

Assessment of the Drivers of Insecurity and Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso

A Pilot Project on Countering Violent Extremism in West Africa and the Sahel

BACKGROUND

The threat of terrorism and violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel is an increasingly urgent concern for local, regional, and international actors. In April 2013, under the auspices of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), the governments of Burkina Faso and Denmark hosted a symposium in Ouagadougou, in cooperation with the African Centre for Research and Studies on Terrorism, to identify practical ways to address the spread of violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel. The symposium, organized by the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC), brought together 140 representatives from 27



Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 2008. UN Photo/Eskinder

governments, four international and regional organizations, and 28 civil society experts and scholar-practitioners. The workshop highlighted four recurring themes that contribute to the effectiveness and sustainability of efforts to counter violent extremism (“CVE”) and strengthen community resilience against violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel:

- 1) The importance of empowering local community, government, and traditional leaders to work on conflict prevention and resolution in a region that has been beset by several prolonged conflicts;
- 2) The critical need to strengthen law enforcement, criminal justice, and security sector actors through training and technical assistance focusing on community engagement, the rule of law, and human rights;
- 3) The value of civil society at the regional and international level and the need to engage and support them to address violent extremism; and
- 4) The need to identify and prevent violent extremism by addressing its structural and ideological drivers.

Building on those four themes and other inputs collected from participants during the workshop, CGCC developed an Action Agenda outlining a range of proposed activities to enhance CVE efforts in West Africa and the Sahel.¹

The Action Agenda includes (1) recommendations for action by states in West Africa; (2) recommendations for action by regional and international bodies; and (3) recommendations for actions to build the capacity of civil society and the media.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

As an initial step in implementing this Action Agenda, CGCC is undertaking a study to more deeply understand the drivers of instability and violent extremism in Burkina Faso. The assessment will serve as a basis for the development of projects and programming in Burkina Faso that advance the goal of preventing the emergence of violent extremism, advance social cohesion, and preserve Burkina's historical stability against this evolving threat. This project is being undertaken with support from the government of Denmark and in partnership with the Ouagadougou-based research organization, Centre pour la Gouvernance Democratique (CGD).

Studies of the drivers of violent extremism have identified a broad range of factors that may serve in contributing to the growing threat of terrorism and violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel. These include both "push" (e.g. human rights, governance, economic, and other variables) and "pull" factors (e.g. the appeal of violent extremist ideas). In Burkina Faso, where subregional trends in violent extremism have prompted concerns about safeguarding the resilience of communities against violent extremism, CGCC and CGD are conducting an assessment study to provide an understanding of the dynamics of extremism reflective of local and national perspectives in Burkina Faso. To do this, CGCC and CGD are reviewing the secondary literature on factors affecting stability in the country and undertaking field work jointly (in Ouagadougou and beyond the capital) to gather primary data. Following an evaluation of this data, the project team will develop a series of recommendations for local, regional, and international partners for the development of context-sensitive programming designed to prevent the emergence of violent extremism in Burkina Faso.

A second component of this project, also drawn from the recommendations in the Action Agenda, involves the design and delivery of CVE training and sensitization for frontline officials and practitioners. CGCC will work with regional partners in Burkina Faso to develop a general introduction to CVE concepts for frontline officials (law enforcement personnel, prosecutors, judges, judicial officials, and corrections officers, as well as officials working on related areas of development, education, and conflict mitigation), to foster the development of multi-dimensional interagency responses to violent extremism. The training is also intended to offer those officials more accustomed to working with a focus on security or development issues an opportunity to deepen their engagement with one another on these issues. This second component is anticipated in early 2014.

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¹ Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation et al., *Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Community Engagement in West Africa and the Sahel: An Action Agenda*, July 2013, <http://www.globalct.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Action-Agenda-ENG.pdf>

CGCC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy institute dedicated to strengthening international counterterrorism cooperation. It works to build stronger partnerships to prevent terrorism among many actors and across many levels: the United Nations, regional organizations, and states; communities, police, and governments; researchers, practitioners, and policymakers; and survivors of terrorism around the world.

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