1 INTRODUCTION

The Puntland State of Somalia has experienced a relative decrease in acute violence and conflict in recent decades. While it is still considered to be in a post-conflict stage of development, there are many indicators that point to the nascent shift towards state-building and the nurturing of resilience.

In this setting, safety concerns expressed by members of the community in the various towns and cities of Puntland have tended move away from fear of widespread inter-group conflict and towards personalised crime and localised small-scale (neighbourhood) confrontations. The youth have often been singled out as the most common perpetrators of crime and violence.
This brief will highlight some of the drivers of youth-based urban crime and violence in Puntland as distilled from perception surveys carried out by the OCVP over a period of three years beginning in 2011. It will also identify some socio-economic commonalities of vulnerability that have been claimed to contribute to the problem. The final part of the brief will set out a broad range of recommendations for the consideration of policy makers and stakeholders.

**Trend, Causes and Effects**

**TRENDS**

**The Youth as Perpetrators of Crime and Violence**

In most of the major towns and cities of Puntland where the OCVP has conducted surveys, the 3 most commonly reported causes of insecurity with which youth have been associated are neighbourhood violence, street theft and violent criminality (OCVP, 2011b; OCVP, 2012b; OCVP, 2012c; OCVP, 2012a; OCVP, 2013a).

Neighborhood violence ensues when groups of youth have disagreements which escalate into street fights. The weapons involved may be crude (sticks, clubs, stones) but the damage is great and casualties and fatalities may rise quickly if those altercations are not contained in time (OCVP, 2013b). The victims in this type of violence can fall across all demographics of the community because it takes place in public spaces, with most casualties reported amongst the disputing youth.

Violent criminality is often perpetrated by loosely organised gangs generally comprised of young men - reported ages fall between 15 and 40 years (OCVP, 2011b). There is an additional, repeated concern that the proliferation of small arms in Puntland could result in loosely organised gangs evolving into armed militia.

Street theft (or petty theft) has been observed to be the most prevalent of the three reported causes of insecurity. It commonly involves one or two perpetrators using either no weapons or crude weapons such as knives (specifically the tooray – a double edged knife) (OCVP, 2011a). In urban centres, the most prevalent form of petty theft is believed to be mobile phone snatching and roadside muggings of which the victims are predominantly young women – who are pre-identified as easy targets (OCVP, 2013b).

**Gender-based violence and the youth**

Rape and sexual harassment are the most commonly mentioned forms of gender-based violence observed in the numerous surveys that OCVP conducted in Puntland. There has been a reluctance to talk about rape amongst the districts due to the sensitive nature
of the issue, however when pressed, most respondents report that rape is a significant security concern: more so in IDP communities (OCVP, 2011a; OCVP, 2013b). In all instances where it was discussed, the perpetrators were identified as youth assailants, acting opportunistically and in recent studies (OCVP, 2013a; OCVP, 2013b) committing gang rape.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS

It would be unwise to attempt to draw direct causal links to youth-based violence because, while there are many similarities in the way youth violence manifests itself, it is not homogenous and is driven by a combination of factors, regularly cited as socio-economic insecurity, social exclusion, substance abuse and vulnerability.

High levels of illiteracy\(^1\) causing low employment rates among the youth (OCVP, 2011a, OCVP, 2013a, OCVP, 2013b) and by connection high levels of poverty (OCVP, 2013b) are issues that have been observed to contribute to the socio-economic insecurity of the youth. The perceived relation they have to increased tendencies towards crime and violence is demonstrable by the fact that members of some of the communities within which OCVP conducted surveys identified acute unemployment as a security concern (OCVP, 2013a).

The youth also feel that they are excluded from decision-making processes on matters that affect their well-being (OCVP, 2013b), and this has been identified as an underlying factor that contributes to increased deviant behaviour. There seems to be high levels of antagonism between the youth and the older generation in most communities of Puntland, with low levels of interaction and collaboration in regards to peacebuilding and development matters.

Drug and substance abuse, particularly addiction to Khat, amongst the youth is also alleged to be an underlying cause of the rising levels of crime. It is believed that most of the youth who take part in petty theft are motivated by the desire to obtain cash so as to purchase the drug (OCVP, 2011b; OCVP, 2012c; OCVP, 2012a; OCVP, 2013a; OCVP, 2013b).

All the above factors, usually operating in concert, have been observed in turn to expose youth to the vulnerability of proscription into more serious criminal organizations such as piracy rings or radical militia (such as Al-Shabaab). The temptation of quick riches coupled with the reality of a dire economic situation and a lack of viable livelihood opportunities has led many youth in

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\(^1\) For instance in Garowe, 73% of the sampled respondents had education levels below secondary school level; over half of those were youth (54%).
coastal towns into piracy related activities (OCVP, 2011a) Towards the south of Puntland, youth are vulnerable to recruitment by Al-Shabaab, which capitalises on the growing feelings of dissatisfaction among them and there is still the feeling that militant elements can pervade into public life/institutions in Galkayo (OCVP, 2011b).

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the observations above, OCVP puts forward the following broad recommendations for consideration:

- Development of multi-party approaches in policy formulation aimed at the creation of increased opportunities for behavioural/life-skills training delivered in complementarity to vocational training targeted at youth.
- Adoption of multi-agency policies aimed at putting in place comprehensive social and recreational intervention programs for youth so as to engage them constructively and reduce their vulnerability to conscription into criminal activities.
- Reinforcement of forums for the representative participation of the youth in democratic processes especially the strengthening of youth participation amongst District Councils.
- Regular public awareness campaigns specifically modelled to encourage social cohesion among the youth by encouraging them to be agents of change.
- Public health campaigns regarding the drawbacks of chewing Khat – the money spent on Khat – the social deprivation it can cause – the negative health effects.
- Development of a Youth coordination mechanism with the police – to develop the relationship that can help better inform on youth crime and improve relations therefore reducing the feelings of social exclusion.

2 REFERENCES


