

White Paper, 7 November 2025

Local peacebuilding in the Sahel and Coastal West-Africa as an Opportunity for German Policymakers

Executive Summary

The security situation in the Sahel has reached a critical juncture. In the border areas between Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire, violence has escalated since 2019, eroding livelihoods, forcing displacement, and undermining state legitimacy. With military regimes entrenched and civic space shrinking, international actors face reduced access and influence.

The risks for Europe are growing: the region is at risk of becoming a major terrorist hotspot, with spillover effects reaching coastal West Africa. Russia and China are increasing their influence, while migration pressures could rise further if instability deepens. Without effective conflict prevention, the region may face severe escalation in the coming one to two years – with direct implications for German and European security.

This **White Paper** draws on the results of a one-year conflict assessment, and more than 2 years of local implementation by the **Kapok Consortium** – a partnership of four local and one international organization working in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Ghana.

The findings demonstrate that discreet diplomacy, trust-building, and community-level cooperation can still prevent escalation and preserve dialogue under highly constrained conditions.

German policymakers now have a **window of opportunity**: by supporting such approaches, Germany can help mitigate risks of wider conflict, counter external destabilizing influences, and strengthen preventive action before escalation becomes unmanageable. This White Paper summarizes key insights from the KAPOK Consortium and presents **five recommendations** for German policymakers.

Learnings from the Kapok-Consortium

- Political environment: Open confrontation with military regimes often leads to diplomatic isolation and reduced influence.
- Preferred approach: Local actors recommend discreet, pragmatic engagement that preserves trust and avoids public confrontation.
- Case example: Ghana's quiet diplomacy towards Burkina Faso lowered tensions by avoiding debates on sensitive political transitions and instead focusing on shared priorities such as water, trade and development.
- Local peacebuilding: Kapok partners implement mediation training, community dialogue, and small-scale cooperation projects – practical steps that help prevent violence and sustain social trust.

Policy Recommendations

To help prevent escalation in the Sahel and safeguard stability, Germany should:

1. Stay engaged despite challenges and continue diplomatic and development efforts in the region rather than disengaging, even under military regimes.
2. Pursue discreet, pragmatic diplomacy by handling sensitive political issues privately while focusing public engagement on less contentious areas such as trade, infrastructure, and development.
3. Strengthen cross-border and local cooperation by supporting initiatives that connect communities across borders and build trust around shared concerns like water management, trade, and cultural exchange.

4. Support local-level peacebuilding by investing in mediation training, community dialogue, and grass-roots negotiation processes where formal regional peace initiatives are stalled.
5. Recalibrate regional cooperation by complementing stalled high-level formats (e.g. the Accra Initiative) with smaller, issue-specific mechanisms that can deliver tangible trust- and peacebuilding outcomes.

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