

Resilience to the Expansion of Jihadist Organizations in West Africa - REJOWA Project

POLICY BRIEF

Understanding resilience: Lessons from Ghana on preventing jihadist spillovers in the Gulf of Guinea

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1. Introduction: The uneven geography of jihadist expansion in West Africa

Over the past decade, the security landscape of West Africa has undergone a profound transformation. What began as localized insurgencies in northern Mali has gradually evolved into a regional crisis, as armed jihadist groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have expanded across the Sahel. Today, groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) and the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP) operate across porous borders, connecting networks of militants, traffickers, and local grievances stretching from Mali, Niger, to Burkina Faso and beyond.

Yet, as these movements have pushed southwards toward the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea, their trajectory has proved far from uniform. In Benin and Togo, violent incidents have escalated in recent years; Côte d'Ivoire, after experiencing deadly attacks between 2016 and 2021, seems to have reasserted control; and Ghana, despite a 600-kilometre border with conflict-torn Burkina Faso, has remained untouched. This challenges much of the existing literature, which has long warned of an inevitable and uniform "Sahelian contagion" spreading toward the coast (Eizenga and Gnanguènon, 2024).

This uneven geography of jihadist expansion presents a striking puzzle. Why has Ghana, which shares many structural vulnerabilities with its neighbors – economic disparities, informal border economies, ethnic fragmentation, and regional inequalities – remained resilient? And what can this teach us about how coastal states can prevent the spillover of Sahelian conflicts? These questions stand at the heart of the "Resilience to the Expansion of Jihadist Organizations in West Africa" project (REJOWA), funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and implemented between December 2024 and November 2025.

In a context of rising concern over the "Sahelian contagion," the REJOWA project moves beyond alarmist narratives to try and explain why the spread of jihadist violence toward the Atlantic has been uneven. Much of the existing scholarship on violent extremism in Africa focuses on structural state fragilities (Hansen 2019). Scholars such as Bøås and Strazzari (2020) and Raineri (2022) have shown how jihadist groups exploit weak governance, inter-communal conflicts, and the absence of legitimate state authority. Others, including Aning, Albrecht, and Nielsen (2021), have highlighted how environmental stress and climate change act as "threat multipliers," deepening competition over land and water in already fragile rural economies. Aubyn (2021) similarly notes that Ghana's apparent stability conceals a set of persistent vulnerabilities, including high youth unemployment, regional inequalities between the north and south, porous borders that facilitate smuggling and arms trafficking, and perceptions of marginalisation among northern communities.

Ghana faces many of the same pressures that have destabilized its neighbours – such as informal gold mining, shrinking land availability, and increasing climate-related stress – yet it has so far avoided the spillover of jihadist violence. Understanding this paradox requires moving beyond analyses of collapse to examine the mechanisms of resilience. REJOWA addresses this gap through an in-depth case analysis of Ghana's response to the threat of jihadist expansion. It then explores the regional generalizability of the findings by putting forward a comparative study of six West African countries – Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Guinea-

Bissau – aimed at identifying not only which factors underpin resilience but how they interact to shape divergent trajectories of stability and conflict across the region. To this end, the REJOWA project combines multiple disciplines – security studies, political anthropology, development economics, and climate science – into a single analytical framework. Its methodology blends statistical indicators, crop modeling, field observation, and qualitative data collection through interviews and focus groups to capture the complex interplay between security, governance, livelihoods, and environmental stress.

Overall, the project builds on the analysis of 55 key parameters across four dimensions – security, economy, governance, climate change – drawing on datasets such as Afrobarometer, the World Bank knowledge portal and national censuses, 12 focus group discussions with farmers and herders in northern Ghana and 82 interviews carried out in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Guinea. Fieldwork in northern Ghana explores how communities manage disputes, negotiate with local authorities, and balance formal and informal security mechanisms. In parallel, agroclimatic prediction tools were used to evaluate how changing rainfall and temperature patterns impact food security, helping to link environmental stress to social stability. Specifically, crop modelling was used to simulate future climate scenarios and evaluate their impact on agricultural productivity in Ghana, focusing on two staple crops that are key for food security: maize and rice.

By combining empirical evidence with comparative analysis, this policy brief aims to provide decision-makers with practical insights into how resilience can be sustained and fostered in different contexts. REJOWA’s interdisciplinary lens shows that preventing the spread of violent extremism requires not only security measures but also attention to the social, political, and ecological fabrics that hold communities together. In this sense, Ghana’s experience offers not merely a case study but a laboratory to explore how peace can endure amid regional turbulence.

2. Resilience and Vulnerability to Violent Extremism in Ghana

Amidst fears of a rapid expansion of jihadist insurgencies from the Sahel to coastal West African countries, Ghana is often presented as an exceptional case of resilience. As a matter of fact, Ghana, unlike most of its neighbouring countries, has not suffered any terrorist attack claimed by or attributed to jihadist insurgent groups such as JNIM, ISSP, or others.

And yet, absence of terrorist attacks only provides a partial indicator of a country’s resilience to jihadist violent extremism, e.g. its capacity to resist expansion, adequately anticipate and address drivers of escalation, and promptly recover should violent events occur. Jihadist groups in West Africa can in fact operate also in less obvious and spectacular ways, including by threatening local communities to instill fear and compliance, mobilizing followers online, preaching in mosques and villages, partaking in informal cross-border economies, or pursuing social embeddedness by leveraging existing grievances against the states.

Noting these alternative pathways of jihadist expansion, it is worth asking preliminarily whether and to what extent is Ghana actually resilient to the expansion of violent extremist organizations from the Sahel? Drawing on both our research findings and existing literature, the overall assessment remains broadly encouraging: Ghana continues to demonstrate notable resilience, and

evidence of jihadist infiltrations and influence in the country remain very scant. Yet not entirely absent either, and emerging vulnerabilities warrant close attention. Recent developments, including the arrests of radicalized individuals (some armed), reports of inflammatory sermons, isolated cases of youth recruitment into violent extremist groups abroad, and suspicious incidents such as market attacks in border areas (where nothing was stolen), suggest that the situation is less reassuring than often assumed (REJOWA interviews; Promediation 2022; Muqthar 2022; Ofosu-Peasah 2024).

The scientific literature identifies several key dimensions that influence a country's exposure to violent extremism, and its resilience to the latter's entrenchment and expansion. These dimensions have guided our analysis and defined our main research areas. The following sections examine each of these areas in greater depth to better assess and explain Ghana's performance facing the expansion of jihadist organizations in West Africa.

2.1 The Peacebuilding Architecture

Ghana's peacebuilding architecture provides a strong foundation for resilience against the expansion of violent extremism. It combines well-structured strategies and policies with coordinated implementation by security agencies, civil institutions, and civil society, while actively engaging communities and promoting a culture of vigilance.

More particularly, Ghana has adopted a comprehensive National Security Strategy (2020) that also encompasses the National Framework (NF) for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism (2019). The NF was developed by a joint military-civilian team with a human security approach; its four pillars – prevent, pre-empt, protect and respond – are jointly implemented by security agencies and civil institutions. The National Security Council provides strategic leadership for the implementation of the NF; its decentralized implementation is coordinated by Regional and District Security Councils (REGSEC and DISEC).

The NF extends effectively to the community level, enabling rapid information flow between citizens and state actors. A key component of this system is the “See Something, Say Something” campaign, which encourages residents to report suspicious activities via a hotline or direct contact with security forces. By leveraging trusted peacebuilding NGOs, community-based organizations and trained monitors, the campaign not only enhances early threat detection but also strengthens relationships between citizens and security agencies.

However, critical vulnerabilities must be addressed to sustain this architecture. In neighbouring countries where similar policies have been adopted, research findings attest that citizens who report suspicious activity may face retaliation by jihadist organizations proscribing any cooperation with the state (ICG 2020; Raineri 2021). Furthermore, lacking an adequate framing of what “suspicious activities” worth reporting may possibly consist of, marginalized groups such as the Fulbe, but also migrants from the Sahel, risk being unfairly profiled, thereby exacerbating feelings of stigmatization and disenfranchisement. Research has repeatedly highlighted the plausibility of such an outcome, albeit unwanted and counterproductive, in other country-cases. The British PREVENT programme is a case in point. Seen as one of Ghana's NF's sources of inspiration, PREVENT has tasked state agencies and community-based organization in the UK with monitoring and reporting early signs of radicalization. Critical scholarship has however demonstrated how this approach entails a serious risk of misleadingly view as “risky” population

groups which are instead “at risk” of being exposed to the drivers of radicalization and violent extremist mobilization (Kundnani 2012; Heath-Kelly 2017). Moreover, reporting channels also suffer from limited feedback to communities on how their reports are acted upon, creating the potential for disillusionment and decreased participation over time. Furthermore, most peacebuilding and community sensitization efforts are concentrated in border regions perceived as high-risk, while emerging vulnerabilities in urban and peri-urban areas farther from the borders receive less attention.

Addressing these challenges is essential to maintaining both the effectiveness and legitimacy of Ghana’s community-based resilience mechanisms, ensuring that vigilance and engagement do not unintentionally exacerbate social divisions or leave emerging threats unmonitored.

2.2. Border Security

In the area of border security, proactive measures to foster resilience coexist with significant vulnerabilities. Border Security Committees (BOSEC) have been established to coordinate the activities of multiple agencies, including the police, immigration, intelligence, customs, and the army. These agencies conduct joint patrols, and cross-border collaboration – particularly information sharing – remains active with neighboring countries, especially Togo. However, cooperation has been undermined by the rise of political cleavages among regional states, prompting the decline of the Accra Initiative, an international security cooperation mechanism originally adopted in 2017 to bring together both Sahelian and coastal West-African countries in the fight against violent extremist groups.

A conflict-sensitive approach guides cross-border engagement, emphasizing tolerance toward local livelihoods and informality to build trust. While this approach supports community relations, it also creates opportunities for opacity and corruption. The proliferation of informal crossing points (e.g., estimated at around 185 in the Upper East Region compared to only 14 formal ones) facilitates the smuggling of both licit and illicit goods, some of which may serve as resources for violent extremist groups. And while border security forces have reportedly stepped-up efforts at clamping down on the smuggling of goods perceived as potentially benefiting violent extremist groups – such as weapons and drugs, but also goldmining tools, fuel and fertilizer – monitoring and detection capacities remain acutely inadequate, thereby highlighting a worrying mismatch between intentions and outcomes.

Border security agencies face in fact chronic shortages of equipment and technology, such as biometric systems, drones, scanners, and forgery detection tools. This contrasts remarkably with recent improvements in border control capacities and technologies observed in much of the rest of West Africa (Frowd 2018; Iwuoha 2025), thus placing Ghana well behind its neighbours in terms of policy developments in this domain. Nonetheless, international partners, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the European Union, and others, have begun to provide vehicles, protective gear, and training to strengthen operational capacity.

2.3 The Religious Field

Our research indicates that genuine religious tolerance and effective interreligious dialogue remain prevalent in Ghana. While some intra-religious tensions exist – such as between Sunni and Shia communities – instances of violence remain extremely rare. Cross-faith mediation mechanisms

are well established: Christian leaders often mediate disputes among Muslim sects, and Muslim leaders play a similar role among Christian denominations. Peace Councils at national, regional, and district levels have been instrumental in fostering dialogue and trust across faiths.

However, the field of religious beliefs and practices is evolving rapidly across the region, and Ghana is no exception. Other countries once known for tolerance, such as Burkina Faso, now face rising violent extremism, raising the question of whether sufficient safeguards exist to protect Ghana's current stability. Compounding this, the effectiveness of Peace Councils has been significantly undermined by the end of USAID support, which previously funded over 90% of their activities. This reduction limits not only their ability to implement projects but also their capacity for early conflict monitoring and preventive diplomacy in communities facing emerging tensions.

Another concern is the lack of state oversight of religious preaching. While many religious organizations practice self-monitoring, where internal hierarchies monitor sermons to prevent inflammatory messages, this remains voluntary and unenforced by government authorities. At the same time, radical sects, including some with alleged links to violent militancy, are gaining deeper roots within the Ghanaian society, posing potential long-term risks to religious harmony. While available literature attests that religious discourses, no matter how radical, only partially explain the rise of violent extremism in Africa (UNDP 2023), observations from Ghana's neighbouring countries demonstrate that jihadist organizations might nevertheless attempt to reframe and radicalize existing social grievances and ethnic fragmentation in religious terms to foster state rejection (Yahya 2017). For the time being, there is no conclusive evidence that this is occurring in Ghana, but the lack of adequate safeguards is no recipe to long-term resilience.

2.4 Social Cohesion

Knowing that research consistently shows how authoritarian regimes often breed social disenfranchisement (Linz, 2000; Cavatorta 2013), Ghana's resilient multiparty democracy and strong civic engagement are likely sources of resilience. Citizens' trust in state institutions is reinforced by bodies such as the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), whose constitutional mandate is to promote democracy and raise awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities. Ghana's governance model also benefits from close collaboration between modern state institutions and traditional authorities, a relationship that may facilitate social integration and conflict mediation.

Nevertheless, intercommunal tensions persist. In the Upper East Region alone, 66 active conflicts – ranging from chieftaincy and land disputes to farmer–herder and resource clashes – highlight ongoing challenges. The Fulbe minority, in particular, faces systematic discrimination, often being labeled as “foreigners” or “inherently violent,” and is frequently blamed for crimes with unknown perpetrators. They experience exclusion from community decision-making, limited access to identity documents and basic services, and frequent violent reprisals following disputes, such as crop damage. In neighboring countries, such marginalization has been exploited by violent extremist groups to recruit followers (Sangaré 2019) – a warning sign for Ghana.

The long-standing Bawku conflict is another source of risks. Rooted in ethnic and chieftaincy disputes, it has spread instability to neighboring districts, fueling youth unemployment and small arms circulation in what was once a major northern trading hub. Reports of illicit gold and

weapons cross-border trafficking add further complexity, though direct links to violent extremism remain unconfirmed (REJOWA interviews, Tisserand 2025; Ajayi 2025; Assanvo 2023).

National data underscore the structural drivers of fragility: poverty and limited access to public services in the northern regions are roughly twice the national average. Combined with widespread youth unemployment and underemployment, identified both in prior research (UNDP 2023) and our own findings, these factors represent significant vulnerabilities that could undermine social cohesion and create an enabling environment for extremist mobilization.

2.5 Climate security in Ghana

Agriculture plays a vital role in Ghana's economy, contributing nearly 25% of the national GDP and serving as a cornerstone for employment, food security, and rural livelihoods (MoA, 2022). Despite its importance, agriculture is predominantly rainfed, carried out with traditional practices, and based on farming systems that are increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Ghana's agroecological conditions are well-suited for the cultivation of a wide range of crops, including cereals such as maize, rice (paddy), sorghum, and millet. Among these, maize and rice are the most critical for food security and are grown across multiple agroecological zones. The country in fact comprises six agroecological zones characterized by distinct rainfall patterns, ranging from humid coastal areas in the south to dry savannahs in the north. These variations strongly influence crop suitability, farming systems, and management practices, with southern regions experiencing two rainy seasons yearly, and northern savannahs only one.

Crop modeling results showed that under scenarios simulating average temperature increases of +1.5 °C and +3.0 °C during the main cropping season in the regions of Ashanti, Bono, Eastern, and Volta, maize yields are expected to decline by approximately 12–20% in the first scenario (+1.5 °C) and by 20–37% in the second scenario (+3.0 °C). These simulations were based on four widely cultivated maize varieties in Ghana. A similar analysis was conducted for rice in Bono Central and Volta regions; however, results indicated no significant yield reduction under the same temperature scenarios. These findings highlight the differential vulnerability of staple crops to rising temperatures and underscore the need for targeted adaptation strategies to safeguard food security. Insights from focus group discussions carried out in northern regions corroborate these modelled projections: farmers consistently reported that the duration of the rainy season has shortened, rainfall patterns have become unpredictable, and the total quantity of rain has decreased.

These observations show how climate change is reducing agricultural yields and intensifying the vulnerability of rural livelihoods in the northern regions neighbouring the Sahel. At the same time, agricultural land is diminishing as a result of population growth, changing social dynamics around land use (such as women and migrants increasingly engaging in agriculture), expanding mining operations, and the spread of large commercial farms, often established by wealthy urban investors. These trends are placing both food security and household incomes at risk – especially in areas where alternative employment opportunities are limited.

The absence of clearly demarcated cattle corridors and designated grazing areas further exacerbates tensions between farmers and herders. These disputes frequently escalate into violence, particularly in the absence of institutionalized, community-based mediation mechanisms capable of managing recurring disputes. Climate change compounds these risks by disrupting

traditional rainfall patterns and long-established transhumance routes. Shifts in rainfall timing and intensity are altering migration patterns both across borders – with herders from the Sahel moving into Ghana – and within the country, as Ghanaian herders move southward during the dry season and northward during the rains.

Resource competition is further intensified by development challenges, especially in the northern regions. Disputes over access to surface water are frequent, particularly where functional boreholes are lacking. Farmers, herders, and domestic users often compete for the same limited water sources, creating flashpoints for local conflict.

Overall, these findings align with the wider literature: there is no direct or deterministic link between climate change and violent conflict. However, the interaction of climate change, development issues, and weak governance mechanisms creates a complex web of vulnerabilities that significantly heighten the risk of conflict, which in turn violent extremist groups can leverage to gain social rooting.

3. Putting Ghana into regional perspective: patterns of resilience and vulnerability to violent extremism in coastal West Africa

While Ghana's relative resilience to the southward expansion of Sahelian jihadist groups rests on a combination of diversified governance, comparatively trusted security institutions, and effective – if uneven – state presence in peripheral northern regions, it is useful to contextualize its performance within a broader regional perspective. Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, two West African states neighbouring the Sahel that have so far avoided significant jihadist entrenchment, offer instructive comparative cases. Both countries exhibit resilience, including lack of manifest attacks or threats thereof in the last few years, yet for reasons that diverge markedly from those observed in Ghana. Their trajectories underscore how different constellations of security responses, governance quality, socio-economic challenges, and pressures on natural resources can generate comparable short-term outcomes in terms of limiting militant expansion, while also revealing distinct vulnerabilities that may affect their long-term stability. Understanding these contrasts helps clarify which aspects of Ghana's experience may travel across contexts, and which may not.

In Côte d'Ivoire, resilience is underpinned by a combination of relatively effective local governance and security mechanisms and persistent structural weaknesses. Governance of land and agro-pastoral conflicts is reportedly improving, and multi-level conflict-settlement mechanisms involving community-based, local and national frameworks are perceived as relatively effective, contributing to a reduction in the type of local disputes and intercommunity tensions that jihadists often instrumentalise. Nevertheless, the provision of basic services remains insufficient in rural areas, and democratic space is shrinking, eroding the state's legitimacy in ways that may become more consequential over time. In the domain of security, Côte d'Ivoire continues to benefit from relatively robust international cooperation by Western partners, while it has strengthened state presence in border regions following the 2020-21 attacks. In addition, Côte d'Ivoire's security model appears to rely on both community-based reporting systems, like in Ghana, yet in combination with high-tech surveillance devices. Public trust in security forces

is reportedly improving, contributing to a more cooperative environment for border management.

Economically, Côte d'Ivoire displays a mixed picture: while youth unemployment and north-south regional disparities appear less acute than in Ghana, the prominence of informal economies – including illicit flows and illegal gold mining – creates complex governance challenges in border areas. These dynamics can encourage transactional relationships between local actors and criminal networks that may potentially intersect with jihadist activity. Looking at climatic trends and stressors, the picture is relatively encouraging, as deforestation, temperature increases and rainfall variations appear comparatively mild, thereby tempering the fear that competition over shrinking natural resources may spiral out of control.

Guinea presents a different configuration of resilience, in which a relatively high degree of inter-ethnic understanding and peaceful coexistence contrasts with eroding trust in state institutions. Looking at governance challenges, the undemocratic nature of the regime compounds widespread perceptions of high-level corruption, thereby undermining trust in the state, and in the justice sector in particular, and constraining the state's overall legitimacy. At the same time, it is noteworthy that Guinea seems to be managing land issues and agro-pastoral disputes relatively effectively: conflicts in rural areas do occur but they rarely escalate into violence, and Afrobarometer data attest that inter-ethnic relations remain broadly cooperative. This comparatively high level of social cohesion, including vis-à-vis Ghana, arguably provides a buffer against the types of local grievances that jihadist groups often weaponize in West Africa.

In the security domain, Guinea has maintained effective CVE (countering violent extremism) cooperation with foreign partners, including in the West – much unlike its Sahelian counterparts. Security governance in remote areas is also improving owing to greater decentralisation of forces and multi-stakeholder governance schemes, with highly connected civilian authorities playing a key role. Yet reports of large-scale abuses against civilians continue to undermine trust in state security forces. This weakens the state's ability to partner effectively with local communities, a key factor that differentiates it from Ghana's more constructive security-community relations. Socio-economic conditions compound these risks. Poverty is widespread; and while this can perhaps help mitigate centre-periphery discrepancies (though at the lower end of the distribution spectrum), extremely high rates of youth unemployment create structural incentives for informal and illicit livelihoods. Much like its neighbours, Guinea is therefore highly exposed to illicit economies; yet unlike the former, its capacity (and possibly willingness) to regulate and sanction them is very limited, thereby making border regions particularly vulnerable to infiltration and opportunistic alliances.

Taken together, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea demonstrate that resilience to jihadist spillover in the Gulf of Guinea is not monolithic: it can emerge from diverse, sometimes contradictory combinations of governance, security, socio-economic and environmental variables. This comparative perspective highlights the distinctiveness of Ghana's trajectory, and the importance of tailoring policy responses to each country's specific configuration of strengths and vulnerabilities, rather than pursuing illusory one-size-fits-all solutions.

4. Future avenues of research and capacity building: ESATRE-Ghana

While REJOWA has helped identify the main features of West African countries' resilience to the expansion of violent extremism, our findings only offer a snapshot of present conditions, whose precarious balance could possibly be disrupted by changing structural trends. Climate change is chief among them. With a view to tackling these challenges, a new project – ESATRE-Ghana – is scheduled to begin in December 2025, with a duration of 12 months. Building on the knowledge accumulated since 2022 through a series of research- and training-oriented initiatives in West Africa, ESATRE-Ghana is premised on the recognition that climate change is already affecting West Africa and is projected to intensify, heightening food and land tenure insecurity and related social tensions.

In this context, Ghana's expanding – but still uneven – agroclimatic and early warning services represent a crucial lever for resilience, with the potential to help improve Ghana's agricultural and pastoral planning, improve food security, and prevent conflicts over natural resources. The Ghana Meteorological Agency (GMet) produces daily and seasonal forecasts on key climate variables, disseminated through radio, television, SMS and WhatsApp (Tindan 2022; REJOWA interviews). Yet both fieldwork data and literature show that barriers of accessibility, trust and language result in many smallholder farmers and herders often relying on traditional environmental cues – such as unusually high temperatures, the flowering of shea or neem trees, or the calls and migratory behaviour of certain birds – to determine the onset of the rainy season (Antwi-Agyei et al. 2014; REJOWA FGDs and interviews).

The ESATRE project therefore aims to promote climate resilience through enhanced climate information. Building on evidence showing that climate information is most effective when communities are involved in shaping how it is produced and communicated (Pienaa et al. 2023); and that agricultural extension officers are viewed as the most trusted forecast intermediaries, (Lawson et al. 2025; REJOWA interviews), yet their impact is constrained by inconsistent dissemination practices (Tindan 2022; REJOWA interviews), ESATRE will seek to develop and disseminate an innovative and inclusive climate information tool tailored to the needs of Ghanaian smallholder farmers and herders.

In parallel, ESATRE seeks to contribute to the improvement of natural resources governance in Ghana, both in terms of communities' rights and state duties. Noting the worrying proliferation of farmer-herder conflicts, the project sets out to: (i) elucidate the factors underlying the lack of transhumance regulation in Ghana; (ii) strengthen the capacity of institutional actors to support informed policy-making; and (iii) analyze the Ghanaian case to contribute to the broader legal debate on the obligations of African states in the context of the climate crisis.

5. Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations for international donors

1. Support Peace Councils and peacebuilding CSOs

The termination of USAID funding has significantly disrupted the operations of both civil society organizations (CSOs) and national institutions engaged in peacebuilding, particularly affecting the functionality of the Peace Councils at all levels. These entities have played a critical role in conflict prevention and social cohesion within Ghana's peace architecture. To prevent erosion of the progress achieved and to mitigate emerging risks of local tensions, international development partners are strongly encouraged to provide targeted financial and technical support to these organizations and institutions – especially the National and Regional Peace Councils

2. Integrate environmental adaptation into security cooperation

Findings from REJOWA highlight the critical role of environmental adaptation – through climate-smart agriculture, land governance, and water resource management – in sustaining peace. International development partners, including the EU and Italy, should develop greater sensitivity to these dimensions in their regional stabilization frameworks, including the EU Security and Defence Initiative in the Gulf of Guinea (2023) and the Italian Cooperation's Africa Plan, ensuring that climate and security policies are mutually reinforcing.

3. Support Ghana in establishing coherent border security cooperation

In Ghana there is a significant untapped potential for further improving and upgrading border security. Reliance on communities' cooperation and trust is a positive step forward, which however, cannot suffice in isolation. Ghana should seek cooperation with regional partners to improve information sharing and border policy coordination. At the same time, Western partners can help Ghana acquire the much-needed resources, equipment and technologies to improve border surveillance. Efforts should prioritise tackling border threats consistent with the risks of jihadist expansion, for which technical and political support is most needed: that is, first and foremost, arms and gold smuggling.

Policy recommendations for Ghanaian decision-makers

1. Consolidate community trust in security agencies

Ghana's success in preventing jihadist attacks arguably owes much to the "See Something, Say Something" campaign and its strong peacebuilding network. Yet, REJOWA findings highlight risks of retaliation against whistleblowers and stigmatization vis-à-vis disenfranchised communities. Authorities should institutionalize community feedback mechanisms to prevent these initiatives from further alienating at-risk groups, particularly Fulbe communities.

2. Address socio-economic disparities in northern regions

Persistent North–South inequalities and youth unemployment remain critical vulnerabilities. Integrating livelihood support, vocational training, and microcredit programs into national security and development plans can mitigate recruitment risks among marginalized populations in border areas.

3. Mainstream natural resource governance in security planning

Conflicts over land, water, and mining – both legal and illegal – are major pressure points. Ghana should reinforce coordination between environmental, agricultural, and security agencies to promote conflict-sensitive resource management, ensuring that local disputes over gold mining and transhumance are handled before they escalate into broader insecurity.

4. Make strategic use of crop modelling beyond agricultural planning

While crop models are already used in Ghana to guide agricultural decision-making – such as fertiliser allocation and varietal selection – their potential for broader climate adaptation strategies remains underutilised. Governmental agencies should make greater use of crop modelling to inform policy decisions, guide resource allocation, and support the design of resilient food systems capable of withstanding future climate challenges.

5. Enhance community accessibility and relevance of climate information through strengthened extension services

To increase the practical use of climate and agroclimatic information, services must be delivered in accessible formats, in local languages, and through trusted channels such as extension services, community radios, local information centres, and participatory early warning systems. Strengthening agricultural extension officers – who are the most trusted intermediaries for farmers and herders – is essential to bridge the gap between technical forecasts and actionable decisions. Expanding their presence, improving their training, and integrating systematic community feedback will ensure that climate information is tailored to local needs, trusted, and more effectively translated into climate-adaptation practices.

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