



Prevention of violent extremism in West and Central Africa

A Swiss FDFA, DCAF and CHEDS project (November 2019 – June 2022) - Systematically reviewing and analyzing conceptual, political, legislative and operational frameworks for the engagement of Defense and Security Forces (DSF) in the prevention of violent extremism (PVE)

Context

For almost 20 years, the scourge of violent extremism has plagued West Africa, the Lake Chad Basin and Central Africa. West African nations located on the Gulf of Guinea currently face a growing threat.

The response to this situation has evolved in recent years. Policies based solely on a military and security-led response, which are still broadly prioritised by African States, have gradually been supplemented by more comprehensive approaches involving political and civilian stakeholders in the action taken by DSF. There is now a broad understanding not only of the root causes of violent extremism, based on the documented work of research groups and knowledge of the reality faced by local populations, but also of the need to actively tackle these causes to prevent further cycles of violence.

The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) and the Centre for Advanced Defence and Security Studies (CHEDS) in Senegal see the need to raise awareness on ways that extreme violence challenges DSF mandates and experiences, to clearly set out how DSF can engage in an approach aimed at Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), to strengthen the commitment and build the capacity of DSF in this regard and to properly monitor the framework promoting DSF engagement to PVE.

Building on the experience of regional conversations for PVE in the region

In 2016, the initiative of the Regional Conversations for PVE identified the importance of the role played by DSF in this preventive approach. This observation prompted the PVE programme of the Swiss Human Security Division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (HSD/FDFA) to establish a partnership with the Centre for Advanced Defence and Security Studies (CHEDS) in Senegal.

A series of regional seminars on PVE, predominantly involving DSF representatives and organised by the CHEDS and FDFA, has been held in the past three years. These high-level meetings have given greater exposure to the issue within West and Central African DSF and helped to effectively mobilise representatives of States involved in these annual seminars.

The present project builds on that process and intends to bring a more systematic knowledge basis on which to pursue that ongoing dialogue. A unique and innovative aspect of this project is the tripartite joint venture between the Swiss HSD/FDFA, the CHEDS in Senegal and the DCAF, as a way to enlarge and consolidate this effort.

The project will specifically conduct a systematic review and assessment of the conceptual, political, legislative and operational frameworks for the engagement of DSF in the prevention of violent extremism in seven West and Central African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

Through an extensive and inclusive consultative process, this project helps improving knowledge about how much this prevention approach is a reality in DSF mandates and actions and identifying existing policy, operational and capabilities gaps for DSF to undertake that role. It is helping to develop targeted political prevention strategies and a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, through a comparative analysis of approaches and experiences.

Expected results

The aim of this project is to conduct a systematic review and taking stock of conceptual, political, legislative and operational frameworks in place for the engagement of West and Central African DSF in PVE. This task is performed by a team of national consultants who work alongside the core team of DCAF, Swiss FDFA and CHEDS experts.

Project implementation

The project has, to this day, covered a series of case studies in the seven target countries. Short fieldwork assignments, direct interviews with key players as well as a collection of relevant documents have provided us with a body of data that is currently being processed for comparative analysis. The results will be published in this final phase of the project and presented to stakeholders in roundtable discussions to be held in three countries.

The aims and expected results are as follows :

- To construct a systematic knowledge base of the conceptual, political, legislative, and operational structures for DSF in the sub-region (illustrative and non-exhaustive);
- To conduct an analytical assessment of their effective or potential scope in relation to DSF engagement to PVE;
- To identify needs (gaps) of existing frameworks, structures, operations or training;
- To generate a dialogue around best practices and lessons from target countries in relation to PVE and DSF engagement;
- To help to identify potential areas in which DSF can strengthen their engagement in PVE;
- To lay the technical groundwork for future Regional Conversations organised by CHEDS, FDFA and DCAF;
- To organise three roundtables in the region to present and reflect on the practical lessons and needs of targeted countries;
- To conceptualise ways in which (i) the evolution of selected conceptual, political, legislative, and operational frameworks relating to DSF and PVE present in the sub-region can be tracked, (ii) the progress made through the study and the Regional Conversations can be captured and (iii) the dialogue around political and operational recommendations can be broadened.

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