

**The U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote
Stability 10-Year Plan for Coastal West Africa**

*La Stratégie des Etats-Unis de Prévention des Conflits et de
Promotion de la Stabilité - Plan décennal pour Afrique de l'Ouest
côtière*

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Executive Summary

The U.S. government (USG) is committed to expanding partnerships in West Africa to prevent violent conflicts from emerging or further spreading across the region. The central Sahel region of Africa experienced more terrorist attacks than any other part of the world in 2021, with terrorist activity increasingly expanding across borders in neighboring Coastal West Africa (CWA) countries. Violent extremist activity is exacerbating distrust among civilians and security and government actors in border areas that are historically disadvantaged in terms of political representation and economic development. This trend perpetuates and coincides with growing strains on democratic institutions across the region.

In April 2022, President Biden announced the USG would prioritize partnerships with the CWA countries of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo to advance the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (SPCPS)*. Leaders across these countries are committed to taking comprehensive action at local, national, and regional levels to build upon existing resiliencies and prevent conflict and instability, including the spread of violent extremism (VE). The USG seeks to be a partner in this prevention endeavor. This plan provides a framework and roadmap for increased U.S. engagement and assistance in this regard, working with international partners.

U.S. embassies across the region and interagency leaders came together to develop this plan for the region, moving beyond traditional bilateral operating lines. This included dedicated integration and planning workshops in the region and in Washington. In addition, U.S. officials conducted wide-ranging consultations with local, national, and regional partners to inform this plan, including high-level diplomatic engagements, workshops with international donor partners, and dialogue with over 100 representatives from civil society organizations. Continued, ongoing multi-stakeholder engagement will be central to further implementation. As stated in the U.S. Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa, “the United States must reset its relations with African counterparts, listen to diverse local voices, and widen the circle of engagement to advance its strategic objectives to the benefit of both Africans and Americans.”

This plan envisions a range of U.S. and partner efforts to advance the long-term goal that *Coastal West Africans promote peace and prevent violent conflict and violent extremism (VE) that risks destabilizing the region*. The term “Coastal West Africans” encompasses civilians, governments and institutions, security forces, civil society, and regional bodies and seeks to reinforce the united front required for success. (Note: Security forces refer to all civilian and defense forces with a security mandate.) **The USG will focus diplomatic engagement and assistance tools at local, national, and regional levels on advancing three overlapping objectives:**

- Objective 1: Social cohesion is strengthened within and between at-risk communities.
- Objective 2: Improved government responsiveness, inclusion, and accountability to at-risk communities.
- Objective 3: Enhanced security force responsiveness and accountability to at-risk communities.

This 10-year plan is explicitly crafted to incorporate lessons learned from overly securitized approaches to addressing VE-related challenges in the Sahel region over the past decade. A stronger social contract and increased trust between national and local governments, security actors, community leaders, and the public will facilitate peaceful resolution of disputes and reduce the ability of violent extremists, criminals, and other destabilizing actors to exploit ethnic, religious, and livelihood cleavages. This plan seeks to reinforce and buttress promising national commitments by the five governments to address VE-related challenges in a more holistic fashion, emphasizing inclusive development and responsive governance.

The U.S. government will marshal and adapt a range of engagement and assistance to support these objectives in each of the five countries, recognizing unique national dynamics and challenges that affect each country’s orientation toward these threats and the potential for expansive partnership. U.S. engagement and assistance under this plan will be tailored accordingly to the individual countries. For example, some countries face more exigent security assistance needs, while others are more focused on economic revitalization. U.S. support to Guinea continues to be oriented toward encouraging a

return to constitutional, civilian-led democracy. At the same time, the plan will support mechanisms to promote regional cooperation and sharing lessons learned – both among government and non-government actors – to effectively prevent conflict and promote stability. The USG will seek to bolster existing mechanisms that can facilitate that cooperation.

The plan includes a strong commitment to put in place the necessary operating structures and staffing to enable more effective interagency U.S. government collaboration to promote prevention across the region. Embassies in the region will engage regularly to advance implementation of this plan, including to hold strategic reviews to assess shared threats, challenges, and opportunities to include necessary resources in the President's Budget Request. This level of planning and coordination across the U.S. government will enable more effective and strategic engagement with key regional and international partners to advance shared objectives.

Overall, in line with the SPCPS and based on lessons learned, this plan represents a commitment to innovate and enhance how the USG engages and works with regional partners. The plan calls for a more flexible and effective approach, including:

- Shifting the focus to include prevention;
- Focusing on dual tracks of bilateral and regional engagement;
- Integrating security and governance approaches;
- Assuming a supporting role toward partner nation and regional institution plans;
- Streamlining international donor coordination;
- Committing to a strategic monitoring and evaluation agenda; and
- Increasing focus on financing for women and youth in support of economic stability.

U.S. leaders will continue to innovate and adapt this plan as new developments occur, including changing political or security dynamics on the ground. Officials will monitor and adapt to threat dynamics that cut across the Sahel and CWA that could create new challenges and limitations. U.S. leaders and partners will come together, at least annually, to review ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) efforts and make strategic shifts to the plan as necessary. Through consultations, iterative analysis, and ongoing

learning and reflection, this implementation plan will continuously evolve to reflect a shared vision for strategic prevention of VE and destabilizing conflict in the region.

1. Analysis

The SPCPS prioritizes data-driven analysis to understand local dynamics leading to targeted policy and program interventions. This summary is based on field-based data collection; consultations with host country partners, civil society, and think tanks; reporting by the U.S. Missions in CWA, the USAID/West Africa Regional Mission, and the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM); learning from previous and ongoing programming in the region; and data analysis and desk research. Starting with an examination of context factors that may exacerbate risk or create resilience to the influence of violent extremism, this analysis shows that many of the historical strengths of the CWA region are increasingly under threat by external and internal factors enumerated in the risk section, rendering many of the resilience factors also potential risk factors. While the analysis below focuses on the most pressing risks and resiliencies to *regional stability*, country-specific risk and resilience factors are considered equally important to take into account in plan implementation. Note that instability dynamics and/or risks as well as resilience factors are all of seminal importance to this 10-year plan but are not noted in order of priority.

Drawing on processes outlined in the MEL preview (Section 5), this analysis will be iteratively updated to reflect shifting dynamics over time and incorporate learning, particularly as it pertains to at-risk communities. The USG will reassess underlying assumptions as part of the context monitoring and learning agenda and will address the knowledge gaps enumerated below.

Instability Dynamics and/or Risks

- **Violent Extremist Expansion:** VE attacks in CWA have increased significantly since 2020. Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo all border the Sahel, where violent extremist organizations (VEOs) leverage porous borders, trade routes, community grievances, gender inequality and marginalization to stage attacks, often against security forces, and to build their influence among CWA communities. Increased VEO influence intensifies distrust among civilians and

security and government actors, worsens intercommunal violence, exacerbates underlying ethnic tensions, upends tolerance and freedom of religion or belief, deters economic growth and investment, and threatens U.S. and partner interests, populations, and security.

- **Marginalization of the Peripheries:** The northern regions of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and eastern Guinea share the common risk factors of persistent poverty as governments seek to address economic and political marginalization, which VEOs and other criminal networks exploit for access and influence. The regions bordering the Sahel are more vulnerable to climate, environmental, social, political, and security stresses, which often lead to humanitarian crises, economic disruption, and worsening gender outcomes including lower political and economic participation by women. Un- and under-employed young people, women, and historically marginalized ethnic populations are among the most vulnerable to recruitment or co-optation by VEOs, traffickers, and other transnational criminal groups. COVID-19-related border closures, mass displacement and humanitarian crises in neighboring regions, insecurity in the Sahel, economic inequality, increased resource competition, and climate change have contributed to shifting transhumance and trade routes from the Sahel into these periphery regions, further stressing communities and contributing to increased tension and illicit activity. Increased violence and/or state failure in the Sahel are prompting refugee flows into CWA, stretching budgets and exacerbating existing discrimination against marginalized communities.
- **Democratic Backsliding:** Political freedom in CWA is on a declining trajectory. From 2020-2022, the broader West Africa region experienced eight coups or attempted coups and no transitions back to civilian rule. The 2021 coup d'état in Guinea triggered Section 7008 of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Acts, which restricts certain types of U.S. assistance in situations where the "duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup d'état or decree." Democratic backsliding tends to exacerbate vulnerability to VE expansion; increase corruption, social conflict, and state-based violence; invite malign foreign actors to intervene; and erode social and

economic resiliencies. Furthermore, democratic transitions are likely to take longer due to VE risks, which provide a pretext to delay elections, restrict freedom of the press, arrest dissenters, and subvert the justice system. Coups in Mali and Burkina Faso make this plain. Finally, democratic backsliding in CWA occurs against the backdrop of great power competition globally, presenting U.S. competitors with another opportunity to push back against core U.S. values and advance their own global agendas.

- **Climate and Environmental Challenges:** Climate and environmental factors are expected to further fray social cohesion as pastoralists are forced to adapt their centuries-old herding routes in response to variable rainfall, often resulting in migration into and within CWA. Furthermore, climate change is expected to contribute to new migration and refugee flows resulting in the displacement of millions of people in the coming decades. These migrations frequently result in conflict with farming communities, which contributes to the further stigmatization and marginalization of pastoralists who become vulnerable targets for VE recruitment. But while the threats posed by climate change cannot be considered in isolation from other shared challenges, addressing climate related challenges is an opportunity to address regional security and stability through resilience factors.

Resilience Factors

- **Social Cohesion:** USAID's 2019 Violent Extremism Risk Assessment found, to varying degrees, social cohesion consistently ranked among the top categories of resilience across the region, driven by traditions of interethnic and interreligious marriages, interreligious tolerance and respect, intercommunal dialogues, and social celebrations. Social cohesion in this context refers to the level and extent of connectedness between and among groups. It refers to the sense of belonging of a community and the relationships among members within the community itself. In general, social cohesion correlates with *decreased* support for VE. However, social cohesion is fraying or has deteriorated almost completely in some areas due to civil war, limited access to justice, increasing VE influence, VE-created general insecurity, political polarization, and economic

stresses, including gender inequality in employment. Climate change and illegal and unregulated fishing by foreign nations also threaten food security and livelihoods, increasing community competition over already scarce resources. Widespread poverty and lack of educational and economic opportunity, especially among youth, is an important risk factor to fraying social cohesion that can lead to higher incidents of gender-based violence and VE exploitation. Lack of comprehensive regional solutions for integration of socially marginalized groups, including returning refugees and other conflict-affected displaced persons, also contributes to developmental challenges that negatively impact community resilience and social cohesion.

- **Democratic Governance:** While democratic governance is eroding across much of West Africa, there is still room for optimism. Ghana has served as a model democracy in the region, and Côte d'Ivoire appears to be on a positive democratic trajectory. Representatives from several CWA countries have effectively leveraged their leadership roles in regional and international fora and as heads of multilateral institutions to strengthen governance. Youth – especially young women – in all five countries have expressed a desire for greater democratic participation and a more substantial role in decision-making processes. Still, significant governance challenges exist in all five countries. Corruption is a serious concern in all CWA countries, as it erodes citizens' trust in government and democratic institutions, limits and sometimes shrinks space for media and civil society to operate freely and reduces avenues for citizens to seek accountability from local and national institutions. Disinformation campaigns spun by malign actors and misinformation are increasingly undermining the population's trust in the government, which is exacerbated by low rates of literacy and access to credible information. Outdated domestic asylum laws and national processes and weak government accountability for international humanitarian law continue to impact local communities and erode trust in regional, national, and local governance structures across countries. Climate change, increasing competition for natural resources, regional migration, land disputes, and growing encroachment and illicit activity in national parks are

all areas of emerging importance for coordinated, cross-border governance solutions.

- **Security Sector:** Some security forces in CWA countries are capable, professional, and appropriately oriented to providing security to citizens, but others have failed to invest in the types of security capabilities and institutions best matched to the threats their citizens face. Some CWA governments are increasingly investing in training but, more investments are needed. In terms of regional cooperation, CWA militaries have some experience working together on United Nations (UN) missions on the continent, including in the Sahel, and have some experience coordinating military operations across borders. However, varying levels of capability and different security architectures create additional coordination challenges. Several countries lack experience confronting the VE threat and a coordinated strategy to address the security and development aspects of this challenge. Each of these countries seeks U.S. support for these efforts.
- **Economic Potential:** All five countries experienced varied economic growth in recent years. Strong private sector development is projected in the near to long term, despite COVID-19-related and geopolitical global market disruptions. Côte d'Ivoire has emerged over the last decade as an important economic driver in West Africa, and U.S. companies have taken note of significant investment opportunities. Côte d'Ivoire and Benin rank among the best-performing economies in Africa, and Togo and Guinea continue to attract significant private sector and extractive industry investments, respectively. However, the unequal distribution of economic opportunity and social services within and between countries and poor regulation of some sectors, such as mining and energy, has further exacerbated grievances and conflict due to perceived inequality and corruption. These countries face daunting challenges to robust private sector expansion, including high per kilometer transportation costs, and long export and import times. The successful implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTFA) and Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) freedom of movement provisions are important for CWA economic growth. These initiatives have the potential to strengthen existing border market

networks, which currently facilitate extensive formal and informal private sector trade flows, including for women entrepreneurs. However, heightened impacts of climate change will continue to affect the ability of CWA states to realize their full economic potential, particularly in **fishing** and agricultural industries that are critical for food security and account for approximately a quarter of CWA economies and employs between 20 to 60 percent of the labor force.

Additionally, global economic activity has slowed considerably, with the lingering COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine contributing to increased economic uncertainty, rising inflation and food prices, and tightening financial conditions. The economic outlook in CWA varies among countries – with Guinea and Togo expected to grow in 2022, whereas Ghana is expected to experience significant growth slowdowns.

Priorities for Further Analysis and Research

The strategic priorities of this plan are grounded in the USG's analysis of data on the region. To effectively target engagements in a changing environment, the USG must assess knowledge gaps and identify opportunities for addressing those gaps with partners.

Below is an initial list of questions:

1. How will the VEO threat to CWA impact democratic governance and influence opportunities for other malign external actors? What resilience factors are needed to prevent such impact?
2. What is the impact of further political instability in Mali and Burkina Faso, including irregular transitions of power, on CWA? What is needed to mitigate these risks?
3. What are the spillover implications of the deteriorating security environment in northwest Nigeria? What is needed to prevent these negative effects?
4. How might food, fuel, or other commodity shocks (including but not limited to Russia's ongoing war of aggression in Ukraine) fuel unrest and instability

(including but not limited to catalyzing VE)? What is needed to reduce the likelihood of such impact?

5. How will environmental degradation, climate change, and insecurity in the Sahel and Nigeria impact VEO activity and recruitment in CWA?
6. What is needed to ensure that security forces modernize sufficiently to address VE and other threats?
7. What types of industries, other than extractives, have been able to survive and withstand in these economies? Do those industries support women and youth? What supports do those industries need to survive and thrive despite the environment?

2. Political Vision and Approach

Long-Term Political End State

Over ten years, through this plan, and as specifically outlined in each Embassy's Integrated Country Strategy, the USG seeks to support CWA partners to achieve concrete progress and pathways toward the following long-term political end state:

Coastal West Africans promote peace and prevent violent conflict and VE that risk destabilizing the region.

Who: *Coastal West Africans.* Local, national, and regional leaders and citizens are at the center of this plan, which reflects a shared vision for promoting regional peace and stability. Their agency and ownership of the objectives enumerated in this plan are critical for enduring and meaningful change.

What: *Behaviors taken by regional partners that collectively promote peace and prevent conflict and VE.* As the SPCPS states and the analysis of CWA confirms, bolstering resiliencies and mitigating risks are equally important. Effective prevention will require a range of government, security, civil society, and private sector actors to work together to prevent violent conflict and VE expansion while simultaneously

making overdue investments in the economic, social, and political health of historically marginalized communities. The focus on preventing violent conflict and VE reflect an effort to prioritize behavior changes that will have the greatest positive impact on regional stability. Violent conflict linked to political competition, corruption, criminality, trafficking, intercommunal disputes, and other factors can create conditions for VE expansion.

Where: *Communities most at-risk of VE violence, recruitment, and entrenchment.*

These communities border the Sahel states, where VEOs have carved out space to operate and stage attacks into the CWA states. If current trends continue, bordering communities that are far from the capitals and largely disconnected from the social, political, and economic wealth and opportunities concentrated around the southern coasts will be most at-risk for terrorists' violence, recruitment, and potentially territorial control.

Why: *Prevent broader regional instability.* While each CWA country faces domestic challenges that pose significant risks to their stability, analysis suggests that VE expansion's greatest existential threat is to *regional* stability. Governance challenges are often exacerbated or preempted by security threats. In neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso, for instance, military leaders used the perceived failure of government to address escalating VE incidents as the premise for coups.

Measurement: The full MEL Plan will include context indicators that enable the team to monitor the extent to which the region is moving towards achieving the political end state.

Political Approach

The USG is committed to learning lessons from other prevention and stabilization contexts and adapting successful policies and interventions where appropriate and feasible. Key lessons learned from the Sahel and other similar contexts that substantially informed the development of this plan and the USG's joint approach with CWA partners include:

- Pursue a whole-of-government, civilian-focused approach. Avoid an approach that is overly focused on security.
- Focus efforts on issues that a range of stakeholders, particularly local actors, have independently prioritized.
- Avoid spreading resources too thin. Make strategic decisions focused on documented key drivers and potential game changers.
- Maintain a regional focus. Policies and programs that address shared regional dynamics or threats to regional stability are likely of greater impact than single country engagement.
- Coordinate across funding accounts, agencies, and bureaus and with international partners from the beginning rather than de-conflicting afterwards.
- Establish strategic and robust MEL frameworks from the start.
- Leverage existing African-owned and -led initiatives.
- Pursue a conflict sensitive approach across all USG efforts.

Applying these lessons, the overall theory of change and approach for this plan is the following:

If social cohesion is strengthened within and between at-risk communities across the CWA region; **and** government responsiveness, inclusion, and accountability to at-risk communities across CWA is improved; **and** security force responsiveness and accountability is enhanced across CWA, **then** Coastal West Africans will promote peace and prevent violent conflict and VE that risk destabilizing the region.

Risks and Mitigation Measures

The USG has identified the following primary risks that could derail progress on this plan:

- If terrorists' groups maintain control and safe haven in the Sahel, especially in Burkina Faso, they will continue to pose significant threats to the CWA countries. VEOs based in the Sahel could further expand their influence and operations in the region over the next five to ten years, contributing to increased levels of VE activity across the border in CWA countries, which could make some interventions ineffective or infeasible.
- Democratic backsliding and coups or the slow pace of democratic transitions to civilian rule could limit the USG's ability to operate in CWA countries.
- Intervention by malign actors to exploit instability for political gain, monetary profit, influence, and control could undermine this plan.
- Climate and conflict related factors could significantly accelerate migration patterns from the Sahel into CWA countries, which would strain intercommunal relations and government resources.
- Security force abuses would undermine key components of the plan and limit USG engagement with responsible units.
- Due to corruption, foreign actors might not be held accountable when they illegally extract resources.

The USG will pursue a series of steps to mitigate these risks, including:

- The USG will conduct frequent and thorough context monitoring and reporting – in conjunction with a range of USG actors and partners focused on the Sahel and CWA – to identify early warning signs of risks that could undermine implementation of this plan, including climate and gender indicators.
- The USG will continue to diversify its partnerships under this plan to provide alternate avenues for engagement and mutual accountability. In Guinea, for instance, the USG is strengthening ties to local civil society until there is a democratic transition to civilian rule when we can engage fully with government and security actors. The USG will seek to build similar ties with local civil society in all target countries to remain aware of citizen priorities and concerns.

- USG diplomatic efforts, in coordination with regional and international partners, will focus on protecting human rights, accountability to international humanitarian law, strengthening democracy, and civil liberties, and highlight the consequences of engaging with malign actors.
- The USG will use its resources to support economic growth and investment activities that it believes will drive stability and improve economic resilience for members of the local community, especially women and youth.

3. Prioritized Objectives and Sub-Objectives

This section presents the three prioritized objectives deemed necessary to achieve the political end state. These objectives are rooted in the analysis and reflect the input and feedback from a range of stakeholders. All three focus on addressing the underlying grievances and vulnerable conditions of communities bordering the Sahel that are most at-risk of VEO violence, recruitment, and entrenchment. The three objectives are mutually reinforcing and must be pursued concurrently; objectives are not noted in order of priority. They are necessarily broad to allow for flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances over the ten-year time horizon of the plan and to cover a region with diverse national-level contexts and institutional capabilities.

The *Theory of Change* connecting the objectives to the political end state asserts that in order to prevent VEOs from gaining a foothold in historically marginalized and diverse communities, resilience and trust must be reinforced between and among at-risk communities, between at-risk communities and their governments, and between at-risk communities and security forces. In order to establish or build this trust, communities, governments, and security forces must develop the skills and capacity - and demonstrate the commitment - to meet the needs of at-risk communities.

For each objective, the USG and its partners¹ prioritized three sub-objectives that apply to all countries in the region. Individual posts also identified specific sub-objectives as priority areas for engagement (indicated by the name of the country next

¹ Please refer to the Partnerships section on pages 17-20 for additional information.

to a sub-objective), but all sub-objectives below are broadly applicable to each of the five CWA countries. Given the diversity of national-level contexts and institutional capabilities, this allows for a regional yet tailored prevention and stabilization approach. Certain country-specific objectives may also be prioritized in other CWA countries in the future.

The resulting framework champions both regional and country specific objectives that aim to achieve the regional political end state that allows for iteration and adaptation. As implementation progresses and generates evidence and learning, the CWA team will utilize the learning activities and inflection points described in the MEL Plan Summary to review the objectives and sub-objectives, make any required updates, and revisit prioritization decisions.

This plan is linked to and aligned with the relevant State Department Integrated Country Strategy (ICS), USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS), and DoD theater campaign and regional plans to ensure coherence across U.S. efforts. As the embassies next review and update their ICS, required at least annually, they will seek to strengthen linkages to this plan and the subsequent objectives and sub-objectives as needed and appropriate. Missions will similarly seek to incorporate the objectives and sub-objectives of the 10-year plan into the regular CDCS stocktaking efforts and/or annual portfolio reviews, as needed and appropriate. U.S. Africa Command will also seek to align future theater campaigns and regional plans, which also reflect the latest National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, with the objectives of the 10-year plan.

Table 1: Objective 1 - Social cohesion is strengthened within and between at-risk communities.

Theory of change: *If* social cohesion (encompassing economic, climate, and community resilience) is strengthened within and between at-risk communities, *then* members of at-risk communities will be more resilient against efforts by VEOs to exploit communal and identity differences *and will thus* promote peace and prevent the expansion of violent conflict and VE that risks destabilizing the region.

Objective Name	Objectives
Priority Sub-Objectives for the Region	<p>1.1 Improved and equitable access to livelihoods and economic opportunity</p> <p>1.2 Reduced community tensions and stigmatization between and among historically marginalized communities</p> <p>1.3 Reduced instrumentalization of communal identities for political purposes</p>
Prioritized Sub-Objectives for Specific Countries	<p>1.4 Enhanced local early warning efforts as well as efforts to bring communities together in dialogue and improve their own community security measures</p>
Sub-Objective for Future Consideration	<p>1.5 Reduced community-level conflict</p>

Description and Justification

Analysis suggests that VEOs based in the Sahel have fine-tuned their ability to drive wedges between community members in CWA, at times attempting to export parallel government structures they have applied in underserved areas of Mali and Burkina Faso. These schisms facilitate VEO recruitment, sow distrust and disunity, and increase acts of intercommunal violence. This, in turn, establishes a fertile environment for VEOs to expand their influence over populations through the promise of protection, security, and economic opportunity. In order to prevent VEO expansion, it is critical that communities remain united in their viewpoint that violent extremists pose a common threat and remain resilient to VE division tactics. Community cohesion will be fostered through a variety of conflict resolution approaches with particular attention to women, youth, and marginalized groups.

Lack of relative access to livelihoods and economic opportunity is a main driver of social division and VE recruitment throughout the region. Competition for scarce resources, such as land and water, worsens this challenge, particularly given the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation on these essential components of economic livelihoods in the region.

However, challenges related to the stigmatization of historically marginalized communities manifest slightly differently from country to country. In CWA countries, the issue is concentrated in the geographically, economically, and politically isolated communities, particularly in Sahel border regions, where the vast majority of VEO attacks to date have occurred. In Guinea, inter-ethnic conflict in the forest region persists and ethnic minorities in border regions are reportedly denied public services. In northern Togo, youth with no local financial prospects seek employment in gold mines and other seasonal industries in neighboring countries where they are exposed to VEOs, then return to Togo to recruit their peers. In agriculture, the main economic sector for these areas, competition over land and ongoing conflict between farmers and herders fuel potential instability made worse by impacts of climate change.

The instrumentalization of communal identities for political purposes is particularly acute in Ghana, where political authority often translates into land resources for chiefs. In turn, this incentivizes chiefs to mobilize their geographic and ethnic bases at all costs.

Table 2: Objective 2 - Improved government responsiveness, inclusion, and accountability to at-risk communities

Theory of change: *If* governments are more responsive, inclusive and accountable to at-risk communities **and** enable these communities to participate in decision making, **then** at-risk communities will perceive their governments as more effective in and committed to addressing their needs, **and therefore** at-risk communities will be less responsive to alternate governance models offered by VEOs **and will thus** promote peace and prevent violent conflict and VE that risk destabilizing the region.

Objective Name	Objectives
Priority Sub-Objectives for the Region	<p>2.1 Strengthened inclusive, democratic political processes both locally and nationally.</p> <p>2.2 Strengthened environment for accountability and transparency.</p> <p>2.3 Improved service delivery</p> <p>2.4 Improved access to and trust in the justice sector</p>
Sub-Objectives for Future Consideration	<p>2.5 Strengthened government-population relations.</p> <p>2.6 Improved adjudication of inter/intra-communal disputes.</p> <p>2.7 Enhanced capacity of the judicial sector</p>

Description and Justification

The SPCPS, which is based on decades of learning from USG prevention and stabilization efforts worldwide, and the CWA context-specific analysis that underpins this plan, reiterates that political leadership and good governance are fundamental to galvanizing an effective prevention response. In many cases, at-risk border communities have had few to no interactions with their governments and do not perceive a sense of national belonging or responsibility. Governments must therefore overcome a significant trust deficit by reliably and equitably delivering basic services in line with the priorities of these communities – in many cases for the first time – and investing in the social, economic, and political inclusion of communities. Increasing women’s political participation and leadership across the region is also key to fostering inclusive and accountable CWA governments. Growing youth populations throughout CWA openly support inclusive, democratic political processes, which contrasts with a recent tide of democratic backsliding in the region.

In Guinea, the uncertain political transition is the most significant driver of fragility, exacerbating economic, political, and social vulnerabilities. Issues of accountability and transparency are acute in Ghana, where corruption threatens the country’s economic outlook and citizen trust. In northern Benin, insufficient service delivery contributes to elevated distrust between communities and the government, and

contributes to perceptions of corruption, lack of accountability for wrong-doing, and insufficient transparency. While more work needs to be done to improve equitable service delivery and transparency in Côte d'Ivoire, progress has been made in recent years. However, improving access to and trust in the justice sector is a stated priority according to the Ivorian National Development Plan 2021-2025. In northern Togo, a lack of government development investment limits government effectiveness in community sensitization and security sector outreach; per the government's own assessments in the Emergency Plan for Savanes Region (PURS), key infrastructure investments in water and sanitation, transportation, and other economic infrastructure are critical to promoting constructive community-government engagement.

Table 3: Objective 3 - Enhanced security force responsiveness and accountability to at-risk communities

Theory of change: *If* security forces are more effective at deterring attacks and defending the population and are more accountable to at-risk communities, *then* at-risk communities will perceive that security forces are worth siding with against a common enemy *and* will be less susceptible to VE influence *and will thus* promote peace and prevent violent conflict and VE that risks destabilizing the region.

Objective Name	Objectives
Priority Sub-Objectives for the Region	<p>3.1 Enhanced local, national, and regional security cooperation.</p> <p>3.2 Improved capacity of security forces to deter and respond to threats.</p> <p>3.3 Strengthened security sector governance, including professionalization of security forces</p>
Prioritized Sub-Objectives for Specific Countries	<p>3.4 Improved capacity of community leaders to engage in accountable community security (Ghana)</p>
Sub-Objectives for Future Consideration	<p>3.5 Strengthened negotiation, mediation, collaboration, and consensus/relationship building skills</p>

Description and Justification

Security for citizens in a responsive and accountable fashion is essential to sustain functioning societies and economies. While CWA security forces will not be able to prevent all VE attacks, they must be seen as the preferred security provider for community members in at-risk areas. They must also recognize the roles of current traditional or informal security providers and seek to align these actors with formal security forces where possible. This requires building a deterrence capability that instills faith in communities through closer relationships. This is a significant challenge for CWA security forces, which have limited to no operational experience in a counterterrorism environment or working within their own borders.

While several CWA countries have experienced internal conflict in the recent past, attacks by Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and ISIS-Sahel pose an unprecedented threat. Within the region, there is a wide spectrum of security force capacity and capability, particularly as it pertains to protecting civilians. In Benin, for instance, the security forces need support in professionalization and capacity building in order to contribute to regional security efforts. In Côte d'Ivoire, the government is focused on increasing professionalization of the security forces. Though Ghana requires additional capacity support, its military is competent and works with civilian security forces to respond to internal and external threats. Civilian law enforcement and border security agencies are less capable and face significant challenges in providing security, particularly in the north. Togo's military is also well-trained and known for its effectiveness in peacekeeping operations abroad. Recent security-focused responses to attacks and community requests in early social cohesion activities have emphasized the need to build military and civilian-security force capacity for constructive civilian engagement. Ghana, Benin, Togo and Côte d'Ivoire have also highlighted through advocacy with the U.S. government the need to increase support for border security units, develop technical expertise on improvised explosive devices, and improve coordination between neighboring countries. In all states, there is a need to consider institutional reform measures for security institutions that will clarify roles and responsibilities, ensure that internal incentive structures prevent corruption and abusive practices, and encourage accountability to civilians and civilian oversight at all levels.

In the north of Benin there have been over two dozen terrorist incidents and attacks since December 2021. Looking beyond Benin, the USG and its partners must prioritize investments in institutional reform, professionalization, and other aspects of security sector governance to help CWA countries have an effective and appropriate threat deterrence and response in the north. Finally, strengthening the capacity of local community actors, in coordination with security actors, to utilize peaceful means to resolve disputes is integral to ensuring that security forces maintain a community-focused and -informed approach to counterterrorism. Strengthening these lines of communication and intelligence sharing will enhance military operations and serve as additional accountability measures. Togo's Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Prevention and Fight against VE (CIPLEV) and local CIPLEV committees provide a potential model for the promotion of dialogue and effective engagement between local authorities and security forces.

A critical element of plan implementation will be to work with CWA leaders to establish accountability mechanisms and community oversight, including communication between security forces and communities. This must include protections to minimize local leaders' fear of engaging with the police and/or military. Security force effectiveness in the near term does not erase existing legacies of distrust. If security forces are present in an area, but are abusive, a significant reset will be needed to establish trust. If security forces are not present, they are unlikely to understand the security needs of that area. In those instances, it will be essential to evaluate who is currently providing security, whether they can be folded into an official or quasi-official structure, and, if not, how to engage with the population to avoid a feeling of invasion by armed outsiders. If human rights and humanitarian principles and assistance are ingrained in security forces' baseline relationships with local populations, it increases their tactical and operational effectiveness within the communities they protect.

Further, the USG will work with CWA security forces to encourage ongoing dialogue and consultation with local communities before, during, and after security forces are deployed. This is a critical lesson learned from the Sahel and will help build trust and improve communication between communities and security forces.

Integrating Strategic Priorities into Plan Implementation

Women, Peace, and Security

The SPCPS uplifts the core principles of women, peace, and security (WPS), including preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV), and focuses on youth engagement. All policy and programmatic efforts in this plan will work toward ensuring women and girls, as well as men and boys and persons of all identities, have access to meaningful participation in all sectors. In particular, the U.S. government will press for greater participation and leadership by women in peacebuilding, governance, and security sector reform efforts under the three objectives of this plan. The U.S. government will encourage governments to advance WPS National Action Plans where they exist and develop them if they do not exist. The U.S. government will apply a gender and conflict sensitive lens – operationalizing the do no harm principle – during program inception and implementation that is informed by extensive consultations with local stakeholders, including women and youth leaders, civil society, the private sector, and marginalized communities.

Climate, Environment, Water and Food Security

The SPCPS recognizes the important role of climate change and environmental degradation in contributing to population displacement, loss of livelihoods, weakened governments, and in some cases, political instability and conflict. In West Africa, changes in precipitation patterns, driven in part by climate change, have been linked to disrupted agricultural production and conflict between pastoralist and farming communities, a primary conflict dynamic that VEOs exploit for purposes of recruitment. Other climate and environmental factors affecting the region include land degradation, water security, and declining marine fishery stocks. Policy and programmatic efforts under the CWA plan will consider and address the risks posed by the impacts of climate change and other environmental security risks; explore new ways of building climate resilience; and deepen the USG's understanding of the connections between fragility, peacebuilding, and the environment. Extensive consultations with USG science agencies, the intelligence community, and climate policy offices; civil society; and multilateral partners and institutions have already occurred and will continue

through the implementation of this 10-year plan. The MEL Plan will also incorporate key environmental and climate indicators and identify priority areas for additional research, data collection, and analysis. Programs and policies under this initiative will be coordinated closely with USG and non-USG climate and environment programs and policies.

Addressing the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change underpins the achievement of the ability of communities to sustain development outcomes, particularly those that benefit the most chronically marginalized and underserved populations. Climate change is both a stressor and risk multiplier, leading to increased crop failures, water insecurity, depletion of natural resources, and more frequent and extreme weather events. Farmers face higher temperatures that stress crops and livestock and make agricultural labor more difficult and dangerous. In addition, climate change causes longer droughts and unpredictable rains, affecting farmers and pastoralists and warming oceans affecting fish stocks.

Atrocity Prevention

In line with the SPCPS, the USG will incorporate an atrocity prevention (AP) perspective into the 10-year plan. Some countries in the CWA region have been identified by third-party watchlists as facing increasing risk for atrocities. Efforts under this plan will take into account those risks and seek to address them as part of a holistic approach to prevention. Ongoing analysis and program design, implementation, and monitoring will draw from the Atrocity Risk Assessment Framework, which provides a reference for conducting atrocity risk analysis, starting with key actors (likely perpetrators and victim groups), means and motivations for employing violence, upcoming periods of heightened risk (elections, changes to governing structure, etc.), and other qualitative risk factors. The USG will leverage AP assessment tools and resources to evaluate AP risks in CWA countries and the region, which will inform diplomatic engagement and foreign assistance programs.

Anti-Corruption

Corruption poses a threat to democracy by undermining confidence in governing institutions and fueling VE, and in extreme cases has been used, along with insecurity,

to justify military takeovers. VEOs depend on access to the international financial system to receive funds and to launder the proceeds of their criminal activities. The SPCPS recognizes the importance of building the accountability, effectiveness, and resiliency of security institutions. The USG will look to draw from the U.S. Strategy on Countering Corruption to work toward elevating, prioritizing and surging funds for institutional capacity building, which could improve resiliency by supporting democracy and implementing anti-corruption efforts in CWA.

The multi-country focus of this plan is a critical opportunity to address the transnational nature of VE and corruption. As outlined in the U.S. Strategy on Countering Corruption, “[in] today’s globalized world, corrupt actors bribe across borders, harness the international financial system to stash illicit wealth abroad, and abuse democratic institutions to advance anti-democratic aims.” Countering this phenomenon requires a broad-based approach that harnesses civil society participation to conduct monitoring of public budgets, strengthens the capacity of state institutions to regulate and enforce financial transparency and accountability measures, works with private sector actors to institutionalize good practices, and promotes international cooperation. Progress on corruption – whether building on recent improvements in perceptions of corruption as in Côte d’Ivoire, Benin, and Togo or improving stagnant scores as in Ghana and Guinea – can rebuild social cohesion and enhance trust in government by proving that governments can deliver for their people. The USG will identify the most promising opportunities for anti-corruption interventions, including efforts that will rebuild the trust between communities and their governments at the local and national level. The USG will use the latest research and analysis on corruption dynamics and will coordinate regularly on corruption issues in relation to the implementation of this plan.

Supporting Democratic Resilience and Countering Resurgent Authoritarianism

As the USG supports efforts to counter violent extremism, we will also be reinforcing approaches that strengthen democratic resilience and development. Strengthening judicial independence and oversight is not only critical for democratic resilience but will also improve rule of law, combating grievance narratives often exploited and weaponized by VE actors. Often as security degrades, the call for centralized

autocratic "strongman" tactics increase, creating fertile ground for suspension of elections and surveillance technologies that lack any safeguards for privacy or human rights. Engaging religious leaders and community groups to advance pluralism is critical to reduce the recruitment by violent extremist groups and helps reduce polarization that can harden into lasting national cleavages and erode democratic norms and values.

4. Local, National, and Regional Partnerships

Overview of Partnerships

Partnership is fundamental to the long-term success of this plan. The SPCPS prioritizes partnership beyond traditional government counterparts to include civil society, the private sector, the media, and regional and multilateral organizations. Inclusive partnership that focuses on women and girls, youth, and minority groups at all levels – local, national, and regional – is paramount to the plan. In the CWA context, the USG is committed to advancing partnership through supporting existing African-led and -owned regional coordination mechanisms and identifying shared regional priorities. Increasing partnership will also require new approaches, including working with peers in the development community who can coordinate to identify ways to engage the local private sector, develop innovative products that provide support to local businesses, and coordinate to offer financing either directly to companies or through third-party banking and non-banking financial institutions committed to strengthening small business and bolstering economic growth.

The USG recognizes that supporting CWA governments in executing their vision for preventing violent conflict and VE and from destabilizing the region will take time and require consistent engagement. Government partners have welcomed this approach, citing lessons learned from the over proliferation of externally-driven security and development initiatives in the Sahel. This also means seeking out the perspective of communities in the at-risk areas at the heart of this plan and ensuring that their voices are heard by government leaders. Other development partners appreciate this model for engagement and are supportive of leveraging existing forums for coordination rather than establishing new architectures in the region. This approach balances the

need for an integrated regional approach with the recognition that country-specific partnerships will require specific attention, because effective efforts in one country will support stability across the region.

In the development of this plan, the five U.S. Embassies led efforts to gather input from communities in at-risk areas as well as a range of other government, civil society, and private sector partners at the local, national, and regional level. Before drafting this plan, the USG reviewed the goals, objectives, and approaches established in existing regional plans such as ECOWAS' 2020-2024 Counter Terrorism Strategy/Action Plan as well as country-specific plans including: Benin's Plan National de Developpement (PND) 2018-2024, Togo's PURS 2022-2025, Ghana's National Security Strategy Blueprint (2021), Côte d'Ivoire's National Development Plan (PND) 2021-2025, and Guinea's transition plan and roadmap. Recognizing that regional stability in CWA is inextricably linked to the Sahel, the USG also sought to ensure alignment of this plan with existing Sahel strategies. The USG continues to identify areas of cooperation with Sahel partners and to invest in learning that will mutually benefit future prevention and stabilization investments in both the Sahel and CWA states.

Engagements to Date

Led by the U.S. Missions in each CWA country, the USG engaged hundreds of partners at the local, national, regional, and international level on the SPCPS to guide and inform the development of this implementation plan. In August 2022, Secretary Blinken highlighted the SPCPS in his first keynote speech visiting the continent and again in a meeting with President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana. The SPCPS and iterations of this 10-year plan have featured in numerous other high-level trips to CWA. Ambassadors from each post, the USAID Mission Director for West Africa, and Assistant Secretary-level officials and their respective staff also engaged a range of officials in recent months, including but not limited to presidents, foreign ministers, ambassadors to the United States, heads of regional institutions and civil society leaders, as well as members of the U.S. Congress. They also traveled outside the capitals to hear directly from local officials and citizens.

The USG benefited from the thought leadership of civil society and think tanks based primarily in Washington, D.C., during the development of this plan. The Alliance for Peacebuilding established a CWA Workstream and co-organized several exchanges with the USG throughout the planning process to provide feedback on draft goals, objectives, and approaches to SPCPS implementation in the region. Similarly, the United States Institute of Peace established the Senior Working Group on CWA, which will continue to play a critical role in guiding senior U.S. government leaders on this initiative.

Regarding the private sector, this plan will build on a variety of proven partnership approaches. For example, USAID/West Africa's current approach relies on matched funding with private sector investors who have a vested interest in stability in the region. The USG aims to enable larger-scale investments by the private sector, facilitating access to finance, and understanding workforce needs and training local populations to meet them, among other support. With a commitment from USAID and other donors to provide technical assistance, grant funding or a regional concessional funding pool, the U.S. Development Finance Corporation could help facilitate private sector engagement and partnerships through political risk insurance, debt financing, and other services that target small and medium enterprises or that help to mobilize private capital into the region. There are many opportunities for growth and development along the northern border of CWA countries that can be pursued with this and other models.

Last, the USG has deepened its engagement with multilateral organizations and like-minded partners that have designated or plan to designate significant resources for the region, some of which directly align to the objectives enumerated in this plan. To date, this has included coordination meetings with representatives of the governments of Germany, Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the European Union (EU). There are notable efforts in this domain, including EU, Ivorian and Ghanaian efforts to promote economic growth through the "Alliance on Sustainable Cocoa," an ambitious roadmap to improve the economic, social and environmental sustainability of cocoa production and trade. At the multilateral level, the USG has also engaged with the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the UN, all of which have significant existing and planned prevention investments in

the region focusing on economic development and social cohesion via livelihoods. And among development finance institutions, the USG is partnering with British International Investment and other development finance institutions to consider more creative investment approaches in fragile environments where the regulatory environments are weak and concerns about instability previously thwarted investment efforts.

Approach to Engagement

In order to advance a shared regional vision for conflict prevention among five unique countries, the USG is taking an innovative, interagency approach to harness best practices and partner most effectively. **Three principles guide the USG's approach to partner engagement in CWA:**

- Take a supporting role to CWA priorities.
- Invest in partnerships at all levels – local, national, regional, and international – with traditional and non-traditional partners.
- Work through African-owned and -led institutions and avoid creating new coordination structures.

The USG plans to demonstrate commitment to these principles by seizing opportunities to jointly convene representatives from each CWA country on the margins of events such as the annual UN General Assembly in New York; ECOWAS, African Union, and Africa Continental Free Trade Area summits; the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit; and various development-related events, such as the annual meetings of the international financial institutions. The margins of the DoD's annual exercises and conferences (FLINTLOCK, OBANGAME EXPRESS, and the African Land Forces Summit) also provide opportunities for regional partner engagement on key security issues.

The U.S. Missions in each country will also continue to foster champions among local partners who will advance shared conflict prevention and stabilization goals. This includes investing in the next generation of leaders by utilizing exchange programs and public diplomacy efforts like the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP),

the Young African Leaders Initiative, and journalist exchanges. In Washington, U.S. government officials will seek to engage the diverse diaspora community when possible.

Table 4: Partnership Objective and Sub-Objectives

Partnership will be monitored and tracked similarly to the prevention and stabilization objectives enumerated above. These sub-objectives indicate how the plan's partnership goal will be implemented specifically in the CWA context.

Objective Name	Objectives
Priority Sub-Objectives for the Region	<p>P.1 Strengthened collaboration between local CWA and regional partners towards improving regional stability</p> <p>P.2 CWA partners possess resources for continued operations and reinvestment, including financial, informational, physical and environmental, and human and organizational resources</p> <p>P.3 CWA partners increasingly lead program strategy and design</p> <p>P.4 Increasing leadership of local actors, including women and marginalized groups, to raise funds, achieve policy reform, and remove bureaucratic obstacles to results</p> <p>P.5 Strengthened collaboration between the U.S. government and local entities, including women and marginalized groups, that are working on issues related to prevention and stability</p> <p>P.6 Strengthened collaboration between the U.S. government and donor partners that are working on issues related to prevention and stability in CWA</p>

5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

Overview

While evidence and learning are central to SPCPS implementation in all priority countries, the CWA regional construct provides specific challenges and opportunities. As a prominent prevention case that balances a regional perspective with interagency management across five posts and partnerships with stakeholders across five countries, the USG will generate substantial learning that will be useful both in the

region and across other priority SPCPS countries. The goal of the CWA MEL approach is not only to understand *if* interventions are working, but *why* they are (or are not) working, while continuously updating the context analysis and assumptions. This section provides a preview of how learning will be captured and used to inform adaptive management, recognizing that the full MEL plan will be developed in the months following submission of this 10-year plan.

Approach to Monitoring

A diverse set of data sources will be used to measure progress towards achieving the political end state and achieving objectives and sub-objectives as outlined in the strategic plan. Three different types of data sets/sources will be used, enabling triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data and the creation of multiple levels of specificity. Additionally, measurement will not be limited to assistance, but will also include diplomatic action (drawing on approaches developed by the State Department and from the international relations academic literature) and security assistance and cooperation.

The first type of data utilized will be existing public data sets produced by global institutions, such as the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project; African-led institutions such as ECOWAS; universities; and national governments, specifically national statistical agencies. Using a variety of public datasets will provide a broad understanding of the state of stability at the country and/or regional level and enable effective context monitoring to track if assumptions are holding and approaching triggers. When possible, public data aligned with recommendations from the SPCPS's Global MEL team will be used.

Second, there will be collaboration with various U.S. government agencies' monitoring and evaluation stakeholders to incorporate CWA-specific indicator measurements. For example, relevant questions could be added to planned surveys to measure improvement related to government accountability in target locations (Objective 2). Measuring progress on outputs and outcomes related to each objective and sub-objective will help show the progress we are making to achieve the political end state.

Third, tailored monitoring tools and approaches will be developed focused on measuring progress. These tools and approaches will draw on complexity-aware monitoring approaches. Specific techniques will be driven by the monitoring or evaluation needs, but are anticipated to include outcome mapping, most significant change, social network analysis, rapid data collection, and community-generated indicators. Collaboration will also focus on African-led data collection and analysis organizations such as Afrobarometer to co-create tailored tools. Implementers will be key collaborators as well, generating program data from Prevention and Stabilization Fund (PSF) funded programs and relevant non-PSF funded programs to better understand progress at all levels. As the ten years progress, all USG programs that align with this plan will include relevant output and outcome indicators. Additionally, the full MEL plan will include indicators and benchmarks to measure progress towards achieving the partnership and management sub-objectives described above, guiding efforts to “do business differently.”

As described above, this plan’s logic includes a focus on increasing trust. While measuring change in trust can be challenging, the full MEL plan will utilize perception data (such as that gathered by Afrobarometer), qualitative methods (such as site visits and systematic qualitative interviews with a representative group of local stakeholders) and other proven techniques developed by the U.S. government, leading peacebuilding NGOs, and academia.

Approach to Learning

This approach to MEL includes a commitment to intentional and applicable learning at the country and the regional levels as well as both strategic and programmatic learning. The full MEL plan will focus on working with partners and stakeholders to create a learning agenda, including learning questions, activities, and products, and setting the foundation for a learning network of researchers and practitioners. USAID’s Peace through Evaluation, Learning, and Adaptation II will assist with developing the learning agenda and serve as a convening platform. The team will emphasize ways that USG departments and agencies are “doing business differently,” including robust collaboration with CWA governments and civil society, in both the

USG (through engaged coalitions such as the Alliance for Peacebuilding) and in the region.

Draft Learning Questions

- Recognizing that this is a regional case, what are the challenges and opportunities of taking an integrated regional approach to preventing conflict and promoting stability in CWA?
- Recognizing that CWA was selected as a prevention case, what approaches are effective in preventing the spread of VE in the region?
- Do the theories of change and their underlying assumptions hold true over the short, medium, and long term?
- What existing practices, innovations, or new approaches to partnerships create the conditions for long-term regional stability?
- What existing practices, innovations, or new approaches to management across the USG improve prioritization, integration, and/or efficiency?

Learning Activities and Products

The full MEL plan will build on learning activities that may already be planned and include local partners to the greatest extent possible. These efforts will involve an explicit focus on including marginalized groups to ensure representation across identity groups and power dynamics. While learning activities will be driven by learning questions and other learning needs, illustrative learning activities and products include the following:

- *Quarterly implementing partners (IPs) meetings - regular meetings involving IPs and other local stakeholders to share information on implementation successes and challenges, best practices/approaches, tools, approaches, and resources.*
- *Annual (or more often) in-person plan progress reviews - incorporate reflections on monitoring data, performance and impact evaluation findings, and pause and*

reflect sessions. These events will be timed to inform existing performance reporting cycles, including the required biennial reporting.

- *Annual scenario planning exercises - focus on emerging risks and resiliencies, producing descriptive scenario plans that enable the CWA team and partners, including civil society, to respond quickly in the event of a significant context change.*
- *Performance and impact evaluations - commissioned as needed to explore key questions related to strategic assumptions, implementation approaches, and innovations in partnership and management focused on “doing business differently.” Products will include evaluation reports with findings and recommendations.*

Learning products will seek to present findings and insights with clarity and ease of understanding, making use of infographics, success stories, and bulleted achievements. Products will be targeted to audiences inside and outside the USG. Specific decisions that might be influenced by data, evidence, and learning include updating the list of priority sub-objectives, adapting and applying promising interventions across CWA countries or from other priority countries, reinforcing or codifying promising partnership or management practices, and discontinuing ineffective practices. This approach includes working closely with CWA governments and other local stakeholders to ensure that data is useful for decision-making outside the USG.

Key Inflection Points

The USG will build in “pause, reflect, and adapt” sessions while implementing this plan, drawing upon outside perspective and advice. **Illustrative decision or inflection points and how plans might be adapted in response:**

- *Context indicator triggers: Should context monitoring show that the region is approaching or has crossed a trigger, there will be a convening of Country Coordinators, other U.S. government personnel, and partners to understand the driving factors and produce recommendations and a timeline for adaptation. The*

team will implement a similar process for major context events (coups, elections, recessions, etc.).

- *Annual plan progress reviews: As described above, these learning events will be designed to facilitate reflection and produce actionable recommendations.*
- *Mid-term evaluations: In addition to the baseline assessment scheduled for year one, there will be mid-term evaluations in years four and seven, and a final evaluation in year 10. After each mid-term evaluation, there will be a convening of USG staff and partners to review findings and produce recommendations and a timeline for adaptation.*
- *Community feedback at regular intervals: This approach will include working with local trusted interlocutors to ensure regular input from local communities in order to ensure representation of these critical stakeholders and build trust.*

Gender and Social Inclusion

The findings and recommendations of the CWA gender and social inclusion analysis will form the basis of the MEL approach to incorporating considerations around various marginalized groups. In addition to the standard collection of youth-, age-, and sex-disaggregated data, the MEL plan will include these considerations in the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, and the development of learning questions. Gender, WPS, AP, and other prioritized SPCPS thematic areas will be included in iterative assessments, analyses, and ongoing monitoring. The full MEL plan will use gender, youth, and WPS indicators, as well as indicators focused on other marginalized groups, to track progress, identify challenges, and inform adaptive management.