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Credit: IRD, Nicholas Griffin

# Countering Violent Extremism in West Africa

In recent years the landscape of violent extremism in West Africa has grown increasingly fractured and complex. Boko Haram has devastated livelihoods in the Lake Chad Basin. Conflict in northern Mali appears increasingly intractable, allowing violent extremist groups to operate with relative impunity and carry out attacks throughout the region. The continued trouble in Libya threatens to export new strains of violent extremism and ethnic tension to West Africa. Taking place against a backdrop of persistent social and economic vulnerability, this insecurity has sparked a surge in migration and smuggling. The regional trade routes that once moved salt and myrrh increasingly facilitate the flow of guns, drugs, people, and violent ideology.

In the face of these challenges, West African governments and civil society organizations are increasingly looking beyond military solutions towards a holistic approach to countering violent extremism (CVE). To that end, the region's historical and cultural

traditions of tolerance and moderation remain a critical bulwark against violent extremist influence and a solid foundation for efforts to build peace.

USAID|West Africa seeks to reduce vulnerability to violent extremism (VE) by strengthening the capacity of West African institutions to counter VE, amplifying credible moderate voices, and increasing community cohesion in areas at greatest risk of violent extremist influence.

The regional nature of violent extremism in West Africa demands a regional response. The mandate of USAID|West Africa promotes a regional perspective that facilitates trans-boundary analysis, fosters cross-border approaches, and leverages partnerships with regional institutions. USAID|West Africa's CVE programming responds to the Department of State and USAID's Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism as well as the objectives of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP).



**Ideologies are not defeated with guns, they're defeated by better ideas – a more attractive and compelling vision.**



President Barak Obama, Leader's Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism, October 2015

## History of CVE Programming

USAID|West Africa began CVE programming in 2006 after the establishment of TSCTP. Early efforts at CVE were characterized by one-off projects addressing specific issues in limited geographic areas, such as rehabilitating radio stations in Agadez, Niger, or training youth in Maradi, Niger. In 2009, USAID|West Africa launched Peace through Development, a three-year project operating in Chad and Niger that marked the Agency's first attempt at holistic CVE programming. Following the success of the model, Peace through Development II, a five-year project targeting Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger was launched in late 2011. By engaging youth, amplifying moderate voices and improving citizen engagement with their governments, the project has made important contributions to CVE in West Africa.

To date, USAID|West Africa has programmed over \$100 million of CVE and TSCTP funds. The mission currently oversees CVE programming in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, and coordinates closely with other USAID CVE programs in Mali, Mauritania and Nigeria as well as with other U.S. Government and donor efforts in the region.

## A New Approach to CVE in West Africa 2016 – 2021

Just as the recent past has brought a dramatic shift in the nature and scope of violent extremism in West Africa, the coming years are certain to bring further change and upheaval in the region.

USAID|West Africa's new portfolio of CVE efforts leverages our experience to date but strikes out in new directions. The approach seeks to support direct CVE programming in communities at risk of VE influence while focusing on the critical long-term goal of building West African capacity. By prioritizing learning, flexibility, and adaptability, the mission seeks to understand and meet new CVE challenges as they emerge.

## Programming Principles

### **Focus on Regional and National African Partners**

Foster long-term solutions by building West African government and civil society capacity to counter VE.

### **Adapt to the Environment and the Threat**

Be flexible in both geographic targeting and activity definition so that programming can meet emerging needs and seize opportunities.

### **Promote Innovation**

Focus on testing ideas, learning and adapting to improve our understanding and effectiveness.

### **Foster Collaboration and Partnerships**

Promote knowledge sharing and synergy by working closely with a broad spectrum of CVE actors, including U.S. Government agencies, donors, civil society organizations, universities, and inter-governmental bodies among others.

### **Balance Community Risks and Regional Dynamics**

Focus on the communities at greatest risk, while not losing sight of the national and regional forces that shape the community context.

### **Nest CVE within a Broader Development Approach**

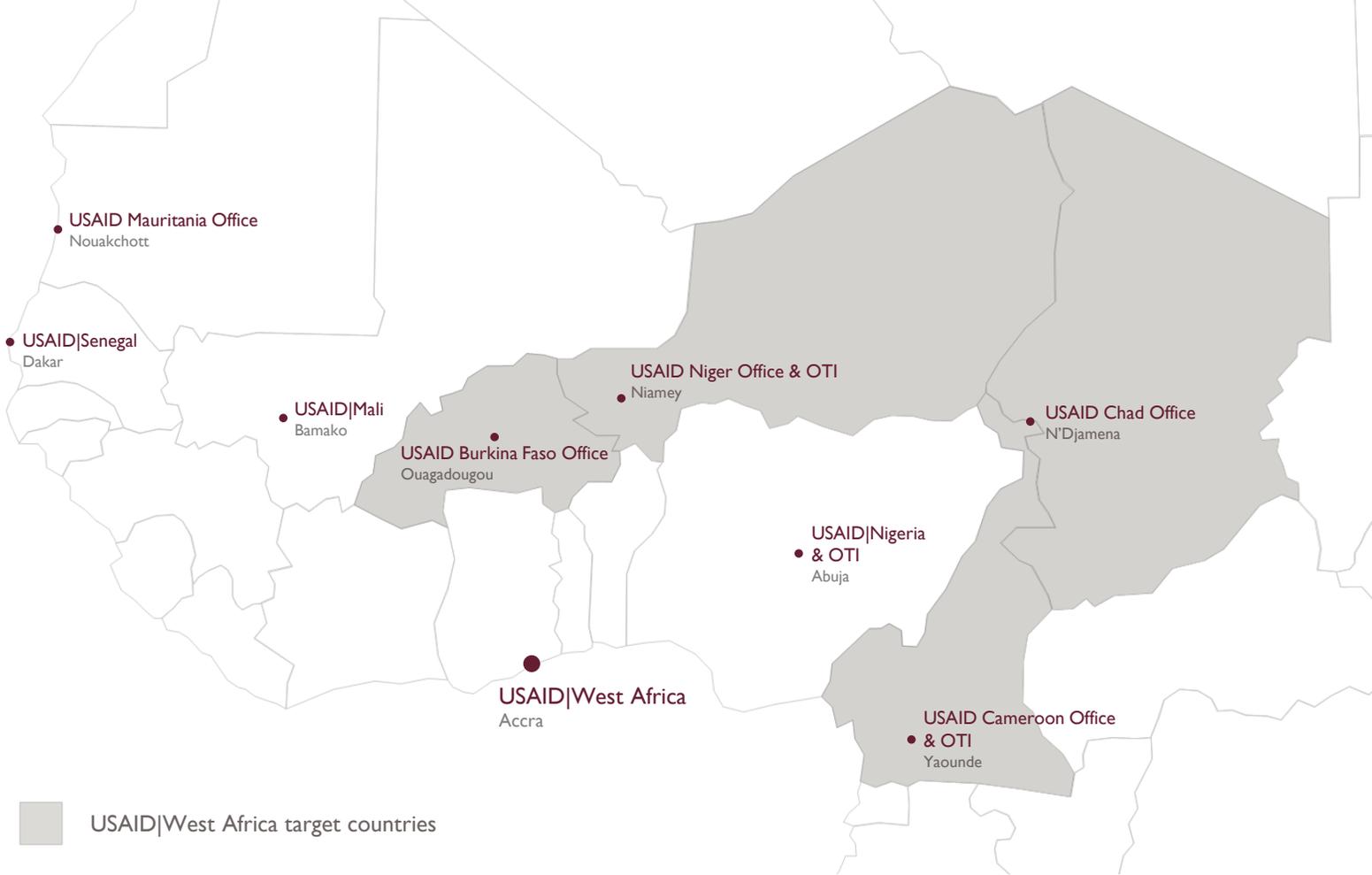
Align traditional development programming with CVE initiatives, recognizing that reducing vulnerability to violent extremism in West Africa requires a holistic effort.

### **Be Gender Nuanced**

Invest in women's capacity to prevent VE in their communities and explore how concepts of masculinity can facilitate or inhibit VE.

### **Do No Harm**

Ensure that interventions do not have harmful unintended consequences and that beneficiaries, partners and staff stay safe.



## Geographic Focus

Recognizing that the underlying causes of violent extremism are present in much of the Sahel, but that limited U.S. Government resources demand a selective and focused approach, USAID|West Africa advances a portfolio that blends systems-level investments in the broader enabling environment with intensive community-level programming in limited geographic zones at immediate risk of VE influence.

For example, efforts to strengthen West African capacity will focus on regional or national institutions and networks and will therefore be largely systems-level interventions, whereas community cohesion programming will target specific areas, such as Boko Haram-affected communities in the Lake Chad Basin. Programming to amplify moderate voices will operate at both regional and community levels. Consequently, CVE investments will be community, national, cross-border, or regional in nature according to the objective and modality of the intervention.

USAID|West Africa coordinates closely with other USAID CVE-relevant programming in the region including:

- Niger Community Cohesion Initiative, managed by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)
- Participatory Responsive Governance Project in Niger managed by USAID's Office in Niger.
- Nigeria Regional Transition Initiative, managed by USAID's OTI
- NOUR project in Mauritania managed by USAID|Senegal
- ACCORD (Appui à la Cohésion Communautaire et les Opportunités de Reconciliation et Développement) in Mali managed by USAID|Mali



**As violent extremism does not respect borders, national and global action has to be complemented by enhanced regional cooperation.**



UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,  
December 2015

## Portfolio Objectives

Over five years, USAID|West Africa aims to reduce vulnerability to violent extremism by:

1. Strengthening West African capacity to counter violent extremism
2. Amplifying moderate voices across the region
3. Increasing community cohesion in areas of greatest risk

## Countering Violent Extremism Programming

### Partnerships for Peace

U.S. \$13 million

August 2016 – August 2021

Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Ability to expand to other countries.

The project will support the efforts of West African regional institutions, national governments, and civil society organizations to counter VE by fostering a greater understanding of VE and knowledge of CVE approaches, supporting West African leadership of CVE efforts, and strengthening regional coordination related to CVE. The approach will be anchored in partnerships with regional organizations such as the Sahel Group of Five (Sahel G5) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and support networks of West African advocacy and practitioner groups to improve stakeholder coordination on CVE approaches among traditional and religious leaders, youth and women's groups. Implemented by: Creative Associates International.

### Moderate Voices

(project name to be determined)

U.S. \$25 million

September 2016 – September 2021

Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger. Will expand to Cameroon in December 2017 and has ability to expand to other countries.

The project will aim to amplify moderate voices of peace and tolerance by strengthening positive local

narratives, expanding access to information, and increasing dialogue and exchange on CVE and peace concepts. Fundamental to the effort will be learning what engagement platforms, partnerships and narratives are most effective in undermining violent extremist propaganda, and adapting new approaches based on that learning. The project will blend media-strengthening with strategic communications and behavior change programming, leveraging both new and traditional media to reach populations most at risk of violent extremist influence in West Africa. Implemented by: Equal Access International.

### Cameroon Peace Promotion Project

U.S. \$2.5 million

December 2015 – December 2017

North and Far North regions of Cameroon.

The project aims to strengthen community cohesion in the conflict-affected northern regions of Cameroon. The project's approach utilizes radio programming and community engagement to support moderate voices to mitigate extremist rhetoric, reinforce community values of peace and tolerance, improve access to factual information, and promote dialogue in vulnerable communities on themes related to conflict. Implemented by: Equal Access International.

### Community Cohesion

Up to U.S. \$32 million

October 2016 – TBD

Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Ability to expand to other countries.

The effort will identify regions and communities at greatest risk of VE recruitment and influence and address specific vulnerabilities to VE through highly tailored interventions to engage at-risk citizens and increase trust within and across communities. The approach will increase youth engagement and promote positive identities or narratives among individuals and communities. It will also promote inclusive dialogue among groups in conflict, and will address the grievances of marginalized groups. The effort will be implemented under a partnership with USAID's OTI, wherein USAID|West Africa will provide funding to augment or start OTI CVE programming in areas critical to regional stability. Current collaborations include:

**Northern Cameroon:** With joint funding from USAID|West Africa, OTI launched a community cohesion project in Northern Cameroon in late 2016.



To be effective, CVE efforts must be guided by ongoing research and analysis of the context, drivers, and most effective interventions against violent extremism.

State Department & USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism, May 2016



Credit: Equal Access

## Learning & Adapting

While each CVE project will have rigorous internal monitoring, evaluation and learning components, two additional portfolio-wide mechanisms will promote learning and knowledge sharing across the portfolio and the interagency.

### Research and Development for Countering Violent Extremism

(project name to be determined)

U.S. \$7 million

Expected to start mid to late 2017.

The project will underpin USAID|West Africa's learning agenda by undertaking evaluations and analyses to inform evidence-based decision-making and interagency understanding of regional peace and governance efforts. The project will also support USAID|West Africa in disseminating findings and organizing coordination and learning events. Implemented by: TBD

## Annual Call for Innovative Proposals

Up to U.S. \$1.5 million per year

April 2016 – April 2021

Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Ability to expand to other countries.

Notices of funding opportunities for activities in targeted countries will be issued annually to solicit proposals that address CVE challenges identified for that year. Emphasis will be placed on research and testing ideas that, where appropriate and subject to available funding, could be expanded and replicated if successful. Current awarded proposals include:

**CVE Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment Initiative:** This \$500,000 initiative implemented by Mercy Corps aims to develop a proven and scalable toolkit that will enable national- and regional-level state and civil society practitioners to identify communities most vulnerable to engagement in VE. Research and development will take place from September 2016 to September 2017.

# USAID|West Africa CVE Unit

The CVE Unit is housed in USAID|West Africa's Regional Peace and Governance Office in Accra, Ghana. The Unit includes six technical staff members, as well as one U.S. Special Forces Civil-Military Liaison Officer and one USAID OTI Senior Regional Specialist. The Unit also supports one technical staff member in each of the USAID Offices in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

The Unit was established with the mandate to: think regionally; promote interagency, intra-USAID collaboration; and be a focal point for coordination, learning, planning and management of USAID CVE programming in West Africa.

## Roles

### Program Management

The CVE Unit programs approximately \$12 million annually. CVE programming is managed jointly by Accra-based staff and staff based in the target countries to ensure a mix of national and regional perspectives.

### Learning & Adapting

In order to accelerate learning and to coordinate and adapt programming in the region, the CVE Unit aims to:

- Capture and disseminate best practices

- Convene regional practitioner events
- Organize regular pause and reflect sessions with partners and beneficiaries
- Test new ideas and approaches
- Finance and direct evaluations
- Serve as a center for knowledge management on CVE in West Africa

### Coordination

The CVE Unit coordinates regularly within USAID, with other U.S. Government Agencies, and with other donors in an effort to harmonize understanding and efforts.

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