WAPSeD
WEST AFRICA PEACE
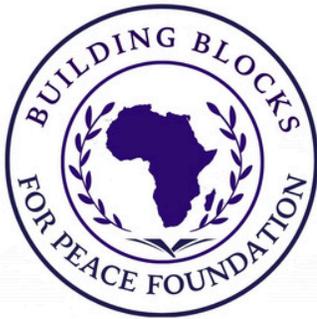AND SECURITY DIALOGUE

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Policy Report

Theme:

Reimagining Peace and Security in West Africa: Local Solutions, Regional Solidarity and Global Partnerships

5th-6th November 2025

Abuja, Nigeria.

Dialogue Partners

Building Blocks for Peace Foundation

Empowering Communities for Peace

IPCR

GPPAC — A Network of People Building Peace

SPSP — PEACE TO HUMANITY

LAC - LAC

Funded by

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Overview

The second edition of the West Africa Peace and Security Dialogue (WAPSeD), which was held from 5-6 November in Abuja, Nigeria, brought together over 100 participants drawn from various West Africa countries, including peacebuilding practitioners, policymakers, academia, media, researchers, youth and women leaders, civil society actors, development partners, and members of the diplomatic community. Delegates represented countries such as Nigeria, Senegal, Liberia, Niger, Guinea, Ghana, and Mali.

The dialogue, which was organised by Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (BBFORPEACE), Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) West Africa, and LAC-LAC Network in partnership with the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) and the Society for Peace Studies and Practice (SPSP), with support from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the 'Connection for Peace: Powerful Local Peacebuilding and Policies' programme, provided a unique opportunity for cross-country and multi-stakeholder engagement on the theme:

"Reimagining Peace and Security in West Africa: Local Solutions, Regional Solidarity, & Global Partnerships".

Over two days, participants examined the multifaceted layers of insecurity confronting West Africa, ranging from democratic crises to violent extremism. They also collectively explored how community resilience, regional cooperation, and inclusive governance can shape sustainable peace in West Africa.

The 2025 West Africa Peace and Security Dialogue (WAPSeD) produced both strengthened stakeholder understanding and concrete institutional commitments.

Participants reported enhanced knowledge of regional peace and security dynamics and of locally led preventive approaches, and new partnerships were initiated among the represented organisations.

The Dialogue also resulted in the endorsement of a joint communiqué outlining shared resolutions and the co-creation and validation of this regional policy report, reflecting broad stakeholder consensus and ownership of its recommendations.

Context

Over the past few years, the West Africa region has become increasingly characterised by overlapping threats that strain both state institutions and community mechanisms. The region has witnessed a rise in violent extremism, farmer-herder conflicts, environmental stress, resource-related tensions, maritime piracy, transnational organised crime, and the proliferation of small arms. These challenges are fuelled by and further deepen poverty, youth unemployment, weak state capacities, and widening inequalities.

The resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea represents a broader crisis of trust in governance. Across the region, citizens, particularly young people, are expressing frustration with leadership failures, political exclusion, and corruption.

This democratic fatigue has created conditions where some populations perceive military rule as a better alternative to dysfunctional civilian governments, which reflects deeper structural governance issues rather than a rejection of democracy itself.

Furthermore, in many West African countries, violent extremist groups continue to exploit state fragility, local grievances, ungoverned spaces, and the vacuum in governance to expand their operations. From the Sahel to coastal West African states, these extremist groups embed themselves in communities by capitalising on poverty, illegal mining net-

works, weak border governance, and limited social services. Their strategies increasingly include forging alliances with criminal networks involved in illegal mining, smuggling, and trafficking, thereby blurring the lines between ideological extremism and economically driven criminality. These patterns are contributing to a regionalised security crisis in which the actions of non-state armed groups in one country affect neighbouring countries.

Across West Africa, local communities, especially youth, women, traditional leaders, and religious actors, remain on the frontline of these crises and continue to absorb the everyday impacts of insecurity. They also remain central to the resilience strategies that sustain everyday peace in their communities. Yet, these actors often remain marginalised within formal political and security structures.

For instance, women continue to serve as informal mediators in homes, markets, and religious spaces, while young people frequently take on the roles of both peace advocates and, in some cases, forced participants in violence due to economic marginalisation. Traditional institutions that historically managed disputes are weakening under the pressures of urbanisation, political interference, and shifting social dynamics.

These disconnects show a significant gap between top-down security responses and the lived realities of local communities that experience insecurity more directly.

It was against this backdrop that the Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (BBFORPEACE), Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and LAC-LAC Network, in partnership with the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) and the Society for Peace Studies and Practice (SPSP), convened the Second West Africa Peace and Security Dialogue (WAPSeD).

The dialogue sought to create an inclusive and reflective space where peacebuilding practitioners, policymakers, youth and women groups, academics, civil society actors, and other stakeholders collectively examine the evolving security landscape in West Africa. Beyond diagnosing problems, the dialogue also aimed to co-create actionable, people-centred strategies rooted in the experiences of people working at the frontlines of peace and security in the region.

Key Insights from the Dialogue

Over the two days, participants examined the state of peace and security in West Africa, the growing complexity of security threats, and the urgent need to rethink approaches to peacebuilding. Emphasis was placed on the failure of governance, leadership crises, youth and women exclusion, increasing coups, the rising tide of violent extremism, community vulnerabilities, and the decline of traditional conflict resolution systems. Some of the key insights from the dialogue include:

1. Governance and Leadership Crisis: Participants agreed that security challenges in West Africa are rooted more in governance failures than in democracy itself. Across the region, political corruption, exclusionary leadership, and poor service delivery have eroded public trust.

Elections often resemble "selections", and leadership recruitment processes are perceived as deeply flawed. The speakers noted that inadequate governance, injustice, and lack of accountability make citizens more likely to support coups or alternative authorities, including armed groups. In many ungoverned spaces, citizens rely more on non-state actors than on formal state structures.

A recurring theme that emerged during the dialogue was that leadership failures undermine national capacity to address conflict, weaken institutions, and create a vacuum in which terrorism thrives.

2. Emerging Dynamics of Insecurity and Expansion of Violent Extremism: During the dialogue, the speakers highlighted the escalation of violent extremism, armed banditry, insurgency, and resource conflicts, especially in Nigeria, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. They stated that terrorist groups now control land, exploit mining sites, and operate porous borders. Key drivers include: illegal mining and resource exploitation; youth unemployment and poverty; porous borders and weak surveillance; inadequate security personnel and equipment; regional spillover from coups and political transitions; spread of disinformation and propaganda; and failure of state security agencies to protect rural communities. Participants noted that security forces are overwhelmed and underfunded. For example, Nigeria has fewer than 70,000 combat-ready troops for over 200 million people, with many police personnel assigned to VIP and high risk business protection, limiting capacity for broader public safety.

3. Weak Regional Coordination and External Interference: Regional tensions, competing political interests, and inconsistencies within ECOWAS were highlighted as a major obstacle to coordinated action, adding that recent coups in Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali further complicate cooperation in the region. Participants stressed that foreign military powers and private security actors intensify conflict dynamics, while global counterterrorism frameworks often impose solutions that do not fit local contexts.

4. Decline of Traditional and Local Peace Mechanisms: Some of the speakers emphasised that traditional mechanisms, which were effective in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, have weakened due to the politicisation of traditional institutions, the erosion of cultural values, lack of state recognition, urbanisation, and individualism. They called for the revival and institutionalisation of traditional systems, stressing that no formal peace effort can succeed without community ownership and local legitimacy.

5. Women and Youth Exclusion: Throughout the dialogue, participants stressed the persistent exclusion of women and youths from formal decision-making despite their important roles in community stabilisation. Some barriers to inclusion include patriarchal structures, economic hardship, political marginalisation, tokenistic inclusion, and limited access to information and platforms.

Young people expressed concerns about unemployment, lack of empowerment, and growing disillusionment with democracy. Women panellists noted that although women are often peacemakers at home and in communities, they remain absent from higher-level political spaces. Participants stressed that meaningful inclusion is essential for sustainable peace.

Key Results of the Dialogue

The 2025 West Africa Peace and Security Dialogue (WAPSeD) yielded both strengthened knowledge and concrete institutional commitments, reflecting the value of inclusive and multi-stakeholder engagement in advancing regional peace and security.

1. Strengthened Understanding of Regional Peace and Security Dynamics

The Dialogue significantly enhanced stakeholder understanding of contemporary peace and security challenges across West Africa. Participants deepened their analysis of conflict drivers, governance deficits, and emerging security threats, while gaining stronger appreciation for locally led and preventive peacebuilding approaches. Post-dialogue reflections indicated that a substantial majority of participants experienced improved conceptual clarity and practical insight, positioning them to engage more effectively in regional peacebuilding processes.

2. Strengthened Regional Coordination among Peacebuilding Actors

The convening facilitated deeper alignment among civil society organisations, networks, and institutions operating across West Africa.

New collaborative pathways were established, with at least five partnerships and joint commitments emerging from the Dialogue. This strengthened coordination enhances prospects for harmonised advocacy, joint programming, and more coherent civil society engagement at national and regional levels.

3. Collective Commitments Formalised Through a Joint Communiqué

A jointly developed and endorsed communiqué formalised stakeholder consensus on priority peace and security actions.

The document articulates shared commitments and strategic directions, providing a reference framework for continued engagement with regional bodies, national governments, and development partners. Its adoption signals collective ownership and a unified voice on key regional peacebuilding priorities.

4. Co-Creation and Validation of a Regional Policy Report

The Dialogue culminated in the co-creation and validation of this regional policy report, synthesising evidence, field insights, and practitioner perspectives. Endorsed by organisers and participants, the report serves as a strategic roadmap intended to inform policy discourse, guide advocacy efforts, and support decision-making processes related to peace and security across West Africa.

These results underscore the Dialogue's role not only as a platform for reflection and exchange, but as a catalyst for strengthened regional collaboration and actionable commitments toward sustainable peace and security in West Africa.

Recommendations

Some of the recommendations from the two-day dialogue include:

Recommendations for National Governments

1. Improve Governance and Leadership

·Reform leadership recruitment and strengthen transparency in elections.

·Reduce political corruption and enforce accountability mechanisms.

·Prioritise service delivery, especially health, education and security.

·Establish quotas for women and youth in peace and security mechanisms.

2. Strengthen Security Institutions

·Increase funding, equipment, and staffing for security agencies.

·Deploy personnel to communities rather than VIP protection.

·Improve border management and interstate intelligence sharing.

·Regulate and monitor mining activities to cut off violent groups' funding.

3. Support Local Peace Mechanisms

·Recognise and integrate traditional institutions into formal peace frameworks.

·Increase funding for community-led peacebuilding.

·Institutionalise bottom-up approaches in peace policies.

·Localise the WPS and YPS National Action Plans across countries.

4. Invest in Human Development

·Expand universal basic education and vocational training.

·Strengthen Almajiri and alternative schooling systems.

·Implement youth employment programmes and economic empowerment schemes.

·Create programmes targeting radicalised youths, especially those between the ages of 15 and 18.

·Address poverty, unemployment, and inequality as key drivers of conflict.

Recommendations for Regional Bodies

1. Deepen Regional Security Cooperation

·Harmonise early warning and early response systems.

·Strengthen ECOWAS Standby Force readiness and joint border operations.

·Improve operational coordination and facilitate coordinated action on violent extremism beyond national boundaries.

·Promote intelligence sharing and joint training.

2. Protect Democratic Norms

·Enforce regional sanctions against unconstitutional changes of government.

·Support member states to strengthen electoral processes and civic freedoms.

·Protect civic space across the region and discourage authoritarian tendencies.

3. Enhance Cross-Country Learning

·Promote replication of local peace models across West African countries.

·Facilitate regular exchanges among peace institutions, CSOs, and traditional authorities.

·Promote cross-border peace dialogues and intelligence sharing.

·Lead regional strategies on violent extremism anchored in local contexts.

·Promote standardised frameworks on trauma healing, DDR, and reintegration.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

1.Strengthen Community-Based Peacebuilding

·Expand training on mediation, dialogue, trauma healing, and peace education.

·Develop fact-checking and digital literacy tools for communities.

·Build cross-border networks to address shared threats.

2. Advance Women and Youth Inclusion

·Provide leadership pathways, fellowships, and platforms for young peacebuilders and women mediators.

·Advocate for the localisation of the WPS and YPS agendas.

·Expand women and youth leadership development programmes.

3. Generate Evidence-Based Research for Policy Influencing

· Research local conflict drivers, mining-based conflicts, and community resilience.

·Conduct evidence-based research and advocacy on governance reforms

·Monitor governance performance and promote accountability.

Recommendations for Communities and Traditional Institutions

1. Rebuild Cultural Mediation Structures

·Strengthen community dialogue forums and inter-family/ethnic mediations.

·Promote women and youth participation in traditional peace processes.

·Revive cultural mechanisms for mediation and communal harmony.

2. Support Local Prevention Efforts

·Engage youth through mentorship, sports, culture, and skills training.

·Engage in early warning and community surveillance.

·Promote cultural heritage, storytelling, and norms that discourage violence.

·Document and preserve local peacebuilding innovations.

Recommendations for International Partners and Donors

1. Move from Prescriptive to Locally Owned Approaches.

·Shift from externally designed interventions to locally owned solutions.

·Provide flexible, long-term funding for community peace initiatives.

·Reduce reliance on externally designed counterterrorism frameworks that do not reflect local realities.

2. Strengthen Human Development Investments

·Prioritise psychosocial support and youth economic empowerment.

·Fund community-driven peacebuilding initiatives at small and medium scales.

·Expand investments in education, digital literacy, and human development.

3. Support Regional and Cross-Border Mechanisms

·Invest in ECOWAS early warning systems and regional training platforms.

·Ease visa barriers for African CSOs engaging and participating in global policy frameworks.

Conclusion

Throughout the two-day dialogue, participants stressed that sustainable peace cannot come from militarised responses alone. Instead, peace must be reimagined through inclusive governance, empowered communities, revitalised traditional systems, strong regional solidarity, and equitable global partnerships. They called for community-led solutions, inclusive and ethical leadership, sustained youth and women participation, strengthened CSO-government partnerships, and regional solidarity against common challenges.

About Us-Building Blocks for Peace Foundation

Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (BBFORPEACE) is a youth-led network/ non-governmental organisation working on Conflict Prevention, Prevention of Violent Extremism, Peacebuilding, Accountability Governance, Climate Action and Sustainable Development. The organisation was incorporated with the Corporate Affairs Commission in Nigeria in 2017.

Vision: "A peaceful, just and inclusive Africa where young people, men and women lead and build resilient communities, accountable governance, and sustainable development."

Mission: "Equip youth, men and women as peacebuilders to prevent conflict, safeguard civic space, and address emerging risks including climate and environmental pressure through knowledge-sharing, coalition building, advocacy, partnerships and programmes."

Core Values:
BBFORPEACE reaffirms its guiding values of Integrity & Accountability, Inclusivity & Gender Equality, Innovation & Learning, Collaboration & Solidarity, Non-Violence & Do No Harm, Youth Leadership, and Non-partisanship.

Strategic Pillars:
Over 2026 - 2030, BBFORPEACE will pursue four interlinked strategic pillars (impact areas): Peace Education & Youth Empowerment; Conflict Prevention, Governance & Accountability; Gender, Climate & Environmental Security; and Organisational Sustainability & Partnerships.
Building Blocks for Peace Foundation currently serves as the Regional Secretariat of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict in West Africa.

GPPAC
The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a global network led by civil society organisations (CSOs) actively working to prevent violent conflict and build more peaceful societies.

The network consists of 14 regional networks, with priorities and agendas specific to their environment.
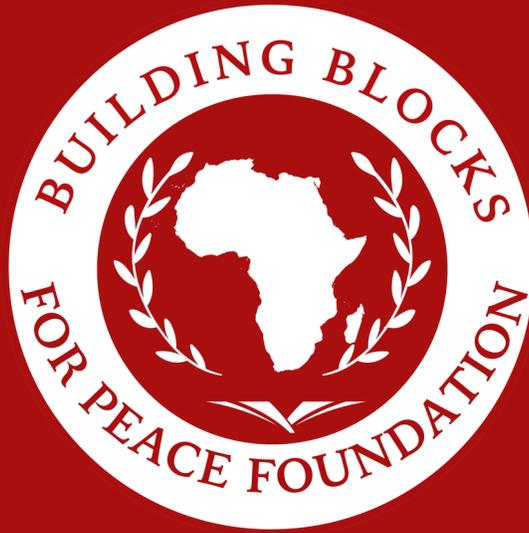
GPPAC currently leads the implementation of the 'Connection for Peace: Powerful Local Peacebuilding and Policies' project supported by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Empowering Communities for Peace

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