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Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in West Africa: *Lessons from Ghana*

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RECOMMENDATIONS

To Ghana’s government:

Counter anti-state and pro-extremist sentiments

by building a more visible state presence in remote areas with active terror cells, like the eastern corridor, by providing essential services, including security, health, food, communication, and electricity.

Popularize PCVE and

promote “See Something, Say Something” through deeper civic engagement and sustained awareness campaigns.

To West African States:

Work closely in a coordinated

manner with CSOs to prioritize local ownership and agency to help build cultures of peace from the ground up.

Better integrate good,

inclusive governance as a worthy value in itself with the added benefit of forestalling the factors that could enable VET.

This briefing note draws on discussions and recommendations from a policy dialogue co-organized in Accra by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) on June 25 and 26, 2023. In the past decade, West Africa’s vulnerability to violent extremism and terrorism has intensified as attacks have spread across the region, exacerbating existing multi-layered crises, and raising critical questions about the effectiveness of existing responses. Recent extremist incursions into Coastal West Africa are of special concern. As the only coastal state that has not experienced extremist or terrorist violence, Ghana offers an interesting case study into strategies and frameworks for preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) in Africa.

CONTEXT

Long considered one of the most peaceful countries in West Africa and Africa,¹ Ghana’s security status is attracting renewed scrutiny for being surrounded by neighbors all afflicted to varying extents by violent extremism and terrorism (VET). There has been at least one attempted attack in early 2023² and repeated attacks on produce trucks entering the country from Burkina Faso.³ Ghana is hosting unspecified numbers of terror refugees and there is speculation that violent extremists have found safe haven in its northern regions, indicating some vulnerability.⁴ At least 200 Ghanaians are reportedly fighting alongside Ansaru Islam and other extremist groups operating in the region.⁵

PEACE IN GHANA: ENABLING FACTORS AND FAULTLINES

Ghana’s resilience to VET is a function of its inherent sociocultural and political dispositions, institutionalized peace practices, and targeted policy actions, some of it inspired by lessons from other countries. High levels of interconnectedness in Ghanaian society are sustained by citizens’ embeddedness in multiple social

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networks and the cultural assimilation afforded by intercultural marriages and geopolitical mobility. Religious tolerance among adherents of the three main faiths—Christianity, Islam, and traditional indigenous religions—allows for the peaceful resolution of occasional conflicts. Ghana’s structured approach to conflict management and peacebuilding rests on a foundation of human rights and the rule of law. Its pillars include a strong chieftaincy system driven by deep-rooted societal belief in divine rights, inclusive religious leadership, and a longstanding culture of civic education.

The spoilers of peace in Ghana include a widely perceived sense of complacency and low-risk perception of the general public toward security issues, accompanied by the exceptionalist notion that VET cannot happen in the country. Previously low levels of civil society inclusion in the formulation of PCVE policy frameworks are seen as improving. However, the weak functional state presence in remote parts of Ghana, the provision of public services by VET groups, lingering colonial border legacies, and strong trans-border ethnic affinities could feed divided loyalties. They are being addressed by the National Boundary Commission.

OVERVIEWING GHANA'S PCVE STRATEGIES

Within Ghana, a National Framework for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and Terrorism (2019) sets out guidelines and responsibilities for a multi-agency, multi-actor approach involving “systematic coordination across Ministries, Departments and Agencies and Civil Society Organisations.”⁶ The Framework is coordinated by a National Counter Terrorism Centre established under the Ministry of National Security and aided by a decentralized local governance system.⁷ As part of its public awareness raising, the Ministry for National Security launched a citizens’ awareness campaign in 2022, “See something, say something,” to encourage Ghanaians to observe and report suspicious activities.⁸

Ghana is signatory to the African-led Accra Initiative, launched by H.E. President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo in 2017 with his colleagues from Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Togo to boost collaborative PCVE efforts by those member-states in West Africa most affected by VET.⁹ To date, most member states have PCVE policies and structures, except Côte d’Ivoire, which has nonetheless set up the Académie internationale de lutte contre le terrorisme (international anti-terror academy) with the support of multilateral partners.¹⁰ Other achievements of the initiative include regular meetings of heads of states and defense ministers, joint forces trainings, shared intelligence, better cooperation among security institutions, and increasing non-kinetic approaches, such as Comité interministériel

de prévention et de lutte contre l’extrémisme violent (the civilian interministerial committee for PCVE in Ghana and Togo).¹¹ The initiative has faced challenges of increasingly limited resourcing and growing tensions within its members.

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To West African States:

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- Better integrate good, inclusive governance as a worthy value in itself with the added benefit of forestalling the factors that could enable VET.

¹Institute for Economics & Peace, June 2022, Global Peace Index 2022: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GPI-2022-web.pdf>

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³Nana Yaw Gyimah, 2023, ‘Niger coup: Ghanaian driver recovering after he was shot’, <https://myjoyonline.com/niger-coup-ghanaian-driver-recovering-after-he-was-shot-trucks-burnt-on-burkina-faso-border>

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⁵Immanuel Obeng-Akrofi, 2022, ‘The Looming Danger Next Door: Terrorism Along Ghana’s Borders’, <https://blogging.africa/security/the-looming-danger-next-door-terrorism-along-ghanas-boarders/>

⁶Government of Ghana, 2019, National Framework for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and Terrorism (2019), page iii, <https://www.peacecouncil.gov.gh/storage/2019/09/NAFPCVET-Document-29-Jan-2020.pdf>

⁷Op. cit., page iv.

⁸Emelia Ennin Abbey, 25 May 2022, ‘See something, Say something’ campaign launched, Graphic Online, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/see-something-say-something-campaign-launched.html>

⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Regional Integration, 2022, Germany’s Participation in Accra Initiative Summit Reinforces Strategic Partnership With Ghana, <https://mfa.gov.gh/index.php/germanys-participation-in-accra-initiative-summit-reinforces-strategic-partnership-with-ghana/>

¹⁰RFI, 2023, ‘Côte d’Ivoire: à l’Académie de lutte contre le terrorisme, visite et réunion sur fond de coopération’, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20230512-c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-%C3%A0-l-acad%C3%A9mie-de-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-visite-et-r%C3%A9union-sur-fond-de-coop%C3%A9ration>

¹¹Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (Ed), 2022, The Jihadist Threat in Northern Ghana and Togo: Stocktaking and Prospects for Containing the Expansion, Promediation, <https://www.kas.de/documents/261825/16928652/The+jihadist+threat+in+northern+Ghana+and+Togo.pdf/>