising, and, in some cases, acting as suicide bombers and taking combat roles (Idris, 2020; Osman, 2020; Praxl-Tabuchi, 2019; Winter, 2018).

Analysis of support for armed groups in both the Sahel and the Lake Chad region also shows that women actively engage with armed groups. Like their male counterparts, women are motivated by a range of factors, which can mirror those of men. In the central Sahel, community concerns surrounding justice, security and the management of natural resources are all factors which can encourage both men and women to support armed groups (Raineri, 2020a). Other studies found that unemployment and low levels of education increase the likelihood that men and women will be vulnerable to radicalisation (Katz, 2020).

There are also overlaps between men and women in terms of common generational concerns around barriers to social progression, such as social hierarchies and increasing bridal prices, both of which have been challenged by jihadist armed groups who view them as ‘non-traditional’ Islamic practices (Raineri, 2020a). For example, the removal of bridal prices proved popular among young men and women due to opening up the opportunity of marriage – seen as a mark of success in the central Sahel – to those who had previously been unable to afford it (Raineri, 2020a).

However, the key learning point from the literature on the Sahel is that there are factors that are different to those motivating men. For example, Katz (2020) found that in north-eastern parts of Burkina Faso, northern Mali and eastern Niger, perceptions of ethnic discrimination, personal security concerns, and attitudes towards the military were the most important drivers of radicalisation for women. Factors that influenced radicalisation among men, however, comprised age, government performance, and corruption in state institutions. A worrying
finding in Katz’s study is that the proportion of women in the region supporting
violent extremism has doubled over the last decade, underscoring the urgent need
for programmatic measures to address the gendered dimensions of radicalisation.

While Katz’s findings indicate a geographically specific set of factors, there are also
factors incentivizing women that are common across regions. At both the national
and local level, women are underrepresented in decision-making bodies, especially
in rural areas where armed groups are present. Although legislation exists that
promotes equality in areas such as inheritance and property law, customary laws
and social norms often obstruct its implementation. For example, women are
discouraged from land ownership and often expected to work on land provided
by men (Raineri, 2020a). Therefore, the opportunity to gain influence and status
through membership of an armed group, as has been noted in Liptako-Gourma
(Raineri, 2020a) and northern Nigeria (Mercy Corp, 2016; Ehrhardt and Umar,
2020), may incentivise women to engage with armed groups.

Armed groups present a range of opportunities for women. Women are employed
as cooks, cleaners and nurses (Raineri, 2020a). Some of the roles that women were
able to take as members of armed groups defied gender norms, including working
as recruiters and spies (ICG 2019b; Abatan and Sangaré, 2021). In both the Niger and
Nigeria, membership of Boko Haram allowed young women the opportunity to learn
the Koran (Abatan and Sangaré, 2021; Mercy Corp, 2016). The opportunity to learn
was said to appeal to those women who had received no education or had to leave
school early due to marriage (Mercy Corp, 2016). Similarly, women also gain access
to roles that defy gender norms in reformist Islamic movements in different parts
of the Sahel (Baba Ahmed and Lam, 2020; McCullough et al., 2017). Baba Ahmed
and Lam (2020) note how women play an active role in the Muslim Brotherhood,
Tablighi Jamaat and Salafi movements in Mauritania. In these movements, they
are often preachers, educators and organisers of winter retreats – positions where
they can gain influence and status.

While the wider literature highlights that those specific incentives for female
radicalisation can relate to gender inequalities, we also need to be aware that
incentives are context-specific and may not always conform to outside perceptions
of gender equality. Therefore, the ways in which women perceive opportunities for
progression within certain contexts may take slightly different forms, and armed
groups are fully aware of this. For example, within the Fulani community social
status for women is attached to idea of not carrying out manual work. Therefore,
the ban on women working in fields by jihadist armed groups proved popular
(Raineri, 2020a). Furthermore, the decision by jihadist armed groups to overturn
social norms prohibiting marrying across social strata again proved popular among
younger women from lower classes within the Fulani community (ibid.).
Violence experienced by women during conflict can also determine how armed groups are perceived. In the central Sahel, Raineri (2020a) found that women’s support for jihadist armed groups varies across countries. Whilst there was evidence to suggest support for jihadist armed groups among women living in central Mali and western Niger, in northern Burkina Faso support for these groups is said to be limited (Raineri, 2020a). This might be due in part to higher levels of violence directed towards civilians, including violence specifically targeting women, by jihadist armed groups in northern Burkina Faso. However, in both Mopti in central Mali and Tillaberi in western Niger, the perception among women of jihadist armed groups was more of protection than of threat, due to these groups’ punishment of perpetrators of gender-based violence (ibid.).

The literature demonstrated – in line with the global literature – that women’s agency during conflict sits along a spectrum that cannot simply be attributed to passive agreement. There were, indeed, examples in which women had been forced to join or support an armed group through pressure from family members or social groups (Abatan and Sangaré, 2021). In Mali and the Niger, women were said to have supported their husband’s decision to join an armed group – and with this, to have given their own support for the group – in line with societal norms of a wife’s duty to support her husband (Raineri, 2020a). However, in other cases the decision for women to engage with armed groups is more of a negotiated position, rather than neatly fitting into a forced or voluntary decision. For example, in central Mali, women were said to have encouraged or ‘giv[en] up’ a male family member in order to establish a ‘peaceful coexistence’ with the group Katiba Macina. In one case, in exchange for food supplies Katiba Macina was said to have granted permission for one woman to continue with her business of trading fabric (Abatan and Sangaré, 2021).

In terms of women performing active combat roles in armed groups, the wider literature notes that the ideological positions of an armed group are a determinant factor. Within jihadist armed groups, although women engage in armed violence through carrying out suicide bombings, they rarely feature in battlefield combat roles (Winter, 2018). The literature covering the Sahel and the Lake Chad region appears to agree with these findings. Although high numbers of women were suicide bombers for Boko Haram, there is little evidence to suggest that women fulfil combat roles among jihadist armed groups in the Sahel (Raineri, 2020a; Abatan and Sangaré, 2021). However, in non–jihadist armed groups in Mali and community defence militias in Burkina Faso, women are said to fulfil security roles such as bodyguards and police (Raineri, 2020a).
5.3. The state can both contribute to and counter radicalisation processes

The state is often viewed as central to combating radicalisation within its jurisdiction. However, the literature revealed that the state itself can also act as a catalyst in people’s decisions to join armed groups or in the mobilisation of communities.

While contexts in which armed groups emerge are often characterised by a minimal state presence, these areas do not equate to ‘ungoverned space’. Instead, they are defined by competing systems of governance in which the state is only one actor. Local communities must navigate different actors, siding with those who not only represent the best source of security, but also those who are most credible in terms of their threat of violence (Kilcullen, 2017).

Repressive or unjust actions taken by the state, which led to individuals seeking revenge or communities mobilising in opposition to the state, were a common driver of radicalisation identified in the literature. In Diffa, the Niger, heavy-handed state security measures targeting the Boko Haram insurgency resulted in the mobilisation of community militias to protect the Kanouri community from state security abuses (Osland and Erstad, 2020). In both central Mali and northern Burkina Faso, abuses by the military have led to both support for jihadist armed groups and the forming of self-defence militias (Raineri, 2018). In central Mali, families provided accounts of where they had supported or encouraged their sons to join armed groups to avenge the killing of a family member by state forces (Abatan and Sangaré, 2021). In northern Nigeria, Botha and Abdile (2017) found that revenge on the military was the most significant factor motivating young people to join Boko Haram. There were also accounts of where state counterinsurgency tactics had provided opportunities for the militarisation of certain areas. In the Lake Chad region, counterinsurgency measures removed people from the region, leading to the mobilisation of community militias which sought to claim back farming and grazing land (Iocchi, 2020; Kohler, 2020).

A state’s indirect actions can also provide a motivation to align with an armed group. In both central Mali and western Niger, the decision to support an armed group can come down to which group offers the most credible source of protection (Mercy Corp, 2017; Tobie and Sangaré, 2019; Raineri, 2020b; Dal Santo and van der Heide, 2018). Insecurity in the Sahel has resulted in both the state’s and international actors’ backing of community-based militias, in attempts to impose control, and in counterterrorism operations. Such measures have, however, often had the reverse effect, by heightening inter-community tensions. The backing of, or turning a blind eye to, abuses committed by the Group d’Autodéfense Tuareg Imghad et Allies
(GATIA) and the Mouvement Pour le Salut de l’Azawad (MSA) armed groups, which are linked to clans within the Tuareg, led to some of the Fulani community turning to ISGS as a source of protection (Raineri, 2020b).

It is not only the actions of state security forces that can contribute to radicalisation, but also those of government departments that would typically be viewed as benign. Clientelism and corruption only fuel resentment and undermine confidence in government institutions. This includes those which oversee land conflicts, such as the Forest Service. (Benjaminsen and Ba, 2018). Both the Water Resources and Forest Services in the Sahel have been accused of unfair treatment and ‘racketeering’, targeting sections of the Fulani community (Raineri, 2018).

On the other hand, states can work to restrain radicalising tendencies in the population. In the Niger, Idrissa (2020) argues that the state policy of promoting Franco–Arab schools whose curriculum is controlled by the Ministry of Education but which include Arabic and extracurricular religious education; the willingness to relax certain aspects of state secularism to appease Islamic reformist movements; and a centralising policy space that remains controlled by Niamey have all helped curb the rise of homegrown radical violent groups.

5.4. The community rather than the individual may be key to understanding drivers of radicalisation

A common approach to understanding the process of radicalisation is to focus on analysing the individual (Kilcullen, 2017; Raineri, 2020b). However, evidence from contexts such as Mali and the Niger suggest that a more accurate way of understanding the drivers of radicalisation may lie at the community level.

Studies show that individuals, particularly young men, saw their membership of an armed group as a way of both identifying with and serving their communities, and of earning respect for supporting that community (Mercy Corp, 2016). In fact, the decision to join an armed group is not always one taken by an individual, but one that is taken by respected community elders (Mercy Corp, 2017). That community could be defined as family, ethnicity or a region (Mercy Corp, 2016; van der Heide and Coleman, 2020). For example, in Mali, in line with the crisis that broke out in 2012 that largely reflected a north/south divide, some of those interviewed revealed that it was their way of identifying as a ‘northerner’ (van der Heide and Coleman, 2020). In some communities it is seen as young man’s duty to act as a protector for the wider community (Mercy Corp, 2017; Raineri,
In the Liptako-Gourma region, young men within the Fulani community are viewed as ‘protectors’; a failure to take up arms would earn derogatory labels such as ‘coward’ or bring shame on the individual’s family (Raineri, 2020a). Some young men described societal pressures to serve their communities through armed group membership, describing themselves as ‘nothing’ without belonging to their respective communities (Mercy Corp, 2016).

The literature revealed that communities may share a sense of common values with an armed group or see a system of ‘rebel’ governance as more effective than the state. These values may be based on ethno-religious reasons, they may align with a community’s anti-government position, or it may be a case of a shared sense of morality (Mercy Corp, 2017; ICG, 2017). For example, communities living near artisanal goldmining sites in northern Burkina Faso were said to have welcomed the presence of jihadist groups whose values were opposed to the drinking of alcohol, prostitution and criminal behaviour which surrounded the mining sites (ICG, 2019a). Similarly, in northern Mali, those living in Gao welcomed the arrival of MUJAO due to their ability to enforce law and order. In both the Lake Chad region (Iocchi, 2020) and central Mali (Rupesinghe and Boås, 2019), the taxation systems implemented by armed groups were considered fairer than those imposed by the state or elites.
The level and patterns of violence communities experience may also offer some explanation for both support for and aversion to violence. Several studies on selected communities in Burkina Faso, Chad and the Niger showed that communities who experienced higher levels of violence were more likely to support violent extremism and to see a reduction in factors that contribute to social cohesion (Finkel et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2020; Mercy Corp, 2021). Violence was seen to politicise individuals and lead to a decrease in social cohesion and trust towards outgroups (Thomas et al., 2020; Finkel et al., 2021). Other studies covering youth support for violent extremism in Mali found that the experience of violence didn’t always correspond with an increased support for violence. Despite both Menaka and Mopti experiencing conflict, youth in Menaka were more likely to express support for violence in defence of one’s community and for armed groups than those living in Mopti (Coleman et al., 2021).

5.5. **Understanding engagement with armed groups requires a nuanced understanding of motivations and looking beyond a single ‘risk’ profile**

The design of P/CVE programming tends to concern itself with identifying individual characteristics, such as age, employment status or education level (McCullough et al., 2017). However, focusing on individual characteristics within P/CVE programming has been criticised. First, it is argued, it ignores the fact that individual factors alone, removed from wider contextual settings, fail to account for why those individuals become radicalised (Wallner, 2021). Furthermore, research has shown that there is wide variation in the individuals that become radicalised, making it difficult to identify overall patterns when it comes to groups or individuals that present a risk (McCullough et al., 2017).

The literature reviewed as part of the REA supports these arguments, revealing a variety of profiles and pathways for those who choose to engage with armed groups. Individuals’ different motivations and roles suggest that not all decisions are voluntary, and that reasons to remain in the group can be the result of circumstances that have developed during the individual’s engagement, rather than representing a fundamental commitment to the group’s cause. Beyond common geographically-defined factors identified (section 4.1), the evidence within the literature reviewed highlighted that there is no single ‘risk’ profile when it comes to determining individuals at risk of becoming radicalised. Studies that carry out interviews or profile former members of armed groups in both Mali and northern
Nigeria reveal mixed evidence in terms of the demographics of those who become involved with armed groups.

As noted, analysing the employment status of individuals has been one method of identifying at-risk individuals. Some arguments suggest that its relevance is the result of grievances at the lack of economic opportunities (Urdal, 2006), while others suggest that, faced with little alternative, the opportunity costs for young men joining armed groups are lowered (Collier, 2000). Although the dangers of ‘idle youth’ have proved influential among media headlines and within policy, the theory is said to be at best mixed and at worst ‘insubstantial’ (Mercy Corp, 2015). The evidence to support the link between unemployment and armed group membership within the literature reviewed as part of the REA was also mixed; this is, in part, linked to the method used. The studies that interviewed former members of armed groups included both employed and unemployed individuals (Mercy Corp, 2016; Mercy Corp, 2017; van der Heide and Coleman, 2020). Some would cite unemployment as a reason for joining an armed group, while others would attribute it to other factors (Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020). Studies that used perception surveys where the proxy for radicalisation was support for violence were more likely to find a link between unemployment and radicalisation (Katz, 2020).

Similarly, poverty is another factor that is often used to profile at-risk individuals. Again, the global literature to support this argument is mixed, with studies highlighting the range of economic backgrounds of those who commit acts of violence (Schomerus and El Taraboulsi–McCarthy, 2017). However, others have noted that the picture is slightly different when considering armed groups within the context of civil war. Here, armed groups can emerge and take hold in economically deprived areas, and may rely on a recruitment pool of communities that are economically worse off (Allan et al., 2015). The evidence in the studies reviewed reveals that membership is drawn from a variety of economic backgrounds. One study covering Boko Haram membership in northern Nigeria found no overall pattern (Mercy Corp, 2016), while another covering central Mali showed an equal number of respondents describing themselves as from economically advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds (Mercy Corp, 2017). While one study covering northern Nigeria did have an overall majority from poorer families, its respondents also included those from families described as average, and a minority from families seen as financially better off (Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020).

Low educational attainment and attendance of religious schools has also been a method to profile at-risk individuals within P/CVE programming (McCullough et al., 2017). However, the evidence within the wider literature on radicalisation suggests that there is no clear link between lack of education and radicalisation,
with the ranks of armed groups including those with high academic achievement (McCullough and Schomerus, 2017; Ostby et al., 2019). While the evidence linking low educational attainment is believed to be weak, one study in Mali did find that the majority of those interviewed had no formal education. However, the data also included a third who had received a formal education, with some having received more than the national average (van der Heide and Coleman, 2020).

With regard to religious education, this was a factor explored as potentially linked to radicalisation within the literature covering northern Nigeria. Reasons for linking religious schooling to radicalisation include the fact that leaving school with no formal education or skills and the removal from social networks make it difficult for individuals to integrate into society (Benkirane, 2016; UNDP and Humanitarian Dialogues, 2016a). However, while one report on northern Nigeria did find a link (Benkirane, 2016), the majority of studies did not. Often, the profiles of former fighters included equal numbers of those who had attended religious and secular forms of schooling (de Montclos, 2018; Mercy Corp, 2016; Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020).

As noted earlier, armed group support is often drawn along community lines, so it is not surprising that armed groups can take on an ethnic characteristic. However, certain communities may become stigmatised as recruitment pools for jihadist armed groups. In the case of Boko Haram, the Kanouri community have often been singled out; however, interviews with former members show that the membership of Boko Haram is actually drawn from a range of ethnic groups (Mercy Corp, 2016; Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020). In the central Sahel, a similar story presents the Fulani as strongly associated with jihadist armed groups, but studies argue that groups recruit from a number of ethnicities (ICG, 2017). Further, the Fulani community do not represent a homogenous bloc, with only certain elements supporting jihadist armed groups (Rupesinghe and Bøås, 2019).

All the studies that collected data on interviewees’ ages showed that most fell into the ‘youth’ category, but some did fall outside of this bracket. While studies acknowledged that the definition of ‘youth’ can vary, most studies profiling former members defined it as 16 to 35 years old. Data from the studies showed that membership of armed groups mainly comprised between the ages of 25 and 35 (Mercy Corp, 2016; Mercy Corp, 2017; van der Heide and Coleman, 2020). However, these studies also included those who fell under the 36+ category (Mercy Corp, 2016;

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4 Note that, at global level, FAO follows the United Nations (UN) youth age frame for statistical purposes (15–24). However, at operational level it follows either regional institutions’ definitions – for example, the 15–35 adopted within the African Union – or the various national age frames adopted by a specific Member Nation.
Mercy Corp 2017; van der Heide and Coleman, 2020) and, in one study, some who were over 46 (van der Heide and Coleman, 2020). Furthermore, while young single men are sometimes stigmatised as an at–risk group, studies in which such data was collected revealed that membership was drawn from both married and unmarried categories (Mercy Corp, 2016; Mercy Corp, 2017), with one study showing a majority who were married (van der Heide and Coleman, 2020).

While the categories outlined in Figure 1 are useful at providing an overall picture, the evidence highlights the importance of understanding the nuances that underpin each driver of radicalisation. A person who is ideologically invested in an armed group will react differently to a counter–radicalisation programme compared with someone who has joined through circumstance. The motivations for joining an armed group can be anywhere on the spectrum from forced to voluntary – or, indeed, any combination thereof. Interviews with former Boko Haram members reveal a ‘grey area’, whereby the decision to join was voluntary but represented the least of a bad set of options (Mercy Corp, 2016). Membership may be through quite ‘normal’ pathways that do not represent a commitment to a cause, such as a need for employment meeting a demand for particular practical skills. Skilled professionals such as blacksmiths and tailors joined Boko Haram for work and their skills were utilised in the manufacture of weapons and uniforms (Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020).

Remaining in an armed group may also be more to do with individual circumstances that have developed after joining, rather than a demonstration of continued commitment to the group. These circumstances may make it difficult to leave, strengthening their bond to the group. Socially, individuals may become stigmatised by the wider community, including family members. Economically, if a business or employment opportunities are tied to the group, then leaving could have financial implications. For women, whether they have joined voluntarily or by force, falling pregnant and the subsequent need for support may mean that there is little opportunity to leave. Members also feared punishment by security forces if they were to leave (Ehrhardt and Umar, 2020; van der Heide and Coleman, 2020).

When thinking about each driver of radicalisation, it is important to consider its connections to the wider societal pressures that young people face. This is especially important when factoring in economic motivations, in order to avoid the reductive labelling of individual decisions to engage with armed groups as ‘greed–driven’. Studies within the review reveal that economic motivations can be tied to a young person’s feelings of frustration at their position in life, and a desire to transition to adulthood and gain independence through earning an income (Benkirane, 2016; Raineri, 2018). Studies that included interviewing former members of armed groups
who joined to escape insecure livelihoods revealed that their decision to join was as much about having a sense of purpose as it was about financial gain (Erhardt and Umar, 2020).

For young men in the Sahel, there was evidence to suggest that joining an armed group can be attached to an idea of a traditional role within society. In Liptako-Gourma, within the Fulani community membership of an armed group conformed to the idea that men are protectors of women (Raineri, 2020a). There is also a common belief among young Fulani men that belonging to an armed group made them more attractive to women (ibid.). Marriage was a common theme in both the literature covering the central Sahel and that covering northern Nigeria. Former members of Boko Haram revealed that privileged members of the group could expect to marry women that had been abducted into the group (Abatan and Sangaré, 2021). In Liptako-Gourma, one young man spoke of how he joined an armed group to offer a bride’s family protection for their livestock (ibid.). Others saw membership as a means to improve their social standing, allowing them to marry women that were above their social status (Raineri, 2020a).
In sum, in line with the wider criticisms of P/CVE programming outlined at the beginning, the evidence within the literature covering the Sahel demonstrates a wide variety in the profiles of individuals joining armed groups and the pathways through which they become members. This means that it is extremely difficult to identify overall patterns of individuals or groups at risk of becoming radicalised, especially if analysis focuses on socio-economic profiles removed from wider structural conditions.

5.6. **Radicalisation is the result of both inter and intra community disparities**

As noted in the literature, the decision to join an armed group, or community-level support for such groups, is also the result of a community’s or region’s perception of its own socio-economic marginalisation in comparison to others (Mercy Corp, 2017). However, the reasons for joining or supporting an armed group have often been a means to readdress strict social hierarchies within communities, rather than just a response to inequalities between communities (Rupesinghe and Bøås, 2019; de Bruijn and Both, 2017; ICG, 2017; UNDP and Humanitarian Dialogues, 2016a). Jihadist armed groups operating in both central Mali and northern Burkina Faso have won favour with those of lower standing within the Fulani community due to their message of social equality and actions such as targeting the unpopular Jowro taxation system (ICG, 2017; Bøås and Rupesinghe, 2019). In northern Mali, the controlling of trafficking routes has allowed vassal tribes to challenge the authority of noble tribes within the Tuareg community (Pellerin, 2017; Raineri and Strazzari, 2015).

Such dynamics are likely to expose generational divides, with younger generations more likely to challenge social orders than older generations (ICG, 2017). In Chad, among younger members of ‘lower castes’, feelings of social frustration have provided an important push factor for members of Boko Haram. The targeting of parents and traditional leaders is believed to be the violent expression of this frustration (UNDP and Humanitarian Dialogues, 2016a). In central Mali, while feelings of injustice towards the state have encouraged some young Fulani to join jihadist armed groups (Benjaminsen and Ba, 2018), de Bruijn and Both (2017) highlight that is also frustration towards elites within the Fulani community that have meant that messages of marginalisation from jihadist armed groups have resonated with younger generations.
5.7. **Radicalisation dynamics reveal both long-term ambitions and barriers to securing economic stability**

Studies (Wallner, 2021) that have reviewed global P/CVE programmes targeting youth radicalisation warn of the risks of targeting youth radicalisation through employment schemes. One of the issues is that P/CVE programming tends to be too short in duration to have any long-term impact on the employment prospects of young people. Also, vocational training can lead to unmet expectations when it is not tied to wider economic opportunities or linked to labour market demands.

While the points raised by Wallner (2021) were in reference to P/CVE programming that had been operationalised globally, the points resonate with the Sahel. As already highlighted, the connection for young people in the Sahel between economic opportunities and joining armed groups is related to the desire to escape a feeling of dependency and subordination to traditional societal structures. Important, radicalisation dynamics reveal the long-term decision making behind engagement with armed groups. In Mali, some individuals quit jobs, or paid (through the selling of land) to join pro-government armed groups. Their hope was to secure long-term economic stability through employment in the Malian national army via Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programmes (Mercy Corp, 2017).

Radicalisation dynamics may also reveal some of the important barriers young people face in securing their long-term economic future. In contexts such as northern Nigeria, the ownership of a business represents an important symbol of status and individual achievement. However, young people often face difficulties in accessing finance to help them support a business venture. Boko Haram were able to take advantage of this through a ‘cash trap’ loans system which provided capital to start-ups and struggling businesses. If individuals were unable to pay the loan back, they were forced to join or support the group (Mercy Corp, 2016).

For others, economic liberalisation policies in northern Nigeria have led to an increasing number of individuals educated to secondary and higher education entering low-skilled employment within the informal sector. This has led not only to a decrease in expected wages, but also to increased competition for the less educated and skilled artisans who already work within the informal sector (Meagher and Hassan, 2020). This has led to feelings of resentment in a context characterised by growing religious intolerance and state aggression, which has only reduced legitimate channels for voicing concerns (ibid.).
Preventing radicalisation: what programming works? And what does not?

Through a series of key informant interviews and a review of the literature, the programme review reflects on two programmes aimed at preventing radicalisation which were implemented between 2011 and 2020, and identifies key insights and lessons learned. Out of a number of programmes (see Annex 2), these two were selected because of their geographic focus; the variety of local actors they engaged; and the fact that they were centred around countering radicalisation through a clear emphasis on employment and livelihoods, as well as their level of documentation of the opportunities for, and challenges to, impact.

6.1. Programmes under review

The first programme is the USAID Peace through Development II Program (USAID PDEV II), a five-year, USD 59 million programme that aimed to increase resilience to violent extremism in at-risk communities in Burkina Faso, Chad, and the Niger from November 2011 to December 2016. At-risk communities were those scoring highest in an assessment of risk factors for violent extremism (VE) (USAID, 2015). The programme had three sub-goals: improved social cohesion; enhanced resilience to extremism and improved civic outlook. It also had four strategic objectives:

- empowering youth through expanded livelihoods via various channels such as vocational and entrepreneurial skills training;
- amplifying moderate voices through integrated radio, social media, civic education, and conflict resolution activities;
- increasing civil society capacity through training, strengthening advocacy and issue-based campaigns integrated with radio and social media, and enhanced civil society organization coalitions and networks; and
strengthening local government through organized community entities and CSO capacity, citizen participation, and training in public administration, transparency, advocacy, and government outreach.

Across the three target countries PDEV II designated 45 ‘core zones’, which received the full array of programme activities and 56 ‘non-core zones’ which received only radio programming. However, 12 of these non-core zones either failed to receive a radio signal or received a radio signal only in the very last month of the programme (USAID, 2018). Core and non-core zones were selected from among the communities with the highest risk factors for violent extremism (USAID, 2015). This assessment built on the findings of a range of analytical tasks undertaken by the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), of which PDEV is one component, that included research to identify the political, social and cultural drivers of violent extremism in the region, and detailed country assessments to identify more precisely the risk factors in each country and the communities at greatest risk of armed groups or ideology (USAID, 2011).

The second programme is the Pilot Project on Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism in the Sahel–Maghreb Region which was launched by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) in 2015, with the support of the European Commission Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). This five-year programme (2015–2020) sought to work with civil society organisations in nine countries of the region in order to pilot and evaluate small-scale interventions of varying nature, scope and duration. It avoided defining at-risk groups or communities and did not define which grievances constitute a risk for radicalisation. Initiatives in Mali, Mauritania and Tunisia provided vocational training for self-employment as a response to feelings of disappointment and marginalisation caused by high levels of unemployment, low access to skills training, dire poverty, economic hardship, and economic marginalisation. Training in relevant agricultural and artisan skills (horticulture, plumbing, electricity, carpentry, floor-tiling etc.) was accompanied by French language, geography and civic education classes and practical guidance on job search techniques. One initiative provided employment opportunities after training (as guardians on a wildlife reserve) and another combined weekend courses with sessions in arts and crafts (mural painting, breakdance, henna tattoos and photography). The goal of the project was to better understand what works in terms of strengthening the resilience of local communities to radicalisation and violent extremism (UNICRI, 2019). The approach allowed UNICRI to support and study practical, innovative and sustainable measures as well as those that struggled to make a difference, learning important lessons in the process (UNICRI, 2020).
6.2. **Key findings**

Overall, both programmes reviewed for this paper had mixed results. Based on a review of evaluation and progress reports, this can be explained in the light of three main factors: contextual (social, political, economic and environmental), programmatic (duration, scale, leadership, capacity within the programme), and relational (at the intersection between programme staff/activities and the community, e.g. trust and credibility with the community).

**Figure 2. Contextual, programmatic and relational factors**

*Source: Authors’ own elaboration.*
With regard to PDEV II, while the final performance review concluded that the programme “established and empowered a network of messengers to counter the appeal of violent extremism” and “demonstrably built resilience against violent extremism’s socioeconomic, political, and cultural drivers” (USAID, 2016, p. iv), an end-line evaluation conducted in 2018 concluded that only two of eighteen outcome indicators showed statistically significant effects when pooled across the three countries (Burkina Faso, Chad and the Niger). These pointed to an increase in institutional trust (one of five indicators of the sub-goal Social Cohesion) and a reduction in perceived religious differences (one of nine indicators of the sub-goal Resilience to Extremism).

Country-specific analysis indicated that the programme had more success in Burkina Faso compared to Chad and the Niger, where the evaluation demonstrated essentially no community-level impact. Analysis of radio programming pooled across the three countries showed significant impacts on four indicators, pointing to “higher perceptions of inclusiveness in community decision-making and significantly higher levels of political efficacy, as well as lower levels of support for the justifiability of religious violence and perception that violence is effective to solve problems” (USAID, 2018, p. 83). An analysis of project documents noted that these indicators were among those which the radio programming was most directly designed to influence in the sub-goal areas of Social Cohesion and Resilience to Extremism. The evaluation also suggests that the programme may have decreased support for jihadist armed groups in PDEV II core versus other zones.

A closer review shows that contextual factors may have contributed to the relative success of PDEV II in Burkina Faso compared to Chad and the Niger. The lack of consistency in the effects of the programme across Chad, the Niger, and Burkina Faso show that “the program cannot be expected to achieve the same results among relatively different country contexts, as implementation logistics and coordination and community contexts (including exposure to violence) varied widely across the three countries” (USAID, 2018, p. 96). At-risk communities in Burkina Faso scored lower on key outcome indicators at baseline, possibly indicating more opportunity for improvement, and experienced significantly less violence during the implementation of the programme compared to Chad and the Niger (Box 1). For radio programming, the sample size available was too small to allow country-by-country comparison but the evaluators noted a relatively favourable operating environment in Burkina Faso with ‘free and developed media, and experienced radio specialists, providing more capacity for PDEV II publicity and radio activities’ (USAID, 2018, p. 26).
Poor programme results for PDEV II in Chad and the Niger were explained as related to:

[...] the difficult operating environment, resulting in implementation challenges and relatively fewer activities in core communities. The qualitative evidence also suggests that the downturn in oil prices in Chad and the uptick in Boko Haram attacks in Niger had important overarching effects in those countries. Finally, a review of the core communities’ exposure to violence over the life of the program revealed significant terrorist violence, particularly in Chad and Niger (USAID, 2018, pp. 11–12).

With regard to the UNICRI project, the evaluators concluded that an analysis of context is essential to good programme practice:

[...] grievances are time and place–specific. While there are some general patterns, it is important to understand local context, the forces at play and the mechanisms that push or pull people to take up arms. What is at the source of the specific inter– or intra–community disputes? Is it land division, access to water or centuries’ old class and slavery structures? What do age, gender, confession, ethnic, tribal or political affiliations reveal about the present conflict? What is its genealogy? It is important to have as complete knowledge of conflict dynamics and its actors as possible to avoid reinforcing the injuries suffered in the past (UNICRI, 2020, p. 77).
During the selection process UNICRI paid close attention to the conflict analysis presented in each proposal and assessed this alongside the project approach (including context-dependant nuances) and the capacity of the implementing organisations (including social capital, strong leadership and the apparent respect accorded them by communities). This allowed UNICRI to support a hugely diverse portfolio of initiatives “which offered a context-specific analysis of local conflict dynamic, grievances and groups at risk, targeted extremely diverse groups of stakeholders and were implemented in different political, social, economic and geographical environments” (UNICRI, 2020, p. 16).

However, the risk with the approach taken by UNICRI was that not all implementing organisations were sufficiently skilled in problem analysis and project design. Faced with a multiplicity of complex, interconnected and urgent community grievances, some were tempted to overcommit. Speaking of a project in Mauritania the evaluators concluded that “the sheer ambition, not coupled with a more-nuanced conflict analysis, failed to channel the positive energy for change into a well-connected and structured enough project design” (UNICRI, 2020, p. 73).

An analysis of youth employment opportunities was undertaken by the PDEV II team in the Niger, to maximise the chance that vocational training would help the participants to find a job or set themselves up in business (PDEV II key informant interview). This built on learning from the first phase of PDEV programming which found that vocational training topics were not always sufficiently matched to market demand, causing frustration for young people (USAID, 2011). UNICRI projects that offered vocational training typically included employment market research in their work planning, but in practice few of them found the time or human resources to undertake take such studies (UNICRI key informant interview). As noted elsewhere, there was insufficient data from both programmes about the outcomes of vocational training in terms of subsequent employment or self-employment of the young men and women beneficiaries.

Programmatic factors also played an important role in determining the success of programmes. The evaluation points out that the intensity of programming mattered when comparing the impact of PDEV II. A comparison of high-intensity zones, where relatively more programme activities were implemented, versus low-intensity zones, revealed greater impacts in the zones where the programme was most active. Programme intensity was one of the factors potentially explaining the relative success in Burkina Faso that emerged from the country-specific analysis (Box 1).

Programmatic scope was another factor. Qualitative analysis in the evaluation shows that while PDEV II activities had positive effects, they were often more limited in scope than local residents would have wished. The evaluation found
that activities “generated increased community awareness, sensitization, and public dialogue, reinforcing social cohesion. Livelihood support activities, such as vocational training and improved youth opportunities, were found to increase perceptions of self-sufficiency and family support” (USAID, 2018, p. 12). However, respondents stated that the PDEV II activities “reached too small a group of beneficiaries, with limited access for many in the community due to the program’s youth focus” (ibid.). In all, 1,506 young men and women benefited from vocational training and internships funded by PDEV II in the three countries over five years.

Findings from one of the UNICRI projects also confirmed the view that scope and duration matter. For a project in Mauritania, the short duration of the project “did not allow for relationships established during the project to be consolidated or for messages to be adequately received and acted upon” (UNICRI, 2020, p. 73). Over five years, the UNICRI programme funded a total 83 initiatives with an average duration of 18 months (UNICRI, 2020, p. xi).

Relational factors also emerged as central to the success of the programmes. For PDEV II, the performance review pointed out that during the last two years of the programme, much more effort was made to engage the national ministries in activities such as public campaigns for peaceful elections; support of education, particularly for girls; and technical training for youth. The increased support of ministries including the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Youth Employment, the Ministry of Communications and the Prime Minister resulted in greater visibility for the programme and a wider impact of many of the activities. As such, the review recommended that it was important to “build and maintain strong bonds with government and local leadership” in an effort to build trust with the local community (USAID, 2016, p. 35).

For the UNICRI project, a key conclusion of the evaluation is that it is only through the engagement and commitment of governmental institutions at the appropriate level (national, regional, local) that the structural causes underlying the drivers of radicalisation can be addressed and that the “durability of launched initiatives [can be ensured] in a systemic way” (UNICRI, 2020, p. 72). The report pointed out that involving government bodies can, however, be time-consuming, and that there is a need to advocate for a particular cause and the reasons for which government resources – financial or personnel – should be allocated to it (UNICRI, 2020, p. 72).

Moreover, the degree to which the programme worked across social strata, taking into account relationships across age, gender, and employment demographics, determined the success of the programme. For the UNICRI project, the report noted that the inclusion of women in activities was inadequate, both in terms of overall numbers participating and in some programme decisions. In the case of one
project, which taught female preachers on their constitutionally guaranteed rights in preparation for them to become trainers for imams on this topic, these female preachers were not subsequently engaged as trainers in a follow-on course for imams on the constitutionally guaranteed rights of women (UNICRI, 2020, p. 73).

With regards to PDEV II, there were indications that efforts to improve to improve interpersonal trust are most effective when they unite different social strata. Overall, programming in Burkina Faso “seemed to be particularly effective in disseminating messages of peace across communities: focus group respondents in Ouahigouya, for example, cite this as one of the strengths of the program”. However, this successful outcome was not achieved everywhere:

 [...] participants in Gorom-Gorom in Burkina Faso and in Niamey, Niger note that activities tended to focus solely on the youth, where interpersonal trust is not in great deficit, but to neglect relationships across age, gender, and employment demographics (USAID, 2018, p. 34).

No explanation was given for this apparent difference in approach between project areas. It is tempting to surmise that it may be linked to differences between localities in the intensity and effectiveness of radio programming, which disseminates messages more broadly across the community, but unfortunately there is insufficient data to confirm this.

Where an effort was made to include women, the results were consistently seen as positive. A number of implementing organisations in the UNICRI project reported that “outspoken messages of peace by female members of the community can act as a strong deterrent to terrorist groups’ recruitment success” (UNICRI, 2019, p. 31). However, since no reasons were recorded as to why this was the case, this is a general conclusion, and should be interpreted with caution (UNICRI key informant interview).

Reflecting on PDEV II, one respondent stressed that it is always critical to include women and girls in programmes to prevent violent extremism, even when socio-economic factors limit their sphere of influence to, for example, their family and social networks: 

If a badly intentioned individual comes into a community, the first people he encounters are likely to be women. Where can he find a restaurant or a woman to cook for him? Where can he get water? Women can undoubtedly be won over to the cause and [on the other hand] women can be real assets in prevention (PDEV II key informant interview).
Inclusion needs to go beyond setting targets for women’s participation. PDEV II activities are described as “gender conscious and integrated to ensure broad participation and maximum impact” (USAID, 2017, p. 11) and former employees recalled a minimum 35% gender-mix target for all activities, adding that this also implied 35% participation by men in activities specifically targeting women. However, project reports show only limited overall progress towards achieving this target. In terms of underlying causes, they mention only that “a constant refrain was that women remain constrained by the strong influence of men over household and community decisions” (USAID, 2018, p. 92).

UNICRI set an ambitious 50 percent target for women’s participation, which the projects, as a whole, failed to meet. Many reported finding it hard to get women to attend events led by men. More than once, this was said to be because of opposition from their families. In a few cases, young men were reluctant to participate in activities in mixed-gender groups.

Of the different mitigation strategies developed by some UNICRI partners, the evaluation noted that “activities involving women and led by women had an initial advantage” (UNICRI 2019, p. 19). To send the correct message, programmes need to carefully choose the local partner who will facilitate women’s participation (do they have women in positions of responsibility; do they practise the values they promote?). Promotional events to explain project activities and their objectives to the wider community can build trust and acceptance for women to participate (UNICRI, 2019, p. 45). Programme staff and visiting consultants (well-respected older men in particular) repeatedly raising the issue of women’s participation helped to highlight its importance, and encouraged implementing partners to continue with efforts to identify effective strategies (UNICRI key informant interview).

More broadly, the most successful strategies for engagement, regardless of gender, were found to be those which:

- use a participatory approach that empowers the young men and women to make decisions and to lead local initiatives (peers influence peers);
- foster debate on values and principles (dignity, self-worth, recognition, emancipation) and encourage young men and women to develop a vision for their future;
- support and fund youth-run organisations directly (UNICRI, 2020, p. 85) with a particular focus on those with a track record of active engagement on such issues, using flexible funding mechanisms that recognise their possibly limited capacity to produce narrative and financial reports (UNICRI key informant interview).
Activities implemented by the UNICRI-supported projects that adopted these strategies included:

- street theatre performances – developed by young men and women and based on real experiences – that highlighted the role of women in creating a modern state based on tolerance, thus raising awareness and initiating debates;

- peace-building initiatives designed and led by ‘social minors’: ethnic minorities, women, unemployed men, returnee and host communities;

- sport, music events, eco-days: social events aligning different groups around a non-controversial issue such as planting trees, sanitation, or garbage collection.

PDEV II used a similar youth-empowering approach to support the emergence of a network of youth leaders through training and material support in leadership, participatory theatre, mobile cinema, social media and political empowerment. No gender-disaggregated data or insights are given regarding this youth network. Some vocational training courses were specifically organised for women (e.g. in tailoring, and in catering and food service) although, compared to young men, the number of women attending vocational training was low. Successful trainees were awarded certificates of course completion and given start-up kits with the tools needed to earn a living; this was done at a public ceremony attended by religious and other community leaders who gave messages of approval and encouragement to the young men and women to begin earning a living using their newly acquired skills (USAID, 2015).

6.3. Key lessons learned

In addition to the conclusions above, the review has pointed out four key lessons learned across the two programmes:

1. **Formulaic approaches to combating radicalisation in the Sahel don’t go far enough.** In the interviews, respondents pointed out that there is a need to recognize the fluidity and non-linearity of radicalism in the Sahel as well as the intersections between push and pull factors in understanding pathways to radicalisation. It is also important to take into account those in between or about to join ‘radical groups’ – the “fallen”, as one respondent reflecting on the USAID PDEV II programme described it. He added:

   [...] the approach was preventative; all the target groups were identified in terms of prevention. But a part of the community had already ‘fallen’. So, the programme lacked a component that targeted the young people that had already gone over [to the side of the radicals] and rehabilitated them. So not just how to stop young people
going but also how to get them back? Through the program we had young people who served as good examples (models) and who were prepared to go and talk to their peers who had gone over [been radicalized]. Unfortunately, it was by then the end of the program (PDEV II key informant interview).

2. Limited planning for exit after the completion of a project means that impact of the programme is diluted. As one respondent mentioned:

What was lacking was PDEV III. We built a foundation and we left it after 5 years. It was only in years 3, 4 and 5, it took that long, for people to understand the need for interventions of this type in the Sahel and Niger in particular. Just at the point where all the beneficiaries were starting to appreciate PDEV II, it ended. There was no recommendation about the capitalization of all the experiences of PDEV II; no way to build on the achievements (PDEV II key informant interview).

The UNICRI programme evaluation identified engagement with government institutions at appropriate national, regional and local levels as a critical factor for long-term success, while recognising that there are multiple ways to achieve this – the choice of which will depend on the context:

The very real grievances are structural in nature: they point to problems of governance, education, economy, security, whereas the effort mounted has been through grass-root organisations from these communities’ civil society. It can thus be expected that more sustainable measures can be put in place either through continued, persevering and committed work of the grass-root organisations pursuing societal change until such time as the governmental structures take up their cause, or through their rapprochement early on and collaboration with the administrative structures (UNICRI, 2020, p. 69).

The initiatives funded under the UNICRI programme were very diverse; some worked more closely with government institutions, others not at all. UNICRI itself, however, did not attempt to influence state organisations directly. Instead, the theory of change was that the local organisations, supported by the programme, would engage with and be able to communicate problems to the state. The programme only facilitated this through their contacts; so that, for example, local partners could hold focus group discussions with state authorities or follow up invitations sent to state authorities to attend municipal events (UNICRI key informant interview).

Consultations between multiple stakeholders can help to highlight the need for broader system changes. PDEV II in the Niger ran a consultative process in 2016 (the final programme year) that brought together religious and traditional leaders, youth, parents, CSO leaders, national and international NGOs, regional chambers of commerce, and local government officials under the broad theme of Public Programs to Educate Youth on Employment and Self-Employment Opportunities.
Participants identified the major causes of youth unemployment and discussed how the different stakeholders – from parents to government institutions – could work together towards addressing the multiple issues faced by young people. Religious leaders, with financial and technical support from PDEV II, had begun to put these ideas into practice as part of the Zinder Action plan, but no information is given on how these activities were funded once PDEV II ended (USAID, 2017, p. 28).

Institutionalisation of change may require engagement beyond a five–year project timescale. In the Niger, USAID Partnerships for Peace was subsequently able to accompany the Government of the Niger in developing a national strategy for the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism (adopted 12 Feb 2021) that is attached to the Prime Minister’s office, via the national mechanism for security/military early warning. The strategy was developed with technical assistance of a former PDEV II team leader and the five–year Action Plan (2021–2025) includes a youth programme which builds on learning from PDEV II (PDEV II key informant interview).

3. **Investing and enabling young people and communities has positive long–term gains, and this needs to be documented to account for impact.**

Interviews confirmed that investing in and enabling youth leadership and community ownership have positive long–term gains. One respondent, reflecting on PDEV II, stated the following: “In my current post in all my meetings, I travel to all the regions [of the Niger], and everywhere I go I encounter young leaders who were trained and coached by PDEV” (PDEV II key informant interview).

PDEV II reporting of vocational training and other employment–related work was, however, essentially limited to output indicators (e.g. numbers trained by age and sex). The evaluation report contains a few selected success stories describing people who gained employment or started small businesses using project–provided skills and resources, but they give no indication of how widespread or durable such outcomes were, nor any insights into other non–project factors that contributed to employment successes or failures. The end–line impact assessment, on the other hand, looked at changes in two high–level (long–term) outcome indicators for this sub–goal area: community perceptions of 1) expectations of employment and 2) access to vocational schools.

With no systematic study of outcomes during implementation, the programme was unable to provide strong evidence for impact on youth employment; nor was it able to tell a convincing story of progress towards the desired end–line impacts. For example, it could not probe or provide insights into how programme activities affected the educational or employment aspirations of young men and women and, possibly more importantly, the attitudes of their parents and the broader
community to women’s education and employment. Measuring changes over time can offer critical insights into programme components that are effectively contributing to long-term goals and help to identify programme gaps or shortfalls that need to be addressed to maximise impact. A study carried out by the UNICRI programme concluded that “local perceptions of the violent extremism need to inform any successful assistance programme”. Reflecting how this might be achieved, the evaluators recommended that:

Measuring how views of a multitude on critical topics change over time can offer important insights into the effects of projects as well as wider societal interventions. Even the most modest tools for detecting changes in perceptions and observing the direction of such changes can offer critical knowledge for better understanding local community (UNICRI, 2020, p. 96).

4. Who implements activities and how they go about it are as important for project success as what they actually do.

In sensitive situations, selecting implementing partners is particularly critical. Lessons from the UNICRI programme indicate that programmes which address the structural causes of vulnerability or marginalisation are best led by “people that have earned the trust of the community over years of advocating for the issue”. For those that address perceived grievances, strong personal investment is a key selection criterion, so that “programmes are led by people that, should it fail, put personal reputation at risk” (UNICRI, 2019, p. 43).

While the people who meet these criteria may often come from older age groups, there were many examples in the UNICRI programme of young men and young women who were able successfully to lead local initiatives, having gained the trust and respect of their peers through their engagement advocating for the issue over several years, before the programme arrived. In Tunisia a young woman no older than 35 ran a very successful project using art to communicate critical thinking and political awareness: an example of using young people to inspire young people more effectively than if it were older people telling them what to do (UNICRI key informant interview).

Where implementing organisations have no previous involvement with target communities it takes time and care to build trust, as one respondent reflecting on PDEV II noted:

It was a painstaking process to get to the point where communities would speak openly without fear of attack or harassment. We found the best way to address these challenges is to work with structures in the community that serve as entry points or key resource persons who are trusted. [The media component] worked through ‘community reporters’ – local trusted residents who were our point of entry (PDEV II key informant interview).
A participatory approach can contribute to the trust-building process while helping people to understand their context and to build a vision of success:

[PDEV II] started with a research-learning process. We talked with people in all the localities where we were to work – discuss/identify/understand all the issues that make up the factors that push people to radicalization. There are the big theories but there are also local realities. In this way we were able to identify all the issues of concern. We then used this as our starting point to create opportunities for people to dialogue with local authorities with the aim of finding agreement on solutions to the issues they face (PDEV II key informant interview).

Stressing that learning is not limited to project start-up, the respondent added:

One of the strengths of PDEV II was its learning-adapting approach with regular sessions where we reviewed progress and challenged our approach: how could we do better? This was important to progressively adapt and improve our approach (PDEV II key informant interview).

Learning from across the UNICRI projects indicates that the types of interventions most likely to be effective in strengthening the resilience of a community to violent extremism also include the following in their approach (UNICRI, 2019, p. 43):

- Make clear references to cultural specificities and, in particular, to the chief ingredient of communities’ lives (in the case of the context of the UNICRI projects, Islamic teachings).

- Create opportunities to engage with the communities on frequent occasions over a longer period of time, building their confidence and engagement.

- Encourage critical thinking through programme activities that develop or reinforce cognitive skills to recognise manipulation and differentiate facts from opinions, rendering individual members of the community more resilient.
6.4. Conclusions

The programme review makes four key conclusions about counter-radicalisation programming that focuses on generating employment and livelihood opportunities for youth:

**Context** – First, the review confirms existing analysis that various forms of radicalisation, militancy, violence and terrorism, Islamist and non-Islamist, emerge from local conditions and the specific lived experience of people living in the Sahel region (Charbonneau, 2017; Dowd, 2015). It also points out that programmes that seek to address the root causes of radicalisation need to be informed by a deep understanding of the local context which not only varies from one country to another in the Sahel but also from one region or locality to another.

**Consistency** – Second, it shows that consistency in the delivery of a programme can play an important role in its success. Other factors include the intensity of the programme itself. High intensity programmes can have a larger impact, as the USAID PDEV II programme in Burkina Faso pointed out (USAID, 2018).

**Scope** – Third, the review shows that a programme’s scope can determine its impact. The ability to target and reach different social groups, including but not limited to youth, can help maximize its impact and, potentially, contribute to long-term gains.

**Trust** – Fourth, strengthening trust in delivering counter-radicalisation programmes is an important factor in its success. This can be done through taking into account relational factors at the intersections between the programme staff, instruments and channels for communication, partnerships and the recipients/participants in the programme.
The intersection between socioeconomic conditions and youth radicalisation
Implications for programming in the G5 Sahel countries
7.1 Key learning points

Based on a review of the evidence on drivers of radicalisation in the Sahel region as well as the ‘light touch’ review, this report makes the following six key learning points:

1. **Drivers of radicalisation in the Sahel are geographically specific.** Therefore, rather than framing the drivers of radicalisation in a hierarchical manner, they need to be analysed and combated spatially through an in-depth understanding of contextual needs and priorities. This includes recognising interconnections across spaces and borders.

2. **Women experience, participate and combat radicalisation in ways that warrant closer attention and examination.** While, like men, women join armed groups for a variety of reasons (sometimes by force and sometimes by choice), women’s engagement with armed groups reveals that membership can offer opportunities and status that may not usually be open to women within society. As the light touch programme revealed, ambitious targets relating to women’s participation in programming do not always translate into long-term engagement of women tackling radicalisation. This is despite the fact that the literature and the evidence from counter-radicalisation programming both show that women can act as key agents in the recruitment of men into armed groups. Programming will have to consider how it navigates cultural sensitivities such as opposition from families and male participants to women’s involvement, and where women’s engagement is constrained by the dominance of men in decision-making at both the household and community level. Programming will also have to analyse how and why women are key to preventing male radicalisation, rather than just assuming that is the case.
3. The state can be part of the problem and/or the solution. The actions and policies of states can both contribute to and counter radicalisation processes. International actors need to get better at engaging state bodies strategically in counter-radicalisation programmes. Lessons from both the PDEV II and UNICRI programmes reveal that in order for a programme to have a long-term impact, working with the state is crucial. However, as evidence from the literature has shown, the state can be part of the problem. Therefore, when working with the state, FAO must be cognisant of ways in which certain state actions drive radicalisation. Whilst FAO has no mandate to work directly with governments’ security forces or to change the ways in which they act, there are other entities within the state, such as the Forest Service, that FAO may be in a position to work with. It is important for programming staff and implementers to recognise where they may be working with a part of the state that contributes to grievances, and to consider how to leverage this relationship to improve the way that a specific entity performs in order to avoid further radicalisation.

4. Common framings used to address and counter radicalisation processes can be ill-suited to the Sahel and need to be rethought in light of existing evidence. The experience of radicalisation in this region, for example, tends to be tied to community expectations rather than an individual undertaking. Where we see active conflict zones, the decision to engage in armed violence is often part of the collective mobilisation of a community, in response to factors such as experienced violence, perceived marginalisation and deep-rooted grievances and the need for protection. Therefore, in contexts such as the Sahel, programming may be more effective at targeting the reasons why communities engage in violence rather than focusing on individual motivations.

Understanding what motivates communities to support armed groups is politically sensitive, especially as communities may fear attack or harassment. As the counter-radicalisation programmes reviewed have shown, one way of overcoming this is to work with structures within the community that act as entry points, or identifying trusted members of the community. The latter is important, as ‘the community’ is not a single identity, and trust might not be equally shared throughout the community.

5. The devil is in the programmatic details. A programme’s scale, reach and targeting methods can be critical to its impact. Evidence from the literature shows that there is no one ‘risk’ profile when it comes to those deciding to join armed groups, which may counter common approaches within P/CVE programming. It is important that programming understands the various pathways through which individuals become connected to armed groups, and
avoid risk-profiling all young people as a threat. Furthermore, programming needs to account for both inter and intra community grievances, which are often directed towards traditional forms of authority. Related to all these points – as evidence from the ‘light touch’ programme shows – the ability to work across social strata, accounting for relationships across age and gender, may be critical to a programme’s success.

6. **Consistency and a long-term vision are necessary** to reap the rewards of a counter-radicalisation programme. Existing evaluations of P/CVE programming highlight that approaching the issue through employment carries certain risks, including unmet expectations. To avoid such risks, given the short-term nature of P/CVE programming, approaching the issue of youth employment might be better served through interventions targeting long-term economic development. This means creating the conditions that are conducive to long-term youth employment and helping them overcome the barriers that prevent them from achieving this. As evidence from the literature shows, some young people can be vulnerable when they have limited options. This includes those transitioning out of rural livelihoods, where accessing the urban job market leaves them at risk of exploitation. Therefore, having access to ‘good’ social networks is key.

### 7.2 Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** *Because the nature of the radicalisation problem varies from place to place across the Sahel, very different interventions will be needed in different places.*

This will be a challenge for a regional or even a national programme, since the programme will have to be seen more as an umbrella for different sets of activities geared to a shared broad objective than as a set of activities spread across the country or region.

- Operating areas or zones should be chosen carefully, and a specific set of interventions should then be designed for each one. Operating areas should be chosen where there is good in-depth understanding of the drivers and the nature of radicalisation.

- It is normal to recommend that a programme should be designed ‘with a good understanding of the context’. Here, this needs to be taken much more seriously and implemented far more deeply, since the context is the problem being addressed. Programme design must be based on a good analysis of the problem from two angles: the different economic constraints and opportunities faced by
different people (e.g. of different ages, sex/gender, wealth, location, ethnicity, etc.) which can be addressed by FAO, and which underlie any sense of grievance, perception of unfairness or hopelessness in the future; and the politics and institutional factors that shape those economic constraints and opportunities, and which will determine whether and how FAO can usefully intervene.

Because different issues may underpin the problem in different places, it is highly unlikely that the programme will immediately be able to successfully identify the best strategies and techniques to achieve its objectives in each place where the programme is implemented. Programme success will depend on how well FAO and its partners can learn from their ongoing experience and adapt the programme in the light of lessons learned. This will be particularly important because changes are likely to occur in the security or socio-economic context. For most programmes, adaptive management can rely on ‘single-loop learning’, adjusting the strategies and techniques as lessons are learnt from results. This programme, however, would benefit more from ‘double-loop learning’ – demonstrated in Figure 3, below – where experience is used to periodically re-evaluate the conceptualisation of the problem itself and the very assumptions on which the programme is based (Valters et al., 2016).

The variability in the nature of the problem being addressed from one place to another will also pose a challenge for the lesson-learning built into the programme design. It will not always be helpful to think in terms of specific strategies or activities which have proved more or less successful, since these will not necessarily be appropriate to addressing the problem in a different place. It may be more useful to learn lessons about successes and failures in the ways in which local understanding of the problem has been used to design the overall approach and to design the implementation strategy.

The variability of the problem and the need for double-loop learning present a particular challenge for monitoring and evaluation. Disaggregation by age/generation, sex/gender etc. are important, but much more than this will be needed. A really good understanding of the local situation (including its politics and power relations; relationships between communities; relations within communities, e.g. gender and inter-generational relations) will be needed in order to determine which parameters to use as indicators and how to interpret them. A plan for monitoring and evaluating needs to be developed afresh for understanding activity sets in each area.
Recommendation 2. **Because there is no one driver of radicalisation and no single profile of people most likely to be radicalised, programmes need to have the breadth to work on several issues with different people.**

They should have the capacity to address different causes of resentment or reasons for joining groups, targeting different profiles of people and addressing relational issues in communities, rather than simply giving assistance to people who fit the most obvious profile of vulnerability (such as young men).

Because the individuals who join armed groups are not always acting alone, FAO needs to look at the wider picture, including drivers at the community level of resentment, radicalisation or engagement. Local problem analysis should look for potential entry points that look at communities and at community- or local-level institutions.
Programming needs to recognise that different factors may be incentivising women to join or support armed groups (including by encouraging men to join). This may involve designing programmes that specifically target drivers related to women of different age or status. Addressing drivers specifically related to women’s engagement with armed groups does not, of course, necessarily mean engaging only or even primarily with women. A box-ticking exercise which simply stipulates how many women will be targeted by generic activities will not help achieve objectives.

Programmes which only deliver assistance to a small number of direct beneficiaries are unlikely to change community dynamics, economic opportunities or any sense of grievance. Indeed, where this entrenches feelings of marginalisation by those left out of the programme, it may even exacerbate a problem. It may be better to find ways of working which are inclusive, changing the nature of opportunity for a wider population group. This will not be the easiest way for an aid programme to achieve deliverables on the number of people receiving vocational training or given short-term employment on Cash for Work.

Recommendation 3. **Engage closely – but cautiously and strategically – with state and other actors.**

FAO would always expect to work closely with the government, and it would always be important to leverage the capacities of the state for economic development (including the state’s capacity to offer services such as land administration, education and training, agricultural research, etc.) and its implementation capacity for investment in infrastructure or public works. Because one of the drivers of radicalisation is a perception of a hostile or ineffective state, this project has to treat its relationship with the state and the government much more carefully.

In some operating areas, one of the objectives of the project may be to help change the relationship between part of the local population and a state agency or the government, which may be best brought about by helping the government or state to improve its responsiveness. Any such objective would need to be chosen with care and be based on a deep familiarity with the power dynamics of various government branches and their relationship to local populations. FAO may want to work closely with a state agency to help it to change but, at the same time, to avoid the reputational risk of being associated with an agency which is perceived negatively. Choices about how to work with government therefore need to be made carefully and be monitored closely: such monitoring should go beyond the ability to deliver project outputs and would need to consider perceptions and relationships as well.
The analysis will also have to consider which state institutions/departments, and at which level, have potential capacity to work effectively and to be supported.

FAO does not have the ability to achieve change, at the scale needed, on its own; it will have to work in partnership with others, and also act as a facilitator or catalyst of change for others. This means that FAO will need to take a position that considers the ‘change it can be a part of’ before the ‘things it can do’. It should look for, and capitalise on, areas of complementarity with both local and other international actors.

FAO should consider where it has influencing capacity and leverage and how to support already existing capacities, including within local businesses and civil society organizations, as well as with governments and state agencies.

The same cautions may be needed in partnerships with non-state organisations. FAO will need to do more due diligence than would normally be expected to understand how different organisations, institutions or companies are perceived and trusted by different parts of the population.

Recommendation 4. Adopt a long-term outlook and focus on achievable objectives.

It is obvious that FAO cannot expect to see measurable change in recruitment to armed groups within the project’s lifetime. This does not mean it cannot offer any contribution to addressing the problem.

Short-term impacts will not necessarily lead to sustainable economic improvements, and they are unlikely to contribute to any improvement in the social contract between citizens and state and radicalisation. The programme should design and implement interventions that can contribute to long-term socio-economic change. This means identifying critical features of the local economy which are amenable to change, and which will create systemic or transformative change in economic opportunities.

It is obviously not realistic to expect the FAO programme to have a measurable impact on radicalisation or on entry into armed groups within its time frame. It will not be helpful to monitor the programme against an unrealistic standard. The drivers of radicalisation vary, as described above. Many of these underlying causes (lack of economic opportunity, exclusion, top-down and unresponsive state action) are worth addressing in their own right. They should be the primary focus of the project, both in its design and during its monitoring and evaluation.
FAO should therefore design, monitor and evaluate the programme by reference to economic justice (and perceptions of economic justice) rather than either focusing on increasing short-term employment or on decreasing recruitment to armed groups.

It would be a standard recommendation for most economic programmes that they should worry about inclusivity. Again, though, this programme needs to take this concern to a far deeper level, since the lack of inclusivity of economic opportunity is part of the very problem it is trying to address. FAO and its partners should go beyond measuring inclusivity by the identity of its direct beneficiaries (e.g. by gender, poverty status, ethnic identity). The objective of many of its activity sets should be to change the inclusivity of the ‘system’, i.e. how different people are affected by the functioning of the local economy (including, for example, access to land rights, education and training, and job opportunities), and where unfairness is perceived.

In some areas, it might be worth considering ways to include civic education within the other activities.

Engaging with the humanitarian–development nexus can provide a useful entry point to engage and build trust with beneficiaries and local authorities. However, thinking longer term: humanitarian action is targeted only based on need, while this programme needs to be targeted based on a political understanding. Humanitarian action is short-term and reactive to acute needs, while this programme needs to be long-term and strategic. If FAO is engaging in humanitarian assistance in the region, it should think very carefully before making any links between that and this programme.
References

Studies reviewed under the REA


de Montclos, M. 2018. ‘The only good jihadist is a dead jihadist: Boko Haram and de–radicalisation around Lake Chad’, Small Wars and Insurgencies, 29 (5–6), pp. 863–885.


Mercy Corp. 2017. We hope and we fight: youth, communities and violence in Mali. Washington, DC: Mercy Corp.


General literature not assessed; used for framing arguments:


Cramer, C., Goodhand, J. and Morris, R. 2016. Evidence synthesis: what interventions have been effective in preventing or mitigating armed violence in developing and middle-income countries? London: Department for International Development.


OCSE. 2019. Understanding the role of gender in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism: good practices for law enforcement. Vienna: OCSE.


**Literature from the ‘light touch’ programme review:**


Annex 1
REÁ methodology

The REÁ used to assess the evidence on the intersection between socio-economic factors and radicalisation in the Sahel employed a four-stage approach:

Stage 1 – Development of a set of key search terms

The research team identified a set of relevant key search terms in both French and English, which were used to search academic databases. This process involved an initial search to determine the effectiveness of the chosen terms and removal of those deemed to be ineffective.

Stage 2 – Deciding the inclusion and exclusion criteria

The team developed a set of criteria (see table below) that was used to define the parameters from which literature identified in the search was either included or excluded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inclusion criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>English or French</td>
<td>Not in English or French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Complete title</td>
<td>Incomplete title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication date</td>
<td>2016–2021</td>
<td>Pre-2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication type</td>
<td>Journal articles, working papers, other academic research, evaluations, discussion papers, books, book chapter</td>
<td>Other (e.g. student paper, dissertation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim of study</td>
<td>Focused on those populations at risk of radicalisation in G5 Sahel countries and northern Nigeria OR identifying the links between socio-economic indicators and radicalised ideas in G5 Sahel countries and northern Nigeria OR interventions targeting de-radicalisation in G5 Sahel countries and northern Nigeria</td>
<td>Those not focused on those populations at risk of radicalisation in G5 Sahel countries and northern Nigeria OR identifying the links between socio-economic indicators and radicalised ideas in G5 Sahel countries and northern Nigeria OR interventions targeting radicalisation in G5 Sahel countries and northern Nigeria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study design</td>
<td>Primary research (quantitative and qualitative) OR systematic reviews</td>
<td>Either lacking explanation of methodology OR secondary literature review OR theoretical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stage 3 – Retrieval of data

The retrieval of data included a three-phase system. The first was a literature search using the keywords identified in stage one. Both Google Scholar and EBSCO were used to search English literature, and Google Scholar and Cairn for French literature. The results were recorded in Excel.

The second retrieval process focused on capturing grey literature using institutional websites. Although Google Scholar results do include entries that would be classed as grey literature, these results are often dominated by academic studies. Therefore, to ensure that the search captured enough of the grey literature, the research team identified a small list of relevant institutional websites in order to capture relevant published material.

From the literature captured in the literature search a screening of the results was carried out based on the inclusion/exclusion parameters listed in Stage 2, above. The first round of screening assessed the literature based on their titles and abstracts. For literature to be considered relevant, it had to meet all of the inclusion criteria. For literature to be excluded it only needed to meet one of the exclusion criteria. The second round of screening involved an assessment based on the full text using the same inclusion/exclusion criteria as round one.

The final retrieval process involved snowballing, which consisted of three processes. The first involved the team identifying a small sample of what are considered the most relevant studies in the literature search and identifying relevant studies within their reference lists. The second process involved engaging with experts known to the team for recommendations of relevant literature. Finally, the team also used its expertise in this field to identify a set of authors well known for their research on armed group dynamics in the Sahel, to ensure their studies were also captured.
Stage 4 – Categorising the quality of the assessments

In order to ensure that we were drawing our conclusions from research based on reliable methods, the team coded and categorised the literature based on the six principles for quality assessment developed by Cramer et al. (2016) in an earlier REA looking at interventions targeting conflict prevention and mitigation. The following table outlines the six principles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual framing</td>
<td>Does the study acknowledge existing research? Does the study pose a research question or outline a hypothesis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Is it clear what is the geography/context in which the study was conducted? Does the study present or link to the raw data it analyses? Does the study declare sources of support/funding? How clear is the study about the quality (and limitations on quality) of the primary data, how clear is it about sampling decisions and site selection, etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of method</td>
<td>Does the study identify a research design and data-collection and analysis methods? Does the study demonstrate why the chosen design and method are well suited to the research?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>To what extent is the study internally valid (valid in terms of where the research was done)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/context sensitivity</td>
<td>Does the study explicitly consider any context-specific cultural factors that may bias the analysis/findings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cogency</td>
<td>To what extent does the author consider the study’s limitations and/or alternative interpretations of the analysis? Are the conclusions clearly based on the study’s results (rather than on theory, assumptions or policy priorities)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each publication, the research team assigned a score of 1–3 against each of the six principles, where a score of 3 represented no concerns; a 2 indicated some concerns; and a 1 major concerns. Each publication was then given an aggregate score ranging from 6 to 18, and was categorised according to the following:

- A score of 6–10: publication considered to be low quality
- A score of 11–14: publication is considered to be moderate quality
- A score of 15–18: publication is considered to be high quality
## Annex 2

### Programmes considered under the ‘light touch’ programme review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Stabilisation Activities in Northern Niger (COSINN) and 3S Initiative</td>
<td>IOM/UNCCD</td>
<td>A pilot project being implemented by IOM in coordination with the UNCCD, the COSINN project aims to contribute to stability in the region through support to the local economy, improving access to basic infrastructure and strengthening community cohesion. The project aims to address both radicalisation and the reintegration of migrants in their countries of origins, through activities such as cash for work and job creation combined with agricultural training and land restoration projects. Appears that the initial offer is skills-based training, but with the long-term aim of securing a plot of land with tenure rights for individuals who pass through the work. This will include financial support until the land becomes productive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agadez Pilot project – Restoring degraded lands to create jobs for migrant reintegration in West Africa and prevent radicalisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger Community Cohesion Initiative</td>
<td>IOM/USAID/GIZ</td>
<td>Phase 1 of the project was implemented by IOM and USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI). The stated aims of the project were to ‘strengthen youth resilience to violent extremist organizations (VEOs), increase local leaders’ effectiveness in addressing these threats and prepare communities in Diffa for the reintegration of ex-combatants.’ Proposal documentation from USAID shows a specific focus on youth living in Diffa and radicalisation/recruitment linked to Boko Haram.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 2 was launched in August 2020 and will again be implemented by IOM with funding from the German Federal Foreign Office and will run until December 2021. It will be implemented in Diffa, Tillaberi and Tahoua, which have been identified as lacking opportunities for youth and vulnerable to armed group recruitment. Activities include vocational training and cash for work opportunities.

**Geography:**
Phase 1: Agadez, Tillaberi and Diffa, the Niger  
Phase 2: Diffa, Tillaberi and Tahoua, the Niger

**Duration:**
Phase 1: 2014–2020  
Phase 2: 2020–2022

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**Programme name**
Support for the vocational training and integration of young girls and boys in Agadez and Zinder to contribute to the economic development of the two regions

**Organisation:** LuxDev

**Description:** This project forms part of the activity stream ‘Greater Economic and Employment Opportunities’, under the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa – Sahel and Lake Chad (EUTF). The project aims to support the professional integration of youth through the development of professional skills. It also seeks to increase the capacity of both public and private actors in the Niger to implement their own training courses, tailored to the needs of the local economy. Although the project does not refer to radicalisation, it does refer to the need to reduce reliance on the economic activities connected to the people smuggling economy.

**Geography:** Agadez and Zinder, the Niger

**Duration:** 2017–

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**Programme name**
Creation of employment and economic opportunities through sustainable management of the environment in zones of transit and departure

**Organisation:** SNV, MAECI DGCS and Enabel

**Description:** Similar to the previous project, this project sits under the EUTF Sahel and Lake Chad component focused on ‘Greater Economic and Employment Opportunities’. Its focus is to support an environmentally sustainable local economy and includes vocational and skills-based training and ‘start up grants’ for small/medium-sized enterprises, in an attempt to address both out-migration and forced displacement. It states that it will focus on what it describes as the ‘most economically vulnerable’, which includes women, young people, unemployed and rural communities.
While the primary focus is on migration and does not include a direct reference to connections between the project’s aims and youth radicalisation, it does make the following statement in its contextual analysis which suggests it is part of their thinking:

▶ The lack of professional occupation and poverty result in the disintegration and destabilization of the social fabric: this makes the population weaker and more vulnerable not only to irregular migration but also to external threats such as membership of terrorist groups.

**Geography:** Agadez, Tahoua and Zinder, the Niger

**Duration:** 2017–

**Programme name**

European Union neighbours pilot project on countering radicalisation and violent extremism in the Sahel–Mahreb region

**Organisation:** European Union

**Description:** This programme runs de-radicalisation programmes in countries in both the Sahel and Maghreb regions. It doesn’t appear to be focused on employment opportunities or vocational training. Instead, it aims to build the capacity of local civil society actors, to help strengthen the ability of their communities to counter radicalisation. It will also include a ‘test and evaluate’ component, which aims to document lessons learned and best practices implemented by civil society actors.

**Geography:** Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger

**Duration:** 2015–2021

**Programme name**

USAID/West Africa P/CVE programming

**Organisation:** USAID

**Description:** In addition to the joint programme above with IOM, USAID runs a number of P/CVE programmes in the region. This includes the ‘Peace through Development’ programme, which aims to strengthen the ability of communities in Burkina Faso, Chad and the Niger to counter radicalisation. It includes several activities: amplifying moderate voices; increasing civil society capacity; strengthening local government through organised community entities; and creation of livelihood opportunities for youth through vocational and entrepreneurial training.

**Geography:** Region–wide

**Duration:** 2012–
Programme name
Improving employment and income opportunities (ProEMPLOI) – vocational training for start-ups in Niger

Organisation: GIZ

Description: Similar to previous programmes shortlisted, this project notes a lack of employment opportunities for young people and the reliance of the local economy on people-smuggling activities. In an effort to increase alternative opportunities for young people, this programme includes vocational and skills-based training and support for small/medium-sized enterprises through training and advisory services.

Geography: The Niger

Duration: 2017–2020

Programme name
Countering radicalization and violent extremism in the regions of the Sahel and Maghreb

Organisation: UNICRI

Description: This pilot project aimed to better understand what works in strengthening communities’ ability to counter radicalisation. UNICRI did not have predefined at-risk groups or causes of radicalisation, but instead worked with local civil society groups to identify local grievances. In both Mali and Mauritania, grievances of disappointment and marginalisation linked to limited economic opportunities and economic hardship were identified. The programme included vocational training for self-employment in areas such as horticulture, plumbing and carpentry. This training was accompanied by French language and civil education classes, and guidance on job searches. Temporary paid employment was also offered as ‘eco guardians’ working in a national park.

Geography: Includes programmes in Mauritania and Mali

Duration: 2015–2020
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth employment in the Sahel</td>
<td>ILO</td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> ILO have two programmes of relevance to the Sahel. The first is a regional programme covering West Africa, which aims to identify the barriers to young people entering the labour market in a bid to influence national youth employment policy and the creation of opportunities for young people to access decent jobs. The second is a national programme in Burkina Faso, which is aimed at developing a national apprenticeship scheme within the construction sector. There is no explicit mention of radicalisation within these programmes.</td>
<td>Regional project focused on West Africa, and one national project in Burkina Faso</td>
<td>2018–2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for training and employment for young people and local authorities</td>
<td>AFD</td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> This project falls under the Alliance Sahel but is being implemented by AFD. The project is aimed at improving what is described as the ‘economic resilience’ of young people, with the aim of reducing perceived feelings of exclusion. The project includes not only short-term training and vocational integration courses, but also the creation and renovation of 25 literacy and vocational training centres.</td>
<td>Mopti, Mali</td>
<td>2018–2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality (ESP) Division
Economic and Social Development Stream
www.fao.org/rural-employment

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