



PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NORTHERN GHANA: UNDERSTANDING THE INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE MECHANISMS AND PRACTICES OF BORDER COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism (VE) is a major concern for peace and security in West Africa (NATO, 2022), having destabilised the Sahel region (Le Roux, 2019a; Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024) and also threatened coastal states (Aubyn, 2021). Despite measures implemented at both the national and regional level, such as the Accra Initiative and the G-5 Sahel Joint Task Force in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Chad (NSD-S Hub & ACSRT, 2022), violent extremist organisations (VEOs) continue to conduct attacks in many countries in West Africa (Le Roux, 2019b; Eizen-ga, 2020; Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2020). Ghana remains at risk of VE infiltration and attacks owing to its proximity to Sahel nations, porous borders, the refugee influx from the Sahel, and its perceived potential for VEOs such as JNIM, particularly around its northern borders (NSD-S Hub & ACSRT, 2022; Bukari & Koren, 2025). The risk of VE in the country is further exacerbated by factors such as the socioeconomic marginalisation of remote communities, inequalities, youth discontent and unemployment, cross-border criminal activities, and the limited essential services and state presence in remote areas (Aning & Amedzrator, 2022; National Commission for Civic Education, 2023; UNDP Ghana, 2023).

In order to build resilience and counter the threat from VE, Ghana has implemented various mechanisms and policy frameworks, including the National Framework for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and Terrorism (NFPCVET), Operation Conquered Fist, the Accra Initiative, and awareness-raising through the “See something, Say something” campaign (Appiah-Boateng & Osei-Kufuor, 2024). The NFPCVET emphasises the principles of prevention, pre-emption, protection, and response, and recommends the integration of national policies and local protection mechanisms, for example by harnessing the potential contribution of traditional leaders to maintaining peaceful co-existence between communities and ethnic groups (Ministry of National Security, 2019, p. 15).

Aside from these specifically targeted measures, other legal provisions are mobilised in anti-extremism efforts, including laws concerning money laundering,

organised crime, and terrorism. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and state institutions such as the National and Regional Peace Councils and National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) undertake capacity-building activities and awareness-raising campaigns about VE in northern Ghana, to build communities' resilience (Appiah-Boateng & Osei-Kufuor, 2024).

Community resilience is crucial for preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) (Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Djanato, 2024; Flan, 2024). While the Ghanaian government acknowledges its importance (Ministry of National Security, 2019), and the need for a holistic approach combining state interventions and local mechanisms, research suggests that resilience-building efforts in Ghana's border communities have mainly adopted securitised and top-down approaches, neglecting indigenous mechanisms and practices (The Commonwealth & National Peace Council, 2022; Appiah-Boateng & Osei-Kufuor, 2024). Furthermore, local actors and institutions outside the security sector have been only minimally included in counter-extremism efforts (The Commonwealth & National Peace Council, 2022). Against this background, this policy brief explores the indigenous resilience mechanisms and practices—understood here as those using community-based participatory approaches (Yadeun-Antuñano & Vieira, 2019; Crowe et al., 2024)—of border communities in northern Ghana towards PCVE. Specifically, this policy brief: 1) maps the indigenous resilience mechanisms and practices of border communities; and 2) analyses the implications of the use of these mechanisms and practices for policy related to PCVE.

The study uses a qualitative approach based on interviews with key community actors. This design was chosen because there is little empirical information on community-based, bottom-up approaches to PCVE in Ghana. A qualitative design therefore offers the advantage of providing in-depth and nuanced analysis of how border communities mobilise, and make meaning of, their local practices for resilience against VE. The study gives voice to local actors, who have so far not been adequately included in PCVE efforts in the country. A total of 26 key actors were purposively selected for interview, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, youth, women, security personnel, assembly members, members of community watchdog groups (CWGs), and local political authorities. The interviewees were drawn from Sapelliga and Zebilla in the Upper East Region, and Hamile, Fielmuo, Nandom, Lawra, and Wa West in the Upper West Region. These actors were selected because of their profile as frontline local defence actors who hold trust and legitimacy within their communities, and are therefore well positioned to bridge national policies and local realities. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data. In addition, secondary data—including journal articles, policy briefs, research reports and other online materials—were reviewed to provide contextual information. The study adhered to ethical principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. Pseudonyms have been used for study participants. However, the use of a qualitative approach and a small sample size limit the generalisability of the findings.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Northern Ghana's diverse religious and ethnic makeup, including Christians, Muslims, and followers of traditional African religions (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021), might be expected to make extremist recruitment and radicalisation difficult. Despite violence and radicalisation among Muslim groups in Ghana (Aning & Abdallah, 2013), this diversity fosters peaceful coexistence and tolerance (Adam et al., 2024; Assanful, 2023). Nonetheless, the Ministry of National Security (2019) has affirmed the existence of religious radicalisation in the country, and argued this is the result of "wrongful" religious teachings. The step from radicalisation to violent extremism may then be exacerbated by governance gaps in areas such as poverty, unemployment, marginalisation, underdevelopment, and corruption. Yahuza et al. (2025) identify several other factors facilitating the transition of Muslim youth to violent extremism, including identity crises, exposure to extremist narratives online and across borders, and socioeconomic exclusion. They point in particular to the practice of "extreme love for religious leaders" and the "influx of audio tapes/videos of Nigerian scholars into the Ghanaian Islamic mainstream media/Saudi graduates" (p. 134).

Northern Ghana's communities have indigenous mechanisms and practices that are effective in preventing and addressing conflicts, violence, and shared problems (Bukari, 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2019). Traditional and religious leaders use local knowledge and customs to foster cohesion and address disputes (Osei-Kufuor & Bukari, 2022). However, the region is vulnerable owing to its porous borders (Ghana Boundary Commission, 2024), and social cohesion is threatened by several types of social tensions: inter-ethnic and/or intercommunal conflict (Agyeman, 2021; Tengzu, 2024), farmer-herder conflict (Soeters et al., 2017; Bukari, 2017; Ahmed, 2022), and conflicts within some Muslim communities¹. However, these conflicts have not been directly connected to VE (Yaro & Kipo-Sunyezi, 2024).

Researchers have observed various cases in West Africa where indigenous mechanisms and practices have supported community resilience against VE. Flan (2024) finds that community-based structures and mechanisms in northern Côte d'Ivoire, such as traditional and religious leaders, support resilience against VE by resolving disputes, countering hate speech, advocating peace, raising awareness, promoting inter-religious dialogue, and sharing VE-related information with local authorities. Sajid et al. (2021) assert that when religious leaders participate actively in PCVE, they help to build community resilience against extremist recruitment and radicalisation. Similarly, Djanato et al., (2024) find that awareness-raising campaigns conducted by local actors, particularly women, help to preserve peace and increase young people's understanding of VE. These community-based mechanisms serve as early intervention mechanisms against VE. Furthermore, communities with strong, trusting relationships are able to prevent extremist organisations from recruiting vulnerable populations, as these relationships (between family, friends, faith leaders, state institutions, CSOs, etc.) underpin the collective mobilisation of resources for solving communal problems, reducing people's vulnerability, and PCVE (Schanzer et al., 2016; Ellis et al., 2016; Dalgaard-Nielsen & Schack, 2016; Ellis & Abdi, 2017). For example, community-based youth organisations in North Waziristan in Pakistan used social activities, education, and awareness-raising campaigns to rebuild trust, promote peace, and strengthen social cohesion in a post-conflict context (Makki & Akash,

¹ In the past decade, tensions among the orthodox Muslim community in the Nandom Zongo community of the Upper West Region have led to violent confrontations and, at times, the closure of the central Mosque. The conflict started as a religious leadership struggle, but later became implicated in divisions between ethnic and linguistic categories. See Kuupiel (2021) and Kuupiel & Nangwele (2022, 2025).

2022). In northern Ghana, family, friendship, cultural, economic, and linguistic ties across the Ghana-Burkina Faso borderlands have been found to facilitate trade, access to resources, education, and medical care (Aning & Amedzrator, 2022; Bernard, 2025).

1 INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE MECHANISMS AND PRACTICES

Several indigenous mechanisms, structures, and routinised practices in Ghana's northern border communities have been observed to help mobilise collective responses against VE. These include mobilisations by traditional and religious leaders, CWGs, social networks, the education of young people by women, intercommunity social activities, and stop-and-search of strangers and traders.

1.1 MOBILISATIONS BY TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Traditional leaders in border communities play a crucial role in PCVE by mobilising community members and resources, convening meetings, and supporting CWGs. They also share early warning information, interrogate suspicious elements, and refer perceived VE threats to state security. Chiefs and religious leaders collaborate to educate community members about VE and precautionary measures against it. Religious leaders use their sermons and religious gatherings to educate and raise awareness about VE. For instance, these religious leaders stated:

Education, education, education, that is what we do. We do regular education about violent extremism through our sermons and during other religious gatherings. We report suspicious individuals and activities to security agencies for necessary actions and also encourage our communities to do so. You know Ketuo is just at the border so the risk is high. So we tell them to say something when they see something suspicious. (interview, Catholic priest in Nandom, 24 May 2025)

I advise my people that for the fear of Allah, they should not try to engage in any of these [violent extremist] activities. It is not only violent extremism we speak against in the Mosques but other social vices like stealing, fighting, smoking and so on. These activities are against Islam and we must not engage in them. We have been hearing of violent extremism in our neighbouring countries and how destructive it is. So, we use those countries as examples to advise our people never to think of engaging in it. Even some few days ago, we had a marriage ceremony here, where we use it as an opportunity to talk about violent extremism to the youth. Any gathering we have in the community we speak against violent extremism and other social vices. (interview, Muslim leader in Nandom, 23 May 2025)

These awareness-raising activities by religious leaders have contributed to increased vigilance among their communities. For instance, a Catholic priest in Nandom indicated that, in June 2019, members of the Hamile Catholic Church arrested a Burkinabe national who entered the church with a pistol and ammunition. Furthermore, interviewees explained that traditional leaders use community meetings to assess risks, and also work with assembly members (elected members of the district assembly), unit committees (community-level local government committees), and security agencies to raise awareness in schools, churches, and mosques. Some religious groups, such as the Catholic Church in Hamile, have also undertaken to monitor human activities and early warning signs along the borders. According to an interviewed Catholic priest, two people from the Kandemegangn and Bekyiineteng communities in the Nandom Municipality of the Upper West Region have been trained by the church to monitor human activities along the borders, including the use of devices capable of automatically recording and photographing human movements. The recorded data are automatically sent to a central system located in Wa (the regional capital), and used to inform response measures. Interviews also revealed that Catholic leaders facilitate the relocation of displaced individuals who have fled from violent extremist attacks in the Sahel to the Zini Refugee Camp in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region. This initiative, a collaboration between the Catholic Diocese of Wa, Caritas Ghana, and UNDP, aims to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants who have fled from the Sahel into border communities. A Catholic priest indicated that the refugee camp helps to protect these vulnerable individuals from exploitation, recruitment, radicalisation, and manipulation by violent extremist groups.

1.2 COMMUNITY WATCHDOG GROUPS

Northern Ghana's border communities have formed CWGs to detect, monitor, gather information on, and arrest suspicious people. These groups, such as the "Kolibuor" in Kokoligu in the Nandom Municipality of the Upper West Region, and the "Koglweogo" (often written "Colwego") in Sapelliga, Zebilla, and other Bawku West areas in the Upper East Region, are organised with a leadership structure and armed with cutlasses, and share information on social media platforms. The membership numbers of CWGs in border communities vary significantly: in Sapelliga (Upper East Region), the CWG has a stable membership of 30, while in Kokoligu (Upper West Region), the "Kolibuor" consists of around 20 members (fluctuating owing to migration) drawn from four sections of the community. Similarly, the membership of CWGs in Wa West District fluctuates considerably, as youth often migrate for better opportunities. The leadership structure of Sapelliga's "Koglweogo" includes a chairman, secretary, organiser, operational commander, assistant operational commanders, and a Council of Elders, each with specific roles in coordinating activities and collaborating with security agencies. In contrast, the "Kolibuor" lacks formal leadership roles and depends on collaboration with local authorities for information sharing and threat management.

These groups engage in community surveillance and are the first local response mechanism to threats of VE. Owing to the limited state security presence in remote border areas in northern Ghana (UNDP Ghana, 2023), CWGs are often formed by traditional leaders, opinion leaders, and community members to combat criminality and insecurity and promote community safety (Kuupiel & Aubyn, 2025). They rely on their local knowledge to detect and prevent criminality and address local security needs (Sowatey &

Atuguba, 2014). Interviews revealed that the activities of CWGs include patrolling, monitoring, detecting early warning signs, arresting suspected VE elements, community awareness-raising, assisting the Ghana Immigration Service in profiling people fleeing from VE in the Sahel, and combating crimes such as theft, drug trafficking, money laundering, arms trafficking, and armed robbery. A member of a CWG in Sapelliga stated:

We do a lot of things. We patrol the community and if we see anything suspicious we respond to it. If we see a stranger in the community, we normally pick up the person and interrogate them, and if we find out that you pose a danger to the community we hand you over to the police. We also educate people on “see something say something”, so that people will report any suspicious person or activity in the community to us or the police for response. And another thing, you know, because we know ourselves and the area very well, the Immigration people sometimes seek our help to profile the people who run from Burkina Faso into our community because of the terrorist attacks there. Then crime too is another thing we fight here. If you steal or rob we will arrest you and hand you over to the police. (interview, a member of Sapelliga’s CWG, 4 May 2025)

CWGs also collaborate with similar groups in Burkina Faso to share information and prevent VE. In Nandom Municipality, a political actor indicated that CWGs also assist in combating “galamsey” (illegal small-scale mining) activities along the borders, as this can be used to fund extremist groups. Community members engaged in fishing, farming, and hunting along the borders are recruited into CWGs owing to their knowledge of border terrain. Since extremist groups partly fund their activities through organised crime, CWGs sometimes (for example, in Bawku West) question community members with unexplained wealth or a lifestyle that does not match their apparent source of income.

1.3 SOCIAL NETWORKS AND CROSS-CUTTING RELATIONS AMONG ACTORS

Border communities also rely on their internal and external social networks to share information about VE activities, helping them to pre-empt and counter threats. Participants in some border communities indicated that family, cultural, and linguistic ties with border communities in Burkina Faso (that is, external social networks) serve as channels of information-sharing about VE attacks or movement towards their communities. An assembly member stated that:

We have our people in Burkina Faso. You know the Dagara are there and we are the same. They come in here and go every day. They pass through Kokoligu here to buy things. We intermarry too. So, they tell us anything about these terrorists and we too prepare. So, when we hear of anything, our local security group move in to arrest the person. (interview, assembly member from Kokoligu, 21 April 2025)

These cross-border social ties can in fact be of use both for extremist elements, who use them to seek refuge and evade arrest (Aning & Amedzrator, 2022; Bernard, 2025), and for border communities seeking to counter VE. Border communities utilise their local knowledge and social capital to identify and map unapproved routes, especially those that are unknown to security agencies, and which are used for illicit trade, or to enter and exit Ghana through their communities. CWGs such as the “Koglwego” in Sapelliga, Zebilla, and other Bawku West areas have established networks with their counterparts in border communities in Burkina Faso, allowing them to share information and collaborate to prevent extremist activities in their communities. The study revealed that, when residents in border communities receive VE-related information from their external networks in Burkina Faso, they pass this information on within and across communities in Ghana, again via their social networks, and through telephone calls and social media. Some border communities, including Dikpe and Bagri in Lawra Municipality, and Kokoligu, Bekyiiineteng, and Kandemegangn in Nandom Municipality, have adopted a practice of reporting families hosting people from Burkina Faso to the CWG and chiefs for identity verification. Participants explained that, because they share cross-border family, cultural, and linguistic ties with communities in Burkina Faso, some families host strangers under the guise of a family relation. Border communities therefore interrogate individuals from Burkina Faso who are hosted in the community about their family connections with their hosts, and evict them if they are found not to have genuine family ties. According to Kuupiel and Aubyn (2025), this practice enables border communities to verify the identity of strangers being hosted in the community and prevent infiltration by VEOs.

1.4 EDUCATION OF THE YOUTH BY WOMEN

Emmelkamp et al. (2020) argue that poor parental supervision is a risk factor for the radicalisation of children into VE. Women play a large role in border communities in educating young people on the dangers of VE and the need to avoid extremist ideologies and behaviours, as well as criminal activities, which are often exploited by VEOs to fund their operations. Women also play a prominent role in monitoring and reporting suspicious elements or events to CWGs. One of the participants stated that:

We encourage our women to educate the young ones at home to desist from bad behaviours like stealing and violence. The young ones can easily be deceived by extremists to join them, especially because there are no jobs and many of them are walking about in the community. Children are close to their mothers and listen to them more than us [men], so the women and our wives at home talk to the young ones to refrain from all vices. They also report any suspicious thing or person in the community. We tell them that when they see something, whether in the market place or anywhere, they should report. And they are doing that. (interview, member of CWG in Zebilla, 4 May 2025)

Women-led educational initiatives on VE focus on awareness, nonviolence, dialogue, tolerance, social cohesion, and preventing youth participation in illicit activities. These initiatives play a crucial role in enhancing young people’s awareness of VE tactics and the associated dangers, empowering them to resist extremist ideologies (Djanato et al., 2024).

1.5 INTERCOMMUNITY SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

In Sahelian countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali, VEOs exploit local grievances and conflicts to recruit and radicalise people (Ammour, 2020). To prevent this, border communities in northern Ghana regularly organise intercommunal social activities that foster unity, friendship, and peaceful coexistence between groups, such as football games and cultural festivals. The Kukur Bagr festival, a shared cultural festival among the Dagaaba and Sissala in the Fielmuo areas of the Upper West Region, promotes unity among the two ethnic groups, preventing VE from exploiting land disputes between them. A participant stated:

The yearly festival that we normally celebrate after harvesting, the Kukur Bagr, is usually celebrated among the surrounding villages of Fielmuo, and the Sissala people are part of it. When the land conflict erupted between us, the Sissala could not come to the Fielmuo Market. The Dagaabas would not allow them. So, the thing that actually pulls us together is the Kukur Bagr festival celebration. (interview, young person from Fielmuo, 20 April 2025)

Similarly, some communities have instituted inter-village football “gala”, as an assembly member explained:

One of the things we have done here to promote unity and peace is football gala. We organise football gala among the communities around here, including Kokoligu, Bekyiineteng, Kandemegangn, Dahil, Guri, Hamile, and the other surrounding communities. There is a cup for the winner and every community mobilises to motivate and cheer up their players. These games bring us together to play and laugh. They help us to be united and build friendships. This is helping to prevent tensions that can divide us. (interview, assembly member from Kokoligu, 21 April 2025)

The interviews revealed that, as communities play these games together, they interact, abandon divisive positions, and promote cohesion and solidarity among themselves. They therefore help prevent exploitation or radicalisation by VEOs.

1.6 STOP-AND-SEARCH OF STRANGERS AND TRADERS

In the Sahel, VEOs have exploited porous borders to expand, move arms, and access supplies (Center for Preventive Action, 2025; Institute for Security Studies, 2025). To prevent this, some border communities along the Black Volta in Lawra, Kokoligu, and Hamile areas engage in stop-and-search of strangers and traders entering or leaving their communities to Burkina Faso, by monitoring all border areas, including unapproved routes. The aim is to prevent people from carrying illicit items such as drugs, guns, or smuggled goods, and prevent VEOs from benefiting from or facilitating organised crime activities. This initiative, while not necessarily indigenous, is a bottom-up approach that is innovative compared to past counter-extremism efforts, which are typically top-down and exclude actors outside the security sector. It ensures the meaningful participation and inclusion of local actors in PCVE efforts.

2 LIMITS OF INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE MECHANISMS IN BORDER COMMUNITIES

Multiple challenges limit the effectiveness of border communities’ indigenous resilience mechanisms against VE. Key challenges include inadequate logistics, insufficient training, corrupt security officials, and poor telecommunications, all of which undermine their operational capacity.

2.1 LOGISTICAL CONSTRAINTS

Religious leaders indicated that logistical constraints limit the reach of their awareness-raising and capacity-building efforts. Similarly, CWGs reported a lack of vital resources such as transportation and protective gear, significantly affecting their morale. Financial support for their patrols is sporadic, with some assembly members providing small amounts of money (e.g., GH 30.00 or GH 50.00, approximately €2.30 and €3.80) for fuel. The interviews also revealed that the lack of protective equipment discourages youth participation: for example, in Wa West District the lack of life jackets limits volunteers’ willingness to patrol risky areas such as the Black Volta. An assembly member in Wa West District stated:

Our youth who are in the watchdog group usually patrol the Black Volta river using the canoe. Because people cross every day and [so we] make sure that we patrol it. But the problem is that they do not have life jackets to protect them from drowning. They do not have anything to withstand or fight back when these terrorists want to cross over here. The last time, criminals stole all my uncle’s cattle and sent them across to Burkina Faso. When they also steal things in Burkina, they bring them here. They are armed with guns and other things, and we are having just cutlasses, so you cannot do anything. That is one of the challenges we face. Many of the youth are now unwilling to volunteer as watchdog group members for fear of their lives. (interview, assembly member from Wa West District, 24 May 2025)

2.2 INADEQUATE CAPACITY AND TRAINING

Interviews revealed that a lack of capacity and training limit the ability of local actors to effectively contribute to PCVE. Although CSOs such as UNDP Ghana, Teen Talk Ghana, WANEP, USAID, and West African Centre for Counter Extremism (WACCE) have implemented capacity-building initiatives in border areas, some of the local actors interviewed reported having limited capacity for PCVE. An Islamic leader explained that:

We are unable to detect extremist individuals and acts early enough due to inadequate knowledge. Peace Council and NCCE have done well but we need more training because we sometimes see a lot of strangers here and we do not know how they got into Nandom. So, they should try and educate us more on violent extremism. (interview, Islamic leader from Nandom, 26 May 2025)

Similarly, many CWGs have not received adequate training in community policing, arrest protocols, and situational monitoring, which impacts the quality of their intelligence-gathering and their responsiveness to VE. Only the Sapelliga CWG has benefited from training support from UNDP Ghana and the National Peace Council (UNDP Ghana, 2025), while others in the Upper West Region reported receiving no training. Consequently, those groups without adequate training sometimes propagate unverified rumours, which heighten community fears regarding VE.

2.3 CORRUPT SECURITY OFFICIALS

Some interviewed security officers alleged that some of their colleagues accept bribes from individuals crossing on unapproved routes, facilitating illicit activities. Individuals engaged in illicit activities then use the routes guarded by these corrupt officials, instead of those monitored by CWGs or honest security officials (Kuupiel & Aubyn, 2025). Bernard (2025) affirms that some security officers at the borders take payments from cross-border traders without giving them a receipt, and people are therefore driven to use unapproved routes to evade extortion by certain security officers. These corrupt practices hinder CWGs' efforts—since they depend on cooperation with security forces—and contribute to the influx of strangers in border communities. A religious leader in Nandom stated:

The officers at our borders need to be diligent in their work. They should be sure of the kind of people entering and leaving the country. This, they are not doing. (interview, Islamic leader in Nandom, 26 May 2025)

Worryingly, UNDP Ghana (2023) asserts that border communities such as Hamile, Tumu, Gwollu, Wechiau, Charikpong, Dorimon, Babile (Upper West Region), and Mognori, Paga, Pulmakan, Kulungungu, and Missiga (Upper East Region) have become routes for illicit trade and the smuggling of grains, petrol, fertiliser, guns, motorbikes, cars, and clothes. Such illicit activities could be exploited by VEOs to finance their operations. Building community resilience against VE requires genuine partnerships between state institutions and communities (Ellis & Abdi, 2017). The corrupt activities of security forces at the borders can therefore undermine community-state security cooperation, thereby hindering collective PCVE efforts.

2.4 POOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Participants reported that poor telecommunications hinder the timely sharing of early warning information with security authorities in their communities. Assembly members, security officials, and community leaders in Wa West District noted that this issue prevents CWG patrols from promptly informing authorities about threats, thereby delaying responses to early warning signals, as explained by an interviewed assembly member:

One of our major problem here is network. Sometimes we can stay without good network for days. So, when our boys are patrolling the border and the Black Volta and see movement of strangers towards the community, they struggle to reach me. The security people have my number so that we can share information. But the problem is that, by the time you are receiving the information these strangers have come in and escaped. The last time they [CWG] saw some strangers from Burkina Faso crossing the border with cattle, they tried calling me but network was poor. When they got me and I relayed the information to the security, it was already too late. (interview, assembly member from Wa West District, 24 May 2025)

This emphasises the critical need for reliable network connectivity in border regions, to ensure effective early warning and response systems to VE threats.

3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE MECHANISMS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The use of indigenous resilience mechanisms and practices against VE in Ghana's northern border communities has several implications for policy and practice.

3.1 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings underscore the need for ongoing integration of community-based resilience mechanisms into Ghana's national strategy and policy framework for PCVE, to ensure a holistic approach to the threat, and promote local community ownership, involvement, and commitment to PCVE. This integration can be achieved through the use of community-led early warning and response, the creation of coordination forums, and co-management of border security. It also requires the inclusion of border community actors/leaders in decision-making regarding the planning, design, implementation, management, monitoring, and evaluation of VE responses. This would enhance operational capacity and community engagement, while aligning national strategies and local protection mechanisms with local realities. Both state agencies and border communities need each other in the fight against VE. In this regard, community engagement programmes are essential for building trust and fostering strong relationships between border communities and state security agencies.

CWGs can significantly contribute to community vigilance, intelligence gathering, and relaying early warning signals of VE. They can help intelligence agencies and peacebuilding CSOs gather real-time data. However, a lack of training for CWGs could lead to them acting as parallel security forces and courts, if they overstep their jurisdiction by arresting, trying, and punishing suspected VE elements or criminals. Traditional and religious leaders can also help raise awareness about VE within communities, as well as addressing tensions and promoting cohesion among ethnic groups. They are uniquely placed to use their social capital, local knowledge, practices, and customs to address local-level disputes and foster cohesion between different groups or identities (Osei-Kufuor & Bukari, 2022). Collaboration between Ghana's security agencies and border communities is crucial for PCVE.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Border communities in Ghana contribute to PCVE through local initiatives, mobilising resources, sharing information, and working through social networks. Social capital fosters unity, awareness, and solidarity among border communities. Mechanisms and practices in border communities' everyday interactions can enhance Ghana's counterinsurgency strategy and resilience to VE, serving as early warning systems and ensuring local ownership of and commitment to prevention efforts. This policy brief makes the following recommendations:

The Ghanaian government and national bodies

1. Integrate community-based resilience mechanisms into the national strategy for PCVE to promote a holistic approach, with local ownership and participation in prevention efforts.
2. Enhance community engagement programmes in border areas to foster strong and trusting relationships and increase local actors' willingness to share VE-related information with state authorities.
3. The National Centre for Coordination of Early Warning and Response Mechanism (NCCRM) should work with CSOs to train, resource, strengthen, and use CWGs as part of their early warning systems, to monitor, detect, and respond to VE activities promptly.

Civil society

1. CSOs such as WANEP should facilitate regular dialogue between Ghana's border communities and state security forces, and design and implement trust-building initiatives aimed at strengthening cooperation and preventing VE.
2. CSOs such as WANEP should support dialogue to assist in the resolution of disputes between border communities and groups, fostering cohesion and preventing extremists from exploiting local disputes.
3. CSOs such as WANEP and state institutions such as NCCE should design and implement awareness-raising initiatives about VE in Ghana's border communities, and build community leaders' capacity to conduct awareness-raising activities.

Border communities

1. Increase vigilance and promptly report vital early warning information to security authorities for response.
2. Collaborate and cooperate with one another and state security forces to enhance awareness, monitor cross-border activities, and share VE-related information.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chrispin MWINKYOGTAA KUUPIEL

Chrispin Mwinkyogtaa Kuupiel is a native of Danko, a community located in the Nandom Municipality of the Upper West Region of Ghana. He completed his elementary education at St. Paul's Primary School in 2007, and continued at St Andrews Junior High School, completing in 2009. Subsequently, he obtained secondary education (WASSCE Certificate) at Daffiamah Senior High School from 2009 to 2013. Following high school, he pursued higher education at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), earning a bachelor's degree in social studies education in 2018. He further advanced his studies, obtaining a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Human Rights, Conflict and Peace Studies in 2021. Additionally, Chrispin underwent professional training in mediation at the Marian Conflict Resolution Centre. Currently, he is a PhD Candidate specializing in Peace and Development Studies at the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Cape Coast (UCC). While pursuing his PhD, Chrispin worked with WANEP, SIPRI, and DRC under the REcAP Mentorship Programme as a Mentee. His research interests focus on violent extremism, conflict analysis and resolution, peacebuilding, political vigilantism, inter and intra-group conflict, and human rights.

LEGAL NOTICES

Research and Action for Peace network (REcAP network)

Trinity Avenue, O Mile 7 Road, Achimota-Accra
P. O. Box CT4434, Cantonments, Accra-Ghana
Link Rd, Dhaka

Tel: +233 302 411 638

Mail: recapsecretariat@wanep.org

www.recapnetwork.org

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