

**Testimony by United States Agency for International Development  
Assistant Administrator for Africa Linda Etim  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
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“Terrorism and Instability in Sub Saharan Africa”**

Good afternoon, Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss USAID’s work with this committee.

Throughout Africa, our efforts to end extreme poverty, promote resilient, democratic societies and create economic opportunity while advancing our security and prosperity are increasingly threatened by instability and the emerging forces of violent extremism. This is a global phenomenon and no part of the world is immune.

The United States has a powerful tool to prevent conflict and instability: international development. As the U.S. Government’s primary development agency, USAID has long recognized the critical role of development in addressing social, economic, governance, and other legitimate grievances that can fuel violent extremism and promote radicalization of individuals and communities. It is also important to build counter-violent extremism messaging into programming, especially in local languages that can reach vulnerable populations. Our activities and interventions are designed to reduce extremists’ opportunities to exploit social injustice, lack of political integration, economic inequality, religious persecution, and ideological extremism to recruit followers to violent agendas or criminal networks.

Violent extremism impedes development. It can slow investment, prevent children from attending schools, place additional burdens on already fragile healthcare systems, and undermine political systems. Today, I’ll discuss our programs that help prevent violent extremism in the Sahel and Horn of Africa and focus on the strategic thinking, analysis, and approach that form the core of our results-oriented programs. I’ll also touch on the importance of USAID’s governance programs, which seek to address the social inequities, corruption and weak institutions that often foster instability.

### **Addressing Drivers**

USAID uses our analytic capabilities and draws upon our knowledge of the local context to examine the drivers of fragility. Our assessments carefully consider the “push factors” that can drive people toward supporting violent extremism, such as social fragmentation, a sense of injustice, perceptions of marginalization, and distrust of government. We also examine the pull factors that can attract those vulnerable to recruitment, including social and peer networks that provide an ideological foundation, and the promise of financial benefit. We have learned that attitudes of potential recruits are heavily influenced by their environment, information channels, peer group norms, and what they hear from trusted sources.

In 2011, USAID issued, “The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency,” which recognizes development’s role in identifying and addressing drivers of extremism in

support of U.S. national security objectives. This Agency notes that much of U.S. foreign assistance goes to countries in the midst of, or trying to prevent, conflict or state failure. Our efforts to prevent and respond to violent extremism are guided by ongoing research and analysis of the factors associated with radicalization and recruitment to violence.

USAID helps prevent the spread of violent extremism through targeted efforts to promote good governance and the rule of law, respect for human rights, and sustainable, inclusive development, among other programs. Together with State, USAID is bringing its development expertise and more than a decade of experience in countering violent extremism programming to bear — harnessing the full range of analytic tools to design, support, and measure programs that reduce the vulnerabilities of communities and build local capacity to resist extremist groups. This is an essential element of the Agency’s integrated approach, which begins with prevention.

Youth are a key demographic targeted by our programming. According to the United Nations, in 2015, 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa. By 2030, it is projected that the number of youth in Africa will have increased by 42 percent to more than 320 million.

While there is no one profile of those most at-risk, unemployed youth who have migrated to peri-urban and slum areas, university graduates whose expectations have not been met, or youth who have lived through conflict can be at great risk. Slow economies and an education that is not tied to market demand leave many youth feeling that they have no role in their community. They lack a sense of belonging and feel marginalized. Such perceptions can drive youth to involvement in destructive or illicit activities.

Gender is a critical element in addressing violent extremism. We work to move beyond generalized assumptions about men and women based on common gender stereotypes, recognizing that gender norms for men and women manifest differently in various social, political, and economic contexts. For example, women are not only victims of violent extremism but can be both perpetrators and critical to prevention. As such, a nuanced and context-specific understanding of gender is needed to accurately diagnose the push and pull factors that drive both men and women to participate in violent extremism, a dynamic that has been largely unaddressed in the research.

Intrinsic to the design of all USAID activities is the belief that our development assistance has the greatest impact on the drivers of extremism by increasing resilience. At the local level, we focus on social cohesion and fostering stronger, more resilient communities. We support individuals, particularly youth, through employment and outreach programs, vocational skills training, and community development activities.

## **The Horn of Africa**

Terrorist threats in East Africa continue to evolve and spread. The regional dynamics and conditions that propel extremism in the Horn of Africa are inextricably linked to neighboring countries. Through the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PREACT) and related programs, the U.S. Department of State, the Department of Defense, and USAID fund projects in Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Uganda and along the Kenya-Somalia border to

promote civic engagement and political participation, strengthen civil society organizations, amplify moderate voices, mitigate conflict, and empower youth and women; this is a coordinated interagency approach.

In Somalia, al-Shabaab threatens not only the country's viability as a state but also the region's stability. USAID supports peace and stability in 17 of 18 regions through targeted community-vetted interventions that foster good governance, economic recovery, and reduces the appeal of extremism. USAID also promotes the women, peace, and security agenda in Somalia. Since 2011, USAID constructed and/or equipped 12 women's centers across Somalia which are neutral venues utilized by women for community planning, conflict mitigation and resolution, counseling services, adult literacy classes, and public health and safety purposes.

One of USAID's flagship programs, the Transition Initiatives for Stabilization Plus, improves community resistance to the influence of al-Shabaab and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), by creating effective local governance, and proactively engaging communities. We know that communities that realize positive social, cultural, and economic benefits in recovered areas are more likely to resist extremism.

This program serves as the bridge between our immediate humanitarian assistance and our medium- to longer-term development programs in Somalia. Development programs need peace and stability to be sustainable and effective. We conduct rapid-impact, high-visibility work that creates short-term employment opportunities for at-risk youth, displaced people, and other vulnerable groups. All projects are carried out in a consultative process between the local authorities and the community, enabling the civilian population to do something good for their communities while interacting and engaging with a legitimate governance structure. This further mitigates conflict, promotes stability and community cohesion, and strengthens and supports relationships between residents and their government officials.

In Kenya, USAID targets at-risk youth populations through Generation Kenya, which closes the gap between young people who are out of work and employers who are short of skilled employees. By partnering with the private sector, we provide training and meaningful employment to vulnerable young people. Generation Kenya has produced impressive results—100 percent of Generation Kenya's 490 graduates were placed with employers and 90 percent are still in these jobs. Generation Kenya plans to place more than 50,000 youth in stable careers by the year 2020. Going forward, USAID will expand its programming in violent extremism "hot spots" working hand and hand with communities, local, and national governments.

In the Horn of Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development has emerged as the leading regional actor in countering violent extremism. In 2015, it announced a decision to establish a regional Countering Violent Extremism Center of Excellence, based in Djibouti. The center will focus on practical and tangible outcomes that will strengthen countering violent extremism capacities and cooperation across the region. USAID will support the implementation of the Center of Excellence's key priorities to ensure that governments, civil society organizations and other actors have the tools and information on "best practices" to effectively carry out their efforts.

## **West Africa and the Sahel**

In West Africa, violent extremism is a potentially destabilizing force which threatens the tenuous progress of the region's development. In the Sahel, vast porous borders fostering centuries-old socioeconomic and ethno-tribal ties exist alongside post-colonial boundaries and enhance the likelihood of spreading tension and instability. Modernization, urban migration, and the breakdown of social cohesion and familial and communal interdependence have disrupted historically strong community and regional ties.

USAID counters this force through our role in the Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership. Our programs and initiatives are designed to reduce the threats of violent extremism and armed conflicts within the Libya-Niger-Mali corridor and in Nigeria, along Niger's southern border. By improving national and regional capacities to resist terrorist organizations, we help disrupt efforts to recruit and train new members, particularly youth. Our efforts also make it harder for extremists to establish safe havens. Through the USAID Peace through Development and Expanded Regional Stability program, we support Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso's community leaders to engage with marginalized communities and work with government officials to make local governance more inclusive and transparent. We engage youth through vocational and entrepreneurial skills training, civic education, and leadership training to increase participation in local decision making, encourage greater citizen participation, advocacy, and government outreach.

In Niger, our Community Cohesion Initiative engages communities through small-scale, targeted activities involving local civil society organizations, governments, and community members. The Niger Education and Community Strengthening Program works in 150 schools across 22 municipalities to improve educational opportunities for children in at-risk communities. This support increased school attendance rates from 62 percent to 93 percent in targeted communities. Investments in these learning opportunities are focused on ensuring an increasingly educated population is paired with economic opportunity.

The USAID Peace through Development II project has reached 40 Nigerien communities across the regions of Agadez, Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri, Zinder and the capital district of Niamey. By producing and delivering original radio content aimed at countering extremist narratives that was broadcast across 33 partner stations, the program has reached over 1.7 million people from groups at risk of violent extremism. It has directly engaged nearly 100,000 people through civic education, moderate voice promotion and youth empowerment themed events. We also facilitate local dialogue and reduce community tensions by tackling small yet important development projects such as rehabilitation of a well or brush-clearing that makes it harder for terrorists and other criminal elements to conduct attacks along popular roads. Our programs increase civic engagement among Nigerien government authorities and citizens and decrease the interest of young people to take part in illegal or extremist activities. These activities also increase the community's knowledge of the Government of Niger's efforts to promote security and stability throughout the region.

Across Mali, USAID supports the Government's roadmap for political transition. Following the successful July 2013 presidential elections, we are focused on supporting the peace accord that

brought an end to the conflict with the Northern Armed Groups, restoring a sense of normalcy in strategic areas in the North, and countering violent extremism through inclusion of marginalized communities. Our assistance increases the effectiveness and legitimacy of government institutions. By strengthening the government's public financial management systems we help ensure that public funds are distributed equitably and justly throughout Mali, and that decentralization efforts are accompanied with sufficient skills, training, and oversight to prevent corruption. Mali is also a partner country Security Governance Initiative, the United States' joint endeavor with six African partners to improve security sector governance and capacity to address threats. We've just embarked on the first-ever Rule of Law program to ensure the Ministry of Justice obtains and maintains qualified staff to carry out its mission. In addition, our newest program, the Mali Peace Initiative, builds upon a three-year, Office of Transition Initiatives program that operated across Northern Mali to strengthen targeted communities' resilience to conflict and radicalization. Still, the tragic loss of USAID friend and partner, Anita Datar, during the November 2015 terrorist attack on the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, Mali underscores the challenges that remain as we continue our efforts to bolster the fragile peace process and provide assistance to vulnerable communities.

In nearby Nigeria, a surge of violence perpetuated by the terrorist group Boko Haram, which now calls itself the Islamic State in West Africa continues. The insurgency has forced large populations to migrate to more secure areas, disrupting homes and livelihoods and burdening already stressed basic public services such as education and health. USAID's programming improves the Nigerian government's responsiveness to community needs, reducing perceptions of marginalization and addressing youth vulnerability to violent extremist influence. Women and girls are not only victims of violent extremism, but have the ability to prevent recruitment and serve as mediators and peace-builders. Christian and Muslim women have used the skills received during USAID-supported training to help citizens in Boko Haram affected communities manage the effects of trauma and stress and to conduct inter-religious dialogue to promote conflict prevention and peaceful coexistence. This is integral to a more holistic and practical healing process.

The Nigeria Regional Transition Initiative focuses on diminishing conditions that allow Boko Haram to exist and flourish in the Northeast. It provides small-scale, strategically targeted assistance to local partners. For example, we supported UNICEF and other implementing partners to provide education activities for conflict-affected children, including internally displaced persons and children in host communities, in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, and Gombe states. We provide child-friendly spaces, psychosocial support, and peer mentoring opportunities for children, while also training teachers in conflict-sensitive instruction. These activities build a stronger sense of community and belonging in these traditionally marginalized areas by facilitating peaceful interactions between the internally displaced and host communities. We are promoting conflict mitigation, expanding a sports-for-peace program, and launching a local language radio program to counter the appeal of terrorist or criminal organizations.

## **Conclusion**

We have seen real progress in our efforts. Through program assessment, implementation and evaluation, we are learning what works and what doesn't. As we gain experience, we improve

our monitoring and evaluation and gather more baseline data so that we can more effectively measure program impact.

A central tenet of our development approach is the transfer of knowledge and skills to stakeholders and partners in African countries. Through our Missions' work and through USAID-funded resource centers, such as those referenced above, we train individuals and communities to own and address violent extremism in their own countries.

At USAID, we're committed to this work. We've increased the number of individuals dedicated to programming focused on countering extremism, trained employees on its principles and incorporated countering violent extremism objectives into our country program strategies.

Instability in some areas is the product of generations of neglect and corruption; solutions to these challenges will be the product of generations of concerted focus, legitimate engagement, and expectations of results. For our development programs to succeed we must invest in strong local partnerships and our methods of engagement must be nimble and creative. Because trends in extremism are fluid, we must constantly reassess our priorities, our progress, and our policies to ensure that our work is based on the realities of today.

Toward this end, we are pleased with our strong and productive partnership with the Departments of Defense and State on the planning and implementation of programming, as well as our work with other donors on coordinating efforts to counter extremism. Sustained engagement—within the U.S. Government, with other donor governments, and with our partners in the region—will be the key to combating extremism today and securing peace and stability for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I look forward to your questions.