

“They call us Jihadists”

Research on the Early Signs of Violent Extremism
in Côte d’Ivoire’s Northern Border Areas



Dr. Parfait N’GORAN - Dr. Aziz MOSSI - Mr. Bernard BLEOU

JANUARY 2023



TABLE OF CONTENTS

A	Executive Summary	5		
B	Recommendations	7		
C	Research Team	9		
1.	Context and Objectives	10		
1.1.	Context of the research	10		
1.2.	General objective	10		
1.2.1	Specific objectives	10		
2.	Research Methodology	11		
2.1.	Research locations	11		
2.2.	Stakeholders and participants	11		
3.	Local History of Violent Extremist Organizations' (VEOs) Attacks	12		
3.1.	General and local context of the VEO attacks	12		
3.2.	Main early signs by community	12		
3.3.	Local accounts of VEO attacks: similarities and differences depending on stakeholders	16		
	<i>The role of women in rebuilding a local collective memory of the early signs of violent extremism</i>	18		
	Conclusion	18		
4.	Perceived Causes, Motives, and Targets	19		
4.1.	Taking over the Comoé National Park (PNC) to create a sanctuary for the VEOs, goldmining, and Fulani herders	19		
4.1.1	A sanctuary for the VEOs	19		
4.1.2	Controlling resources and minerals	19		
4.1.3	Fulani herders	19		
4.2.	Revenge on VEO informers, local Islam practitioners and avenging injustices against the Fulani in farmer/herder conflicts	20		
4.2.1	Taking revenge on informers and on practitioners of local Islam	20		
4.2.2	Avenging injustices against the Fulani in farmer/herder conflicts	20		
4.3.	Removing military presence and perceived injustice	21		
4.3.1	Removing military presence	21		
4.3.2	Addressing extortion	21		
	Conclusion	21		
5.	VEOs' Resources and Operations	22		
5.1.	Challenges related to tracing VEOs' Resources	22		
5.1.1	Robberies	22		
5.1.2	Cattle theft	22		
5.1.3	Kidnappings and ransoms	22		
5.2.	Operating methods	22		
5.2.1	Motorcycles and foot travel	22		
5.2.2	Improvised explosive devices (IEDs)	23		
5.2.3	Disguise and hiding strategies	23		
5.2.4	Diversion tactics	23		
5.3.	Places, times, and targets of VEO attacks	23		
5.3.1	Locations	23		
5.3.2	Chosen times and places of attacks	23		
5.3.3	Primary and secondary targets	23		
	Conclusion	24		
6.	Changes Resulting from VEO Actions, and Local Resilience Strategies Against Violent Extremism	25		
6.1.	Slower economic activities and perceived degradation of living conditions	25		
6.2.	Interpersonal and community relationships: fear and mistrust	25		
6.3.	Military presence	26		
6.4.	Memory of the attacks and building local resilience and monitoring strategies	28		
6.5.	Fragile local early warning systems	28		
	CONCLUSION: Lessons Learned in the Ivorian and Beninese Contexts	29		
7.	References	30		
8.	APPENDICES	31		



ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CFA	African Financial Community franc (CFA franc)
CCM	Civilian-military committee (cellule civilo-militaire)
PNC	Comoé National Park (Parc National de la Comoé)
EAI	Equal Access International
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FACI	Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (Forces Armées de Côte d'Ivoire)
FDS	Defense and Security Forces (Forces de Défense et de Sécurité)
PS. Gouv	Government social program (Programme social du Gouvernement)
IED	Improvised explosive device
LT	Lieutenant
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OIPR	Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserves (Office Ivoirien des Parcs et Réserves)
R4P	Resilience for Peace Project
FS	Special Forces (Forces Spéciales)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VE	Violent extremism or extremist
VEO	Violent extremist organization

A Executive Summary



We have taken a historical approach to the study, structuring it around testimonies and accounts from communities. This study aims to identify the early signs of attacks in communities that are harboring or have harbored active violent extremist organizations (VEOs). We have sought to gain a clear understanding of the issue to strategically guide the actions of the government and the Resilience for Peace project (R4P). We believe that by identifying these early signs in other communities, appropriate preventative measures can be taken.

This study is a qualitative survey based on individual and focus group interviews with the communities and other local actors in Téhini, Zèpou, Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô, Bolé (Bounkani region) and Kafolo (Tchologo region), communities in the Ivoirian north bordering Burkina Faso. The surveys were conducted from September 27 to October 7, 2022.

The main results of this study are set out in the executive summary.

Local reactions to attacks by violent extremist organizations (VEOs):

Whether they were direct or indirect victims of VEO attacks, all communities have a “good” memory of the events and the locations in which they took place. However, communities have difficulties pinpointing the exact periods and toll of the attacks. Administrative authorities and the Defense and Security Forces (Forces de défenses et de Sécurité - FDS) are more precise. As for early signs, robberies, cattle raiding, kidnapping of rich shopkeepers and Fulani, and rumors of VEO presence are constants in the areas we studied. The closer you are to the Burkina Faso border, the more features like outfits, physiological traits, and the origins of supposed VEO members become apparent. Though obvious for the most part, none of these signs were interpreted by the community as an early warning of extremist attacks to come.

Perceived causes of and motives for VEO attacks:

Locally, VEO attacks have occurred in a context already marked by structural crises and local failings characterized by a shortfall in basic public services, conflicts between herders and farmers, an absence of economic alternatives for young people, extortion and bribery by authorities, illegal goldmining, and questions about Fulani presence and stigmatization. It is not about radicalized Islam or about taking revenge on “those who are collaborating with the FDS” by informing on the violent extremists (VE). The VEOs utilize local grievances, pushing the issues of reparation of injustices against the Fulani and the suppression of the military presence and their racketeering in Côte d'Ivoire's northern border areas, and offer to provide higher-quality public services. All these narratives cast doubts about the presence of the government in these areas and the modalities for inclusive and successful management of social diversity and cohesion.

Means, targets, and operating methods of VEOs:

It is difficult to trace where the means and resources used by the VEOs originate. According to the communities, their criminal activities are fueled by the proceeds of robberies, cattle raiding,

and clandestine goldmining. In terms of targets, the VEOs' attacks are directed at a certain number of actors, such as the FDS, the rich local traders or herders, and members of the community suspected of collaborating with the FDS. Depending on their targets and the opportunities for attack, the VEOs have a range of methods at their disposal, such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), dissimulation, fake news, disguise, and diversion.

Perceived changes linked to VEO attacks, and community resilience strategies:

The attacks and threats from the VEOs have caused significant socioeconomic transformations within the communities. Social interactions often take place against a backdrop of fear and mistrust, between the inhabitants of the same village as well as between the members of the same family. With the heightened military presence and the various measures taken by the authorities and the reality of extremist violence experienced by the population itself, habits in the various communities, without exception, have been transformed.

Because of this atmosphere of psychosis and mutual fear, a kind of omertà (*code of silence*) has set in. For their own safety, they refuse to address VE-related subjects in public. In economic terms, farmers, herders, and cross-border traders are bearing the brunt of the newly destabilized activities. Their living conditions have degraded, their sources of income have dried up by the slowdown in economic activities and households' capacities to stand on their own two feet and keep up with primary needs such as health and children's schooling have been threatened. For young people already economically at risk and disinclined to work in traditional activities such as farming, herding and trading, the security threat posed by VE actions only accentuates their vulnerability. In the face of all these outside shocks, communities are responding in various ways, adapting to the new economy and looking out for early signs of VE. These community responses are still quite fragile. To strengthen their capacities for resilience in the face of a still-perceptible extremist threat, these communities need support.

B Recommendations

Based on the study, the research team has formulated recommendations for the R4P Program and the government of Côte d'Ivoire.

For the R4P Program and Equal Access International:

- Strengthen local monitoring and alert initiatives with training sessions for young people, women, and community / religious leaders on the early signs of a VEO presence and VEO operating methods.
- Encourage and support local elected officials, sub-prefects, and prefects to embed a culture of vigilance and collective responsibility in the face of security threats.
- Support border communities most exposed to extremist violence in developing their existing networks of authority-reporting mechanisms and accompany this with a communal alert and security plan and the money to finance it.
- Alongside initiatives to enhance capacities of local radio stations, train and support the main local users (young people, women, FDS, administrative authorities) of social media (e.g., WhatsApp) on how citizens can use these as monitoring tools for security and peace.
- Using the Môrô-Môrô community monitoring model, help communities and local authorities to promote territorial intelligence by identifying socially legitimate local actors to safely gather and disseminate information in the communities.
- Strengthen the capacities for action of the civilian-military committees (CCMs) with joint population-FDS training sessions on ways to co-build trust and security in a context of extremist threats.
- To mitigate suspicion directed at the Fulani community over whether they are collaborating or sheltering VEs, work with the Fulani leaders living in the towns to sensitize Fulani herders in the countryside on the community mechanisms for registering and identifying strangers.
- With the community's support, identify successful local models and encourage the development of local economic initiatives to be shared with young people and women at risk.
- Change paradigms or be flexible in interventions within the communities, by offering meaningful support for local initiatives by young people and women and by offering, within the limits of the available resources, responses to certain local concerns (rehabilitation of schools, health centers and safe water sources; support in the form of farm inputs, barbed wire to protect vegetable gardens from straying animals, etc.).



For the public authorities and the Ivoirian government:

- Maintain and strengthen the military presence in areas under threat from VEOs while equipping the units deployed with better means of communication adapted to an environment with inconsistent mobile telecommunications coverage.
- Building on collective achievements between communities and soldiers, multiply and support citizen initiatives (patriotic and hygiene activities, etc.) involving all the components of the FDS and the local populations.
- Strengthen the monitoring and surveillance mechanism for Comoé National Park (PNC), making sure that the neighboring communities are included in the governance and development of peripheral economic activities.
- Better sensitize the FDS to the risks posed by extortion in a context of extremist threats and emphasize a culture of accountability.
- Increase availability, in both quantity and quality, of basic socioeconomic services to populations in particularly isolated locations not covered by government programs, to reduce their vulnerability and level of exposure to recruitment offers by VEOs.
- Accelerate the construction / rehabilitation of road infrastructure and electricity and telecommunications networks in the border areas to facilitate communication between the populations and stakeholders involved in preventing and fighting violent extremism.
- Boost human capital development by creating learning centers for livestock farming vocations (especially poultry), agriculture (with a focus on food production and market gardening), legal goldmining, and trade to build competencies necessary to support local development initiatives.
- Facilitate the granting of artisanal goldmining permits to local economic operators and young people to enable them to mine legally and reduce the risk of young people sliding into criminal activities and extremist networks.

C Research Team

The team of consultants is a trio of researchers from the Violent Extremism Researchers Network set up at R4Ps Annual Learning Summit in Korhogo in February 2022. The diversity of their profiles and the issues they cover are aligned with the criteria defined by Equal Access International (EAI) to conduct this study.



Dr. Parfait

The principal consultant, **Dr. Parfait N’Goran**, has over 14 years of experience in socio-anthropological expertise. He has conducted or participated in major studies related to (i) community development, (ii) local and community governance, (iii) political violence, (iv) criminal violence in the urban environment, (v) social cohesion, (vi) women’s empowerment, (vii) illegal goldmining, and other topics for national and international institutions. He coordinated the study and the data collection process.



Working alongside him were **Dr. Aziz Mossi**, from Benin, and **Mr. Bernard Bléou**. Aziz Mossi is an anthropologist and has proven expertise in (i) conflicts, (ii) radicalization, and (iii) violent extremism. Head of the project “Société civile, participation communautaire et coproduction de la sécurité au Bénin et au Burkina Faso” for the Hans Seidel Foundation and Laboratoire Citoyennetés, he has done research on the governance of public goods and services, public political analysis, safe governance, and the dynamic relationships around national parks and nature reserves. His contribution was to develop and fine-tune the data collection tools



Mr. Bernard Bléou

and analyze the data through a lens of comparison with the dynamics observed in the Beninese context.

A specialist in conflict management and gender, Bernard Bléou has conducted a number of studies on (i) vulnerability and resilience factors, (ii) perceptions, (iii) signs of violent extremism, (iv) security dialogues and (v) gender. In this study, he served as a focal point between the team of consultants and the sponsor. He also participated actively in the field investigation and in writing the report.

Two (2) doctorate-level researchers assisted the team of consultants by conducting qualitative and quantitative investigations. They are Ms. Makoura Bamba and Mr. Sosthène Touré. Because they belong to the ethnolinguistic area of the Ivoirian north and have a good knowledge of the Maninka language (commonly known as “Dioula”), communication barriers between the communities and the researchers were lifted.



1 Context and Objectives

1.1 Context of the research

This study is part of the Resilience for Peace (R4P) program. R4P is a five-year initiative funded by USAID and launched by Equal Access International (EAI) to strengthen community resilience and learning in order to fight violent extremism in the northern border areas of Côte d'Ivoire. The project's main objective is to perform actions that reduce the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of the communities in the area.

Since June 10, 2020, over four years after the deadly attack at Grand-Bassam, the northern border area of Côte d'Ivoire has experienced a series of extremist-type attacks (see Table 2, page 26). These events clearly show that the VEOs based in the Sahel have tightened their hold in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger and are working actively to destabilize the northern border communities of Côte d'Ivoire. Although at present these violent incursions into Ivorian territory appear to be largely committed by external, non-national actors, the challenge lies in the fact that nationals are gradually and increasingly becoming implicated and that certain local dynamics have made the Ivorian borderlands ripe for the "sanctuarization" of these organizations. For the monitoring of these risks to be effective, we need a clear understanding of the early signs of the presence of these groups and their actions in the community. This will have the effect of better orienting and contextualizing awareness and prevention actions, particularly in the communities in which the phenomenon seems most likely to expand.

Ultimately, it is about being able to identify and analyze all the early signs that might be considered today (ex post facto) as early signs or indicators of acts of extremist violence in the communities of Téhini, Zèpou, Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô, Bolé, and Kafolo, which have experienced or are exposed to actions of this kind (attacks against the defense and security forces, improvised explosive devices, open threats). An analysis like this can strategically guide the government and the R4P project in their efforts to spot the manifestation (or not) of early signs in other communities and towns and take the appropriate measures in time. This raises the following question: How can the early signs that violent extremist organizations (VEOs) are acting and taking root in an area be embedded in the collective memory

of communities on the receiving end of extremist violence in the northern border towns of Côte d'Ivoire?

To answer this question, R4P included this particular study, on the identification and analysis of these early signs, in its 2022-23 workplan.

1.2 General objective

The objective of this study is to identify, mainly via qualitative methods based on testimonies and/or accounts from communities, the early signs of attacks in communities that had harbored or were harboring active VEOs.

1.2.1 Specific objectives

In specific terms, the study answers questions on:

- Perceived early signs of the actions of violent extremism organizations.
- Perceived causes of the actions of violent extremism organizations.
- The actors involved in acts of violent extremism.

Map 1: research locations



Source: Resilience for Peace

2 Research Methodology

Researchers gathered accounts, speeches, testimonies, and experiences of and relationships with the phenomenon of violent extremism. The information was collected and analyzed along with details on the context in which it was produced, the location of the actors who produced it, their status and social roles, and their relationship with the phenomenon of violent extremism. The data is therefore essentially discursive, involving behaviors, attitudes, and practices of actors identified as being part of VEOs. This is subjective information overall, requiring prudence and discretion in its handling, as it varies from one individual to another. To collect this information, we took a qualitative approach based on individual interviews and focus group discussions with community members (traditional leaders, religious leaders, community leaders, young people's and women's associations, farmers, herders, traders, transporters, goldminers, teachers, etc.), political and administrative authorities (local elected officials, prefect, sub-prefects, municipal councilors), security forces (FACI, Gendarmes and police) presiding in the communities selected, ordinary people, etc.

The mission took a diachronic approach that identified specific moments, facts, events, and factors in the recent history of communities that had a relationship with the proven presence of VEOs and/or the occurrence of acts of extremist violence. This meant the team of researchers was relying on the memories of local actors to empirically construct the early signs of acts of extremist violence.

"We have representatives among you. Wherever you are, that's where we'll be. Even at all your meetings, we'll be there"

2.1 Research locations

The research took place in six (6) communities in northern Côte d'Ivoire, Téhini, Zèpou, Tougbo, Bolé, and Môrô-Môrô in Bounkani, and Kafolo in Tchologo. Among these six communities, Môrô-Môrô was not directly a victim of VEO actions. However, its choice as a control zone meant we were able to compare the local narrative of VE's early signs and the way the other dynamics covered by the study were expressed with those of the affected communities.

2.2 Stakeholders and participants

The team met with three main categories of actors: institutional actors, local actors and "ordinary people." The category of institutional actors includes sub-prefectural, prefectural, and military authorities, mayors and/or their collaborators, and other relevant actors. In terms of local actors, researchers interviewed religious leaders, traditional leaders, community leaders, leaders of women's and young people's associations, and actors in the agricultural, livestock, transportation, and commercial sectors. The category of "ordinary people" includes actors (teachers, economic operators, average people) who have had a long-standing presence in the communities visited and who consequently have a knowledge of the local dynamics. All these actors were chosen based on their status and social roles, but also on their relationships with the phenomenon we were studying. The interviews conducted, individually or in groups, consisted of open, semi-structured questions in a data collection matrix or interview guide.

3 Local History of Violent Extremist Organizations' (VEOs) Attacks

Based on the testimonies / accounts from communities, local authorities, the FDS, and informal self-defense groups ("Dozo"), this chapter sets out the context of the VEO attacks and documents their local history.

3.1 General and local context of the VEO attacks

Long considered a calm nation spared the storm of violent extremism that swept the world and the West African region, the reality of extremist attacks finally hit home in Côte d'Ivoire with the March 13, 2016, shootings in Grand-Bassam (southern Côte d'Ivoire) that left 19 dead.

After the 2016 shootings in Grand-Bassam, the northwestern and northeastern border areas became the VEOs' new targets. They shifted to the effective deployment of violence and a process of gradually carving out a sanctuary for themselves in the northeastern area. This was aided by a series of attacks beginning in 2020 against military positions, specifically in the departments of Téhini (Téhini, Gongombel, Zèpou Togolokaye, Kolobougou, Govitan, Gôgô, Tougbo, and Bolé) and Kong (Kafolo).

The VEO attacks occurred in an area that is already contending with multiple challenges such as political governance, the expansion of VEOs into Mali and Burkina Faso, changes in the economic paradigm, and ongoing conflicts between farmers and herders.

The first challenge is political governance (development) and the perception of government in this area on the Burkina Faso border. The area has long been marked by a shortfall of public services (schools, health centers, water, electricity, security services, etc.) and road infrastructure. The situation has been aggravated by more than 10 years of rebel governance that caused the government to become distanced from the population. The situation, characterized by an anemic government presence and extreme poverty, is perceived locally by the populations as abandonment. It created a loss of confidence in and disaffection toward the government and its representatives, gradually eroding citizenship in these abandoned spaces, where young people and women have had to develop a certain culture of coping. This culture has fostered the development of smuggling, illegal trafficking, and organized transnational crime. Despite the security situation created by VE, illegal activities persist (even if their intensity has diminished) among certain populations (Môrô-Môrô, Kafolo) via community networks set up on either side of the Burkina Faso border. These illegal activities are un-

der the control of bandits and organized crime. In the last few years, the Ivorian government has begun several road, water, electrical, and other infrastructure development projects, but communities that have experienced attacks (especially Zéou) are still lacking in essential public services (water, electricity, health centers, schools, network coverage, etc.).

The second contextual challenge is its proximity to Burkina Faso (2 km from Môrô-Môrô and 5 km from Bolé and Tougbo), where there is intense VEO activity. The repeated attacks stem from a desire to expand and gain a foothold in the area. As a result, the porosity of the borders between this area and Burkina Faso and the unregulated circulation of people and goods in the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) space represent an enormous security challenge for the Côte d'Ivoire government.

Furthermore, the attacks occur in a context in which the agricultural economy has significantly declined because of the emergence of new opportunities for young people. These are mainly activities linked to illegal goldmining. Agriculture, increasingly threatened by climate change, the degraded security situation, and animals (cattle, monkeys, etc.), no longer attracts young people, who seem drawn to the type of employment that promises "fast cash." In fact, despite the existing economic potentialities, there has been a narrowing in the socio-professional outlook of young people. Many of them are now turning to goldmining, an activity whose supposedly outsized benefits fuel juvenile imaginations and trajectories of success. The closure of the mining sites by the Côte d'Ivoire government has created a situation of unemployment for many young people, who "don't want to do anything else" (Téhini). Despite the initiatives of the government through its Government Social Program (PS. Gouv 1 and 2) and the Agence Emploi Jeunes, many young people are not working and have no technical or professional skills. The other characteristic of the area is the ongoing conflict between the Indigenous farmers and the Fulani herders, which culminated in 2016.

Our various discussions with the communities suggest that cohabitation between herders and farmers is very often problematic in this pastoral farming area. The absence of areas of transhumance and the failure to respect transhumance paths, and the search for safe water sources and pastureland create tension between the two groups over crop damage by livestock. The fight for control of natural resources is often violent. In 2016, bloody and murderous confrontations between Fulani herders and Lobi farmers left 33 dead, 52 wounded, and 2,640 displaced in Bouna¹.

3.2 Main early signs by community

The accounts of our interview subjects on the early signs of VE were characterized by two elements: most of the interview subjects remembered the attacks and locations, but their accounts had inaccuracies over the exact dates and the number of victims.

The study was able to identify some 30 early signs, some of which turned up in the reconstructions of events by the various actors we met with in all the communities. Among them are hold-ups by bandits on various roads (Téhini-Bavé-Kafolo, Téhini-Doropo, Téhini-Kointa, Téhini-Varalé-Bouna, Tougbo-Bolé-Kafolo-Mapinan-Ferké, Tougbo-Téhini, Môrô-Môrô-Gbon tchêso (Burkina-Faso); Môrô-Môrô-Bati, Kouloumitan-Bavé, Bolé-Bouaké, Bolé-Kafolo, Bolé-Mapinan, Kafolo-Kong and Kafolo-Téhini-Bouna), robberies of shops and financial institutions, kidnappings, cattle raiding, and rumors of the presence of VEOs in communities.

The kidnappings and ransom demands (considered a new phenomenon in the area) have attracted much attention among the population, who link them directly with the actions of VE. This is not the case, however, with robberies and cattle raiding. At first, most of our interview subjects failed to see a supposed link with these practices and the VEOs because they have always existed in the area, especially when exporting agricultural products (cashews, cotton, etc.). However, the sheer volume of stolen livestock (often whole herds) focused attention on a

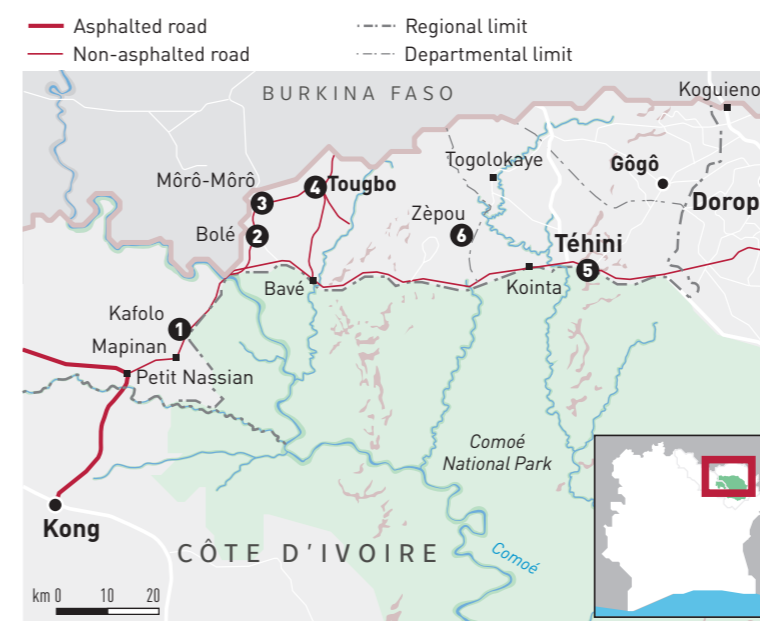
phenomenon they would ultimately connect with the actions of violent extremists.

Early signs varied, moreover, according to how far they were from the Burkina Faso border. Starting in Tougbo, the accounts of the signs change, becoming more specific on the characteristic traits of VE. Here, the accounts of the signs focus on the clothing styles of the purported VEO members ("Appearance and disappearance of people wearing the full veil [both men and women]" (Tougbo), "Discovery on two occasions of people clothed in black boubous, their faces and heads covered with veils" (Kafolo), etc.), physiological traits ("Discovery on two occasions of people [...] resembling shepherds, in the fields" (Kafolo), "Discovery [...] of light-skinned people resembling Fulani swimming in the Comoé River" (Kafolo)), the languages of communication ("They speak in the Fulani language and in Maninka" (Bolé)), their origins ("We come from Chad, from Libya, from Mali, and from Burkina Faso" (Bolé)), their identity ("We're the ones they call jihadists") (Bolé)), their motivation ("We are here for an Islamic conflict; if you can't help us, don't inform on us [...] Mind your own business; if not, soon, when we come back here, there won't be anyone left" (Bolé)), etc., the actors involved, and their operating methods. This can be explained by the fact that these communities are very close to Burkina Faso and have many commercial and family exchanges, but even more so by the hostage taking in Bolé, where the population has had direct contact and direct exchanges with VEOs who revealed their identities, their origins, their weapons, their support, the motives for their actions, and their potential targets.

Also worth noting are the accounts in Tougbo and Kafolo of early signs perceived as triggers for VEO attacks. These are joint operations (Operation Comoé and Operation Watertight Border) between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso as part of the Accra Initiative and the arrests of VEs and Fulani. For one military authority in Tougbo, the joint Côte d'Ivoire-Burkina Faso military operations and arrests of VEs triggered attacks by VEOs in retaliation for their actions: "Every time we do military exercises with Burkina Faso and end up arresting VEs and their supposed accomplices, we must automatically expect reprisals on their part. And this is something we see as an early sign."

This perception, that the joint operations and arrests of VEs and Fulani were early signs of the attacks in Tougbo, was reiterated in the accounts in Kafolo. In fact, for numerous interviewees, the first attack on the military base was preceded by the arrest of some 15 Fulani by the FDS, and the second occurred after the

Map 2: main roads with bandits



Source: Resilience for Peace

¹ <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/320158/societe/cote-divoire-se-penche-lepineux-probleme-conflits-intercommunautaires/>

joint operation between the Ivorian and Burkinabe armed forces known as "Operation Comoé." For them, there is no doubt that both attacks were provoked by the Fulani arrests and Operation Comoé, during which certain VEs were killed, and others arrested. For these interviewees, the two events are now part of the early signs of VEO attacks, and reason for precaution.

Table 1, below, details the early signs of VEO attacks as reported by the interviewees in the six communities visited.

The various signs listed in Table 1 preceded seven attacks, five IED explosions, and a hostage-taking in the area under study, detailed in the diagram on page 17 (Table 2).

Table 1: List of early signs according to interviewees' accounts. Source: The research team, October 2022

	Main early signs cited	Resemblances between communities	Differences between communities
	Repeated robberies (bandits) on the following roads: - Bavé-Kafolo and Téhini-Doropo, Téhini-Kointa, (2019 to 2020); - Tougbo-Kafolo-Petit Nassian-Ferké, Tougbo-Téhini - Môrô-Môrô-Gbontchéso (Burkina-Faso), Môrô-Môrô-Bati (2015) - Kouloumitan-Bavé (2017-2019) - Bolé-Petit Nassian (2015) and Bolé-Kafolo - Bolé-Kafolo-Mapinan (2019-2020) - Kafolo-Kong and Kafolo-Téhini-Varalé-Bouna (2018-2019)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo 2 Bolé 3 Môrô-Môrô 4 Tougbo 5 Téhini 	
	Robberies of financial establishments in Doropo (2019-2020) and stores in Bolé (2015)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Tougbo 5 Téhini 	
	Kidnappings for ransom intensified, specifically targeting rich shopkeepers and Fulani or their kin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Bolé 4 Tougbo 5 Téhini 	
	Rumors of the presence of VEOs in the area, or persistent rumors on the supposed progression of VEOs from Mali and Burkina Faso toward communities in the northern border area of Côte d'Ivoire	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo 2 Bolé 4 Tougbo 6 Zépou 	
	Theft of livestock starting in 2015 and intensified in 2021 (between 2015-2021)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo 2 Bolé 4 Tougbo 6 Zépou 	
	Discovery of a house for holding hostages in Comoé National Park (PNC)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Téhini
	Presence of unknown persons proposing to build a thousand-place mosque and Koranic schools financed by Saudi Arabia in Kolobougou in 2017		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Téhini
	Massive purchase by certain Fulani people of supplies (bags of rice) and fuel transported by tricycles in the direction of PNC		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Téhini
	Massive displacement of Burkinabe populations fleeing VEO attacks toward communities in the northern border area of Côte d'Ivoire	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Tougbo 6 Zépou 	
	Supply, through naiveté, of bags of rice and fuel to unknown persons taking refuge in PNC and of loaves of bread (50 to 120) in Bana-Yalfou (Fulani camp located a few cable's lengths from Téhini) in 2021		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Téhini
	Anonymous calls to lure the FDS in an ambush		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Zépou
	Supposed poster written in Arabic and posted on a building in the market announcing the next VEO attack in Tougbo after the one in Kafolo in 2021		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Tougbo

	Main early signs cited	Resemblances between communities	Differences between communities
	Appearance and disappearance of persons wearing the full veil (men and women) over an average period of 40 days		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Tougbo
	Unusual appearance of seemingly mentally ill people (After one of the supposed mentally ill people who was arrested was searched, the FOCI found drugs in his possession. After a lengthy interrogation, the supposed mentally ill person confessed to being a drug runner for the VEs.)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Tougbo
	Purchase of fuel from resellers at double or triple the usual price		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Tougbo
	Encounter with people of foreign appearance on the Tougbo-Burkina-Faso road (Sirakôrôso, Noumouchédougou, Djébata, Toupi, Goti)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Tougbo
	Presence of "bearded men" in Goti (Burkina-Faso) (Tougbo)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Tougbo
	Presence of FDS drones and helicopters flying over the communities around PNC in 2020-2021		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Môrô-Môrô
	Disappearance of a Lobi farmer from Bolé in Comoé National Park (PNC) in 2020		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Môrô-Môrô
	Gunfire heard in Bavé (19 km from Bolé) in 2019		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Bolé
	Hostage-taking of Muslim worshippers from the Bolé mosque between 6:30 and 7:30 p.m. to convey rallying messages and threats to the population for its supposed collaboration with the FDS and the administrative authorities, 2021		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Bolé
	Discovery of a herd of cattle without herders in the bush on the Burkina Faso border in 2018		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo
	Appearance of new faces in the Fulani community starting in 2020		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo
	Arrests of 15 Fulani and one Mauritanian on May 13, 2020, as part of a joint Côte d'Ivoire-Burkina Faso military operation (Operation Comoé)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo
	Discovery by fishers of light-skinned people of Fulani appearance swimming in the Comoé River on the Burkina-Faso side (Kafolo) in 2019		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo
	Discovery on two occasions of people dressed in black boubous, faces and heads covered with veils, resembling shepherds, in the fields and on the Mapinan road in 2021 (Kafolo)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo
	Discovery by fishermen of a cortege of motorcycles on the banks of the Comoé River (Burkina-Faso side) in 2018		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo
	Shooting of the son of the Dozos chief (guide for OIPR agents) by unidentified armed gunmen in PNC in 2019		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo
	Power cuts during the two attacks that occurred in Téhini (Gongombel; military camp 2021); also, power cuts and communication network cut for three days in Bolé (on the day before the hostage taking in the village and main mosque in the month of Ramadan 2021)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Bolé 5 Téhini 	
	Appearance of unknown persons resembling Tuaregs in Kolobougou, Togolokaye, Zépou, and Kafolo on the market days and Fridays at the mosque		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo 6 Zépou
	Joint Côte d'Ivoire-Burkina military operations as part of the Accra Initiative (Operation Comoé, Operation Watertight Border, etc.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Kafolo 4 Tougbo 	

One of the questions these observations raise is the following: Is an administrative authority's account of a VEO action the same as one by a member of the FDS, a member of the community, or a refugee?

3.3 Local accounts of VEO attacks: similarities and differences depending on stakeholders

Whether they come from an administrative authority, a member of the FDS, a member of the community, or a refugee, accounts of VEOs are reported the same way. In general, we noted similarities in the events recounted and in the communities where there were major incidents. Most of the people interviewed remember the attacks that took place in the area.

For the most part, the dissimilarities are over the dates of the attacks, the number of victims (most of them are FDS and VEs, and the army generally does not provide figures on the victims), details on the attacks (those who directly experience the events generally give more details than those who experience them from afar), the operating method, and the strategies put in place to deal with the attacks.

In terms of operating methods, the interviews with the members of the FACI yielded highly elaborate accounts of the techniques of attack adopted by the VEOs in their various operations. These accounts mention:

- "The fact that no one is claiming responsibility for the attacks (...), the use of two-wheeled vehicles to get around (columns of motorcycles with two people per motorcycle (...), once they approach the target, they disperse, shooting in opposite directions to create a diversion" (FACI);
- Use of coded language, to provide information while hiding in communities ("the chickens went that way" (FACI); or many others. Concealing themselves as herders, traders and ordinary customers on market days. This tactic enables them to obtain information on the FDS's movements within the communities" (FACI).

FACI accounts generally focus on operationalization, while the administrative authorities are more likely to emphasize the strategies implemented to counter or prevent attacks. These strategies include regulations to restrict freedom of movement and assembly, such as curfews, orders banning the purchase of fuel in containers, bans on clandestine goldmining, and the control and implementation of government-promoted actions as part of the fight against violent extremism. Sometimes there are also facilitation or intermediation measures in the dynamics of community conflict resolution, etc.

Overall, the administrative and military authorities have a good knowledge of the context and situation of the areas studied. They seem to understand the full extent of the danger and assign great importance to the role and place of the communities in the fight against VE.

Table 2: Primary early signs mentioned

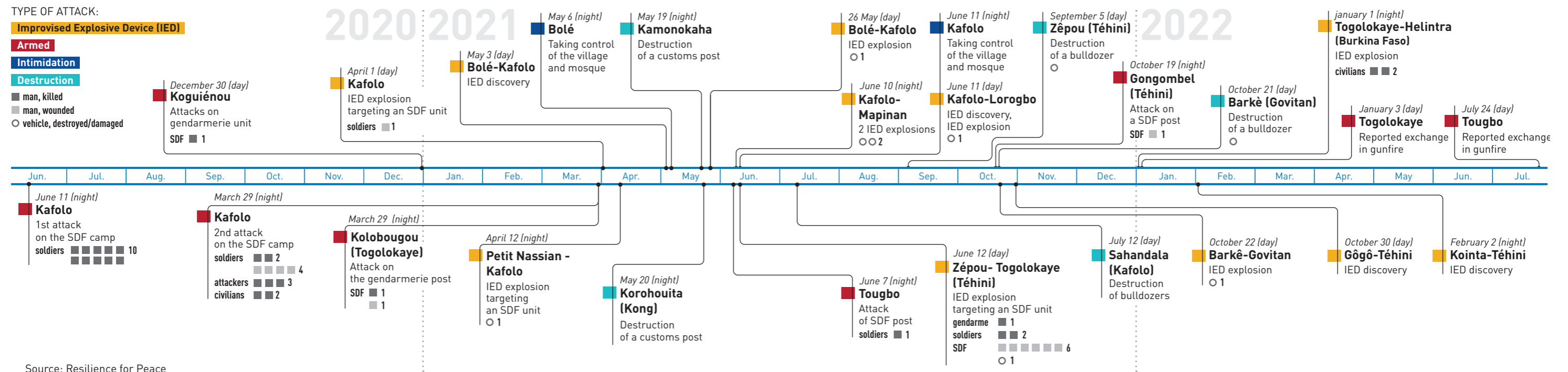
		LOCALITIES:					
		1 Kafolo	2 Bolé	3 Morô-Morô	4 Tougbo	5 Téhini	6 Zépou
SIGNS OF RESOURCE MOBILIZATION BY VEOs (violent extremist organizations)	Robbery	●	●	●	●	●	
	Cattle theft	●	●		●		●
	Kidnapping for ransom		●		●	●	
SIGNS OF POSSIBLE VEO PRESENCE	Provision of large quantities				●	●	
	Rumors of VEO presence	●	●		●		●
SIGNS OF VEO INTIMIDATION AGAINST THE POPULATION	Unusual-looking individuals appearing	●			●		●
	Assumed presence		●				
	Use of firearms	●	●				
	Massive displacement of Burkinabe populations		●		●		●
SIGNS OF IMMINENT VEO ATTACKS	Kidnapping to intimidate					●	
	SDF operations	●		●	●		
	Power cuts		●			●	
	Ambush						●

The populations interviewed in these communities blame the VEO attacks on several factors. These factors can be found in territorial ideologies

(conquest of the Comoé National Park (PNC) to obtain sanctuary for jihadism, goldmining, and the Fulani herders) and in the ideologies of the people themselves (taking

revenge on those who inform on the VEOs and on local practitioners of Islam, and avenging injustices that have befallen the Fulani in the conflicts between farmers and herders), and, of course, in the ideologies of the defense and security forces (promise of suppressing the military presence and rackets in the northern border areas of Côte d'Ivoire).

Diagram 1: Timeline of attacks related to violent extremism



Conclusion

All the people interviewed have a clear memory of the attacks of violent extremists (VE) and of the communities in which they took place, although many have trouble pinpointing the exact periods. In terms of early signs, we found there was a constancy in the signs, such as robberies, cattle raiding, kidnapping of rich shopkeepers and Fulani, and rumors of the presence of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) in the six communities. However, the people in the communities closer to the Burkina Faso border differ in their accounts, citing signs related to clothing style, physiological traits, and the origins of the purported members of the VEOs.

The role of women in rebuilding a local collective memory of the early signs of violent extremism

Women play an important role in building a collective memory of the signs of violent extremism in the different communities we visited. Their activities (trade and agriculture) mean they travel from one community to the next on a regular basis. This has led to encounters with suspect people resembling Tuaregs, bearded people in the markets, fields, and Burkina villages bordering the Côte d'Ivoire. Often mentioned in the interviews with the men was the fact that certain early signs of VEs were reported by women: "Women told us that they met people who looked like Tuaregs who didn't respond to their traditional bush greeting

(Bolé, Môrô-Môrô)." "Women told us that they saw men passing for women by wearing the full veil, sometimes with a baby on their back, at the market (Tougbo)." « Women said they saw a tricycle loaded with bags of rice and parked next to PNC (Téhini)," etc.

Though they are the source in many cases of alerts over signs of VEs, women tend not to explicitly assume this role because of the weight of local traditions, which put women in a background role. They prefer to bring the information to their husbands and children (male children) who are used to relaying it in public.

In Bolé, it was through the focus groups held with the young women's and women's associations that the team was able to obtain more details on signs the men had already cited. For example, on the robbery of a number of stores in the community, the women's accounts revealed that a man was killed (a Lobi) by two men in balaclavas at midday and that the robbers took off in the direction of Burkina Faso after their crime.

This female engineering is a strong argument for the inclusion of female actors in any local initiative for the monitoring of, and resilience to, violent extremism.

4 Perceived Causes, Motives, and Targets

4.1 Taking over the Comoé National Park (PNC) to create a sanctuary for the VEOs, goldmining, and Fulani herders

The first cases reported of VEO action in the area were related to the supposed conquest of Comoé National Park, which seems to be at the confluence of a trio of interests for the groups.

4.1.1 A sanctuary for the VEOs

In terms of a space that might constitute a "sanctuary for violent extremism," Comoé National Park, as the largest park in Côte d'Ivoire and one of the largest in West Africa, seems ideal. According to our surveys in Téhini, Bolé, and Kafolo, PNC's location explains the VEs' presence in these communities, which are considered as "red zones." The extent of the park (estimated at 1,148,756 hectares) and its extensive network of trails offer undeniable potential for a secret existence/organization and passage by VEOs. The people who were victims of kidnappings in the departments of Doropo, Bouna, and Téhini between 2020 and 2022 reported that there was a house in PNC where hostages were held. But if PNC is to serve as a home base for VEO operations, the goal is really the artisanal extraction of its abundant gold.

4.1.2 Controlling resources and minerals

Over the decade from 2010-2020, goldmining intensified in the Bounkani region. Non-native Burkina and Guineans came to prospect in PNC, ultimately discovering goldmine sites that were rich with ore. The news of the discovery spread to the neighboring communities (Téhini, Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô, Bolé, Kafolo) and beyond the limits of Bounkani, resulting in an influx of people in the region. An impressive social diversity was born. The actors involved were able to move freely between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. This gold "fever" would diminish in intensity between 2019 and 2020 after the ban on goldmining by the Côte d'Ivoire government throughout the territory. The same period marked the start of a wave of attacks organized by the VEOs in the Bounkani region, which persuaded many that there was a correlation:

"Mind your own business; if not, soon, when we come back here, there won't be anyone left... (...)"



"Téhini is a goldmining area... the VEs sow disorder in this area so they can mine gold on the sly without getting caught (...) Goldmining is an activity that serves as a cover for the VEs. A number of the military expeditions in PNC flushed out arms (Kalashnikovs) in the mining sites. That's why the authorities are always fighting mining in this entire area."

According to certain traditional authorities many suspects and accomplices of the VEOs were in possession of artisanal gold detection and extraction equipment. These revelations are fueling suspicion that the VEOs are seeking to take over PNC to carve out a sanctuary for themselves and to mine the gold they need to finance their activities. But a third reason emerges against the backdrop of the interviewees' opinions: It is to conquer PNC on behalf of the Fulani herders.

4.1.3 Fulani herders

The purported involvement of the Fulani in acts of violent extremism has fueled suspicion that the VEO presence in PNC is a strategy for conquering space that will enable the Fulani herders to pasture their herds, particularly in the dry season. In fact, the Fulani herders are known to be present in the park on certain occasions, particularly in the dry season: "During the dry season, there are no water reserves to water the herds. The only water reserves available are in Comoé National Park, yet access is prohibited." (Téhini). It

is important to remember that this reading of the perceived causes of VEO attacks is specific to the communities of Téhini and Môrô-Môrô, but it seems just as valuable in other West African contexts, especially in Benin and Niger, where similar dynamics are at work. The Park W reserve, which extends over the borders of Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger, appears to be partially under the control of violent extremist organizations, which regulate herders' access to it by means of alliances and agreements. They authorize

the herders' entry into the park for pasturing and in return levy heads of cattle under the pretext of Zakat (charitable contributions recommended by Islam, for any Muslim with the recognized financial and material capacity²).

² cf. Mossi, A.A. (2022). Forêts contestées : conflits armés et économies illicites dans les zones forestières d'Afrique de l'Ouest. Case study of Parc W in Niger, GI-TOC, 41 p.

4.2 Revenge on VEO informers, local Islam practitioners and avenging injustices against the Fulani in farmer/herder conflicts

In addition to their supposed interest in PNC, numerous cases of attacks by VEOs in the region of Bounkani (according to their reports to the populations surveyed) correspond to warnings issued against people in the community who inform on VEs, against local practitioners of Islam, and over the unresolved conflicts between farmers and Fulani herders.

4.2.1 Taking revenge on informers and on practitioners of local Islam

The various attacks by the VEOs in the region of Bounkani between 2020 and 2022 were mainly directed at two targets. The first target of gunfire, ambushes, and improvised explosive devices was the FDS.³ The second target, and one we will be examining more closely, was the populations themselves (kidnappings, open threats, storming of villages and mosques), who were subjected to a constant discourse of warning against anyone in the community who spoke out against the VEOs and who practiced the local version of Islam. It was only when a group of violent extremists stormed the village of Bolé that the content of this discourse was made real.

On a Thursday in the month of Ramadan, 2021, taking advantage of the dusk prayer (Maghrib), a group of VEs came from the direction of the Burkina Faso border and stormed the village of Bolé. They captured the Muslim worshippers assembled for the fast-breaking prayer along with all bystanders (Muslim and non-Muslim) inside the mosque. They issued a series of messages:

“We are here for an Islamic conflict, if you can’t help us, do not speak out against us (...) The young girls of marriageable age, give them husbands (...) Chase away the teachers (...) We must only speak Arabic (...) The women must dress suitably (...) The boys must keep their beards (...)” (Bolé).

These messages were delivered against a backdrop of threats. The climax of the hostage taking in Bolé was when these inhabitants were accused of informing on the VEOs to the FDS:

“Our food comes from Bolé, we repair our motorcycles in Bolé... (...) We’re being told that it is the population of Bolé that is informing on us to the defense and security forces (FDS). Mind your own business; if not, soon, when we come back here, there won’t be anyone left... (...) We’re the ones they call jihadists.” (Bolé).

In other, simpler terms, “all the villages that suffer attacks and extortion by the VEOs are villages that have stuck their noses in the jihadists’ business. Môrô-Môrô has not yet stuck its nose in the jihadists’ business, and that’s why, up to now, no one has touched it (Môrô-Môrô). This explains why the community of Môrô-Môrô has not yet been affected by VEO attacks.

Another element worth mentioning is the way in which the VEOs who took the village of Bolé hostage mobilized gender issues. They know that the drive for sexual equality runs up against the habits and customs of the traditional northern communities³. To rally the women to their cause, they promise them a dream life, free from daily household tasks: “From now on, the men will take care of the women. They will do the housework in their place. All the women will have to do is take care of the children.” And, though, for the women of Bolé, this proposal by the VEOs is more utopia than reality—so much so that they joke about it—the account of the women of Môrô-Môrô suggests it must be given credit. According to the accounts of close relatives living in the communities of Burkina (2 km from Môrô-Môrô) under VEO domination, women forcibly married by the violent extremists are pampered by their husbands, who take care of everything.

4.2.2 Avenging injustices against the Fulani in farmer/herder conflicts

Since the start of the VEO attacks in the northern border areas of Côte d’Ivoire, the Fulani, rightly or wrongly, have been looked at as collaborators with the violent extremists, most notably because they share many of their traits: the way they dress, the color of their skin, and the vernacular language of the groups. But the mistrust toward the Fulani is also based on the fact that the purported VEs captured or killed by the FDS were Fulani, which only amplifies the perception that they are members of VEOs. The Indigenous populations (Lobi, Lorhon, and Komonon) are often convinced that the Fulani are objectively at an advantage and favored by the violent extremist organizations: “We never steal Fulani herds (...) We never kidnap Fulani people for ransom.” (Téhini). As proof, they point to the outcomes of conflicts between the Fulani and the VEOs. For example, the chief of the Fulani community in Téhini was kidnapped and released without any ransom required. In his own words “Certain people have been doubting my credibility since I was arrested and released by the VEs.” (Téhini). Some Indigenous populations refer to unresolved conflict situations to explain Fulani involvement in violent extremism groups. Some speak of revenge aimed at repairing the injustices the Fulani suffered in conflicts between farmers and Fulani herders – especially in 2016, in in Bouna. Based on the testimonies

of Komonon refugees living in Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô and Bolé, this way of interpreting Fulani engagement, with regard to what was allegedly done, to the Indigenous populations (Lobi, Lorhon and Komonon) comes from the border communities of Burkina Faso that are under the control of VEOs. The chief (a Lobi) from the village of Alidouougou (a Burkina village on the border of Côte d’Ivoire) was kidnapped by VEOs, which issued a reminder to him: “We haven’t forgotten what you did to the Fulani in 2016 in Bouna.”

4.3 Removing military presence and perceived injustice

Whenever the military presence in the northern border areas of Côte d’Ivoire is strengthened, as it has been, it is often accompanied by a feeling among motorcycle users that their rights are being abused by authorities extorting bribes. The VEOs exploit this feeling in their speeches to win the local populations to their side.

4.3.1 Removing military presence

Overall, the populations are unanimous on the fact that the primary target of the VEOs is still the FDS (military and police). In Téhini, when the VEOs are referred to, they are often called “The friends of the soldiers because they don’t pick on anyone but soldiers and police officers.”

The VEOs who stormed the village of Bolé confirm this thesis: “We are here for the soldiers and nothing else. (...) We aren’t afraid of standing up to them. Our weapons are very powerful, and we have the support of powerful countries. It is we who will end up governing here and no one else.” In say-

ing so, the VEOs promise to suppress the military presence in the northern border areas of Côte d’Ivoire, and particularly in Bounkani. It is a promise that hides their real objective, which, according to an FACS officer, is nothing less than “the creation of a corridor (no man’s land) crossing the borders of Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Togo and Benin for smuggling.”

4.3.2 Addressing extortion

In the Bounkani region, the owners and users of motorcycles are constantly in conflict with the FDS. Very often in our discussions, the interview subjects would describe how at checkpoints the FDS would demand anything from 1000 CFA to 5000 CFA (roughly \$2 to \$10 USD) from drivers when they did not have the valid administrative documents. The users feel abused, and many have spoken out against these actions, which, for them, only impoverish them more and above all dissuade them from wholeheartedly collaborating with the FDS in the fight against violent extremism.

It is a situation the VEO are clearly trying to turn to their advantage. They propose this alternative: “If you help us govern here, you will no longer pay taxes, nor the 1000 and 2000 CFA francs to go through the corridors. You can circulate freely without documents.”

To add weight to their words, the VEO promote the idea that extortion “is not the way of God.” In consequence, they must be suppressed. The goal is to incite the population to defy and hate the FDS, and it seems to be working: many people who were victims of bribery demands confirmed that they had become averse to sharing information on suspects or potential operations of the VEOs.

Conclusion

In the end, there are a range of explanations for the VEOs’ actions. First, to conquer Comoé National Park to create a jihadist sanctuary, to practice a goldmining economy, or on behalf of the Fulani herders. Secondly, to take revenge on those who inform on the VEOs and on local practitioners of Islam, and to avenge the injustices suffered by the Fulani in the conflicts between farmers and herders over the past few years. Finally, the VEOs propose to suppress the military presence and extortion in the northern border areas of Côte d’Ivoire. To achieve their goals, they are mobilizing several means and operating methods that will be analyzed in the next chapter.

³ Bernard Bléou, “Renforcer la résilience et l’apprentissage de la lutte contre l’extrémisme violent dans les zones frontalières du nord de la Côte d’Ivoire”, feasibility study on behalf of FH360, May 2020.

5 VEOs' Resources and Operations

In the fourth chapter, we outlined the perceived causes and motives for VEO attacks in the northern border areas of Côte d'Ivoire. In this chapter, we will analyze the probable origin of the means they have at their disposal, and their operating methods.

5.1 Challenges related to tracing VEOs' Resources

In the heart of the communities of Bounkani (Téhini, Zèpou, Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô, Bolé) and Tchologo (Kafolo), considered as "red zones," people are quick to confirm the following: "We don't know where the VEOs' means and resources come from." But a recurring theme in the interviews is illegal economic activity, which, in the interviewees' minds, may what is driving VEOs' actions.

5.1.1 Robberies

According to the local populations, the phenomenon of robberies linked to banditry has surged since 2015 on certain main roads (including Téhini-Bavé-Kafolo, Téhini-Doropo, Téhini-Kointa, Téhini-Varalé-Bouna, Tougbo-Kafolo-Mapinan-Ferké, Tougbo-Téhini, Môrô-Môrô-Gbontchêso (Burkina-Faso) ; Môrô-Môrô-Bati, Kouloumitan-Bavé, Bolé-Bouaké, Bolé-Kafolo, Bolé-Mapinan, Kafolo-Kong and Kafolo-Bavé-Téhini-Varalé-Bouna). Between 2018 and 2021, over 20 armed robberies on the roads were reported to the FDS in the Bounkani region, mainly in the departments of Doropo, Bouna, and Téhini. In addition to the increase in robberies, there was a rise in the number of burglaries of homes and stores in Doropo, Bouna, and Bolé in 2019 and 2020. According to a recent study⁴ on the robberies in Bounkani, the thefts amount to 14 million CFA per year. Those interviewed believe these robberies may be the work of VEOs seeking to finance their actions.

5.1.2 Cattle theft

The populations also emphasize the presumed involvement of VEOs in cattle raiding (one of the most lucrative illicit activities in the region, as the price of a stolen cow ranges from 175,000 to 200,000 CFA⁵). According to the testimonies, between 2015 and 2020, the route the cattle raider took in the

department of Téhini went from Tougbo to Bouaké and other towns in the interior. But since 2021, the cattle are being stolen from communities considered "red" (Téhini, Zèpou, Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô and Bolé) and taken to communities under siege by the VEOs in Burkina Faso. These thefts are coordinated with the complicity of former local herders, particularly unemployed young people, whom the VEOs recruit with promises of money and motorcycles.

5.1.3 Kidnappings and ransoms

According to the accounts of the people involved, in September 2020 and July 2021, there was a rise in kidnappings in the departments of Doropo, Bouna, and Téhini, with five cases in which the kidnappers demanded a ransom. These five cases occurred at around the same time as the extremist attacks in the area. For the interviewees, there is no doubt that the kidnappers were affiliated with VEOs. These kidnappings for ransom, which targeted rich local traders, generated at least 45 million CFA in total. Three of the hostages paid 5 million CFA each for their release. A fourth paid 20 million CFA. The fifth and last hostage paid 10 million CFA⁶. A sixth case of kidnapping that occurred in Bolé targeted the son of a rich farmer. The ransom demanded by the kidnappers was 6 million CFA, 125 heads of cattle, two smartphones, and two motorcycles. The latter case shows that, locally, the rich traders/herders, the economic operators, and their families are potential targets of the VEOs. What are their operating methods and the times, places, and targets of their attacks?

5.2 Operating methods

VEO attacks are focused on certain categories of actors. The operating method varies according to the goal they want to achieve.

5.2.1 Motorcycles and foot travel

According to the testimonies of both ordinary people and the FDS, the violent extremist organizations attack by surprise, bursting suddenly from the wilderness, or more specifically from Comoé National Park. Their most common means of travel is by motorcycle, but the groups also travel on foot.

5.2.2 Improvised explosive devices (IEDs)

One of the techniques currently used by the VEOs in their confrontations with the FDS is the planting of improvised explosive devices (IED). In 2021, these improvised explosives caused the deaths of two members of the FDS on the Zèpou-Togolokaye road, then the deaths of three members of the FDS on the Togolokaye-Téhini road, and finally the wounding of one FDS agent on the Govitan-Gôgô road. Other IEDs have been discovered by the population (Téhini, Kafolo) and defused by the FDS.

5.2.3 Disguise and hiding strategies

The third operating method of the VEOs is infiltration. It enables them to escape the scrutiny of the FDS and the populations and blend into the community to obtain information and stock up on supplies and goods. Interviewees reveal that often violent extremist members masquerade as mentally ill people or disguise themselves as women by wearing the full veil, sometimes even with a baby on their backs (in Tougbo). Others disguise themselves as herders, shopkeepers, and ordinary customers on market days in Téhini and in the villages of Tougbo, Bolé and Kafolo. This tactic enables them to gain information on the movements of the FDS and above all to stock up on supplies for their fellow VEs who are concealed in the wilderness, according to interviews conducted in Téhini and Bolé.

5.2.4 Diversion tactics

The strategy of diversion involves circling the target while dispersing in small groups and shooting in opposite directions. The goal is to evade the scrutiny of the FDS and leave an impression of numbers "when they are only really a handful of people" (FACI). The VEOs also spread rumors. These rumors generally focus on "the omnipresence" of the VEs: "We have representatives among you. Wherever you are, that's where we'll be. Even at all your meetings, we'll be there" (Bolé).

Given the general atmosphere of mistrust we observed in the areas under study, these efforts by the VEOs to create a psychosis in the communities seem to be working:

"Sometimes our village meetings go on and on simply because no one wants to give an opinion on decisions that go against the VEOs. You're scared they're going to come and tell you; we know you, this is what you said about us" (Kafolo).

5.3 Places, times, and targets of VEO attacks

5.3.1 Locations

The communities targeted by the VEOs are not chosen at random, but depend on the natural opportunities that arise and the social vulnerabilities they are attempting to exploit. In the opinion of one local administrative authority, "The VEOs do their homework before attacking. (...) they choose vulnerable areas where there is no water, electricity, health centers or schools (...) they choose areas where the subsoil is rich in ore, as is the case with gold for most of the communities targeted in Bounkani (...) they besiege the border communities of the neighboring countries (Burkina Faso, Mali), where they burn the administrative offices and communication services (telephone antennas) to better control these territories (...) » (Téhini).

5.3.2 Chosen times and places of the attacks

It is the belief of the local populations that the attacks by the VEOs only occur during the hours of Muslim prayer. But according to many of the accounts gathered from the local population and military authorities, the VEOs can launch an attack at any time, depending on what opportunities are available to them. These opportunities for attacks are often built around the movements of the FDS, their number, the type of weapons they have, the number of checkpoints, etc. This information is obtained from covert "information services" in the population with whom they have a coded language, e.g., "the chickens (the FDS) went that way" (Tougbo).

According to their reading of the attacks that occurred between 2020 and 2022 in the communities of Kafolo, Zèpou, Bolé and Tougbo, many in the population believe that the VEO attacks intensified between March and June. During this period, the rarity of rainfall made it easier for them to travel through wilderness trails. In general, the attacks by the VEOs target military camps (Téhini and Tougbo), roads (Zèpou-Kolobougou-Togolokaye, Téhini-Govitan, Kafolo-Mapinan, Kafolo-Lologbo), checkpoints, and mosques (Bolé).

"If you help us to govern here you will no longer pay taxes, nor the 1000 or 2000 Francs CFA to pass the road checkpoints. You will circulate freely without any papers"



5.3.3 Primary and secondary targets

When you look at the actors targeted by the VEOs, a consistency emerges. The FDS are the main target of the attacks. The remarks attributed to the VEOs more or less corrob-

⁴ Online at <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Nord-de-la-Co%CC%82te-dlvoire-nouvelles-menaces-djihadistes-anciens-re%CC%81seaux-criminels.pdf>

⁵ On this topic, read the Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa. Online at <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/WEA-Obs-RB4-French.pdf> Project, Tetra Tech, November 2019.

⁶ Read Northern Côte d'Ivoire: new jihadist threats, old criminal networks. Online at <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Nord-de-la-Co%CC%82te-dlvoire-nouvelles-menaces-djihadistes-anciens-re%CC%81seaux-criminels.pdf>

orate the claim: “We do not want to see administrators or uniformed personnel” (administrative authority). However, according to the persons interviewed, no administrative authority has yet been a target of an attack by the VEOs.

As secondary targets, the accounts cite close family and relatives of the FDS, the Dozo, “community whistleblowers,” wealthy traders and herders, Fulani from Burkina Faso, and teachers. In Tougbo, for example, there are accounts of close relatives of the FDS being the targets of the VEOs, based on the testimonies of victims of VE in communities under VEO control in Burkina Faso. In Kafolo, the Dozo were the second target of the VEOs because of their purported collaboration

with the FDS and their supposed knowledge of the intricacies and nuances of PNC. Witnesses to the hostage situation at the mosque in Bolé in April 2021 also affirmed that the VEOs openly went after teachers, whom they consider to be educating local elites in western culture.

Finally, the Fulani from Burkina Faso have also been designated as a potential target for the VEOs for reasons that are still unclear. This could be explained by their refusal to collaborate with the VEOs, a refusal that would make them fugitives, according to Amadou Koufa’s appeal to all Fulani to join the violent extremist movements to defend Fulani identity and culture.

Conclusion

The facts described above suggest that, based on current knowledge, the means and resources used by the violent extremist organizations are a mix of robberies, cattle raiding, goldmining, and finally kidnappings for ransom. Locally, the operating methods of the VEOs are structured around strategies aimed at avoiding community and military scrutiny before perpetrating the attacks. The times and places of the attacks depend on the opportunities available to the VEOs. As for the attacks themselves, they are still, as yet, directed at the FDS and their close relatives, rich traders and herders, informers, Dozo, teachers, and to a lesser extent, Fulani from Burkina Faso.

6 Changes Resulting from VEO Actions, and Local Resilience Strategies Against Violent Extremism

This part of the analysis does not specifically emphasize changes effected by VEO actions, but a cursory look at them can provide a better understanding of the alert/monitoring strategies the communities have implemented after the fact.

In communities that were directly affected by the attacks (Téhini, Zèpou, Tougbo, Bolé et Kafolo) and those that, as yet, are only under threat (Môrô-Môrô), VEO actions have not only destabilized the daily habits and behaviors of the populations, but have impacted their economic activities. In the face of endured shocks, communities have developed monitoring strategies, which, for the time being at least, remain embryonic and fragile.

6.1 Slower economic activities and perceived degradation of living conditions

In each community surveyed, one of the leading negative impacts of the VEO attacks and threat on the population is the slowdown of economic activities. The situation affects farmers, herders, and fishermen (Kafolo) as well as those working in cross-border trade and small businesses.

Because of the fear of being attacked or kidnapped by VEOs—as often reported in interviews—many have had to adopt new habits: not travelling alone, for example, or limiting activities at longer distances from the village. Farmers, for example, have been forced to abandon fields that are far away, or close to the Burkina border and develop market gardens on the edge of the village (Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô, Bolé and Kafolo). Those who continue to go to their fields no longer do so alone, but travel in groups. The fishermen (in Kafolo) who were accustomed to crossing the border to fish on the other side of the Comoé River (Burkina Faso side) no longer go for fear of being kidnapped by VEs, whose presence near Alidouougou in Burkina Faso has been confirmed by testimonies from displaced Burkinabe and cross-border traders in the six communities in the study. Confronted with the closing of the usual circuits for commercial exchanges with communities on the Burkina Faso border (Mangandara, Sirakôrosso, Noumoutchédougou, Djébata, Toupi, Goti, Alidouougou), the traders now travel to Ferké and Bouaké to stock up on supplies and other staples (Bolé, Môrô-Môrô, Kafolo).

With their sources of income dried up because of the slowdown of economic activities in the area, living conditions have

degraded. The closer one gets to the border with Burkina Faso — a country with which the communities traditionally traded — the greater the feeling of economic vulnerability. In many families women play the role of financial backup in the household, but many say they are no longer able to help out their husbands financially because their economic activities have shut down or dwindled considerably. This situation has a negative impact on households’ ability to keep up with primary needs such as health and children’s schooling. For young people, already economically at risk, the security threat inherent in VE action exacerbates their vulnerability. Disinclined to do the traditional jobs of the region (agriculture, herding, trading), many young people use the pretext of the current weak economy and lack of alternatives for insertion to justify entering illicit goldmining. Yet, as the communities themselves insist, there is a real fear that the VEOs may exploit this vulnerability in youth to recruit.

6.2 Interpersonal and community relationships: fear and mistrust

“We don’t know who is who. You know your wife, your wife knows you. But she can betray you and she can hand you over, so everyone is being careful” (Kafolo). Similar remarks were recorded in all six communities. Attacks or threats of attacks by VEOs have created psychosis and mutual mistrust, as much between the inhabitants of a same village as between the members of a same family. Because of this mistrust, a kind of omertà mindset (code of silence) has set in among the population, who, for safety’ sake, refuse to talk about VE-related subjects. Many will say, “I was not present at the time of the events and nobody told me what happened here” (Zèpou). In this environment of fear and mistrust, the Fulani community, because of its supposed contacts with VE, culture, style of dress, and number of arrests by FDS, continue to be marginalized and stigmatized.

This atmosphere of general mistrust persists in the testimonies of kidnap victims (Kafolo, Bolé, Téhini), who insist there are insiders on whom the VEO rely on to carry out their kidnappings and attacks against the FDS. The accounts by the kidnap victims (Téhini, Bolé) and their families (Bolé, Kafolo) have instilled a kind of terror in the populations. They have had a chilling effect on their ability to talk freely of the VEs for risk of being labelled as undercover informants and targeted by kidnapers.

6.3 Military presence

After the deadly attack in Kafolo in June 2020 that 16 dead, including 14 soldiers, the Ivorian government deployed soldiers and units of the Special Forces (SF) in Téhini, Tougbo, and Kafolo. Military camps were built (Téhini, Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô, Bolé) and the training center of the Ivorian Parks and Reserves Office (OIPR) in Kafolo was occupied.

According to the military authorities and others interviewed, the military presence has contributed to lowering the threat level and reassuring the population. Since the security forces' arrival, even if residents are attached to their land ("Death is everywhere... This is our home" (Téhini). "This is our village. We were born here, we grew up here. We don't know where to go" (Zèpou and Bolé), which prevents some from leaving their villages, the overwhelming majority of study participants believe that the army is the main safety net for the populations in these at-risk areas. In every community, those interviewed, including village chiefs, are unanimous: "It is thanks to the military that we are here! If the soldiers decide to leave the village, we're all going to follow them. There will be no one left here." Despite the changes to their daily habits, the populations largely adhere to the curfew measures imposed by the local authorities (Tougbo, Bolé, Kafolo) prohibiting circulation of motorized vehicles from 7 pm people from 9 pm. However, the attitude of the populations reveals:

- the desire to see the military presence continue and
- the fragility of community response to the extremist threat.

Depending on whether police or soldiers are involved, the perception the local populations have of the FDS differs. As many studies conducted in the country's northern border areas reveal, the FDS's cohabitation with the population is regularly tense, with the main grievances being extortion and bribery. Accusations against the police are legion. For the interviewees, the extortion is more plundering of a population already crippled by the actions of the VEOs, and more importantly, the perceived laxity of the police in controlling motorcyclists may constitute an opportunity for VEOs to infiltrate populations, organize, and eventually carry out attacks. These complaints against the police have eroded their reputation and diluted community trust. However, the level of acceptance of the military presence is high overall in the study area. It is strengthened by the soldiers' participation in citizen activities (raising the flag at the middle school in Tougbo, cleaning the rural health center in Bolé, cleaning the courtyard of the mosque in Kafolo) and participating in sports (in Kafolo), etc.

Diagram 2: Local strategies for monitoring and alerting violent extremism

INVESTIGATION SITES

- 1 Kafolo
- 2 Bolé
- 3 Môrô-Môrô
- 4 Tougbo
- 5 Téhini
- 6 Zèpou

TYPE OF RESILIENCE STRATEGY

Absorption
We take it as it comes!

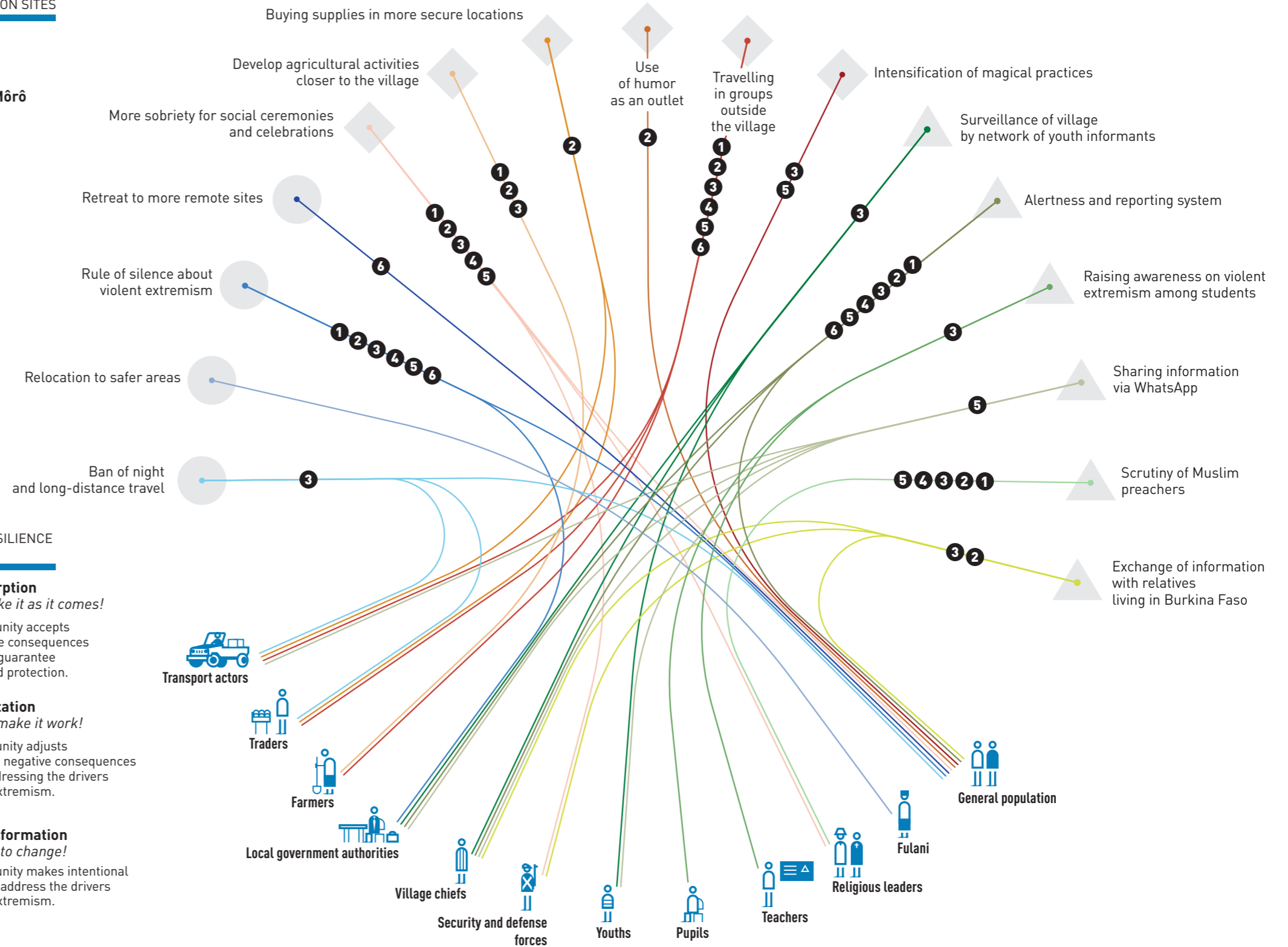
The community accepts the negative consequences in order to guarantee survival and protection.

Adaptation
We'll make it work!

The community adjusts to avoid the negative consequences without addressing the drivers of violent extremism.

Transformation
It has to change!

The community makes intentional changes to address the drivers of violent extremism.



6.4 Memory of the attacks and building local resilience and monitoring strategies

Despite the differences in the ways people reconstituted the early signs of VEO attacks, it is clear that those encountered have a “good” memory of VEO attacks and actions, which are now part of their collective history. Building on this memory of the events, resilience strategies have been developed, even if, for the time being, the army is still the number-one alternative in terms of protection. Diagram 2 above illustrates these strategies.

6.5 Fragile local early warning systems

In all six communities, the team noted that the existence of community monitoring and alert initiatives against VEO actions testify to at least two things:

- a collective awareness of the threats posed by the phenomenon of violent extremism, and
- the existence of societal resources able to make populations more resilient. In fact, there is in the communities a more or less shared culture featuring many of these local resilience mechanisms.

This is for example, the case with:

- the culture of vigilance and informing,
- the culture of omertà (code of silence) about VEOs,
- travelling in groups to country and market activities, and
- an increasing use of magic and religion to protect their communities.

However, there are disparities in the degree to which these mechanisms are structured between the communities. In nearly all the areas directly affected by VEO attacks that host a functional military camp, the communities seem to be deeply

attached to the army “umbrella.” In fact, the degree to which these community initiatives are structured is still relatively weak. In Téhini, for example, there is an ongoing conflict between two generations of young people (20 to 30 years of age and 30 years of age and over) around the fallout from projects initiated in the village. As a result of this conflict, two parallel WhatsApp groups have been set up. Ultimately, this conflict over leadership may put the circulation and sharing of information on violent extremism at risk. Yet in a context where security is under constant threat, collective involvement and citizen engagement can be important variables in ensuring resilience strategies are effective.

Although it has not been directly targeted by VEO attacks, Môrô-Môrô, out of the six communities we studied, is where community monitoring and alert mechanisms are the most developed. The young people’s village networking strategy is specific to this community.

The general trend was of a weakening of the social control of older generations over younger generations. According to the chieftom of Môrô-Môrô, these cultural barriers reduce young people’s exposure to economic vulnerability and, in consequence, to the recruitment offers of the VEOs. Moreover, their involvement in the goldmining economy—very much in vogue in the Bounkani region despite government measures to suppress it—is negligible. In reality, behind this social regulation through cultural norms hides a strong leadership, offered by a few elderly transporters who have become local models of success and whom the young people want to emulate. To this day, at least 20 of the minibuses commonly known as “Massa” are in operation, providing an occupation for the young people. Without neglecting the local initiatives (e.g., creation of economic interest groups and associations for women and young people), a dose of support from the local transportation economy might help reduce young people’s vulnerability.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned in the Ivorian and Beninese Contexts

This study explored the knowledge and perceptions of communities and their memories of the early signs of the presence or actions of violent extremism organizations in northern Côte d’Ivoire.

The data gathered show that:

- There is a diversity of signals that the populations link to the presence of VEOs in their communities, and these signals concern the behaviors, practices, but also discourses of the purported violent extremists, who seem not to be part of the communities’ habits and established ways.
- In terms of behavior, the populations refer to their style of clothing (wearing of balaclavas, disguises), travelling in columns on motorcycles of a particular type, etc.
- As for the more recurring practices, the populations refer to mass purchases of goods such as food supplies (multiple loaves of bread, rice, fuel, and other types of consumer goods) and to practices like cattle raiding, robberies, power cuts, kidnappings followed by demands for ransom as conditions of release, and the planting of improvised explosive devices.
- As for the discursive elements the populations describe, they concern the surprise forced sermons in the mosques, and the threats issued against communities that dare to conspire with the defense and security forces or share information on the VEOs with the FDS.

These early warning signs, identified by the communities, the local authorities and defense and security force personnel alike, are widespread and recurrent. They overlap with similar practices identified in other contexts, most notably in certain coastal West African countries such as Benin and Togo. Large purchases, travelling in columns of motorcycles, wearing balaclavas, the threats against those complicit with the FDS and government agents, planting improvised explosive devices, storming of places of worship and giving unannounced sermons, cattle raiding and kidnapping are the same behaviors identified in neighboring countries. However, we note elements

specific to the Ivorian context, such as the way men disguised themselves in a woman’s full veil, and the power cuts before operations began. Likewise, there are elements referenced in the Beninese context that do not arise in the discourses of the people we met. This includes extorting Zakat from the herders to pasture their cattle in national parks, circulating new banknotes in local markets, and developing black markets for medicines and motorcycle parts.

This study has also taught the team of researchers two main lessons worth mentioning:

- The advent of violent extremism reinforces the never-ending influx of NGOs in the northern part of Côte d’Ivoire. Certain members of the surveyed communities have begun to tire of the situation. They are more likely to express a need for support for their economic initiatives or for delivery of basic social services, such as rehabilitated schools and health centers, the offering of potable water services, and the erection of barbed wire fences to protect market gardens (even if these activities are the remit and responsibility of the state). The risk of such an influx of external actors in the communities is that it creates mistrust toward external intervenors—such as, for example, researchers— for whom they may harbor a certain hostility. This was the case with the research team, who were shunned by the women and young people in Kafolo and because of this could not hold a focus group there.
- The young people are increasingly developing a disaffection toward traditional economic activities (agriculture, fishing, trade) in favor of illicit goldmining which, in the local imagination, accelerates their access to success. Since then, the Côte d’Ivoire government’s shutdown of goldmining has eliminated economic opportunity for many young people in a context of security threats and in a crisis of professional alternatives. For young people who do not want to do anything else, their risks of radicalizing and slipping into violent extremism are real.



7 References

Aziz Mossi (2022). "Forêts contestées : conflits armés et économies illicites dans les zones forestières d'Afrique de l'Ouest," Case study of Parc W in Niger, GI-TOC, 41 p.

Bernard Bléou (2020). "Renforcer la résilience et l'apprentissage de la lutte contre l'extrémisme violent dans les zones frontalières du nord de la Côte d'Ivoire," feasibility study on behalf of FH360, May 2020.

ISS (2019). "Extrémisme violent, criminalité organisée et conflits locaux dans le Liptako-Gourma, Rapport sur l'Afrique de l'Ouest," 26 p. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-fr.pdf>.

Kouamé Yao Séverin, Binaté Issouf, Diarra Lassina (2018). "Étude exploratoire sur les risques ou facteurs potentiels de radicalisation et d'extrémisme violent en République de Côte d'Ivoire," Program for the Prevention of Radicalization and the Fight against Violent Extremism – Phase II.

Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa (2022). Risk Bulletin Issue 4, 6 p. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/WEA-Obs-RB4-French.pdf>.

PNUD, [sd], Prévenir et lutter contre l'extrémisme violent en Afrique: une approche axée sur le développement, 56 p. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/africa/UNDP-PVE-updated2017_FR.pdf.

Sampson Kwarkye, Jeannine Ella, Michaël Matongbada (2019). "L'Initiative d'Accra peut-elle prévenir le terrorisme dans les États côtiers de l'Afrique de l'Ouest?", Dakar, ISS: <https://issafrica.org/fr/iss-today/linitiative-daccra-peut-elle-prevenir-le-terrorisme-dans-les-etats-cotiers-de-lafrique-de-louest>.

Resilience for Peace (2021). "Security and Resilience: Perceptions and Experiences. Understanding the Border Area in Northern Côte d'Ivoire Research Series".

Philippe Assalé, Bernard Bléou (2019). "Violent Extremism Risk Assessment," Côte d'Ivoire.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1: Collection Tools and Techniques

The objective of this study is to identify, mainly via qualitative methods based on testimonies and/or accounts from communities, the early signs of attacks in communities that had harbored or were harboring active VEOs.

Collection Tools

The study is based on a participatory diagnostic founded on exploratory participatory action research (PAR). With exploratory PAR, we were able to collect information on the problems addressed, with an emphasis on signals and violent extremism organizations.

The data collection tools used in the study were the following:

- **Semi-structured interview guides**
- **Observation grid**
- **Historic profile**

Collection techniques

Individual interviews and focus groups were the main techniques the team used to collect field data. In all, 40 individual interviews and 15 focus groups involving 199 people were conducted in the course of a 12-day field mission in the departments of Téhini (Téhini, Zèpou, Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô, Bolé) and Kong (Kafolo).

The work was articulated around various activities, namely: (i) Document research and scoping meeting, (ii) Development and validation of collection tools, (iii) Collection of data, (iv) Processing of data, development and debriefing of the preliminary report, (v) Writing and submission of the final report, (vi) Participation in a debriefing session. These activities took the study's regulatory timeline into account.

Data collection preparation phase

Preparing for the data collection was a three-phase process. These three phases respectively covered the first two weeks of the study. It included the following activities:

- **Scoping meeting:** The effective start-up of the study took place after two scoping meetings between the study sponsor and the team of consultants. At these meetings,

we came to an agreement on the study's objectives and the relevance of the data collection tools and defined a common working approach.

- **Document review:** Document review was ongoing throughout the study. This helped us to pinpoint the locations of the attacks and reconfigure the study areas originally selected when we needed to. For example, the location of Kimbirila-Nord was replaced with Zèpou. We consulted secondary sources (study reports, scientific articles, press reviews) to gain a clearer picture of the question and better articulate our analysis.

- **Development and validation of the collection tools:** The team of consultants drew up a simplified interview guide for the communities and a data collection matrix for the administrative, political, and military authorities. These tools were then validated with the responsible people at the R4P before we started on our field surveys.

Data collection

This phase of the study required two consultants and two surveyors to travel to the study sites for a 12-day period. It started on September 27, 2022, in Téhini and ended on October 7, 2022, in Kafolo with stops in Zèpou, Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô and Bolé in between. It was done concomitantly with the daily debriefing sessions.

Processing of the data and writing of the preliminary report

The phase for processing the data and writing the preliminary report also took two weeks. It started in the fifth week and ended in the sixth week. It involved centralizing the data, transcribing it, sorting it into themes, and analyzing its content.

Writing and submission of the final report

After the preliminary report, an online work session was held on November 11, 2022, to obtain input from the sponsor. The final report incorporating the sponsor's suggestions was submitted the following week.

Participation in a debriefing session

The team of consultants will be participating in a debriefing session that will be managed by the R4P team.

Appendix 2: Ethical Questions and Gender Aspect

The ethical requirements of this study were as follows: ethical and regulatory questions, the free and informed consent of the interviewees, the confidentiality of the answers, and finally the advantages and benefits.

Ethical and regulatory questions

The study team had a number of orientation sessions on the protection of privacy and confidentiality. Also, all of the data collected in the course of this research project has been processed and presented anonymously so as to preserve the identity of the people who provided the information. No respondent's name will appear in the report. The list of people interviewed and their contact information will also not be shown.

All data and other information obtained in the course of this baseline survey have been securely stored and kept confidential and anonymous to the extent possible. Furthermore, all of the data will remain the property of Equal Access International and can only be used by the consultant with its prior agreement.

Equity and gender

The gender dynamic was taken into account throughout the process of choosing the investigators and identifying the people to interview. The team of investigators was made up of one woman and one man.

With regard to the interviewees, 50 women took part in the discussions, either in individual interviews or in focus groups. Some 40 more women attended the various discussions in Bolé, but did not speak.

Benefit for the participants

The respondents will not receive any benefits from participating, but the consideration of their needs by funders will, through their projects, serve to prevent VE, build peace and social cohesion, and boost socio-economic development in the communities covered by the study.

Conflict-sensitive approach

Taking a conflict-sensitive approach ensures that the interventions do not involuntarily contribute to or revive conflicts,

but instead create a climate of peace and social inclusion. Cognizant of the situation and of the sensitivity of their subject, the team of researchers relied on the R4P project's community facilitators for this study, who have a thorough understanding of the local political, security, and socio-economic issues. They supported the team in identifying and scheduling meetings with the key informers and helped to instill a climate of trust between the researchers and the interviewees. This support facilitated the active participation of the notoriously insular Fulani community in the study.

Challenges related to the terrain and the consultants' immersion strategies

The team of consultants faced two major challenges during the field survey. The first was the difficulty of accessing the interviewees, the communities themselves. In fact, the context of psychosis and fear generated by the violent extremists' attacks and the supposed presence of their accomplices in the population made any public discussion on violent extremism very sensitive, especially with strangers. To overcome this difficulty, the team had the support of community facilitators. Building on the trust capital they had with the populations, they proved very useful in canvassing the actors we met.

At the same time, while reassuring the interviewees that their anonymity would be respected and about how the data collected would be used, the consultants made a point of using digression and playing on the joking kinship between the team's two surveyors and the local populations before the interviews began. From Téhini to Kafolo, with all the stops in Zèpou, Tougbo, Môrô-Môrô, and Bolé along the way, the entire data collection process was nurtured by this practical approach to immersion. The second challenge was the impassibility of certain village roads (especially the Téhini-Zèpou road) and the security risks the team and the R4P facilitators were exposed to in taking them. Because of extreme rainfall over the study period, the team had to use motorcycles to get to Zèpou. All in all, despite the real security risks (the populations and even certain administrative authorities feared for the team sometimes), the data collection operation went well overall.

Appendix 3: Qualitative Interview Guide for Communities

Date:	...	Time started:	...
Interviewer:	...	Time ended:	...
Note taker:	...		

Other persons present?	Yes / No	Functions/Titles
Name
Name

Name of interviewee:			
Organization:	...	Function/Title:	...
Unit:	...	Since?	...
Gender:	...		
Email:	...	Phone:	...

This interview is being conducted as part of an Equal Access International-sponsored study on early signs of insecurity. The results of this study should enable the Resilience for Peace (R4P) project to better orient and contextualize future actions for awareness and prevention.

Resilience for Peace (R4P) is a five-year USAID-funded initiative implemented by Equal Access International (EAI) to strengthen community resilience and learning to counter insecurity in Côte d'Ivoire's northern border areas. The project's main objective is to perform actions that reduce the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of the communities in the area.

The answers you give during this exchange will remain anonymous and confidential. Nothing you say will be attributed to you. Any personal information that might identify you, including telephone numbers, will only be used for purposes of follow-up and quality assurance. The data will be protected by codes, and no one outside of the research team and R4P will have access to them.



I. History of perceived early signs of VEO actions

1. In your experience, what was the context before the violent incident? (Did you notice anything? What was happening here before the event happened?) One year before? Six months before? Three months before? Two to three weeks before? One to three days before? Do you remember the things you began to see, and then afterwards what were the reactions?
2. What new things (signs, facts, events, situations, gestures, behaviors) did you begin to see in your community before the attack happened?
3. Were the new things you were beginning to see suggesting anything to you? If yes, what did you do? If not, why not?
4. According to what you experienced, heard, or saw, tell us a little bit about this event.

History of armed attacks	Answers
a. When did this happen? How long did it last (days / hours)?	...
b. How many people were killed, wounded, or displaced?	...
c. Who were they after?	...
d. How did they proceed?	...
e. What places were the attacks coming from?	...
f. What changed in your community / location after the events?	...

5. Tell us about the problems there were between the people here before the events happened. (Look at the focuses of tension in the intra- and inter-community reports and in the reports to the public services.)
6. Did things happen here in the same way they did in other locations? These new things that happened here and drew your attention, are they the same as the ones you heard about elsewhere or are they different? Explain how.

II. Perceived causes of VEO actions

7. In your opinion, why did these people come here? What were they themselves saying about it? Or, what did you hear the people say about what was making them do this?
8. In your opinion, what provoked or brought on this incursion? What comes to mind first?
9. Is what provoked the event here the same thing as in the other locations? Why?
10. Are the reasons that made people come here to infiltrate the same as you are hearing and seeing elsewhere?

III. Actors involved in acts of VE

11. Did the people who infiltrated all come from elsewhere?
12. Do you know or did you hear if there are Ivoirians among them?
13. Have you ever heard of any people from around here being with the people who infiltrated here (focus on the VEOs)?
14. Were there any people from around here walking with them?
15. In your opinion, what is it that makes or might make people from here walk with these people? How do you recognize those who have joined VEOs or who walk with them (how do you know it is them)?
16. What means do they have? Where do they make the money?

IV. Communities' capacities for resilience in the face of VE

17. Where you live, who are the groups / communities most endangered by these people?
18. How do you cope, or what gives you the strength to keep going with what has occurred? Where do you find the strength to hold on?
19. What makes you weak when you're faced with these events and people?
20. In your opinion, what could be done to prevent these things from coming here or to stop them?
21. Where you live, if you had to do something to prevent these things from happening or continuing, what is the first thing you would do? What groups / persons should be helped most? Why?
22. What do you do to make sure that the memory of what happened here is not erased in the community?



Appendix 4: Data Collection Matrix

Objective 1: Document the local history of attacks by violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and the changes they have wrought in communities					
Key questions	Subsidiary questions	Types of information	Sources of information	Collection instruments	Analysis methods
(i) In your experience, what were the signs suggesting there was going to be an attack by an extremist group in your community?	<p>a. What contexts or events preceded the attacks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional festivities, traditional wedding ceremonies, etc.? Municipal, regional, legislative, or presidential elections? When the government brought in reforms (e.g., related to land, marriage). When the slowdown of economic growth in Côte d'Ivoire was particularly bad? When disparities in income and living conditions between populations (men, women, and young people) began to deepen? When youth/women's unemployment in the community worsened? When the population of non-nationals increased in relation to nationals? When tensions around natural resource management (water, land, minerals, etc.) heightened? When movements between the Côte d'Ivoire and its northern neighbors (Mali and Burkina Faso) intensified? Were there any particular rumors prior to the attacks? If so, what were they? <p>b. Are the context and events that preceded the attacks in your community different from those in other communities? If so, how different are they?</p>	Descriptive and normative	Prefects, sub-prefects, mayors, regional presidents and councilors, community chiefs/leaders, leaders of young people's and women's associations, religious leaders, "ordinary people," customs officials	Individual interviews and/or focus groups	Discourse analysis, document analysis (study reports)

Objective 1: Document the local history of attacks by violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and the changes they have made in the communities					
Key questions	Subsidiary questions	Types of information	Sources of information	Collection instruments	Analysis methods
(ii) What is the local history of attacks by extremist groups and people's accounts of them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When did the attack or attacks take place in your community? What times were chosen for these attacks? Why? In your experience, how many people were killed, wounded, or displaced in the attack or attacks? What groups of people were most targeted? Why? What places were targeted? Why? How did the VEOs proceed in their attacks? What means did they use? Were there any differences or resemblances with attacks in other communities? 	Descriptive and normative	Prefects, sub-prefects, mayors, regional presidents and councilors, community chiefs/leaders, leaders of young people's and women's associations, religious leaders, "ordinary people," customs officials	Individual interviews and/or focus groups	Discourse analysis, document analysis (study reports)
(iii) What changes have you perceived since the attacks by violent extremist organizations in your community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What has changed in your community as a result of the extremist attacks? In cohabitation between communities/populations? In the practicing of economic activities? In travel? In the choice of places to gather or live? In religious practices? 				



Individual interviews and/or focus groups					
Key questions	Subsidiary questions	Types of information	Sources of information	Collection instruments	Analysis methods
What are the dynamics at the origin of the actions of violent extremist organizations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In your opinion, what are the causes of VEO attacks in your community and in northern Côte d'Ivoire? On a first scale of 0 to 10, assign a score to the following causes by their importance: marginalization of certain social categories; unequal distribution of water, land, minerals, etc.; social and political exclusion; poor governance; impunity; the lack of government authority; the insufficiency of basic public services On a second scale of 0 to 10, assign a score to the following other causes: arms proliferation, illicit criminal networks, the emergence of armed self-defense groups, extremist attacks in Burkina Faso and Mali spilling over the border, the lack of water and the rarity of land, community conflicts, tensions with the FDS, frustrations with the government, clandestine gold mining What events or factors triggered the attacks in your location? Are they different in other locations? 	Descriptive	FDS, prefects, sub-prefects, mayors, regional presidents or councilors, community chiefs / leaders, leaders of young people's and women's associations, religious leaders, "ordinary people," NGOs	Individual interviews and/or focus groups	Discourse analysis, document analysis (study or investigation reports, activity reports, etc.)

Objective 3: Characterize the actors or groups of actors involved in acts of extremist violence					
Key questions	Subsidiary questions	Types of information	Sources of information	Collection instruments	Analysis methods
Who are the actors / groups of actors involved in the extremist violence and what are their motivations ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In your location / community, are there any categories of people who have joined VEOs? If so, what were they? What were their motivations? What strategies did they use to join these VEOs? In your location / community, who are the actors involved or suspected of being involved in extremist violence? What were their main motivations and strategies? What means and support did they have? Where did these means and this support come from? How are these actors different from those in other locations? How are they the same? 	Descriptive	FDS, prefects, sub-prefects, mayors, community chiefs / leaders, leaders of young people's and women's associations, religious leaders, "ordinary people," NGOs	Individual interviews and/or focus groups	Discourse analysis, document analysis (study or investigation reports, activity reports, etc.)
Objective 4: Analyze community resilience in the face of VE and define local strategies for monitoring the early signs of VE					
Key questions	Subsidiary questions	Types of information	Sources of information	Collection instruments	Analysis methods
What strategies do you implement for strengthening community resilience in the face of actions by the VEOs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In your opinion, which communities are most exposed to VE in your location? Why? What capacities or resources do the communities where you live have to protect themselves against VEO actions? What priority actions are taken to prevent VE where you live? Who should be the priority targets or groups in these actions to prevent VE? 	Descriptive and normative	Prefects, sub-prefects, mayors, community chiefs / leaders, leaders of young people's and women's associations, religious leaders, "ordinary people," NGOs, and other local development actors	Individual interviews	Discourse analysis





This study is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Photo on cover page: Bernard Bleou, member of the research team for this study

Project and layout: Marco Giannini / Dataspoiler

