

# From the Sahel to Coastal West Africa: Examining the Spillover of Violent Extremism and Ghana's Strategic Response

Desk Study



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This report is a desk study by the Security Sector Governance team at the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) as part of the CDD-Ghana-Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund Project to empower vulnerable communities against violent extremism.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADR	-	Alternative Dispute Resolution
ASS	-	Alliance of Sahel States
CDD-Ghana	-	Ghana Center for Democratic Development
CIPLEV	-	Committee for the Prevention and Fight against Violent Extremism
CPPCs	-	Community Peace Promotion Committees
CSOs	-	Civil Society Organizations
CVE	-	Countering Violent Extremism
DPC	-	District Peace Committees
ECOWAS	-	Economic Community of West African States
GIS	-	Ghana Immigration Service
GSIM	-	Group in Support of Islam and Muslims
IDFP	-	Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace
IS Sahel	-	Islamic State Sahel Province
ISIS	-	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JNIM	-	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin
KAICIID	-	King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue
LRI	-	Littorals Regional Initiative
MDDAs	-	Metropolitan Municipal District Assemblies
MINUSMA	-	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MLF	-	Macina Liberation Front
MORE-WOMEN	-	Movement of Rural Entrepreneurial Women
NAFPCVET	-	National Framework for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and Terrorism
NCCE	-	National Commission for Civic Education
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organization
NORPREVSEC	-	Preventing Electoral Violence and Providing Security to the Northern Border Regions of Ghana
NPC	-	National Peace Council
OTI	-	Office of Transition Initiatives
PMCs	-	Private Military Companies

RPCs	-	Regional Peace Councils
SNUD	-	United Nations Development System
UN	-	United Nations
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	-	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	-	United States Agency for International Development
VSLAs	-	Village Savings and Loan Associations
WACCE	-	West Africa Center for Counter Extremism
WANEP	-	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WAP	-	W-Arly-Pendjari



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The security landscape in the Sahel is rapidly deteriorating as violent extremist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda's Sahelian branch, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) continue to escalate violence and insurgent activities.<sup>1</sup> While Ghana has thus far remained insulated from direct terrorist attacks, its porous borders, deep-seated grievances stemming from the economic marginalization of Northern regions, illicit economies, and unresolved intercommunal conflicts present significant vulnerabilities to extremist infiltration.<sup>2</sup> As neighboring countries like Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo experience rising militant activities, the risk of spillover into Ghana increases, making proactive mitigation strategies essential.

This desk study first explores the global context of violent extremism, highlighting its evolving nature and the shift of its epicenter from the Middle East to Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the Central Sahel region. Extremist groups increasingly exploit governance weaknesses, socio-political grievances, and digital misinformation to expand their influence, adapting their tactics to localized contexts and leveraging transnational networks to recruit and mobilize supporters.<sup>3</sup> This desk study then examines the push and pull factors contributing to the spread of violent extremism from the Sahel to coastal West Africa and Ghana's specific vulnerabilities. It highlights how factors such as youth unemployment, farmer-herder conflicts, weak dispute resolution mechanisms, and unregulated gold mining serve as entry points for extremist groups. Moreover, it explores the role of misinformation, social exclusion, and governance deficits in fostering radicalization.

The study also reviews Ghana's security and counter-extremism frameworks including; the Accra Initiative, civil-military cooperation, and community-led mediation efforts. While these initiatives have strengthened regional and national security coordination, gaps due to logistical and financial limitations remain in border surveillance, intelligence-sharing, economic resilience programs, and inclusive governance. Addressing these weaknesses is critical to enhancing national security and preventing extremist expansion into Ghana's northern regions.

To effectively mitigate the spillover of violent extremism from the Sahel into Ghana and strengthen national resilience, this study proposes a comprehensive, multidimensional approach integrating security, governance, and socio-economic interventions. Key recommendations include:

1. Addressing Socio-Economic Drivers of Radicalization
2. Enhancing Community-Based Conflict Prevention and Mediation
3. Regulating and Formalizing Pastoralist-Farming Relations
4. Disrupting Extremist Financing and Illicit Networks
5. Countering Extremist Narratives and Digital Misinformation

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<sup>1</sup> ACLED (2024). *Conflict Watchlist 2024 | The Sahel: A Deadly New Era in the Decades-long Conflict*. [online] ACLED. Available at: <https://acleddata.com/conflict-watchlist-2024/sahel/>

<sup>2</sup> Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2023). Gaps and Needs in Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Early Warning and Mediation Mechanisms and Structures in Ghana and its Border Areas. [online] ReCap Network. Available at: <https://recapnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WORKING-PAPER-N%C2%B02-ANGLAIS-WEB.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> UNODC (2018). *Counter-Terrorism Module 2 Key Issues: Radicalization & Violent Extremism*. [online] www.unodc.org. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/radicalization-violent-extremism.html>.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 Introduction

In recent decades, the epicenter of violent extremism has gradually moved from the Middle East to Africa, where militant Islamist organizations have exploited weak governance, socio-economic grievances, and transnational criminal networks to expand their influence.<sup>4</sup> The Sahel has become a key battleground in this shift, with jihadist groups leveraging ungoverned spaces, illicit economies, and political instability to consolidate their power.<sup>5</sup> However, as regional counterterrorism efforts struggle to contain their operations, these groups are pushing further southward, seeking new areas for recruitment, financing, and territorial control in West Africa's coastal states.

The consequences of this expansion are already visible. The number of violent incidents associated with militant Islamist groups within 50 kilometers (km) of the Sahel's coastal West African neighbors has surged by over 250 percent (%) in the past two (2) years, exceeding 450 recorded events.<sup>6</sup> Benin has been the most affected, with fatalities doubling from 2023 to 2024, reaching 173 deaths.<sup>7</sup> Togo has also seen a sharp rise in militant Islamist violence, reporting 69 fatalities over the same period.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, extremist activity is increasingly encroaching on new frontiers, with Mali experiencing 24 violent incidents near its borders with Mauritania, Senegal, and Guinea—areas that, until recently, had remained largely unaffected.<sup>9</sup>

A particularly concerning trend is the concentration of militant activity in shared protected areas, such as the W-Arly-Pendjari parks, which span Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger and border Togo, Ghana, and Nigeria. These remote and lightly monitored areas have provided strategic strongholds for jihadist groups, enabling them to regroup, train, and coordinate cross-border attacks.<sup>10</sup> As their presence deepens, coastal West African countries are facing mounting pressure, with militant groups exploiting local grievances, economic hardship, and governance weaknesses to expand their influence and destabilize communities.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond direct violence, Islamist expansion has also triggered humanitarian crises, particularly in displacement and food security. Nearly five (5) million people have been displaced across Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and coastal countries as of August 2024—a 25% increase since 2020.<sup>12</sup> Over 150,000 Burkinabe refugees have fled into coastal states since 2021,

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<sup>4</sup> Center for Preventive Action (2024). *Violent Extremism in the Sahel*. [online] Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>.

<sup>5</sup> Eizenga, D. and Amandine Gnanguênon (2024). Recalibrating Coastal West Africa's Response to Violent Extremism – Africa Center for Strategic Studies. [online] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/publication/asb43en-recalibrating-multitiered-stabilization-strategy-coastal-west-africa-response-violent-extremism/>.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>West Africa Center for Counter Extremism (2024). West Africa – WACCE. [online] Waccegh.org. Available at: <https://waccegh.org/west-africa/>

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR (2025). Global Appeal 2025 Situation Overview. [online] UNHCR. Available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Sahel%20Situation%20Overview.pdf>.

placing additional strain on host communities.<sup>13</sup> The displacement crisis has also worsened food insecurity, as many refugees lack access to farmland, leading to further instability<sup>14</sup>.

Although Ghana has so far remained insulated from direct terrorist attacks, its proximity to conflict zones and porous northern borders creates growing security risks. Reports of extremist movements near Ghana's border regions, along with evidence of jihadist recruitment efforts targeting marginalized communities, raise concerns about potential infiltration.



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*The W-Arly-Pendjari parks (it is also a UNESCO Heritage Park)*

*W-Arly-Pendjari Complex, also known as the "WAP Complex", is a transboundary Natural UNESCO World Heritage Site in Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. It is believed to be used as hide out for the terrorists.*

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Raga, S., Lemma, A. and Keane, J. (2023). The Sahel Conflict: Economic & Security Spillovers on West Africa. ODI Emerging Analysis.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.1 The Global Context

In recent years, the world has witnessed a concerning rise in violent extremism, which, driven by diverse ideological motivations and exacerbated by socio-political grievances, has exerted devastating economic, social, and political consequences around the world.<sup>15</sup> According to the Institute for Economics & Peace's 2024 Global Terrorism Index, deaths from terrorism—a prevalent form of violent extremism—rose by 22% in 2023, reaching 8,352, the highest level since 2017, though still below the peak recorded in 2015.<sup>16</sup> The threat of violent extremism is becoming increasingly complex as groups continuously adapt their propaganda strategies to localized contexts to recruit members and provoke acts of violence.<sup>17</sup> Their influence is further amplified by social media, which enables them to spread extremist narratives and facilitate mobilization at an unprecedented global scale.<sup>18</sup>

Islamist extremist groups like Daesh (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) have employed sophisticated propaganda and recruitment strategies to attract thousands of foreign fighters while simultaneously carrying out high-profile attacks, such as the 2015 Bataclan theater attack in Paris.<sup>19</sup> Notably, in the past two (2) years, the epicenter of violent extremism has shifted from the Middle East and North Africa to Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the Central Sahel region.<sup>20</sup> The most violent splinter groups of Daesh have expanded their presence in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, exploiting weak governance, socio-economic grievances, and existing ethnic tensions to strengthen their influence.<sup>21</sup> Since 2015, militant Islamist group activities in the Sahel have doubled annually, with 2019 witnessing more than 700 violent incidents.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, far-right extremism has surged, expanding its operations across borders. According to the UN Security Council's Counterterrorism Committee, global right-wing terrorism increased by 320% between 2015 and 2020.<sup>23</sup> Recent terrorist attacks in New Zealand

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<sup>15</sup> United Nations (2024). Amid Growing Strength of Terrorist Groups in Sahel, West Africa, Senior Official Urges Security Council to Scale Up Support within Regional Frameworks | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. [online] Un.org. Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15950.doc.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace (2024). Global Terrorism Index 2024: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, Sydney. Available from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>.

<sup>17</sup> The Carter Center (2019). Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Extremism Guidebook. [online] Available at: [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/countering-isis/inclusive-approaches-to-preventing-violent-extremism.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/inclusive-approaches-to-preventing-violent-extremism.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Seibt, S. (2015). Paris Attacks: The Investigation Continues. [online] FRANCE 24. Available at: <https://graphics.france24.com/paris-attacks-investigation-terrorism-belgium-bataclan-suspects/>.

<sup>20</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace (2024). Global Terrorism Index 2024: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, Sydney. Available from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>.

<sup>21</sup> Roux, P.L. (2019). Responding to the Rise in Violent Extremism in the Sahel. Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

<sup>22</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace (2024). Global Terrorism Index 2024: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, Sydney. Available from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>.

<sup>23</sup> UNDP (2022). *Secretary-General's new report highlights new, emerging form of 'far-right' terrorism | Security Council - Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)*. [online] Un.org. Available at: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/secretary-general%E2%80%99s-new-report-highlights-new-emerging-form-%E2%80%9Cfar-right%E2%80%9D-terrorism>.

(2019), Germany (2019), and Norway (2019) further illustrate the transnational nature of the rise of far-right violent extremism.<sup>24</sup>

The drivers of violent extremism are complex and deeply intertwined with the historical, political, economic, and social structures which encompass the environment where radicalization takes place.<sup>25</sup> These are also directly interactive with regional and global power politics.<sup>26</sup> However, worsening horizontal inequalities - disparities between culturally distinct groups<sup>27</sup> – are continuously referenced in existing literature as a primary cause of violent extremism.

## 2.2 Economic Grievances

Limited employment and socio-economic opportunities create a vacuum that violent extremist organizations exploit, offering financial incentives and psychological fulfilment that would otherwise be unavailable through official channels.<sup>28</sup> For example, a significant factor attracting recruits to ISIS has been the payment (or promise of payment) of \$500 per month to its fighters, which serves as a strong motivator for uneducated, unskilled, unemployed, and rural individuals.<sup>29</sup> This is further supported by UNICEF’s 2014 interviews with Syrian refugee children in Jordan’s Za’atari camp, which revealed that a major motivation for joining groups like the Free Syrian Army was boredom and a lack of educational opportunities.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, a 2023 UNDP report, based on interviews with 1,000 former members of violent extremist groups across Africa found that 73% expressed frustration with their government’s failure to provide jobs.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.3 Socio-Political Exclusion

Nevertheless, economic factors are not the sole drivers of violent extremism. A European Commission (2024) report highlights that perceptions of injustice, socio-political exclusion, sustained discrimination against particular groups, widespread corruption, and human rights

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<sup>24</sup> The Carter Center (2019). Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Extremism Guidebook. [online] Available at: [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/countering-isis/inclusive-approaches-to-preventing-violent-extremism.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/inclusive-approaches-to-preventing-violent-extremism.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> UNDP (2016). Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity. [online] Available at:

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Discussion%20Paper%20-%20Preventing%20Violent%20Extremism%20by%20Promoting%20Inclusive%20%20Development.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Stewart, F. (2019). Horizontal Inequalities. In: Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics. [online] Routledge. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9781315626796-16/horizontal-inequalities-frances-stewart>.

<sup>28</sup> United Nations Development Program (2017). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives, and the Tipping Point for Recruitment. [online] Available at: <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/enter>

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Development Program (2016). Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity. [online] Available at:

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Discussion%20Paper%20-%20Preventing%20Violent%20Extremism%20by%20Promoting%20Inclusive%20%20Development.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Sude, B.H. (2020). Prevention of Radicalization to Terrorism in Refugee Camps and Asylum <https://icct.nl/publication/handbook-part-ii-prevention-radicalisation>

<sup>31</sup> United Nations Development Program (2023). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement. [online] Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement>.



violations are also significant contributing factors.<sup>32</sup> This is evident in the rise of the terrorist group Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, particularly in the northeastern states, where economic hardships such as high poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy—combined with widespread corruption and the political exclusion of the region—have fueled grievances among northern Muslims, leading to increased radicalization and recruitment into Boko Haram.<sup>33</sup> A similar trend in Kenya shows how the profiling of Somali Muslims by security agencies has fueled grievances, contributing to radicalization and the expansion of extremist groups' activities.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the social marginalization of refugees, which fosters feelings of alienation and hopelessness after being granted legal status, can further drive radicalization and vulnerability to extremist violence.<sup>35</sup> For instance, young Somali refugees in Yemen have been found to be more susceptible to radicalization than their counterparts in Kenyan refugee camps due to facing discrimination in Yemeni schools.<sup>36</sup> Further reinforcing this trend, a 2015 study by the NGO Mercy Corps, which examined both refugee and non-refugee youth in three conflict-prone states, found a direct correlation between experiences of discrimination—particularly perceived favoritism toward corrupt elites—and participation in political violence.<sup>37</sup> The NGO strongly recommended that, in addition to skills-based training for youth, “intercommunity peacebuilding and governance reforms” are critical to mitigating radicalization, particularly among young people (ibid).

## 2.4 The Role of Misinformation and Disinformation

In regions with limited access to credible news sources and low digital literacy, particularly in rural areas, extremist groups utilize misinformation and disinformation to manipulate narratives and radicalize vulnerable individuals.<sup>38</sup> A key example is Pakistan, where internet penetration remains relatively low at 45.7%, with only 29.5% of the population holding a social media account in 2024.<sup>39</sup> This restricted digital access has, in part, enabled violent extremist organizations, including al-Qaeda, to successfully exploit existing socio-political narratives.<sup>40</sup> These groups justify Pakistan's economic and political instability as evidence of an alleged continuous war against Islam, further fueling radicalization efforts (ibid). Supporting this trend,

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<sup>32</sup> European Commission (2023). The Root Causes of Violent Extremism. [online] Available at: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/63770ad9-8c0b-44c4-a568-254bb22a8009\\_en?filename=ran\\_root\\_causes\\_of\\_violent\\_extremism\\_ranstorp\\_meines\\_july\\_2024.pdf&prefLang=de](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/63770ad9-8c0b-44c4-a568-254bb22a8009_en?filename=ran_root_causes_of_violent_extremism_ranstorp_meines_july_2024.pdf&prefLang=de).

<sup>33</sup> Onah, Emmanuel Ikechi (2014). "The Nigerian State as an Equilibrium of Violence: An Explanation of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Northern Nigeria." *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 14(2), 63-80.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Development Program (2016). Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity. [online] Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Discussion%20Paper%20-%20Preventing%20Violent%20Extremism%20by%20Promoting%20Inclusive%20%20Development.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Radicalization Awareness Network (2019). Preventing radicalization of asylum seekers and refugees. [online] European Commission - Radicalization Awareness Network. Available at: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-01/ran\\_asylum\\_seekers\\_refugees\\_rome\\_11122019\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-01/ran_asylum_seekers_refugees_rome_11122019_en.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Sude, B.H. (2020). Prevention of Radicalization to Terrorism in Refugee Camps and Asylum <https://icct.nl/publication/handbook-part-ii-prevention-radicalisation>

<sup>38</sup> Holmer, G. (2018). The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism. [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/2/400241\\_1.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/2/400241_1.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Kemp, S. (2024). Digital 2024: Pakistan. [online] DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. Available at: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-pakistan>.

<sup>40</sup> Khan, A. (2013). Pakistan and the Narratives of Extremism. United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/162088/SR327-Pakistan-and-the-Narratives-of-Extremism.pdf>



a World Bank study on radicalization in the rural areas of the Districts of Republican Subordination region in Tajikistan found that individuals, particularly those with limited education and poor access to reliable information, were more susceptible to recruitment by Salafi-Jihadist groups.<sup>41</sup>

### **2.1.4 Ineffective Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

The absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms significantly contributes to radicalization. When mediation and dialogue systems are weak or nonexistent, individuals lacking formal channels to express grievances against the state become more susceptible to extremist narratives.<sup>42</sup> Extremist groups exploit these gaps, positioning themselves as alternatives to state authority and providers of justice.

This dynamic is evident in Kenya, where heavy-handed security responses to the rise of al-Shabaab—often involving human rights abuses and the indiscriminate targeting of Muslim communities—have deepened mistrust between local populations and security forces.<sup>43</sup> Counter-extremism initiatives such as Nyumba Kumi, originally designed to enhance community policing, have been widely perceived as intelligence-gathering operations rather than genuine efforts at community engagement.<sup>44</sup> As a result, many local communities remain hesitant to cooperate, fearing surveillance and wrongful association with extremist groups. The lack of trust, communication, and coordination between key community members and security stakeholders has intensified tensions, driving more individuals to seek conflict resolution and security from violent extremist groups.

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<sup>41</sup> World Bank (2020). Strengthening Youth Resilience to Radicalization: Evidence from Tajikistan. World Bank.

<sup>42</sup> United Nations Development Program (2016). Preventing Violent Extremism Through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity. [online] Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Discussion%20Paper%20-%20Preventing%20Violent%20Extremism%20by%20Promoting%20Inclusive%20Development.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Yue, J., Bako, H., Hampton, K. and Smith, K. (2020). Conflict and Online Space in the Sahel: Challenges and Recommendations. [online] Search for Common Ground. Available at: <https://documents.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Issue-Brief-Conflict-and-the-Online-Space-in-the-Sahel-July-2022.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.1 The Spill Over of Violent Extremism from the Sahel to West Africa

The persistent instability in the Sahel has fueled insecurity across West Africa, with violent extremist groups exploiting existing vulnerabilities to expand their influence. Weak state institutions, economic fragility, and climatic pressures have created conditions that facilitate the proliferation of armed groups and transnational criminal networks. Once concentrated in Mali, northern Burkina Faso, and Niger, this instability now threatens coastal West African states, including Ghana.

To understand the forces driving this spillover, it is essential to examine the push and pull factors that not only make the Sahel a breeding ground for extremist expansion but also facilitate its spread into West Africa.

### 3.2 Push Factors: Drivers of Insecurity from the Sahel

#### 3.2.1 *Weak Security Institutions in the Sahel*

Sahelian and Nigerian government security forces are increasingly overstretched and under-equipped, struggling to address security threats posed by guerrilla groups, armed criminal networks, and violent extremists.<sup>45</sup> These challenges are particularly acute in remote regions where poor infrastructure and difficult terrain—especially during the rainy season—limit mobility and operational effectiveness.<sup>46</sup> The inability of state forces to secure these areas has created ungoverned spaces, which extremist groups exploit for recruitment, training, and cross-border operations, thereby accelerating the spread of violence into West African coastal states.<sup>47</sup>

One major weakness is the security forces' lack of air support, surveillance technology, and logistical coordination, which significantly hampers their ability to counter well-armed militants. In some cases, low morale, tactical disadvantages, and political constraints have further discouraged direct engagement with extremist groups.<sup>48</sup> This security vacuum has led to the proliferation of self-defense militias in Niger's border regions, where state forces withdrew following large-scale jihadist attacks.<sup>49</sup> While Burkina Faso has attempted to compensate for these security gaps by recruiting civilian defense volunteers, these groups have often lacked proper training and oversight, sometimes exacerbating local conflicts rather than improving security.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Silla, E. (2022). Preventing Conflict in Coastal West Africa. CFR.org. [online] 26 Aug. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/report/preventing-conflict-coastal-west-africa>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group (2021). Murder in Tillabery: Calming Niger's Emerging Communal Crisis. [online] [www.crisisgroup.org](https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/b172-murder-tillabery-calming-nigers-emerging-communal-crisis). Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/b172-murder-tillabery-calming-nigers-emerging-communal-crisis>.

<sup>50</sup> Orosz, A. (2022). Violent extremism in the Sahel is strengthening its grip in West Africa. [online] Africa at LSE. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2022/02/15/violent-extremism-in-the-sahel-strengthening-grip-west-africa-mali-burkina-faso-niger-jihadi/>.

Moreover, public trust in security institutions remains critically low, as communities fear both retaliation from extremists and human rights abuses by state forces.<sup>51</sup> This lack of cooperation hinders intelligence gathering and limits the effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts.<sup>52</sup> Without significant reforms in security sector governance, strategic investments in defense capabilities, and improved civilian-military relations, state failures will continue to drive the expansion of violent extremism, further destabilizing both the Sahel and its neighboring coastal states.

### *3.2.2 Alliance of Sahel States' isolationism and its impact on regional security initiatives*

The Alliance of Sahel States' (ASS) increasingly isolationist policies, including its withdrawal from ECOWAS and geopolitical realignment toward Russia, have placed significant strain on regional efforts to promote economic development, climate resilience, and security cooperation in West Africa.

By annulling or withdrawing from key regional security initiatives—such as the G5 Sahel, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the ECOWAS Standby Force—the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS) has severely weakened collective security efforts, both in terms of kinetic preparedness and intelligence sharing. This, in turn, has diminished the capacity of both ECOWAS and ASS states to effectively combat violent extremism.<sup>53</sup> This shift also threatens broader international initiatives aimed at addressing insecurity in the Sahel, including the 2019 Global Fragility Act, the Sahel Resilience Project, and the 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.<sup>54</sup> Without sustained cooperation between ASS countries, and regional or international actors, violent extremism is likely to spread not only within these states but also into neighboring West African littoral countries.

This concern is reinforced by the continued surge in terrorist activity across Sahelian states, despite their recent realignment of security partnerships. The expulsion of French and U.S. forces in favor of Russian military advisers and Wagner-linked PMCs has failed to deliver the internal stability these governments sought.<sup>55</sup> Between January and August 2024, over 673 armed attacks were recorded across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Burkina Faso, in particular, suffered the highest global death toll from terrorism, with fatalities increasing by 68% despite a 17% decline in the frequency of attacks.

Beyond security concerns, the disruption of trade between ASS nations and their key West African economic partners risks further fragmenting regional cohesion. This could lead to

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<sup>51</sup> Silla, E. (2022). Preventing Conflict in Coastal West Africa. CFR.org. [online] 26 Aug. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/report/preventing-conflict-coastal-west-africa>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Eizenga, D. and Amandine Gnanguènon (2024). Recalibrating Coastal West Africa's Response to Violent Extremism – Africa Center for Strategic Studies. [online] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/publication/asb43en-recalibrating-multitiered-stabilization-strategy-coastal-west-africa-response-violent-extremism/>.

<sup>54</sup> Eizenga, D. and Amandine Gnanguènon (2024). Recalibrating Coastal West Africa's Response to Violent Extremism – Africa Center for Strategic Studies. [online] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/publication/asb43en-recalibrating-multitiered-stabilization-strategy-coastal-west-africa-response-violent-extremism/>.

<sup>55</sup> WANEP (2024). *Security and Economic Implications of the Exit of the AES Countries from ECOWAS*. [online] Wanep.org. Available at: <https://wanep.org/wanep/security-and-economic-implications-of-the-exit-of-the-aes-countries-from-ecowas/>.

heightened resource competition within ECOWAS states, reducing incentives for collective action.<sup>56</sup> Without mechanisms to coordinate economic policies, individual states may prioritize national interests over regional stability, undermining West Africa’s broader integration efforts. The consequences of this fragmentation extend beyond economic policy, affecting food security, energy provision, and water management—all of which rely on regional cooperation to address transnational challenges. The weakening of these collaborative frameworks may, in turn, exacerbate existing cycles of violence within member countries driven by resource-based conflicts, providing extremist groups with further opportunities to exploit local grievances.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the erosion of regional cohesion may diminish oversight of cross-border migration and trade, creating governance gaps that extremist groups can leverage to expand illicit smuggling networks.<sup>58</sup>

### ***3.2.3 Illicit economies and extremist financing***

Violent extremist groups in the Sahel are increasingly exploiting illicit economies in West Africa to secure equipment and financing for their operations. Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo have emerged as key hubs for terrorists to procure resources or serve as transit zones for funding and logistics.<sup>59</sup> Livestock stolen from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger is sold in Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, and Ghana, with the profits used to fund terrorist groups in the Sahel, enabling them to purchase arms, fuel, and motorbikes.<sup>60</sup>

Security forces have frequently arrested smugglers transporting fertilizer from northern border towns in Ghana to Burkina Faso, where it is used by terrorist groups to manufacture explosives.<sup>61</sup> Extremists have also infiltrated the illicit gold trade, with illegal miners from across West Africa, including Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso, operating in Ghana’s northern border towns and smuggling gold into Burkina Faso.<sup>62</sup> Concerningly, these areas are already rife with banditry and violence.

The disruption of these illicit supply chains in West Africa’s coastal countries could trigger a surge in terrorist attacks, as extremist groups seek to protect their places of retreat, maintain supply channels, and target border posts perceived as threats to their receipt of resources. Addressing violent extremism therefore requires not only focusing on direct attacks but also dismantling the financial and logistical networks that sustain these groups—while ensuring that countermeasures do not severely disrupt cross-border trade, which many local communities depend on for their livelihoods.

### ***3.2.4 Climate Change and Resource Scarcity***

The Sahel is one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world, with temperatures rising 1.5 times the global average between 2011 and 2020, leading to more frequent and severe

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<sup>56</sup> Mant, K., Patel, J. and Munasinghe, S. (2024). From Crisis to Conflict: Climate Change and Violent Extremism in the Sahel. [online] Available at: <https://assets.ctfassets.net/751a1c9taeh/4j2aAETZ9ThaUxDTeROHBv/e951bdffa2b48679b1eb60fbd2e6371d/4vR1jTie7rIKfvo4GighXQ--114026112024>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Kwarkye, S. (2020). Breaking terrorism supply chains in West Africa. [online] ISS Africa. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/breaking-terrorism-supply-chains-in-west-africa>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

droughts, heavy rains, and floods.<sup>63</sup> These extreme weather events have accelerated desertification, reduced agricultural yields, and damaged critical infrastructure, exacerbating food insecurity and intensifying competition over increasingly scarce natural resources.<sup>64</sup> As water and arable land become more limited, migration patterns have shifted, fueling both north-south and rural-urban displacement, particularly across Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.<sup>65</sup> The breakdown of traditional pastoral mobility patterns has further strained relations between host communities and incoming migrants, increasing tensions between herders and farmers and driving conflict in both the Sahel and the West African littoral states.

In Nigeria's Middle Belt, these pressures have escalated long-standing farmer-herder conflicts into large-scale violence, with fatalities in some years surpassing those caused by Boko Haram.<sup>66</sup> The intensifying struggle over grazing land and dwindling water sources has also weakened traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, fueling the rise of self-defense militias in Burkina Faso's Centre-Nord and Soum regions, Mali's Mopti region, Niger's Tillabéri region, and Nigeria's North West zone.<sup>67</sup>

This growing instability has created an opportunity for violent extremist groups, which have increasingly stepped in to fill governance vacuums. By offering security, dispute resolution mechanisms, and access to food and water, extremist groups are embedding themselves within local communities and expanding their influence.<sup>68</sup> As climate change continues to erode livelihoods and push more communities into crisis, West African littoral states face an escalating risk of spillover violence, making urgent intervention and a comprehensive action plan essential.

### **3.3 Pull Factors: Why Coastal West Africa is at Risk**

#### ***3.3.1 Porous borders and unapproved routes***

Porous borders between coastal West African countries—particularly around Burkina Faso's border towns such as Nassoumbou and Soum, which connect with Mali, Niger, and Côte d'Ivoire—combined with the overstretched capacities of regional security institutions, have facilitated the movement of small arms, fighters, and illicit goods along unapproved and poorly monitored routes, making them a critical enabler of cross-border extremist activity.<sup>69</sup> Border and customs officials lack the financial resources, operational capacity, and adequately trained personnel needed to effectively detect and curb the expansion of illicit trade within the region.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, border checks are geographically limited, which allows violent extremist groups to move more freely across national boundaries. This issue is particularly evident in the tri-border

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<sup>63</sup> Muggah, R. (2021). *In West Africa, Climate Change Equals Conflict*. [online] Foreign Policy. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/18/west-africa-sahel-climate-change-global-warming-conflict-food-agriculture-fish-livestock/>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Tarif, K. (2022) 'Climate change and violent conflict in West Africa: assessing the evidence'. SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security. Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Center for Preventive Action (2024b). *Violent Extremism in the Sahel*. [online] Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>.

<sup>70</sup> Silla, E. (2022). Preventing Conflict in Coastal West Africa. CFR.org. [online] 26 Aug. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/report/preventing-conflict-coastal-west-africa>.



region connecting Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger, where 76% of armed group activities occur in ungoverned areas.<sup>71</sup> These areas serve as hubs for recruitment, training, and smuggling, which further facilitate the spread of extremist influence.<sup>72</sup> Poorly defended police and military outposts in remote areas are also increasingly targeted by violent extremist groups, which exploit these vulnerabilities to seize weapons, further expanding their operations within the region.<sup>73</sup>



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Source: *Ghana Weekend*

*People entering Ghana through unapproved route*

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### **3.3.2 Unemployment, political exclusion, and weak governance**

Unemployment and underemployment remain significant grievances across West Africa, particularly among the region's rapidly growing youth population. In 2020, 30.4% of young people (aged 15-24) in West Africa were neither employed nor enrolled in formal education or

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<sup>71</sup> United Nations (2024b). Amid Growing Strength of Terrorist Groups in Sahel, West Africa, Senior Official Urges Security Council to Scale Up Support within Regional Frameworks | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. [online] Un.org. Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15950.doc.htm>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Silla, E. (2022). Preventing Conflict in Coastal West Africa. CFR.org. [online] 26 Aug. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/report/preventing-conflict-coastal-west-africa>.



training.<sup>74</sup> This economic insecurity increases the appeal of violent extremist groups, which often exploit disillusionment by offering financial incentives, a sense of purpose, and social belonging.

Political exclusion, in addition to economic hardship, significantly exacerbates vulnerabilities to radicalization, especially in the northern regions of coastal West African states, which are often less socioeconomically developed than their southern counterparts.<sup>75</sup> Evidence from the region consistently shows that individuals frustrated by economic stagnation and political neglect are increasingly receptive to extremist narratives.<sup>76</sup> Sahelian extremist groups have proven adept at integrating jihadi ideology with local frustrations, using these grievances as a tool to mobilize recruits and establish legitimacy.<sup>77</sup>

Compounding these economic and political challenges is weak governance, marked by widespread corruption and entrenched patronage systems that erode public trust in state institutions.<sup>78</sup> According to 2021 Afrobarometer surveys, more than half of the population in several West African countries perceive at least one key government institution—such as the police, judiciary, civil service, presidency, or legislature—as corrupt. This systemic corruption undermines state legitimacy, weakens law enforcement, and hampers government's ability to provide essential services, protect citizens, and deliver justice.<sup>79</sup> In the absence of credible state responses to economic hardship, political exclusion, and governance failures, marginalized groups have increasingly turned to alternative means of securing economic and political agency, including joining violent extremist groups.<sup>80</sup>

### *3.3.3 Existing intercommunal tensions*

Violent extremist organizations take advantage of pre-existing ingrained ethnic, religious, and socio-political divisions across West Africa to expand their influence. They intentionally fuel rivalries between communities by ethnicizing tensions, using identity-based arguments to sharpen conflicts.<sup>81</sup> By doing so, they impose their influence through coercion and persuasion, presenting themselves as protectors of marginalized groups and offering immediate financial incentives to impoverished youth.<sup>82</sup> Religious indoctrination is then utilized as justifications for their actions.

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<sup>74</sup> Ismael, Issifou; Silvére Y, Konan; Dosso, Bakary (2021). United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa Policy brief: What is the link between youth unemployment, the life cycle deficit and the demographic dividend in West Africa?. Addis Ababa: UN. ECA. <https://hdl.handle.net/10855/47570>.

<sup>75</sup> Silla, E. (2022). Preventing Conflict in Coastal West Africa. CFR.org. [online] 26 Aug. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/report/preventing-conflict-coastal-west-africa>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2021). Democratic backsliding in West Africa: Nature, causes, remedies. Accra, Kofi Annan Foundation.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Nato Strategic Direction South Hub & African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (2022). The Contagion of Violent Extremism in West African coastal states. [online] Available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42293-doc-20220927\\_NU\\_JFCNP\\_NSD-S\\_HUB\\_REPORT\\_THE\\_CONTAGION\\_OF\\_VIOLENT\\_EXTREMISM\\_IN\\_WEST\\_AFRICAN\\_COASTAL\\_STATES.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42293-doc-20220927_NU_JFCNP_NSD-S_HUB_REPORT_THE_CONTAGION_OF_VIOLENT_EXTREMISM_IN_WEST_AFRICAN_COASTAL_STATES.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> UNSC (2019). West Africa and the Sahel: Briefing on Intercommunal Violence and Terrorism. [online] Security Council Report. Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2019/12/west-africa-and-the-sahel-briefing-on-intercommunal-violence-and-terrorism.php>.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

The rising violence between farmers and pastoralists in West Africa, especially involving the Fulbe herders—who number approximately 30 million<sup>83</sup> has become a key vulnerability that violent extremist groups can exploit. Tensions over land and resource competition, compounded by weak governance structures and systemic economic discrimination against pastoralists, create an environment conducive to extremist infiltration.<sup>84</sup> In Nigeria, for example, the elite acquisition of grazing reserves, followed by the redistribution of land through patronage networks, has fueled grievances amongst pastoralists who have turned to extremist groups to escape security control, gain autonomy, and seek an alternative source of livelihood.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, in volatile political enclaves where insurgents operate—such as northern Burkina Faso and neighboring districts in Mali—Islamic extremist groups have strategically leveraged religious detachment to fuel recruitment.<sup>86</sup> For example, the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), led by Fulbe cleric, Amadou Koufa, has capitalized on these tensions to attract disenfranchised pastoralists to its ranks.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, in Benin, a ‘group of twelve’ affiliated with violent extremist organizations was reported to have intended, though unsuccessfully, to intervene in violent clashes between Fulbe pastoralists and local farmers in Goungoun on June 3rd, 2021.<sup>88</sup> This incident highlights the awareness of violent extremists regarding local tensions and their intention to exploit these divisions for their own gain.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Sanders, L., Dow, K. and Scott, V. (2025). Surge of Hate Speech in the Sahel, Including on WhatsApp, Signals Atrocity Risk. [online] Just Security. Available at: <https://www.justsecurity.org/107051/sahel-hate-speech-violence/>.

<sup>84</sup> Brottem, L. (2021). The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa. [online] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/publication/growing-complexity-farmer-herder-conflict-west-central-africa/>.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> De Bruijne, K. (2021). Laws of Attraction. Northern Benin and risk of violent extremist spillover, CRU Report, Amsterdam: Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations-ACLED.

Eizenga, D. and Amandine Gnanguènon (2024). Recalibrating Coastal West Africa’s Response to Violent Extremism – Africa Center for Strategic Studies. [online] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/publication/asb43en-recalibrating-multitiered-stabilization-strategy-coastal-west-africa-response-violent-extremism/>.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1 Existing Resolution Mechanisms

The spillover of violent extremism from the Sahel to West African has driven governments and international partners to adopt multifaceted approaches that integrate security measures with socio-economic interventions. While regional and national military responses remain a core component, countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Nigeria have implemented programs emphasizing economic development, community engagement, and interfaith dialogue to address the root causes of radicalization.

Côte d'Ivoire's Program spécial du Nord combines infrastructure development and youth employment initiatives with enhanced security measures in northern border regions. Similarly, Togo's Committee for the Prevention and Fight against Violent Extremism (CIPLEV) focuses on civil-military engagement, integrating early warning systems and leadership training to strengthen community resilience against radicalization. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, intergovernmental organizations have introduced interfaith dialogue and youth-led peacebuilding initiatives to reduce intercommunal tensions and curb extremist recruitment.

While these interventions have made notable progress in reducing violence and fostering community dialogue, their long-term effectiveness depends on sustained financial and institutional support, strengthened trust between security forces and civilians, and enhanced regional cooperation. Without addressing communities' economic marginalization, governance deficits, and human rights abuses by state security forces, extremist groups will continue to exploit local grievances, ultimately undermining efforts to achieve lasting peace.

### 4.2 Integrating Security and Development: Côte d'Ivoire

In 2022, the Ivorian government launched the *Program spécial du Nord*, a comprehensive initiative that integrates an increased security presence in northern border regions with strategic infrastructure investments.<sup>90</sup> These include electricity and water systems, road maintenance, educational facilities, healthcare centers, and social programs designed to support unemployed and undereducated youth.<sup>91</sup> Over its three-year implementation period, the program has benefitted over 60,000 young people through training, integration, and mentorship opportunities.<sup>92</sup> Complementing the government's efforts, the United Nations Development System (SNUD) in Côte d'Ivoire has implemented several youth-focused projects.<sup>93</sup> UNICEF's *Génération Sans Limite* provides vocational training to equip young people with professional skills, while the International Labor Organization's *ProAgro YOUTH* program develops the agricultural capacities of rural youth through sustainable and innovative agro-industrial

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<sup>90</sup> CIGC (2023). Le program en faveur des jeunes des zones de fragilité du Nord : Un dispositif robuste pour faire barrage aux extrémismes - Abidjan.net News. [online] Abidjan.net. Available at: <https://news.abidjan.net/articles/723604/le-programme-en-faveur-des-jeunes-des-zones-de-fragilite-du-nord-un-dispositif-robuste-pour-faire-barrage-aux-extremismes>.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> International Labor Organization (2023). Le Programme des jeunes du Gouvernement de Côte d'Ivoire se met en place avec la contribution de l'OIT. [online] International Labour Organization. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/fr/resource/article/le-programme-des-jeunes-du-gouvernement-de-cote-divoire-se-met-en-place>.

clusters.<sup>94</sup> These developments and government coordinated efforts have been recognized as a successful model for addressing the root causes of violent extremism.

However, the long-term success of these initiatives depends on sustained funding, community trust, and effective regional security measures. Continued investment is critical to maintaining infrastructure quality and ensuring that economic grievances are gradually alleviated, preventing extremist groups from exploiting disillusionment from economic vulnerabilities. Moreover, building genuine trust between security forces and civilians requires an end to abuses such as racketeering, harassment at checkpoints, ethnic profiling, and human rights violations during military operations, which persist today. Finally, strengthening domestic and regional security coordination—including effective border management, intelligence-sharing, and cross-border security cooperation—is crucial to addressing the evolving threats posed by violent extremism in West Africa.

### 4.3 Strengthening Civil-Military Dialogue: Togo

In May 2019, Togo established the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Prevention and Fight against Violent Extremism (CIPLEV) to provide early warning mechanisms, raise awareness, and, most importantly, coordinate efforts between the government, security institutions, and civil society in combating the threat.<sup>95</sup> To foster civil-military dialogue and build trust between security forces and the population, CIPLEV has launched numerous awareness campaigns on violent extremism and established communication mechanisms that connect citizens with security institutions, particularly in the most vulnerable Savanes, Centrale, and Kara regions.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, recognizing the weakness of local mediation mechanisms, CIPLEV has organized training workshops for traditional and religious leaders, educating leaders on the complexities of violent extremism and equipping them with strategies to promote social cohesion within their communities.<sup>97</sup> In turn, this has reinforced their role as key influencers in preventing radicalization.

However, CIPLEV's success in strengthening relations between communities hinges on the ability of security forces to protect civilians, as extremists have threatened reprisals against those collaborating with the state and its affiliated forces.<sup>98</sup> Amid rising attacks, fear, and mistrust, security forces must prioritize the protection of their sources to ensure sustained cooperation from local communities.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, as highlighted earlier, security forces must avoid committing human rights abuses, as such actions undermine trust and risk alienating the very communities they seek to protect.<sup>100</sup> Beyond security concerns, civil society's role in CIPLEV has also drawn criticism, with some questioning whether they genuinely represent

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Abatan, J., Matongbada, M. and Assanvo, W. (2021). Evidence must guide terrorism prevention in Benin and Togo. [online] ISS Africa. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/evidence-must-guide-terrorism-prevention-in-benin-and-togo>.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> International Organization for Migration (2023). Preventing and Combating Violent Extremism in Togo: Traditional and Religious Leaders Called on to Play Their Role. [online] Iom.int. Available at: <https://rodakar.iom.int/news/preventing-and-combating-violent-extremism-togo-traditional-and-religious-leaders-called-play-their-role>

<sup>98</sup> Abatan, J. (2023). Civilian-state security cooperation in Benin and Togo: a double-edged sword | ISS Africa. [online] ISS Africa. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/civilian-state-security-cooperation-in-benin-and-togo-a-double-edged-sword>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

their constituencies and have meaningful influence in decision-making processes.<sup>101</sup> In many cases, civil society organizations (CSOs) have had limited involvement in designing and implementing action plans, weakening their potential contributions to counter-extremism efforts. To foster a more inclusive and community-driven approach, CIPLEV must prioritize civil society engagement, leveraging their local knowledge and grassroots networks to address the legitimacy gap between security institutions and communities.<sup>102</sup>

### 4.3 Interfaith Dialogue and Youth-Led Peacebuilding: Nigeria

In 2017, the International Dialogue Center (KAICIID) established the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) in Nigeria, following extensive consultations with over 80 stakeholders and local partners.<sup>103</sup> As a locally owned and legally registered organization, the IDFP is mandated to promote interreligious dialogue, foster collaboration between religious actors, and engage international, governmental, and civil society partners in peacebuilding.<sup>104</sup> The forum has facilitated a high-level intra-faith roundtable on de-radicalization, leading to the development of a roadmap and a consensus document for further implementation within the Muslim community.<sup>105</sup> It has also organized workshops for women that raised awareness on hate speech and incitement to violence as well as implemented a training program for 120 Nigerian youth, emphasizing the constructive role of religion in peacebuilding within their communities. Preliminary visits have also been conducted in communities most affected by farmer-herder conflicts, particularly in Kaduna and Plateau States, to assess local needs and develop tailored conflict resolution mechanisms.<sup>106</sup>

Similarly, the NGO Conciliation Resources, with support from the German Foreign Office, has partnered with local organizations, including the Borno Coalition for Democracy and Progress and Hope Interactive in Yobe State, to establish youth-led peace initiatives in Northeast Nigeria.<sup>107</sup> As part of this effort, a 550-member youth network has been created and mobilized, forming a coalition of both in-person and digital youth groups dedicated to promoting tolerance within their communities.<sup>108</sup> This network also serves as a platform for young people to process past trauma, navigate conflicts, and effectively voice their concerns to community leaders. More than 3,000 youth have participated in training and mentorship programs aimed at enhancing their understanding of violent extremism, equipping them with strategies to cope with its effects, and supporting them in exploring alternative livelihoods.<sup>109</sup>

While interfaith dialogue and youth peacebuilding initiatives in Nigeria have played a critical role in reducing tensions, their success is often contingent on external funding, shifting political landscapes, and community participation. Moreover, violent extremist groups continue to

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<sup>101</sup> Abatan, J., Matongbada, M. and Assanvo, W. (2021). Evidence must guide terrorism prevention in Benin and Togo. [online] ISS Africa. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/evidence-must-guide-terrorism-prevention-in-benin-and-togo>.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> International Dialogue Centre (2017). Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP). [online] KAICIID. Available at: <https://www.kaiciid.org/what-we-do/we-convene/platform/interfaith-dialogue-forum-peace-idfp>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Conciliation Resources (2019). Young people prevent violence in northeast Nigeria | Conciliation Resources. [online] [www.c-r.org](http://www.c-r.org). Available at: <https://www.c-r.org/our-work-in-action/young-people-prevent-violence-northeast-nigeria>.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

exploit local grievances, particularly in conflict-prone areas such as Borno, Yobe, and Kaduna, where competition over land and identity-based divisions remain significant drivers of conflict. Therefore, while local peace platforms contribute to short-term reductions in violence, their ability to address systemic inequalities, strengthen institutional trust, and prevent future radicalization requires long-term commitment, stronger policy frameworks, and deeper integration with state-led conflict resolution mechanisms.



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*Sheikh Halliru Maraya (Right) presents to faith leaders at a conference in Nigeria*

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.1 The Ghana Case

For decades, Ghana has remained one of West Africa's most stable nations. However, escalating violence in the Sahel and its spillover into neighboring coastal states now pose a significant security threat. Burkina Faso—one of the Sahelian countries hardest hit by terrorism since 2015—shares a 602 km border with Ghana, with 33 official and 189 unofficial migration entry points.<sup>110</sup> The under-equipped Ghanaian immigration forces struggle to monitor movement across these borders, raising concerns over the infiltration of armed groups.<sup>111</sup> A similar situation exists along Ghana's boundaries with Togo and Côte d'Ivoire. Intensification of terrorist activities in Burkina Faso's Cascades region and northern Côte d'Ivoire makes northern Ghana an attractive cross-border withdrawal and logistics zone for armed groups.<sup>112</sup> Alarming, the Macina Liberation Front, a JNIM-affiliated terrorist group, has established itself near the Dida Forest along the Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire border, situated just 150 km from Ghana.<sup>113</sup>

As security conditions in the Sahel deteriorate, extremist groups—facing financial constraints—are increasingly likely to expand into coastal states. Even if direct attacks do not materialize, these groups may establish logistical hubs, training camps, and safe havens in Ghana, which offers greater security than their Sahelian bases.<sup>114</sup> Their intent to expand is evident in the recruitment of young Ghanaian fighters into jihadist movements operating in the Sahel. Reports estimate that 200-300 young Ghanaians have undergone six months of training in the region before returning to propagate radical ideologies and pressure local communities into providing arms.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, in April 2019, Burkinabè security forces arrested a jihadist commander who was found in possession of a contact list containing names from Benin, Togo, and Ghana, highlighting existing jihadist networks in West Africa's littoral states.<sup>116</sup>

Although Ghana has so far avoided terrorist attacks, its porous borders, unofficial entry points, proximity to Sahelian extremist groups, weak surveillance infrastructure, high youth unemployment, and intercommunal tensions create vulnerabilities that extremists can exploit. These risks are particularly pronounced in northern Ghana, where the proliferation of small arms, unresolved local conflicts, and perceptions of state neglect heighten security challenges. The influx of refugees and Fulbe pastoralists fleeing instability in the Sahel—particularly from Burkina Faso—has intensified competition over scarce resources, deepening local grievances that extremist groups could leverage for recruitment. Moreover, electoral violence and the rise of political vigilante groups further destabilize the region. These groups, often composed of economically marginalized young men reliant on political elites, operate within overlapping socio-economic networks that extremists may exploit. The situation is compounded by limited access to mediation mechanisms, particularly in addressing communal disputes over land and

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<sup>110</sup> Raga, S., Lemma, A. and Keane, J. (2023). *The Sahel Conflict: Economic & Security Spillovers on West Africa*. ODI Emerging Analysis.

<sup>111</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2022). *The Jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo*. [online] [www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de). Available at: <https://www.kas.de/de/einzeltitel/-/content/die-dschihadistische-bedrohung-im-norden-von-ghana-und-togo-3>.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

farmer-herder tensions, leaving many conflicts unresolved and creating further openings for extremist infiltration.<sup>117</sup>

The following section will examine Ghana's key vulnerabilities to violent extremism in the northern regions, with a focus on economic marginalization and youth radicalization, farmer-herder conflicts, cross-border criminal networks and jihadist expansion, as well as information gaps and digital vulnerabilities.

## 5.2 Youth Bulge and Unemployment

In Ghana, youth face increasing economic marginalization despite being more educated than previous generations. Young people aged 15–35 make up 38% of the population, yet 21.7% of them are unemployed, highlighting a major disconnect between education and employment opportunities.<sup>118</sup> According to the 2022 Afrobarometer survey, unemployment and poor economic management are the top concerns among Ghanaian youth, with 47% identifying these as the most pressing issues they want the government to address<sup>119</sup>. However, only 16% believe the government is doing well in managing the economy, and just 14% think it is creating sufficient jobs.<sup>120</sup> This growing frustration and exclusion from economic opportunities render Ghanaian youth particularly vulnerable to the recruitment narratives of violent extremist groups, which often offer supposed promises of income, purpose, and belonging.<sup>121</sup> Experts such as Dr. Kaderi Noagah Bukari, Research Fellow at the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Cape Coast as well as existing research from UNDP Ghana Peace and Development Analysis (2022) have highlighted this risk, warning that widespread youth unemployment and economic disenfranchisement are creating fertile ground for radicalization.<sup>122</sup> UNDP (2022) analysis, in particular, identifies this dynamic as a significant national security threat, underscoring the urgency of targeted interventions to expand economic inclusion and prevent the spread of violent extremism.<sup>123</sup>

## 5.3 Economic Marginalization and Radicalization – Northern Ghana

The limited capacity of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) to provide essential services and maintain control over vast territories in Ghana's Northern regions has left governance gaps that extremist groups exploit by offering security, financial

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<sup>117</sup> Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2023). Gaps and Needs in Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Early Warning and Mediation Mechanisms and Structures in Ghana and its Border Areas. [online] ReCap Network. Available at: <https://recapnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WORKING-PAPER-N%C2%B02-ANGLAIS-WEB.pdf>.

<sup>118</sup> Ghana Statistical Services (2023). *Labor Statistics*. [online] Available at: [https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2023\\_Quarter\\_Labour\\_Statistics\\_Bulletin\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2023_Quarter_Labour_Statistics_Bulletin_full_report.pdf).

<sup>119</sup> Howard, B., 2023. Youth priorities in Ghana: Economy and employment take center stage. <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/R9-News-release-Youth-priorities-in-Ghana-Economy-and-employment-Afrobarometer-ma-bh-1nov23.pdf>

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> WACCE (2024). *The Youth and Violent Extremism*. [online] West Africa Center for Counter Extremism. Available at: <https://waccegh.org/the-youth-and-ve/>.

<sup>122</sup> GNA (2022). *Youth unemployment a bait for extremist insurgency—Dr Bukari* | Ghana News Agency. [online] Ghana News Agency. Available at: <https://gna.org.gh/2022/05/youth-unemployment-a-bait-for-extremist-insurgencydr-bukari/>

<sup>123</sup> Azinim, M. and Kang, C. (2021). *Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda in Ghana*. [online] Available at: [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-05/Youth\\_%20Peace%20and%20Security%20in%20Ghana.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-05/Youth_%20Peace%20and%20Security%20in%20Ghana.pdf).

incentives, and social services, thereby gaining local support and expanding their influence.<sup>124</sup> A survey by the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) of 1,351 community members across eight border regions confirms these findings, with respondents identifying unemployment (35.9%), financial incentives (29.3%), and political and socio-economic marginalization (6.3%) as the three main factors driving participation in extremist activities.<sup>125</sup>

This governance vacuum has particularly severe consequences for northern youth, who face disproportionate unemployment and economic exclusion. According to the Ghana Statistical Service, the five northern regions rank among the six highest in youth unemployment nationwide.<sup>126</sup> A 2023 UNDP study surveying 1,394 youth aged 15-25 found that 39% were unemployed, with an equally low percentage having completed only primary, junior high, secondary, technical training, or higher education. The lack of economic opportunities has contributed to the rise of informal youth camps, where unemployed youth gather for entertainment and political mobilization.<sup>127</sup> Local reports indicate that these spaces have become recruitment hubs for extremist groups, forming networks that later engage in crime, armed violence, or terrorism.<sup>128</sup> The threat is tangible, as the UNDP study found that 8% of surveyed youth had been directly approached by violent extremist recruiters during their studies. These trends are particularly evident in Ghana's Upper West and Upper East regions, where youth participation in illicit trafficking and banditry has risen in response to socio-economic marginalization, making these areas prime recruitment grounds for jihadist groups.<sup>129</sup> This dynamic also extends to able-bodied migrants fleeing neighboring Sahel countries with little to no alternative opportunities.<sup>130</sup> Alarming reports indicate that some Ghanaians recruited into extremist networks receive training and ideological indoctrination in Sahelian states before returning home to spread radical ideologies and recruit others.<sup>131</sup>

Youth marginalization has not only increased their exposure to jihadist recruitment but has also driven many into political vigilantism, further heightening their vulnerability to radicalization. Deprived of economic opportunities and excluded from formal governance structures, young people are frequently recruited by political parties as enforcers in election-related violence, attacking opponents, destroying state property, and forcibly removing government appointees.<sup>132</sup> This issue is particularly acute in 'Zongo' communities, densely populated urban

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<sup>124</sup> United Nations Development Program (2023). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement. [online] Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement>.

<sup>125</sup> National Commission for Civic Education (2023). Baseline Study on Preventing and Containing Violent Extremism in Eight Regions in the Northern Part of Ghana. [online] Available at: <https://www.ncegh.org/publications/view/160BASELINE+STUDY+ON+PREVENTING+AND+CONTAINING+VIOLENT+EXTREMISM+IN+EIGHT+REGIONS+IN+THE+NORTHERN+PART+OF+GHANA.pdf>.

<sup>126</sup> Ghana Statistical Services (2023). *Labor Statistics*. [online] Available at: [https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2023\\_Quarter\\_Labour\\_Statistics\\_Bulletin\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2023_Quarter_Labour_Statistics_Bulletin_full_report.pdf).

<sup>127</sup> United Nations Development Program (2023). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement. [online] Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement>.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2022). The Jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo. [online] [www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de). Available at: <https://www.kas.de/de/einzeltitel/-/content/die-dschihadistische-bedrohung-im-norden-von-ghana-und-togo-3>.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> United Nations Development Program (2023). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement. [online] Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement>.

migrant settlements where high levels of unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion create conditions ripe for political party recruitment.<sup>133</sup>

The enactment of the Vigilantism and Related Offences Act (Act 999) in 2019, which criminalized political vigilante groups, has led to an evolution of their activities rather than their disbandment.<sup>134</sup> These groups have adapted to their ban by shifting towards intra-party violence, operating more covertly, and expanding into illicit activities such as drug trafficking and illegal mining.<sup>135</sup> Critically, violent extremists and jihadist recruiters often operate in the same spaces as political vigilantes, who are economically unstable due to their dependence on the success of political elites within a given party.<sup>136</sup> Accustomed to violence and lacking viable alternatives, these vigilantes become highly vulnerable to extremist influence, as jihadist groups offer them a sense of belonging and alternative economic opportunities.<sup>137</sup> This dynamic is further exacerbated in ‘Zongo’ communities, where the combination of economic marginalization, shared use of Hausa—a language spoken by Sahel-based jihadist groups—and religious identity deepens their vulnerability to radicalization.<sup>138</sup> Addressing northern Ghana’s economic exclusion, particularly among youth, is therefore critical not only to directly counter jihadist expansion but also to prevent the dangerous convergence of political vigilantism and violent extremism.

#### 5.4 Farmer-Herder Conflict

Farmer-herder conflicts, particularly between Fulbe pastoralists—both long-established in Ghana and those fleeing instability in Burkina Faso—and local farming communities, heighten vulnerabilities that can foster radicalization. Persistent grievances, ethnic marginalization, and cycles of retaliatory violence create opportunities for extremist groups to exploit local tensions and recruit disenfranchised individuals.

In northern towns such as Yendi, Zabzugu, Gwollu, Buipe, Sawla-Tuna-Kalba, Gushegu, Chereponi, Saboba, Bongo, Wecheaand Karaga, clashes have intensified as pastoralist routes increasingly overlap with residential and agricultural zones.<sup>139</sup> Climate change and population growth have exacerbated these tensions by reducing grazing land and forcing pastoralists to alter their migration patterns.<sup>140</sup> As pastoralists migrate in search of viable grazing land, their movement increasingly brings them into conflict with settled farming communities, where land

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<sup>133</sup> Adzoga, A. (2020). Coalition sets out to stamp out Political Vigilantism in ‘Zongo’ Communities - MyJoyOnline. [online] MyJoyOnline. Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/coalition-sets-out-to-stamp-out-political-vigilantism-in-zongo-communities/>.

<sup>134</sup> Bukari, K., Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2022). Political Party Youth ‘Vigilante’ Groups in Ghana. [online] University of Cape Coast. Available at: <https://elva.org/wp-content/uploads/Rebranded-But-Business-As-Usual-Ghanas-Political-Party-Vigilante-Groups.pdf>.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> United Nations Development Program (2023). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement. [online] Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement>.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa. [online] ACCORD. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

<sup>139</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2022). The Jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo. [online] [www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de). Available at: <https://www.kas.de/de/einzeltitel/-/content/die-dschihadistische-bedrohung-im-norden-von-ghana-und-togo-3>.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.



governance disputes further complicate access and ownership.<sup>141</sup> Government-issued permits granting migratory herders settlement rights often conflict with the customary land tenure system, which grants traditional chiefs control over land. As a result, local villagers, viewing the Fulbe as encroachers, have formed militias to defend what they consider ancestral land, often resorting to violence by killing livestock or poisoning water sources.<sup>142</sup> In retaliation, some herders have attacked villages and farmlands before moving on. Even when herders obtain customary permission to settle, disputes frequently arise due to a lack of transparency—herders may underreport livestock numbers, exceed agreed grazing boundaries and paths, and chiefs may fail to inform local communities of these agreements.<sup>143</sup> This fuels perception of trespassing and repeated outbreaks of severe violence that has led to alarming rates of fatality, the destruction of villages, the slaughtering of livestock. Moreover, the rising influx of Fulbe fleeing violent instability in Burkina Faso into northern Ghana which has led to rising resource competition with local farmers has further exacerbated existing farmer-herder conflicts, particularly in the Upper West, Upper East, Northern, North-East, and Savannah regions.<sup>144</sup>



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### *Farmer-Herder conflicts*

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These tensions create an entry point for violent extremist groups, which have historically exploited farmer-herder conflicts across the Sahel by positioning themselves as defenders of marginalized Fulbe communities.<sup>145</sup> In Mali and Burkina Faso, jihadist organizations have

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa. [online] ACCORD. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

<sup>145</sup> Brottem, L. (2021). The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa. [online] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/publication/growing-complexity-farmer-herder-conflict-west-central-africa/>.

leveraged land grievances to radicalize those excluded from formal governance structures.<sup>146</sup> By offering protection, advocating alternative governance systems, and supplying arms, they have successfully mobilized local actors into insurgencies.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, leaders of JNIM have repeatedly called on Fulbe communities in coastal West African countries, including Ghana, to join the jihadist movement.<sup>148</sup> The risk of extremist infiltration is further amplified by the erosion of trust between local communities and state institutions, which have historically failed to protect Fulbe from violence, engaged in discriminatory practices, and been complicit in attacks on Fulbe livestock.<sup>149</sup> Where governments fail to provide transparent conflict resolution mechanisms, extremist groups can step in as alternative mediators, imposing their own judicial and governance structures under the guise of restoring order.

Another key driver of recurring farmer-herder conflicts in Ghana is the systemic marginalization of Fulbe communities. Often perceived as non-Ghanaians or “aliens,” Fulbe herders face exclusion from economic, civil, and political rights. Aning et al. (2017) argue that these perceptions stem from deep-rooted stereotypes portraying Fulbe as “armed robbers, rapists, violent, non-citizens, aliens, and uncivilized people.”<sup>150</sup> Similarly, Bukari and Scheffran highlight the media’s role in reinforcing these biases, often identifying criminals by their Fulbe ethnicity while referring to others simply as “Ghanaian armed robbers”<sup>151</sup>, despite many Fulbe herders being second- or third-generation Ghanaians.<sup>152</sup> The stigmatization is further exacerbated by the disproportionate representation of Fulbe individuals in militant Islamist groups, which has led to a widespread but inaccurate generalization linking the entire Fulbe community to extremism.<sup>153</sup> This persistent stigmatization has led to systemic discrimination, particularly in access to security and social services, fueling grievances within Fulbe communities.<sup>154</sup> This issue is especially acute for Fulbe refugees fleeing instability in Burkina Faso and seeking refuge in northern Ghana as many face discrimination in obtaining legal documentation due to their identity, which in turn restricts their access to basic resources.<sup>155</sup> The continuous profiling and exclusion of Fulbe herders provide a fertile ground

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa. [online] ACCORD. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

<sup>149</sup> Bukari, K., Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2022). Political Party Youth ‘Vigilante’ Groups in Ghana. [online] University of Cape Coast. Available at: <https://elva.org/wp-content/uploads/Rebranded-But-Business-As-Usual-Ghanas-Political-Party-Vigilante-Groups.pdf>.

<sup>150</sup> Aning, K., Aubyn, F., & Adomako, M. (2017). Herder-Farmer Conflicts in West Africa: a challenge for Regional Security: A Ghana Case Study.

<sup>151</sup> Adomako, M. (2019). Addressing the causes and consequences of the farmer-herder conflict in Ghana. KAIPTC <https://www.kaiptc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/20200901-faar-Final-Policy-Brief-6-2019-Farmer-Herder-Conflict-in-Ghana.pdf>

<sup>152</sup> Bukari, K.N., Sow, P. and Scheffran, J. (2018). Cooperation and Co-Existence Between Farmers and Herders in the Midst of Violent Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Ghana. *African Studies Review*, 61(2), pp. 78–102. doi:10.1017/asr.2017.124.

<sup>153</sup> Global Detention Project (2024). Ghana: Expelling People Fleeing Conflict in Burkina Faso. [online] Global Detention Project | Mapping immigration detention around the world. Available at: [https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/ghana-expelling-people-fleeing-conflict-in-burkina-faso?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/ghana-expelling-people-fleeing-conflict-in-burkina-faso?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>154</sup> Wayo, R. (2023). Fulbe Vulnerability and Accusations: Need to Promote Dialogue, Peace-building Initiatives. [online] Ghana News Agency. Available at: <https://gna.org.gh/2023/12/Fulbe-vulnerability-and-accusations-need-to-promote-dialogue-peace-building-initiatives/>.

<sup>155</sup> Global Detention Project (2024). Ghana: Expelling People Fleeing Conflict in Burkina Faso. [online] Global Detention Project | Mapping immigration detention around the world. Available at: [https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/ghana-expelling-people-fleeing-conflict-in-burkina-faso?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/ghana-expelling-people-fleeing-conflict-in-burkina-faso?utm_source=chatgpt.com).



for violent extremist groups to exploit anti-state narratives, facilitating radicalization and recruitment, as seen in the Sahel and increasingly across coastal West Africa.

The entrenchment of discriminatory perspectives among local farming communities has also resulted in targeted reprisal attacks against Fulbe herders, further increasing the risk of extremist exploitation. In 2022, several Fulbe herders in the Zakoli community in Dagomba were killed by armed Konkomba locals in retaliation for the death of a Konkomba teacher—despite no evidence linking the crime to a Fulbe individual.<sup>156</sup> In response, many Fulbe herders have begun acquiring small arms and light weapons for self-defense, contributing to the growing militarization of these communities (ibid). This escalation not only intensifies communal tensions but also increases Fulbe exposure to illicit arms markets and the extremist groups that operate within them. The widespread availability of illegal weapons further lowers the threshold for violence, making it easier for extremist actors to recruit armed and socially marginalized individuals into their ranks.<sup>157</sup>

## 5.5 Cross-Border Criminal Networks and Jihadist Expansion

Jihadist groups' control of illicit trafficking routes in Ghana's Upper East Region and artisanal gold mining sites along the Côte d'Ivoire border in the Upper West Region poses a significant security threat, as these areas serve as strategic points for the expansion of foreign extremist groups affiliated with the Support Group for Islam and Muslims (JNIM/GSIM).<sup>158</sup> By exploiting governance weaknesses, economic hardships, and ongoing conflicts, these groups seek to consolidate their presence and influence in northern Ghana.

In the Upper East Region, the border towns of Bawku, Garu, and Zebilla serve as key transit hubs for the illicit trade of arms, heroin, and cocaine from the Sahel into Ghana's interior and the broader sub-region.<sup>159</sup> Jihadist groups seek to control and secure these supply chains, creating a significant vulnerability for infiltration and the expansion of their operations. Bawku, in particular, is a high-risk area due to the widespread proliferation of arms, driven by three key factors. First, ongoing, prolonged chieftaincy conflicts among groups such as the Mamprusi and Kusasi, and Bongo and Nabdam have sustained violence in the region.<sup>160</sup> As rival factions seek to protect themselves, the demand for sophisticated weaponry has surged, with arms perceived both as a means of defense and as a deterrent against attacks.<sup>161</sup> Second, the inability of security forces to effectively safeguard local communities during violent clashes has compelled factions to arm themselves for self-defense. Third, political elites have leveraged ethnic tensions for their own advantage, exacerbating divisions and fueling the proliferation of

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<sup>156</sup> MyNewsGH (2022). Zakoli killings spark uproar on social media. [online] MyNewsGh. Available at: <https://www.mynewsgh.com/zakoli-killings-spark-uproar-on-social-media/>.

<sup>157</sup> United Nations Development Program (2023). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement. [online] Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement>.

<sup>158</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2022). The Jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo. [online] [www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de). Available at: <https://www.kas.de/de/einzeltitel/-/content/die-dschihadistische-bedrohung-im-norden-von-ghana-und-togo-3>.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ofosu-Peasah, G. (2024). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa. [online] ACCORD. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

arms.<sup>162</sup> The growing availability of weapons and the normalization of armed violence in Bawku—and, to a lesser extent, the broader Upper East Region—create opportunities for jihadist groups to acquire arms and embed themselves within local conflicts under the guise of ethnic or financial interests.<sup>163</sup> This not only strengthens their influence but also exacerbates insecurity in the region. Indeed, reports already indicate that jihadists with family ties in Bawku are actively recruiting locals to join the fighting.<sup>164</sup>

Similarly, in the Upper West Region, artisanal gold mining sites in Chache and Bole, situated along the Ghana-Ivory Coast border, have become hubs for jihadist activity due to weak governance.<sup>165</sup> Poorly defined administrative boundaries and minimal state oversight have left these areas vulnerable to armed groups affiliated with jihadist movements (ibid). According to security reports, these sites, reportedly run by Burkinabe gold miners, have become hotspots for arms trafficking, robberies, and radical preaching targeting young recruits. Moreover, in Hamile, a border village near Burkina Faso, “self-defense” groups linked to arms trafficking were identified by WANEP in 2019.<sup>166</sup> Reports indicate that Burkinabe extremist groups have approached them offering combat training.<sup>167</sup> The extent of jihadist infiltration in Hamile was further evidenced by the arrest of two suspected terrorists that same year.<sup>168</sup>

## 5.5 Information Gaps and Digital Vulnerabilities

Border communities’ limited access to reliable information and alternative perspectives, combined with low awareness of violent extremism, creates a critical vulnerability that radical groups can exploit through propaganda tactics. This risk is highlighted by a National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) 2023 study, which surveyed 1,173 Ghanaians across ten border regions and found that 63% of respondents had limited awareness of the risk factors associated with violent extremism, including its socio-economic and political drivers.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, the previously mentioned 2023 UNDP study found that only 12% of Northern region residents use the internet as a source of information.<sup>170</sup>

However, this does not imply that digital radicalization is absent in the region. The study revealed that among youth, internet use as a primary source of current event information is significantly higher, suggesting that social media plays an increasing role in shaping their

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2022). The Jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo. [online] [www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de). Available at: <https://www.kas.de/de/einzeltitel/-/content/die-dschihadistische-bedrohung-im-norden-von-ghana-und-togo-3>.

<sup>164</sup> Ofosu-Peasah, G. (2024). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa. [online] ACCORD. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

<sup>165</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2022). The Jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo. [online] [www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de). Available at: <https://www.kas.de/de/einzeltitel/-/content/die-dschihadistische-bedrohung-im-norden-von-ghana-und-togo-3>.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> National Commission for Civic Education (2023). Baseline Study on Preventing and Containing Violent Extremism in Eight Regions in the Northern Part of Ghana. [online] Available at: <https://www.ncecegh.org/publications/view/160BASELINE+STUDY+ON+PREVENTING+AND+CONTAINING+VIOLENT+EXTREMISM+IN+EIGHT+REGIONS+IN+THE+NORTHERN+PART+OF+GHANA.pdf>.

<sup>170</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2023). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement. [online] Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/journey-extremism-africa-pathways-recruitment-and-disengagement>

perspectives.<sup>171</sup> Notably, the majority of northern youth rely on peers for information, highlighting the growing risk of radicalization through social networks and online platforms.<sup>172</sup> This is particularly concerning given the “protest discourse” tactics employed by Sahelian jihadist groups, which capitalize on youth frustrations with political elites, socio-economic inequality, and inter-ethnic violence to mobilize recruits.<sup>173</sup> A notable example is the use of telegram by Ansar Dine - a faction of the al-Qaeda-affiliated Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) - to spread narratives portraying the group as defenders of Mali against foreign oppression.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Yue, J., Bako, H., Hampton, K. and Smith, K. (2020). Conflict and Online Space in the Sahel: Challenges and Recommendations. [online] Search for Common Ground. Available at: <https://documents.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Issue-Brief-Conflict-and-the-Online-Space-in-the-Sahel-July-2022.pdf>.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6.1 Resolution Mechanisms in Ghana

Following the increasing risk of violent extremism spilling over from the Sahel, the government of Ghana has developed security collaborations and national frameworks to prevent the expansion of jihadist activities within its borders. National institutions such as the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the National Peace Council (NPC), and its subsidiary Regional Peace Councils (RPCs) have played a vital role in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, early warning initiatives, and mediation of intercommunal tensions in Ghana.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, civil society organizations, in partnership with development agencies, have introduced initiatives aimed at enhancing local authorities' capacity to mediate conflicts effectively and improving the livelihoods of vulnerable groups to reduce their susceptibility to extremist rhetoric. While each intervention was initially envisioned as a durable solution to the growing security threats, persistent conflicts fueled by ethnic, religious, and resource-based tensions continue to undermine stability in northern Ghana. These resolution mechanisms are reviewed below.

#### 6.1.1 Multilateral framework – Accra Initiative

Beyond its financial and security contributions to ECOWAS's 2020-2024 Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism, Ghana has played a leading role in the Accra Initiative, a multilateral security mechanism designed to address the growing threat of violent extremism in West Africa.<sup>176</sup> The initiative was established in response to the 2017 terrorist attack in Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, and the expansion of militant Islamist violence from Mali into Burkina Faso.<sup>177</sup> Its core members include Ghana, Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire, with Mali, Niger, and Nigeria participating as observers.<sup>178</sup> It is structured around a central coordinator and a permanent secretariat housed within Ghana's National Security Secretariat, with focal points in each member country.<sup>179</sup>

Members of the initiative focus on three primary areas of operational cooperation. The first is intelligence gathering and sharing, which has facilitated a series of exchanges between member states' security and intelligence agencies.<sup>180</sup> This has strengthened communication and cooperation between partner countries, allowing governments to better anticipate and respond to emerging threats. The second area is cross-border joint security operations. Since 2018, national armed forces have conducted periodic joint operations within their respective

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<sup>175</sup> Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2023). Gaps and Needs in Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Early Warning and Mediation Mechanisms and Structures in Ghana and its Border Areas. [online] ReCap Network. Available at: <https://recapnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WORKING-PAPER-N%C2%B02-ANGLAIS-WEB.pdf>.

<sup>176</sup> Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa. [online] ACCORD. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

<sup>177</sup> Eizenga, D. and Amandine Gnanguênon (2024). Recalibrating Coastal West Africa's Response to Violent Extremism – Africa Center for Strategic Studies. [online] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/publication/asb43en-recalibrating-multitiered-stabilization-strategy-coastal-west-africa-response-violent-extremism/>.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

territories, relying on their own command structures and funding.<sup>181</sup> These include Operation Koudanlgou I, II, and III, aimed at countering militant Islamist activities in border regions.<sup>182</sup> The first operation was conducted by Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Togo, the second by Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Ghana, and the third by Togo and Ghana.<sup>183</sup>

While these operations have led to the arrest of numerous suspected militants, their effectiveness remains limited due to their short duration and restricted geographic scope.<sup>184</sup> A key challenge remains the lack of coordination among security agencies, particularly in managing militant Islamist groups operating in border zones such as the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) Park Complex and southwestern Burkina Faso.<sup>185</sup> Current communication channels within the Accra Initiative could be formalized into a regional exchange center to enhance cross-border strategic planning.<sup>186</sup> This mechanism would strengthen coordination among security agencies and streamline fragmented responses, as national governments currently prioritize their own livelihood and security programs.<sup>187</sup> Strengthened communication would also enable member states to systematically share lessons learned from previous operations.<sup>188</sup>

The third area of focus is training and capacity building, though this remains underdeveloped as most Accra Initiative members already operate independent countering violent extremism (CVE) training programs for their security personnel.<sup>189</sup> To enhance regional coordination, there is a need for a standardized training curriculum tailored to regional security dynamics, as well as clear pre-deployment requirements to ensure professional development and operational readiness. In addition to security cooperation, fostering trust between security agencies and host communities is critical.<sup>190</sup> This erosion of trust between communities and the security institutions within West African nations have reduced communities' willingness to cooperate with authorities and report suspicious activities, particularly in border areas.<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, Initiative remains overly reliant on military-led responses, neglecting the socioeconomic, political, and governance factors that contribute to the vulnerability of populations to violent extremism.<sup>192</sup> Addressing these structural challenges are critical to ensuring the initiative's long-term effectiveness and sustainability in countering violent extremism.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa. [online] ACCORD. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Eizenga, D. and Amandine Gnanguênon (2024). Recalibrating Coastal West Africa’s Response to Violent Extremism – Africa Center for Strategic Studies. [online] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/publication/asb43en-recalibrating-multitiered-stabilization-strategy-coastal-west-africa-response-violent-extremism/>.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Abatan, J., Matongbada, M. and Kwarkye, S. (2019). Can the Accra Initiative prevent terrorism in West African coastal states? [online] ISS Africa. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-accra-initiative-prevent-terrorism-in-west-african-coastal-states>.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.



### 6.1.2 National frameworks

Ghana has adopted numerous legislative measures to combat violent extremism, including the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2008, the 2014 amendment to the Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2008, and the Organized Crime Act of 2010.<sup>194</sup> These acts introduced targeted provisions against terrorist financing, recruitment, and operations, reinforcing Ghana's legal framework for countering violent extremism.<sup>195</sup> To complement these legislative efforts, the National Framework for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and Terrorism (NAFPCVET) was established in 2019.<sup>196</sup>

**The National Framework for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and Terrorism (NAFPCVET):** The framework aims to coordinate strategies across ministries, departments, and agencies from the national to the district level, ensuring a multi-sectoral approach to countering violent extremism.<sup>197</sup> It is structured around four key pillars: *prevention*, which addresses the underlying socio-economic and governance challenges that contribute to radicalization while raising awareness about extremism and available institutional support; *pre-emption*, which strengthens early warning mechanisms to detect and respond to violent extremism and measures to disrupt extremist financing networks; *protection*, which enhances the resilience of Ghana's infrastructure and borders against potential terrorist threats; and *response*, which improves the preparedness of security and civilian institutions to manage and recover from attacks effectively.<sup>198</sup>

NAFPCVET has played an important role in establishing a comprehensive national strategy for countering violent extremism.<sup>199</sup> It has also facilitated coordination between key national actors, including the National Peace Council, security agencies, MDDAs, District Security Councils, and more.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, it successfully implemented widespread education and awareness campaigns on violent extremism particularly in Ghana's northern region.<sup>201</sup>

However, the framework faces several challenges that undermine its effectiveness. It remains heavily donor-driven which has impacted the sustainability of its security and livelihood initiatives (ibid). Moreover, critics argue that it has not fully integrated local perspectives, with limited participation from civil society organizations, the media, local religious authorities, and

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<sup>194</sup> Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2023). Gaps and Needs in Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Early Warning and Mediation Mechanisms and Structures in Ghana and its Border Areas. [online] ReCap Network. Available at: <https://recapnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WORKING-PAPER-N%C2%B02-ANGLAIS-WEB.pdf>.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid

<sup>196</sup> Ibid

<sup>197</sup> Ghana National Peace Council (2017). *National Framework for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Ghana*. [online] Available at: <https://www.peacecouncil.gov.gh/storage/2019/09/NAFPCVET-Document-29-Jan-2020.pdf>.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2023). Gaps and Needs in Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Early Warning and Mediation Mechanisms and Structures in Ghana and its Border Areas. [online] ReCap Network. Available at: <https://recapnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WORKING-PAPER-N%C2%B02-ANGLAIS-WEB.pdf>.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2023). Gaps and Needs in Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Early Warning and Mediation Mechanisms and Structures in Ghana and its Border Areas. [online] ReCap Network. Available at: <https://recapnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WORKING-PAPER-N%C2%B02-ANGLAIS-WEB.pdf>.

citizens—particularly in communities most vulnerable to radicalization.<sup>202</sup> Collaboration between these stakeholders remains ad hoc, and clear guidelines for engagement with security forces are lacking.<sup>203</sup> Although the framework acknowledges the need to address underlying socio-economic causes and intercommunal conflicts, the Ghanaian government’s broader security-oriented approach to tackling violent extremism has led to an inadequate focus on these issues.<sup>204</sup> Lastly, the absence of a structured monitoring and evaluation mechanism prevents the framework from adapting to emerging threats and integrating lessons learned into its four pillars.<sup>205</sup>

Building on NAFPCVET’s efforts to enhance collaboration between citizens and state security institutions, the Ministry of National Security launched the “See Something, Say Something” campaign in 2022.

**The “See Something, Say Something” campaign:** This initiative encourages citizens to report suspicious activities through a toll-free hotline, emergency contacts, and the social media platforms of the Ghana Police Service.<sup>206</sup> In areas with limited mobile connectivity, reports can be made through local police, traditional leaders, opinion leaders, heads of faith-based organizations, and political party representatives, who can relay concerns to security agencies (ibid). To maximize the campaign’s impact, the government has implemented workshops and educational programs across Ghana on the root causes of violent extremism and the importance of identifying and reporting security threats.<sup>207 208 209 210</sup> These efforts have been particularly emphasized in border communities, where the risk of extremist activity is heightened due to geographic proximity to conflict zones and socio-economic disparities.

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<sup>202</sup> Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa. [online] ACCORD. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

<sup>203</sup> Mottet, C. and Inkesha, A. (2020). Improving our understanding of the role of defence and security forces (DSF) in the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) in West Africa. [online] Available at: [https://www.eda.admin.ch/content/dam/eda/en/documents/aussenpolitik/frieden/role-of-defence-and-security-forces\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eda.admin.ch/content/dam/eda/en/documents/aussenpolitik/frieden/role-of-defence-and-security-forces_EN.pdf).

<sup>204</sup> Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa. [online] ACCORD. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/>.

<sup>205</sup> United Nations (2024b). Amid Growing Strength of Terrorist Groups in Sahel, West Africa, Senior Official Urges Security Council to Scale Up Support within Regional Frameworks | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. [online] Un.org. Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15950.doc.htm>.

<sup>206</sup> Abbey, E.E. (2022). ‘See something, Say something’ campaign launched. [online] Graphic.com.gh. Available at: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/see-something-say-something-campaign-launched.html>.

<sup>207</sup> Kangah, E. (2023). National security takes ‘see something, say something’ campaign to Volta Region. [online] Asaase Radio. Available at: <https://www.asaaseradio.com/national-security-takes-see-something-say-something-campaign-to-volta-region/>. Also see

<sup>208</sup> Citinewsroom (2024). National Security Ministry takes ‘See Something Say Something’ campaign to schools. [online] Citinewsroom - Comprehensive News in Ghana. Available at: <https://citinewsroom.com/2024/02/national-security-ministry-takes-see-something-say-something-campaign-to-schools/>.

<sup>209</sup> Marfo, E. (2024). ‘See something, Say something’: Ministry of National Security extends campaign to schools | Ghana News Agency. [online] Ghana News Agency. Available at: <https://gna.org.gh/2024/02/see-something-say-something-ministry-of-national-security-extends-campaign-to-schools/>.

<sup>210</sup> Ghanaweb (2024). National Security educates Western North residents on ‘see something, say something’ campaign. [online] GhanaWeb. Available at: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/National-Security-educates-Western-North-residents-on-see-something-say-something-campaign-1920293>.

While the campaign has successfully increased public awareness and improved community-security collaboration, its long-term sustainability will depend on the government's ability to build trust between citizens and security agencies, ensure accountability in security operations, strengthen whistleblower protections, and improve coordination between traditional leaders and state institutions. A significant gap remains in engagement and information-sharing, as many community leaders are unaware of the government's counter-extremism efforts. Addressing this disconnect will be essential to enhancing the campaign's effectiveness and fostering a more cohesive approach to preventing violent extremism.

## 6.2 National Actors

The **National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE)** has implemented various initiatives, including baseline studies on preventing and countering violent extremism, as well as awareness-raising campaigns and inter-party dialogues across different regions. It has also organized high-level national dialogues in Accra and Tamale, bringing together multiple stakeholders to assess the country's national strategy on preventing violent extremism. Moreover, NCCE's regional and district offices regularly conduct sensitization programs on violent extremism, radicalization, and the importance of community cohesion, with a particular focus on Northern Ghana.<sup>211</sup>

The **National Peace Council (NPC)** operates through a national office and 16 regional offices, with **Regional Peace Councils (RPCs)** serving as key structures for community engagement. These councils include representatives from religious, traditional, youth, and women's groups, security councils, local peacebuilding structures, and traditional political systems at the district and community levels. The NPC and RPCs play a central role in conflict management, mediation, and peacebuilding, particularly in chieftaincy and land disputes, as well as in addressing communal violence and election-related tensions.

In Ghana's five northern regions, the Regional Peace Councils (RPCs) have undertaken peacebuilding initiatives, early warning systems, mediation efforts, and sensitization programs to prevent conflicts. While these initiatives have yielded positive outcomes, their impact is uneven across the regions and restricted by funding shortages which affect the capacity and establishment of mediation frameworks and peace committees. This challenge is particularly evident in areas where intercommunal conflicts—stemming from chieftaincy disputes, land ownership tensions, and farmer-herder clashes remain persistent and deeply rooted.

The Northern, Savannah, and North East RPCs, with support from USAID, WANEP, STAR Ghana Foundation, CARE International, and Coginta, have formed District Peace Committees (DPC) in conflict-prone areas to facilitate community-led peacebuilding. However, many districts remain without peace committees, and those that exist are dependent on short-term donor funding, making them unsustainable. In Northern Region, 10 out of 16 districts lack peace committees, while in Savannah, high-risk districts like East Gonja, North Gonja, and

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<sup>211</sup> Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2023). Gaps and Needs in Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Early Warning and Mediation Mechanisms and Structures in Ghana and its Border Areas. [online] ReCap Network. Available at: <https://recapnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WORKING-PAPER-N%C2%B02-ANGLAIS-WEB.pdf>.

Central Gonja remain without intervention. North East Region's East Mamprusi, a hotspot for Konkomba-Bimoba clashes, also lacks a peace committee, limiting conflict resolution efforts.

Mediation efforts face similar constraints. The Northern RPC has helped manage ongoing disputes in Nanumba North and South, Kumbungu, Mion, and Savelugu, areas where land and chieftaincy conflicts are particularly contentious. However, there are no effective mechanisms in place to address chieftaincy, land, and farmer-herder conflicts in Nanumba North and South, Kumbungu, Mion, and Savelugu, where tensions continue to escalate. In Savannah, inter-ethnic mediation committees have proven effective in addressing tensions between Fulbe pastoralists and settled farming communities, particularly in Bole and Sawla-Tuna-Kalba, where resource competition has fueled recurring clashes. These committees have facilitated dialogue and reduced the likelihood of violent confrontations. However, insufficient funding has prevented the committees from receiving the necessary training and capacity-building support, reducing their ability to intervene in escalating disputes. Additionally, reprisal attacks in North Gonja and Central Gonja continue, as local peace structures lack the authority and coordination with security agencies to prevent retaliatory violence.

In Upper East, disputes such as the Bawku ethnic conflict and Bolga chieftaincy dispute remain highly volatile despite the RPC's dialogue sessions and judicial mediation efforts. While these initiatives have helped create short-term ceasefires, deep-seated historical grievances continue to fuel intermittent outbreaks of violence. The region also experiences a high volume of land and farmer-herder disputes, which make up over 70% of reported conflicts, yet RPC-led mediation efforts remain underfunded and largely reactive rather than preventive. Moreover, Upper West and North East RPCs receive minimal support for conflict mediation, leaving many disputes unresolved.<sup>212</sup>

With the growing threat of violent extremism in northern Ghana, the NPC has worked with WANEP to implement early warning systems. In the Upper West, early warning monitors have been established in all districts. In the Upper East, the RPC has collaborated with USAID, UNDP, and Christian Relief Services, to conduct cross-border risk monitoring in areas vulnerable to spillover effects from Burkina Faso, where over 4,000 refugees are currently settled.

There have also been efforts to engage at-risk youth in community dialogues to encourage their participation in local decision-making and the fight against violent extremism. Notably, as part of the USAID Engaging Youth for Peace Project, the Savannah RPC established dialogue platforms connecting 62 youth groups with the leadership of Metropolitan Municipal District Assemblies (MMDAs). These platforms provided a space to discuss critical community issues, helping to bridge the communication gap between youth and local authorities. By fostering dialogue, this initiative has strengthened social cohesion and rebuilt youth trust in state institutions, addressing a key barrier to effective governance and conflict prevention. However, this project's effectiveness was limited by its small geographic scope as it was only implemented in two out of the seven districts in the region.

Despite these efforts, critical security concerns remain unaddressed. In Savannah, the rise of illegal mining and transnational migration in Bamboe, Tinga, and Banda Nkwanta raises significant concerns about extremist infiltration, yet there is no structured response strategy

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

from the RPC to monitor or mitigate these risks. Additionally, inter-ethnic stereotyping and marginalization of minority groups, particularly the Fulbe community in North Gonja, Sawla-Tuna-Kalba, and East Gonja-Salaga, remain largely unaddressed, leaving grievances that extremist groups could exploit. That said, progress has been made in promoting Fulbe inclusion in governance in the North East, Northern, Savanna, and Upper East and Upper West regions, through interventions engaging local chiefs, district assemblies, the Ghana Health Service, the National Identification Authority, and the National Health Insurance Authority. These efforts have improved access to public services and governance participation for Fulbe communities. However, conflicts persist between Fulbe and local farmers in Goriba, Zanzara, Nangruma, and Yikpabong, where the NPC has been unable to intervene due to logistical and financial limitations. The lack of follow-up mediation mechanisms in these areas undermines the long-term success of inclusion efforts.

Sensitization campaigns have been a major component of the NPC's work, particularly in the Northern and Upper West Regions. Hate speech prevention programs, funded by Coginta, have been carried out in Lambussie and Funsí in the Upper West Region, yet many districts lack targeted interventions, allowing inflammatory rhetoric to exacerbate existing conflicts. In Upper East, media engagement and training in conflict-sensitive reporting, promoted with support from the Media Foundation for West Africa, have helped to increase awareness, yet identity-related conflicts remain widespread and volatile.

Across all regions, lack of sustainable funding remains a critical issue. Many peace initiatives are donor-funded, with no long-term government support, leading to program collapses when funding ends. North East RPC, despite being a high-risk region, receives the least donor support, limiting its ability to address conflicts related to governance, resources, and ethnic divisions. While the NPC's efforts have improved peacebuilding and conflict prevention in northern Ghana, sustainable funding, stronger mediation mechanisms, and improved collaboration between state and local actors are needed to ensure long-term stability.

### **6.3 Civil Society Organisations and Partners**

Efforts to prevent electoral violence, gender-based violence, and cross-border crime in northern Ghana have been bolstered by initiatives led by organizations such as STAR Ghana, CDD-Ghana, WANEP, WACCE, Coginta, USAID, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and more. These programs focus on peacebuilding, capacity-building for security institutions, and socio-economic empowerment, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and youth.

One of the most comprehensive initiatives is the EU-funded Preventing Electoral Violence and Providing Security to the Northern Border Regions of Ghana (NORPREVSEC) project, implemented by Coginta from December 2021 to March 2024. The project had three key components.<sup>213</sup> First, it supported the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) in conducting nationwide sensitization campaigns to raise awareness about electoral violence, violent extremism, and security threats. Second, it provided funding and technical assistance to 30 CSOs in northern Ghana to implement peacebuilding and violence prevention initiatives.

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<sup>213</sup> Coginta (2021). Strengthening Mechanisms and Structures for Peacebuilding and Violence Prevention in Northern Ghana (NORPREVSEC) - Coginta. [online] Coginta. Available at: <https://coginta.org/en/projets/renforcement-des-mecanismes-et-des-structures-de-consolidation-de-la-paix-et-de-prevention-de-la-violence-dans-le-nord-du-ghana-norprevsec/>.



As part of this component, all five northern RPCs received capacity-building workshops and logistical support, including office equipment, computers, and motorbikes to enhance their operations.

The third component of the project targeted local chiefs and community leaders, recognizing their critical role in regional and district security councils. The initiative hosted dialogue sessions aimed at enhancing intelligence-sharing and joint security strategies between local authorities and security agencies. Moreover, members of chieftaincy councils and queen-mothers were trained in alternative dispute resolution (ADR), land management systems, and laws on chieftaincy and succession. These educational sessions equipped traditional leaders with the necessary tools to mediate local disputes effectively, reducing the risk of intercommunal conflicts escalating into crises that could be exploited by violent extremist groups.

Coginta has also directly contributed to enhancing security capacities in northern Ghana. This includes the development of specialized training modules for regional and divisional police commanders on combating violent extremism.<sup>214</sup> Furthermore, the Ghana Police Service has benefited from the construction of two police stations and outposts, improving law enforcement response capabilities in remote and vulnerable areas.<sup>215</sup> Recognizing the limited security presence in certain border communities, Coginta partnered with the Spanish Police to train local residents in community policing techniques, empowering communities to take an active role in their own security.<sup>216</sup>

Another pivotal intervention is the Littorals Regional Initiative (LRI), funded by USAID through its Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI).<sup>217</sup> LRI represents one of the most comprehensive U.S.-backed responses to the growing risks of violent extremism and intercommunal tension in northern Ghana. The initiative was designed to support peacebuilding, early warning, and socio-economic resilience, with a strong emphasis on building local capacity and strengthening cohesion in conflict-prone communities. Prior to the USAID funding cuts, it operated across all five northern regions.

LRIs' projects focus on enhancing stakeholder awareness of local vulnerabilities to violent extremism, improving inter- and intra-community relationships, and promoting inclusive, community-based solutions. In districts such as Yendi, Saboba, Sawla-Tuna-Kalba, and Bawku West, the initiative has supported the creation of dialogue platforms between Fulbe and non-Fulbe leaders, traditional authorities, and local security actors. These platforms foster discussions on sensitive issues including transhumance, land rights, and communal policing, and have played a vital role in de-escalating long-standing tensions. In the Savannah and Upper West regions, LRI has also facilitated dialogue between high-risk youth groups—often referred

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<sup>214</sup> Coginta (2021). Development of 3 training modules for police officers on community policing, accountability and leadership in Ghana - Coginta. [online] Coginta. Available at: <https://coginta.org/en/projets/elaboration-de-3-modules-de-formation-pour-les-officiers-de-police-sur-la-police-de-proximite-la-redevabilite-et-le-commandement/>.

<sup>215</sup> Appiah-Boateng, S. and Osei-Kufuor, P. (2023). Gaps and Needs in Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Early Warning and Mediation Mechanisms and Structures in Ghana and its Border Areas. [online] ReCap Network. Available at: <https://recapnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WORKING-PAPER-N%C2%B02-ANGLAIS-WEB.pdf>.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

to as "Ghetto" or "Attaya" groups—and municipal authorities, contributing to the rebuilding of trust and local governance inclusion.

LRI further supports the formation of mediation committees in collaboration with Regional Peace Councils (RPCs), and has prioritized the training of traditional leaders and queen-mothers on conflict resolution, trauma-informed care, and relevant legal frameworks, such as chieftaincy succession and land administration. These sessions aim to bolster community-led mechanisms that can resolve disputes before they escalate into broader crises. In parallel, LRI has championed the use of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and economic empowerment schemes to build resilience among women, youth, and Fulbe populations—groups that are often targeted by extremist recruiters due to their marginalization.

In addition to these community-level initiatives, LRI has partnered with local assemblies and Regional Security Councils in districts such as Lambussie, Nandom, and Sissala West to develop by-laws addressing structural drivers of exclusion, and to enhance border security in response to the rising influx of refugees from Burkina Faso. These interventions are particularly crucial in areas where the presence of state institutions remains weak, and where socio-political grievances can be easily manipulated by violent extremist groups.

While the LRI's programming has been commended for its integrative approach and strong local partnerships, notable gaps remain—particularly in high-risk areas such as Bunkpurugu and Mamprugu, where sustained mediation platforms are absent. Additionally, the temporary nature of many dialogue structures raises concerns about their long-term impact, especially in the absence of mechanisms to ensure local ownership and continued funding. The future of the LRI project also remains uncertain due to significant funding cuts to USAID by the current U.S. administration. Nevertheless, the initiative offers valuable insights into the design and implementation of effective interventions to prevent violent extremism, particularly through the integration of awareness-raising, conflict mediation, and inclusive community development.

Beyond security-focused interventions, targeted efforts have been made to address youth and women's vulnerabilities to violent extremism through economic empowerment initiatives. In collaboration with the Movement of Rural Entrepreneurial Women (MORE-WOMEN), UNDP provided livelihood support to 258 beneficiaries in Manyoro, Upper East Region.<sup>218</sup> These beneficiaries received vocational toolkits for hairdressing, metal fabrication, and weaving, as well as agricultural resources such as seedlings and livestock, including sheep and goats. The provision of these livelihood support items was complemented by workshops to help recipients develop sustainable value chains, ensuring their economic advancement benefits both themselves and the broader community.

While these initiatives have made notable progress in strengthening security, preventing violent extremism, and addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities, sustained investment, institutional collaboration, and long-term support mechanisms will be essential to maintaining their impact and ensuring lasting stability in northern Ghana.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### 7.1 Recommendations and Conclusion

#### 7.1.1 Recommendations

To effectively mitigate the spillover of violent extremism from the Sahel into Ghana and broader West Africa, a multidimensional approach integrating security, governance, and socio-economic development is required. The following recommendations are proposed:

##### 1. *Strengthening Socio-Economic Inclusion*

Expand vocational training and business support for vulnerable groups by:

- Providing market-driven skills training for youth, women, and displaced populations to improve employability and economic self-sufficiency.
- Facilitating micro-financing initiatives and access to start-up capital, enabling small business development and entrepreneurship.
- Establishing mentorship programs to connect trainees with experienced business professionals, ensuring long-term sustainability.

##### 2. *Enhancing Social Cohesion and Addressing Intercommunal Tensions*

i. Promote interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue by:

- Establishing community dialogue forums where traditional leaders, religious figures, and youth leaders can engage in structured discussions on coexistence.
- Training local influencers and community leaders to serve as ambassadors of peace and tolerance.
- Facilitating joint community projects that bring together farmers, herders, refugees, and local youth, fostering collaboration and trust.

ii. Improve access to public services for marginalized groups by:

- Ensuring refugees, asylum seekers, and minority groups have equal access to healthcare, education, and civic documentation.
- Partnering with local governments to sensitize public service providers on non-discriminatory policies.
- Implementing public awareness campaigns to encourage inclusive governance and reduce ethnic tensions.

iii. Strengthen community engagement on peaceful coexistence by:

- Using local radio stations and community events to counteract misinformation and extremist narratives.
- Supporting responsible journalism and fact-checking initiatives to curb the spread of extremist propaganda.
- Organizing youth mentorship and reintegration programs to provide alternatives to radicalization.

### **3. *Mitigating Farmer-Herder Conflicts through Inclusive Decision-Making and Sustainable Land Use Policies***

i. Foster inclusive governance in land resource management by:

- Ensuring Fulbe pastoralists are represented in local decision-making bodies, particularly on land tenure, resource allocation, and grazing rights.
- Encouraging joint community forums where farmers and herders can negotiate land-use agreements, reducing tensions over grazing areas.
- Implementing policies that protect both farming and pastoralist livelihoods, balancing land access while preventing displacement.

ii. Strengthen mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms by:

- Training opinion leaders from Fulbe communities in negotiation and mediation techniques, equipping them to serve as trusted representatives in dispute resolution.
- Establishing neutral, expert-led mediation teams to facilitate dialogue-based conflict resolution, ensuring both sides have confidence in the process.
- Developing community-based conflict prevention conventions, where pre-agreed dispute resolution frameworks become the standard reference in case of tensions.

iii. Enhance infrastructure and social services to support peaceful coexistence by:

- Expanding ranching programs while integrating supportive social and welfare services, such as water infrastructure and alternative income sources for women.
- Constructing additional boreholes and water points to reduce competition over natural resources, which is a key trigger for conflict.

### **4. *Conflict Prevention and Mediation Mechanisms***

i. Revitalize local mediation and dispute resolution structures by:

- Providing financial and logistical support to RPCs to sustain existing DPC activities and establish new committees in districts that currently lack them.
- Providing structured training for community leaders in mediation techniques, human rights principles, early conflict resolution strategies, land management systems, and laws on chieftaincy and succession, ensuring leaders are equipped to resolve disputes effectively.
- Establishing Community Peace Promotion Committees (CPPCs) to facilitate mediation between farmers, herders, and displaced populations, addressing recurring land-use and resource disputes.
- Creating regional forums for traditional and religious leaders to collaborate on peace initiatives, fostering cross-community dialogue and conflict resolution.
- Encouraging joint mediation efforts among queen-mothers, tribal chiefs, and religious authorities to address land disputes, resource conflicts, and ethnic tensions through culturally appropriate reconciliation mechanisms.

ii. Develop early warning and response systems by:

- Training local security personnel and community leaders to identify signs of radicalization, intercommunal tensions, or extremist infiltration.

- Establishing anonymous reporting channels where residents can share security concerns without fear of reprisal, expanding the scope of the “See Something, Say Something” initiative.
- Enhancing coordination between local governance structures and national security agencies to enable rapid intervention in high-risk areas.

iii. Enhance border security while fostering community trust by:

- Increasing border patrols and surveillance technology (e.g., biometric entry systems, drones, and real-time intelligence-sharing platforms).
- Allocating resources to Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) for capacity-building and logistical support in vulnerable border districts.
- Engaging border communities in security efforts, ensuring their cooperation and reducing distrust towards law enforcement agencies.

## 5. *Combating Illicit Networks Controlled by Violent Extremists*

i. Strengthen oversight of the informal gold mining (galamsey) sector by:

- Enhancing state regulation and monitoring of artisanal mining sites to prevent their exploitation as funding hubs for extremist groups.
- Establishing community-based mining cooperatives that provide legal alternatives to illicit mining networks, reducing dependency on black-market operations.
- Deploying joint security task forces to monitor and dismantle extremist-linked gold smuggling rings, preventing proceeds from financing radical activities.

ii. Enhance border security and trade route monitoring by:

- Deploying advanced surveillance technologies and intelligence-sharing platforms at key border points to track illicit arms trafficking and smuggling routes used by violent extremist groups.
- Strengthening regional cooperation with ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative to identify and dismantle transnational extremist financing networks operating across Ghana’s borders.
- Increasing customs and law enforcement presence at major entry points, ensuring goods transported through informal networks are properly screened.

iii. Regulate and formalize the livestock trade to curb extremist financing by:

- Establishing livestock tracking systems and certification processes to prevent cattle rustling, which serves as a funding source for extremist groups.
- Strengthening collaboration between traditional authorities, pastoralist associations, and law enforcement to monitor and disrupt illicit livestock markets.
- Enhancing community engagement initiatives to ensure local populations are incentivized to report suspicious transactions and infiltration by extremist-linked actors.

iv. Expand financial intelligence and anti-money laundering mechanisms by:

- Tightening regulations on informal money transfer systems (such as hawala networks) to prevent extremist groups from laundering illicit funds.



- Training local financial institutions and law enforcement agencies to detect suspicious financial transactions linked to smuggling, mining, and arms trade.
- Encouraging public-private partnerships between banks, fintech companies, and government agencies to develop early warning systems for detecting extremist-linked financial flows.

## 6. *Governance and Institutional Capacity Building*

i. Integrate counter-extremism strategies into local governance by:

- Embedding violent extremism prevention programs within district-level development plans.
- Establishing multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms involving security agencies, CSOs, and local governance bodies.
- Conducting regular policy reviews to ensure adaptability to emerging threats.

ii. Improve coordination between state and non-state actors by:

- Strengthening partnerships between local security agencies, traditional authorities, and community organizations.
- Enhancing data-sharing between ECOWAS and Ghana's security institutions to track extremist activities.
- Establishing public-private partnerships to finance community-driven resilience initiatives.

iii. Invest in public infrastructure in vulnerable regions by:

- Expanding education, healthcare, and social service facilities in high-risk areas.
- Improving road networks to strengthen community resilience.

### **7.1.2 Conclusion**

Ghana's exposure to violent extremism is shaped by regional instability and internal vulnerabilities. As militant groups exploit governance gaps, economic hardship, and localized conflicts, the country faces growing risks of infiltration. Short-term security measures alone cannot address the deeper socio-political grievances that fuel radicalization. Without sustained efforts to strengthen community resilience, close security gaps, and promote inclusive governance, extremist networks will continue to find footholds, threatening long-term stability.

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