Search for Common Ground (Search) is working with a coalition of partners to support community-led peace and security initiatives in four counties in Coastal Kenya, namely Kilifi, Kwale, Lamu, and Mombasa. This policy brief draws on a recent conflict scan conducted by Search and its partners, MUHURI and Kiunga Youth Bunge Initiative (KYBI), in June 2018 in these same four counties. The scan highlights changing trends, emerging dynamics, and the impact of these factors on security and social cohesion in coastal Kenya. Conflict issues identified in previous scans conducted in 2017 include: access to land, access to employment, abuse of power, the 2017 presidential elections, politics, and culture and religion. Although the 2018 scan found that these factors are still concerning, their importance within communities has changed. In particular, politics and the 2017 Presidential Election (signifying the divides between parties and factions) were not mentioned as frequently as previously, whereas access to land and employment have increased in importance, particularly in Lamu. Across the four counties, emerging trends were observed with domestic violence and family disintegration, youth gangs, and increasing drug abuse now being identified as key causes of conflict by the population. This policy brief presents these findings and offers opportunities to further engage communities for long-term sustainable peace in coastal Kenya.

2 Research and findings used in this brief, unless otherwise noted, come from the 2018 Conflict Scan conducted by Search, MUHURI and KYBI and available upon request.
Evolving Conflict Dynamics

Conflict trends have shifted since November 2017. Key conflicts identified in 2017 like politics, the 2017 elections, abuse of power, and religion and conflict have decreased in importance. Meanwhile other trends have remained important like access to land and employment. Emerging trends have also been identified in this scan that threaten the peace and security of communities, including juvenile gangs, drug use, and domestic abuse. These changing trends and emerging dynamics will be explored more fully below.

Juvenile Gangs

Respondents in Mombasa and Kwale indicated that youth gangs are an important concern that threaten security and peace in their communities. Although youth gangs have been prevalent in these communities previously, the extent of the violence on both sides has increased recently. This trend was noted to be of a lesser concern in Kilifi and Lamu where only occasional cases were reported. Youth gangs use pangas (machetes) and knives to intimidate, rob, and sometimes kill individuals. According to respondents and recent reports these gangs are made up of young school-aged children approximately 12-26 years-old, some of whom are speculated to be using drugs. Police have cracked down hard on youth gangs. Police often resort to fatal violence, which results in reprisal attacks by the gangs - increasing insecurity and unrest in the region.

Further contributing to the tension, some community members suspect that these gangs are connected to violent extremist (VE) groups. This scan highlighted concerns that the gangs are used as a recruiting ground for VE groups or that returnees are offering advice and support to the gangs. However, any connection between the two remains unverified. Despite that, community members agree that youth are pushed to join these gangs through a combination of peer pressure and failing family dynamics, and are pulled to them by the possibility of financial gain through theft and burglary.

Family Disintegration and Domestic Violence

Another emerging conflict identified by the scan was the increase in domestic violence. In addition to the ongoing issue of men mistreating their wives, recent reports of wives beating their husbands and throwing them out of the house concerned respondents in all communities. Disintegrating family dynamics was a common conflict issue in all four counties. According to respondents, this leads to poor parental involvement, which in turn gives way to youth gang recruitment, drug abuse, and radicalization. Of concern to community members, particularly in Mombasa and Kwale, was the increase in reported domestic violence cases. In both these counties, the scan identified domestic abuse and gender-based violence as the most common form of violence. This increase was noted by a Kwale authority who mentioned during a key informant interview that 10 cases of domestic violence are reported every week. However, the extent to which violence by wives against their husbands impacts other conflict dynamics or the reason for the increase in this type of violence - despite continued male on female violence - is unclear and requires further attention.

Despite the lack of clarity, the impact of family on vulnerability to recruitment has been established previously. County CVE Action Plans included “dysfunctional family life” as an indicator of an individual’s susceptibility to recruitment and previous research has noted the importance of families and mothers in identifying and preventing radicalization. Family ties occupy an important role in youth and community resilience as at-risk individuals turn first to their friends and then family networks for advice and support. Lacking the tools and knowledge, friends and family are often unable to give advice pushing frustrated youth towards drug abuse, gangs or VE groups for solutions. Mothers and wives are also in a place to identify early warning signs to radicalization but often mistake signs of radicalization as simply an increased dedication to their religion. This highlights the need for a functional and resilient family structure, with the skills and knowledge to identify radicalization.

4 “Kisuni locals recount day of horror as gangs attack”, Daily Nation, February 2018.
6 UNDP. Journey to Extremism in Africa, 2017
LAND AND EMPLOYMENT

In Lamu, respondents increasingly mentioned planned development projects as a key concern. People are worried about the ways these development projects will impact access to land, eliminate certain employment opportunities for locals, and potentially hurt vital ecosystems in the area further jeopardizing livelihoods related to fishing and herding. Communities feel uninformed and disconnected from proposed developments like the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSET) project and the new coal power plant, yet they are critical issues in the area. Lamu community members already believe themselves to be economically and politically marginalized; the scan found these infrastructure projects are increasing those perceptions and raising tensions in the region. Identified as key conflict issues as well as drivers contributing to VE in 2017, access to land and employment, therefore, remain important concerns in Lamu. Outside of Lamu, land has remained a key conflict concern. For instance, respondents in Kwale and Kilifi also mentioned land conflict as issues impacting the peace and security of their communities as well.

Despite the continued prevalence of these issues, respondents also noted that existing platforms for dialogue between the security sector and communities are seen to be contributing to peace. They specifically noted that these efforts appear to be reducing the prevalence of VE in some areas by opening avenues for communication and trust. For instance, some community members have been approached by members of VE groups to replicate police uniforms. However, the production of these was prevented through communication to police forces of the issue and swift follow up.

DECREASING CONFLICT TRENDS

As mentioned previously, this scan noted the decreasing importance of factors like the 2017 elections and politics in communities. In the previous scan, these two issues represented the two most important community dividers and conflict drivers in coastal Kenya. The decrease in these trends can be attributed to a widely publicized handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition politician Raila Odinga. Although the details of what was agreed on were not known by community members, the gesture itself was seen to calm tensions across the country. This effort to walk back tensions has increased trust in politicians within the communities surveyed. In addition to politics and the 2017 election, other conflict trends have decreased in coastal Kenya. Factors like abuse of power have decreased slightly and religion and conflict, although not as high a driver of conflict in the last scan, has significantly decreased in the most recent one. Continued engagement on these issues will be important to ensure there isn’t a later increase.

| CONFLICT DRIVERS RANKED BY IMPORTANCE TO COMMUNITIES FROM MOST TO LEAST |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2017 | 2018 |
| • Politics | • Juvenile Gangs |
| • 2017 Elections | • Economic Marginalization |
| • Abuse of Power | • Domestic Abuse |
| • Access to Land | • Access to land and employment |
| • Access to Employment Culture and Religion | • Politics/2017 Elections |
| | • Culture and Religion |
Regular monitoring of conflict dynamics in coastal Kenya is providing greater insight into evolving community concerns. Existing dialogues between the community and security actors both at the community (chiefs) and county level (county commissioner’s office, etc.) have been credited with improving security in the region. However, continued conflicts based on real and perceived community marginalization and exclusion require renewed commitment to engagement and dialogue from all stakeholders. The following recommendations highlight opportunities where communities, government, the security sector, and CSOs can continue to engage with one another to collaboratively move forward towards peace.

1. **Support long-term engagement on critical community concerns by reinforcing existing platforms like County CVE Action Plans and CSO-led interventions.** Many of the historic grievances identified by communities do not have a short-term fix, they require long-term commitment by stakeholders. Continuing to engage, discuss, and adapt to evolving community conflicts and grievances will help to alleviate issues identified by communities and develop a stronger relationship between all stakeholders.

2. **Encourage multi-stakeholder discussions on new tensions that are creating divisions between communities and government.** In addition to supporting existing platforms, multi-stakeholder dialogues need to address emerging concerns. For example, development projects in Lamu are increasing tensions in the region as they play into existing feelings of marginalization. As perceptions of marginalization are a critical issue in the community, it is important to open discussions and strengthen relationships with communities to ensure that development projects offer win-win solutions that meet both government and community needs and interests.

3. **Explore the evolving domestic violence trends to verify and then understand the causes and consequences on the community.** It is commonly recognized that gender-based violence against women is a prevalent issue that needs to be addressed. The scan’s findings of violence by women against men was greeted with some skepticism, and thus needs to be further explored and verified. This exploration should examine contributing factors to the shift, and the consequences on the women, men, and children in the household and community as compared to the more studied violence of men against women.

4. **Support strengthened family networks and relationships to reduce the risk of youth joining gangs, using drugs, or being radicalized.** As has been noted, dysfunctional families are considered to be a main factor of vulnerability to radicalization. This most recent scan also brought forth the fact that family disintegration and poor parental involvement is increasingly believed to be a motivating factor for youth joining gangs and abusing drugs, which are growing security concerns in three counties. More attention needs to be paid to this dynamic in interventions seeking to address VE in coastal Kenya.

5. **Increase understanding of any existing or potential connections between youth gangs and VE groups.** Communities have expressed concern that youth gangs are being used for recruitment, training, and support by VE groups. To verify and better understand this possible connection, more research should be focused on the issue. If there is a connection established, addressing this relationship should be integrated into County CVE action plans and should incorporate non-violent multi-stakeholder (state-citizen) approaches that provide alternative paths and safe restoration processes for those who turn away from gangs to prevent a further escalation of violence.