



COMMUNITY MECHANISMS AND STRUCTURES TO COUNTER THE THREAT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NORTHERN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

INTRODUCTION

Northern Côte d'Ivoire faces a growing threat from violent extremism, as illustrated by the attacks in Kafolo and Téhini.¹ This threat is exacerbated by ethnic tensions, territorial conflicts and socio-economic disparities, as well as the region's proximity to Mali and Burkina Faso, where several extremist groups operate. As a result, northern Côte d'Ivoire is becoming a strategic zone for terrorist groups. Characterized by impoverished populations, high unemployment and a lack of economic prospects, the region is fertile ground for the radicalization of young people.

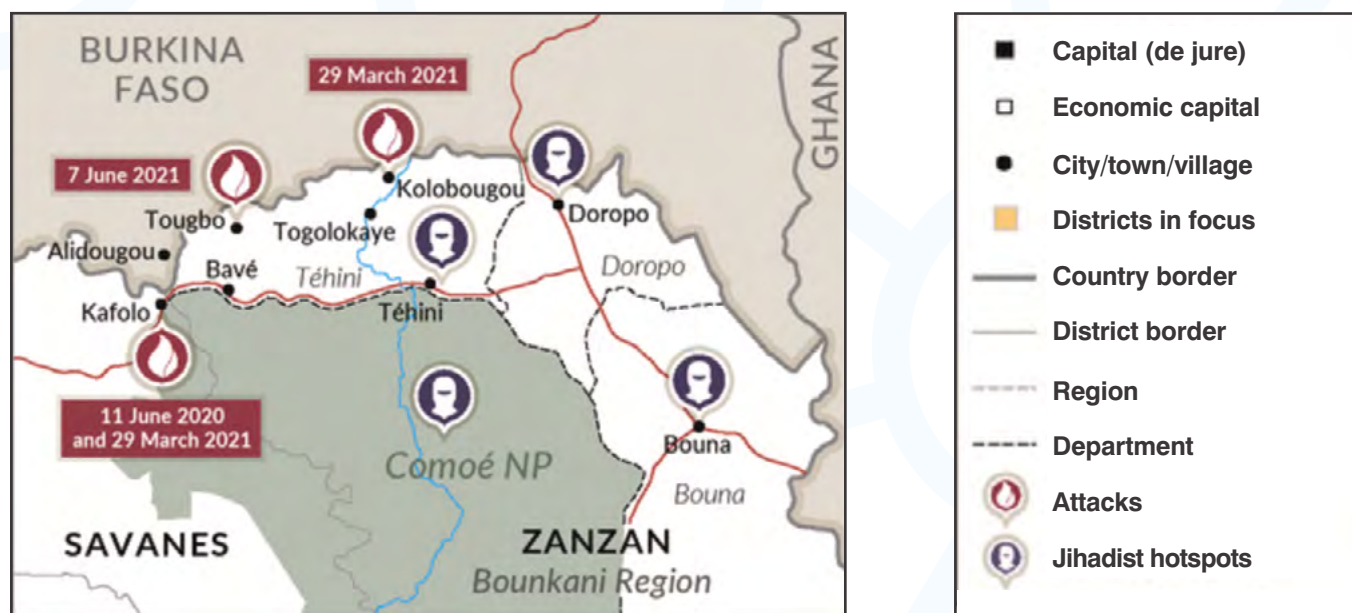
In the context of this report, radicalization can be viewed as a process whereby an individual or group ends up adopting violent forms of action directly linked to an extremist political, social and/or religious ideology, in doing so challenging the established political, social or cultural order.² Faced with this destabilizing threat, community mechanisms and structures - which encompass a diverse range of collaborative and participatory approaches - are essential for mitigating the risks of violent extremism and promoting social cohesion in northern Côte d'Ivoire.

Against the above backdrop, this policy brief analyses the various means and approaches by which these community initiatives help meet the threat of violent extremism. In highlighting both their effectiveness and limitations, the report points the way to possible solutions.

The analysis is based on primary and secondary data collected through individual interviews (with religious leaders, customary authorities, heads of state structures and civil society organizations) and documentary research.

¹ According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), violent extremism is defined as the advocacy, commission, preparation or support of ideologically motivated or justified acts of violence to achieve social, economic and political objectives. For the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), violent extremism 'refers to the opinions and actions of those who approve of or resort to violence in the name of ideological, religious or political objectives. This definition includes terrorism and other forms of sectarian and politically motivated violence'. Regarding the Kafolo and Téhini attacks, at least 18 members of the Ivorian defence and security forces were killed, notably in Kafolo on 11 June 2020 and 29 March 2021; in Kolobougou on 29 March 2021; and in Tougbo on 7 June 2021. ² Farhad Khosrokhavar, 'The trajectories of young French jihadists', *Études* vol. 6 (June 2015), pp. 33–44.

SITES OF JIHADIST ATTACKS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE, 2016-2021



Source: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 'Northern Côte d'Ivoire: new jihadist threats, old criminal networks', Risk Bulletin no. 1 (Sep. 2021).

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COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE NORTHERN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Community resilience in the face of violent extremism in northern Côte d'Ivoire can be seen as a process whereby local communities work to strengthen their capacity to resist and cope with the inherent threats posed. This resilience is crucial to preventing radicalization and the grip exerted by extremist groups on populations, particularly young people. However, while analysis of community resilience dynamics reveals a variety of community mechanisms and structures designed to respond to this threat, such responses remain incomplete and insufficient.

COPING WITH THE RISE OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: RESILIENCE STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS

Two community structures present in northern Côte d'Ivoire—one religious and the other traditional—currently play a crucial role in putting in mechanisms in place to aid community resilience to violent extremism: the Commission for Mosques and Islamic Affairs (COSIM) and the National Chamber of Traditional Kings and Chiefs of the Côte d'Ivoire (CNRCT).

COSIM, the governing body for the country's Muslim community, is a key player when it comes to community resilience to violent extremism.³ The Muslim community, irrespective of what the reality on the ground might be, has been closely linked to the rise of violent extremism, as the main extremist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State profess to act in the name of Islamic ideals.⁴ This has put the community at the forefront of strategies to curb indoctrination, particularly in the predominantly Muslim north of Côte d'Ivoire.⁵

COSIM regularly organizes community awareness campaigns against violent extremism, such as the campaign run by the Al Bayane media group.⁶ The overarching aim is to inform and educate the Muslim community about the dangers of violent extremism, while promoting the values of peace, tolerance and moderation. These awareness-raising campaigns take the form of conferences, workshops, seminars and public meetings, alongside brochures, leaflets and digital media.⁷

At the same time, COSIM promotes a moderate interpretation of Islam that favours tolerance, respect for human rights, and peaceful coexistence with other faiths.⁸ Towards this end, it offers training to imams and preachers aimed at making them aware of established standards and guidelines. For instance, since 29 April 2016, a series of training sessions focusing on the 'contribution of imams to building spiritual and moral values in society' has been held across the country, with more than 600 religious leaders taking part. The programme was set up in response to the 13 March 2016 attack by radical groups in Grand-Bassam, southeast Côte d'Ivoire, in which around twenty people were killed. The training seeks to help participants understand the risks of violent extremism, while encouraging them to promote messages of peace and moderation.⁹

In addition, COSIM has set up mechanisms to supervise preachers in mosques, thereby ensuring their speeches and religious discourse does not encourage violent extremism. These processes include issuing licences and certificates authorizing individuals to preach, and recording their sermons.¹⁰

Other mechanisms deployed by the religious body encompass mediation and community conflict resolution. Muslim religious leaders have repeatedly called for peace during flare-ups of communal violence, broadcasting their sermons on COSIM's digital platforms and relaying them via theme radio stations.¹¹

In addition to COSIM's initiatives, there are a number of inter-faith dialogue platforms promoting mutual acceptance. These include the Christian-Muslim Dialogue, a mechanism initiated by the Catholic Church in Côte d'Ivoire, which aims to 'defuse bombs, break down prejudices, remove distorting glasses and get to know each other better'.¹² In practical terms, this involves, among other things, priests supporting Muslims by attending prayers, particularly during Ramadan, and vice versa.¹³ Such inter-religious dialogue is illustrated by the frequent meetings between Reverend Father Éric Norbert Abékan of the Notre Dame de la Tendresse parish on the Riviera and COSIM member Imam Cissé Djiguiba of the Grande Mosquée du Plateau.¹⁴

Traditional organizations are also working to prevent the rise of violent extremism in northern Côte d'Ivoire. In accordance with article 4 of the organic law, 'the National Chamber of Traditional Kings and Chiefs contributes to the enhancement of customs and traditions, the promotion of the ideals of peace, development and social cohesion, and the non-judicial settlement of disputes within villages and between communities'.¹⁵ As such, one of the institution's functions is to initiate mediation missions aimed at preventing and managing crises or conflicts, including contributing to community resilience in the face of violent extremism.

In order to combat the phenomenon more effectively, members of the CNRCT are undergoing training through external NGO so that they can better understand the concept of violent extremism.¹⁶ In the specific case of Bounkani region, traditional chiefs are helping raise awareness of the risks of violent extremism through socio-cultural activities in Bouna, Doropo and Téhini—the yam festival, for example, offers an opportunity to inform and raise awareness among young people.¹⁷

Moreover, the role played by traditional leaders as facilitators in conflict resolution contributes to peaceful coexistence between communities. Traditional mechanisms—particularly mediation by traditional chiefs—have helped resolve conflicts between farmers and herders, which are often characterized by suspicion and stigmatization.¹⁸ Similarly, the traditional chiefs of Gontougo region (northeast) have committed to reconciliation following incidents that took place in November 2021 between indigenous Koulangos and non-indigenous Lobis.¹⁹ Traditional chiefs have also launched violent extremism awareness campaigns in their communities, with workshops and educational seminars organized to promote peaceful coexistence and inter-community cohesion.²⁰ These campaigns have led in

³ COSIM is an association of imams that plays an important role in promoting the interests and concerns of Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire. The institution works to coordinate the activities of the country's various Islamic organisations, and is involved in conflict prevention, social cohesion and mediation. ⁴ Lassina Diarra, 'Radicalisation and perception of the terrorist threat in the far north of Côte d'Ivoire', African Center for Peace Studies, Timbuktu Institute, 30 Apr. 2021. ⁵ Thomas J. Bassett, 'Muslim North and Christian South': The media moulds of the Ivorian crisis', *Afrique contemporaine*, vol. 206, no. 2 (2003), pp. 13–27. ⁶ L'info express, 'Combating violent extremism: COSIM conducts a peace mission in the Far North', 27 Mar. 2023. ⁷ Agence Ivoirienne de Presse (AIP), Seminar on the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation in the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) region, September 2022. ⁸ The Forum of Religious Confessions, which includes imams, priests and pastors, focuses on inter-religious tolerance and preventing inter-community and political conflicts. The Forum is also involved in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. ⁹ Abdoul Hakim Hoduloyé, 'Imams trained in violent extremism and radicalisation', Al Bayane info, 27 Sep. 2022. ¹⁰ [www.radiodelapaix](#) (accessed 7 Oct. 2023). ¹¹ Aissatou Diallo, 'Côte d'Ivoire: Ousmane Diakité, the imam of the happy medium', *Jeune Afrique*, June 2022 (accessed 8 Oct. 2023). ¹² Reverend Father Eric Norbert Abékan, National Executive Secretary of the Justice, Peace and Environment Commission of the Catholic Church in Côte d'Ivoire, interview conducted on 18 Nov. 2023. ¹³ Such initiatives aimed at bringing people together and getting to know one another mainly take mainly locally, where Muslim and Christian communities are expected to live in harmony. ¹⁴ Abékan (note 14). ¹⁵ The CNRCT was created by the Constitution of 8 Nov. 2016, with its composition, powers and operation governed by organic law no. 2020-942 of 25 Nov. 2020. ¹⁶ Kakra Kobenan Jacques, Executive Director of the NGO Les Flamboyants and Chairman of the Doropo civil-military unit, interview conducted on 26 Oct. 2023. ¹⁷ Adama Kounga Ouattara, dignitary in charge of communication at the royal palace in Bouna, interview conducted on 26 Oct. 2023. ¹⁸ Local radio station 'La Voix des Savanes' broadcast a programme promoting community resilience and encouraging peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms within communities in Bounkani region. The broadcast featured the representative of the King of Bounkani, Lélé Ouattara; the spokesman for the Lobi chiefdom of Bouna, Kambou Bouaké; and the secretary general of the Peuhl community, Amadou Diallo. All three stressed that the resolution of these crises had been made possible by traditional conflict management mechanisms, in particular local-level mediation by customary chiefs (accessed 8 Oct. 2023). The 'farmer-breeder conflict' refers to conflicts between farmers and breeders over agricultural resources, and is often used in official speeches in Côte d'Ivoire (accessed 8 Oct. 2023). ¹⁹ [www.lauroré.net](#) (accessed 26 Oct. 2023). ²⁰ Adama Kounga Ouattara, communications officer at the royal palace in Bouna, interview.

collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—to the establishment of peace and early warning committees tasked with preventing conflict and radicalization.²¹

As part of the Resilience for Peace (R4P) project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with the aim of fostering community resilience and conflict resolution mechanisms in Bounkani region, the period 2021–2023 saw a strengthening of traditional chiefs' preventative capacities towards violent extremism. In pursuing a collaborative approach, the effective involvement of women as vectors for preventing violent extremism and promoting peace is promoted by the R4P programme.²²

Finally, traditional leaders work with local authorities and security forces to share information about suspicious individuals or activities linked to violent extremism through early warning system. Towards this end, civil–military cells—overseen by the National Security Council (CNS) and represented by community players (traditional chiefs and religious guides, local youth representatives) and NGOs on the civilian side—have been set up.²³

Concrete actions such as these demonstrate the commitment of traditional chiefs to preventing violent extremism and promoting community stability in northern Côte d'Ivoire. They thus represent key players when it comes to strengthening community resilience in the face of challenges in this field.

Local and regional authorities are also involved in the fight against violent extremism. For example, Bagoué regional council is setting up development projects—some with the support of partners such as the World Bank—to help empower young people and women. Through positively engaging people, such initiatives aim to curb the rise of violent extremism in the region.²⁴ Moreover, the initiatives are complemented by the creation and/or rehabilitation of essential social infrastructure.

Regional councils are also working on opening official crossing points along the border strip to prevent people entering the country via the bypass routes.²⁵ This has been facilitated by a multilateral cooperation framework between the northern regions of Côte d'Ivoire and the southern regions of Mali and Burkina Faso. The Border Union of Local and Regional Authorities of the SKBo (Sikasso–Korhogo–Bobo–Dioulasso) area, with financial support from the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), is organizing working sessions on the prevention of violent extremism that incorporate administrative, customary and religious authorities on either side of the border.²⁶

Despite the existence of structures and mechanisms for community resilience to violent extremism in northern Côte d'Ivoire, however, their real impact remains limited.

1.2

CHALLENGES TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE ACTIONS AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The effectiveness of the community resilience structures and mechanisms outlined above are undermined by a number of factors.

Community structures face a shortage of qualified human resources. Despite the terrorist attacks perpetrated in Côte d'Ivoire, violent extremism has not manifested itself in the same way as in Mali and Burkina Faso. Extremist groups have been able to establish sanctuaries in the latter two countries, with entire areas of national territory outside the authority of the state. Attacks on Ivorian soil, by contrast, have so far been carried out by individuals who have crossed borders. This puts community structures in a delicate position, as they are required to detect the early signs of radicalization (especially at the hardening and exclusion stages).²⁷ Despite the training provided by international and civil society organizations, particularly the various sessions on violent extremism in Bounkani region, community leaders remain insufficiently equipped to deal with violent extremism.²⁸

On top of this, there is the complex issue of financial, logistical and material resources. Community structures involved in the fight against violent extremism, particularly in northern Côte d'Ivoire, must face up to this challenge, both individually and collectively. Although the CNRCT has an operating budget, the projects carried out by it and other bodies often depend on ad hoc subsidies. Examples include USAID's R4P project; the US Embassy's PS-CEV (Countering Violent Extremism Awareness Project) project, conducted in partnership with the Abidjan Political Research Centre (CRPA); and the Prevention of Political Violence and Strengthening of Social Cohesion through Dialogue and Citizen Collaboration in Côte d'Ivoire (PREDIA) project, funded by the Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and implemented by Interpeace and Indigo CIV (Côte d'Ivoire). Even when setting up civil–military cells, however, there are substantial financial, material and logistical challenges to overcome.³⁰ Organizing awareness-raising activities, for example, inevitably requires financial and material resources.

Another challenge is that radical leaders or extremist preachers can rapidly gain influence and authority within communities. Despite the measures taken by COSIM, the monitoring of preaching is restricted by the relative autonomy of imams and the freedom of worship enjoyed by adherents. Moreover, despite the national government's efforts to reduce regional disparities, radical leaders remain well-placed to take advantage of the impoverishment and lack of employment faced by the young population in northern Côte d'Ivoire where the poverty rate is around 60 per cent.³¹

In addition, coordination among community institutions (religious associations, customary and traditional authorities, civil society organizations) when it comes to combatting violent extremism remains poor. Actions and/or activities are often redundant and not complementary: different organizations organize the same activities, or fail to take into account the recommendations of other organizations that have previously

²¹ AIP, 'The NGO "Les Flamboyants" sets up peace and conflict prevention committees in the north of France', 20 Aug. 2022. ²² AIP, 'The chief of Korhogo canton favours the inclusion of women in traditional decision-making bodies', 13 Jan. 2018. ²³ The CNS is a government institution responsible for advising the President of the Republic on national security issues. It plays a key role in managing security affairs and shaping the country's security policies. The CNS is generally made up of senior military officers, senior government officials, representatives of the security forces and other security experts. Civil–military cells are an operational structure of the departmental security committees (regional representation of the CNS). A cell is set up by order of the regional prefect, who also chairs the departmental safety committees. The cell is tasked with helping coordinate security and stability efforts in the region or department concerned. Each cell has 40 members: 25 civilians (local authorities, civil society organisations, traditional authorities, religious guides, youth associations) and 15 members of the defence and security forces. ²⁴ Losséni Camara, Director General of the Bagoué Regional Council (northern Côte d'Ivoire), Interview conducted on 31 Jan. 2024. ²⁵ Camara (note 31). ²⁶ Camara (note 31). ²⁷ According to the Canadian Centre for the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violence, the process of radicalisation is a five-stage process: 1) dogmatism or indoctrination; 2) ideology; 3) hardening; 4) exclusion; and 5) violent extremism. ²⁸ Kakro Kobenan Jacques, Executive Director of the NGO Les Flamboyants and Chairman of the Doropo civil–military unit, Interview conducted on 26 Oct. 2023. ²⁹ PS-CEV (2020–2021) involved 500 community leaders from seven regions of Côte d'Ivoire attending a capacity-building seminar and documentary film screening, followed by a debate on the radicalisation process and countering violent extremism. PREDIA involves implementing collaborative frameworks (aimed at steering the collaborative governance of local-level conflict prevention and management initiatives) in the districts of Abidjan, Comoe, Goh-Djiboua, Montagnes, Vallée du Bandama, Yamoussoukro and Zanzan. Interpeace, 'Guidance note: an effective, localised and predictive barometer or early warning mechanism to prevent political violence in Côte d'Ivoire', Nov. 2023. ³⁰ Valérie Vai-Bih, President of the NGO Centre of Excellence for the Women of Man (CEFM), member of the civil–military cell in Tonpiki region (Western Côte d'Ivoire), Interview conducted on 14 Oct. 2023. ³¹ National Institute of Statistics (NIS), relayed on www.infodrome.com (accessed 6 Oct. 2023).

worked on the issue. This impedes consistency and effectiveness in terms of the messages conveyed and approaches/strategies used to combat violent extremism.³² Without coordination, it is difficult to put in place a comprehensive action plan that integrates the contributions of a variety of community organizations.³³

Finally, conflicts over natural resources increase the difficulty of establishing and maintaining community structures. There is always an economic, historical, sociological and cultural background to conflicts between livestock breeders and farmers, even touching on lifestyles. Such conflicts, rightly or wrongly, have become part of the prevention of and fight against extremism, often putting community structures and mechanisms to the test. Livestock rearing in northern Côte d'Ivoire, particularly herding, is generally practised by members of the Fulani community, from which extremist group leaders such as Amadou Koufa (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, JNIM) are drawn. JNIM is suspected of using Fulani herdsman to extend its area of influence, with stigmatization of the herdsman by the indigenous population—who predominantly rely on farming—increasing the likelihood of them joining extremist groups.

2 PROSPECTS FOR STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE NORTHERN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

As elaborated above, shortcomings remain in the mechanisms and structures that have been put in place to combat violent extremism in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Below are a number of recommendations—falling into two categories—made with a view to optimizing their effectiveness.

2.1 ENCOURAGE STRONG STATE INVOLVEMENT TO MAXIMIZE THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY MECHANISMS AND ACTIONS

Better coordination of local community structures (religious associations, customary and traditional authorities, civil society organizations) by the state holds the potential to increase the impact of local actions aimed at preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Doing so requires the state to identify all the community structures and mechanisms currently in place, map the actions being carried out, and determine the specific targets and objectives being pursued. Conducting a rigorous evaluation of community actions along these lines should lead to political decisions (and so public policies) conducive to the prevention of violent extremism.

The National Coordination Centre for the Early Warning Response Mechanism (CNCMR) plays an important role in coordinating actions.³⁴ Despite the hope that communities will take ownership of early warning responses by participating in the development of northern Côte d'Ivoire's security, however, local-level adoption of safety measures remains a major challenge. This points to the importance of awareness-raising among the general public, including on how good coordination can strengthen security governance in the region. Moreover, the state should allow local authorities greater involvement when it comes to developing inclusive, participatory local frameworks for preventing and combatting violent extremism.

At the same time, the state must work to build the prevention capacities of religious, traditional and other community lea-

ders. Educating these leaders in the factors leading to violent extremism and how best to guard this will allow them—and the structures they work through—to have a much greater impact on community awareness and behaviour. This approach includes training religious and traditional actors in crisis communication, conflict management and understanding extremist ideologies. Here, the training modules proposed by the CNS should be adapted to the needs and specific characteristics of each target group.

In addition, the state must strenuously promote inter-religious and inter-community dialogue as a means of cultivating mutual understanding, reducing mistrust and alleviating inter-community tensions. Given that violent extremism is often fuelled by ignorance of others and prejudice, such an approach could lead to religious and traditional communities acting as bulwarks against radicalization. It could also be used as a means of supporting de-radicalization or youth mentoring programmes initiated by, among others, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), USAID and the European Union. Collaborative approaches to such complex and sensitive issues increase the chances of programmes aimed at preventing violent extremism succeeding at the local, national and sub-regional (e.g. Economic Community of West African States, the Sahel) level.

Finally, the state must be involved in properly managing the resources made available to community structures. While these structures can be organized by communities in accordance with current legislation,³⁵ the law on associations should be supplemented by provisions setting out the state's advisory and supervisory role in managing the material and financial resources directed towards implementation of community-level projects. This would help ensure transparency in the use of resources.

In view of the above, a national strategy for preventing and responding to violent extremism is required, leading in turn to the development and adoption of regional strategies down to the municipal/village level, each of which should be adapted according to the level of threat. This would help in coordinating and supervising the actions of various players, including technical and financial partners; providing subsidies for local religious, traditional and security structures; encouraging inter-religious and inter-community dialogue; promoting social cohesion; providing relevant public services; and fostering local economic development.

2.2 REVITALIZING THE STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNITY STRUCTURES IN NORTHERN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The design of strategies aimed at preventing and combatting violent extremism must be based at inception on the socio-political, socio-economic and demographic realities of northern Côte d'Ivoire. This will require constant vigilance on the part of community leaders—through both their traditional/religious structures and the civil-military cells—regarding developments in the region, especially geographical areas at risk, and the activities of certain individuals and groups. Any change in the *modus operandi* of extremist groups (e.g. recruitment of young people with a view to 'jihad', efforts to curry favour with local chiefs) should give rise to an appropriate, targeted response. As such, strategies and approaches must be flexible and adaptable.

³² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'Dynamics of Violent Extremism in Africa: Conflict Ecosystems, Political Ecology and the Spread of the Proto-State', 2022.
³³ UNDP, 'Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach', Aug. 2016. ³⁴ Created by Decree no. 2016-122 of 2 Mar. 2016, the CNCMR is a strategic tool for alerting the government to the first signs of threats or violence, while proposing appropriate responses. ³⁵ Law no. 60-315 of 21 Sep. 1960 on associations.

Community structures must also adopt a proactive approach when it comes to evaluating the potential options available for preventing violent extremism. Here, the socialization process, in which religious guides and traditional chiefs play a major role, should be a particular focus of consideration. By influencing people's behaviour and consciences—particularly among the youth—through the teaching of religious and traditional African values, religious guides and traditional chiefs can help protect those at risk of radicalization.

In addition, greater cooperation with local state authorities (prefects, sub-prefects, military authorities) will further help community structures achieve their objectives around preventing violent extremism. This cooperation framework should go beyond civil–military cells. In Côte d'Ivoire, decentralized territorial administration is carried out by villages, regional prefectures, departmental prefectures and sub-prefectures, meaning close cooperation between traditional authorities and other local administrative authorities should in theory be a matter of course.³⁶ Nevertheless, steps should be taken to strengthen such cooperation, particularly in the context of preventing violent extremism.³⁷ Here, the fact that the Lobi community has two chiefs who are in conflict with each other raises the problem of cooperation between the administrative authority and the traditional chieftaincy in Bounkani region.³⁸ This dysfunctional situation weakens administrative action and affects the flow of information.

At an operational level, the capacities of community structures and players must be strengthened in order to equip them with the resources needed to contribute to the prevention of violent extremism. The aim here is to train individuals not only to recognize the phenomenon itself but to fully understand the mechanisms of resilience. Achieving this objective necessitates that early warning systems (EWS) be better understood and mastered, which in turn means drawing on the proven expertise of organizations such as the West African Network for Peacebuilding-Côte d'Ivoire). Incident and threat monitoring, reporting and feedback should be central EWS pillars, helping strengthen community resilience to violent extremism in northern Côte d'Ivoire.

Securing an EWS set up by community structures requires a threefold process of evaluation. Firstly, an upstream (predictive) evaluation of the various mechanisms would enable rigorous assessment of the overall state of the EWS. Such an approach would avoid having to blindly navigate the response to violent extremism, making it possible to prevent problems flaring in the first place rather than having to manage the after-effects.

Secondly, a formative evaluation would enable adjustments to be made to the various early warning mechanisms, thereby maximizing their effectiveness.

Thirdly, a summative evaluation would allow for a drawing up of all the lessons learned from the mobilization of early warning tools in the context of community resilience to violent extremism in northern Côte d'Ivoire.

Achieving the various violent extremism-related objectives placed before community structures will require financial, material and logistical support.³⁹ The budget available to the CNRCT is mainly intended for operational costs and carrying out social cohesion activities. Similarly, when it comes to organizing awareness-raising activities around violent extremism, the resources provided by the CNS and UNDP's contributions do not always reach NGOs and community leaders.⁴⁰ Faced with this situation, community structures must seek partnerships with funding organizations in order to make up the shortfall.

The civil–military cells also need to be improved. From an operational point of view, the ongoing, active participation of traditional chiefs is essential. The fact that traditional chiefs are not represented in the Department of Man's civil–military cell (western Côte d'Ivoire), and that the vacancy left by the death of the traditional chief in Kabadougou's civil–military cell (far north-west) has not been filled, demonstrates the marginal—almost non-existent—participation of traditional and customary authorities in this structure.⁴¹

Finally, platforms for dialogue need to be developed in order to counter the use of religion as a central pillar in the strategies of extremist groups. Inter-religious frameworks encourage respect for the freedom of others to choose their religion and practise their faith. Beyond this, addressing inter-religious dialogue in the context of innovative themes such as 'religion and individual and collective freedoms', 'religion and economic development', and 'religion and sustainable development' would help highlight the converging interests of religious leaders.⁴²

³⁶ Law No. 2014-451 of 5 Aug. 2014 on the orientation of the general organization of the Territorial Administration (Article 2). ³⁷ Jacques (note 35). ³⁸ Jacques (note 35). ³⁹ Abékan (note 14) and Imam Ibrahim Koné, interview. ⁴⁰ Vai-Bih (note 39). ⁴¹ Vai-Bih (note 39). ⁴² Since 2017, the CRPA has been organising inter-religious dialogue events in partnership with the Israeli Embassy in Côte d'Ivoire and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The themes addressed reflect a desire to guide members of different religious denominations towards identifying common interests.

CONCLUSION

The threat of violent extremism in northern Côte d'Ivoire is a major challenge requiring multidimensional responses. Over the course of this briefing, we have examined the crucial role played by community mechanisms and structures in preventing and responding to violent extremism in the region. This includes, among other things, fostering peaceful coexistence by raising awareness; promoting tolerance; acting as mediators, identifying the warning signs of radicalization; and passing on information.

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In order to strengthen community resilience to violent extremism in northern Côte d'Ivoire, the state should:

- ensure better coordination of local community structures and their actions;
- identify existing community structures and mechanisms;
- map actions that have been carried out, as well as those currently in progress;
- work to build the preventative capacity of religious, traditional and other community leaders;
- train religious and traditional actors in crisis communication, conflict management and understanding the ideologies driving the actions of extremists;
- be involved in managing the resources made available to community structures;
- draw up a national strategy to prevent and combat violent extremism, based on regional and local strategies, thereby enabling better coordination between the various players.

Meanwhile, community structures should:

- take into account northern Côte d'Ivoire's socio-political, socio-economic and demographic realities when (re-)designing strategies aimed at preventing and combatting violent extremism;
- take a proactive approach;
- engage in greater cooperation with local state authorities;
- build the capacity of community structures and players in order to mobilize resources relevant to the prevention of violent extremism;
- develop platforms for inter-religious dialogue;
- take ownership of early warning response mechanisms and be more proactive in seeking funding; and
- evaluate early warning mechanisms before, during and after implementation.

Given the importance of local authorities in responding to violent extremism in northern Côte d'Ivoire, a study focused on determining the scope and limits of their actions would be highly relevant.

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