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Introduction

1. Terrorism and Violent Extremism in West Africa and Ghana

In recent years, the emerging trend of terrorism and Violent Extremism activities in the Sahel and the West African sub-region became more prominent as it witnessed a stark increase in the number of terror incidents and casualties. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2022, the Sahel and the West African sub-region in 2021 were home to the world's fastest growing and most deadly terrorist groups. With 48% of the world's terrorist attacks centered in the region, the deaths in the Sahel region accounted for more than 35% of the global total of terrorism deaths in 2021. What is more alarming is the fact that more than 64.7% of the armed attacks were directed southward, demonstrating a southward spread of violent extremist attacks which pose a grave threat to the security of Ghana and its neighboring countries.

Often hailed as an oasis of peace in the West African sub-region, Ghana has long enjoyed an atmosphere of peace despite the history of sub-regional instability. However, the growing instability and tension in the region, coupled with local grievances and innate weaknesses such as actual and perceived socioeconomic marginalization of specific societal groups, poor governance, ethnic and religious tensions, as well as mistrust towards state institutions, provide an opportunity for the infiltration of these violent extremists into Ghana. In short, although Ghana has not yet experienced any attacks by extremist or terrorist groups, the country is not immune from armed terrorist attacks.

2. UNDP Ghana and the Prevention of Violent Extremism

As the United Nations lead agency on international development, UNDP in Ghana has worked with various partners to strengthen the trust of public institutions, empower citizens, and foster social cohesion and peace in Ghana. Specifically, under its Inclusive Growth and Accountable Governance cluster, UNDP has supported the Government of Ghana's efforts in Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and fostering sustainable peace in Ghana, working closely with government and civil society partners such as National and Regional Peace Councils, West Africa Centre for Counter Extremism (WACCE), West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Regional and Ghana offices, as well as various security institutions. In 2020, the UN in Ghana Conflict Development Analysis report identified some of the risks and vulnerabilities that threaten peace and security, which included violent extremism and terrorism. In 2021, UNDP supported the organization of a series of training surrounding the topics of PVE, Peacebuilding, and Conflict Prevention for the stakeholders in the border communities of the upper west and east regions as well as national consultations and trainings. Through these workshops, UNDP aimed to foster awareness about the risks and vulnerabilities of border communities to violent extremism as well as the crucial role that stakeholders can play in preventing it. The preventive activities of the UNDP were tailored to tackle the root causes of violent extremism, initiate and reinforce collaborating mechanisms, strengthen community resilience, and foster an enabling environment to prevent violent extremism.

Furthermore, UNDP with the support from the Governments of Netherlands and Sweden was able to promote engagements with relevant stakeholders at all levels to strengthen the collaboration towards joint actions against violent extremism in Ghana. As part of the effort, UNDP successfully hosted a session with both state and non-state actors on PVE in Prampram on 10 November 2021.

In 2022, **Building Resilience of Youth and Women-led Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through Innovation and Digitalization for green and inclusive recovery project** was approved by the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa to reinforce youth and women-led MSMEs to flourish in a green, inclusive, and equitable manner. One of the key project results is Result 2: Expanded opportunities for the inclusion of youth and women-led start-ups and MSMEs and increased engagement of citizens to prevent radicalization. As part of the project, UNDP has been supporting the Government's effort in heightening the capacities of various stakeholders, including MSMEs, to prevent violent extremism that responds to the pillar of prevention in the National Framework for the prevention and countering of violent extremism. As a result, a series of training has been conducted to design and implement actions for developing civic responsibility and conflict prevention mechanisms as well as to foster awareness of violent extremism among businesses in vulnerable and conflict-prone communities.

UNDP Ghana's work in Prevention of Violent Extremism

1. Location and People reached

UNDP Ghana's work in PVE strategically focused on the selected communities prone to conflict and violent extremism, especially in border communities where residents frequently engage themselves in cross-border activities. UNDP's work extensively covered various districts within Ghana, ranging from the Sissala West in the Upper West to Bongo of the Upper East. For the final workshop of 2022, Kumasi metropolitan was selected due to its unique location as the largest commercial town on the country's middle belt and the quick transitioning of traders and visitors into long-term residents, which makes it a vulnerable at-risk community.

From 2020 to 2022, a total of 1670 participants were reached as part of UNDP's project. In 2020, 296 community members consisting of 115 females and 181 males from the Eastern and Northern borders of Ghana were reached to enhance their knowledge of the threats of violent extremism and prevention of radicalization. In 2021, a total of 362 participants from different border communities were empowered with skills to identify early warning signals to prevent conflicts and violent extremism and collaborate with state security. Out of the selected participants, 198 were male and 164 were female. Furthermore, recognizing the necessity to strengthen the capacity and collaboration of state security agencies and civil society, UNDP with the support from the Government of Japan, worked with Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KA IPTC) to reinforce the response capacities of 81, 71 male and 10 female state and civil society actors from Ghana, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire in preventing

and countering terrorism and violent extremism. In 2022, a total of 1012 participants were drawn from MSMEs in border communities and commercial districts. Compared to 2021, there was significant progress in terms of the engagement of the marginalized groups in the PVE process, notably women and youth groups as a result of the UNDP project specifically targeting women and youth-led MSMEs within the community. Out of the total participants, youth participants accounted for roughly 70.8%. Specifically, the female youth group accounted for the most significant share of participants, with more than half of the total participants (51.4%) in this group. Furthermore, women's active participation was salient in the 2022 training, as approximately 66% of the total participants were female compared to 45% in 2021.

2022

Number of Participants	Male	Female	Total
Youth (15~34)	842	858	1700
Adults (35+)	423	354	777
Total	1265	1212	2477

Source: reports Number of beneficiaries/ participants in 2022

2. Emerging issues and Lessons learned

The objective of the PVE trainings were to 1) enhance the knowledge of communities and security agencies in peacebuilding and early warning as preventive approaches to violent extremism; 2) strengthen the trust and enhance the partnership between the community and security agencies; 3) build the capacity of relevant stakeholders to understand early warning signals and how they can be reported to relevant authorities for timely intervention; and 4) create a platform for the participants to acknowledge and appreciate the important roles they can play in PVE and combating terrorism. Some of the key issues discussed during the trainings were the concept of violent extremism and terrorism, gender dimensions to peacebuilding and conflict prevention, early warning signals and early response in relation to working closely with security agencies, and the impact of violent extremism on economic activities including MSMEs.

During and post-training, a series of discussions were held to facilitate active knowledge and opinion exchange among the participants. In these discussions, the participants were encouraged to identify the emerging issues within their community and to share the lessons they have learned through the training.

1) Emerging issues

- Participants noted that some extremist groups might appear philanthropic by providing social amenities such as portable water, scholarship packages, fertilizer, and micro-credit. By luring and attracting the community members' sympathy and support, extremist groups might subsequently utilize them for radicalization

- Participants also highlighted that the failure to provide sufficient economic opportunities and support for the youth bulge remains a threat to the peace of the entire districts. The seeming exclusion in the distribution of economic benefits has provoked the youth to resort to the formation and mobilization of groups on social media, which could easily stir unrest within the district. The participants emphasized the need for the Peace Council and other stakeholders to pay attention to the youth to prevent the issues from escalating.
- There is the need for cultural integration and broader consultation to develop a cohesive framework for the "Queen mothership".
- The increased influx of "Fulani" herdsmen and their cattle was repeatedly mentioned in several communities. The participants emphasized the need to establish a system to help the traditional leaders and authorities identify such settlers.
- Participants highlighted the lack of public trust in security agencies as well as the lack of responsiveness of the officers as one of the major deterrents that keep them from reporting suspicious individuals.
- Participants from different regions raised concerns regarding the proliferation of small arms in their districts. Especially in the border communities, there has been an increase in the smuggling of petroleum products and fertilizers that could be made into explosives.
- Participants from the border communities raised concerns regarding the increase in the number of youths engaged in cross-border activities. It was revealed that youth from the border communities often migrate to gold mining towns in Burkina Faso in search of employment, which could make them subject to radicalization
- In the newly established district of Tempene, unauthorized development projects were pointed out as one of the emerging issues. Participants raised their concerns against such development, as the district would struggle to identify and monitor the developers and their true intentions.
- The proximity of terrorist attacks to Ghana was also mentioned during the discussion. For instance, the participants from border communities such as Tempene, Garu, and Bansi raised their concerns about the extremist attacks in Togo and Burkina Faso.
- The increased influx of refugees fleeing attacks in Burkina Faso was also brought up during the discussion. The participants expressed their fear of extremist infiltration as terrorists disguise themselves as refugees to enter Ghana. They highlighted the need for Ghana Immigration Service to conduct proper profiling and screening at the border before accepting the refugees to enter.

2) Lessons learned

Overall, the post-training assessments displayed an increased understanding of participants on the various issues related to the Prevention of Violent Extremism. Some of the key lessons that participants learned are captured below:

- Peace and security within the community are shared responsibilities. Thus, it is important to establish effective collaboration between security agencies and community members to ensure timely intervention. Throughout the training, the participants were encouraged to be vigilant and actively participate in the "See something, say something" campaign.

- Participants were able to raise their awareness of the dynamics and drivers of conflict and violent extremism. Furthermore, participants became more aware of their vulnerabilities such as ethnicity, chieftaincy, and unemployment issues as well as the mechanisms for mitigating these vulnerabilities.
- Participants were able to realize the importance of detecting early warning signs as well as the unique and important role women can play in the peacebuilding processes
- Difference between conflict and violent extremism. There is a need to acknowledge the inevitable nature of conflict and the appropriate measures to prevent the conflict from escalating into violent activities.
- UNDP in working with its partners at different levels has also realized that special focus must be given to the mobilization and active participation of marginalized groups such as women, youth and persons with disability

3. Challenges and Opportunities

1) Challenges

During the trainings and engagements, the key challenges that make the community vulnerable to the threat of violent extremism were highlighted. Some of the common challenges outlined in different communities are as follows:

- *Porous border entry points*
The existence of numerous entry points without proper oversight by the Ghana Immigration Services leaves room for illegal immigrants to enter the country with smuggled goods without a security check. These smuggled goods might be explosive devices or items utilized to manufacture bombs and other dangerous implements for extremist activities.
- *Poverty, high illiteracy rate, and ignorance of community members*
The high poverty level of the community, especially in the northern part of Ghana, leaves its members susceptible to taking part in all sorts of activities including illegal ones to fend for themselves. Furthermore, the communities' lack of knowledge of early warning signs and procedures of violent extremist activities poses a serious challenge to its efforts to confront the infiltration of terrorists into the country.
- *Poor infrastructure*, such as poor telecommunication and road infrastructure, hinders the information distribution and timely intervention of the relevant authorities. Border communities particularly suffered from mobile network interferences from neighboring countries, poor roads that made it difficult to move around
- *High youth unemployment rate*
With the absence of sustainable jobs, the unemployed youth can be easily recruited by extremist groups to engage in illegal activities. Furthermore, high unemployment rates can hinder the effective participation of youth in the PVE process as it creates a sense of frustration, exclusion, and irresponsibility among them.

- *Prevailing chieftaincy, land, religious, and ethnic conflicts* threatening the peaceful coexistence of different communities. Extremist groups might seek to take advantage of the lack of unity and cohesion to infiltrate the country.
- *The lack of women's participation* in the decision-making processes at the district level. Existing Data on the number of women in the local government system either as elected or appointed was very low, as out of an average of 25,2 were women.
- *Lack of the number of security personnel and efficient tools*
- *General mistrust of security agencies* among the community members which hinders the effective collaboration between the community and security agencies. There was a concern regarding the security agencies' failure to protect the identity of the information provider, which made community members reluctant to provide key information out of fear of becoming the next target.
- *Illegal mining (galamsey)*
Some participants also raised concerns regarding the negative impact of illegal mining in the community, namely the higher youth dropout rate and the exploitation of girls as sex workers at mining sites. There were also concerns about the possible usage of gold to finance violent extremist activities.
Furthermore, some border communities also expressed concerns about the existence of illegal mining points along the border area as it can promote the acquisition and possession of small arms.

2) Opportunities

Despite the challenges, the program also provided numerous opportunities to be incorporated into the prevention of violent extremism. Some of the key opportunities identified in different communities include the following:

- The desire and willingness of the community members, especially the youth to cooperate with the security agencies in preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism
- The availability of local capacity to form a resilient network between civilians, security services, state authorities, and civil society organizations. This could serve as an important mobilizing point in combating terrorism and PVE
- Presence of active youth groups that establish a network for positive youth activism and youth communal development
- The existence of community information centers as well as local radio stations to facilitate education and awareness creation of PVE
- Various government flagship programs and income-generating training activities present opportunities for active youth engagement in community livelihoods and skill acquisition for financial independence
- New technologies, including social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter, can be utilized to sensitize and mobilize the youth to help prevent violent extremism.

- The trainings also created a great opportunity for PVE work. With enhanced knowledge and skills, participants can detect early warning signs and report them to appropriate security agencies for timely intervention.

4. Recommendations and Way forward

1) For the Government of Ghana and its international partners

- Throughout the training, participants listed illegal mining activities as one of the emerging issues threatening the community's peace. Therefore, the government and environmental agencies should work to put in place strategic measures to address the issues related to illegal mining.
- Establish and reposition some border posts to more vantage points to enhance the effectiveness of border control and prevent the infiltration of violent extremists. Furthermore, the government should work towards the closure of unapproved routes leading to Burkina Faso and other conflict-prone countries in the Sahel region.
- Equip the security agencies with the necessary resources and provide regular training to enhance their capacity
- Enhance inter-agency cooperation among different security agencies including Ghana Police Service (GPS), Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), etc.
- Incorporate Violent Extremism and Terrorism awareness education into the country's educational curriculum, from basic to tertiary education
- Support the development of various comprehensive datasets such as youth employment status and chieftaincy succession data for all traditional authorities to identify the potential threats and utilize them in preventing potential conflicts.
- In the medium to long term, integrate the provision of economic opportunities into all Violent Extremism prevention mechanisms to prevent radicalization and recruitment of citizens into Violent Extremism activities for monetary reason

2) For local government

- Invest in improving the infrastructure of the community, such as roads, schools, and hospitals
- Monitor cross-border activities conducted by community members to prevent radicalization and possible engagement in violent extremism activities.
- Strengthen communities engagement in early warning and ensure early response in collaboration with security agencies
- Encourage youth and women's active participation in the decision-making process at the local level and implement policies to ensure their adequate contribution

3) For UNDP Ghana Country Office

- As participants showed a lot of enthusiasm in implementing their action plans, if possible, UNDP should continue to provide logistics and technical assistance to the groups to successfully carry out the action plans
- The active participation of the participants revealed a lack of awareness by the ordinary Ghanaians on the threats of Violent Extremism to individuals and communities. Thus, it is strongly recommended for UNDP to continue its capacity-building workshops in other violent extremism 'supply chain' cities and large commercial towns within the country.
- Throughout the training, the communities revealed a limited understanding of the government-community joint efforts in countering violent extremism. Thus, it would be desirable for UNDP to implement the training in more at-risk communities, specifically focusing on building cohesion and collaboration between community and security agencies in fighting against violent extremism.
- UNDP should work with other stakeholders to develop a coordination mechanism to build synergies on the different PVE interventions and leverage limited resources to address various development gaps

Implementing partners; National/Regional Peace Councils, district assemblies (Sagnarigu, Garu, Tempene, Kasena nakana West,Sissala East and West, Sefwi Wiawso, Jomoro, Ketu South, Kumasi, Bolgatanga), religious and traditional leaders

5. Media Links

- 1) NPC admonishes citizenry alertness over violent extremism spillover in country
<https://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/npc-admonishes-citizenry-alertness-over-violent-extremism-spillover-in-country/>
- 2) Involve youth in decision-making- NPC
<https://www.ghanaiantimes.com.gh/involve-youth-in-decision-making-npc/>
- 3) Women and youth in Ketu trained on violent extremism and terrorism
<https://gna.org.gh/2022/07/women-and-youth-in-ketu-trained-on-violent-extremism-and-terrorism/>
- 4) Peace Council holds workshop on violent extremism (tamale)
<https://gna.org.gh/2022/07/peace-council-holds-workshop-on-violent-extremism/>
- 5) Empowering Youth and Women-Led MSMEs to prevent violent extremism
<https://www.modernghana.com/news/1176332/empowering-youth-and-women-led-msmes-to-prevent.html>

PVE ACTION PLAN

- 1) Be vigilant and help the Security Agencies fight crime – Peace Council
<https://gna.org.gh/2022/11/be-vigilant-and-help-the-security-agencies-fight-crime-peace-council/>

- 2) Community leaders cautioned against violent extremists
<https://gna.org.gh/2022/11/community-leaders-cautioned-against-violent-extremists/>
- 3) Conflict forces closure of school for 7 months in Northern Ghana
<https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/news/education/conflict-forces-closure-of-school-for-7-months-in-northern-ghana/2022/>
- 4) NRPC sensitization on border communities- news broadcast (19:36~21:50)
https://m.facebook.com/gbcghana/videos/506300167884067/?_rdr (19:36~21:50)
https://m.facebook.com/gbcghana/videos/505840688226387/?_rdr (17:30~ 20:50)
- 5) Fighting Extremism is a Collective Job – Association
<https://newsghana.com.gh/fighting-extremism-is-a-collective-job-association/>
- 6) Hairdressers in Tamale sensitized on violent extremism
<https://gna.org.gh/2022/08/hairdressers-in-tamale-sensitised-on-violent-extremism/>
- 7) National Peace Council takes education on violent extremism to traders (Kumasi)
<https://gna.org.gh/2022/11/national-peace-council-takes-education-on-violent-extremism-to-traders/>
- 8) Threats of violent extremism: NPC engages market women at Asawase (Kumasi)
<https://gna.org.gh/2022/11/threats-of-violent-extremism-npc-engages-market-women-at-asawase-2/>