



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“A war that hurts us twice”
Inside Kenya’s war on terror: community
perspectives on security in Mandera county**

August 2020

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Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AP	Administration Police
ATPU	Anti-Terrorism Police Unit
CVE	Countering violent extremism
FGM	Female genital mutilation
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
IED	Improvised explosive device
KDF	Kenyan Defence Force
KES	Kenyan Shillings
KPR	Kenya Police Reserve
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RBPU	Rural Border Patrol Unit
STRIVE	Strengthening Resilience against Violent Extremism project
TFG	Transitional Federal Government (Somalia)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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Cover photo: Men transport goods from Somalia into Kenya while passing by Kenyan policemen at the border, in the town of Mandera.

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Passengers travelling to Nairobi wait to be searched for weapons by Kenyan police, in the town of Mandera at the Kenya-Somalia border.

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Executive summary

This report looks at Mandera, a county in Kenya whose many challenges have been complicated by its exposure to violence and repressive responses by al-Shabaab and Kenyan security forces and a range of programmes to ‘counter terrorism’. It describes the range of structural challenges that underpin insecurity in the county, and how the various responses by authorities, civil society and donors are impacting on people living in Mandera, drawing on the perspectives of those caught up in what one person described to us as ‘a war that hurts us twice’.

Situated in Kenya’s volatile north-east frontier region, Mandera straddles borders with Ethiopia and Somalia and, tied to them, multiple layers of the region’s conflicts. Too often people living in Mandera find themselves caught in the line of fire as Kenyan security forces, clan militias or al-Shabaab fighters compete to enforce their interests on Mandera’s communities and recruit individuals for their own ends. This contest has resulted in insecurity, repression and underdevelopment for most people in Mandera. Alongside the trauma of historical injustice and upheaval, Mandera’s communities have endured years of marginalisation and the consequent stagnation of public services and economic opportunities.

Complicating these circumstances are the inequalities and divisions within Mandera county, between the predominant Kenyan Somali population and recent migrants from across the Somali border, between clans that span the Kenya-Somali border and among generations and even households. Neither the Kenyan national government, Mandera’s devolved authorities nor international donors have been unaware of these issues. Yet while their approaches to build peace and security in the county have sometimes made modest progress, these gains are fragile, and jeopardised by outstanding grievances and ongoing failures that heighten feelings of exclusion and injustice in the area.

To look more closely at the impacts of these interventions on patterns of violent conflict in Mandera, Saferworld spoke with community members, local authorities, security forces and NGOs about their experiences of and views on insecurity, its various strands, layers and impact, and how they thought the situation could be improved. We found that insecurity was still a major source of fear for communities in Mandera who regularly found themselves, their schools and hospitals on the receiving end of attacks by al-Shabaab. In desperate need of state protection, they have instead been targeted by blunt and even abusive responses by Kenyan security forces, which have led to disappearances and even deaths of suspected al-Shabaab sympathisers.

Unfortunately, this retaliatory cycle of violence rests upon and contributes to others, including several long-standing clan conflicts, which have shifted and intensified in some respects following the migration to Mandera of Somalis of various clans fleeing violence across the border and more recently following the introduction of devolved authorities in the region. Al-Shabaab has proved adept at manipulating these feuds and resulting grievances to recruit fighters and garner sympathy. However, it relies mostly on anger and suspicion towards the central Kenyan state, whose security forces have had notorious and controversial roles on both sides of the Kenya-Somalia border. Building on common perceptions of marginalisation by the Kenyan state, al-Shabaab has attacked ‘non-local’ people, targeting public services, businesses, development initiatives and infrastructural projects, and thus reducing their presence.

The twin challenges of insecurity and exclusion from power particularly harm minority clans, women and young people who have little representation in

devolved authorities, NGO community engagements or community-level decision-making forums. Patriarchal gender norms have also constrained the ability of communities to adapt to worsening economic conditions, with too few opportunities for young men to take on reliable jobs and play their traditional roles as breadwinners, placing additional strain on them and the women in their families who are forced to generate additional income. This plays into the hands of al-Shabaab as well as feuding clan leaders who can offer resources to lure young men into violence. These conflicts all feed into violence against women and girls,

whether as a direct result of fighting, or in the form of sexual and gender-based violence in the domestic sphere.

To begin to address Mandera’s security challenges, the Kenyan authorities, international donors and civil society have taken a variety of steps. Mandera’s communities highlighted some promising, though modest, developments including more inclusive political representation in county structures, the risky work of cross-border peace initiatives and the constitution of a locally recruited and largely trusted police reserve. The latter has been credited with reducing attacks by al-Shabaab. However, these initiatives have not made major inroads in ending ongoing abuses or providing justice for historical and more recent abuses by security forces. Reform and redress in this area would fundamentally improve relations between communities and national police and military forces. Meanwhile, the reportedly unbalanced composition of the new police reserve, and the low salaries of its members, have caused some concerns.

The research clearly showed that security forces in the area were beginning to recognise the pitfalls of a heavy-handed security response, and there is growing appetite to build trust with communities. At the same time, donor resources and attention have been focused on ‘countering violent extremism’ (CVE) projects. While these have sometimes facilitated much-needed interaction and cooperation among communities and the security establishment, they have not been effective at ending insecurity and raised worries that those participating in them may be targeted by al-Shabaab. Until security forces can heal the wounds opened by past abuses, demonstrate their own accountability to communities and build a solid track record of protecting people from the multiple threats they face, CVE is unlikely to yield lasting change.

The international support for Kenya’s security establishment has proved persistent despite the often destructive role Kenya’s security forces have played in Mandera, historically and in recent years. Such defence and counter-terrorism cooperation not only risks legitimising or even resourcing abuses that occur in the region – it can also entrench an important driver of conflict, an obstacle to building trust and to preventing attacks by al-Shabaab.

If they wish to help make people in Mandera feel safe and secure, donors should not just support the modest progress made by security forces in engaging and protecting Mandera’s communities. They must also call for an end to security forces’ abuses and for accountability. At the same time, donors can play an important role in addressing the gaps in governance and development identified by Mandera’s communities, including by tackling gender inequality and lack of access to education, health and justice. In particular, this support should seek to reverse the marginalisation felt by minority clans and young

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people while working to shift the gender norms driving discrimination against women and girls.

This report begins by tracking a brutal cycle of violence in Mandera which has trapped people between persistent al-Shabaab attacks and heavy-handed Kenyan security forces' operations, while clan-related tensions and sexual and gender-based violence wreak havoc away from the headlines. Chapter three investigates the historical context that brings these trends to life: legacies of marginalisation and repression by the Kenyan state; regional and local conflicts spilling over from across the Somali border; and social norms that exclude minority clans and impose harmful and unequal roles onto women, men, girls and boys. Chapter four then reviews the various approaches to address these sources of insecurity by different levels of government, international donors and civil society groups. The report finds reasons for modest hope and serious concern, all of which have significant implications for donor assistance and government policy in the region.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity. We are a not-for-profit organisation working in 12 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

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