Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Perspectives and Actions on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in Ghana and (Regionally)

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African Security Sector Network (ASSN)

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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ABSTRACT

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) is an increasing national and regional security concern across West Africa. Although Ghana has not experienced a major direct attack, the increasing threat in the Sahelian region underscores the need for proactive and locally-rooted measures to build resilience against the threat. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) occupy a distinct role — bridging communities and state, delivering services, shaping narratives and providing early warning and leading interventions that enhance resilience against the threat.

This paper explores civil society perspectives on PCVE in Ghana and West Africa in the midst of pervasive regional insecurity characterised by widespread violent extremism for more than a decade. The analysis highlights the crucial role CSOs play in addressing the underpinnings of radicalisation and Violent Extremism (VE), building community resilience, promoting social cohesion and shaping both policies and grassroots insights into the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism.

This paper acknowledges that whilst PCVE is a new security typology to the civil society domain in Ghana, CSOs have long established a credible reputation for brokering peaceful elections, dissuading rival ethnic factions, mediating intercommunal tensions and ensuring accountable governance – roles that are crucial to PCVE. Many of them have evolved rapidly, incorporating PCVE themes into their programming, which has allowed them to cultivate important perspectives critical to addressing the threat.

Given the distinct role civil society plays, the study highlights not only perceptions, but also the initiatives and experiences of CSOs working on PCVE-related issues, including Prevention, Rehabilitation, Community Resilience, Social Cohesion and building a culture of pluralism using counter-narratives in target communities.

It also captures CSO perspectives on existing national and regional PCVE efforts, the challenges CSOs face and factors that hinder the implementation of PCVE initiatives, including limited resources, ineffective collaboration, lack of political will and the rapidly changing priorities and agenda of donor agencies. It identifies gaps and opportunities, and proposes actionable recommendations for CSO-led and multi-actor responses.

To emphasise the important role of stakeholder collaboration and coordination, the study maps out existing collaborations, coordination mechanisms between CSOs, state actors, including law enforcement, various security agencies, ministries and agencies.

Key words: *Civil Society Organisations, Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, Preventing Violent Extremism, Radicalization, Civil Society, Violent Extremism.*

INTRODUCTION

West Africa has remained the epicenter for global terrorism[1] and the deadliest region[2] for terrorism globally, accounting for 19% of attacks and 51% of terrorist deaths in 2024.

Before 2016, the idea of terrorism occurring in Ghana or coastal states, including Burkina Faso, was a remote possibility in the psyche of the local population until the deadly Splendid Hotel attacks in Ouagadougou, in February 2016, and the shocking Grand Bassam attacks in Cote d'Ivoire two months later, in March 2016. Whilst Cote d'Ivoiresuffered[3] subsequent bombardments, decisive actions and tailored interventions involving Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)[4] helped the Ivorian state to reclaim their society from further terrorist exploitation. Sadly, Burkina Faso would go on to serve as the global nerve of terrorist violence.

''The language and narratives around both civil society and state actors recognise that there is a need for a fundamental shift away from the kinetic approach to embrace a more human-security and human rights-compliant approach. Whilst this narrative has gained currency in recent PCVE platforms, the state in practice is still largely rooted in state-centric combat approaches".

Ghana's proximity to the theatre of violence in the Sahel, including the reality of internal vulnerabilities, increase the country's exposure to the threat. The increased expansion in the violence highlights the need to expand counter terrorism efforts to include the role of CSOs in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE).

Civil Society (CS) commands higher legitimacy, community goodwill, trust and support. They occupy an inherently distinct role, bridging communities and the state, delivering services, shaping narratives and providing early warning and leading interventions that enhance resilience against the threat. The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), West Africa Centre for Counter-Extremism (WACCE), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), STAR-Ghana Foundation, NORSAC, International Republican Institute (IRI), Promediation, Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA), and the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), among many others, have been consequential in promoting PCVE initiatives in Ghana and West Africa.

Rather than the simplistic view that often characterise mainstream analyses on PCVE, CSOs cultivate more innovatively nuanced perspectives, gravitating away from kinetic approaches in favour of human security-centered and conflict-sensitive approaches. Their unique appreciation of PCVE inevitably leads them to advocate for approaches that are built around 'killing terrorism', not terrorists, unlike the traditional state-centric approaches that focus on 'killing terrorists' through kinetic approaches. Given that Ghana is yet to experience extremist attacks, CS considers kinetic approaches as an overreach and potentially counter-productive, as it (kinetic approach) has a proclivity to elicit consequential backlash and damage essential community goodwill for effective PCVE.

The language and narratives around both civil society and state actors recognise that there is a need for a fundamental shift away from the kinetic approach to embrace a more human security and human rights compliant approach. Whilst this narrative has gained currency in recent PCVE

[1] https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2025-04/west-africa-and-the-sahel-14.php
[2] https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/
[3] https://acleddata.com/report/light-kafolo-attack-jihadi-militant-threat-burkina-faso-and-ivory-coast-borderlands
[4] https://2021-2025.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ICS_AF_Cote-dIvoire_Public.pdf

platforms, the state in practice is still largely rooted in state-centric combat approaches. Such valuable perspectives are inherently important to effectively addressing the challenge.

Given the very important role played by CSOs, it is imperative to gauge the perspectives of key actors in the sector on PCVE to inform policy formulation and implementation in the field.

Table 1
Evolution of the Threat in Coastal West Africa.








Benin	Burkina Faso	Cote d'Ivoire	Ghana	Togo
Pendjari Hostage. May 2019.	Splendid Hotel Attacks of January 2016.	Grand-Bassam Attacks. March 2016.	No attacks* Nazir Nortey joined ISIS in August 2025.	November 2021

Table 1.1: Evolution of Attacks in Coastal West Africa.

**Ghana has not recorded VE attacks on home soil. But a dozen Ghanaians have travelled to join terrorist groups including Nazir Alema Nortey, who was the first Ghanaian to declare that he had joined ISIS in August 2015.*

DEFINING PCVE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

PCVE

Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) refers to polices, initiatives and measures intended at dissuading groups and individuals from engaging in violent extremist acts. PVE focuses on *prevention* making use of human-security oriented measures to prevent radicalisation whilst ensuring social cohesion and trustful relations between communities and state actors through community dialogues and engagements.

This differs from **Countering Violent Extremism** (CVE), which traditionally refers to measures and initiatives that are directed at disrupting planned attacks and recruitment activities. It utilises security measures aimed at individuals and groups that are already in the web of radicalisation.

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) is, therefore, a holistic approach that integrates both preventive (PVE) and countering (CVE) measures to address the whole gamut of the threat from conditions that lead to radicalisation to the reality of extremist violence.

Civil Society

Civil Society (CS) is a widely used, yet, contested concept. Whilst it is commonly thought of as referring to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or 'The Third Sector' in many academic, political and development literature, its meaning varies quite widely in different circles. Whilst some invoke a more universal definition to embody the general public, exclusive of the State, others use the term in a normative sense, 'focusing on its capacity to impart civil values and behaviour and its capacity to make states more accountable' (Howell & Lind, 2009). For these people, Civil Society is likened to an arena for fostering social participation and providing corrective, alternative means of social governance.

CSOs for the purpose of this paper is invoked to encompass non-state entities, including associations and faith-based organisations (FBOs) who are engaged in provision of services or public good within the PCVE domain.

CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES

The prevailing perspectives within the Civil Society domain regarding PCVE are of various strands:

Over-Concentration on Borders

Firstly, there is a pervasive perception that the threat is from external sources. This has been significant in shaping PCVE initiatives. Security measures are often a function of threat perception. Thus, if threats are thought to be emerging from external sources, it inevitably leads to a focus on borders as, perhaps, the most legitimate targets for PCVE measures. On the other hand, if threats are conceived as emanating from internal sources, then it would lead to a focus on local communities for vulnerabilities for homegrown terrorism. In Ghana, the predominant presumption is that the VE threat is largely externally driven. That is why most analyses and PCVE interventions are focused on borders, intending to build resilience against infiltration and exploitation of weaknesses at entry points and in border communities.

Most of the interventions, including those by GCERF, STAR-Ghana Foundation, CDD Ghana[5], WACCE, NORSAAC, RISE Ghana, CDA, among others, have all been focused on border communities. Nearly all expert views and materials consulted as part of this research regarding PCVE interventions referenced border communities as a major vulnerability target for interventions.

This typifies a traditional state-centric approach to security. But this perception is not engineered exclusively by state actors. Even among academics and researchers, the understanding and approach to PCVE are rooted in the mistaken view of VE as a threat emanating from external sources. Among many authors, Aubyn (2021) highlights Ghana's porous borders and geographical proximity[6] to Burkina Faso and the Sahel as a major source of the country's vulnerability.

It is this perspective that has led to the proliferation of PCVE interventions in border communities. The tendency is that the over-concentration on border communities could result in missing the real vulnerabilities in inner cities. Examples abound in this regard. The first deadly attacks on Burkina Faso, in January 2016, and Cote d'Ivoire, in March 2016, happened not in border communities but in the centre of Ouagadougou and Abidjan, respectively. Indeed, since 2015 when Ghana first began to take cognisance of the potential VE threat to the country, most individuals who travelled to join ISIS or JNIM had come from inner cities, not border communities.For instance, Nazir Alema Nortey, the first Ghanaian to publicly declare his allegiance to ISIS and announce his departure to Syria, was raised in Accra. Baba Adams, an ISIS recruit who was dissuaded a day before his planned departure, is a native of Wulensi, in the Nanumba South District, in the Northern Region. About 13 others who had left or attempted to leave Ghana to fight with terrorist groups had come from inner cities, including Accra, Kumasi, Karaga, Tamale and Wulensi.

Whilst these may be valid perspectives, PCVE needs to target a broader section of society, including inner-city populations. This will give meaning to the Whole-of-Society approach being promoted in

[5] Mumuni Yunus (2025). CDD-Ghana launches project to prevent violent extremism in Northern Ghana. https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/CDD-Ghana-launches-project-to-prevent-violent-extremism-in-Northern-Ghana-1986200 Accessed on December 28, 2025.

[6] https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/. Accessed on December 26, 2025.

Ghana's National Framework for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism (NAFPCVET).

Secondly, there is almost unanimous agreement among CS actors that Ghana has a comprehensive national framework, robust National Security Strategy and other relevant mechanisms to address Violent Extremism and Terrorism. Both the National Security Strategy and the PCVE framework consider the structural drivers of radicalisation, key actors, stakeholders and particularly the role of civic engagement through the mutually reinforcing four pillars. Many CSOs consider the NAFPCVET not only as a crucial PCVE strategy, but also acknowledge that it contains adequate space for all relevant state and non-state actors, including CSOs with a dedicated coordinating ministry, and two units located within the National Security Secretariat – the Human Security Unit and the Counter Terrorism Fusion Centre. Years of CSO advocacy have led to the state's appreciation of the role of Civil Society in security, security governance and peacebuilding, resulting in a commitment to establish a CSO desk at the National Security Secretariat to enhance coordination between the two.

Implementation

Thirdly, CS actors do not differ in the opinion that the robustness of Ghana's framework is only on paper, and that the reality in terms of implementation significantly departs from what is on paper. They see limited CSO-government collaboration in the implementation of the framework, the Accra Initiative and various exercises. Festus Aubyn acknowledges this and cautions that this undermines local ownership and goodwill for implementation[7]. Aubyn is not alone on this. CSO actors are concerned that the operationalisation and coordination with stakeholders[8] within the principle of *"A whole of Government, and A Whole of Society"* approach is limited, reducing the ability of civilians and civil society support for the fight. They explain that the ongoing review of NAFPCVET is a clear example of insufficient collaboration with civil society as it lacks adequate civil society consultation. An,d yet, without the *whole-of-society approach* and support, PCVE implementation and sustainability will suffer.

Accra Initiative

In spite of the important role of CSOs, their role is barely highlighted in the Accra Initiative. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) also argues[9] that the Accra Initiative is characterised by its ad hoc nature with a restricted geographic scope and operations lasting usually between four and five days' deployment. They further note that it is primarily focused on military solutions, paying insufficient attention to the socioeconomic, political and governance issues that contribute to violent extremism. Beyond these issues, member states, especially those in the AES, have limited trust in the Accra Initiative because they perceive it as being influenced by Western interests.

Moreover, the Accra Initiative is considered to be dysfunctional and no longer operational among CSOs. But it must be noted that there are efforts by the current Ghanaian government to restructure and retool the Accra Initiative in a different[10] mode or even dissolve it altogether and replace it with a new platform that will be inclusive of the AES countries. The form of the envisaged entity is not certain, but President John Dramani Mahama is expected to outline the new entity in 2026 to reflect the realities and changing environment since the Accra Initiative was inaugurated.

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[7] https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/
[8] Interview with Paul Aborampah-Mensah, CDD
[9] Kwarkye, Sampson; Abatan, Ella Jeannine; and Matongbada, Michaël (2019) 'Can the Accra Initiative Prevent Terrorism in West African Coastal States?', Available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-accra-initiative-prevent-terrorism-in-west-african-coastal-states.
[10] https://www.myjoyonline.com/mahama-pushes-for-new-regional-security-platform-to-tackle-extremism-as-germany-pledges-e65m-support/

Securitisation

Militarisation and the over-securitisation of the response to the threat are repeatedly referenced as a major factor for PCVE failure in the Sahel. The deployment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) with over[11] 15,200 personnel, G5 Sahel Force with about 5,000 forces, Operation Barkhane with over 5,000 forces, coupled with AFRICOM, the Special Operations Task Force Takuba, and the Multinational Joint Task Force under the Lake Chad Basin Commission, resulted in a complex congestion of security actors. This created a disproportionate focus on security measures, to the seeming neglect of the economic and social underpinnings of the threat.

At both country and regional levels, the implementation of security frameworks targeted at VE is viewed as over securitised[12] and combat-driven. Mustapha and Lartey (2022) amplify this point, having conducted various studies in Burkina Faso, by emphasising that the Burkinabe government's state-centric conception of the threat implies that the ''response strategy has been reduced to military operations[13]" .

In the last six years, Ghana's approach to PCVE has been significantly disproportionate in favour of combat measures. This is evidenced by the Operation Conquered Fist, Eagle Claw and Operation Koundandglou I, II, III and IV. Other practices involve, for instance, viewing marginalised groups, refugees fleeing danger and unemployed youth as threats, resulting in the deployment of forces to tackle them. Engagements with security forces reveal the deep-rooted combat mindset that drives PCVE actions in spite of numerous trainings. The disproportionate focus on national security to the detriment of human security ensures that more resources and initiatives around state-centric approaches are prioritised. The Counter Terrorism Fusion Centre at the National Security Secretariat focuses more on activities designed to protect the state, not the people. Even where state actors, such as the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) and the National Peace Council are involved, the interventions are tailored towards state preservation, protection of critical national infrastructure and advocacy narratives that promote state preservation. State PCVE efforts must go beyond that. It must emphasizs human security. Human security is national security – without security of the people, there is no security of the state.

Prioritisation

PCVE is inadequately prioritised by the state actors compared to other socially and politically attractive themes such as illegal mining, vigilante violence, chieftaincy and ethnic conflicts. This is so because such topics are considered politically emotive with significant electoral value. The review of the NAFPCVET throughout the 16 regions of Ghana is reliant on donor support. This is taken as a sign of low prioritisation by the state.

POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Ghana's PCVE space consists of legal frameworks, institutional arrangements and local governance and security initiatives. Aubyn[14] categorises measures by the state to respond to violent extremism in respect of legal, operational and multilateral responses. At the level of the legal response, he references legal frameworks, including the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2008 (Act 762), the 2014 amendment to the Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2008 (Act 749) and the Organised Crime Act of 2010, which outlaws the financing, recruitment and support for terrorist activities.

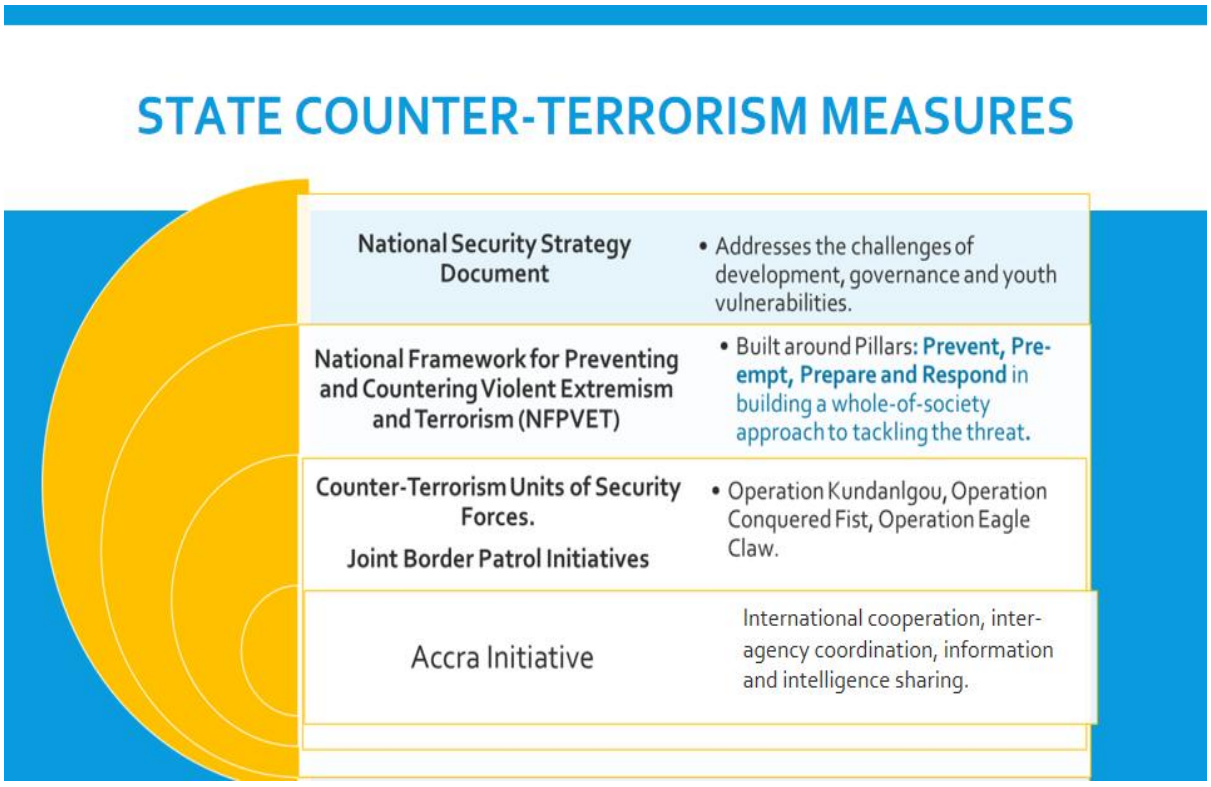
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[11] https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IPI-E-RPT-Emerging-Lessons-from-MINUSMAweb.pdf
[12] https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/19089.pdf
[13] https://www.kaiptc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/occational-paper-48.pdf. Accessed on December 31, 2025.
[14] [14]Aubyn, F. K. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa: Assessing Ghana's Vulnerabilities, Resilience and Responses. *ACCORD Conflict Trends Issue 3.*

Ghana's National Security Strategy, adopted in 2021, lays out a comprehensive framework for safeguarding the nation with the promotion of a people-centred and whole-of-society approach. This is enhanced by the National Framework for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism (NAFPCVET) designed and intended to address violent extremism and terrorism in Ghana. The NAFPCVET maps out all relevant stakeholders and clearly defines the context, stakeholders and a structure outlining coordination roles and responsibilities.

The PREVENT pillar, as part of the four pillars (including PRE-EMPT, PROTECT AND RESPOND) provides a leading role for CSOs in terms of education[15], awareness creation and capacity building training for local community actors in building resilience against radicalisation and potential for recruitment. Others, such as the Cyber Security Act[16] of 2020 (Act 1038), the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2008 (Act 762) and the dictates of the Accra Initiative are reference materials for PCVE work.

On an operational level, Muqthar[17] notes that the Accra Initiative has undertaken various steps to bolster border security. Counter-terrorism operations and exercises, such as 'Operation Conquered Fist', 'Exercise Eagle Claw 2020' and Operation Koundanlgou I, II, III and IV, have been undertaken to manage threats, empower security forces to prevent potential terror attacks and address transnational crime in border regions. Additionally, the provision of social services, including health screenings, borehole drilling and construction of bridges in vulnerable border communities, is crucial. According to Aubyn (2021), these counter-terrorism efforts, with the provision of crucial services in remote and vulnerable areas, have contributed to a strong and resilient front that has likely deterred potential attacks in Ghana.



Source: Ghana's Exposure to Violent Extremism. (2022) by WACCE.

[15] https://www.peacecouncil.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/NAFPCVET-Document-29-Jan-2020.pdf
[16] https://ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/1800/CYBERSECURITYACT,2020(ACT1038).pdf?sequence=1
[17] Muqthar, M.M. (2022). The Threat of Violent Extremism to Coastal States: Ghana's Exposure to Violent Extremism. West Africa Report: Ghana No. 003/2022.

The World Bank-funded Gulf of Guinea Social Cohesion (SOCO) project is the biggest regional PCVE initiative of about a US$450 million credit facility for projects aimed at preventing conflict spillover from the Sahel and improving socio-economic resilience against extremism. Ghana's portion of the fund (US$150 million) has been used for implementation since 2022, focusing on six regions in the northern part of Ghana. The implementation of SOCO has been criticised for its failure to involve Civil Society and also to include direct PVE activities, as the activities were disproportionately focused on economic and infrastructural development.

REGIONAL LEVEL INITIATIVES AND APPROACHES

The security emergency in the region has occasioned the rapid development of national frameworks and initiatives across West Africa. Ghana's NAFPCVET is often cited for its comprehensiveness. Similarly, Benin and Togo have produced national strategies that create space for 'whole of society' approaches.

Both Benin's High-Level Committee for the Fight Against Terrorism and Insecurity at Borders (CLTIF) and Togo's Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Prevention and Fight Against Violent Extremism (CIPLEV) emphasise the importance of inclusion. It consists of national-level actors represented by various stakeholders, including non-state actors, and is chaired by the Minister for the Interior. It has been decentralised to feature local-level actors in committees that are tasked to monitor and ensure the implementation of extremism-related interventions to prevent a possible spill-over into other parts of the country. Other assessments describe CIPLEV as an initiative that showcases the strengths of a holistic approach to countering violent extremism. Indeed, Togo's CIPLEV could provide a blueprint for effective PCVE in countries that have not been impacted yet.

Among regional PCVE initiatives, a key departure is the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDPs) programme created by the Burkinabe government, which has since mobilised over 90,000 youth as auxiliary forces between 2020 and 2025 to augment the military forces against the extremist onslaught. Whilst it continues to face allegations of human rights abuses against local populations, the VDPs remain the central security strategy under Captain Traore to tackle terrorism in Burkina Faso.

ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative serve as key regional security platforms for all member states. But their work has been undermined by a lack of effective coordination. As both ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative struggle for goodwill and trust, there is very little will and room for effective coordination. Coordination is essentially left to individual state-to-state level engagements.

Internally, the many layers of security actors in some of the Francophone countries of the region, including Togo and Benin, often exhibit competition over resources and sometimes duplication of roles. Interviews with practitioners revealed that the gendarmerie and the Police sometimes compete over jurisdiction, resources and visibility.

But this is not limited to the Francophone countries. Ghana's national security sector has two different ministries (Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defence), in addition to over 22 other national level agencies that are tasked to address security vulnerabilities, including the National Centre for Coordination of Early Warning and Response Mechanism (NCCRM), National Peace Council (NPC), National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), National Commission for Small Arms and Light Weapons, National Cybersecurity Authority, National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO), Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), Ghana Boundary Commission and Economic and Organised Crime Office (EOCO). This situation makes competition, duplication of roles or siloed approaches inevitable.

Existing PCVE Interventions and Initiatives in Coastal West Africa					
Country	**Benin**	**Burkina Faso**	**Cote 'Ivoire**	**Ghana**	**Togo**
PCVE Initiatives	CLTIF SOCO	NSP – DC VDPs	SOCO CT Academy	NAFPCVET National Security Strategy SOCO	CIPLEV SOCO
Responsible Agency	State-driven, Securitised.	State-driven, securitised	State-driven, Relies on local governance structures	State-driven, securitised. Relies on local governance structures.	State-driven, securitised.
Regional Initiatives	Accra Initiative	Accra Initiative	Accra Initiative	Accra Initiative	Accra Initiative
CSO Roles	Limited	Very limited	Limited	Limited	Limited

Source: National-Local Cooperation in Addressing Violent Extremism (2023). WACCE

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIONS

CS remains the most visible, pervasive and active PCVE stakeholder in addressing VE in West Africa. Among the various initiatives, research, capacity-building training and education/awareness creation have been the dominant interventions across countries. Awareness creation and community engagement, with dialogue platforms, have been the commonest mechanisms in countries that are still in the 'Prevention Mode', including Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo.

Apart from Nigeria, Mental Health and Psychosocial well-being (MHPSS) with trauma-informed programmes are almost non-existent in coastal states where VE manifestations are fundamentally different from what pertains in the Sahel. Nigeria has more advanced Civil Society capacity and experience in PCVE interventions, not only in the areas of traditional capacity-building training and research, but also in MHPSS, reintegration and trauma-informed PCVE interventions.

Research and Capacity-Building

STAR-Ghana, in a consortium with two other partners – WACCE and FOSDA, is currently implementing a PVE programme in 12 districts in Northern Ghana with funding from the Forein, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). It is aimed at strengthening resilience against VE through capacity-building for law enforcement officers, livelihood support and enhancing women's voices for peace in border communities in Northern Ghana.

In 2019, **STAR-Ghana Foundation** published a report on the Roadmap for Sustainable Peace, Security and Development in Northern Ghana, focusing on the drivers of conflicts and violent extremism[18]. The report identified issues such as prolonged chieftaincy succession and land rights disputes, high levels of youth unemployment, limited trust in the criminal justice system, stereotyping along ethnic identity lines, growing development inequalities, political polarisation and radicalisation. Their current interventions include a PVE project funded by GCERF on building resilience in border communities in Northern Ghana. **WANEP** has implemented a broad-range of PCVE-related programmes owing to its vast network within the region. WANEP has a network of 700 local organisations across West Africa. It has conducted three major comprehensive studies in PCVE in five countries, in collaboration with local CSOs in terms of data collection. One of the major research

[18] Star-Ghana Foundation (2019). *Roadmap For Sustainable Peace, Security and Development In Northern Ghana.* Accra: Star-Ghana Foundation. Find here https://star-ghana.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/ROADMAP-FOR-SUSTAINING-PEACE-AND-DEVELOPMENT-IN-NORTHERN-GHANA-Final.pdf

initiatives is the WANEP Research and Action for Peace Network (ReCAP) in 18 countries in West and Central Africa, launched in February 2023, in partnership with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). It has been instrumental in building capacity to strengthen the role of experts in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and violent extremism across 18 countries in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin.

In 2020, **WANEP,** in collaboration with ELVA and ECOWAS, carried out research on the spill-over of violent extremist movements into Littoral States in West Africa, focusing on Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, and Benin. The study uncovered significant community-level drivers of radicalisation towards violent extremism in Ghana[19]. Before that WANEP had conducted comprehensive studies providing analysis of the issues in the Sahel – Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso – to understand the nature and scope of the situation. Based on this study, a lot of interventions, such as capacity building, sensitisation, building community resilience, enhancing early warning and early response, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence, have been carried out. In addition to these, relying on its offices (network) across West Africa, WANEP provides regular security briefings on the security situation in West Africa to ECOWAS ambassadors in Abuja, as well as national-level institutions such as NCCE and NPC. **WACCE** commenced its first major PCVE research on the Vulnerability of Muslim Youth in Tertiary Educational Institutions to Radicalisation, in collaboration with the British High Commission (BHC) during 2018-2019. It targeted Muslim youth on six campuses of five universities, namely, the University of Ghana (UG), University of Cape Coast (UCC), Islamic University College, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and the two campuses of the University for Development Studies (UDS) in Tamale and Nyankpala. The study uncovered that whilst there exist significant vulnerabilities for radicalisation in Ghanaian educational institutions, there was no evidence, suggesting that university environments are supportive of radicalisation. The report recommended enhanced education and awareness creation, and strengthening of guidance and counselling units in universities to provide mentorship and guidance for students.

WACCE's report[20] titled 'The Threat of Violent Extremism to Coastal States: Ghana's Exposure to Violent Extremism' (2022) highlights the magnitude and nature of the threat to Ghana. WACCE is currently in a consortium with STAR-Ghana and FOSDA, with the support of FCDO, to undertake capacity-building training activities for 360 state security officers across 12 districts of border communities. The intervention revealed that most security officials have a low-level understanding of VE and PCVE. Subsequent reports issued by WACCE continue to underline the inadequacy of education and awareness of the threat in local communities. This is corroborated by **CDD-Ghana's** research reports[21], which highlight that most of the population in the border communities and security personnel lack adequate knowledge of the threat. This exposes them to terrorist propaganda, narratives and radicalising rhetoric. CDD-Ghana recommends the strengthening of capacity-building and awareness-creation, and sensitisation, especially for communities vulnerable to the threat.

Promediation's studies outlined the drivers of, and Ghana's increasing vulnerability to, violent extremism. It highlighted the spillover effects of the security situation in the Sahel, porous borders and local dynamics in the country's northern frontiers.[22] The report argued for the strengthening of the defense and security apparatus, as well as local governance and economic development.

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[19] ELVA, WANEP and ECOWAS (2021) Tracking Violent Extremism Spillover from the Sahel to Littoral West Africa. Analytical Report. Find here https://elva.org/wp-content/uploads/Extremism-Spillover-Full-Report-Elva-04-10-2021.pdf

[20] Muqthar, M.M. (2022). The Threat of Violent Extremism to Coastal States: Ghana's Exposure to Violent Extremism. West Africa Report: Ghana No. 003/2022.

[21] CDD-Ghana (2022). *Assessing Community Sensitivity to Cross-Border Security in Ghana.: A Baseline Survey.* Accra: CDD-Ghana. Available at https://cddgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Cross-BORDER-

[22] Promediation (2021). The Jihadist Threat in Northern Ghana and Togo: Stocktaking and Prospects for Containing the Expansion. Available at https://www.kas.de/documents/261825/16928652

Livelihood Support and Community Resilience

WACCE's two-year Mining4Peace programme, funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), features skills training and support for vulnerable youth in five mining regions of Ghana. CDD-Ghana's skills development programme (small ruminants and guinea fowl farming, currently ongoing in 15 districts in Upper East, Upper West and North East regions) is targeted at youth in vulnerable populations along Ghana's northern borders. The project also involves revitalising community mediation committees with technical training in all the 15 districts (December 2025) and enhancing the economic capacity of local community members. Similar interventions exist, including those by STAR-Ghana, NORSAC, SONGTABA, YEFL, CDA and RISE Ghana.

Reintegration and Trauma-Informed Interventions

With the exclusion of Nigeria, deradicalisation and reintegration are new in coastal states. CSOs, including the Neem Foundation, Equal Access and Kishimi Foundation, have played leading roles not only in advancing MHPSS, but also in reintegration efforts. The Kishimi Foundation, with counsellors for survivors[23] of violence, and Neem Foundation, with its 'Counseling on Wheels' programme, both in North Eastern Nigeria, have had a major impact on PCVE practice in Nigeria regarding MHPSS.

Policy Dialogues and Engagements

The complexity and evolving nature of PCVE imply that only a small number of CSOs have built the requisite capacity to initiate PCVE policy engagements. WANEP, CDD-Ghana, STAR-Ghana and WACCE having built decades of leadership capacity in the areas of security and governance, have had various policy actions on PCVE. For instance, STAR-Ghana has instituted an annual Regional Security Dialogue that allows security chiefs and heads of government institutions to share relevant information and discuss them to inform policy action. The dominant issues have been around enhancing institutional structures and capacity to address chieftaincy, ethnic and land disputes, as well as the challenge of marginalisation of ethnic Fulbes and their integration. This year's dialogue, held in Tamale, involved Ghana's Minister the for Interior, who shared relevant data on the security situation in the northern parts of Ghana, and responded to questions on security and governance. STAR-Ghana plans to hold an expanded regional security dialogue involving security heads from Burkina Faso and Togo in an attempt to enhance regional security collaboration across borders.

WANEP's Early Warning and Early Response mechanism has been popularised and adopted by ECOWAS and various West African states. Among other things, it serves as a key tool for policy-level engagements in member countries for forums, conferences, security briefings and consultations. CDD-Ghana regularly organises forums that serve as platforms for interrogating security-governance linked themes. WACCE as a pioneer organisation in the PVE space has held various national forums and dialogue sessions involving national security and civil society actors with the aim of shaping national PCVE efforts.

Regional Collaborations and Mechanisms

The collapse of the Accra Initiative and the strained relations between ECOWAS and the AES countries leave a major collaboration vacuum that undermines the regional collaborative efforts. But it is believed that Ghana's creation of the **Office of the Special Envoy** to the Sahel has summoned a new ray of oomph for ECOWAS-AES collaboration. It is the attempt by the government of Ghana to reestablish trust and goodwill between ECOWAS and the AES countries. The engagements with AES have been characterised by Ghana's support in terms of logistics, information sharing and solidarity actions.

[23] https://atjlf.org/rebuilding-lives-through-psychosocial-support-in-northeast-nigeria/#:~:text=Kishimi%20Foundation's%20impact%2C%20however%2C%20extends,for%20sustainable%20mental%20health%20services. Accessed on December 31, 2025.

Whilst the aim of the Office of the Special Envoy is not to bring the AES back into the fold of ECOWAS, it seeks to structure a cooperation mechanism that allows the two entities to work together for mutual security outcomes.

STAKEHOLDER AND CSO PROJECT COLLABORATIONS

The CDD-Ghana, WANEP, WACCE, STAR-Ghana Foundation, WACCE and FOSDA work with national security bodies – defense, police, immigration and intelligence agencies – to build multi-agency PCVE capacity. Beyond this, there are collaborations in the form of project consortia that have become a common feature that has allowed multiple CSOs to work together, pooling their respective capabilities for greater effect.

WANEP has a strong collaborative footprint in the region on various research and capacity-building projects with UNOWAS in Dakar, UNDP Regional Office in Ghana and Dakar, and ISS. Although the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework and Counter Terrorism Action Plan ended in 2024, WANEP continues to provide support with capacity-building, briefings and community engagement actions.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES

Stakeholder Mapping – Even though the NAFPCVET appropriately features all relevant institutions, it ignores an important agency like the National Centre for Coordination of Early Warning and Response Mechanism (NCCRM). Whether this is an oversight or deliberate action, it is a fundamental error that should be revisited. NCCRM is a product of ECOWAS regional security efforts, and serves as Ghana's central hub for monitoring, analysing and reacting to potential security challenges while ensuring a coordinated national response.
As in other West African nations, NCCRM was set up under ECOWAS' framework to identify security threats in West Africa in ways that bridge the gap between warning and response by focusing on national security and human security through strategic research, inter-agency collaboration and community engagement. It operates under, and reports to, Ghana's Presidency, coordinating with national bodies and ECOWAS to ensure proactive action against emerging regional crises. Such an agency is fundamentally crucial to addressing VE in the country. The current revision of the framework must feature the NCCRM to tap into its capabilities.

Lack of Action Plans – The NAFPCVET implementation requires action plans at the regional levels to allow CS and local-level actors to participate in it. In addition, Ministries lack sectoral plans on PCVE.

Limited Consultation – Most CSO voices are concerned that at the time of developing the framework, there was no adequate consultation of CSOs. Also, there has not been sufficient and deliberate efforts at educating CSOs on the framework and the various state PCVE interventions.This is why many CSOs are only learning about the framework and its content.

Operational gaps – How do we link early warning and early response? There has always been a gap between the two, as state actors maintain a weak collaborative link with CSOs.

Project-Driven Interventions – Most PCVE interventions are project-driven, instead of being internalised by local structures. Among other things, the continuous reliance on external donors makes this inevitable.

Monitoring and Evaluation – Evaluation is overly focused on the number (participants, beneficiaries, communities, interventions or activities), rather than the impact of the interventions. It emphasises output over outcomes.

Disproportionate Focus on Kinetic Approaches – Whilst there is growing appreciation of the fact that PCVE must shift from combat approaches, most collaborations are still state-centric as they remain attractive to state actors.

Funding Constraints – PCVE in Ghana lacks dedicated local funding. Most PCVE initiatives are donor-funded (e.g. Japan, UNDP, USAID, Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden). Apart from the USAID, which is no longer available, it is projected that the Swedish funding stream may end in 2026, creating real difficulties for especially gendern-related programmes to be implemented.
Beyond this, most funding programmes are for short-term interventions. This does not allow for project sustainability. CSOs are concerned that sometimes, it is not only about the unavailability, but also the short-term nature of it.

Crowded Architecture and Coordination – Ghana's National Security Architecture manifests as a 'crowded space' characterised by inter-ministerial, securitised/militarised, centralised and role-duplication activities. This creates agency competition, 'turf wars' and ineffective coordination.

Low Technical Capacity – The poor understanding and sometimes characterisation of the threat by state actors remain a major challenge. Whilst state actors remain in the lead role in addressing VE challenges, there is inadequate appreciation of the challenge and its nuances.

Community Level Resistance – In various remote border areas in West Africa, limited state presence, governance deficit and local mistrust of formal institutions undermine goodwill for interventions and make PCVE outreach more challenging.

Coordination Complexity – Aligning diverse stakeholders — security forces, CSOs and local authorities across multiple countries and sectors, requires significant coordination capacity. In spite of the multiplicity of security agencies in Ghana, there is no central agency or mechanism to coordinate PCVE interventions. Depending on the project, CSOs choose which stakeholders or partners to deal with or share with.

Safety of Staff and Operations – Insecurity, especially within the AES, has undermined the safety and security of staff of some CSOs. WANEP provides accounts of the safety concerns and challenges they encounter in some countries: ''In some of the AES countries, once you talk about PCVE, they become resistant[24]''. This is partly because they suspect that some CSOs are acting in cahoots with foreign powers to undermine their security. ''We have had some of our staff being escorted away from project sites in places such as Mali and Burkina Faso''. But ''our early warning activities in those countries have not been suspended yet''. In some parts of these counties, including Nigeria, where there are ongoing kidnappings or attacks, some CSOs stay away from operations.
If they (state) are unaware of an organisation's PCVE intervention, such entity is viewed as an agent of a foreign actor. What has worked for WANEP is that it proactively engages the authorities to assure them of the goals and intentions of its programmes in order to build goodwill and support for their work.

Over-crowding – The **Over-crowding** of CSOs in PCVE space without capacity undermines the effectiveness of PCVE implementation.

[24] Interview with Dr. Festus Aubyn (2025).

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

There are overwhelmingcalls for a shift from securitized (kinetic) approach to a people-centred approach to interventions. Interventions must be human rights-compliant and devoid of human rights abuses, as such abuses push vulnerable people to join VEOs.

Lessons Learnt

PCVE will suffer without the effective role of Civil Society. It will survive under collective security in which the role of the state is supplemented by those by non-state actors, giving meaning to the concept of hybrid security[25] governance being popularised by Bagayoko et al (2016).

Field experiences reveal that PCVE is not new to only civilian populations. It includes state security forces in border communities who demonstrate a very limited understanding. Junior officers who are often deployed for such training are novices in PCVE who possess requisite intellectual rigor for the appreciation of the threat and its dynamics.

Whilst the SOCO project serves as a potential game-changer if tweaked appropriately for PCVE, the GCERF project serves as a blueprint for effective collaboration in PCVE in Ghana.

Funding constraints go beyond limited funding. ‘‘Sometimes, it is not only about the unavailability, but the short-term nature of it’’. – WANEP (Dr. Festus Aubyn).

Recommendations

Increase Sustainable Funding

Allocate domestic budgetary support for PCVE programmes to reduce reliance on external donors. It is recommended that the state deploys innovative funding strategies, including expanding the funding scope to cover private sector actors, such as financial institutions, construction companies, telecom and technologies, not only to raise money but also to solicit their services. They can support in construction of motorable roads, provision of telecommunications infrastructure and provision of medical screening and key services in hard-to-reach areas.

Expand Community Engagement

Formalise mechanisms where CSOs and local leaders are central actors in early warning, counter-narratives and resilience-building. Increased engagement with the state helps to build sustainable goodwill and support for state measures.

Data & Research Prioritisation

Support community-level research and monitoring systems that inform adaptive PCVE strategies linked to emerging drivers of radicalisation.

Regional Integration

Deepen Ghana’s implementation of regional PCVE frameworks (e.g. through a new initiative, as the Accra Initiative appears defunct). A new initiative must include all regional partners that emphasises a regional approach to addressing VE.

Evaluation

PCVE must emphasise a focus on the impact, rather than the number of interventions, participants/beneficiaries or geographical areas covered.

Strengthen National PCVE Coordination

Enhance the mandate and resources of the NCTC to improve integration between security, development and civic actors nationwide.

Continuous Research and Policy Integration

PCVE interventions must be informed by up-to-date evidence, evaluation and adaptive strategies responsive to evolving threats.

[25] https://www.africansecuritynetwork.org/assn/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Hybrid-security-governance-in-Africa-rethinking-the-foundations-of-security-justice-and-legitimate-public-authority-1.pdf