



A brief on recommendations from the final report from the U.S. Institute of Peace Coastal West Africa Senior Study Group

Violent conflict often erupts in areas where state authority is absent or weak and governments are unable to effectively deliver basic public services. If government institutions are absent, insufficient or seen as inequitable, local populations can see government as irrelevant in their lives and view the compact between government and the governed as ruptured. This can lead people to use violence to fulfill these needs, or to support violent groups that fill this governance gap.

As such, a prerequisite for peace and security is the strengthening of economic and political good governance.

Recognizing this, the USIP Senior Study Group on Coastal West Africa views the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability as a unique opportunity for the U.S. government to support and reinforce efforts to fortify the bonds between citizenries and their states by strengthening responsible and accountable governance institutions and effectively and equitably delivering essential public services.

Specifically, the study group recommends the following:

Prioritize the support of good governance in all U.S. policies regarding Coastal West Africa.

- ▶ All U.S. activities in the region, including economic and security-related activities, should encourage and support national and sub-national governments' own efforts to improve their governance, and regional organizations' programs to support these efforts.
- ▶ This support should be for responsible and equitable government institutions and practices, including democratic elections, the rule of law and the effective delivery of essential public services such as public safety, infrastructure and basic health and education.
- ▶ The U.S. government should provide this support as a partner, reinforcing host government and local community initiatives, and should encourage other international actors to take a similar approach.

Shape interventions to help redress inequalities of power and perceptions of unfairness that risk violence.

- ▶ "Horizontal" inequality — defined as the distribution of inequality among communities within a society — is often a significant contributor to instability and conflict. Consequently, all U.S. policies and activities should encourage Coastal West African governments and regional organizations to pay careful attention to mitigating these "horizontal" economic and political inequalities.
- ▶ Inequality in governance should be a particular focus of U.S. engagement in Coastal West Africa. Unequal representation in government, plus the distributional inequity of policies that can result, can undermine government legitimacy and spur conflict as a means to express grievances and redistribute political and economic resources.
- ▶ Inclusive and equitable economic policies are similarly important. The U.S. should promote policies that revive social contracts and advance equity. These include the expansion of access to banking and financial services and improvements to e-government services that facilitate government's transparency and responsiveness. Supporting more efficient and transparent tax collection systems can also advance this goal.

Increase U.S. support to Coastal West African countries' engagement with peripheral communities.

- ▶ Governments' legitimacy can be undermined by people's perceptions that they are marginalized, especially in peripheral communities distant from governance institutions. The United States should therefore shape all its efforts in Coastal West Africa to mitigate these perceptions.

- ▶ Similarly, increased USAID-supported programming to strengthen the capacities of regional and local government institutions, and Department of Defense-supported efforts to improve the accountability of security services, could promote these countries' efforts to strengthen the social contract with their populations.

Engage the “whole of society” in each country to advance peace and stability.

- ▶ The U.S. government should engage not only with national governments but also with civil society, including business and farmers' associations, religious leaders and youth leaders, as well as provincial and local governments.

Engage regional organizations alongside bilateral engagement.

- ▶ Instability in the region is not contained by national borders. Many drivers of instability are regional, including erratic crop yields and prices, population growth and migration, climate change, and intercommunal relations. The U.S. government should engage regional and sub-regional organizations.
- ▶ The United States should engage with the Economic Community of West African States, specifically its commission and heads of state, to build the organization's capacity to advance peace and security and to promote African efforts like the Accra Initiative, which promotes greater coordination among the security forces and intelligence communities in its member states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo).
- ▶ The U.S. government should encourage regional economic mechanisms, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area, to prioritize the promotion of peace and stability, through both their own institutional designs and the policies that they advance.

Build on the successes of existing efforts and lessons learned from previous efforts.

- ▶ The U.S. government should use the launch of the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability in Coastal West Africa as an opportunity to thoroughly review programs to build peace and security in the region. Such a review should aim to leverage successes of previous and existing programs, avoid duplications of effort, and draw on lessons learned from previous activities — including USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives programs in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, the Security Governance Initiative's unique success in Ghana, and USAID's Disaster Assistance Response Teams.
- ▶ In particular, the United States should look to leverage efforts underway that are strengthening the capacities of government institutions and social institutions even if they are not focused primarily on promoting peace and stability. These include Power Africa, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, and the President's Malaria Initiative.

Lead a coordinated international commitment to peace and stability in the region, especially with partners with influence in the region.

Finally, the United States should lead like-minded and influential partners to ensure that peace and security are also central concerns in their regional policies and activities. These include:

- ▶ Regional powers such as Nigeria and Senegal
- ▶ Countries with influence due to historic legacies, such as France, whose economic and commercial relationships in the region are unparalleled
- ▶ International organizations and multilateral institutions, including the European Union, the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund
- ▶ Like-minded countries like the Nordic states, Germany and the United Kingdom