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VOICES FOR PEACE

Engaging communities against violent extremism by promoting good governance and social cohesion in West Africa

Voices for Peace (V4P) is a regional project aimed at countering violent extremism (CVE) and promoting democracy, human rights and good governance by leveraging both traditional and new media at the community level in areas affected by violent extremism. The project builds partnerships with respected leaders, institutions, and networks to address drivers and root causes of violent extremism such as marginalization, exclusion, and poor governance. It supports a culturally effective communications environment to empower locally influential voices, establish interactive media platforms, and engage at-risk youth, women, and communities. The project's approach is rooted in communities' culturally diverse traditions of social cohesion and solidarity that have effectively served in the past to promote resilience to increased radicalization and violence in the region.

The project initially targeted Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger, and expanded in February 2018 to Northern Cameroon and in April 2018 to Eastern Mali. This allows the project to cover two major areas of Violent Extremist Organization (VEO) conflict- the Lake Chad region and the Liptako-Gourma/Tri-border region. These regions have an active presence of trans-national terrorist organizations including Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State along with local violent extremist organizations including Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region and Nusrat al-Islam (JNIM) in the tri-border region. As this landscape continues to shift, Voices for Peace has the built-in flexibility to modify its geographic targets, messaging and scope in order to adapt and respond to changing violent extremist narratives in fluid security situations.

Voices for Peace is an element of USAID’s support to the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. Together, with other CVE programming and broader development efforts, the project contributes to the U.S. Government’s goal of reducing vulnerability to violent extremism in West Africa.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Voices for Peace project engages communities against violent extremism in West Africa by:

- Strengthening positive community engagement on CVE issues;
- Expanding access to information;
- Increasing dialogue and exchange to address the root causes of Violent Extremism, and;
- Learning and adapting continuously.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Identify key drivers or enabling factors of violent extremism in each target country and build a coherent strategy to address them.
- Produce and broadcast interactive media programs in over 30 local languages on 93 radio stations to promote peace, tolerance, good governance, and human rights, through:
 - Locally produced programs that tackle community-specific CVE issues;
 - Engagement of women to promote democracy, peace, and security; and
 - Empowerment of youth to serve as positive change agents in their communities
- Engage at risk-youth and CVE actors across the five countries utilizing social media.
- Promoting community engagement and civic action through listener discussion and action groups, radio station associations, media centers, tech camps, and civic action competitions.



PROGRAM INFORMATION

GOAL

Engaging Communities against Violent Extremism in West Africa

LIFE OF PROGRAM

September 2016 – September 2021

TOTAL USAID FUNDING

U.S. \$ 24.9 million

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Northern Cameroon, and Eastern Mali,

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER

Equal Access International

- Expand the reach and strengthen the capacity of local radio station partners in the front lines through technical and management training, material support, and peer-to-peer sharing.
- Enhance regional collaboration among CVE actors to address common drivers of violence
- Rigorously evaluate project results and promote learning through pilot activities,

project review workshops, CVE studies, white papers, and widely share results with the greater CVE community.

PROJECT RESULTS

- Over 8000 hours of broadcast regionally and at local partner stations in FY18 to engage local communities in countering violent extremism.
- 400 community leaders and young activists in targeted regions in 5 countries have gained new skills in advocacy and are helping promote social cohesion using social media and technology.



Examples of engagement at the regional level that occur regularly through project interventions include:

- In Burkina Faso, 500 people from traditionally marginalized communities have been educated in 3 languages on the Sahel Emergency Plan and empowered to advocate for inclusion, transparency and better communication with Central Government.
- In Niger, V4P gathered 144 civil society and Government stakeholders from 31 communes in Diffa and in Tillabery to address key factors and define joint strategy to counter violent extremism whose message was amplified further with V4P programming.
- In Northern Cameroon, increasing violent conflicts between herders and pastoralists are attempting to be exploited by violent extremists. V4P's radio partners organized a live roundtable with to address these conflicts and a total of 398 citizens attended the live show and 16 Cameroonian radio partners broadcasted the round table.
- Burkina Faso has taken a lead in addressing drivers of violent extremism and V4P partnered with policy-makers and 6 radio stations to engage the community a year after the plans release. Through a series of programming, 155 persons called in interact with various leaders to provide feedback.

