



REGIONAL CONFERENCE

“Unifying for Stability: Addressing Violent Extremism Amidst Political Uncertainties in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin”



DATE: DECEMBER
5TH-6TH, 2023

VENUE: LABADI BEACH
HOTEL , ACCRA GHANA

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	5
1.1 WELCOME REMARKS.....	7
1.2 GOODWILL MESSAGES	8
1.2.1 EU Representative	8
1.2.2 Mr. Luke Van De Goor (SIPRI Director).....	9
1.2.3 Mr Mujid Junadu (UNOWAS).....	10
1.2.4 Commander Sokomte (MNJTF)	10
2.0 KEY NOTE SPEECH.....	11
3.0 SESSION I	13
3.1 <i>Overview of the threat of Violent Extremism in Sahel, Coastal states of West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin.</i>	13
3.2 KEY TAKE AWAYS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.0 SESSION II	15
4.1 <i>Expert Panel Discussion</i>	15
4.2 KEY POINTS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.0 SESSION III	18
5.1 <i>Interactive Institutional Experience Sharing</i>	18
5.2 KEY POINTS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.0 SESSION IV	21
6.1 <i>Group Work</i>	21
6.1.1 <i>Outlining the prospects and challenges in fostering collaborative multi-stakeholder partnerships for the prevention of conflicts and VE in the Sahel, the LCB and the Coastal Zone of West Africa.</i> 22	
6.1.2 <i>The roles ECOWAS and other regional and sub-regional mechanisms must assume in VE and terrorism fight in the wake of Western forces withdrawal and the growing presence of mercenaries, private military contractors and foreign fighters in the region.</i>	23
6.1.3 <i>The key initiatives to help strengthen regional resilience against violent extremism and specific elements of the regional framework that contributes to resilience.</i>	25
6.1.4 <i>Identifying the main gaps in evidence-based research and the advocacy strategy needed in the current regional context to influence policy decisions on preventing and combating violent extremism in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin.</i>	26

6.2	Advocacy strategies required in preventing and combating VE and terrorism in west Africa and the LCB.	27
7.0	Session IV.....	28
7.1	<i>Panel discussion of ongoing studies and policy engagement of REcAP Network</i>	28
7.2	KEY POINTS	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.0	<i>CLOSING REMARKS</i>	32
8.1	<i>Presentation on the REcAP Governance Framework</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.2	The Legal and Governance Framework.	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.1	The Governance Model	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.2	The Management Operational Framework.	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.3	Sustainability	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3	Concerns and Reactions	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CDD	Centre for Democracy and Development
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECPF	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF)
EU	European Union
G5	Group of five
GA	General Assembly
INTRAC	the International NGO Training and Research Centre
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
LCB	Lake Chad Basin
LC	Lake Chad
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MUNISMA	the United Nations Multinational Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NEC	Network Executive Committee
REcAP	Research and Action for Peace
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
TWG	Technical Working Groups
UNOWAS	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
UN	United Nations
US	United States
VE	Violent Extremism
WANEP	West African Network for Peace

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The Research and Action for Peace (REcAP) Network Consortium consisting of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), with funding from the European Union (EU) organized a two-day Regional Conference on the theme: ***“Unifying for Stability: Addressing Violent Extremism amidst Political Uncertainties in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin”***.

The regional conference held from the 5th-6th December 2023 in Accra, Ghana brought together experts, policymakers, international and regional actors from within and outside the REcAP Network who collectively brainstormed, shared experts’ knowledge and good practices on how to effectively respond to violent extremism and the weakening of counterterrorism mechanisms efforts in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) particularly in the Sahel. The event sparked practical, intellectual and policy discussions and provided collective solutions to the growing menace of violent activities by non-state armed actors and the increasing incidences of violent extremism (VE) in the face of the ongoing political crisis in the Sahel region of West Africa and the LCB. The conference covered thematic experts’ presentations, panel discussions, group work sessions, interactive institutional experience sharing and contributions from distinguished guest speakers and experts drawn from civil society, academia, and national, regional, and international institutions.

The Conference was organised against the backdrop that West African, Sahel, and LCB regions have been plagued with political and security challenges exacerbated by violent extremism and communal violence. These challenges have given rise to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, particularly in the border region between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, which has become the epicenter of the crisis. Similarly, attacks by Boko Haram and its splinter groups continue to threaten stability in different regions of West Africa. The underlying vulnerabilities such as porous borders, youth bulge, farmer-herder conflicts, and

corruption have been identified as some of the drivers of this phenomenon. Despite the various multilateral operations implemented to prevent and counter violent extremism, the problem persists.



Group picture of the conference participants

OPENING SESSION

1.1 WELCOME REMARKS

WANEP Deputy Executive Director, Mrs. Levinia Addae-Mensah gave the welcome remarks on behalf of the Executive Director of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). In her remarks, Mrs Addae-Mensah welcomed members of the RECAP network; RECAP Consortium partners namely: SIPRI and DRC. She described the Conference as an opportunity to discuss what CSOs and states have been implementing to address VE in the region.



Mrs Levinia Addae-Mensah delivering the welcome remarks

Mrs Addae-Mensah expressed optimism that the experts' and practitioners' assembled for the meeting will help unpack why the existing frameworks were not yielding the expected results to help generate tangible contributions towards

addressing these concerns across the West African, Sahel and LCB regions. She also indicated the need to reflect on how new alliances, such as the REcAP network and multilateralism, could help in addressing the phenomenon.

Mrs Addae-Mensah expressed her gratitude to the EU for supporting the project and urged all participants to actively engage in the discussions, share their insights, and forge meaningful connections. In conclusion, she suggested the need not to overlook the efforts and little successes achieved so far and hoped the Regional Conference would generate the investment needed to develop new scorecards that measure the tangible impact of VE prevention efforts. Mrs Addae-Mensah concluded with a warm welcome to all participants to the 2-Day Regional Conference.

1.2 GOODWILL MESSAGES

1.2.1 EU Representative

Miss Anna Yeezy (First Counselor and Head of Sector Governance and Security of the EU Delegation in Ghana) congratulated, on behalf of the EU, the REcAP Consortium for the conference. She indicated the significance of the event for the EU whose commitment to addressing VE in the West African states and LCB has been unwavering.

Miss Anna observed that REcAP project is a highly relevant initiative. She praised the regional network



Miss Anna Yeezy delivering her address

for its efforts to generate such discussion in order to find collective solutions to the rise of VE and other safety issues.

She expressed optimism that the conference, which in itself constitutes a significant achievement of the REcAP

Network, would produce workable recommendations toward addressing the security and VE concerns in West Africa and LCB. Miss Anna noted the EU's delight that the project fits into its ongoing initiatives in the regions. She concluded that the conference's discussion and recommendations would be highly relevant to the EU as a partner and indicated the EU's commitment to continue with such bilateral and regional cooperation.

1.2.2. Mr. Luc Van De Goor (SIPRI Conflict, Peace and Security Program Director of Studies)

Reflecting on the history of the consortium and the progress made so far in terms of strengthening the network and initiating research, Mr Van De Goor emphasized the importance of the Conference, which



he said provided an opportunity for all the members to interact, know each other better, discuss projects, and connect beyond virtual discussions. From the research perspective, he pointed out that the conference offered an opportunity for the exchange of experiences among the various institutions and a platform for dialogue and brainstorming on the challenges and solutions to VE in West

Mr. Luc Van De Goor: Conflict, Peace and Security Program Director of SIPRI

Africa and Lake Chad.

In his appraisal of the RECAP Network, he noted that several vital and far-reaching activities from capacity building, awareness raising, and information sharing with CSOs, to supporting network members for publications and exploring the multifaceted spectrum of Prevention of conflict and violent extremism, has presented the network as a great asset.

Having identified political instability, economic difficulties, and climate change as some of the challenges influencing VE in the regions, the SIPRI Director stressed the need for a holistic and bottom-up evidence-based response approach, which renders the researchers' role pivotal. The complexities of the security and VE challenges and ways of addressing them remained achievable during the Conference. He also described the Regional Conference as a tool for strengthening the Network members' bond and increasing its regional visibility. Members were, therefore, encouraged to use their advocacy tools to share the conclusions of the conference and participants from international and regional organizations were urged to implement the practical solutions discussed in their practices.

1.2.3. Mr Moudjid Djinadou (UNOWAS)

Among his remarks, Mr Moudjid expressed concerns about the lack of clarity around the term VE, which was the key term of the Regional Conference. He indicated the need for clarity on key governance



Mr Moudjid Djinadou of UNOWAS

concepts, and also emphasised the need for a clear definition of the concept to establish the nexus between violent extremism and transnational organized crime.

Mr. Moudjid warned against losing sight that violent extremism is no longer just an ideology or a religious belief.

He expressed the belief that

the Conference theme was crucial given the political uncertainties in West Africa, and hoped that the conference would help to produce a genuine/accurate definition of violent extremism, a phenomenon that had become even more complex in the past eight years. He then concluded his goodwill message by thanking the consortium and reaffirmed UNOWAS's continuous collaboration and support to the RECAP Network.

1.2.4. LT. Commander Sokamte Yves Patrice (MNJTF)

Commander Sokamte expressed his gratitude to WANEP, other consortium partners and the EU for the invitation. He stated that the political uncertainty in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin makes the Conference theme, "unifying for stability" a perfect fit. According to the Commander, the increased attacks by Boko Haram and other groups in recent times in the region clearly illustrate his position.

Lt. Commander Sokamte expressed optimism that the conference would generate practical and effective recommendations that would offer significant support/assistance to the MNJTF and other partners in addressing the region's security challenges. He also expressed his desire to share the MNJTF's experience with the other participants as the main force operating in the region.

2. KEYNOTE ADDRESS

H.E. Dr Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the African Union High Representative for Silencing the Guns opened his keynote address by praising the REcAP Consortium, consisting of WANEP, DRC, SIPRI, and the



European Union (EU) for organizing the Conference. He indicated that there could not have been a better time for such conference, considering the context in which both West Africa and the LCB were

HE Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas delivering the Keynote Speech

experiencing multi-faceted

political and security challenges heightened by the spread of violent extremism and communal violence. Dr. Chambas observed that despite the kinetic and the various non-kinetic approaches (developmental and political responses) engaged in addressing VE in West Africa, the Sahel and the LCB, the regions have witnessed continual deterioration in political stability and security. Amid this gloomy picture, Dr Chambas expressed his satisfaction that the two-day REcAP Regional Interactive Conference had provided an opportunity for Peacebuilding, conflict prevention and violent extremism experts as well as international, regional, and local actors to gather and exchange information, experiences, and best practices towards preventing and countering VE.

The key highlights and recommendations proffered by HE Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas in his keynote address are summarized as follows:

- The need to deploy African agencies to stop the current wave of nationalism and sovereignty in the Sahel
- A review of African continental and sub-regional mechanisms for peace, security, democracy and governance to elaborate effective instruments for preventive action.

- The threat of military intervention should be directed against the principal enemy (terrorist and violent extremists) rather than towards other Sahelian countries. Application of sanctions should be legal and targeted to avoid harm to already impoverished populations in the Sahel and LCB area.
- There is a need for an international response from the UN Security Council and international partners such as the EU, the Gulf and Middle Eastern countries, since the terrorist groups operating in the Sahel and West Africa are an offshoot of an international network of terrorism.
- Climate actions must begin to see real funds flowing into the Sahel and Sahara for purposes of mitigation, adaptation and implementation of new green technology given that it directly influences the security of the area.
- There must be affirmative measures to include women and young people in peace-building processes and governance in violence-stricken countries.
- Support reforms to harness the resources in these regions to reduce poverty, inequality
- Strengthening accountability mechanisms at international, national and local levels can go a long way to prevent impunity.

3. SESSION I

3.2. *Overview of the threat of Violent Extremism in Sahel, Coastal states of West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin.*

The session was moderated by Dr Philip Attuquayefio, Senior Lecturer, Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD), University of Ghana. The panel discussion included Mr. Ifeanyi Okechukwu, the Regional Coordinator, Early Warning, WANEP; Madam Prisca Nandoumabe, Coordinatrice, BUCOFRE, Chad, and Dr. Moulaye Hassane, the Executive Director, Centre National d'Études Stratégiques et de Sécurité (CNESS), Niger. They presented an overview and also took stock of the VE and terrorism threats in the Sahel and LCB, their spillover effects in the coastal states, as well as



The Expert Panel of the Session

how they should be addressed. The panellists, therefore, attempted to unpack the root causes, prospects and challenges of the situation. .

The panellist established that VE and terrorism threats had increased, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. They also shared concerns that the effects of the phenomenon including school closure had increased the exposure of affected populations to recruitment strategies by extremist groups. The exit of

MUNISMA, the ungoverned areas across the Sahel, the complex system of humanitarian emergencies, the sudden changes of government and proxy wars have all been identified as vectors of VE in the regions.

The panelists further stated some of the gaps and the lack of effective citizens and the State engagement are contributing factor for increasing security threats in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin. They argued that bad governance and development issues contributed to legitimizing the claims of extremist groups. The panelists also observed that most states failed to comply with the 2001 ECOWAS protocol, including the obligations related to education, governance, equity and equal access to resources.

This widespread phenomenon has resulted in citizens' marginalization, the feeling of exclusion, consequently turning most youth against the State.

To overcome those challenges, the plenary discussions provided response to the increasing challenges to political uncertainties and violent extremism in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin. Other efforts stated by panelist included multilateral engagements and collaboration with CSOs and other non-state actors to address some of the challenges highlighted during the session. It was also established that while there were ongoing multilateral responses, there was the need for improvements in order to respond adequately to current challenges. The ECPF, which serves as the Action Plan for ECOWAS, was cited as one of the frameworks requiring review to align with the changing dynamics.

In their recommendations, the panel called for a closer consideration of multilateral efforts, the need to monitor ongoing proxy wars and adopt preventive diplomacy by AU, ECOWAS and other initiatives. They also called for minimising bureaucracies in rapid response application, commitment to agreements through enforceable obligations to states, support for long term engagements at both the State and multilateral levels, increasing the number of women involvement in VE and terrorism prevention as well as in management processes.

By identifying the underlying multifaceted causal factors of VE and terrorism, they suggested that military approaches or hard-core measures such as embargoes could not address the issues but rather worsen the consequences for innocent civilians. To fight terrorism, they instead advocated for the use of non-kinetic approaches used by religious bodies and CSO's such as awareness campaigns, education and public involvement in governance processes.

3.3. Key highlights of the Session

1. The threats of VE and terrorism are on the rise in the Sahel and the Western Coastal States but its frequency in the LCB is relatively minimal.
2. The main cause of the threats of VE menace in the region is governance failure.
3. Economic and social factors have been central in the scheme of radicalization.
4. The lack of coordination among the various multilateral mechanisms for addressing the VE and terrorism in the Sahel, Lake Chad and West Africa is of great concern.
5. Over-concentration on kinetic approaches is counterproductive. There should be a right balance of both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches.
6. There should be a recognition of the little progress made that would serve as a lining for more positive energy.

4. SESSION II

4.2. Expert Panel Discussion

The session was moderated by Dr Festus Aubyn; Regional Research and Capacity Building Coordinator of WANEP. This panel discussion included Mr. Damian Ihekorenye of CDD-West Africa, Nigeria, Dr. Thomas Rayede Ouedraogo, the Executive Director; Centre pour la Gouvernance Democratique (CDG) Burkina Faso, Mr. Alhassan Niambelle, Executive Director; Institut Malien de Recherche Action pour la Paix (IMRAP), and Dr. Ibrahim Bangura; Senior Lecturer, University of Sierra Leone, Foura Bay College. Picking from the previous where overview of the nature of the threats of VE and terrorism within the West African sub-region, the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin and the response mechanisms for addressing the same were presented, this session paid critical attention to some of the various response mechanisms, challenges and offered some solutions to enhance their effectiveness in countering VE and terrorism in West Africa, the Sahel and LCB.

Mr. Damian Ihekorenye of CDD-West Africa, Nigeria opened the panel submissions by mapping the



Mr Ihekorenye Damian during the Conference

regional mechanisms for VE prevention in West Africa and LCB. In his submissions on the different mechanisms, their challenges and solutions in countering VE and terrorism in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin, Mr. Damian noted the various response mechanisms to VE and terrorism in the region. These ranged from individual State level kinetic and non-kinetic mechanisms, eg. Nigeria's National Counter Terrorism, Operation Safe Corridor and the DDR and Niger's Dialogue approach; Regional responses or counterterrorism mechanisms e.g. ECOWAS Counter Terrorism Strategy whose three pillars includes prevention, pursuing and reconstruction. These were encapsulated in both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches. The response mechanism also involves International Support Initiatives by countries that also feel the impact of VE and

terrorism in West Africa such as the US, France and other EU countries, China, and Russia. Such exertions have resulted in multinational joint efforts such as the G5, MNJTF and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the African Standby Force and the Committee of Defense Force. Mr. Damian, however, identified some major challenges with these responses including the multiplicity of mechanisms causing overlapping, crowding of the security landscape and resulting in counter-productivity; donor-oriented multilateral response initiatives such as the G5; the lack of clear-cut definition on the nature and character of the mechanisms; a lack of proper coordination and cooperation among the multilateral initiatives and the lack of accountability mechanisms on the use of funds and power. These challenges, which impact the effectiveness of the mechanisms, he argued, could be addressed by institutionalizing mechanisms that coordinate existing responses. The success story of the MNJTF was cited to justify this viewpoint. He also advocated the need for deliberate efforts towards strengthening the porous borders; and strengthening DIABA to check illicit funds and arms flow.

Presenting on VE and terrorism prevention and countering amidst the political uncertainties in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin, *Dr Thomas Rayede Ouedraogo* noted that adequate responses or solutions to



Dr. Ibrahim Bangura during the Conference

the issues could be realized only after a clear and better understanding of their causes. In this regard, Dr. Ouedraogo identified religious factors, groups' marginalization, poverty and governance deficits as underlying VE and terrorism in the regions and so reasoned with Mr. Niambelle on tailoring the responses along those lines at regional, national and community levels. Recommendations include the redress of governance issues (ensuring transparency and accountability); economic development; public awareness creation; better coordination and cooperation among stakeholders both domestically and internationally; ensuring social inclusion among the people; promoting inter-faith dialogue; promoting integration and re-integration; and bringing back people to resettle in their original home were

hence proposed by them as a remedy. Dr. Bangura in his presentation on the geopolitical factors (external and internal) impacting on the threats of VE and terrorism and which should be considered in the fight against the menace in West Africa and LCB, identified the presence of the WAGNER Group as a major concern. He argued that the well-armed groups are committing a lot of atrocities and human rights violations, and so pushing a lot of the communities into the hands of violent extremist groups.

Dr Bangura also mentioned the distrust in the regional bodies and the frustrations from their inactions as a reason why most youth populations in the region are joining extremist groups. He explained that young people see ECOWAS and AU as having consistently failed to show up when it matters most and superintending over illegalities by the powerful ruling class and so rendering all their freedom struggles worthless.

4.3. Key highlights of the Session

- The session established that there are VE and terrorism response mechanisms of various levels in the region. These include multilateralism and international, regional and state-level responses.
- The mechanisms have faced several challenges that stifle their full realization of their prospects.

- The challenges stifling the initiatives involve a multiplicity of mechanisms that have resulted in duplicity and overcrowding, donor-dependent funding mechanisms, and a lack of a clear-cut definition of the nature and character of the mechanisms. Others are a lack of proper coordination and cooperation in the initiatives and the lack of proper accountability mechanisms on funds and resource usage.
- There is a need to direct these response mechanisms down to the community level to make the people own the process.
- The WAGNER group's presence in Africa and its exploitative orientation have had significant implications on security in the region.
- The failure of states and growing mistrust in the regional bodies' (ECOWAS and AU) ability to make any meaningful interventions is pushing many youths in the region into joining extremist groups.

5. SESSION III

5.2. Interactive Institutional Experience Sharing

In keeping with the objective of the Conference, this session, moderated by Dr. Ibrahim Bangura, Senior lecturer of the University of Sierra Leone, Fourah Bay College, discussed institutional experiences on existing regional and sub-regional mechanisms and efforts to prevent and counter VE and terrorism in West Africa and LCB. The panelists who included Col. Emmanuel Mouaya Pouyi of AU, Mr. Moujib Djinadou from UNOWAS, Lt CDR Sokamte Yves Patrice from MNJTF and Lt. Enoch Awudu of the Accra Initiative, collectively shared their institutional perspectives, observations and recommendations towards countering the VE and terrorism within the region.

Against the background of the need to strengthen the synergy and harmonization of efforts to stem VE and terrorism in West Africa, Sahel and the LCB, Col. Emmanuel Mouya Pouyi of the AU indicated the



Col. Emmanuel Mouya Pouyi, CAERT/ACSRT/AU

need for proactive responses and a clear approach to preventing VE. He added that there was the need for a human security-based approach where the focus would be on addressing the needs of the people which constitutes the main cause of the menace. Col. Emmanuel further noted the need to bring communities and various sub-groupings into

the process of addressing VE and terrorism, an approach in which the AU has been a trailblazer.

On his part, Mr. Djinadou of UNOWAS indicated that the UN made several efforts towards preventing and countering VE and terrorism in West Africa, the Sahel and LCB with strategies including the Regional Stability Strategy of the LCB and Liptako Gourma region. This strategy aims at providing infrastructure to host the people willing to come back when normalcy returns and allow the LCB countries to discuss issues of cooperation. While the approach is said to have benefited from the peace secured by the MNJTF and succeeded in the Lake Chad region, the same could not be said of the Liptako Gourma region. Mr. Djinadou indicated the UN's preparedness to support the ECOWAS Action Plan Against Terrorism and VE, which has been dormant since 2017 due to funding constraints and also improve upon the UN 2014 Integrated Strategy for the Sahel that provides a political advocacy forum and helps coordinate international actions in the fight against VE. He acknowledged that while the former has largely been implemented, the latter has not seen much success because of the multitude of country-level response strategies in the Sahel. Each country's response strategy is based on local situations and limited by their parliamentary budgetary approval, which prompts the need to harmonize states' strategies for synergy and progress.

In his submission, Lt CDR Sokamte Yves Patrice from the MNJTF noted the practicality of countering VE and terrorism which calls for stronger collaboration among all actors. He averred that the MNJTF has provided platform for the states to respond to the region's security threats collectively. Notwithstanding

the significance of the multilateral response mechanism, Lt CDR Sokamte expressed concerns with respect to political will or commitment, as well as funding which continue to pose challenges to the full maximization of its potential. To this end, he advocated for more support for the response mechanism to enable a more enhancing, collaborative or partnership approach.

Touching on collaboration efforts as earlier mentioned by Lt CDR Sokamte, Lt. Col Enoch Awudu of the Accra Initiative (AI) indicated that the AI, which started in 2017 with seven member States, aims to collaboratively tackle the pressing VE and terrorism menace in the region through homegrown solutions. According to the Lt. Colonel, its operational pillars include information and intelligence sharing, training of security and intelligence personnel and conducting joint border multilateral military operations for border security. He observed that although the AI favours kinetic regional response, it is complemented by non-kinetic interventions by member states at a national level.

On the AI's operations, Lt. Enoch Awudu indicated that the Initiative has conducted bilateral and multilateral military joint operations code-named "Operation Koudanlgou" and the success realized has inspired the conduct of a second phase. He contended that even though Niger's political turmoil and ECOWAS's pronouncements on the same challenged, the Initiative's operations, its apolitical nature has continually preserved the faith reposed in it. This, he said has propelled the initiative's continued work with CSOs, its use of a civil-military approach and proper blend of both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches in addressing the region's VE and terrorism menace.

The plenary observed the reluctance of most countries to address VE and terrorism threats when they are not directly impacted. Such countries that mostly adopt reactive measures in their security governance management, needed an increased understanding of the need for pro-activeness in dealing with VE and terrorism. The plenary again indicated the need for improved cooperation, collaboration, coordination and harmonization in efforts and synergy among the respective actors. In concurrence with the keynote speaker, Dr Ibn Chambas, they argued for an African-led Peace operations as the UN's Brahimi Peacekeeping Model had outlived its effectiveness in Africa. Other issues including funding challenges, capacities of African national armies, the identity and credibility crises and communication gaps in ECOWAS activities were mentioned as loopholes that needed to be addressed.

5.3. Key highlights of the Session

- The session established that most States in the region lacked interest in addressing VE or terrorism threats, especially when they are not directly affected.

- The need for a proactive approach by states in West Africa, the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin in addressing the issues of VE and terrorism.
- It also revealed the need for initiatives designed along human security and community-based approaches to address VE and terrorism in the region.
- There should also be deliberate efforts towards promoting community acceptance of the counter-violence and terrorism processes right from mapping to implementation stages.
- The cooperation and collaboration gap among policymakers, CSOs and experts in fighting VE and terrorism must also be addressed.
- The credibility crisis of ECOWAS also needs to be addressed to uplift its reputation in the sight of both member states citizens' and donors.
- There is a need for an African-led approach to dealing with African problems and states must show political commitment towards implementing the various mechanisms.

6. SESSION IV

6.2. Group Work

This session was co-moderated by Dr. Luqman Saka from the Centre for Research and Policy Development (CRPD) and University of The Gambia, Dr. Kaderi Noagah Bukari, Snr Lecturer, University of Cape Coast and Mrs Ruth Maria Loreta Jorge, Regional Peacebuilding Coordinator, Project Focal person for DRC, and featured groups tasked to brainstorm on VE and terrorism response mechanisms. The focus involved identifying and presenting policy recommendations for international, regional, national, state and non-state actors such as CSOs and traditional authorities, on countering VE and Terrorism in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin.

6.2.3. *Outlining the prospects and challenges in fostering collaborative multi-stakeholder partnerships for the prevention of conflicts and VE in the Sahel, the LCB and the Coastal Zone of West Africa.*

The outcomes of the group's brainstorming session indicated that though the mechanisms have great potential, some challenges needed to be addressed. The key highlights of the group discussions are stated as follows:



A group brainstorming during the session

- The existence of different approaches and multiplicity of concepts on VE and terrorism in the Sahel and LCB thereby creating the need for conscious efforts towards building synergy between them.
- The constraints in raising funds to implement and sustain counter-violent extremism and terrorism projects must also be aggressively tackled.
- A lack of focus on the human security approach has led to high youth unemployment. The solution is to design programs that will map out the needs of youth and involve them as stakeholders in designing such programs.
- The Limiting of VE and terrorism prevention responses to reactive other than pro-active approaches must also be reviewed. Leaders of states must also be engaged and made to

appreciate the need for proactive measures in addressing VE and terrorism other than waiting to react after a catastrophe.

- There must be a shift towards long-term projects that can have a deeper and sustained impact.
- Limited capacities (technical expertise). This can be addressed by calculated attempts towards building the capacities of researchers, military personnel and CSOs.
- The promotion of inclusiveness and local ownership of programs. This calls for the involvement of all stakeholders, particularly the local, in the planning, designing and implementation of programs aimed at dealing with VE and development.
- There must be deliberate efforts to encourage collaboration between practitioners and researchers to resolve the challenge of disjointed policy measures that do not reflect reality.
- There are also resource management challenges. This situation calls for an upscale in accountability mechanisms and ensuring that the local people are given a voice in their resource management.
- There should be a standardization of the activities of actors working on VE and terrorism prevention and peacebuilding to deal with the issues of duplicity and unnecessary competition.

6.2.4. *The roles ECOWAS and other regional and sub-regional mechanisms must assume in VE and terrorism fight in the wake of Western forces withdrawal and the growing presence of mercenaries, private military contractors and foreign fighters in the region.*

- ECOWAS should implement the stand-by force (activation)
- There is the need for countries to whip up their political will in addressing the VE and terrorism challenge.
- ECOWAS should support national initiatives and border collaboration (joint operation)



Madam Edwige Dede Mensah, WANEP's Liaison Officer to ECOWAS presenting her group's submissions

- Deliberate effort towards rebuilding confidence for information sharing (intelligence, collaboration with CSOs for conflict prevention, Early Warning systems) must be undertaken.
- ECOWAS national offices and officials should also stay closer to the populations they represent and enhance their communication and information sharing and popularize their activities through appropriate communication channels.
- ECOWAS should engage and sustain dialogue with countries in the Sahel to democratize its decision making process. The youth and local leaders are required to play significant roles in these engagement processes.
- ECOWAS should also build upon the success of multilateral initiatives such as the MNJTF and the Accra Initiative
- ECOWAS should further review its strategy regarding sanctions regime and should consider lifting current sanctions. The focus should be on collaborative fight against VE rather than sanctions which only goes to worsen the plight of the local people.
- There should be proper implementation of democracy and good governance by establishing monitoring and accountability mechanisms and organs.
- ECOWAS must partner with civil society organizations (eg. WANEP) and utilize their recommendations in their decision making.

6.2.5. *The key initiatives to help strengthen regional resilience against violent extremism and specific elements of the regional framework that contributes to resilience.*

The following constitutes the cumulative outcome of the groups' engagement.

- Promoting trainings and entrepreneurship to improve productivity of vulnerable population.
- Strengthening social contracts and services delivery (provision of basics services, improvement to access to education to the dispensation of justice)
- Revision and reframing of the existing protocols on governance and democracy, security architecture, and other working documents of ECOWAS to suit the situation on the ground.
- Enhance collaboration between ECOWAS, research institutions and academia.
- Promote mainstreaming of gender equality and inclusivity
- Support regional and national architecture /infrastructure for peace (community and religious leaders, authorities, youth and women group, security, etc.).
- Better coordination and pooling of actions and resources at regional level.
- The resolution of security issues must be separated from political issues. Such sharp differentiation will benefit the entire region.

6.2.6. Identifying the main gaps in evidence-based research and the advocacy strategy needed in the current regional context to influence policy decisions on preventing and combating violent extremism in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin.



A group brainstorming session

6.2.6.1. Key evidence-based research gaps that needs to be addressed includes the following:

- The need for ECOWAS to explore the potential of the centers of excellence to support specific studies on PVCE.
- The need for integrative education and research on the drivers, financing, and prevention of VE targeted at parents, pupils/students and communities at large.
- The need for funding of research on VE and terrorism. Donors need to be impressed upon to fund studies that help to unearth VE and terrorism causes and home grown solutions.
- The need to conduct studies on the relations between armed groups and local traditional chiefs.
- The need to conduct studies on the use of endogenous local knowledge in conflict management and prevention.
- The need to conduct studies on arms trafficking, human trafficking, drug trafficking and their links with the financing of terrorism to cater for aspect that are not covered by the UNODC publication on trafficking.

- The need to conduct studies on young people who join terrorist groups for social status or for economic reasons, to establish how to truncate the phenomena and get them to return to their normal lives.
- An examination of the level of indoctrination of young people in the various armed groups.

6.3. Advocacy strategies required in preventing and combating VE and terrorism in West Africa and the LCB.

- The need to establish specific platform for constructive engagements between think-tanks, researchers and security practitioners.
- The need to adopt the culture of using evidence -based research approach in policy development.
- The need to bridge the gap between researchers and decision makers.
- The need for states to strengthen their relationships and engagements with CSOs women and youth groups.
- The need to use popular artists to support advocacy to prevent PVCE (actors, musicians)
- The need to use mainstream media to educate local populates on the terrorism and VE.
- The need to reinforce counter-narrative and efforts to mitigate disinformation (social media)
- The need to develop and improve upon existing advocacy strategies.
- The need to update REcAP's mapping of actors and improving dissemination of research findings.

7. Session IV

7.2. Panel discussion of ongoing studies and policy engagement of REcAP Network

This session was focused on ongoing studies and policy engagements of the REcAP Network. The session was moderated by Mr. Luc van de Goor, Director of Studies, Conflict, Peace and Security at SIPRI. Thematic presentations on various intriguing studies from three expert members of REcAP of REcAP Network. Mr. Francis Tazoacha of the Nkafu Policy Institute, Cameroon, presented on armed conflict mitigation in the LCB through the strengthening of regional cooperation on climate change and natural resource management; Dr Flan Moquet Cesar talked about community structures and mechanisms to counter VE threats in Northern region of Côte d'Ivoire; whilst Ms. Estella Djanato rounded the session with a presentation on community-based women initiatives to combat VE in North-western region of Benin.

Mr. Francis Tazoacha in his presentation noted that climate change-induced drought and desertification had influenced violent clashes among the fishing, herder and farming communities in the LCB. He noted that given that the region is a confluence of four countries; Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad, the LCB Commission was set up in 1964 as the regional stabilization strategy for the settlement of cross-border disputes, to manage the LCB's water resources; account for the consequences of climate change; promote regional integration, peace, and security and monitor, regulate, and harmonize the management of the natural resources of the LCB. These were ultimately geared towards diffusing any possible conflicts over natural resources by these countries in the region.

According to Mr. Tazoacha, the Commission has since its creation promoted and coordinated natural resource projects and research in the LC region, fostered regional oneness and cooperation and made trading by member states' citizens across states' markets easier. The cooperation has also strengthened the safety and security of border town inhabitants and created a Multinational Joint Task Force to help manage its security threats and challenges. Notwithstanding the contributions of the strategy, Mr. Tazoacha identified low political commitment of member states, inadequate financial disposition, the unavailability of trans-border water management mechanisms and organizational structure, information disconnectedness, the lack of visibility to the outside world, cultural and linguistic differences, and violent banditry activities and terrorism and draining the effectiveness of the strategy.

To address these challenges for a robust strategy, Mr. Tazoacha argued for the prioritization of community mediation initiatives to resolve community conflicts triggered and aggravated by global warming, raise funds for activities to strengthen regional cooperation on climate change and natural resource management in the LCB and renewal of LCBC and its member state's commitment in providing timely, adequate, and meaningful support for the people affected by climate change, natural resource-induced conflicts, and related inequalities.



A section of the Presenters during the session

Mr. Tazoacha also advocated for the setting up of conflicts early warning and response mechanisms to monitor hostilities and financial support by donors towards addressing the pressing needs of the LCB.

With his ongoing study on community structures and mechanisms for countering the threat of VE in northern region of Côte d'Ivoire, Dr. Flan Moquet established the existence of two main mechanisms and structures in the communities. These include the *Superior Council of Imams* and the *National Council of Kings and Chiefs of Côte d'Ivoire*. The former engages in campaigns against VE and promotes moderate Islamism (an Islam which advocates tolerance, respect for human rights and peaceful coexistence with other religious faiths), promotes the training of Imams in Morocco and facilitates interreligious dialogue as its VE and terrorism prevention endeavour. For the National Chambers of Traditional Kings and Chiefs (CNRCT) of Côte d'Ivoire, Dr Flan indicated their contribution towards VE prevention in the form of awareness raising and training of members (ie. Kings and chiefs) on the concept of VE in order to mobilize

their energies against the threat. The council also promotes close collaboration between the traditional leaders, local authorities, security institutions and governing political authorities.

Some challenges of these mechanisms and structures as identified by Dr Flan include the deficit of qualified human resources at the community structures level, inadequate financial, logistical and material resource support; a mass impoverished idle youthful population; festering natural resource-induced agro-pastoralist conflicts and weak coordination between the central/state administration and community activities.

Based on the above, Dr Flan recommended better coordination of civil-military cells, replicating them across the country, enhancing religious and community leaders' capacities, promoting interreligious dialogue for social conflict minimization and instituting good management mechanisms to promote fair and equitable distribution of state's resources across various communities. He further called for communities' proactiveness in dealing with underlying causes of VE, instilling religious and traditional African values in the youth to guard them against radicalism, promoting horizontal dialoging among communities through community capacity building, creating strong synergy between community leaders and state or central administrative authorities and ensuring a fair representation of traditional leaders in the civil-military committee.

Moving onto the broader issue of civil society structures and their involvement in VE management, Estelle Djanato presented findings on the role that women groups played in VE and terrorism prevention. With a focus on women's initiatives to combat VE in northern Benin, Ms Djanato examined the prospects and challenges of such efforts and some possible policy recommendations.

Her findings indicated that northern Benin, in terms of VE activities, is divided into the northeast area which has not had VE experience and the northwest which has been affected. Given that women are equally victims of VE and terrorism activities, women and women groups in each area have engaged in activities aimed at preventing or responding to VE and its consequences. Each area has however had distinct initiatives. For the north-eastern region, women and women groups have focused on preventive initiatives which include raising awareness on peace preservation through discussions with community women, and informal conflict management and mediation training for women. The initiative is extended to the younger population through dialogue to awaken them to the negative impacts of VE. In addition to the awareness, the women also adopt prayer or spiritual intervention as a preventive mechanism against VE and terrorism.

In the northwest where VE had been experienced, women and women groups' initiatives toward addressing its impact have included feminine resilience; and support mechanisms initiated by women to support other women who have been traumatized by the loss of relatives through VE. This manifests through company keeping and the provision of psychological services. The other initiatives include giving back new economic life to women who have lost their livelihood to VE through training on income-generating activities and using women as a source of intelligence for security and intelligence gathering for security authorities.

Miss Djanato noted that these efforts have faced challenges among which are the difficulty in mobilizing funds for their activities, less representation of women in formal peacekeeping mechanisms and processes at the community level and the lack of opportunities to train women in more lucrative income-generating trades. The study hence urges the Benin government to eliminate any feeling of not belonging by bridging the gap between national-level authorities and local-level women and women groups, establish and allocate a special fund to support the strengthening of income-generating activities for women affected by VE and also integrate a gender-sensitive and resilient support budget in border municipalities affected by VE. The systematic involvement of women in conflict prevention mechanisms at the community level and the facilitation of women's access to basic social services such as water, markets etc. is recommended to local actors and women groups are urged to replicate their initiatives in other neighboring municipalities for the lasting and robust fight against VE.

7.3. Key highlights of the session

- The need to improve upon governance and the visibility of the State. The State must show its presence by providing sufficient community social infrastructure, hospitals and schools, particularly in the remote areas, to both reduce the plight of the people and showcase what the state has to offer.
- A clear push for more research on the role of women in the prevention of violent extremism.
- There is also the call for collaboration between the State and the community and community level engagements in addressing VE and terrorism
- The demand for enhanced women participation and representation in security governance in West Africa has also been highlighted.
- Moreover there is the call on the REcAP to ensure that policy recommendation from policy briefs gets to the various policy makers rather than stacking up on conference tables and rooms.

8. CLOSING REMARKS

Mr Romain Sztark expressed delight to be delivering the closing remarks to the regional conference, themed “*Unifying for Stability in Addressing Violent Extremism, Political Uncertainties in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin*”. He, on behalf of the consortium (SIPRI, WANEP and DRC), thanked all the participants for their rich, informative and concrete contributions throughout the conference. The exchange of ideas, he indicated, brought the best out of each participant, and provided a better understanding of the Sahel, Coastal Countries of West Africa and the LCB's current threats and some of the suggestions to counter them.



Mr Romain Sztark delivering the closing remarks

Mr Sztark indicated that the urgent need for collective efforts and improved local and community approaches that involve women, young people, civil society organizations, as well as, religious leaders and institutions peace initiatives, has been highlighted as required to tackle the VE and terrorism threats in the region. Also, given that unfortunate rising coups in the region and its link to state failure in providing

basic public services, initiatives such as addressing the economic opportunities gap, using existing institutions such as the ECOWAS to unify forces against the VE and terrorism scourge and reforming civil societies' initiatives to reduce potential efforts duplications have all been considered as ways of tackling the menace.

The main objective of the conference, Mr Sztark stated, was to create the space for experts and practitioners in conflict prevention and prevention of violent extremism to discuss and share information and practical experiences among themselves. Mr Sztark expressed gratitude to all the participants for their insightful and engaging discourse that has led to the successful realization of these objectives. He intimated that the realized conference objectives were in line with the establishing dictates of the RECAP network which involved serving as stepping stone in the collective efforts to build the needed foundation to restore stability and conflict free Africa. He further aligned this to the network's five working pillars which includes creating an original network of experts in West Africa and the LCB, create an online platform to facilitate the exchange of ideas among members, conduct current relevant studies that are beneficial to all members and contribute to better understanding and way forward on VE and terrorism in the region. The others are engagement in advocacy to get state policymakers participate in VE and terrorism prevention processes and enhance the capacity and visibility of the various CSOs and promote the consolidation of messages and approaches towards addressing VE and terrorism.

Mr Sztark reiterated that the RECAP network was owned by all and such must be the mentality of members towards its activities. The online interactive platform, he argued, must hence be invigorated and used for regular discussions among members, as advocated during the framework presentation and other sessions. He also encouraged member to own and effectively participate in the TWGs that would be set up in early 2024 to provide valuable inputs towards achieving the Network's vision on producing scientific publications.

Mr Sztark further suggested a consideration of the various rich discussions for publication and subsequently communicate them to policymakers so as to create legitimate connections for the implementation of their recommendations. He applauded the network's rolled out training programs on conflict prevention and management and support for civil society actors in their daily handling of these issues with local communities. Other thematic areas including trainings on strengthening the residents of the communities involved were going to be added to these trainings which would be held at countries where RECAP operates. Togo according to him as the next to benefit after same had been organized in Senegal.

On the network's operational framework which had been presented for consideration, Sztark mentioned that the various administrative and operational organs including the GA, NEC, Secretariat and TWGs and the 4 proposed operational values including collaboration, inclusion, innovation and agility, are quite encompassing and worth thorough deliberation by network members. He admonished network members to also stick together around the network's goal and maintain a common commitment to ensure its sustenance. This would help in realizing the 4 sustainability pillars of illustrated in the drafted framework.

Mr Sztark concluded by reiterating the question posed by Mrs. Ruth on the commitment levels of the respective organizations to use and promote the network. He argued that the indispensableness of the question lied in the fact that the funding of the EU that the organization survives on would soon end. And so the network's partners need to collectively put together their energies to obtain additional funding and collective support.

Mr. Sztark once more thanked all who contributed to the organization, particularly WANEP, the technical personnel, interpreters, and everyone who made it to Accra for the conference. He thereafter declared the conferences duly closed and wished that more of same opportunities of spending time together would come.