

BY AGGREY MUTAMBO

NAIROBI. Violent extremist groups are exploiting cheap and accessible technology, rising public disaffection with authorities, and weak state responses to fuel violence, a new report says.

Two related reports highlight the rise of terror merchants in Africa, linked to growing internet access, gaming technology, and porous borders.

One study, a joint initiative by the UN Counter-terrorism Centre and the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, shows that Africa's gaming ecosystem has become a major profit source for developers. It is also a

'Extremists exploit technology, resentment to fuel terror across Africa'

fertile hunting ground for extremists to recruit and spread their narratives.

A separate situational analysis by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) finds that jihadist groups are expanding their reach from the Horn of Africa to the Great Lakes and Mozambique's coast.

They are profiting from access to war technology such as drones and other unmanned equipment, while weak border enforcement enables transnational smuggling and external alliances that bolster their military capacity.

While some Islamist groups, such as

the Somalia and Central Africa branches of IS, rely mainly on rudimentary weapons, others have acquired more advanced technology.

Portable satellite internet and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) systems have enhanced their operational capabilities, with drones increasingly used for combat, reconnaissance, and propaganda.

In Mozambique, the extremist group terrorising Cabo Delgado Province has sought to establish po-

often attached to Western assistance.

litical legitimacy, presenting itself as "an alternative authority in coastal Cabo Delgado," according to ACLED.

This threatens to erode government control of coastal areas and nearby urban centres such as Mocimboa da Praia. "This control could then allow them to smuggle in weaponry," Mr Peter Bofin, a senior analyst for Southeast Africa, said.

Africa's expanding digital market is also becoming a breeding ground for

extremism. Mobile phone penetration in sub-Saharan Africa reached 527 million in 2023 and could rise to 751 million by 2030, with nine in 10 owners expected to have smartphones. Meanwhile, 32 million new users joined online gaming in 2024, bringing the total to 350 million players spending about \$1.8b (Shs6,77 trillion) annually on games and in-app purchases.

Extremists also borrow from gaming narratives to enact violence. In 2013, al-Shabaab militants attacked Nairobi's Westgate Mall and tweeted their assault as they killed civilians.

