



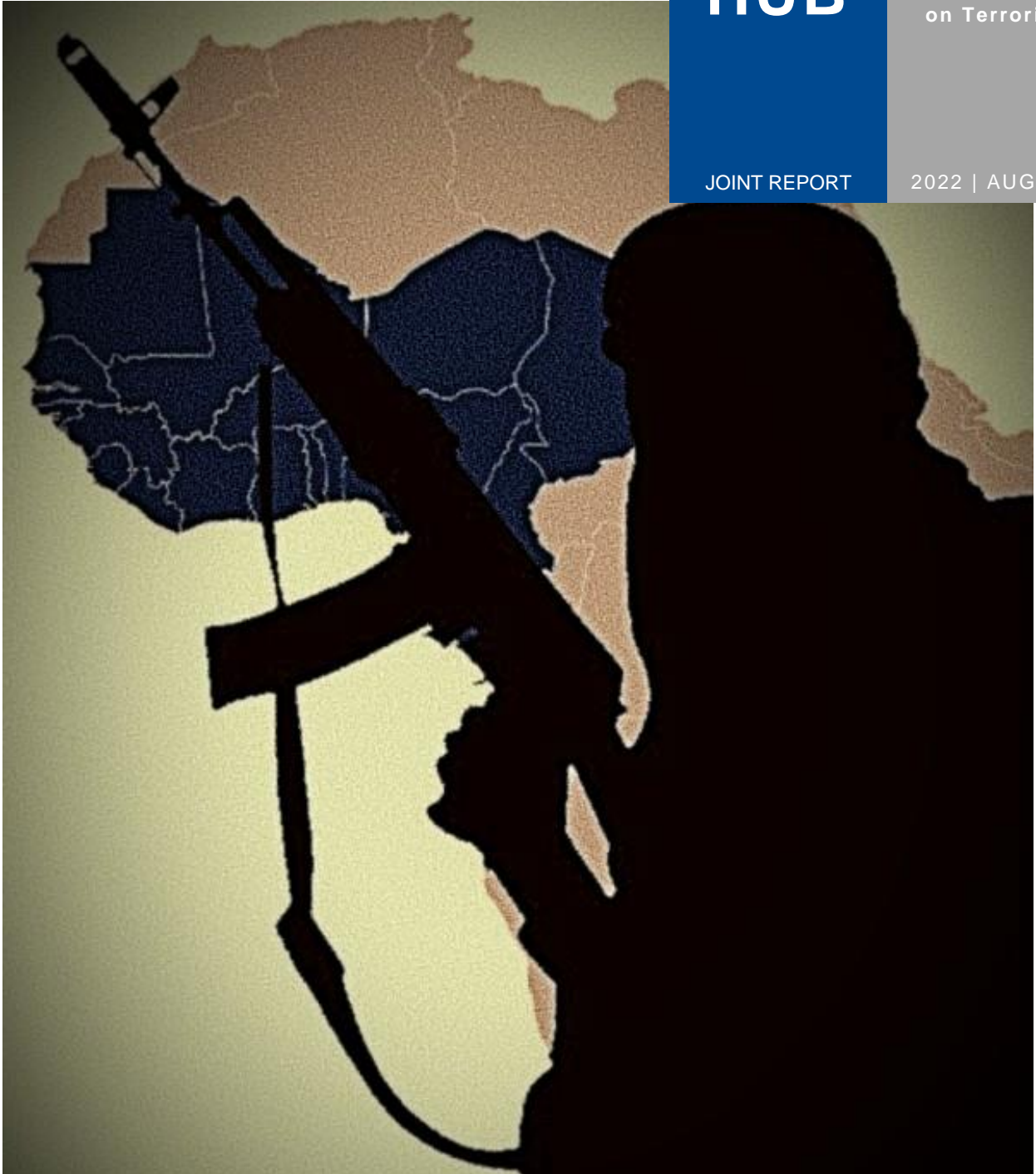
The Contagion of Violent Extremism in West African coastal states

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on Terrorism

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent extremism – often intertwined with intercommunal tensions and criminality – has continued to gain ground across the Sahel. Rising instability and the deteriorating security situation in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have generated concerns among neighbouring West African states about the effects of regional spillover. Since 2016, there have been incidents tied to the presence of Terrorist and Violent Extremist Organizations (TVEOs) in some of the border communities of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo (the main focus of this report), as well as reports of preaching, recruitment and local development initiatives by violent extremists. Given the current deteriorating security situation in the Sahel and the potential spillover effects, this report aims to shed light on the potential vulnerability of West African coastal states to the spread of violent extremism from the Sahel area and to carry out an in-depth investigation into the state of governmental and regional efforts to counter the security and social challenges associated with this growing vulnerability.

The report approaches the phenomenon of the contagion of violent extremism by firstly presenting background research carried out by both organizations and, secondly, highlighting the main takeaways of a Subject Matter Expert (SME) Workshop conducted as part of the report methodology. The Workshop was held with the participation of more than 30 (thirty) SMEs drawn from key institutions based in the West African sub-regions, including international organizations, state institutions and non-governmental organizations. The report includes research into the current situations regarding violent extremism in the Sahel Region and those factors potentially contributing to its expansion in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, including in-depth analysis of statistical data and the available literature. The report also provides information on key institutional capacities and state security efforts put in place to prevent and counter that expansion.

Analysis of the unfolding situation shows a deteriorating security in the Sahel, as evident by the number of terrorist attacks between 2019 and 2021. Despite the multiplicity of both international and regional military deployments, terrorist activities are far from abating. The nature of attacks has grown more sophisticated, become more synchronized, and the groups are growing in confidence and cohesion. Recent resurgence of coup d'états have further threatened and worsen an already volatile situation. Multiple factors such as ideological and religion-inspired extremism, governance deficits as violent extremism catalysts, structural socio-economic conditions, and historical grievances and rivalries were identified as vulnerability factors in coastal states. In addition, lack of government presence in some local communities; herder-farmer conflicts; prolonged and unresolved conflicts; unfavourable government policies; inability of government to provide for the basic needs of local communities; high and rising unemployment levels particularly among energetic youthful population; lack of accountability by political office

holders; rampant corruption; impunity of the political elites; and marginalisation and discrimination of minority groups were identified as local-level context specific grievances that have the propensity to drive and sustain violent extremism in coastal West Africa states.

Having recognised the devastating effects of violent extremism there have been efforts aimed at preventing the spread of violent extremism. International, regional and state-initiated actions towards preventing violent extremism by presenting the “hard” and “soft” security efforts are present. At the international level, the French-led Takuba forces and the European Union Training Mission in Mali, the US AFRICOM, and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) are some of the efforts to contain the terrorism and violent extremism threats in the Sahel and prevent expansion. The Accra Initiative, which was launched in September 2017 to coordinate and unite interests and capabilities in stopping violent extremists, especially in the border areas was identified a key regional preventative strategy. Other regional initiatives include the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the G-5 Sahel Joint Task Force and the ECOWAS actions on preventing the finance of violent extremism. In addition to international and regional level efforts countries in coastal areas have implemented new administrative frameworks, regional and broader international cooperation, the development of security forces and other counter-terrorism measures. The countries have widely accepted that the spread of violent extremist ideologies cannot be halted by purely legal and armed means. The development of society, embracing communities which have been left behind by economic and social investments have become key.

In conclusion, the findings of this report have pointed out that violent extremist activities have been growing in recent years in West African coastal states, radiating there from the Sahel. Although the security situations of the four countries assessed herein are not directly comparable to the very severe situation in the Sahel, the appearance of certain violent extremist groups at the northern border areas of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo is cause for concern. Equally worrisome is that the spread of violent extremism is multi-directional: TVEOs do not exclusively expand southward, but in any direction where circumstances permit.

INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism – often intertwined with intercommunal tensions and criminality – has continued to gain ground across the Sahel. Rising instability and the deteriorating security situation in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have generated concerns among neighbouring West African states about the effects of regional spillover.

The past decade turned the spotlight to the Sahel as the most concerning region due to the instability of the countries and the rapidly growing violent extremist threat. After the fall of Libya and the 2012 Tuareg rebellion in Mali, the spread of terrorist activities rose to unprecedented levels in the Sahel and reached the tri-border area of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger (the Liptako-Gourma region). As the extremist activities and ideologies spread, the coastal states in the Gulf of Guinea were also affected.

More recently, additional events have gradually worsened stability and have made the future of Western Sahel and the entire West African region very uncertain. During the last two years, there have been numerous coups and attempted coups against the political leaderships and, at this time, three countries in this area (Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea) are led by military juntas.

Since 2016, there have been incidents tied to the presence of violent extremists in some of the border communities of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo (the main focus of this report), as well as reports of preaching, recruitment and local development initiatives by violent extremists. There is a risk, therefore, that TVEOs may be attempting to legitimize their existence and expand their operations in these areas through the promise of better security, law and order and conflict resolution of local disputes than what legitimate governments actually provide. These tactics are akin to those that they adopted in the Sahel.

Besides their proximity to the areas impacted by violent extremism, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo are confronted with other vulnerability factors which may expose them to the spread of violent extremist activity. These include ethnic and religious tensions, real and perceived socio-economic marginalization of certain societal groups, and challenges related to border security, governance and trust in institutions.

For the affiliates of Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), an expansion into West African coastal states would bring more financial, operational and strategic benefits (e. g. adapting to military pressure; securing new sources of illicit revenue; access to ports; staging attacks on Western targets; etc.).

In response, the four aforementioned countries, as part of the wider region, have realised that pooling their resources to counter the incursion of violent extremism from the north could substantially help prevent the active presence of TVEOs in the daily life of border

communities, as was experienced in Western Sahelian communes. They are committed to investing in intelligence, capacity-building in the security sector and development. Still, the many cautionary tales in the broader region and beyond regarding the difficulties of effectively tackling violent extremism cannot be ignored.

This report aims to shed light on the potential vulnerability of West African coastal states to the spread of violent extremism from the Sahel area and also to carry out an in-depth investigation into the state of governmental and regional efforts to counter the security and social challenges associated with this growing vulnerability.

Therefore, the report consists of three main chapters. The first, by way of considerable quantitative data, presents the current situation in the Sahel and how the security and political situations might affect the West African coastal states.

The second provides a summary of potential vulnerabilities in West African communities, which might facilitate regional spillover of violent extremism and instability. Since the investigated countries have diverse and complex societal structures, it is essential to highlight the potential vulnerabilities which could be used by extremist groups for local support in each of them.

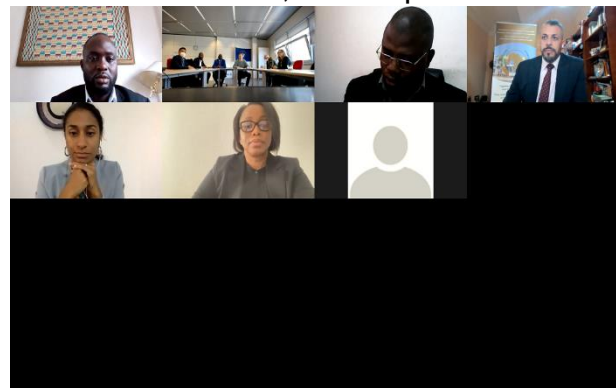
The third chapter elaborates the existing state-initiated, Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) actions, strategies and operations. These four countries are already actively engaged in the fight against terrorism and have recognized the fact that the use of force alone is insufficient and ineffective in dealing with these security challenges. Social inclusion, conflict resolution methods and economic development are also key factors which can increase a society's resilience against violent extremist ideologies.

METHODOLOGY

This report is the product of collaboration between the AU's African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) and the NATO Strategic Direction-South Hub ("The Hub"). It approaches the phenomenon of the contagion of violent extremism by firstly presenting background research carried out by both organizations and, secondly, highlighting the main takeaways of a Subject Matter Expert (SME) Workshop which was held on 12 April 2022.

The report includes research into the current situations regarding violent extremism in the Sahel Region and those factors potentially contributing to its expansion in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, including in-depth analysis of statistical data and the available literature. The report also provides information on key institutional capacities and state security efforts put in place to prevent and counter that expansion.

The Workshop was conducted with the participation of more than 30 (thirty) SMEs drawn from key institutions based in the West African sub-regions, including international organizations, state institutions and non-governmental organizations (See photos opposite). These included The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – Early Warning Directorate; The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP); The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) – West Africa Regional Office; The Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Training Centre (KA IPTC); and The West Africa Centre for Counter-Extremism (WACCE). Representatives of the ACSRT's Focal Point Institutions in the coastal states in question were also invited as SMEs. Thus, the report includes



the findings of an extensive review of the available literature conducted by the ACSRT and the Hub, as well as the statements, presentations and opinions expressed by the participants of the SMEs workshop. A detailed participant list is attached to this report as APPENDIX A.

The hybrid SME Workshop took place online and at the NSD-S HUB in Allied Joint Force Command headquarters in Naples, Italy.

By design, therefore, the report includes content which does not necessarily reflect the positions of ACSRT and/or the Hub.

CHAPTER I: THREAT ASSESSMENT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE SAHEL AND THE EFFECTS OF REGIONAL SPILLOVER INTO COASTAL STATES

Introduction

The growing threat of terrorism and violent extremism in Africa has made the continent an epicentre of terrorism on a global scale. The nature of attacks has grown more sophisticated, become more synchronized, and the groups are growing in confidence and cohesion. The Sahel region has become home to some of the world's deadliest terrorist groups in recent times, resulting in numerous, protracted atrocities committed against civilians, security forces, military establishments, government officials and critical infrastructure.¹ The Sahel now hosts a significant number of Africa's terrorist groups such as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Ansaroul Islam, among many others. Notably, a significant number of other violent groups, not necessarily linked to Al-Qaeda or Islamic State (IS), have also emerged. The deteriorating security situation has triggered a spillover effect as terrorist and violent extremist groups continue to expand southwards towards coastal countries of West Africa viz Benin, Côte Ivoire and Togo. Noting that the spread of terrorism and violent extremism to the coastal states of West Africa comes from the Sahel region, it is crucial to assess the terrorism and violent extremism threat and its various manifestations in the Sahel as well as identify its trends. This chapter, therefore, provides a brief overview of the evolution of violent extremism in the Sahel and how its persistence threatens the stability of coastal countries.

Spread/Expansion of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Sahel Region

The third Tuareg rebellion in 2012 in the northern part of Mali completely changed the dynamics of terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel, resulting in the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Amadou Toumani Toure.² Soon after, the security situation in Mali took a sharp nosedive. Within ten days into the military takeover, rebels and terrorists took control of the regional capitals of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu (See Figure 1).

¹ The Carnegie Papers – W. Lacher - Organized crime and conflict in the Sahel-Sahara region - 2012

² African Journal on Terrorism, 4(2) – K. A. Johnmary - Tuareq Insurgency in Mali and the Regional Security in the Sahel pp. 92-126. - 2013

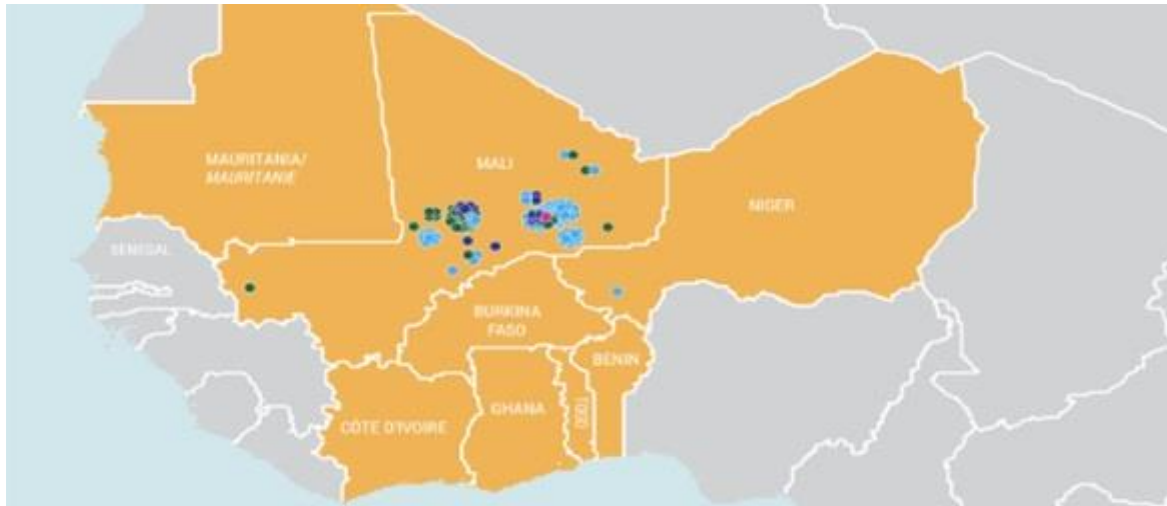


Figure 1: 2012 Violent Extremists and Terrorists Attacks in Sahel; Source: ISS Africa

The return to civilian rule in 2013 did little to improve the deteriorating security situation in the country. Religion-inspired violent extremist groups capitalised on the volatile security situation brought about by both the Tuareg rebellion and the then Malian government's off-balance state and ran riot in the north. The optimism that came with the signing of the Algiers Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2015 between the Malian government and the Coordination of Azawad Movements, an alliance of rebel groups in northern Mali, diminished as terrorist groups that were not party to the agreement expanded their activities. This resulted in the spread of terrorist groups and activities to central Mali by the end of 2015 and their impetus increased with the establishment of an alliance with the newly formed Macina Liberation Front (MLF) led by Amadou Koufa. The rapid spread quickly spilled over into Burkina Faso and Niger. In Burkina Faso, Ansarul Islam, then led by the late Mallam Ibrahim Dicko, had also commenced attacks in the north of the country. By 2017, the Sahel region became the epicenter of terrorist activities on the continent, with Mali bearing the brunt of most of the attacks (See Figures 2 and 3).

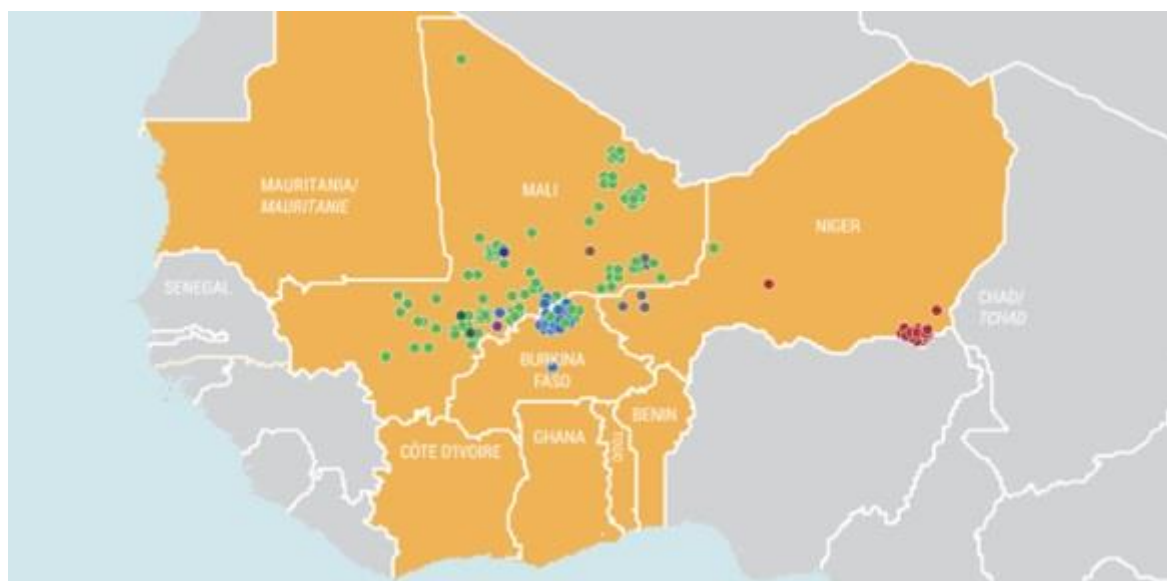


Figure 2: 2017 Violent Extremists and Terrorists Attacks in Sahel; Source: ISS Africa

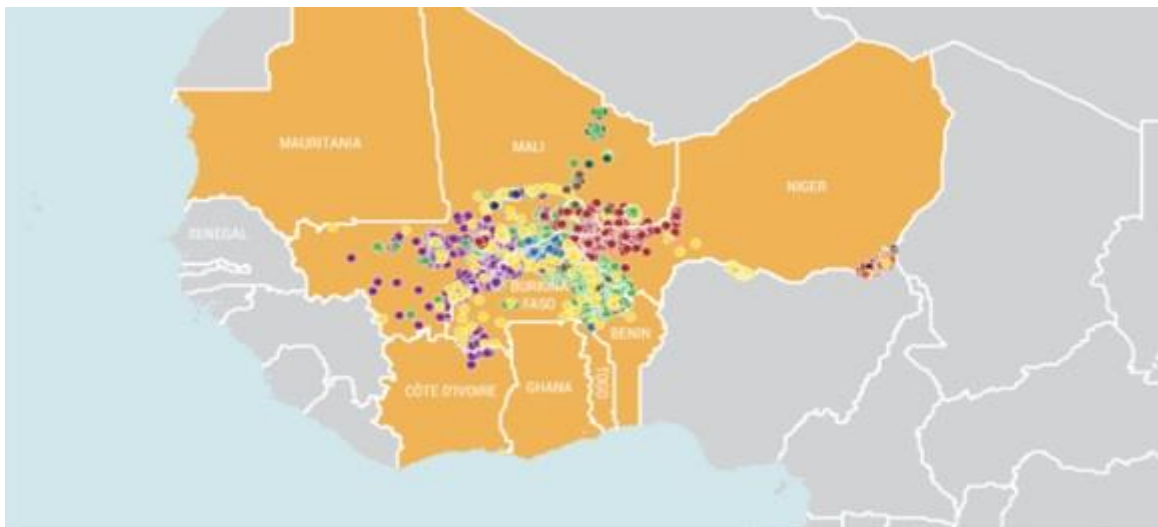


Figure 3: 2021 Violent Extremists and Terrorists Attacks in Sahel; Source: ISS Africa

Simultaneously, in the Lake Chad Basin, Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province – the former’s splinter group - continued to maintain a climate of terror by multiplying deadly attacks against civilians, defence/security forces and various vulnerable targets augmented by massive kidnappings of girls and students.

Following the expansion of international military deployments in the region (including the MINUSMA, Operation Barkhane, and the G-5 Sahel Force) the Al-Qaida-affiliated groups comprising AQIM, Al Mourabitoun, the MLF, and Ansar Dine announced, in March 2017, a merger into the JNIM under the leadership of Iyad Ag Ghali, a Malian national. The merger, which bolstered the capacity of the newly formed JNIM, led to the intensification of attacks in northern and central Mali, Western Niger and north and eastern Burkina Faso. Figure 4 shows the annual number of terrorist attacks in Western Sahel countries from 2019 to 2021.

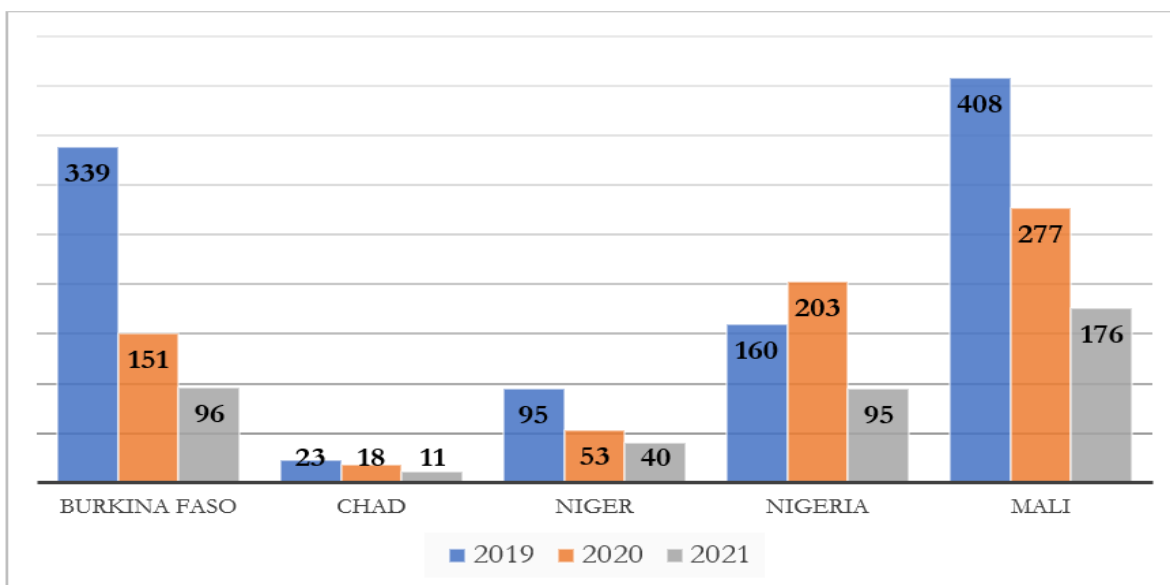


Figure 4: Yearly Violent Extremists and Terrorists Attacks in Sahel; Source: ACSRT

The Evolving Situation and the Possibility of Regional Spillover

The Sahel region is confronted with severe political, social, economic and security challenges that are exacerbating the threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism.³ As shown in Figure 4, countries in the region - particularly Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria - have continued to witness increases in terrorist attacks. Data from the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) reveals that in 2018 and 2019 there was a spike in the number of attacks, particularly by Boko Haram and its breakaway faction (ISWAP) in Nigeria and Niger, JNIM in Mali and Burkina Faso, and ISGS in Burkina Faso and Niger. ACSRT records also indicate that from January 2019 to December 2021, West Africa recorded the highest number of terrorist attacks in Africa.⁴ The region recorded 2,602 attacks that resulted in 10,899 deaths. Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Togo were the countries affected by the attacks with Burkina Faso experiencing a rather sharp increase in the number of deaths per attack during the period.⁵

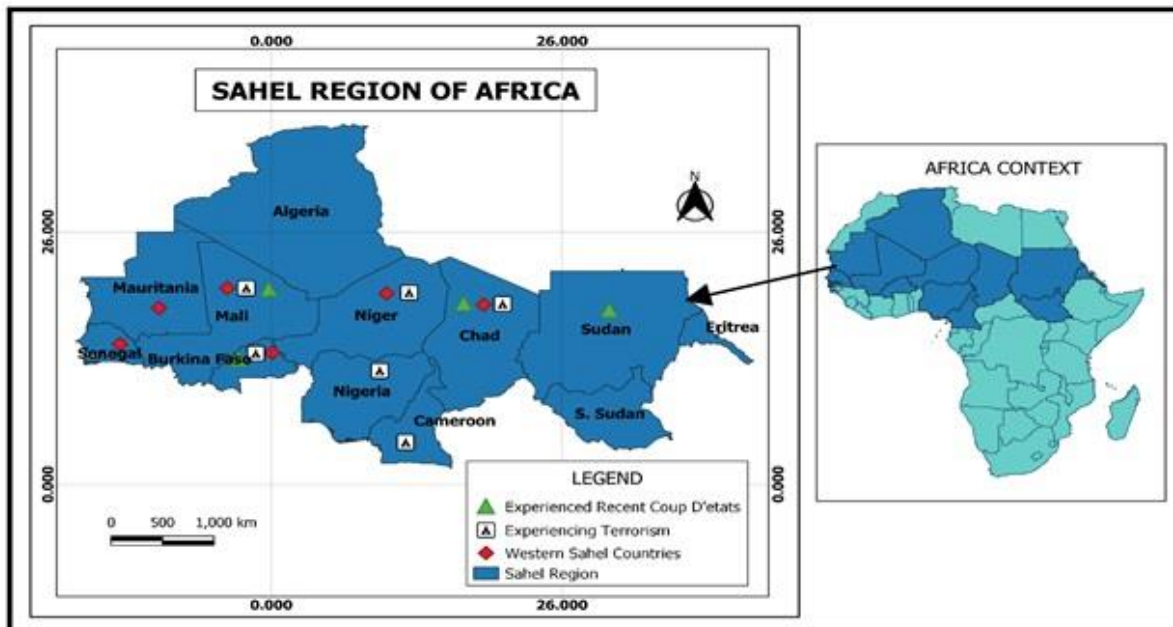


Figure 5. Geographical map showing the broader Sahel region, delineating countries which have experienced recent coup d'etats (2019-2022), and countries experiencing the scourge of violent extremism and terrorism.

The deteriorating security situation in the Sahel has elicited support from the international community resulting in a multiplicity of both international and regional military deployments. However, despite the deployments, terrorist activities are far from abating. While the African

³ African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, Policy Brief 001 – R. Apau, I. Ziblim - Beyond Rhetoric: Addressing the Terrorism Situation in the Sahel -2019 - <http://caert.org.dz/Policy-Briefs/POLICY%20BRIEF%20001.pdf>

⁴ African Terrorism Database (2022). This information is available at African Union's African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), based in Algiers Algeria. Information retrieved on 21/04/2022.

⁵ 3rd Joint NSD-S HUB & ACSRT Four-Monthly Report. Jan 2019 to Dec2020 - Terrorism in the Sahel: facts and figures -2020 - <https://caert.org.dz/Reports/NSDS-HUB-ACSRT-Sep-2020.pdf>

Union Commission (AUC) and its partners are strategizing innovative approaches to contain the scourge, the region is beginning to witness a resurgence of coup d'états that are threatening to worsen an already volatile situation. In August 2020 and May 2021, Mali experienced double coup d'états carried out by Colonel Assimi Goita, leading to the overthrow of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) and Transitional President Bah N'Daw respectively. In Chad, Mahamat Deby was installed as the transitional President following the death of his father, Idris Deby Itno, in violation of the national Constitution.⁶ In September 2021, Colonel Mamady Doumbouya successfully led a coup d'état resulting in the overthrow of President Alpha Condé in Guinea. The most recent coup d'état in Burkina Faso by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba resulted in the overthrow of the newly re-elected Roch Marc Christian Kabore in January 2022.⁷ Ominously, most of the countries affected by the recent coup d'états are central to the fight against terrorism and violent extremism as shown in Figure 5.

Given the already volatile security situation, there is the fear that terrorist and violent extremist groups could exploit the chaotic political scene to further entrench their positions and expand their activities to West African coastal states and beyond.

CHAPTER II: POTENTIAL VULNERABILITIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY-LEVEL SPECIFIC GRIEVANCES IN WEST AFRICAN COASTAL STATES CONDUCTIVE FOR THE SPREAD OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Introduction

Violent Extremism often comes across as an interplay between multiple factors, hence making it difficult to be predicted by one single factor.⁸ The diversity and multi-faceted nature of the causal factors of violent extremism reinforces the need for strategic approaches in tackling the phenomenon. The development and growth of violent extremist movements rely on and exploit vulnerabilities existing in the broader society as well as individual grievances in local communities. Individual precarious situations coupled with socioeconomic and socio-cultural challenges have been viewed as conditions that encourage violent extremist movements to develop and fester. Although political factors and economic circumstances such as governance deficit, state failure, political exclusion, marginalisation, low employment, rampant corruption, amongst others, resulting in the citizenry mistrust of their

⁶ ISS Africa – P. S. Handy, F. Djilo - AU balancing act on Chad's coup sets a disturbing precedent – 2021 - <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/au-balancing-act-on-chads-coup-sets-a-disturbing-precedent>

⁷ DW - Burkina Faso coup: West African bloc hold off on new sanctions – 2022 - <https://amp.dw.com/en/burkina-faso-coup-west-african-bloc-hold-off-on-new-sanctions/a-60654646>.

⁸ African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, Policy Brief 001 – R. Apau, I. Ziblim - Beyond Rhetoric: Addressing the Terrorism Situation in the Sahel - 2019 - <http://caert.org.dz/Policy-Briefs/POLICY%20BRIEF%20001.pdf>

governments.⁹ The lack of trust between the citizenry and the governments facilitates the emergence, development and escalation of violent extremism. In addition to the above-mentioned factors, social and psychological factors concerning a group or individual identity are also considered driving factors of the growth of extremist ideologies, thereby do not lend violent extremism to be predicted by one single variable. In coastal West Africa vulnerabilities such as weak political institutions, the porosity of borders in many of the countries, security forces not well equipped and trained, historical grievances, and structural economic challenges confronting countries in the region have served as catalysts for the spread of violent extremist activities. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of some of the critical vulnerabilities and local-specific grievances conducive to the emergence and spread of violent extremism into West Africa Coastal Countries of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

General Vulnerabilities Conducive for the Spread of Violent Extremism into West African Coastal States

Potential vulnerabilities conducive to violent extremism in coastal West Africa are those influences, circumstances or situations that are both externally and internally driven within and without the African context that affect the security landscape in this part of the continent. Issues pertaining to vacuums created by state agencies in local communities including absence of government in certain local communities, the mere lack of government ability to provide basic services and need the local population, high rate of unemployment particularly among graduates, lack of accountability by political office holders, rampant corruption, impunity of the political elites, marginalisation and discrimination of certain societal groups, exclusive politics, injustices and other local level context-specific good governance deficits have generated and contributed to the growing level of mistrust between government and local communities which have in turn resulted disappointments among local communities.¹⁰ Consequently, these unresolved grievances have created the conditions of disillusionment, hopelessness and frustration among the local population. In many instances, radicalisation by violent extremist groups resulting in the resort to acts of violent extremism and terrorism could be traced such unresolved grievances.

The existence of historical tribal rivalries and conflicts that can be exploited is another key factor contributing to the vulnerability in several instances.¹¹ It is undeniable fact that most developing countries of which

⁹ African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, Policy Paper 002 – F. K. Aubyn, I. Ziblim, R. Apau - Coups d'état and Political Instability in the Western Sahel: Implications for the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism – 2022 - <http://caert.org.dz/Policy-Briefs/final-policy-paper-coups200522.pdf>.

¹⁰ ACSRT Journal on Terrorism – 2020 - https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/8303/African%20Journal%20on%20Terrorism%20June%202018_E.pdf?cv=1

¹¹ The Conversation – M. D. Suleiman - Sahel Region: Africa – 2017 - <http://theconversation.com/sahel-region-africa-72569>

West African coastal states are no exception lack the economic and financial resources to meet the needs of the populations. Thus, the inabilities of these countries to deliver on the expectations of the citizenry are regarded as causal factors that have internally contributed to level of disillusionment, hopelessness and frustration in several instances.¹² The above-mentioned vulnerabilities are categorised as structural fault lines that contribute to the instability and the spread of violent extremism in many countries of West Africa (see figure 6). It is important to emphasize that none of these vulnerabilities conducive to the spread of violent extremism should be considered in isolation, given that a lot of factors are at play. Furthermore, the identified potential vulnerabilities which are conducive for the escalating of violent extremism must necessarily be contextualized, considering other issues at the local, national, and international levels since all of them contribute to the state of violent extremism situation.¹³ Indeed, just as conditions at the national level triggers situations at the local level, international conditions also trigger changes in the national social, economic, and political dimensions that results in the vulnerabilities in some cases. The four identified structural Fault lines, which of course, are not exhaustive are discussed in detail for the purposes of understanding the key issues that have supported and occasioned the vulnerabilities and high risk of violent extremism in West Africa coastal countries.

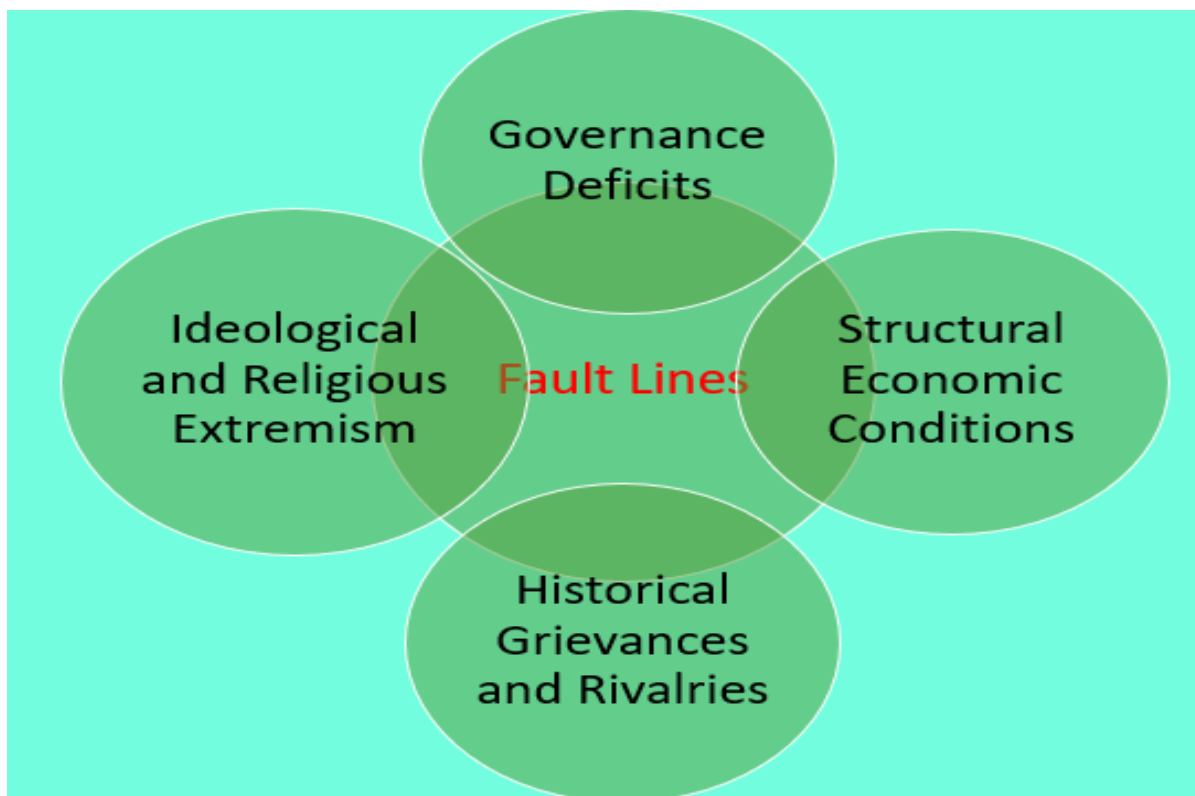


Figure 6: Structural fault-lines conducive for the spread of violent extremism

¹² Ibid.

¹³ UNODC - Drivers of violent extremism – 2018 - <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/drivers-of-violent-extremism.html>

a. Ideological and Religion-inspired Extremism:

Ideological and religion-inspired extremism are present in the terrorism and violent extremism situation in Africa, particularly in the Sahel region. This phenomenon is driven by both internal and external causal factors, which have become entrenched in the African society and gripping in coastal countries. The growing presence of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and their activities,¹⁴ incidences relating to militant religion-inspired extremism, transnational organised criminal network groups (TNOCs) involved in the trafficking of weapons and drugs are external identified factors that contributed to the current state of security in the Sahel and potential threats in coastal West African states.¹⁵ The affiliations to Al-Qaida or Islamic State and the world view dimension facilitates the provision and receipt of moral, logistical, or financial support.

Different religious communities in Africa have coexisted for centuries and tolerated each other's faiths and cultures. The new dimension and worldview being introduced is a recipe for confrontation. Religious communities in Africa have co-existed peacefully for generations in a long tradition of tolerance and inter-religious harmony. With the new wave of ideological and religion-inspired extremism development in Africa,¹⁶ extremist clerics are generating tensions among different faiths by radical preaching. This problem has been compounded by the indiscriminate setting up of Madrassas, Churches and other religious practices without proper regulation in a number of the coastal countries of which Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo are no exceptions.

Education - which has strategic value in shaping the beliefs of the youth - has also played a key role in facilitating religion-inspired extremism. Given the limited opportunities that exist in Africa, many young people are regularly on the lookout for scholarships to study abroad. The drive to award scholarships to African youth to study abroad with some of them becoming radicalized has contributed to the problem. Majority of these young people return as radicalised charismatic extremist clerics with religious view contrary to what is being practiced in their communities. These young people begin to proffer different ideologies and, in some cases, challenge existing preachers. This practice has contributed significantly to the state of radicalization in West Africa coastal states and the broader Sahel. The baseline to address this complex situation will be an evaluation of how the negative yet powerful synergy act as external causal factors in order to generate the required response by coastal countries that are facing the threat of violent extremism. This will

¹⁴ ACSRT/CAERT - Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the Sahel-Sahara Region of Africa: Recommendations for stemming a long-lasting threat- 2022 - <http://caert.org.dz/Policy-Briefs/policy-paper-ftfs200522-foreign-terrorist-fighters-in-the-sahel-sahara-rigion-of-africa.pdf>

¹⁵ Studies in Conflict & Terrorism – M. Vergani, M. Iqbal, E. Ilbahar, G. Barton - The three Ps of radicalization: Push, pull and personal. A systematic scoping review of the scientific evidence about radicalization into violent extremism, pp. 1-32. - 2018

¹⁶ Centre for Strategic and International Studies - Religious Extremism in Africa – 2016 - <https://www.csis.org/events/religious-extremism-africa>

help answer the question of to what countries can do to end and further prevent the threats of violent extremism. Thus, the creeping influence of militant religion-inspired and ideological extremism need to be interrogated by reviewing the growing development in many local communities and their impact on threats that coastal countries currently increasingly face.

b. Governance Deficits as Violent Extremism Catalysts:

West African states, and by extension the larger Africa continent appears to be grappling with decline in democratic dispensation.¹⁷ This is evident by the number of mass demonstrations in many of the coastal countries under investigation and the recent coups d'états that have taken place in Western Sahel. While the COVID-19 pandemic has to some extent contributed to this decline in democracy, other governance deficit issues such as violations and abuse of human rights by state authorities, complete disrespect for the rule of law, injustice, poor governance, and some context specific factors have contributed in no means to the decline.¹⁸ Issues of governance deficits undermine preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts at all levels. The effectiveness of P/CVE efforts at the local, national, and regional levels are derailed as extremists' groups thrive well in an atmosphere of discontent characterised by poor governance, rampant corruption, state abuse and culture of impunity by state authorities.¹⁹

Violent extremism grows, fester and heighten in an environment where governance deficits indicators become present and are combined with human rights violations, lack of rule of law as well as government repressive policies and practices. The exploitation of state repression and the manipulation of other grievances are often capitalised on by violent extremist groups to advance their cause. Therefore, the potency of the lure of violent extremism tends to be aggravated in situations where there is conspicuous evidence of government repression. Indeed, not only do government deficits serve as catalyst for the development and spread of violent extremism, but they also constitute a significant source of frustration to citizens. Mistrust between citizens and government grow wider when there are weak development outcomes. This threatens and weakens state institutions abilities to respond to the scourge of violent extremism when it does occur. Figure 7 demonstrates how governance deficits could lead to violent extremism.

¹⁷ Council on Foreign Relations – J. Campbell, N. Quinn - What's Happening to Democracy in Africa? - 2021 - <https://www.cfr.org/article/whats-happening-democracy-africa#:~:text=A%20democratic%20decline%2C%20accelerated%20by%20the%20COVID-19%20pandemic%2C,the%20last%20two%20decades.%20More%20From%20Our%20Experts>

¹⁸ African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, Policy Paper 002 – F. K. Aubyn, I. Ziblim, R. Apau - Coups d'état and Political Instability in the Western Sahel: Implications for the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism – 2022 - <http://caert.org.dz/Policy-Briefs/final-policy-paper-coups200522.pdf>.

¹⁹ UNODC - Drivers of violent extremism – 2018 - <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/drivers-of-violent-extremism.html>

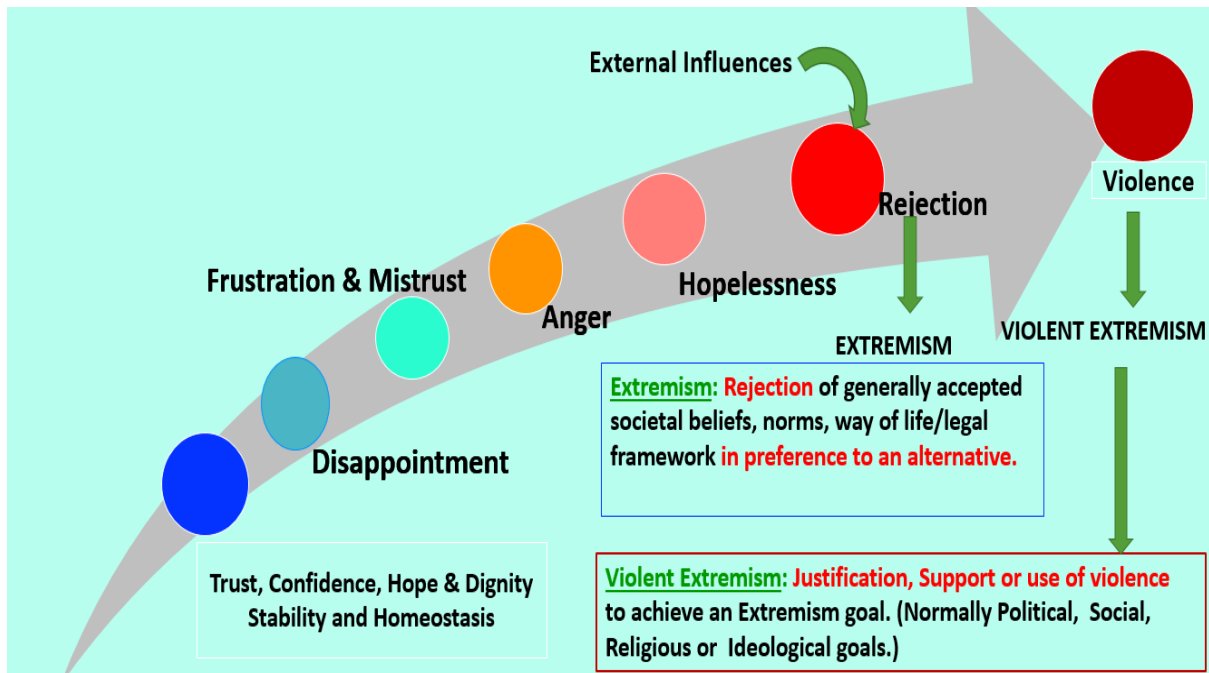


Figure 7: Violent Extremism as a results of Governance Deficits. Source: ACSRT

In West Africa, particularly in countries that are in the eye of the storm of violent extremism, many local communities have lost the trust, hope and confidence in their governments and the security forces to protect them against violent extremists' atrocities and hostilities. Many civilians continue to bear the brunt of attacks in areas where these groups operate. Also, in a number of these local communities there is the absence of government presence. This has resulted in inadequate resources in those communities mainly due to lack local government structures to address the needs and expectation of the local population including issues of protection and empowerment. This lack of government presence and developmental gap coupled with the lack of basic amenities and opportunities as well as inter-ethnic rivalry and violence have remained primary shortcomings that the violent extremist groups continue to exploit. Given the government inability to meet the expectations of the local communities, violent extremist groups have developed the strategy of winning the hearts and minds of the people by in most cases providing basic service to the satisfaction of the local people. Satisfied with the services of the violent extremist group, the local communities develop and foster relationship with the extremist groups for survival and self-preservation. As a results, there is mutual support and terrorist and violent extremist groups in a number of instances occupy national territories and the local communities are made to benefit from it. This trajectory must be dislodged. This is because, under the present circumstance, it becomes difficult for government to counter the message of the violent extremist groups, that they have an alternative to provide solutions to their problems and improve their well-being. The government's efforts are considerably challenged, as the citizens have lost confidence in the government to ensure their peaceful existence. This trajectory, if left uninhibited, could develop into entrenched insurgencies and would be extremely difficult to dislodge.

c. Structural Socioeconomic Conditions:

Socioeconomic conditions as a foundation under which economic policy decision concerning the development of general economic activities and programs of most coastal states are not favourable. Indeed, most coastal states, and by extension the larger African continent faces structural economic challenges. This creates a lack of socioeconomic opportunities particularly for the youth and vulnerable in society.²⁰ The socioeconomic challenges affecting several countries limit their abilities to respond to the needs of the growing population, making the population vulnerable to extremist propaganda and recruitment strategies. For example, structural economic challenges have facilitated economic exclusion, high levels of unemployment among very energetic and active population creating very limited opportunities within the employment eco-system.²¹ The lack of economic opportunities has created disillusionment among already impoverished population which have the propensity to degenerate into alienation and frustration which if not adequately addressed can result in radicalization and violent extremism. Globally, countries are encouraged to ensure promotion of sustained and inclusive economic growth for the realisations and the achievements of economic objectives of their citizens, as contained in the goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).²² Notwithstanding the economic aspirations of countries, most of them are bedevilled with a significant proportion of educated population without any meaning job. Unemployed, they become frustrated of the system and develop a feeling of disenfranchisement, developing grievances and making them vulnerable to violent extremist ideologies. This situation, therefore, provides a fertile ground for recruitment as violent extremists can convince the vulnerable youths that they can provide a route out of poverty.

Pull factors that drive people towards violent extremism include economic deprivation and marginalisation. Violent extremist organisations have become strategic in exploiting the global economic challenges as well as a feeling of injustice caused by political and socioeconomic system. Indeed, in recent time the COVID-19 pandemic has dashed the economic hope,²³ and the Russia-Ukraine conflict have further altered the economic situations of most West African countries, worsening the plight of disadvantaged groups in society. Given their precarious economic grievances, violent extremist groups offer ideological alternatives and present a better democratic narrative often with violence as means to imposing their ideologies on the wider society. However, not all violent extremists lack educational or economic

²⁰ UNODC - Drivers of violent extremism – 2018 - <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/drivers-of-violent-extremism.html>

²¹ African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, Policy Paper 002 – F. K. Aubyn, I. Ziblim, R. Apau - Coups d'état and Political Instability in the Western Sahel: Implications for the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism – 2022 - <http://caert.org.dz/Policy-Briefs/final-policy-paper-coups200522.pdf>.

²² Ibid, p. 8.

²³ Axios – F. Salmon - Africa loses economic hope – 2020 - <https://www.axios.com/2020/10/28/africa-covid-19-economy>

opportunities. There are several cases of high-profile terrorist attacks involving highly educated individuals with varied education trainings including engineering.²⁴ Such graduates with vast technological, manufacturing and engineering experienced being employed to develop increasingly sophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

d. Historical Grievances and Rivalries:

Historical grievances and rivalries as a structural fault line pertains to unresolved and largely prolonged; exclusion, discrimination, and marginalisation; and inter-communal tribal violence and clashes. These conflicts that persist in the broader society comes to play with the other vulnerabilities, further aggravating the opportunity for violent extremist groups to exploit. Effective conflict resolutions are sine qua non for ensuring better socioeconomic opportunities.²⁵ Also, peacebuilding approaches, community resilience as well harmonious living have become critical in mitigating other factors that contribute to the development and festering of violent extremism. A just and inclusive society hinges on long lasting peace as a foundation development. Therefore, unresolved historical grievances, prolonged rivalries, sectorial and ethnic conflicts if of great importance as violent extremist groups are noted at exploiting such situations to further their agendas and motives. Such historical grievances and rivalries also lead to human sufferings and poor governance in a number of instances. This is because, prolonged conflict causes the debilitation of state machinery, creating a void in effective state control, thereby creating a perfect atmosphere for violent extremist groups to operate.²⁶ Thus, violent extremist organisations are enabled to promote their extremist narratives and activities in a largely unchecked fashion. Consequently, they begin to take over territories and resources with the aim of controlling areas and zone to prosecute their violent atrocities. The need to adequately find enduring mechanism and measures to resolve protracted conflicts, community clashes among ethnic and tribal groups, as well finding lasting solution to existing acrimonies among local community members could go a long way to curtail extremists' hostile ideologies and narratives.

It must, however, be noted that conflicts in society have often come about by multifaceted factors including marginalization and discrimination. In addition, other factors such as socioeconomic exclusion, ethnic segregation, socio-cultural differences, racial discrimination, religious differences, as well as status relating to a person's existence in society (e.g., migrant) are all issues that reinforce marginalisation and discrimination in the broader society. Prior studies have established a link between marginalization and discrimination as drivers of

²⁴ Geo.tv – T. Hashmi - Highly educated terrorists have always existed 2017 -

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/157342-pope-to-see-a-medellin-that-has-put-drug-wars-in-its-past>

²⁵ UNODC - Drivers of violent extremism – 2018 -

<https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/drivers-of-violent-extremism.html>

²⁶ CSS Analyses in Security Policy, no 183. – O. Frazer, C. Nünlist -The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism – 2015 - www.rcc.int/swp/download/docs/CSSAnalyse183-EN.pdf/35ed6de8e00fe308c

radicalisation that may lead to violent extremism.²⁷ It is against this backdrop, that the sustainable development goals, particularly goal 16 requires countries to put measures in place to promote and guarantee peaceful and inclusive societies as a requirement for sustainable development.²⁸ Countries are also to ensure justice accessibility to all, ensure institutions are accountable and effective at all levels. Therefore, a reduction in discrimination and marginalisation will not only deny the space for violent extremist groups to operate, but will also promote the realization of socially inclusive, equitable, and tolerant societies that pay critical attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.

Local Community-Level Specific Grievances Conducive for the Spread of Violent Extremism into West African Coastal States

Aside the general vulnerabilities conducive for the spread of violent extremism in the broader West Africa sub-region, West Africa coastal states of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo are facing some local community-level specific grievances that have often acted as catalysts to develop and facilitate the growth of violent extremism ideologies. These catalysts include but not limit to ethnic, sectorial, and religious tensions; discrimination and marginalization of minority and vulnerable groups in the society; border security management challenges; lack of probity, transparency, and accountability resulting in bad governance, the evidential threats of youth bulge across the continent, impunity of the political elite, and mistrust by citizens in state institutions to effectively deliver to address their grievance.²⁹ For terrorist groups such as JNIM, ISGS, Boko Haram, ISWAP, Ansaroul Islam and other local terrorists and violent extremist groups, exploiting local grievances as pathway of an expansion into West African coastal states has been a long strategic objective.

The terrorist and violent extremist groups, as part of the processes of winning the hearts and minds of local population, develop socialization processes with local communities by filling the states' gaps in governance and service delivery. The groups also seek to undermine central governments in the rural communities by identifying areas of failure of government to provide basic services such as potable drinking water as well as medical and other services. By providing these services to the rural communities, they seek to win their hearts, minds and obedience. This strategy has translated into a dividend of sympathy,

²⁷ USIP - The Causes and Consequences of Violent Extremism and the Role of Foreign Assistance – 2016 - <https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/04/causes-and-consequences-violent-extremism-and-role-foreign-assistance#:~:text=Already%20it%E2%80%99s%20known%2C%20through%20empirical%20research%2C%201%20that,by%20state%20and%20security%20services%20in%20these%20counties.>

²⁸ UN Sustainable Development Goals - <https://in.one.un.org/page/sustainable-development-goals/sdg-16/>

²⁹ African Journal on Terrorism,8 (1) – R. Apau, A. Banunle - Terrorism, Violent Extremism and Insurgency in the Sahel: An Assessment pp. 1-21. – 2019 - <https://caert.org.dz/Publications/Journal/Journal-19-1.pdf?cv=1>

loyalty, support and cooperation of the respective local communities and in great measure is responsible for the resilience and growth of the violent extremist groups in some local communities in a number of West Africa coastal states. This is manifested in the freedom of movement and frequency with which the groups are able to launch successful attacks against security forces in countries including Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo. The local context-specific grievances identified through extensive literature review and corroborated by the Subject Matter Experts' (SME) workshop for each coastal country of focus are enumerated for policy reflection and actions.

a. Benin:

The growing threats of violent extremism in Benin are a consequent of local grievances held by pastoralist communities that have provided an entry point for extremists' interests. Since 2019, Benin has experienced more than fifteen (15) terrorist attacks attributed to militant extremist groups in its border communities. Some of the attacks have been very lethal resulting from sophisticated operations involving the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). For example, on 8 February 2022, at the W National Park, located at Kandi, Northern Benin, armed men ambushed the park's patrol team with IEDs killing nine people, including five park rangers, two park officials, a soldier and a French trainer. Twelve others were injured. Macina Liberation Force (MLF) - an affiliate of JNIM - is suspected to have carried out the attack. Two days after, on the 10 February 2022, also at the W National Park, a reconnaissance patrol team was hit by an IED killing one park official. Similarly, on 11 April 2022 at the Pendjari National Park, five Beninese soldiers were killed and eight others injured when their convoy was attacked by armed men using IEDs. Other attacks have occurred in Alibori along the border with Niger and Yangoli along the border with Burkina Faso.

Violent extremist groups in neighbouring bordering countries appear to be using grievances expressed by local pastoralist communities to gain influence in Northern Benin. Issues driving violence in northern Benin include herder-farmer conflicts, ownership and access to land and the issues concerning the management of W Park and Pendjari Park. There are also some government policy initiatives that significantly constraint traditional pastoralist livelihoods inadvertently, thereby facilitating the recruitment drive of militant extremist groups looking to build local support. The decision to hand over the management of the W-Arly Pendjari Park complex to African Parks, a South African non-profit conservation organisation, appears to generate some local grievances. The new management of the park has excluded certain resource users, especially hunters and livestock herders, thus creating local animosity. It is important to note that the park has served as livelihoods support for the locals for centuries. Government policies introduced in 2019 are contributing the state of insecurity in Benin.³⁰ A policy to ban

³⁰ Africa Center for Strategic Studies – L. Brottem - The Growing Threat of Violent Extremism in Coastal West Africa – 2022 - <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/the-growing-threat-of-violent-extremism-in-coastal-west-africa/?cv=1>

transhumance activity- foreign livestock involved in long distance migration-, and an initiative undertaken by the government geared towards reducing land conflicts and disputes associated with property rights appears to generate some grievances among the local population.³¹ While these policies were formulated as an ambitious plan to sedentarize local pastoralists by providing dedicated areas for purposes of livestock production, they nevertheless carry significant risks which if not looked at could further escalate the country's violent extremism threat levels. The need to find innovative approaches to establishing a new social contract by addressing the concerns of the local communities could serve as a preventative measure to the evolving violent extremism threats.

b. Côte d'Ivoire:

Since the country suffered its first terrorist attack at Grand Bassam in March 2016, the threat of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Côte d'Ivoire is no longer perceived but real. The country since 2020 has experienced several attacks along its border with Burkina Faso where, - between January and June 2021, more than six Ivorian Soldiers were killed, while five others were injured in an attack along the Burkina Faso border, believed to have been carried out by Katiba Macina, also known as (aka) Macina Liberation Front - an affiliate group of JNIM. Specifically, on the 1 April 2021 along the roads of Nassian and Kafolo, a vehicle of security forces was struck with an IED. Similar incidents happened along the same route on the 12 April 2021. Also on 7 June 2021, armed fighters attacked a town called Tougbo. Previously, towns such as Bole and Kolobougou have all been attacked by violent extremist and terrorist groups. The above-mentioned incidents, which are not exhaustive, demonstrate the worst manifestation of violent extremism in the country and a reflection of the extremist groups' intention and dexterity to escalate violent extremism in Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire's local specific grievances stem from vulnerabilities that exist in the Northern part of the country and how extremist groups may exploit such to cause devastating atrocities. Specific grievances include recurring conflicts between herders and farmers over access to grazing lands and water whilst tensions over crop destruction by livestock is also a major source of violence. The poor living conditions of border communities, whose inhabitants feel neglected, are a potential grievance that could be exploited by extremist groups. The Dozo hunters' associations' reported feeling of marginalization by the government and dissatisfaction on how the state takes advantage of their members to push back religious extremist groups without any support is of grave concern.³² Similarly, concerns of ex-combatants from the civil wars of the early 2000s, who were not reintegrated into society and never formally

³¹ *ibid*

³² Resolve Network – J. Moody - Addressing the Dozo in Côte d'Ivoire – 2020 - <https://www.resolvenet.org/research/addressing-dozo-cote-divoire>

demobilized, present threats to the country.³³ The resentment felt by the ex-combatants could be exploited by extremist groups. Strengthening cohesion within and between communities could be a safeguard measure to stop violent extremists from deepening and expanding their roots in the country. There is also the need to reinforce conflict resolution mechanisms using the local police and local chiefs.

c. Ghana:

Ghana provides a clear example of the contagion effects of violent extremism in the coastal states, although the country has not witnessed any direct terrorist attacks. Despite the clear presence of general vulnerabilities in the country just like its neighbouring countries that have suffered and continue to experience violent extremist and terrorist attacks, Ghana has successfully managed to isolate the country from the growing atrocities of violent attacks by extremists.³⁴ However, the threats and vulnerabilities continue to thicken owing to complex and wide-ranging factors. Ghana's risk factors include its proximity to countries like Burkina Faso where groups such as ISGS, JNIM and Ansarul Islam have operated for long and established a foothold that has become difficult to dislodge. Burkina Faso clearly serves as a key strategic geographical location, by the country's mere location at the intersection of the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, sharing borders with Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo.³⁵ By this, terrorists and violent extremists could use Burkina Faso as launchpad to cause devastating atrocities to Ghana as a way of achieving their desire to "push West Africans into the sea". Internally, Ghanaian nationals who were radicalised, trained and recruited by the ISIS through the consumption of online propaganda materials, who may return home or have returned home as foreign terrorist fighters remain the biggest threats of home-grown terrorism.³⁶ Ghanaian youths continue to fall prey ISIS social media propaganda, and a few of them have been recruited by terrorist and violent extremist groups in Africa, particularly in Burkina Faso and Libya. For example, in 2015, a 25-year-old university graduate Mohammad Nazir Nortei Alema, joined ISIS and was later reported dead.³⁷ In the same year, two other Ghanaian girls were reported to have joined ISIS as per the account of

³³ SSRN – J. Hellweg - Performing State and Society: Zakaria Koné as Dozo Hunter and Political Exemplar in Post-War Côte d'Ivoire – 2013 - <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2253750>

³⁴ The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) - Conflict Trends Issue 3 – 2021 - <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/ct321-web.pdf?cv=1>

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ ACCORD – F. K. Aubyn - The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa Assessing Ghana's Vulnerabilities, Resilience and Responses – 2021 - <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/?cv=1>

³⁷ Sahara Reporters - Ghanaian Graduate Among 10 Suspected To Have Joined ISIS – 2015 - <https://saharareporters.com/2015/08/25/ghanaian-graduate-among-10-suspected-have-joined-isis>

the then National Security Coordinator.³⁸ Subsequently, in October 2017, reports of about 100 Ghanaian migrants joining ISIS in Libya also surfaced.³⁹ In the case of Libya, some of those who joined were allegedly forcefully conscripted, while the others joined voluntarily for financial rewards and safety. Also in June 2021, Abu Dujana, a Ghanaian national who joined the JNIM, detonated a suicide car bomb near a French military camp in Mali, and in a video posted online, called on Muslims in Ghana to take up arms against the state.⁴⁰ All the above-mentioned cases of recruitment into terrorist groups pose direct threat to Ghana's national security, safety and resilience.

The local grievances expressed by border communities over incidences of violence perceived to be perpetrated by inflowing refugees fleeing conflicts zones in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger remain a cause of worry. In 2019, the area around Bawku in the Upper East region experienced influx of refugees fleeing violence in Zoaga, Boulgou Province of Burkina. A further 1,600 refugees were also registered in the Sissala East District of Upper West Region. Following these incidences of inflow of migrants, especially those fleeing conflicts zones in Burkina Faso has been noted by many P/CVE experts as a potential threat that could fuel violent extremism in Northern part of Ghana. For instance, one expert opined that "the presence of Burkinabe migrant labourers in the Upper West Region of Ghana has, for instance, exacerbated chieftaincy and intercommunal violence related to land access and the migration of farmers and herders. Communities such as the Doba and Kandega, Kologo and Navrongo, and Bavungnia and Wusungu along the borders with Burkina Faso have all experienced disputes".⁴¹ Historical chieftaincy issues in Bimbilla, occasional land disputes between Nkonya and Alavanyo, as well as the perceived grievances surrounding independence of Western Togoland are all issues that could be exploited by violent extremist groups. Addressing historical conflicts using whole-of-society approach that involves, amongst others, traditional leaders, community leaders, and youth groups is a worthy pathway of eschewing violence and securing harmonious peaceful living and resilience in local border communities.

d. Togo:

Violent extremism has become a serious threat in Togo. Violent Extremist groups continue to carry out attacks close to the northern borders that the country shares with Burkina Faso and Niger, or in the

³⁸ Graphic Online - Two Ghanaians join ISIS -National Security Co-ordinator confirms – 2015 - <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/two-ghanaians-join-isis-but-national-security-co-ordinator-cautions-media-to-be-circumspect.html>

³⁹ Ghanaweb – 100 Ghanaians join ISIS – 2017 - <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/100-Ghanaians-join-ISIS-Minority-589477>

⁴⁰ West African Centre for Counter-Extremism – M. Muqthar, R. Newton - White Paper: Updates on Violent Extremist Threat to Ghana – 2021 - <https://waccegh.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/White-Paper-Update-on-Extremist-Threat-to-Ghana-July-2021.pdf>

⁴¹ ACCORD - Conflict Trends Issue 3 – 2021 - <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/ct321-web.pdf?cv=1>

country itself.⁴² Togo, despite its proximity to countries affected by violent extremism, until recently was spared of terrorist attacks. Then, on 9 November 2021, a security post in northern village of Sanloaga was attacked. This was followed by the 10 and 11 May 2022 incidents in which armed men, believed to be members of JNIM, attacked a Togolese military outpost located in Kpekpakandi, a few kilometres away from neighbouring Burkina Faso and killed eight soldiers. These attacks signal a conscious desire of violent extremist organizations to establish a presence in Togo as part of a broader recruitment drive.

Beyond the general vulnerabilities of high-rate poverty, inequality, illiteracy, unemployment, rampant corruption, weak institutions and poor governance - which are eminent in all coastal countries - Togo faces local specific grievances that are being exploited by violent extremist groups. The feeling of abandonment and resentment by local communities particularly those in North on the poor living conditions is a potential driver for violent extremism once allowed to fester and left unchecked. These local communities feel neglected and marginalized by the central government. The heightened state of frustration among the citizenry, most of which is directed at the state's rule as expressed through street protests, should also be checked as it could breed a fertile ground for extremist groups to exploit. These specific local grievances could signal a coordinated effort by violent extremist organizations to cement their infiltration and expansion.

⁴² The Conversation - A. Folahanmi - Togo looks like West Africa's new frontier of violent extremism – 2022 - <https://theconversation.com/togo-looks-like-west-africas-new-frontier-of-violent-extremism-183304>

CHAPTER III: STATE EFFORTS FOR PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Introduction

The West Africa coastal states have recognized that the violent extremist threat from the Sahel area will not stop at the borders. In fact, terrorist organizations have expanded their operational areas, from Northern Mali and the Lake Chad basin to the tri-border area of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, as well as southward towards the borders of Benin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and, to a lesser extent, Ghana, Guinea and Senegal.

This chapter aims to examine the efficacy of key institutions (state security - police, armed forces, justice system, local, regional and international initiatives and presence of multinational peace-keeping missions in the area) which are key to preventing the spread of violent extremism. Specifically, it provides a comprehensive review of state-initiated actions towards preventing violent extremism by presenting the “hard” and “soft” security efforts. The “hard efforts” relate to military and police activities, legal measures and strategies, while “soft efforts” mean dialogue, economic and social development plans and actions geared towards ensuring community resilience against extremist narratives.

Presence of Multinational Peace-Keeping Missions

In addition to national and regional efforts in the fight against violent extremism, international support in the fight against violent extremism to West Africa states is pervasive. The French-led Takuba forces and the European Union Training Mission in Mali have a Sahel-centred approach and, according to very recent developments, they are closing or repositioning to another country. The future of the European military/police contribution to the security of Sahel remains a determining factor in the matter of stability. However, the new direction is not known.

The European Union is also active in funding the projects, which aim to strengthen border control and collaboration among the states. The latest occasion to ensure EU's commitment in support of stronger border control was in November 2021, when EU funded a meeting with the interim ministers of Ghana, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso to facilitate their cooperation and find solutions to decrease incidents at the border areas.⁴³

US AFRICOM is committed to support the fight against violent extremism throughout the Western African region as was ensured in September 2021 by the visit of Commander of AFRICOM to Benin, Côte d'Ivoire,

⁴³ European External Action Service - Ghana and three other West African countries collaborate to strengthen security and border management with the support of the European Union – 2021 - https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/107149/ghana-and-three-other-west-african-countries-collaborate-strengthen-security-and-border_en

Ghana and Togo. International partners are keen on the cooperation in development of interoperability, joint training and capacity building.⁴⁴

The prevention of the spread of violent extremism before it reaches the state borders of West Africa coastal states is also an important factor. Benin, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo also participate in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). This peacekeeping mission has been active since 2013 with currently 18,000 personnel. Côte d'Ivoire and Togo are among the main troop contributors to the mission from the region.⁴⁵

	Troops	Individual police	Formed police units	Staff officer	Total
Chad	1404	15	-	27	1446
Senegal	955	24	312	17	1308
Togo	905	25	278	17	1225
Niger	862	31	-	8	901
Côte d'Ivoire	845	24	-	17	886
Burkina Faso	649	28	140	8	825
Guinea	650	13	-	17	680
Benin	250	18	140	10	418
Nigeria	65	6	140	14	225
Liberia	148	-	-	12	160
Ghana	138	-	-	14	152
Sierra Leone	-	-	-	17	17
Gambia	-	9	-	6	15
Mauritania	-	-	-	6	6

Table 1: Western African contribution to MINUSMA (NOV 21). Source: peacekeeping.un.org

Regional and International P/CVE Initiatives

Besides the state-level efforts against the spread of violent extremism, international and regional efforts are also active and play an important role.

a. The Accra Initiative:

One of the most important joint security efforts in the future could be the Accra Initiative, which was launched in September 2017 in order to coordinate and unite interests and capabilities in stopping violent extremists, especially in the border areas. This coordinating forum was founded by Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo (Mali and Niger as observers) and it works at different levels: heads of

⁴⁴ DefenceWeb - Africom Commander visits Togo, Benin, Ghana and Ivory Coast – 2021 - <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/africom-commander-visits-togo-benin-ghana-and-ivory-coast/>

⁴⁵ MINUSMA Mandate – 2021 - <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/mandate-0>

administration, heads of security forces, chiefs of intelligence and experts.⁴⁶

The initiative is based on three pillars: sharing of information and intelligence capacities, common training, and operating joint military operations. Since 2018, Operation Koudalgou was conducted three times in 2018 and 2019 by the joint forces and resulted with hundreds of arrests thorough the border areas between the coastal states and Burkina Faso. The operations were not only directed to find and arrest extremist groups but also to reveal and dismantle organized crime gangs and smuggling activities, which are particularly problematic in these countries.⁴⁷ These countries working together is a very positive outcome, gaining the trust and the effective coordination among each other and this could lead to a more comprehensive counter-terrorist approach within the region.⁴⁸

The latest operation by the cohesion of the Accra Initiative members was Goundalgou-4 in November 2021 (Operation Goundalgou was launched in 2018), where about 5,700 soldiers were deployed to five regions of Burkina Faso, bordering with the other member states. It was reported that five terrorist bases were destroyed, 300 suspects were arrested and a significant quantity of narcotics, weapons and vehicles were seized.⁴⁹

Despite the high numerical outcomes, concerns have been raised regarding the usefulness of the actions. These operations had been conducted only over a very limited time (maximum one week) and geographical framework and it was also worrisome that the majority of the arrested people were Fulani, which could give a picture of an ethnically selected action.⁵⁰

b. Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF):

The contribution to the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is an important element in ensuring security and stability in the broader Sahel area. As the recognition of the multidimensional approach of the issue of violent extremism, MNJTF has three main roles in its mandate: creating a safe and secure environment with military actions; facilitating and securing the implementation of stabilization programs; and conducting humanitarian operations. The Task Force mainly consists of

⁴⁶ European Council on Foreign Relations - Accra Initiative - <https://ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/accra-initiative/>

⁴⁷ Afrikipresse - La chronique du lundi – La menace terroriste dans le golfe de Guinée et l’Afrique de l’Ouest : Vers une coordination des actions du G5 Sahel et de celles de l’Initiative d’Accra” – 2021 -

<https://afrikipresse.fr/la-chronique-du-lundi-la-menace-terroriste-dans-le-golfe-de-guinee-et-lafrrique-de-louest-vers-une-coordination-des-actions-du-g5-sahel-et-de-celles-de-l-initi/>

⁴⁸ Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina - Initiative d’Accra: développement, sécurité et lutte contre le terrorisme au menu – 2019 - <https://www.rtb.bf/2019/02/22/initiative-daccra-developpement-securite-et-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-au-menu/>

⁴⁹ DefenceWeb - Joint West African operations confronts terrorists – 2022 - <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/joint-west-african-operation-confronts-terrorists/>

⁵⁰ Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l’école Militaire - Dr. A. Tisseron - L’initiative d’Accra. Un “game changer” dans la lutte contre les groupes jihadistes en Afrique de l’ouest? p.34. - 2021 - <etude-irsem-81-tisseron-afrique.pdf>

troops from Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria and, by its nature, it focuses on the Lake Chad territory and the activities of Boko Haram.⁵¹

c. G-5 Sahel Joint Task Force:

As the main influencer of the coastal states' security, the monitoring of the situation in the Sahel has always been important. The activities of the TVEOs had been exceeded since 2016, therefore, the heads of states of the G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger) have decided in 2017 to form a joint force against these organizations with the support of the international community. The Task Force with military and police components are conducting operations through the territories of the members up to 50 km on each side of the borders. While the 5000-manned force main task is combat terrorism and organized crime, they are also mandated for supporting humanitarian actions and the return of displaced people.⁵²

d. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS):

As one of the most influential Regional Economic Communities (REC)⁵³ in Africa, ECOWAS has ambitions in creating stability in Western Africa. ECOWAS members decided in 2021 to coordinate their efforts against the financing of violent extremism by developing their national policies.⁵⁴ The latest action plan was adopted in 2019 for the period of 2020-2024 and prepared USD 2.3 billion for terrorism prevention projects. This includes both coordination and pooling of counter-terrorist efforts and promoting inter-community dialogue. However, the implementation of the plans has been slower than expected. Due to the pandemic, the member states' economies are weakened, thus the financial support of the projects faces difficulties. Also hampering the success of the action plan is the fact that national resources are divided among the many local security initiatives and that there is a lack of coordination with the regional security stakeholders (G5 Sahel, Accra Initiative, African Union, Multinational Joint Task Force, European forces) in order to avoid mission and resource overlap and conflicts of interest.⁵⁵

⁵¹ International Crisis Group - What role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in fighting Boko Haram? – 2020 - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/291-what-role-multinational-joint-task-force-fighting-boko-haram>

⁵² Accord – N. Rupesinghe - The Joint Force of the G5 Sahel – 2018 - <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-joint-force-of-the-g5-sahel/>

⁵³ African Union – Regional Economic Communities (RECs) - <https://au.int/en/organs/recs>

⁵⁴ Ministère de la Justice et de la Législation - 35^{ème} plénière de la commission technique GIABA discours du GDS, Ministre de la Justice et de la Législation – 2021 - <https://justice.gouv.tg/35eme-pleniere-de-la-commission-technique-du-groupe-intergouvernemental-daction-contre-le-blanchiment-dargent-en-afrique-de-louest-giaba-discours-du-garde-des-sceaux-mini/>

⁵⁵ Institute for Security Studies - S. Kwarkye - Slow progress for West Africa's latest counter-terrorism plan – 2021 - <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/slow-progress-for-west-africas-latest-counter-terrorism-plan>

Key State Institutions' Efforts for P/CVE in West Africa Coastal States

In order to prevent the spread of violent extremism, countries in coastal areas have implemented new administrative frameworks, regional and broader international cooperation, the development of security forces and other counter-terrorism measures. It is now widely accepted in these countries that the spread of violent extremist ideologies cannot be halted by purely legal and armed means. The development of society, embracing communities which have been left behind by economic and social investments, is key. The efforts at the individual state level are therefore enumerated.

a. Benin:

In Benin it is clear that hard security issues are very closely connected to societal and economic challenges and cannot be handled separately. The control of the border is challenging because of the vast wildlife and forest reserves. The porous border with Niger and Burkina Faso allows extremist groups to hide and move over to Benin to rest and loot resources.⁵⁶



Figure 8: National Parks at the borders of Benin with Burkina Faso and Niger. Source: researchgate.net

The cross-border ethnic and family ties lead to difficult border management and control, allowing extremist groups to reach Benin unchecked. The Agency for the Integrated Management of Border Spaces is actively working on the development of control over these territories and on the improvement of the living conditions in the vulnerable areas in order to bring the central government and the local communities closer. The Agency contributes in infrastructure development, empowering women, reducing poverty, securing borders and promoting cross-border cooperation.⁵⁷ The European Union financially supports Benin's efforts in these activities. A EUR 47 million budget program in 2019 aimed to enhance competitiveness, energy access and terrorism prevention.⁵⁸

However, matters still exist which could push the local communities towards radicalization. One of the main disputes between the central governance and local communities is the control over the National Parks

⁵⁶ Institute for Security Studies - M. Matongbada - Can Benin protect itself from terrorism in the region? – 2019 - <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-benin-protect-itself-from-terrorism-in-the-region>

⁵⁷ Ministère de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité Publique - Mission L'Agence Béninoise de Gestion Intégrée des Espaces Frontaliers - <https://abegief.bj/pages/10/Mission>

⁵⁸ European Commission - EU and Government of Benin sign agreements to boost competitiveness, energy access and action against violent extremism – 2019 - https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/eu-and-government-benin-sign-agreements-boost-competitiveness-energy-access-and-action-against_en

and the right to hunt on those territories. Hunting communities feel their livelihood is threatened because of a central government decision to give the management of the parks to a South African company (African Parks Network, APN). The disagreements between the park designated hunters and locals have led to clashes.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the cooperation between the government and APN has led to benefits in fighting violent extremism. APN provided helicopters for Beninese Armed Forces for air surveillance and deployment to areas which are not accessible terrestrially.⁶⁰

Additionally, Benin established a High-Level Committee for the Fight against Terrorism and Insecurity at Borders, a government organization for coordinating and synchronizing state efforts against violent extremism and enhancing border security. Compared to Togo's Inter-Ministerial Committee (CIPLEV), the visible difference is that Benin's Committee struggles to cope with the local communities, mayors or religious leaders, and misses the chance to engage and feel the "public pulse" in order to have a comprehensive view on the situation.⁶¹

As mentioned, economic factors could be facilitators to gain resilience among locals against the spread of violent extremism. Benin's National Development Plan for the period 2018-2025 primarily targets the expansion of human capital and the wellbeing of the population, raising the economic productivity, environmental awareness and good governance. While the average growth of the population in Benin is 3.5%, economic development cannot keep pace and the poverty rate rose in recent years to 38.5%. Youth unemployment is also a factor. If addressed through appropriate planning, the exposure of vulnerable communities to violent extremist ideologies might be reduced.⁶²

At a hard security level, Benin strengthened the military and police presence on its borders with the creation of the Northern Theatre in April 2020. The government has an ambition to raise its military presence at borders with Burkina Faso, Niger and North-Western Nigeria with 12,500 soldiers. The police also raised its contribution to border security by establishing new police stations and deploying Special Border Surveillance Units.⁶³ The contribution to the Multinational Joint Task

⁵⁹ La Nouvelle Tribune - C. Hessoun - Après le parc de la Pendjari: Le parc national du W sur le point d'être cédé à Apn - 2017 - <https://lanouvelletribune.info/2017/09/benin-parc-w-bientot-cede-apn/>

⁶⁰ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung - North of the countries of the Gulf of Guinea The new frontier for Jihadist groups? P. 44. - 2021 - <https://www.kas.de/documents/261825/13432629/North+of+the+countries+of+the+Gulf+of+Guinea+-+The+new+frontier+for+jihadist+groups.pdf/97cbceda-85c1-33fc-45fd-50f8ddaaa0ab?version=1.2&t=1625138447487>

⁶¹ Institute for Security Studies - W. Assanvo, J. Abatan, M. Matongbada - Evidence must guide terrorism prevention in Benin and Togo - 2021 - <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/evidence-must-guide-terrorism-prevention-in-benin-and-togo>

⁶² UN Development Programme - Benin's National Development Plan 2018-2025 - 2019 - <https://www.bj.undp.org/content/benin/fr/home/presscenter/pressreleases/plan-national-de-developpement-2018-2025-du-benin.html>

⁶³ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung - 2021 - pp.43-44.

Force (MNJTF) is an important element in ensuring security and stability in Benin's neighbourhood as they are contributing a non-combatant company to this mission.⁶⁴

b. Côte d'Ivoire:

Investment in vulnerable areas can prevent local communities to be exploited by the spread of extremist ideologies. In November 2021, Côte d'Ivoire's central government announced a great investment project for the northern border area. The investment will develop the health sector, education and provide new job opportunities. Prime Minister Patrick Achi announced the project which can offer an alternative to violent extremism to the youth in vulnerable communities. According to the plan, a USD 430 million project will construct a dry port in the northern city of Ferkessedougou and will boost the production of cotton and cashew in the area.⁶⁵ A project, directed at the development of the youth, has a budget of over USD 14 million and provides training and professional integration programs for underage populations in the northern areas.⁶⁶

Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire pledged to prevent violent extremism in "hard security" matters after the 2016 Grand-Bassam terrorist attack.⁶⁷ Ensuring the economic background for the actions, President Alassane Ouattara announced in May 2021, that the country will invest 1% of its GDP to counter-terrorism measures, without any details.⁶⁸

The country could be a new hub for regional efforts against the spread of violent extremism. In June 2021, Côte d'Ivoire officially opened the International Academy for the Fight against Terrorism with the support of France and the United States.⁶⁹ The institution was established to serve as the regional training centre for preparation, training and coordination in the fight against terrorism for the entire West Africa region. After the withdrawal of the European forces from Mali, the security-related cooperation among the states in the region could be much more important. The institution has existed since 2017 and trained more than 500 soldiers and the pledged assistance of France and the

⁶⁴ International Crisis Group - What role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in fighting Boko Haram? – 2020 - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/291-what-role-multinational-joint-task-force-fighting-boko-haram>

⁶⁵ Reuters - A. Aboa - Ivory Coast says it will invest in north to counter jihadism – 2021 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ivory-coast-says-it-will-invest-north-counter-jihadism-2021-11-08/>

⁶⁶ Jeuneafrique - La Côte d'Ivoire renforce son budget antiterroriste dans le Nord – 2021 - <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1281576/politique/la-cote-divoire-booste-son-budget-antiterroriste-dans-le-nord/>

⁶⁷ BBC - Ivory Coast: 16 dead in Grand-Bassam beach resort attack – 2016 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35798502>

⁶⁸ Afriquesur7 - Terrorisme: Ouattara sort son arme économique contre les djihadistes – 2021 - <https://www.afrique-sur7.ci/478598-terrorisme-ouattara-arme-economique>

⁶⁹ TheDefensePost - Anti-terror 'Academy' set up in Ivory Coast – 2021 - <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2021/06/11/ivory-coast-anti-terror-academy/>

United States can provide a unique initiative for a regional approach against violent extremism.⁷⁰

A visible example is Exercise Flintlock in February 2022, where the armies of the United States, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon and Niger trained together for a counter-terrorist scenario. The exercise was also supported by France, United Kingdom, Canada, Austria and the Netherlands. This military exercise has been running since 2005 under the umbrella of US AFRICOM. The main objective, as the Command said, "While regional security is the focus of the exercise, lessons learned and shared at Flintlock will create lasting effects beyond North and West Africa. Malign actors and terrorists who seek to expand their influence here also threaten stability throughout the world. By bringing together the considerable talent of African and international partners, we are collectively stronger and more capable of solving the foundational issues affecting regional and global stability."⁷¹

Besides the efforts in preparation and training of counter-terrorist forces, Côte d'Ivoire is actively engaging in military operations at both multinational and bilateral levels. In May 2020, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso held the first joint operation (Comoé), with the participation of more than 1,000 Ivorian troops at the common border areas and successfully eliminated and arrested terrorists during the action.⁷² As a reaction to the joint operation, violent extremist forces, allegedly linked to Al-Qaeda, attacked and killed 14 army personnel in Kafolo. The country decided to go further with measures defending the border from violent extremists. In July 2020, the government designated a special military zone in the north with direct command in order to prevent any kind of infiltration onto Ivorian territory.⁷³ The country is also actively engaged to Operation Barkhane. Côte d'Ivoire hosts around 950 French personnel for support and logistics purposes. It is not known how this will be changed after the withdrawal of European forces from Mali.⁷⁴

c. Ghana:

Of the four selected countries, at the moment, Ghana is the least exposed to the threat of expansion of violent extremism. This could be

⁷⁰ TheDefensePost - US-led anti-jihadist military drills begin in Ivory Coast – 2022 - <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/02/20/us-anti-jihadist-drills-ivory-coast/>

⁷¹ DefenceWeb - Exercise Flintlock 2022 to begin in Cote d'Ivoire – 2022 - <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/land/land-land/exercise-flintlock-2022-to-begin-in-cote-divoire/>

⁷² Ecofin Agency - Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso launch first joint counter-terrorism operation – 2020 - <https://www.ecofinagency.com/public-management/2505-41395-cote-divoire-burkina-faso-launch-first-joint-counter-terrorism-operation>

⁷³ AlJazeera - Ivory Coast creates northern military zone after deadly attack – 2020 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/14/ivory-coast-creates-northern-military-zone-after-deadly-attack#:~:text=African%20country%20creates%20zone%20in,its%20border%20with%20Burkina%20Faso.&text=Ivory%20Coast%20has%20created%20a,attack%20on%20a%20frontier%20post.>

⁷⁴ The Wall Street Journal - M. Phillips – Militants are edging south toward West Africa's most stable and prosperous states – 2022 - <https://www.wsj.com/articles/sahel-based-militants-edging-south-toward-west-africas-most-stable-and-prosperous-states-11646221800>

explained with good relations and understanding among different religious communities (Christian and Muslim), intermarriages between people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds as well as opportunities for mediation and consultation in local disputes related to land issues or chieftaincy.⁷⁵

One of the most important Ghanaian strategic documents regarding the emerging security challenge is the National Framework for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Ghana, 2020. This provides the basic directions and principles for counter-terrorism efforts in the country in the field of prevention, pre-emptive measures, protection and response to terrorist acts. This framework provides the basis for various institutions, already existing prior to this legal framework, to achieve success in the aforementioned objectives – The National Commission for Civic Education; the National and Regional Peace Councils; the Regional and National House of Chiefs; the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding; and the Civil Society Organization Platform for Good Governance are the main institutions in Ghana for violent extremism prevention, non-kinetic approach in mediation and conflict prevention. Importantly, these institutions allow for local communities and religious groups to raise their voices regarding their concerns and the institutions can propose solutions.⁷⁶

Generally, in supporting social inclusion and the strengthening of authorities/local community's relations, Ghana has a decentralized institutional structure. It exists as regional and district level security authorities, which convene regularly with traditional and religious leaders for information sharing and conflict resolution.⁷⁷

Economic development is also an important factor in sustaining stability in northern Ghana. The government created 'master plans' for the development of agriculture, urban planning and infrastructure investment. The long-term goal is to reach a sustainable, middle-income economic environment which could deal with youth employment and give an accountable future for local communities.⁷⁸

The European Union is an important partner for Ghana and is in close cooperation in prevention of violent extremism, particularly in the northern border area of Ghana. They launched a joint program in 2020 named Preventing Electoral Violence and Providing Security to the Northern Border Regions of Ghana (NORPREVSEC) with the focus on

⁷⁵ Accord - F. Aubyn - The risk of violent extremism and terrorism in the coastal states of West Africa - 2021 - <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>

⁷⁶ European Union - Action Document for the Preventing Electoral Violence and Providing Security to the Northern Border Regions of Ghana (NORPREVSEC) Programme p.7-10. – 2020 - https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/ghana_aap_2020-annex.pdf

⁷⁷ Ibid p. 7-10.

⁷⁸ Star Ghana Foundation - Roadmap for sustainable peace, security and development in Northern Ghana p.22. – 2021 - <https://star-ghana.org/learning-2/publications-and-resources/reports/176-roadmap-for-sustainable-peace-security-and-development-in-northern-ghana/file>

the development of security and resilience of the country by capacity building, early warning and conflict resolution. The key motive of this project, was to continue and enhance the peacebuilding mechanisms for resolving land, chieftaincy and farmer-herder disputes, which could be exploited by violent extremist organizations. Also important in the project are to bring together institutions, authorities, security actors to the local communities, building confidence and raising awareness of security vulnerabilities.⁷⁹

The International Organization for Migration is also actively engaging with Ghanaian authorities, primarily in supporting the development of border management, reinforcing the infrastructure of border posts, capacity building in local authorities and connecting with border communities and other stakeholders.⁸⁰

It advances Ghana in the fight against terrorism, demonstrating that the security institutions are taking all the potential threats and security incidents in the neighbourhood seriously. Recently, after some confirmed attacks from violent extremist groups in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana rapidly developed its security presence in the border area, increased the personnel of the anti-terrorist forces and enhanced its intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. After an alleged terrorist attack in the northern city of Bawku, the armed forces were rapidly deployed with armoured vehicles, helicopters and constant patrols.⁸¹ The Armed Forces regularly participate in counter-terrorist training along with other security forces and intelligence services.⁸²

d. Togo:

Togo's approach could be a good example for the countries of the region in preventive measures. The establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Prevention and Fight against Violent Extremism (CIPLEV) in May 2019, aims to coordinate among the related state institutions in the fight against violent extremism and, moreover, with civil society.⁸³ The Togolese government had realized that an effective fight against the spread of terrorism cannot happen solely by the security forces. Thus, the Committee includes the security sector, the state

⁷⁹ European Union - Action Document for the Preventing Electoral Violence and Providing Security to the Northern Border Regions of Ghana (NORPREVSEC) Programme p.2. - 2020 - https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/ghana_aap_2020-annex.pdf

⁸⁰ Star Ghana Foundation - Roadmap for sustainable peace, security and development in Northern Ghana p.18. - 2021 - <https://star-ghana.org/learning-2/publications-and-resources/reports/176-roadmap-for-sustainable-peace-security-and-development-in-northern-ghana/file>

⁸¹ 3news - Gov't beefs up security in Bawku over Jihadist attack - 2022 - <https://3news.com/govt-beefs-up-security-in-bawku-over-jihadist-attack/>

⁸² Foreign Brief - Ghana Armed Forces to commence counter-terrorism exercises - 2021 - <https://www.foreignbrief.com/daily-news/ghana-armed-forces-to-commence-counterterrorism-exercises/>

⁸³ Portail officiel de la République Togolaise - Le Togo se dote d'un nouveau mécanisme pour contrer la menace terroriste - 2019 - <https://www.republiquetogolaise.com/securite/1605-3140-le-togo-se-dote-d-un-nouveau-mecanisme-pour-contrer-la-menace-terroriste>

administration and civil society. They are working with prefectural and county level committees to achieve a focused view of the local challenges in security, administration, finance and social action.⁸⁴

Development programs, managed by the local authorities with the inclusion of civil society to decrease the societal gaps and give a voice for local concerns are equally important.⁸⁵ The Committee has also been supported by the United States and United Nations Development Programme since 2019 by facilitating a strategy for pooling and synchronizing efforts in finding solutions for the root causes of violent extremism and in the fight against terrorism.⁸⁶

Togo reached a milestone due to this new approach for social inclusion: in June 2019, after 32 years, the Togolese people elected new mayors to their local residences, strengthened the local governance and strengthened the ties between the population, the state authorities and religious leaders.⁸⁷

To reinforce the local voices in the fight against violent extremism, in October 2020 Togo established the Cross-border Regional Early Warning Committee (CTRAP), which consists of the delegates of five prefectural committees and collects data about possible vulnerabilities regarding violent extremism, communicating with higher level counter-terrorism authorities and, additionally, interacting with the similar local committees of Benin and Burkina Faso to exchange information and manage the risks associated with violent extremism.⁸⁸

Economic development is one of the important pillars for the stabilization of vulnerable areas. Togo adopted its development plan for the 2018-2022 period with ambitious projections and three main goals. It desires to be a logistics hub for the region, so they started large infrastructure expansion throughout the country. The government aims for Togo to be a business centre by creating special economic zones, enhanced business education and a simpler investment climate. For Togo, agriculture is an important factor for economic development, and they plan to enhance their industrial parks for manufacturing industry. These elements could pave the way for social development and a sustainable

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Lomegraph - Togo/L'extrémisme violent: la division du comité interministériel de la Kéran désormais opérationnelle – 2020 - <https://lomegraph.com/ciplev-togo-lutter-extremisme-violent/>

⁸⁶ US Embassy in Togo - Ambassador Eric Stromayer remarks to Inter-ministerial Committee for the Prevention and Fight against Violent Extremism – 2019 - <https://tg.usembassy.gov/ambassador-eric-stromayer-remarks-to-inter-ministerial-committee-for-the-prevention-and-fight-against-violent-extremism/>

⁸⁷ Institute for Security Studies - N. Amedzenu-Noviekou, P. Handy, J. Abatan, M. Matongbada - Togo ups its ante against terror threats 2019 - <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/togo-ups-its-ante-against-terror-threats>

⁸⁸ Agence Togolaise de Presse - Tone/prévention de l'extrémisme violent dans les zones frontalières: les membres du CTRAP outillés – 2022 - <https://atoptg.com/tone-prevention-de-lextrémisme-violent-dans-les-zones-frontalieres-les-membres-du-ctrap-outilles>

social environment, which will be the foundation of a resilient society against the spread of violent extremism.⁸⁹

Besides all of the above, Togo is also strengthening border security. Since 2018, Operation Koundjoare has been active and deployed to the northern border with about 700 personnel. Along with the violent extremist groups, the presence of smugglers, poachers and robbers are also keeping the Togolese soldiers busy in the border area. In conjunction with the military actions, the army is also contributing in school reparations, medical assistance and water supply, thus building good relationships with the local communities.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Embassy of Togo to London - Togo National Development Plan 2018-2022 Vision & Objectives – 2019 - <http://togoembassylondon.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Pr%C3%A9sentation-du-PND-du-Togo-2018-2022-Anglais.pdf>

⁹⁰ TheDefensePost - Worried Togo finds itself on front line of Sahel's Jihadist war – 2020 - <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/05/21/togo-jihadist-war/>

CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

The findings of this joint project have pointed out that violent extremist activities have been growing in recent years in West African coastal states, radiating there from the Sahel. Although the security situations of the four countries assessed herein are not directly comparable to the very severe situation in the Sahel, the appearance of certain violent extremist groups at the northern border areas of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo is cause for concern. Equally worrisome is that the spread of violent extremism is multi-directional: TVEOs do not exclusively expand southward, but in any direction where circumstances permit.

Kinetic actions, conducted by military and police forces at national or international levels, are essential in dismantling TVEOs and are equally necessary regarding related criminal gangs, smugglers and bandits. Many existing operations could be overlapping, causing duplication of effort. This could cause financing problems and even conflicts of interest among stakeholders. This issue could be addressed through discussions headed by a supranational organization or by coordinating conferences with the participation of both local and international actors.

It is fundamental that such kinetic activities do not abuse or exclusively target certain communities to the exclusion of others, even if that ethnic group is predominant in a particular VEO. This practice can cause prejudice, resulting in the stigmatization and marginalization of whole communities, thus deepening inter-communal tensions.

The Accra Initiative could become the coastal states' spearhead in the fight against terrorism. Although it was designed by the countries to provide for information sharing, common training and operations, its expansion could greatly benefit all stakeholders. The Initiative is governed and financed by its members, which gives them full control and the freedom to choose their own direction in the fight against violent extremism. The inclusion of human security programmes and the involvement of existing national organizations from the member countries could raise the effectiveness of the Initiative.

Our project also focused on the fact that local populations in these vulnerable border areas are exposed to extremist influences, especially if their basic needs are not met, or are only weakly provided by the state (security, justice, health, education, employment opportunities). For various reasons, communities in these border areas are often marginalized, receiving less attention from central governments. Rural banditry, kidnappings, local disputes, prolonged and unsolved conflicts, the vast quantity of youths lacking vision and a satisfactory means of livelihood are considered the main factors creating instability. The weak presence of state authorities causes dissatisfaction among populations and motivates them to accept other sources of income. Akin to the tactics used in the Sahel, violent extremist groups aim to usurp the role of the governing authority and gain trust and support among local communities. TVEOs purport to be the security, justice and livelihood providers, which

makes them popular and facilitates their true objective – to spread radical ideologies and gain financial, personnel or other support and to appear as the legitimate alternative to the current government.

Research has shown that conventional P/CVE approaches (military and police operations) are still the most widely employed by the various stakeholders. Undeniably, the development of armed and police forces against violent extremist activities is fundamental, but human factors and non-kinetic action in prevention are equally significant. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the matter of human security is included in all mainstream security discussions and strategy development in order to achieve a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of violent extremism.

A human security approach to P/CVE, with the citizenry and local communities as the primary focus of national security policy formulation and implementation, is a worthwhile pathway to eschewing impunity and the abuse of human rights. This would help build mutual trust, social cohesion and a sense of common purpose between the government and the citizenry. Without these, effective counter-terrorism operations in conflict zones where poverty and marginalization are pervasive could remain a mirage.

While there is the need to do more to support counter-terrorism operations underpinned by actionable intelligence in order to improve security and stability, a human security response approach should inform military concepts of operation. Ensuring future stability will require far more than a purely military approach unless conducted in tandem with addressing the root causes, such as: (perceived) marginalization, poverty and social exclusion, injustice, lack of rule of law and bad governance. Although military strategies are justifiable in combative situations, more pragmatic preventive measures are required for lasting solutions. P/CVE policies must necessarily consider creating a conducive economic atmosphere and a sense of belonging, particularly for young people, to be productive and contribute to the socioeconomic development of their communities and countries.

Communication is a key TVEO tool for recruitment and the spreading of violent extremist ideologies. These groups quickly adapt to changes in communication channels and the accelerating flow of information. Terrorists have expanded their field of recruitment in cyberspace, where they easily reach the youth and take advantage of their uncertainty to spread radical ideologies. The most vital counter-measures have proven to be the active and effective use of communication tools, both in mainstream media and in cyber domains, in order to prevent TVEOs from misleading the youth and the general population.

Besides kinetic and non-kinetic CVE action, an improvement in the population's economic circumstances would likely deeply influence the attitude towards violent extremism. The four countries are committed to greater development in the economic sphere in order to improve the general population's employment and livelihood prospects. Better incorporation of marginalized communities and well-formulated plans for

the inclusion of the youth and women could increase resistance against violent extremist ideologies.

TVEOs are currently operating in a cross-border manner throughout Western Sahel and coastal states, which indicates the need for strong regional cohesion and cooperation in P/CVE. The synchronization of National Security and Violent Extremism-related Strategies could provide a solid foundation for P/CVE efforts. It is already clear that affected countries are willing to work together to increase their security. However, it has been noted that the plethora of international, regional, governmental and civil P/CVE initiatives make coordinated work challenging. The four selected countries have created institutions for communicating and coordinating with the numerous stakeholders in order to ensure a comprehensive approach, but the outcome – a positive response from the local populations – will only be visible in the long-term.

The need to blend the kinetic approach with P/CVE approaches which address the vulnerabilities in local communities must be reinforced, as military/police power per se as a guarantor of national security needs to be present on the entire territory. The referent object of national security need necessarily be the individual citizenry and their local communities. This entails the identification of their vulnerabilities, ensuring their protection and their empowerment to acquire the required resilience that enables them to live in dignity. The protection and empowerment of local communities should be prioritized in order to ensure their resilience. The lack of opportunities for young people, political impunity, exclusion, marginalization, effects of climate change, competition for scarce resources and underdevelopment are all concerns which if not addressed, in local communities, present a high risk of further escalation of discontent that could lead to the commission of more atrocities. The pursuit of justice, participatory political policies and the promotion of favourable socioeconomic conditions that promote human development, human rights and inclusive policies in local communities should be regarded as effective means of addressing the conditions that are conducive for the spread of extremist ideologies.

APPENDIX A: WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

No	Name	Organisation
1	Dr. Festus Kofi Aubyn	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)
2	Dr. Abdou Lat Gueye	Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
3	Mrs. Esther Daramola	ECOWAS
4	Mrs. Nantene Coulibaly	ECOWAS
5	Dr. Lori-Anne Theroux Benoni	Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS), WA
6	Mr. William Assanvo	Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS), WA
7	Mr. Sampson Kwarkye	Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS), WA
8	Mrs. Jeanine Ella Abatan	Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS), WA
9	Dr. Fiifi Edu-Afful	Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Centre (KAIPTC)
10	Mr. Mutaru Mumuni	West Africa Centre for Counter-Extremism (WACCE)
11	Mr. Ahmed Mokhtar Awed	Conflict Management Directorate, AUHQ
12	Maj. Gen. (Dr.) Emmanuel Kotia	Boundary Commission of Ghana- Expert Ghana
13	Amb. Herve Djokpe	Focal Point- Benin
14	Madame Maryse Glele Ahanhanzo	WANEP- Benin
15	Mr. Landry Ganye	WANEP- Benin
16	Col. Messan Akobi	Ministry of Security – Togo
17	Mr. Bawubadi Tchekpi	Togo
18	Mr. Idriss Mounir Lallali	ACSRT
19	Col. Emmanuel Christian Mouaya Pouyi	ACSRT
20	Mr. Kutoati Adjewoda	ACSRT
21	Ms. Mauna Ntwaetsile	ACSRT
22	Mr. Eric Hukportie	ACSRT
23	Mr. Elias Benyu	ACSRT
24	Mr. Richard Apau	ACSRT





25	Col. Jose Mallasen	NSD-S HUB
26	Mr. Andrea Grazioso	NSD-S HUB
27	Mr. Alexander Mackenzie-Smith	NSD-S HUB
28	Ms. Sabina Avasiloae	NSD-S HUB
29	Maj. Mario Caparroz	NSD-S HUB
30	Mr. Marton Hegedus	NSD-S HUB

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