



FOSDA MONITORING REPORT

BORDER COMMUNITIES SENSITIVITY TO VIOLENT ATTACKS

Focus on: Upper East Region of Ghana

(Paga, Namoo and Mognori Border Communities)

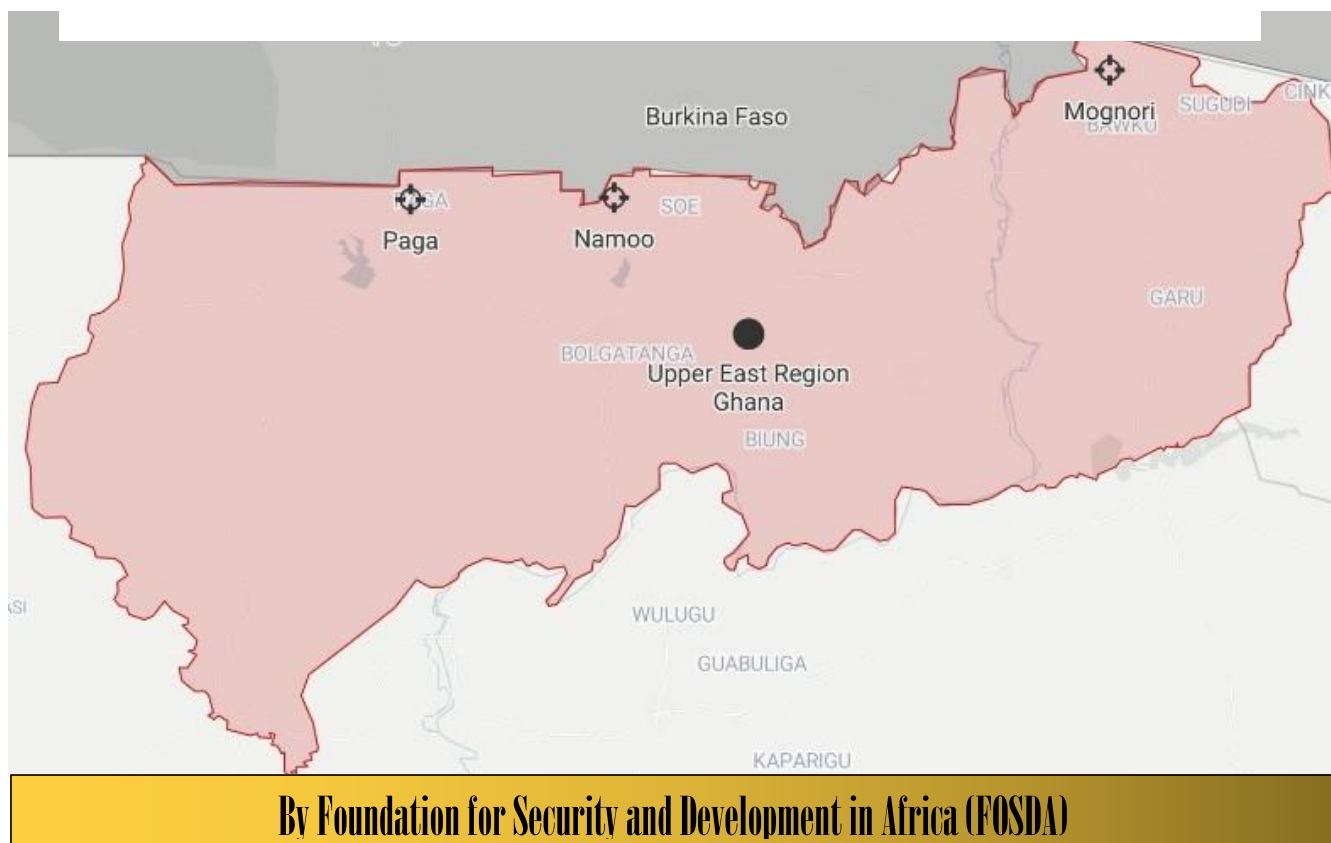




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Executive Summary

Border communities are critical to the conversation on extremist and terrorist attacks as well as other trans-national organised crime. Strategies and actions aimed at preventing or countering such violent attacks and crimes must necessarily factor in the dynamics of border communities and their role as buffer communities to the state. In the wake of the escalation of violent extremist and terrorist attacks across West Africa and the threat Ghana faces, communities along the borders of Ghana to Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Togo have become of immense interest to all stakeholders. Are they prepared, well informed and ready to support strategies and actions to minimise the probability of Ghana being attacked? FOSDA's Border Sensitivity monitoring exercise set out to answer some of these questions and more in the Namoo and Magnori border communities bordering Burkina Faso in the Upper East Region.

The monitoring was based on eight elements of sensitivity covering knowledge of subject matter by leaders and ordinary citizens, adequacy of logistics of security apparatus, level of collaboration, level of trust between citizens and security officers, porosity of borders, and level of structural challenges including youth unemployment.

The monitoring report indicates high level of knowledge of the subject matter among community leaders, such as chiefs, assembly members, opinion leaders, and the security agencies in all the three communities monitored. They all confirmed the work done by the Regional Peace Council to engage community leaders on the subject matter. The generality of citizens in the three communities on the other hand reported low and inadequate knowledge on violent extremism and terrorism. Critical direct service providers at the frontiers, including traders, okada riders, money changers among others reported no sensitisation or engagement on the issue, and are depending on their personal sources of information. The Community leaders confirmed these assertions. They also complained of lack of logistics for grass-root engagements.

This report provides evidence for some already known information such as inadequate logistics for the security agencies at the borders, poorly manned entry points and high youth unemployment. The youth in all three communities are crossing over to work in mining fields in Burkina Faso, increasing risk of radicalisation. This confirms fears and the reality of

young Ghanaians being radicalised. It is interesting that they blamed politicisation of opportunities and nepotism for the unemployment situation.

The report makes short and long term recommendations. In the short term, stakeholders recommend grass-root sensitisation in these communities. It is also critical that the security services are provided with adequate logistics to patrol entry points, including the establishment of a drone monitoring centre. In the long term, it is recommended that Government, through its Ministries, Departments and Agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture, National Youth Authority, Youth Employment Agency and the Youstart project, must pay particular attention to youth unemployment in the border communities. Special arrangement must be made for young people in Border communities.

Introduction

The current wave of violent extremist and terrorist attacks in coastal West Africa puts Ghana in a conundrum. The country is presently surrounded by countries that have experienced various levels of attacks, the most recent being Togo which borders Ghana to the east. The risk of attack is high, Ghana appears to exhibit most of the factors believed to have led to the attacks of its neighbours. For many experts, an attack on Ghana is only a matter of time.

The Government of Ghana has been proactive and consistent in deploying military solutions to the situation at both national and international levels. However, that has not allayed the fears of citizens and civil society as the political and socio-economic deficiencies which form the structural base for such attacks persist.

The 2021 report of the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) on Risk of Extremism and Terrorism' found that Ghana's northern borders were very porous (over 42% out of the total 66% of total border porosity) and could serve as a passage for terrorist into Ghana. This challenge is just one of the many Ghana faces in the fight against Violent Extremism (VE). In fact, the 2019 National Framework for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Ghana (NFPCVET) acknowledges that 'factors such as unemployment and youth bulge among others, could become the sources of grievances in some sections of the population which could be exploited by Violent Extremist and Terrorist groups to recruit persons domestically to their cause.'

In May 2022, the Ministry of National Security launched a citizen education campaign dubbed ‘See Something, Say Something in the capital Accra. A campaign that is premised on sensitizing citizens and non-citizens in Ghana on the modus operandi of VE and channel of reporting suspicious persons and events to the Security architecture put in place. It is therefore crucial that both Government and Civil Society Organisations extend this campaign and its message to all parts of the country.

In June, 2022, the media reported the proclamation of the Upper East Regional Minister, Hon, Stephen Yakubu, that Ghana is “prepared to take on terrorist groups...explained that the government has adequately armed the region with the requisite logistics to fight any such attack¹”. This reinforces fears that the country is overly focused on the military approach to preventing and countering violent attacks and much is left to be done to address the ‘soft factors and elements.’

Monitoring Objective

The ‘Border Sensitivity Monitoring Report’ is an intervention of the Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (**FOSDA**). It ascertains the alertness of border communities to the subject of violent extremism and terrorism. The monitoring exercise is also to interrogate the alertness of stakeholders and their role in preventing extremist and terrorist attacks. The report provides long, medium- and short-term recommendations for target stakeholders. This Report specially focuses on three Border communities in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

Scope

The monitoring exercise was conducted in the Paga, Namoo and Mognori border communities of the Upper East region. Field work and other auxiliary interaction was conducted from May to June, 2022.

Methodology

The study deployed the qualitative method of data collection and analysis which is context-dependent, focused specifically on situations and people movement, processes and outcomes and the primary use of textual data rather than numerical data. We used the qualitative approach in the specific knowledge and individual experience of target stakeholders. This therefore required that we engage stakeholders through unstructured and semi structured

¹ <https://www.myjoyonline.com/we-are-prepared-to-take-on-terrorist-groups-upper-east-regional-minister/>

interviews to elicit the information required. FOSDA staff were deployed to the border community to interact with security agencies, assembly members, youth groups, Okada-riders, religious leaders and members of the Peace Council, who were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who possess useful information on Ghana's security strategies in preventing terrorism. Based on the sensitivity of confidential security information, we analysed data thoughtfully and treated it with utmost care.

Elements of Border Sensitivity

Border Sensitivity is defined as the alertness of target border communities to extremist attacks. It translates into what is consciously and unconsciously being done to prevent attacks by the criminal activities of extremists in those communities and beyond. We identified eight specific elements of sensitivity, outlined below.

- 1. Level of knowledge or awareness of the population including leaders about VE and terrorism (attacks and activities)*
- 2. Level of awareness of the population about local and national interventions to prevent or counter any possible attack.*
- 3. Level of knowledge among Border officials about the subject matter*
- 4. Level of collaboration among key stakeholders*
- 5. Level of Trust between stakeholders and the security services.*
- 6. Relevant Logistic provisions for security agencies*
- 7. The number and state of unmanned unapproved routes of borders*
- 8. Youth vulnerability/resilience / Youth Employment issues*

Context of the Upper East Region

The Upper East Region of Ghana shares boundaries with two countries, to the north with Burkina Faso and with the Republic of Togo to the east. Burkina Faso and Togo have both encountered VE attacks on civilians and armed security personnel including military and prison installations. These have led to not only injuries but the loss of lots of lives. Some of these attacks have been so close to the borders of the Upper East Region of Ghana. For instance, there has been several attacks in Yolwungo in Burkina Faso, directly bordering Namoo in the Bongo district. A Ghanaian citizen, a trader from Guruko, a border community

is reported to have been killed in one of those attacks. This fuels fears that extremist attacks might be closer to Ghana than ordinarily envisaged.

The Regional Director of the National Investigation Bureau (NIB) cautioned in an interview that the ‘situation in Burkina Faso is getting bad by the day and inching close, the reasons for vigilance by every citizen’.

In general, some sensitisation work has been done across the region, led by the National Peace Council with support from the UNDP. The Regional Peace Council has led the conduct of various stakeholder engagement workshops and training sessions on Violent Extremism and Terrorism for some selected border communities. The communities include Paga, Bongo, Zebilla and Bawku. The engagement targeted chiefs, queen mothers, opinions leaders, youth leaders, assembly members, the Police Service and the Immigration service.

The challenge is that this information and education provided during these engagements have not trickled down to the grass-root as anticipated. Some of the stakeholders who FOSDA interviewed confirmed the engagements and also confirmed that they have not been able to further disseminate the information due to logistical challenges, however they are doing that in their own small way.

Findings in the Paga, Namoo and Mognori Border Communities



Paga, Namoo and Mognori communities are all located in the Upper East Region of Ghana. They are all border communities which share direct boundaries with Ghana's neighbour Burkina Faso. Paga is the district capital of the Kassena

Nankana West District Assembly. Mognori and Namoo communities are located in the Bawku Municipality and Bongo District Assemblies respectively. Paga, which is the host to the official Border between Ghana and Burkina Faso is vibrant and busy with trading activities.

1. Level of knowledge or awareness of the population

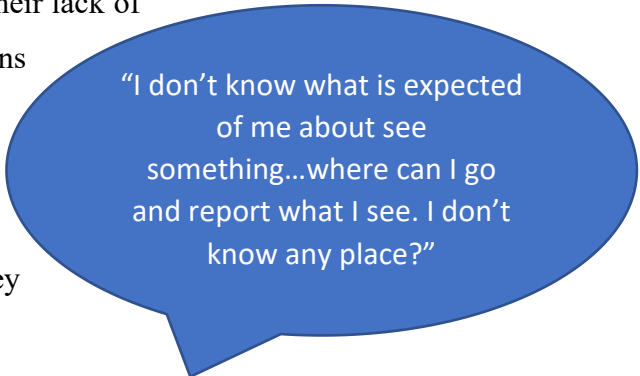
The Community leaders were interviewed from all three border communities. They included chiefs and their elders, assembly members, traders, women and youth groups. Generally, community leaders reported having been engaged on the violent extremism and terrorism by the National and Regional Peace Council, hence adequately sensitised on the subject. An Assemblyman in Paga confirmed that sensitisation meetings was conducted for chiefs and elders at the Chief's Palace. The Director of the National Peace Council in the Upper East Region also confirmed organising various stakeholder sensitisation of Chiefs, elders, assembly members, youth leaders, religious leaders, and women leaders among others, within border communities in the Upper East Region.

However ordinary people engaged, including youth, okada riders, traders and women at the border front and in the communities, had not received any formal or informal sensitisation and are depending on their personal information systems. They reported that they have no knowledge about what suspicious characters and activities to report and who to report to. In all three communities, it was reported that the Assembly, Information Service Department and NCCE have not conducted community sensitisation or durbars.

The leaders and stakeholders engaged in the three communities, including opinion leaders, immigration, NIB and National Peace Council and NCCE officials confirmed and bemoaned the lack of community sensitisation on violent extremism and terrorism given the very sensitive nature of the phenomenon. They all cited logistical challenges as the reason why they have not been able to disseminate the information at the grass-root level.

2. Level of awareness of the population about local and national interventions to prevent or counter any possible attack.

Community members were concerned about their lack of knowledge of any national or local interventions on the subject matter. When asked about the “See Something Say Something Campaign” they indicated that they do not know the office to run to say something to, should they even see a suspect.



“I don’t know what is expected of me about see something...where can I go and report what I see. I don’t know any place?”

They were also not aware of any activity being carried out by the local assemblies or government agencies on the subject matter.

3. Level of knowledge among Border officials

Officials interviewed, including the Immigration, NIB, NCCE, in the target communities expressed adequate knowledge on information about VET. They all however expressed concern about the lack of community sensitisation and volunteered to participate in such engagement when possible.

4. Level of collaboration between key stakeholders

There is some level of collaboration between the Police and the Immigration Services. Beyond that, there is minimum collaboration among key security institutions including the National Peace Council, and the NCCE. Stakeholders also reported that they are not aware of any Security - Civilian strategies for intelligence gathering at the border and in border communities on VE.

In a meeting with the Counter Terrorism Fusion Centre of the Ministry of National Security to present this report, it was mentioned that the Regional Border Security Committees (BOSEC) exist to achieve this objective of collaboration. Curiously, none of the stakeholders interviewed referred to it. The Regional Peace Council, especially raised concern about inadequate security-community collaboration and also collaboration with the council.

5. Level of Trust between stakeholders and the security services.

Response from stakeholders including community leaders in all three communities indicated very low trust in the security services and their readiness to counter or prevent attacks. They reported that there have been about three robbery attacks within the premises of the Paga border and in all these cases the police arrived after the robbers had left. They retort that ‘Customs and Immigration officers could not even overpower mere armed robbers. They expressed doubt in the ability to foil or counter any attack.

A Paga Assembly man said:

“Frankly we are not ready for any attack, I visit the border every day and I see people before they enter Ghana, they don’t have devices to even check to see if the loaded cars are carrying guns. They will finish us if they attack”

They also expressed lack of confidence in the security services for the purpose of information sharing.

6. Relevant Logistic provisions for security agencies

Both security agencies and stakeholders interviewed complained of inadequate logistics for effective patrol of the borders. Officials at the Namoo Border reported logistical challenges. There were also complaints of lack of fuel to adequately supervise the many unapproved routes.

It was reported that at the Namoo Border an Immigration Officer, Michael Otto, was gunned down in cold blood and his weapon taken away from him. This was to confirm the lack of adequate logistics such as weapons, weapon detecting gadgets among others.

Officers were of the view that they are blamed wrongly for smugglers moving in and out of Ghana however they are highly challenged and can only do so much.

7. Porosity of border / number of illegal unmanned borders

In Namoo, there are about 30 unapproved routes. Officers have only three Honda Motorbikes and one quad motorbike for patrolling these routes most of the time unarmed

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based on the inadequate rifles or rather sometimes with non-functioning weapons. They do not have metal detectors or arms infrared detectors for inspection before allowing vehicles into Ghana.

In Paga, stakeholders lamented that extremists and terrorists ‘would not pass through the border but through the many unapproved routes. This was indicated by the Leader of the Paga Border Assistance. These youth engage in assisting travellers to across the borders. Some of them are also motorbike riders popularly referred as “Okada Riders”.

8. Youth vulnerability/resilience / Youth Employment issues

Interviewees in the Namoo community complained of high rate of unemployment and difficulty in the cost of living. They revealed that some young people seek employment across the border to Burkina Faso and even farther to Mali on the mining sites and in search of other jobs. Some whom have been privileged to lay their hands on some jobs have returned to recruit their mates across. They expressed fear that some of these young people may be radicalised and may be used as a launching pad for any future attack.

In Mognori, the findings suggest that there is a high rate of youth unemployment. They also complained of inadequate water to support them in their irrigation and agricultural activities, which is their main sources of livelihood. They complained that the dam provided under the “One Village One Dam” programme does not produce adequate water to sustain their farming, making the youth idle during the long dry season. Other challenges include the lack of capital to acquire watering machines and other farming equipment. They hailed the Brick and Tile factory under the 1D1F as great news to the youth but unfortunately is currently not operational.

Stakeholders in Paga reported high rate of youth unemployment. They shared that the youth

“Ghana its’ self is the terrorist not the Terrorists, the suffering that people go through is the number One Terrorist. This can make anybody do anything for money”.
Paga Border Youth Base

are at the border assisting travellers to cross the border for a fee. They complained of nepotism and politicisation of opportunities, where one has to know someone to get a job.

They also complained of water produced by the one village on dam project.

There are also reports of rise in armed robbery due to unemployment, ‘no work and no money for survival’.

Additionally stakeholders complained of the impact of the E-

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Levy. Even though the levy was barely in operation, some interviewees shared their opinion that ‘Business people now carry physical cash along due to the fear of tax, increasing their risk of attack and robbery.

Stakeholder also raised issues with the proliferation of arms in the border communities. ‘Smugglers are smuggling in arms across the borders’ and this is a major concern.

They also raised a concern about Land Mark Pillars of Ghana being shifted by Burkina Faso citizens ’ in areas such as around Navio-Kazeko. This phenomenon is gradually breeding boundary disputes.

Recommendations

These recommendation were expressed by interviews and interventions that will address challenges and help improve the sensitivity of the three border communities to extremist and terrorist attacks as well as improve their role to support interventions to minimise the risk of attack in Ghana. The recommendation are grouped in the short, medium and long terms perspectives.

Short to Medium Term Interventions

1. Conduct grass-root sensitisation engagements: Government and key stakeholders must urgently conduct grass-root sensitisation engagements with the population in border communities. It is critical to engage people who provide direct services at the border and in the communities. It is important for Government to resource key ministries and agencies such as The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Ministry of Information (Information Service Department), National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), and the National Peace Council to partner with the State Security services and CSOs to educate citizens and key service providers on the subject. Such engagement should also provide early warning mechanism and educate on intervention such as “See Something Say Something Campaign”. This is very important in order to avoid what may appear to be prank calls and reporting if members of the community do not really know what observation to report.

2. Set up Drone Monitoring Centres for surveillance of unmanned and unapproved entry routes. Immigration officers at the borders believe these centres will keep them updated and

informed of who is crossing in and out of Ghana and what they are carrying. They narrated some attack in Burkina Faso where soldiers were killed by suspected Jihadists². Reports indicate that a Prison facility was also attacked to release their colleagues in custody, destroying vehicles and motorbikes. About 60 inmates escaped from prison custody.³ These are only but to mention a few of several such attacks across Sub-Saharan Africa. It is, therefore, requested that these Drone Centres should be installed to enable Immigration Officers at the borders to get ahead of situations.

3. Immigration Offices at the border should be equipped with the necessary logistics such as motorbikes, weapons, arms infrared detectors, protective gear, etc. They suggest modern infrared detectors as against metal detectors. Officers report that they are not able to conduct thorough searches and scan due to the lack of logistics and sometimes fear for their lives.

4. The need for proper profiling of these returnees: Stakeholders are of the views that provision should be made to conduct profiling of people, especially young people who return to Ghana from neighbouring countries minimise radicalisation of Ghanaians.

5. In a short to long term it is crucial for government and its agencies to prioritise youth employment opportunities for border communities. Special provisions must be made under Government interventions such as the Youstart, Planting for Food and Jobs, Youth Employment Agency among others. The Ministry of National Security must engage institutions leading youth employments projects. Urgency must be attached to this recommendation to minimise the vulnerability of young people and citizens to violent extremism and terrorism.

Long Term Proposed Interventions

² <https://www.africanews.com/2022/05/20/burkina-Faso-11-soldiers-killed-in-latest-attack-in-the-east//>

³ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/60-inmates-escape-burkina-Faso-prison-after-gunmen-attack-media/2582395#>

1. We acknowledge the recent efforts by the National Youth Authority to ensure effective harmonisation of youth development is commendable and must be pursued to improve youth development efforts.
2. Government policies such as One District One Factory is a good policy but more must be done to ensure the factories established survive.
3. Security agencies should continue working on strategies to improve their relationship with citizens and build trust. Adequate resourcing and provision of logistics to the security agencies is also important to building trust.
4. Government and the Boundaries Commission must make effort to address issues of shifting of border boundaries to prevent boundary related conflicts.

Conclusion

This sensitivity report of the Magnori, Namoo and Paga border communities confirms fears about the low sensitivity level of Ghana's border communities and their preparedness to act as buffers in protecting Ghana against extremist and terrorist attacks as experienced in neighbouring countries. The National Peace Council with the support of the UNDP has done an impressive job in engaging key leaders in these sensitive communities. The Counter terrorism fusion Centre of the Ministry of National Security has also conducted some engagement with these communities. However the evidence on the ground confirms FOSDA's concern that the generality of citizens lack the knowledge and capacity to support preventive interventions. It also confirms reports that security official at the borders are poorly equipped despite government military interventions to prevent and counter attacks. Efforts at addressing structural elements such as youth unemployment is also very slow and increases the vulnerability of the youth and people to extremism and criminal behaviours. Obviously, efforts are being made by the government and other stakeholders. More efforts must be made and targeted at increasing the sensitivity of border communities as well as their resilience to extremist and other criminal behaviours, minimising the risk of an attack.