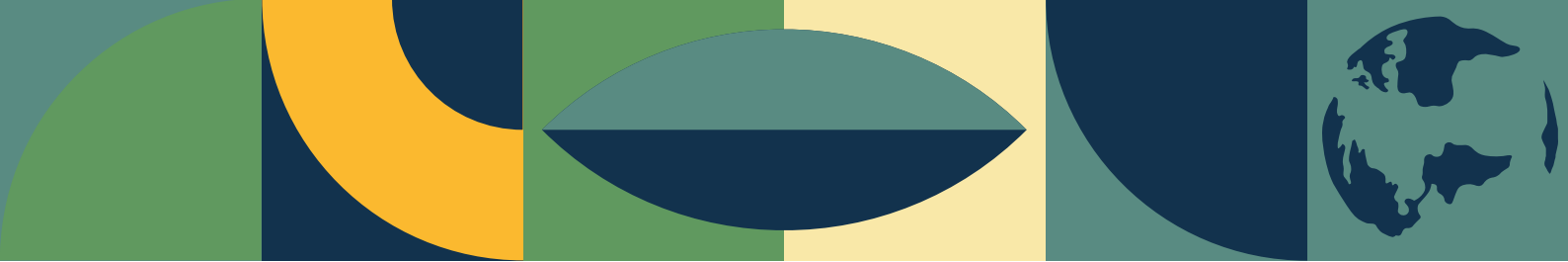

ASSESSING RISKS AT THE INTERSECTION OF CLIMATE
INSECURITY AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM:

**Key Insights and Recommendations
from the Design Workshop**

29-31 July 2024 | Dakar, Senegal





Background

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a growing threat to security, acting as a “risk multiplier” that exacerbates underlying factors such as weak governance and inequality. It weakens coping mechanisms, making populations more vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist groups, creating a vicious cycle that hinders adaptation and mitigation efforts.

UNICRI’s report, [“Perceptions of Climate Change and Violent Extremism: Listening to Local Communities in Chad,”](#) highlights how climate change and resource depletion exacerbate local conflicts and fuel violent extremist recruitment narratives. Based on in-depth interviews with Chadian communities, the report analyses climate impacts on two levels: the direct effects on livelihoods such as agriculture, livestock, and fisheries, and the indirect consequences on social cohesion, coping mechanisms, and the use of climate-induced hardships in extremist propaganda and recruitment efforts.

The report recommends that future interventions to prevent violent extremism in the Sahel take into account cross-cutting and context-specific challenges related to climate and security risks. It also highlights the importance of understanding specific gender-related vulnerabilities and promoting women’s inclusion and empowerment.

Based on these recommendations, UNICRI has partnered with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), to design a risk assessment tool for regional governments to provide a nuanced understanding of the interrelated risks posed by climate change and violent extremism. This tool will offer a nuanced understanding of interconnected risks and promote collaborative, inclusive, and sustainable solutions. The initiative is aligned with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, recognizing the disproportionate impact of climate change and violent extremism on women, and actively encouraging their participation in peacebuilding and security efforts.





The Design Workshop

In collaboration with UNOWAS, UNICRI organized a three-day regional workshop in Dakar, Senegal, in July 2024. The primary goal was to develop a context-specific methodological tool to assess the risks posed by the nexus of climate change and violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel.

Over 30 key stakeholders participated, representing UN agencies, regional organizations, climate and security experts, local communities, women's and youth groups, and civil society organizations. The workshop emphasized the importance of incorporating local knowledge and gender perspectives, particularly the vulnerabilities faced by women and youth. The goal was to design practical, sustainable tools to empower governments in addressing these complex risks.

Interconnected Risks of Climate Change and Violent Extremism

The workshop explored the connections between climate change and violent extremism risks in West Africa and the Sahel, focusing on how these challenges exacerbate regional tensions and vulnerabilities. Panelists highlighted how climate security is becoming a focal issue not only within the UN but across global and regional organizations, governments, and civil society. Participants discussed the importance of adopting climate-sensitive methodologies in peacekeeping and security operations, noting that traditional approaches may fall short when addressing climate-induced vulnerabilities that drive extremism. Peacekeeping missions and stabilization initiatives—whether led by the UN, the African Union, ECOWAS, or national governments—should consider climate impacts as central to their strategic planning. This shift calls for updated tools and frameworks that can identify and mitigate the underlying environmental and socio-economic drivers of conflict. The importance of developing climate adaptation strategies tailored to local contexts was highlighted, with discussions centered on advanced water management and agricultural technologies that can optimize scarce resources and reduce the potential for resource-based conflicts.





In addition, participants recognized that the implications of climate change on local communities require a multi-sectoral response. Economic, social, and educational sectors need to be engaged, with a clear emphasis on empowering local communities to take ownership of resilience-building initiatives. The discussion also emphasized the lived realities of local communities facing the dual threats of climate change and violent extremism. Environmental shifts, such as changing pastoral routes, further marginalize these communities, increasing the vulnerability of youth and women. Participants stressed the urgent need for education, training, and climate adaptation programmes to protect young people from the lure of extremist recruitment. In particular, equipping women with the resources and skills necessary to navigate climate-induced crises was identified as essential. Gender-sensitive policies that consider women's unique challenges—from livelihood disruption to health impacts—were called for, with participants advocating for a holistic, inclusive approach that strengthens the resilience of both youth and women.

The Pathways

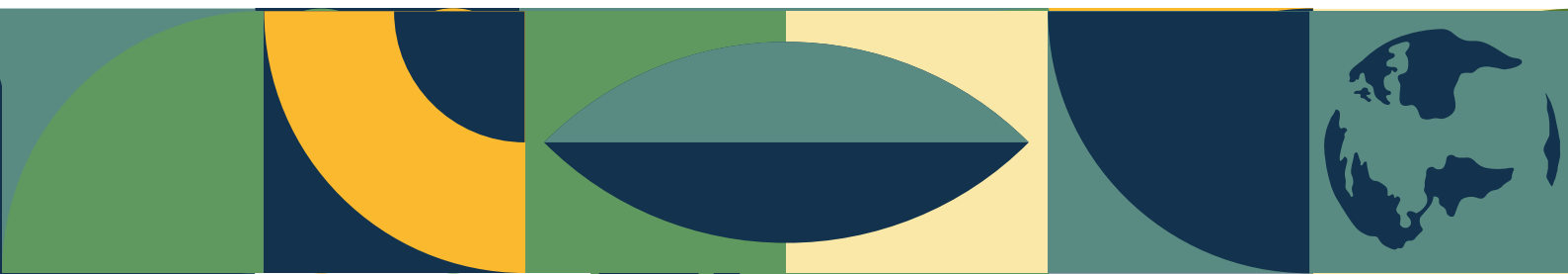
The workshop identified four pathways of interaction between violent extremism and climate change risks in West Africa and the Sahel.

Pathway 1: Resource Scarcity and Competition

Resource scarcity, exacerbated by climate change, is heightening tensions between communities in West Africa and the Sahel. Lack of water, arable land, and food intensifies competition, providing extremist groups with an opportunity for exploitation, especially in areas with weak state institutions. Recommendations include strengthening local institutions and improving governance to mitigate these tensions.

Pathway 2: Displacement and Migration

Climate change-induced extreme weather conditions force displacement, creating vulnerabilities for migrant populations. By migrating in precarious conditions, these populations become easy targets for attacks and recruitment by violent extremist groups. Discussions emphasised the need to better understand the causes of these migrations, provide appropriate humanitarian assistance, and implement gender-sensitive strategies to strengthen the adaptation of displaced communities to reduce their vulnerability.

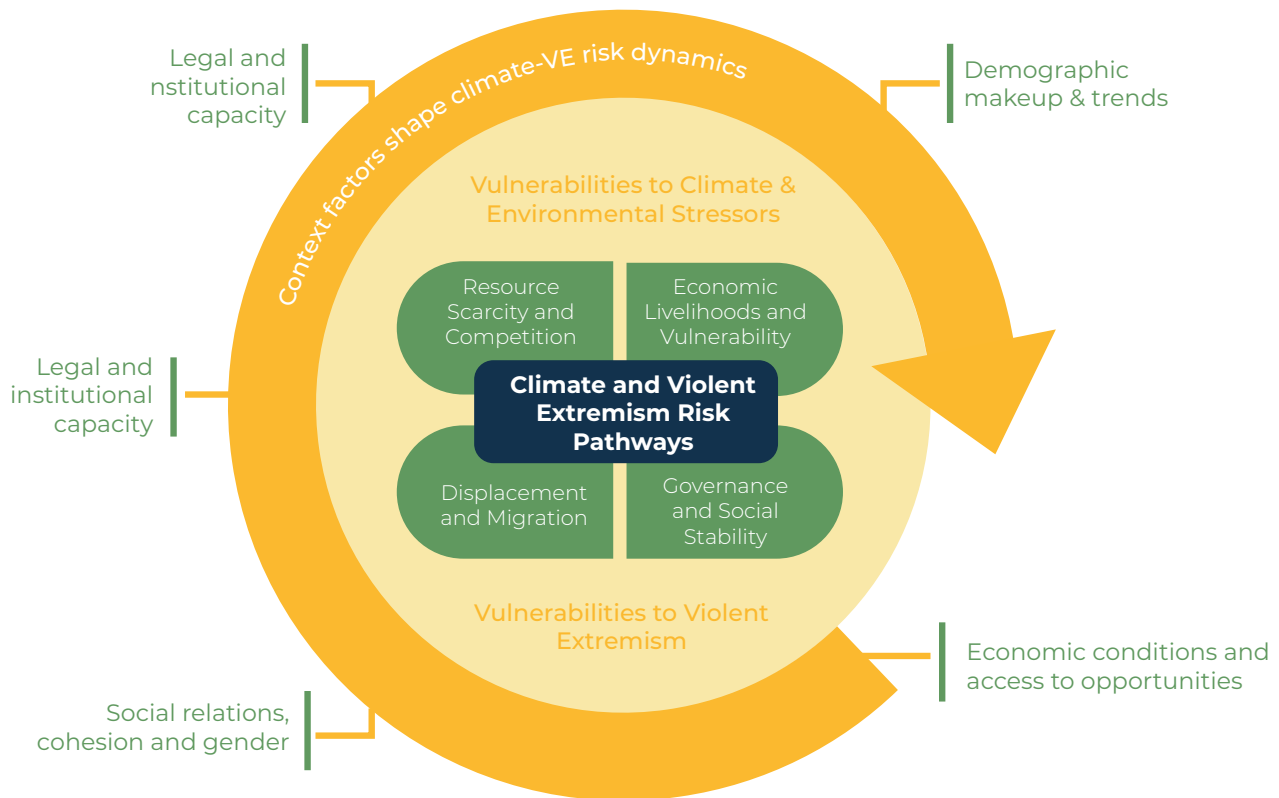


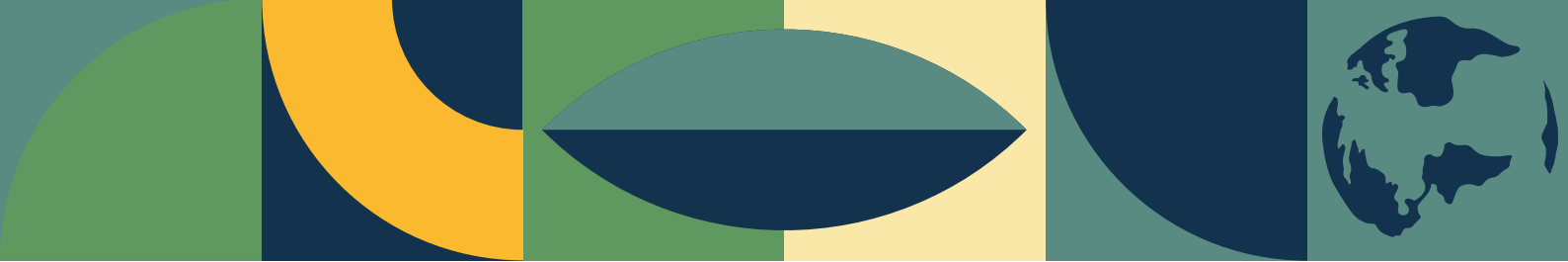
Pathway 3: Economic Livelihoods and Vulnerability

Declining agricultural productivity and rapid population growth are exacerbating poverty and food insecurity, creating fertile ground for recruitment by extremist groups. The rural exodus, driven by deteriorating living conditions, intensifies this vulnerability. Recommendations included promoting initiatives to build economic resilience, support sustainable solutions, and develop strategies to avoid resource-related conflicts.

Pathway 4: Governance and Social Stability

Weak governance, exacerbated by climate change, creates vulnerabilities that extremist groups exploit by establishing alternative forms of authority. The recommendations include an assessment of formal and informal regulatory mechanisms, the need to create synergies between different actors, and the importance of building the capacity of local actors. Lack of coordination and adequate data was identified as a major obstacle, with a call to improve dialogue and management of local conflicts.





Risk assessment and policy gaps

Developing context-specific risk assessment tools

The workshop emphasized the need for risk assessment tools tailored to the intersection of climate change and violent extremism. Participants stressed the importance of collecting local data to understand socio-political dynamics, such as in the Lake Chad Basin, and called for the development of regional tools like agrometeorological forecasting and the ECOWARN early warning system. Key challenges, including limited data access, lack of interdisciplinary collaboration, and inactive decision-makers, highlighted the need for improved data sharing and awareness.

Addressing policy and infrastructure gaps in climate security

Participants identified significant gaps and opportunities in policies, partnerships, and resources related to climate security. While various environmental policies are in place, there is a strong need for improved cross-sector coordination and better integration of climate and security concerns. Successful collaborations, such as partnerships with international organizations and religious leaders, were highlighted, though adapting projects to fit local contexts remains critical. Participants also stressed the importance of increased investment in resilient infrastructure, particularly hydrometeorological stations, to strengthen early warning systems and enhance regional preparedness.

Importance of women, youth, and vulnerable groups

Throughout the workshop, participants consistently highlighted the importance of incorporating youth and women's perspectives when assessing the interlinked risks of violent extremism and climate change. Gender inequalities, exacerbated by climate change, leave women and girls particularly vulnerable to socio-economic challenges and recruitment by extremist groups. As climate-induced crises – such as water shortages and food insecurity – intensify, they not only deepen existing inequalities but also fuel gender-based violence and limit women's resilience. Examples from Senegal and Mauritania showcased how empowering women through climate resilience and income-generating initiatives can counter these trends.





Participants stressed the importance of designing interventions that integrate local community perspectives, involving traditional and institutional structures such as religious leaders and state institutions. Continuous collaboration with communities and improved access to climate and security data were seen as critical. Creating inter-ministerial bodies to coordinate disaster response and data access at both national and local levels was recommended.

A gender-sensitive lens was considered essential for developing inclusive strategies that address both climate and security risks. Panellists advocated for women's active participation in decision-making processes and climate policy negotiations, along with improved access to education, financial capital, and resources. Aligning national and local priorities, fostering stakeholder engagement, and building women's capacity through education and climate-resilient financing were seen as key to creating sustainable solutions to the interconnected challenges of climate change and violent extremism.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Methodology, Strategic Approach and Information Dissemination

- **Conduct comprehensive risk mapping:** Start with a thorough, participatory mapping of climate change risks and vulnerabilities, involving local stakeholders to gather a nuanced understanding of how these risks intersect with violent extremism. Leverage both quantitative data (e.g., meteorological reports, economic indicators) and qualitative insights (e.g., community perceptions, traditional knowledge) to design tailored strategies that reflect local conditions.
- **Develop practical and accessible guides:** Create concise, step-by-step guides that include relevant data sources, case studies, and links to national processes. These guides should be disseminated to different user groups—government officials, community leaders, and civil society organizations—and incorporate mechanisms for periodic updates based on local feedback.
- **Simplify and translate information:** Translate all key documents into relevant local languages and employ infographics and visual tools to make complex information accessible to a wider audience. Use culturally sensitive language and storytelling approaches that resonate with local populations. Ensure plain, clear language is used across all platforms, with input from local experts to ensure cultural appropriateness.
- **Leverage digital tools for better dissemination:** Use digital platforms like mobile apps, social media, and SMS services to disseminate key information, particularly to youth and rural communities. Establish dedicated online portals for climate security awareness and real-time updates, with an emphasis on user accessibility even in areas with limited internet connectivity. Partner with local influencers and community groups to amplify digital outreach.
- **Strengthen awareness and training:** Collaborate with climate scientists, lawyers, and local experts to offer comprehensive training programmes that link climate change impacts with violent extremism. Use a train-the-trainer model to ensure that local actors can spread awareness and build capacity within their communities.
- **Promote good practices:** Highlight and disseminate existing good practices from across the region, promoting peer-to-peer learning and open access to innovative approaches, to inspire and guide future initiatives.
- **Control and reorient the narrative on climate change, violent extremism, and migration:** Develop a balanced and forward-looking discourse that stresses intervention strategies, opportunities, and risk assessments. Frame climate migration not only as a security threat but also as an opportunity for development and adaptation, emphasizing the benefits of mobility for resilience and fostering international cooperation.



2. Inclusivity, Capacity Building, and Collaboration

- **Promote collaboration among actors:** Create synergies and a centralized mechanism to coordinate the efforts of different groups working on climate risks and security, to build mutual capacity.
- **Actively involve youth and women:** Ensure that women and youth are actively involved in every phase of the project, from design to implementation and evaluation.
- **Support research and knowledge dissemination:** Encourage researchers, universities and research centres to produce quality data on the links between climate change and violent extremism. Mobilize young people to disseminate this information within local communities.
- **Facilitate the sharing of innovative solutions:** Create networks for sharing innovative solutions, both within and between regions, to ensure successful strategies can be adapted to local contexts. Establish open-source platforms where actors from across sectors—government, civil society, academia—can contribute and access solutions, ensuring that all tools are adaptable and scalable to meet local needs.

3. Government Involvement and Financing

- **Ensure government buy-in:** Engage governments early in the process by involving key ministries, local authorities, and security agencies in the design and implementation of climate-security initiatives.
- **Facilitate access to finance:** Ensure direct and accessible financing for the most impacted communities, taking into account the cross-border dynamics of climate and security issues.
- **Adopt a multi-scalar approach:** Formulate recommendations tailored to each scale – national, regional, local – to meet the specific needs of the actors concerned.