“This briefing is based on perception studies conducted on district conflict and security by the Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention across the major towns and cities in Somaliland. The aim of the briefing is to elucidate some of the key issues and problems identified by the reports and share it with policy makers and other stake holders”

1 INTRODUCTION

Somaliland has a tradition of prioritizing security over the other functions of the state. While this could have had an effect on reduced clan based conflicts, it did not abate the rise of youth-based urban crime and violence which is seldom addressed or analyzed in a systemic manner. Understanding this phenomenon can provide a meaningful contribution to decision-making processes and lay the foundation on which proactive interventions could be designed.

This briefing will identify some of the key issues surrounding youth-based urban crime and violence from perception surveys carried out by the OCVP at the district level across the major towns in Somaliland. The causes underlying these issues and effects they are likely to have on stability and socio-economic development will be investigated culminating in the presentation of a broad set recommendations aimed at helping policy makers focus their efforts on addressing youth-based urban crime and violence.
TREND, CAUSES AND EFFECTS

The type of crime that occurs in the various districts of Somaliland varies from one place to another. Certain trends, however, are common in a number of districts – one of these is youth-based violence. According to surveys conducted on major districts in the country, loosely-organized youth groups are the route cause of a number of incidents of violence and crime (OCVP, 2012, OCVP, 2013e).

In Borama, youth violence is the most prevalent and feared criminal activity in the city (OCVP, 2013a). 47 percent of respondents in this district said that the majority of violent incidents they witness is between youth groups who organize themselves along neighborhood divisions. In addition to this youth (aged between the age of 18 and 25) are also perceived to be responsible for repeat, personalized crimes such as robbery and mugging.

Similar trends were also apparent in the neighboring district of Gabiley. Respondents in this district indicate that the number of youth-driven conflicts witnessed in a 12 month period added up to 72 – 24 of which led to violent confrontation between the parties involved parties (OCVP, 2013d).

Females are particularly vulnerable to youth violence as they are subjected to individual and gang rape (OCVP, 2013a). As a result, rape is increasingly becoming a major urban security concern for women - although cases of rape are difficult to verify because of the lack of a proper judicial process and, in some cases, it has been remarked that families of a pregnant female will claim rape by way of saving their honor (OCVP, 2013b).

Settlement of rape cases outside courts is blamed for the increase in rape incidents. (OCVP, 2013a). The absence of reliable data on rape, however, makes intervention difficult. The research team found that there are no statistical figures on rape due to the fact that, in most cases, such crimes are dealt with by clan elders.

Youth violence can lead to greater communal problems such as insecurity and instability in major urban settings which affects the whole of the community. This is so due to the fact that youth violence has the potential to ignite clan based violence if an existing youth dispute escalates to a clan level.

Besides the impact of youth violence on personal safety, it can also have a dire impact on economic activities. In Gabiley, female respondents said they feel unsafe to walk in the dark at night, revealing the potential economic cost to concerned neighborhoods. In Erigavo, revenge killings, mainly committed by youth, have crippled the social and economic development of the city as skilled workers have migrated out of the
area due to the fear of revenge killings and tit-for-tat clan violence (OCVP, 2013c).

Substance abuse and addiction is believed to be one of the major factors that underpin youth crimes and violence in major towns across the country. In Burao, there is a widespread perception that the majority of individuals who snatch phones and threaten people with knives are alleged to be khat addicts (OCVP, 2013b).

Unemployment is alleged to have a causal effect on the increasing involvement of youth in criminal activities (OCVP, 2012). Respondents in Borama reported that "the high rate of unemployment amongst youth, poor parent-child relations and shorter hours spent in schools" (OCVP, 2013a) plays a role in the youth’s involvement in crime.

The picture presented by the research undertaken to date is of a marginalized, disempowered youth demographic which is vulnerable to the push and pull factors of crime in the absence of viable livelihood opportunities and exclusion from decision-making capacities within their communities.

The spatial organization of most cities in Somaliland further exacerbates youth violence. Cities across the country are divided along clan lines with each clan predominantly populating one section of the city (OCVP, 2013b). This creates a public perception on how people experience safety as crime is most feared when one is outside areas dominated by his/her clan.

A culture of impunity, mainly supported by the Somali clan and kinship practices, also complicate the justice system through which crime could be better addressed. In many cases, next of kin and close clan members of those committing crimes provide assistance in the release of culprits from custody without due process.
1 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to mitigate the urban crimes and violence in Somaliland, the following are recommended

- Development of multi-agency policies aimed at putting in place comprehensive intervention programs for youth so as to engage them constructively and make them less prone to criminal activities.

- Development of security provision policies aimed at coordinating, consolidating and documenting the efforts of various security actors and their role in reducing youth based crime and promoting urban safety.

- Development of policies for the prevention of drug abuse, rehabilitation and reintegration of youth affected by drug dependency and the promotion of public awareness on the negative effects of drug use.

- Development of effective policies aimed at stimulating growth in youth employment by ensuring that all avenues of economic engagement take special consideration of youth so as to address the push and pull factors drawing youth to crime.

- Building forums for youth and providing them with a voice to stimulate change by putting in place effective strategies on social reconstruction and encouraging a coordinated approach amongst youth groups to address the prevention of youth-based violence.

- Development and enhancement of crime statistics’ policy that helps monitor not only incidents of crime and violence reported to the statutory institutions but also those undertaken by the other non-statutory institutions (informal sharia courts and the customary institutions).

- Improvement of urban infrastructures (such as better street lighting) that could enhance urban safety and security so as to prevent/deter personalized attacks at night and protect vulnerable groups such as women and children.
2 References


