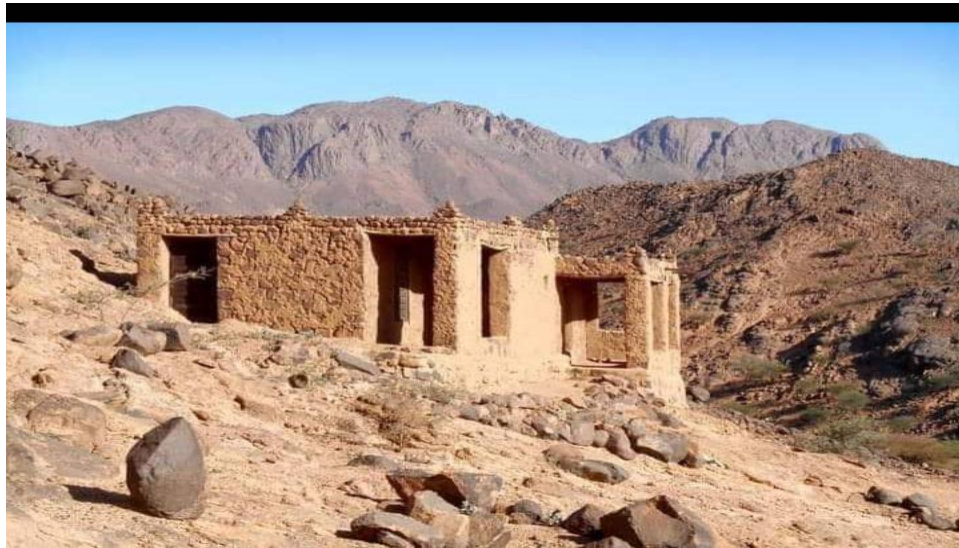**Carter School for Peace & Conflict Resolution**

**George Mason University**


**Better Evidence Project**



**Safe Havens Amidst the Jihadist Storm: How Leaders Spare Some Regions from Terrorist Violence in the Sahel**

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# Executive Summary

Inspired by a report on local peacekeeping in Amataltal by a Reuters journalist, this study has sought to identify what has helped the people of Amataltal in Niger and Dori in Burkina Faso maintain a relatively satisfactory level of peace and security amidst the jihadist storm that has been sweeping across the Sahara-Sahel region since 2011. To that end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 36 key local actors selected through purposeful sampling techniques, with the help of local partner organizations, in Amataltal, Agadez, and Niamey in Niger, and Dori in Burkina Faso during the summer of 2021. The respondents were from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, including men, women, and youth leaders. The resulting interview data were transcribed in French, then translated into English, processed through thematic coding and analysis, and visualized in NVIVO, a qualitative analysis software program. The analysis and visualization highlighted dominant themes and patterns emerging from the data.

One of the major findings is that the relative peace and security enjoyed by Dori, Amataltal, and the larger Agadez region resulted from a set of initiatives taken by local actors who understood that peace cannot be obtained only through military means, but also requires local solutions, involving local leaders and the whole population, to satisfactorily address security, development, and governance issues. The theory of change underlying the conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives mentioned by the research participants suggests a human security approach that 1) seeks to meet the basic human needs of the population without any discrimination, 2) that involves local people and their leaders, and 3) that is fully informed of the realities of the local context.

In short, the peace activism of local leaders, the commitment of the population to peace and social cohesion, the establishment of local infrastructures for peace (especially local peace committees), the vocational training and provision of economic opportunities to youth, and a more visible, positive presence of the government, have made a critical difference in terms of peace and security between Dori, Amataltal, and Agadez, and other localities affected by jihadist terrorism in Niger and Burkina Faso.

This relative success, however, was not achieved without any obstacles. Respondents in both countries mentioned the following challenges: the lack of adequate financial and logistical resources to conduct their activities; difficulties of communicating, traveling, and mobilizing

people; and the difficult relationships that local civil society actors and international partners often had with government officials whenever they took a critical stance.

Previous research on local violence prevention and peacebuilding initiatives, designed and led by local actors—most often through local peace committees and awareness campaigns, sometimes with external donors' support—has provided, over the past few decades, more and more evidence that such initiatives have effectively helped preserve peace, rebuild relationships between groups after violent conflict, and even prevent violent extremism in other countries.
Building on this line of research, this study calls attention to the fact that local people are not only recipients of peacebuilding. They are, and can be, change agents and key actors for violence prevention and peacebuilding in their societies.

However, if local conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms often yield satisfactory results that reflect local indicators of peace and security, one should not forget that most of the armed conflicts and violence that they try to prevent or manage are most often driven by structural deficiencies. Those deficiencies include corruption, poor economic performance, poor governance, state fragility, weak security apparatus, illicit transnational flows—that people at the local level in Amataltal or Dori cannot always fix in a sustainable, impactful manner with their local mechanisms or local solutions. Local mechanisms need, therefore, to be supplemented with effective strategies to build strong states with strong institutions that can effectively address those structural deficiencies.

**Future research paths**

The research participants, while answering our research questions, raised, through their comments, other questions that are worth further investigation. For example, both in Dori and in Amataltal/Agadez, respondents repeatedly raised the question of the role of the military, the need for cooperation between the military and civilians, and the effectiveness of military action in fighting terrorism. Many pointed out that the military alone cannot defeat terrorism, and cannot be present everywhere the population needs them and the military need civilians who trust them and can collaborate with them. However, respondents mentioned several challenges related to military counterterrorism operations and collaboration between civilians and the military, especially the killing of civilians by the military who find it often difficult to make a distinction between ordinary civilians and the terrorists in regions affected by the terrorist crisis, in addition to the security risks

that civilians face when they consent to collaborate with the government, the military or with the terrorist groups.

Thus, in future research, it would be worth investigating in depth the following issue areas: i) the role and effectiveness of the use of force by government security forces, pro-government self-defense groups, and foreign troops for counterterrorism and the stabilization of conflict zones; ii) the operational and ethical conditions under which civilians can be encouraged to collaborate with the government and the military in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations, and what needs to be done to foster a trustful and secure civilian-military cooperation in conflict zones; and iii) the exact role that compliance with human rights norms should play in counterterrorism operations, given the difficulties that government armed forces have in distinguishing between combatants and non-combatant civilians in contemporary battlefields.

# INTRODUCTION

The Sahara-Sahel region, of which Niger and Burkina Faso are part, is an arid, semi-desert zone located south of the Sahara Desert. Since the collapse of the Kadhaffi regime in Libya in 2011, the region has been stormed by armed groups, some of which declared allegiance to Al Qaeda or ISIS and claim to wage Jihad against national governments and Western powers such as France. While Niger, like Mali, experienced successive armed rebellions led by Tuareg secessionists, Burkina Faso was quite peaceful, despite a succession of coups d'etat, until the popular uprising that ended the 27-year authoritarian regime of President Blaise Compaore in October 2014. Besides the armed insurgencies, the region has witnessed recurrent disputes pitching nomadic herders (especially the Fulani and Tuaregs) against sedentary farmers usually over issues related to the grazing of animals.

Departing from this regional context, this study project was inspired by a report by Edward McAllister on local peacekeeping in Amataltal (Niger) titled "Does this village in Niger hold the key to defeating African jihad?", a thought-provoking article published online by Reuters in August 2020.[1] In that publication, the Reuters reporter wrote: "The Agadez region where Amataltal is located - an area the size of France that borders Algeria, Libya and Chad - has remained largely peaceful. Local leaders say a network of influential ex-rebels, clerics, and peace committees - formed in response to an armed uprising seeking greater political autonomy for Tuaregs in the 1990s - has stopped jihadists gaining a foothold by monitoring grievances and people with extreme ideas. With thousands of French troops struggling to contain the bloodshed elsewhere, and the United States mulling a drawdown of forces, Agadez leaders say their methods offer a possible blueprint for defeating militants - without weapons."

After reading this report, I also remembered from a stay in Burkina Faso that Dori, the main city of the northern Sahel region, the most affected by jihadist violence in that country, has also remained quite peaceful. Thus, it appears that some localities of this troubled Sahara-Sahel region – at least, Dori in Burkina Faso and Amataltal in the Agadez region of Niger – have managed to keep away the armed jihadist groups that have been operating across West Africa.

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1 McAllister, E. (2020). "Does this village in Niger hold the key to defeating African jihad?" *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-islamists-niger-idUSKCN2590RX (accessed 11/20/2020).

These two localities have maintained a relatively satisfactory level of peace and security. The evidence of that relative peace and security is provided by testimonies from the field and by the fact that the number of violent incidents, including terrorist attacks, reported in these localities by datasets such as the Global Terrorism Database or the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (ACLED) is either zero or very low compared to the number of incidents reported in other places. For example, the Global Terrorism Database recorded 284 terrorist incidents in Burkina Faso between 1970 and 2019.  But most of these incidents, that is 280, occurred after the collapse of the Compaore regime, in four years, namely from 2015 to 2019. Only one terrorist attack was reported during the period from 1970 to 2019 in the city of Dori, the main city of the northern Sahel region of Burkina Faso, the region that is most affected by the terrorist violence in the country. During the same period, no terrorist incident was recorded, according to the Global Terrorism Database, in the village of Amataltal in Niger.

Building on this observation, this study seeks to understand why and how these localities made an exception in maintaining a relative peace and security amidst the jihadist storm in the Sahara Sahel region. If this did not happen by chance or thanks to a special divine protection as some residents believe, what are the initiatives that resulted in this outcome? More specifically, the study investigates two central questions: 1) What have been the specific strategies that political authorities, religious and local community leaders implemented to keep Dori and Amataltal relatively safe from inter-community violence and from the terrorist attacks perpetrated by jihadist militants throughout the West Africa's Sahel region? And, 2) What can we learn from their practices that offer evidence of the effectiveness of some local peacebuilding initiatives?

To answer these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty-six (36) local people, mainly key actors who participated in peacebuilding, countering violent extremism, or conflict prevention initiatives in Amataltal and other parts of the Agadez region (Niger), and in the city of Dori (Burkina Faso).The analysis of the data gathered both from desk research and the interviews show that the two localities share a number of similar features that: 1) helped prevent or manage inter-group conflict peacefully, and 2) prevented jihadist insurgent groups from settling, recruiting militants, and operating on their territory. The interview data suggest that beyond repressive military action, some local actors contributed to maintain a relatively satisfactory level of peace and security in Dori and Amataltal. They did so through various initiatives, including good leadership and innovative local peacebuilding initiatives that promoted socio-economic

development, intra-religious dialogue and tolerance between Muslims and Christians, socio-economic reintegration for former militants, and cooperation between the military and the civilian population.

This study makes two contributions. First, it brings empirical evidence from Niger and Burkina Faso that shows that some local initiatives do effectively help maintain peace, manage conflict constructively, and prevent violent extremism. Secondly, it contributes to the literature by demonstrating, with concrete examples, how bottom-up, local initiatives (from grassroots and middle-range actors) can make a significant difference in preserving peace, not necessarily in opposition to, but along with, top-down liberal peacebuilding programs that are usually initiated, under the sponsorship of national governments and the international community, to reduce state fragility and build stronger state institutions.

# I. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach adopted in this study differs from the approach usually taken by researchers who try to gather evidence of what works and what does not work in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, countering violent extremism, and counterterrorism. Indeed, most often researchers highlight activities that have been implemented (usually in the framework of projects or government policies) and they assess which ones have been "effective" or "successful" in light of defined indicators of success or project objectives.

The approach taken here departs not from activities but rather from the reality of the field—that is, what anyone can observe on the ground as regards the level of peace and security at a given moment. The researcher looked at two countries of the Sahara-Sahel region of West Africa, Niger and Burkina Faso, which are both affected by armed conflict and terrorism, and ranked by the World Bank and the UN Development Program as the poorest in the world. He observed that in these two countries, some localities have remained relatively peaceful and safe, namely Amataltal in the northern, desertic Agadez region that neighbors Algeria and Libya, and Dori in Burkina Faso. He double checked this observation by looking at violent incidents data from existing datasets such as the Armed Conflict Location and Events Data project (ACLED) and the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). After the empirical observation was corroborated by these datasets,

then he explored why this relative peace and security existed amidst the bloodshed occasioned by armed non-state actors in these countries.

Instead of seeking whether some conflict and terrorism drivers were present or absent in these localities in order to diagnose what went wrong – as a doctor would do with a patient – the researcher gathered data from two main sources: i) relevant secondary sources through desk research by looking at the available literature and local media archives,  and ii) primary sources by conducting interviews (with eye witnesses and key actors)  in the field in order to trace back the initiatives and factors that contributed to the observed relative peace and security. Semi-structured interviews were conducted mainly through phone and, in a few cases following the respondents' preferences, through e-mail during the summer 2021 (see questionnaire in Annex 1). The 36 respondents,  who were carefully identified, selected and recruited through purposeful sampling, with the help of  local partner organizations in Agadez, Niamey, and Amataltal (Niger) and in Dori (Burkina Faso), included elected local leaders,  traditional chiefs,  religious leaders, government officials or government agency representatives, civil servants, local and international NGOs employees, community organizers, ordinary citizens (cattle breeders, farmers, merchants), women and youth leaders, and local experts.  The respondents were from different religious backgrounds, and from different age and ethnic groups. Among them, there were mostly Muslims –Niger and Burkina Faso are predominantly Muslim– but also Christians and practitioners of African traditional religions. Even though the sample does not claim to be representative of the populations of the two countries, an effort was made to ensure that the respondents come from different ethnic communities: mainly Tuaregs, Hausas, and Zermas in Niger, and Fulani (or Peulhs) and Mossi in Burkina Faso. Their ages range between 20 and 80. In Niger, the respondents were mainly natives from Amatatal or the larger Agadez region of which Amataltal is part. Following the local partner organizations' recommendations, it was assumed that the natives and the other recommended research participants were the most knowledgeable about Amataltal and Agadez, and about peace and security issues in these localities. In Burkina Faso, almost all the respondents were residents and/or natives of Dori and surroundings. The interviews were conducted mainly in French but also in local languages  --  in Moore and, with the help of an interpreter, in Fulfulde  -- with local leaders who could not speak French. For security reasons, the

interview data have been de-identified, which means that the respondents' names and other personally identifiable information will not be mentioned in any of the research reports.[2]

The data collected  from the interviews were transcribed in French with the respondents' identities coded, then translated from French into English before being imported in NVIVO, a qualitative analysis software, and processed through a thematic coding and analysis in NVIVO, in light of the research questions. The results of the analysis have been summarized in a codebook and tables (see Annex 4) and visualized with different charts. When visualized, a comparison of the analytical codes created in NVIVO, based on their frequency or number of references by respondents, clearly highlights dominant themes and patterns that emerge from the data. It shows what respondents identify as the local indicators of peace and security, the initiatives that helped maintain peace and security in Amataltal-Agadez and in Dori,  and finally what have been the most effective strategies and best practices for conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and countering violent extremism in their respective contexts.


## II.FINDINGS

The research participants suggested a few explanations of why Amataltal, and more generally the Agadez region in Niger, and Dori in Burkina Faso have remained relatively peaceful and safe amidst the jihadist storm that has been sweeping the West Africa's Sahel region.  Muslim extremists and local insurgent groups that declared allegiance to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State have been storming the region since the 2011 Arab spring that led to the collapse of the Kadhaffi regime in Libya, and subsequently to the 2012 jihadist and Touareg-led insurgencies in Northern Mali causing armed violence that spilled the porous national borders to neighboring countries.

Before delving into the analysis of the interviews data, a brief description of the respective contexts of Niger and Burkina Faso, the two countries where the two research sites are located, will help

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2 This measure is meant to protect the security and privacy of the respondents in compliance with the recommendations of the Institutional Review Board of George Mason University that reviewed the research proposal, including an amended version, and approved it.

better shed light on the difference that local initiatives made in these two sites, namely Amataltal/Agadez in Niger and Dori in Burkina Faso.

## II.1. Agadez and Dori: Geographic and Social Context

Amataltal is a small village located in the department of Ingall, not far from Agadez, the main city of the Aïr or Agadez region in the North of Niger, a region that borders Libya and Algeria. Dori, the second research site, is the main city of the Sahel region, located in Northern Burkina which borders Niger and Mali.
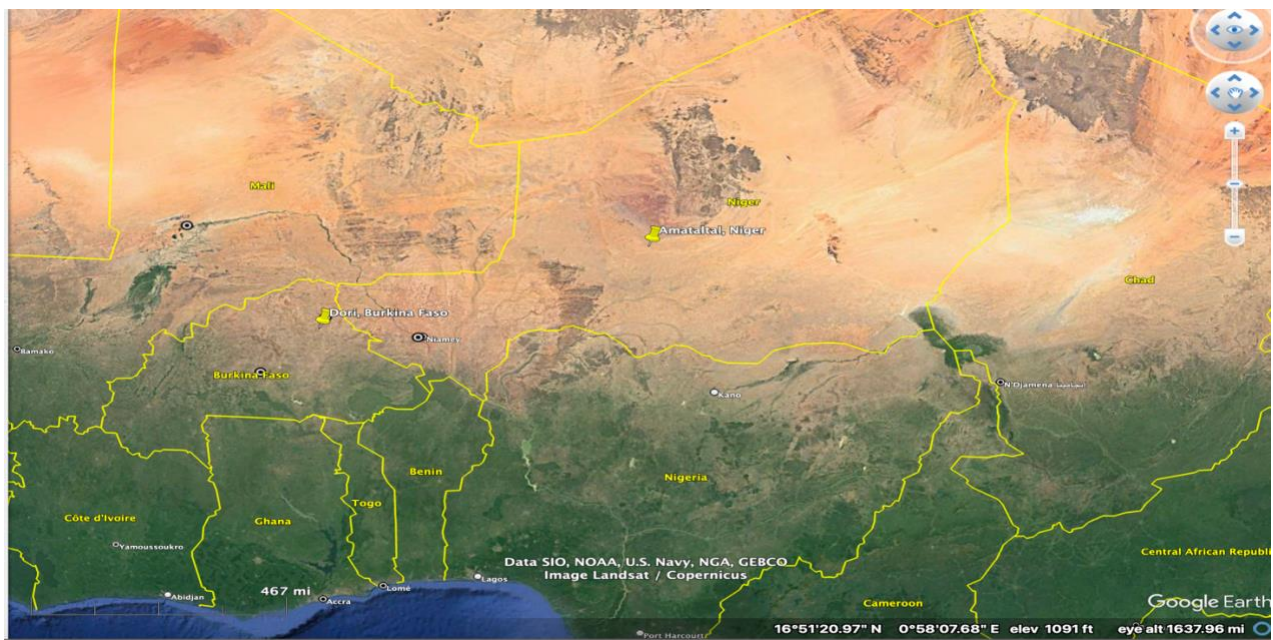


The Aïr and Sahel regions where the two research sites are located share a few common points. They are both border regions neighboring conflict hotspots like Mali and Libya. They are arid, semi-desertic. They are weakly populated, compared to other regions located in the South of Niger and Burkina, and their residents are mostly nomadic, pastoralist communities such as the Fulani and the Tuaregs, two ethnic groups from which, according to some local sources, jihadist groups recruit most of their militants in West Africa. For example, the region of Air, which covers

53% of the land area of Niger, is home to only 3.3% of the country's population, with a density of 0.3 inhabitant/sq km.[3]

Despite their unfavorable geographic locations, both the Sahel region in Burkina Faso and the Air region in Niger have important mineral reserves that have become the first source of income of the two countries. Most of the gold in Burkina Faso is extracted from mining sites in the Sahel region by foreign companies. In Niger, the Air region has one of the largest uranium reserves uranium in the world. This uranium has been extracted for decades by the French company AREVA. Agadez also has an important oil reserve that is now extracted. So, mining activities have been the main occupation for many people in the two regions; they have created job opportunities and have become major sources of income for both the population and the government.

Furthermore, a look at the geographic distribution of the population and at the history of the complex relationships between ethnic groups in Niger and in Burkina Faso may help shed light on the conflict map in the two countries.

## Human geography and inter-ethnic relations in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso

In both countries, one may distinguish two types of groups. First, nomadic pastoralist populations who live mainly in the North, e.g., the Tuaregs, the Toubous, the Fulani, and Arabs in the northern part of Niger. These are minority groups living mainly in the Agadez and Diffa regions.[4] The second group is made of sedentary populations who live mainly on farming in the south of both Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali, or in other parts of these countries. For example, in Niger, sedentary communities such as the Songhai and Zarma live in the West, the Hausa in the center, and the Kanuri and Gourmantche live in the East. The sedentary ethnic groups constitute most of the population in Niger, and yet only 10% of Niger's land is considered arable.[5] Given the distribution of ethnic groups across the national borders that the current states have inherited from Western colonization (see table below), inter-ethnic relationships are quite complex and often raise issues to national governments.

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3 See Centre National d'Etudes Stratégiques et de Sécurité, *Stratégie Nationale de Prévention de la Radicalisation et de l'Extrémisme Violent- Niger,* version provisoire, aout 2019, p. 23.

4 See Pierre Donaint & François Lancrenon, *Le Niger.* Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1972, p.56.
5 Donaint & Lacrenon, *Le Niger,* p.56

**Ethnic Groups and their areas of residence in Niger and neighboring countries [6]**

| Ethnic group | Percentage | Regions of Niger | Neighboring countries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hausas | 55.4% | Centre; East | Northern Nigeria |
| Zarmas | 18.2% | West | |
| Songhais | 4% | West | Northern Mali |
| Tuaregs | 11% | North | Northern Mali, Northern Burkina, Libya, Algeria |
| Toubous | 0.1% | North | Chad, Libya |
| Fulanis | 10% | Everywhere, but high concentration in Tillabery | Mali, Burkina Faso, Northern Nigeria |
| Gourmantches | 0.3% | South-West | Burkina Faso, Benin |
| Arabs | 0.04% | Niamey; North | Algeria, Libya |

According to French historian Bernard Lugan, the nomadic, pastoralist communities in the entire Sahara-Sahel region have co-ethnics across the national borders, and they are minority groups in each country where they are. Being minority groups makes it hard for them to win elections and control state power. Since the advent of democracy in the 1990s, these minority groups have been subjected to the rule of the majority groups, that is sedentary ethnic groups, some of whom their ancestors had conquered and dominated. [7] As a result, in the postcolonial period, when these pastoralist minority groups felt marginalized in the newly independent states, they revolted against the national governments as it was the case with the Tuaregs in Northern Niger and Northern Mali.

An alternative theory to Lugan's may be found in a quantitative, cross-national study by Brian Arva and James Piazza (2016), for the involvement of Tuaregs and Fulanis in armed insurgencies and terrorism in the Sahel reflects a pattern identified by Arva and Piazza across the world. After conducting a statistical analysis of data retrieved from the Minorities at Risk database and the Global Terrorism Database, data that cover about 170 countries from 1981 to 2006, Arva and Piazza found that "both transnational dispersion of kin minority communities and domestic

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6 The table has been created with data retrieved from *Infos Niger,* available at https://www.infos-niger.com/le-niger/peuples/ (accessed 09/05/2021).
7 See Bernard Lugan, *Les guerres du Sahel : des origines à nos jours*. Bernard Lugan Editions.

concentration of minorities within countries increase terrorism and that transnational dispersion is a particularly robust predictor of terrorist attacks,"[8] and, if one dares to extrapolate, of ethnic-based, armed insurgencies during which rebels often resort to terrorist tactics.

However, besides the successful conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives to which participants in this study attributed the relative peace and security in Dori and Amataltal, the specific context of each country and the specific experiences of the different communities in each country might better explain why, for example, the Fulani in central Mali or some parts of Burkina Faso, and the Tuaregs of Northern Mali easily joined the jihadist movement, whereas their co-ethnics of the Agadez region or Dori did not.

The different ethnic groups of the Sahel, who have been divided between several countries by Western colonization, had established kingdoms and empires (e.g., the empires of Kanem, Bornou, Mali, Songhai, or the Mossi empire). These kingdoms and empires had fought wars against each other for centuries just like in Medieval Europe. For example, the Hausas, who are known as successful traders and who live in parts of Niger and Nigeria, went to war against the Tuaregs, who kicked them out of Northern Niger in the 17th-18th century, before their territory was conquered by the Fulani.[9] Likewise, the Songhai empire fought wars against neighboring empires, and was also fought by the Tuaregs, Fulani, and Mossi people. Under the leadership of Ousmane Dan Fodio, the Fulani conquered some Hausa states in the 18th century and converted them to Islam. These historical inter-ethnic rivalries have not completely died in the current states in which these different ethnic groups find themselves, which partly explains the recurrence of ethnic-based conflicts such as the ones led the Tuaregs.

## The Tuareg-led rebellions

The Tuaregs, who were divided by the European colonizers in newly created states (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Libya, and Algeria) have been waging armed rebellions against the national government in Mali since the 1960s and in Niger in the 1990s and in 2007. The Tuareg rebellion

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[8] Brian Arva & James A. Piazza (2016). Spatial Distribution of Minority Communities and Terrorism: Domestic Concentration versus Transnational Dispersion. *Defence and Peace Economics*, *27*(1), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2015.1055091

[9] Donaint & Lancrenon, *Le Niger*, pp.44-45.

in Niger was initiated in the 1990s by Tuareg exiles, especially military officers who deserted or were dismissed from the national army and who exiled to Libya and Algeria, some of them serving in Ghadaffi's army and considering themselves of Arab descent.[10]

Besides these inter-ethnic rivalries, the poor economic performance of Niger and Burkina Faso partly explain the armed conflicts and the political violence that they experience. Even though Burkina Faso has a better ranking than Niger in terms of economic and human development (see the UNDP Human Development Index 2019), it shares with Niger a number of common features: a large-scale poverty, a fast growing population with a youth bulge (more than 60% of the population are not older than 25)[11], environmental degradation with progressive desertification in the North, recurrent farmers and herders disputes, and a terrorist crisis generated by home-grown and foreign jihadi groups that have been perpetrating attacks against the government armed forces, government representatives, civil servants, and ordinary civilians mainly in the Northern and Eastern regions of Burkina Faso that border Mali and Niger, or in the Tillabery and Diffa regions of Niger that borders Mali and Northern Nigeria.

## Interfaith relations

A last layer, also identity-related, that sheds light on armed conflicts, including jihadist violence, across the Sahel, is the interaction between religious communities. Most of Niger's citizens are Muslims (about 98%).[12] In Burkina Faso, the Muslim population is around 62%. The presence of Islam, which dates to the eight century BCE is felt more strongly in Niger than in Burkina Faso, partly due to Niger's being close to North Africa. The strong influence of Islam is felt through the clothing of men and women –for example, most women and girls wear the burqa in Niger –the pace of daily life with the five prayers prescribed by the Quran, and the fact that very few restaurants sell alcohol. In general, the Islam practiced in Niger, Burkina Faso, and in most of West Africa, is moderate and tolerant. However, in 2012, there were violent anti-Christian demonstrations led by Muslim extremists, very likely manipulated by fundamentalist preachers, in

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[10] See Andre Salifou, *La question touarègue au Niger*, Paris : Karthala, 1993, pp. 109 ff.
[11] Niger's women have the highest fertility rate of the world (an average of 7.6 children per woman) and about 75% of the women get married by the age of 18, which interrupts their schooling and compels them to become mothers and housemaids. See Infos Niger, https://www.infos-niger.com/le-niger/demographie/
[12] See *Infos Niger,* available at https://www.infos-niger.com/le-niger/peuples/ (accessed 09/05/2021).

reaction to a film produced in the United States titled *The Innocence of Muslims*, a film considered offensive to Islam by many Muslims.

During these demonstrations, some Christian churches, especially in Zinder were burnt down and others damaged by angry mobs. In 2015, other violent anti-Christian demonstrations broke out in Niamey and Zinder in reaction to the cartooning of Prophet Mahomet by the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo and to the international campaign « I am Charlie Hebdo ». About 70 churches were burnt down and damaged, and businesses belonging to Christians, especially French expatriates, were looted and damaged by violent protesters encouraged by young extremists. In Niamey, Muslim extremists were reportedly trying to identify and locate Christians by asking: "Are you Allah Akbar or are you Hallelujah?"

The attacks were also directed against symbols of the French presence in Niger. This anti-Christian violence came as a surprise and a shock for many Christians because they have been living in good terms with their Muslim neighbors for years.

In Burkina Faso, Muslim-Christian relations have been in general peaceful and friendly. Within the same family, there are often members of different faith communities, and marriages between Christians and Muslims are not rare. However, since the outbreak of the jihadist movement in the Northern Mali and in the Sahel following the Arab Spring and the collapse of the Kadhaffi regime, a wave of extremist Islam has been threatening the harmony between the two religious communities, even though efforts are made by leaders on both sides to preserve it. For example, the Global Terrorism Database recorded fourteen (14) incidents targeting religious figures or institutions in Burkina Faso from 2015 to 2019. Six of those incidents were perpetrated by Muslim or Fulani extremists. Some pastors, priests, and imams were kidnapped or killed, and churches were attacked by suspected jihadist militants particularly in the Sahel and Eastern regions, which compelled some Christian religious leaders to close their churches and leave some localities for security reasons.

In sum, from the data gathered through desk research and from the field trip in Niger and Burkina, one could map the conflict and security situation in the two countries with the following diagram that shows the different drivers of the conflict, terrorism, and insecurity.

Smuggling & transnational organized crime (illicit traffickings)

Large scale poverty & youth unemployment

Jihadist ideology

Armed violence/ Terrorism/ Insecurity

State fragility (weak security apparatus, corruption, anti-government grievances)

Nomadism-related challenges/ Recurrent farmers-herders disputes

Bad neighborhood & arms proliferation (Mali-Chad-Libya-Algeria-Nigeria)

Inter-ethnic conflicts or rivalries between factions

How could then Amataltal and Dori manage to preserve a relative peace and security in this violent national and regional context? And what lessons can be learnt from the experiences of these two localities? The next sections will try to answer these questions by analyzing the data collected through interviews with natives, residents, and key local actors.

## II.2. How Peace and Security Have Been Maintained in Amataltal/Agadez

Because of its geographic position – close to the border with Libya and Algeria – the Air region, in general, is a focus of attention of the government, the UN, and Western countries' efforts to curtail illegal migrations towards Europe and transnational illicit trafficking of migrants, drug, and arms. Several international and local organizations (e.g., IOM, Caritas, the Association of Journalists for Security and Migrations…) along with the government of Niger are working on issues related to migration and human trafficking in that region. Nonetheless, one native of Agadez who is very familiar with the region, and with the peacebuilding and countering violent extremism (CVE) initiatives taken indicated that since the end of the Tuareg-led rebellion, the interventions by international NGOs were rather limited in that region. Local people were able to find local solutions to their conflicts and to preserve peace and security after the peace agreement that officially ended the Tuareg rebellion. Former combatants, in collaboration with traditional leaders,

especially the Sultan, and the government, have worked with local peace committees to identify individuals involved in acts that could endanger the security of their communities, to keep away the jihadist groups, and protect their communities from the jihadist ideology and violence. They did so, among other things, by monitoring the development of extremist views and preventing their spread.[13]

Indeed, the interview data collected in Amataltal, the city of Agadez, and Niamey suggest that local actors, often with the support of the national government or some international partners, created the conditions that have helped maintain peace and security in Amataltal and the Agadez region at large. At least ten major factors and initiatives emerge from a thematic coding and analysis of the interview data. These factors and initiatives can be ranked based on their recurrence through the data or how many times they were referred to by the respondents when asked to explain why there has been this relative peace and security in Amataltal and in Agadez (see chart 1).

*Chart 1. Causes of the relative peace and security in Amataltal-Agadez*

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[13] Centre National d'Etudes Stratégiques et de Sécurité, *Stratégie Nationale de Prévention de la Radicalisation et de l'Extrémisme Violent- Niger,* version provisoire, aout 2019, p. 35

**Causes of relative peace and security in Amataltal-Agadez**

| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| SHARING OF WATER POINTS AND GRAZING AREAS | 1 |
| MINGLING OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS | 1 |
| IMPACTFUL ROLE PLAYED BY WOMEN | 1 |
| TRUSTFUL CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION | 2 |
| JOKING KINSHIP BETWEEN ETHNIC GROUPS | 2 |
| FAVORING LOCAL SOLUTIONS | 2 |
| DEDICATION OF PEOPLE TO RECONCILIATION AND… | 2 |
| SOCIO-ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION OF FORMER… | 3 |
| LOCAL PEACEMAKING EXPERTISE | 3 |
| REJECTION OF JIHADIST IDEOLOGY AND MILITANTS BY… | 4 |
| GEOGRAPHIC POSITION | 5 |
| ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURES FOR PEACE | 5 |
| PEACE ACTIVISM OF LOCAL LEADERS | 6 |
| PEACE AGREEMENT | 7 |
| DECENTRALIZATION AND POLITICAL INCLUSION OF… | 9 |
| VOCATIONAL TRAINING THAT CREATES INCOME-… | 11 |
| COMMITMENT OF THE POPULATION TO PEACE AND… | 14 |
| COMMITMENT OF FORMER REBELS TO DEMOCRACY FOR… | 15 |
| PEACE COMMITTEES | 21 |
| PEACE EDUCATION THROUGH PEACE CARAVANS | 22 |

As the chart above shows, based on the number of references by respondents, the following factors and initiatives were cited by order of importance as having contributed to the preservation of peace and security:

1. Peace education and awareness campaigns through peace caravans. The peace caravans (or *Taglam Taher* in Tamasheq) are an association whose members work for peace, gather and share information about what is happening, monitor and report the movements of people across the region and the desert that separates Niger, Chad, Libya, and Algeria. As the spokesperson of the peace caravans put it: "The strength of this association is that nothing happens in the region, even in the desert, without us being informed."

2. The work of local peace committees under the leadership of the regional peace and security commission, an organ of the regional council in Agadez. Through these peace committees, former combatants, traditional and religious leaders, and other resource-persons raise the awareness of the population about the importance of maintaining peace and security in order to bring about development, for they realized that development is what they want and there is no development without peace and security.

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3. The commitment of former combatants of the Tuareg rebellion to peaceful change through democratic means and their involvement in intelligence, securitization, and peacebuilding activities. Many former combatants were elected to leadership positions after the peace agreement and understood that they were better able to achieve the change they wanted through the ballot box rather than through arms. "After the fall of the Kadhaffi regime, a local expert remembers, the Tuaregs who came to Niger, unlike those in Mali, preferred to come without arms and opted for the democratic path rather than the path of arms to have the change they wanted. Because they saw what the ex-combatants had done in Agadez." Thus, the former combatants became peacemakers in Agadez and inspired others to renounce violence and seek peaceful, democratic ways to resolve their conflicts and change the *status quo*. Seeing their success in bringing about change and development in their communities, some Tuaregs from Mali felt inspired by their example and have been trying to imitate them.

4. The commitment of the whole population to peace and reconciliation through their involvement in initiatives for the preservation of peace and security after the signing of the peace agreement that ended the rebellion. After all the suffering that they endured during the rebellion and after becoming aware of the importance of peace, the population of Agadez willingly participated in efforts to maintain peace by denouncing and reporting criminals, thieves, and anyone or anything that threatened their community's security. This has contributed to the low crime rate that the police reported in the whole Agadez region along the years.

5. Efforts made by local actors to create employment and economic opportunities, e.g., through vocational trainings that helped keep the youth busy and provided them with sources of income. On this topic, one respondent observed: "Usually, it is through the youth that jihadist groups manage to establish themselves in a locality. If young people have activities that keep them busy and are educated about the importance of peace, they will not go to these groups."

6. The peace agreement that ended the Tuareg rebellion in Niger, especially the efforts made as a result of the implementation of the peace agreement to promote the disarmament of combatants, a more decentralized governance that helped the population managed their own affair through elected leaders, the political inclusion of minority groups, and the socio-economic reintegration of former combatants.[14] Most former combatants were elected or appointed to political positions, joined the armed forces of Niger, got vocational training that helped them to

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[14] See Peace agreement….

start income-generating activities and to participate actively in the restoration of peace and development efforts in their region.

7.      The peace activism of local community, religious, traditional, and political leaders, including women and youth leaders who got involved in efforts to preserve peace and security after the armed rebellion. These different leaders acquired from their experience during and after the civil war some expertise – that one could consider as local peacemaking and peacebuilding expertise – and they favored the search for local solutions to their peace and development problems. Amataltal, which is the village of one of the former mayors of the Ingall department, was lucky to be selected, under the leader of that mayor, to host many activities for peace and had become a kind of regional hub for the promotion of peace and security.

8.      The establishment of mechanisms to monitor, report, and manage conflicts and other threats to peace and security, including in each commune and village, throughout the Agadez region, what John Paul Lederach would call "local infrastructures for peace."

9.      The geographic position of Amataltal has also cited by five respondents as one of the factors that accounts for the relative peace and security in that village. For, they explained, first, Amataltal, is far from the borders with troubled neighboring countries, and second, it is less accessible to jihadist groups.

10.     Some good local practices, including the joking kinship that traditionally forbids disputes and diffuses tensions between some ethnic communities such as the Tuaregs  and the Hausas, the mingling of ethnic groups, the readiness of the population to trust and collaborate with the government security forces by reporting suspicious persons and activities, and the sharing of water points and grazing areas for animals, were also mentioned as important factors that have helped preserve peace in the whole Agadez region.

Causes of the relative peace and security in Amataltal-Agadez

- Peace education through peace caravans
- Peace committees
- Commitment of former rebels to democracy for change
- Commitment of the population to peace and security
- Vocational training that creates income-generating activities for the youth
- Decentralization and political inclusion of minorities
- Peace agreement
- Peace activism of local leaders
- Establishment of local infrastructures for peace
- Geographic position
- Rejection of jihadist ideology and militants by the population
- Local peacemaking expertise
- Socio-economic reintegration of former combatants
- Dedication of people to reconciliation and community welfare
- Favoring local solutions

Thus, the story behind the peacefulness of Amataltal is quite simple. During the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s in Niger, their home region was very affected by the war and the Tuareg

people suffered very much until a negotiated agreement with the government of Niger put an end to the war. Drawing lessons from their painful experiences of the war, the people themselves decided not to resort any more to arms to settle their conflicts with others. Moreover, community leaders and former combatants became involved in peacebuilding activities and were integrated in the government decision-making spheres at various levels. The role played by the former combatants has been critical to foster peace and social cohesion in the village of Amataltal, where many of them come from, but also in the rest of the Agadez region. After participating in various armed struggles, they became aware of the destruction and suffering that come with war, and they learnt to appreciate the value of peace. As two respondents put it, "the person who starts a fire knows better than anyone else, how to put it out." Having contributed to wage the armed rebellion, these former combatants became the primary peacebuilders in the whole Agadez region, educating others on how to prevent and avoid another war, monitoring threats to peace, discouraging and fighting organized crime, and collaborating with the government, local traditional and religious leaders to promote peace and social cohesion. In short, the peacebuilding strategy implemented in Agadez has been population-centric, for it emphasizes educating and sensitizing the population on the need to preserve peace and involving the population in promoting peace and security by denouncing any threat to the community's safety.

Amataltal, as we have seen above, was privileged to be selected as the focal point for many meetings and activities for peace, as well as many peacebuilding and development initiatives, e.g., the peace caravans.[15] After participating in various armed rebellions, natives of Amataltal have also accumulated enough experience about conflict and peacemaking. This means that Amataltal has no shortage of local experts who know, from experience, how to prevent or resolve conflict. The peacebuilding work done in Amataltal as well as its geographic position made it difficult for terrorist groups to access the and operate there. As one respondent from Amataltal put it, "the terrorists could not find a window to enter Amataltal." As a result of the work of local leaders and the involvement of the whole population for the preservation of peace and the promotion of tolerance and dialogue among the various communities, the people of Amataltal and of the whole

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15 "Amataltal is a village located in the municipality of Ingall. It is the village of the former mayor of Ingall (…). He is a native of this village. Because of this, Amataltal has served as a focal point for some peace meetings. The former mayor had made Amataltal, his native village, the hub of various initiatives for the promotion of peace thanks to the funding that NGOs received, NGOs in which Amataltal was lucky to have many natives." Interview with former government official and native of Agadez.

Agadez region have been enjoying the fruit of religious moderation and tolerance and peaceful coexistence between ethnic communities. "One of the reasons why jihadists have not taken root and carried out attacks here, a teacher from Amataltal told us, is that our youth have rejected them and have understood that it is a pointless fight."

Finally, respondents have mentioned decentralization and political inclusion initiatives that provided opportunities for previously marginalized groups such as the Tuaregs to participate in decision-making at different levels and that brought decision-makers closer to the people. "Decentralization, a respondent said, has played an important role because it has brought the people closer to the government, and it is the people themselves who decide to make themselves secure, using their knowledge of the region, of its geography and its inhabitants. These are local actors who are there and who have eyes and ears almost everywhere, and therefore get the information they need to act." In contrast to the positive experience of the Agadez region, feelings of marginalization and political exclusion have driven some ethnic communities in other regions such as Diffa to join the jihadist groups. "For example, a local leader narrated, the state created a department, Gigimi, in Diffa to which the Boudouma were to be attached and assimilated. However, in this new department, the Kanouri being the majority, the Boudouma, who found themselves in a minority situation, felt marginalized. Many were frustrated by this measure of the State in which they did not recognize themselves. As a result, the Boudouma were the first to join the Boko Haram insurgency in the Diffa region."

## II.3. Explaining the Relative Peace and Security in Dori

Unlike Amataltal, which is a small village, Dori is a city, the main city of the northern Sahel region in Burkina Faso, a small, land-locked country of 274.00 sq km that shares borders with six neighboring countries, namely Mali in the North, Niger in the East, and Côte d'ivoire, Ghana, Benin and Togo, four coastal countries which give it access to the sea in the South. Whereas Amataltal and the Agadez region, in general, experienced a Tuareg-led armed insurgency against the government of Niger in the 1990s and in 2007, Dori was not involved in any armed rebellion against the government of Burkina Faso.

Dori, like the rest of the Burkina Faso Sahel region, is arid, semi-desertic, and mainly populated by ethnic Fulanis, a nomadic pastoralist group that is scattered all over Western and

Central Africa. The city is also the place where government agencies, the defense and security forces, NGOs, and international organizations have their main offices for the whole region. Even though this northern Sahel region, which is one of the 13 administrative regions of Burkina Faso, is considered as the home of the Fulani people, its population is more and more ethnically diverse.

**Monument at the entrance of Dori featuring key elements of Fulani culture**



Other ethnic groups, speaking different languages coexist there along with the Fulanis, for example, the Tuaregs and Bellas, who are also nomadic, pastoralist groups, and sedentary farmers and traders such as the Fulse, Gourmantches, Sonrhai, and Mossi, Dogons, Bissa, Hausas, and Arabs.

Like the Agadez region in Niger, the Sahel region in Burkina Faso is rich in minerals, especially gold that is extracted mainly by foreign mining companies and local artisanal miners. The most common conflicts in the region, before the advent of the jihadist insurgent groups, were

over grazing land and water points and over mining sites, opposing respectively herders and farmers, and, on the other hand, conflicts between foreign mining companies and the local population or artisanal gold panners. The jihadist movements leveraged these local conflicts and, in some places, fueled them in order to recruit militants and achieve their agenda.[16] However, some would put it otherwise and argue that the local conflicting parties used the jihadist rhetoric to get external support, more visibility, express their grievances against the government, and advance their respective agendas. No matter how we view the situation, one thing is sure, the jihadist rhetoric made the local conflict situation more complex, more violent, and more intractable in Burkina Faso, particularly in the tri-border region between Mali, Niger, and Mali.

Being the main city of a whole region, Dori, unlike Amataltal, offers to its inhabitants better economic opportunities, and the best public infrastructure, social and security services of the region. According to some observers, that might explain why Dori has remained relatively more peaceful and safer than other cities and villages of the region. However, access to economic opportunities and basic social services alone cannot account for the relative peacefulness of Dori. According to the Global Terrorism Data, the city of Djibo and other cities such as Timbuktu, Gao or Mopti in Mali have the same level of development and access to basic social services as Dori, but they all recorded more terrorist incidents than Dori between 2015 and 2020. Therefore, there are other factors that we need to identify to account for the relative peace and security that Dori enjoys.

Here again, like in the case of Amataltal, dominant, recurrent themes emerge from the results of the thematic coding and analysis of the data collected through interviews with 14 key actors who reside in Dori or other areas of Burkina Faso northern Sahel region. The 14 respondents attributed the relative peace and security in Dori to the following factors and initiatives by order of importance as illustrated in the charts:

i) The peace activism of local leaders, including religious, traditional, youth and women leaders, who established well regarded local infrastructures for peace that brought Christian and Muslim religious leaders to collaborate with traditional chiefs and political leaders in inter-religious dialogue and tolerance initiatives.

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[16] See Nabons Laafi Diallo, *Le terrorisme au Sahel : Dynamique de l'extrémisme violent et lutte anti-terroriste. Un regard à partir du Burkina Faso.*Paris : L'Harmattan, 2020, pp.104 ff.

ii) Peace education and awareness campaigns like the peace caravans in Agadez meant to foster harmonious relationships between the various ethnic and religious communities, and promote peace and development in Dori and its surroundings to the benefit of all without exclusion.

iii) The population's commitment to peace and rejection of the jihadists' extremist ideology, as result of the prevailing culture of tolerance and the mingling of ethnic groups that have been developed in Dori.

iv) The greater presence of the government that makes available for the population basic infrastructures and social services.

v) The key role played by local peace committees in conflict prevention and resolution through mediations and conflict monitoring.

vi) Divine protection

vii) The greater availability of vocational training, employment, and economic opportunities in the city of Dori, which keeps the youth busy and reduces their vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist organizations.

viii) The geographic position of Dori that makes it less accessible to jihadist groups.

ix) The tendency of the people in Dori to search for local solutions to peace and security related issues, and finally,

x) Specific local factors and practices such as the higher level of education of the population, the development of a local peacemaking expertise and a traditional democratic system that bans class-based or ethnic discrimination, and the people's willingness to trust and collaborate with the military.

*Chart 2.Causes of the relative peace and security in Dori*



## Causes of relative peace and security in Dori

| Cause | Value |
|---|---|
| TRUSTFUL CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION | 1 |
| TRADITIONAL NON-DISCRIMINATORY DEMOCRACY | 1 |
| LOCAL PEACEMAKING EXPERTISE | 1 |
| HIGHER LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF THE POPULATION OF DORI | 1 |
| GEOGRAPHIC POSITION | 2 |
| FAVORING LOCAL SOLUTIONS | 2 |
| VOCATIONAL TRAINING THAT CREATES INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES FOR THE YOUTH | 2 |
| EXISTENCE OF EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH | 3 |
| DIVINE PROTECTION | 3 |
| PEACE COMMITTEES | 4 |
| MINGLING OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS | 5 |
| GREATER GOVERNMENT PRESENCE AND SOCIAL SERVICES | 5 |
| COMMITMENT OF THE POPULATION TO PEACE AND SECURITY | 5 |
| REJECTION OF JIHADIST IDEOLOGY AND MILITANTS BY THE POPULATION | 9 |
| PEACE EDUCATION THROUGH PEACE CARAVANS | 10 |
| ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURES FOR PEACE | 12 |
| INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE PROMOTED BY UFC-DORI | 13 |
| PEACE ACTIVISM OF LOCAL LEADERS | 20 |

*Chart 3. Hierarchy chart-Causes of Peace*



Causes of relative peace and security in Dori

- Peace activism of local leaders
- Inter-religious dialogue  and tolerance promoted by UFC-Dori
- Establishment of local infrastructures for peace
- Peace education through peace caravans
- Rejection of jihadist ideology and militants by the population
- Commitment of the population to peace and security
- Greater government presence and social services
- Mingling of different ethnic groups
- Peace committees
- Divine protection
- Existence of employment and economic opportunities for youth
- Vocational training that creates income-generating activities for the youth
- Favoring local solutions
- Geographic position
- Higher level of education of the population of Dori
- Local peacemaking expertise
- Traditional non-discriminatory democracy
- Trustful civil-military cooperation
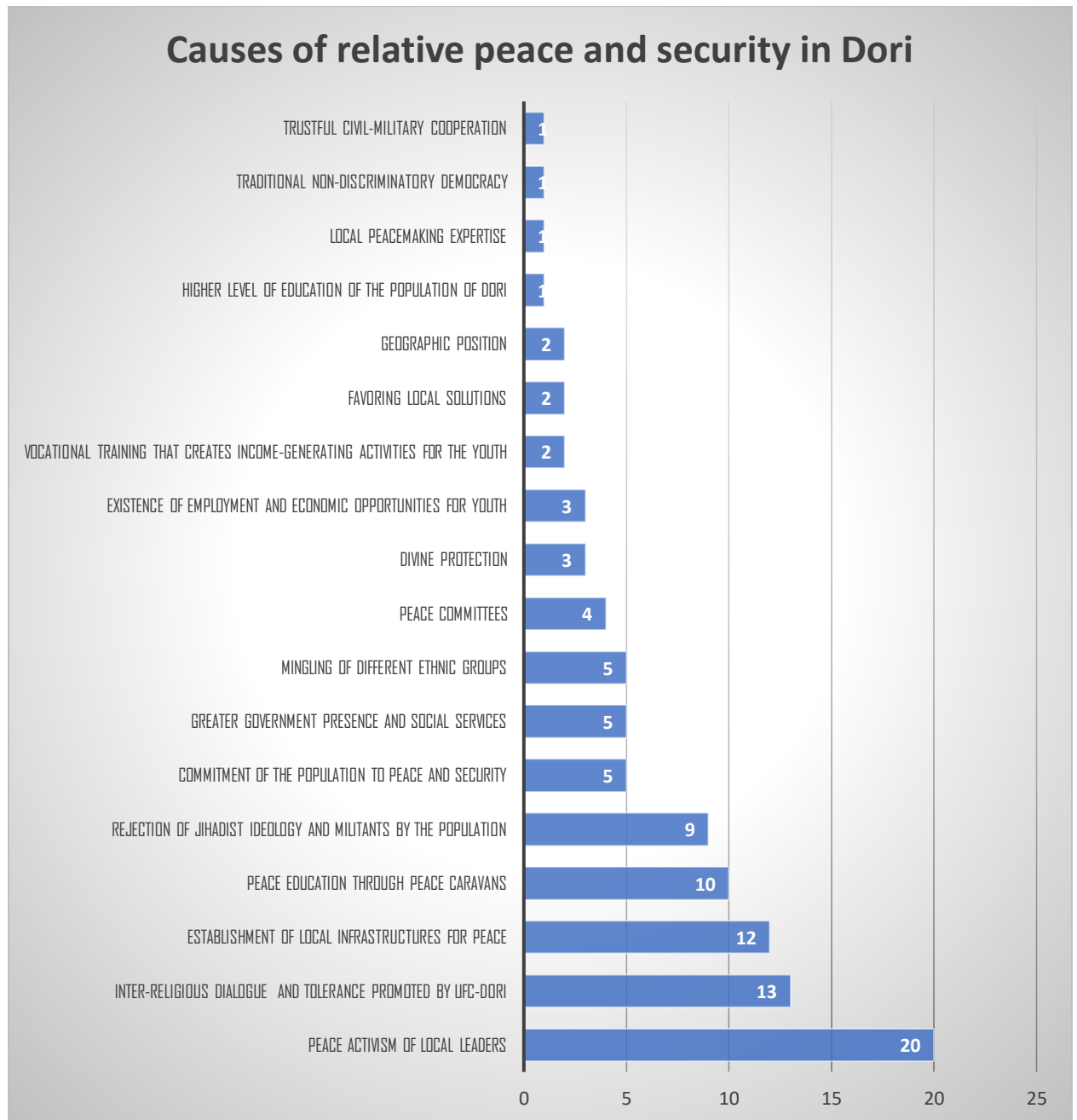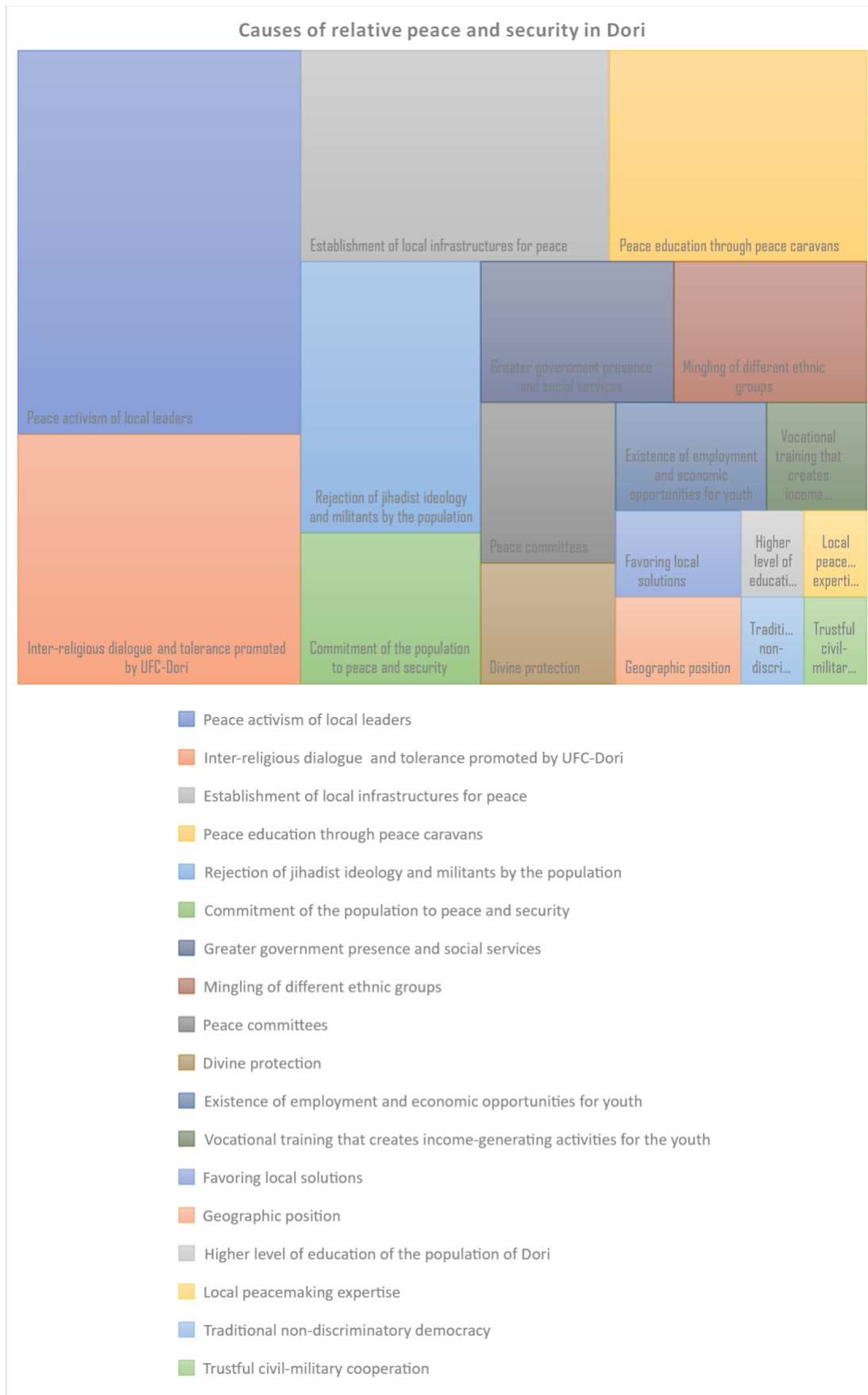
Let us elaborate a bit more on these different factors and initiatives.

*The peace activism of local leader and contribution of local infrastructures for peace*
In trying to explain why Dori has remained quite peaceful and secure, three respondents evoked divine protection and two others pointed to Dori's geographic location at the center of the Sahel region and to the fact that the city is partly surrounded by a pond. However, other respondents contend that Dori is more accessible than other localities that suffer from terrorism and therefore, its geographic location cannot explain its peacefulness. They rather point to the peace activism of local leaders, the commitment of the population to peace, and the faith testimony of key local organizations and posed acts of fraternity, compassion, and mutual care towards each other beyond their religious differences.

**Interreligious Work**

Repeatedly, respondents mentioned the higher number of initiatives taken in Dori and the surroundings to promote social cohesion, peace, and inter-religious dialogue and tolerance since the 1960s by various organizations.  Among the initiatives in Dori, respondents  also cited the work of local peace committees, of a council of sages established by the government, and the organization of peace caravans.

Interreligious peacebuilding work began in 1969 when Christians and Muslims came together to fight famine and promote social cohesion and tolerance between Christian and Muslim believers in Dori. One respondent explained why the people of Dori rejected jihadism as follows: "We saw violent extremism coming in time and we took initiatives to avoid it in Dori. We have tried to prevent this and to avoid religious conflicts through educational talks, preaching at the mosque, awareness programs on the radio and workshops, and…especially the vocational trainings that have allowed many young people to keep busy and earn money. You know, armed groups recruit their militants in two ways: 1) by word, and 2) by money."

A prominent leader of the Muslim community of Dori also shared with us about his personal contribution: "My collaboration with the bishop…has shown people that there is no difference between us, that nothing should separate us, nor prevent us from living or working together." Following the exhortations of their leaders, the population has rejected the jihadist ideology and refused to join the jihadist groups. A respondent, for example, told this story of a

young man from Dori who was approached by a terrorist group that offered him money to join them. "But the youngster came back to us to report this recruitment attempt and showed us the money he received from the group."

Religious leaders have been encouraging the creation of frameworks through which Muslims and Christians, women, and young people can come together, share, celebrate their joyful moments, or show compassion and support to each other during painful moments. All this has contributed to foster a climate of religious tolerance and social cohesion that explain why the population of Dori, like those of Amataltal and Agadez in general, rejected the extremist ideas of jihadist groups, making it difficult, and even impossible, for them to settle, recruit militants and sympathizers, and operate in Dori.

"The people of Dori, a local community leader insisted, have not joined the jihadist groups or their cause, unlike in other parts of the Sahel. Once you join these groups, you make enemies and you become the enemy of some persons. For me, the main reason why Dori has been relatively spared from terrorist attacks is that the people of Dori have refused to embrace the jihadist cause and join the jihadist groups. If some children from Dori had agreed to join them, we would have had many terrorist attacks as well." Another resident of Dori, in the same line, said: "From the information that I have, it seems that the jihadists have tried to recruit people here in Dori. And they started with preaching. But people did not listen to them and did not want to join. Since people did not adhere to their extremist ideas, this certainly helped to maintain peace and security in Dori. Elsewhere, such as in Tin Akoff, there has also been preaching, and there is recruitment."

Furthermore, key local actors have made the people of Dori less vulnerable to jihadist indoctrination and recruitment through two other initiatives: i) community development projects, especially the "boulis" that bring together farmers and herders, and the different groups around water points for the drinking of animals or gardening (see picture of a bouli in Annex 2); and ii) religious education programs combined with vocational trainings and job placements to provide income-generating activities to the youth (especially Qu'ranic school students).

**The local peace committees**

Like in Amataltal, another key actor that played a major role in the preservation of peace and security in Dori has been the local peace committees (LPCs), created by a major local institution in 2015, to promote peace and justice within the communities without resorting to courts

and other state institutions. Their members are carefully selected from the different ethnic and religious communities to ensure that everyone in the village feels represented. The LPC members have been doing outreach by going door to door, and neighborhood to neighborhood.

A respondent explained how the LPCs have been working to prevent violent extremism in Dori and other areas: "It has been noticed that jihadist groups usually go through children to get news and access to certain people in a locality. So, having understood this, the LPCs in their door-to-door sensitization advised children not to talk to strangers and to report to the LPCs strangers who seek information from them. They have also sensitized the youth to warn them that militants from jihadist groups will seek to recruit them by offering them money and have advised them to reject such offers which are dangerous to themselves and to the community. LPCs also try to identify, accompany, and counsel young people who engage in deviant behavior, e.g., drug consumption."

*The commitment of the population to peace and their rejection of the jihadist ideology*

Among the dominant themes that emerged from the Dori interviews data, there is the strong commitment of the people of Dori to peace, and their rejection of extremist ideas of the jihadist groups. The youth, for instance, mobilized and created concertation frameworks through which they conducted awareness campaigns and other activities for peace and social cohesion (such as tea-debates). In that regard, the major lesson that one may draw from the experiences of the people of Amataltal, Agadez, and Dori is that violent extremist organizations like the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, the Group of Support for Islam and Muslims, or Ansarul Islam cannot access, settle, and conduct their violent operations in a village or city unless they get in that locality supporters, militants, or accomplices who embrace their extremist ideas and cause. These groups failed to obtain that local support both in Agadez and in Dori and, as a result, they could not do anything there.

Other important factors and initiatives that contributed to the relative peace and security in Dori mentioned by research participants include the greater presence of the government, the higher level of economic development and education, the mingling of ethnic groups, the availability of employment and economic opportunities made possible by gold mining and vocational trainings offered to the youth in the city of Dori.

*Greater government presence and higher level of development in Dori*

The greater presence of the government, the relatively higher level of economic development, literacy rate, and the quality of the infrastructures and social services in Dori, compared to the rest of the Sahel region, have had concrete and tangible results: a greater number of youth who are educated, busy, and have an income-generating activity in Dori; a more satisfactory administrative and security governance; and a better and easier access to social services for the population. In contrast, a government official in Niger observed that "In the Tillabéry region [that has been very affected by terrorist attacks], the state has little presence and there is little infrastructure or very few basic social services. In this region, the state is seen as a spoiler by the herders, because the state has never intervened to protect them or their livestock in case of attacks and theft." Consequently, it seems that the greater government presence and investment in Dori has made a key difference in terms of human security indicators in general (easier access to basic social services, more public infrastructure, and more education and employment opportunities to the people who live in that city). This has contributed to reduce the likelihood of the population's frustration and anti-government grievances in Dori compared to other localities of the Sahel region.

Finally, in Dori, there is some space and opportunity offered by civil society organizations (e.g., Tartit) to minority groups to voice their concerns and advocate for their rights. One respondent observed: "There is no political or socio-economic discrimination in Dori. There is no traditional structure that discriminates. For example, Arba Diallo [the late elected mayor and member of parliament of Dori] was not a member of the royal family but was able to be deputy mayor of Dori for a long time. In Dori, the particularity is that those who are considered slaves have the same names as their masters. For example, there are Dickos who are considered as nobles whereas other Dickos are common people without any nobility title. This is inconceivable in Djibo, for example, where there is a rigid traditional hierarchy. In Dori, there is this kind of traditional democracy that bans class-based hierarchy and discrimination, unlike in Oudalan, where the Bella, a minority group, are considered less than nothing and have no right to anything. This is why many Bellas, a respondent explained, joined the armed terrorist groups, out of frustration with the traditional hierarchy system, and took up arms."

In summary, Dori has preserved a relative peace and security not only thanks to the establishment of local infrastructures for peace (including the peace committees),  the peace

activism of local leaders, and the commitment of its population to peace, but also thanks to the higher level of economic development and education, easier access to basic social services, the availability of economic and vocational training opportunities facilitated by a more visible government presence and investment. The geographic position of Dori and the presence of a larger government security apparatus in that city might have reduced Dori's vulnerability to terrorist attacks, but these factors alone cannot explain why other cities with a similar geographic position and security apparatus have been repeatedly attacked. One research participant in Dori captured succinctly the theories of change implicit in most of the conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives taken by local actors in that city and in Amataltal through this statement: "Armed groups recruit their militants in two ways: by using words, and by using money. Through outreach and educational talks, we have been able to counteract the extremist messages of armed groups that claim to wage jihad. And through vocational training, we have reduced the temptation of financial benefits that these groups use to lure some youth."

## III. Insights for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Lessons from Amataltal and Dori

Even though each conflict context is specific, a few lessons and best practices might be learnt from the local peacebuilding and conflict prevention experiences described above.

**1)** **Sensitizing or educating people for peace, e.g., through peace caravans and awareness campaigns,** has been found by most respondents to be an effective way of turning them, especially the youth, away from the temptation of joining armed groups, particularly when these campaigns involve former combatants or rebels who have become aware of the futility of war in resolving problems. On this point, the government of Niger had an original, insightful approach to the problem of former combatants. Instead of systematically arresting, prosecuting, and sending to jail the former combatants of the Tuareg rebellion or of Boko Haram, the Niger government chose another approach: getting them to renounce armed struggle and to lay down their arms in return for an amnesty, vocational training and socio-economic reintegration. This government policy has helped demobilize and disarm many former rebels and jihadist militants, e.g., by sending some to a deradicalization center and establishing socio-economic reintegration programs for former combatants in general. Thus, policy-makers in conflict zones need to carefully consider how they

treat former fighters by striking a balance between the need for reconciliation and peace, and the need for justice.

**2)  Recruiting and integrating into the defense and security forces local young people who are natives of the communities affected by armed conflict and terrorism**: in  Amataltal, Agadez, and in Dori, at least five respondents indicated that this is an effective way of addressing feelings of ethnic discrimination and marginalization especially among minority groups, for it reinforces their patriotism and their sense of belonging to the same nation. From experience, the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace (HACP) in Niger learnt that military recruits from the conflict-affected localities know the local terrain and customs better, which makes the armed forces more effective and reduces the risks of abuses against the local populations.

According to the HACP, including former rebel leaders, former combatants, and members of conflict-affected communities in governance structures (the security sector, the judiciary, local and national government) have helped the security forces of Niger improve their relationships with the people of the Agadez region and turn away the youth of the region from terrorist groups, including the youth from nomadic communities such as the Fulani, Tuaregs and Toubous who have been traditionally reluctant to join the army and who have been the main targets of jihadist groups for recruitment in Niger and Mali. Likewise, the recruitment of local people in the army and the judiciary system has helped improve trust and collaboration between the local populations, the armed forces, and the judiciary in regions such as Tillabery and Diffa.

**3)  Establishing and providing adequate financial support to local peace committees**

There is evidence both from this study and previous research suggesting the effectiveness of local peace committees in local conflict prevention and peacebuilding. For example, in a chapter in a new book on political violence, Van Tongeren showed through a comparative case study, the pacifying effect of local peace committees in South Africa (between 1991 and 1995), Kenya, Burundi, South Sudan, and the DRC, five African countries that have had a peace agreement like Niger. As Van Tongeren observed, "Inclusivity, participation, and collaboration were essential. Many LPCs were informal, although in three countries—South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana—LPCs had a national mandate. These "peace infrastructures" were relatively successful. (…) Three of the five major national peace agreements failed, at least partly, through lack of inclusiveness and being

top-down focused. In many more African countries there are LPCs: Ethiopia, Central Africa Republic (CAR), Zimbabwe, and Guinea-Bissau, as well as throughout West Africa."[17]

When the different social groups that exist within the community feel represented in these committees, as we have seen in the cases of Amataltal and Dori, they acquire from the community members some recognition that gives them the required legitimacy and authority to intervene in conflicts, prevent violence, peacefully settle these conflicts, monitor and address potential threats to peace and security within the community. If given adequate financial and technical support, the local peace committees are very likely to help reduce violence across the Sahel region and Africa at large. This type of support may come in the form of collaboration between local and international actors that emphasizes local leadership and ownership as it happened with the Community Action Committees (CACs) in the framework of the USAID-sponsored Peace through Development Project (PDEV) II. As a woman leader in Dori testified, "The Community Action Committees (CACs) that were created under PDEV II have been very helpful. It was the strategy of PDEV II that the CACs applied, that is to say, to make people responsible for their behavior, their way of life, and for the prevention of conflicts." Likewise, local youth were able, through the support of USAID, to promote social cohesion through tea-debates, forum theaters, and training in villages around Dori, and by organizing various pacifying activities by commune so as to ensure that people from the 26 communes of Burkina Faso Sahel region come and share their experiences.

### 4) Creating employment and economic opportunities for the youth

Providing employment and economic opportunities, most often through vocational training and start-up funding, has also been repeatedly mentioned by respondents in Dori and in Niger as the most effective strategy to turn away most youth from terrorist groups, armed banditry, drug abuse, and other illegal activities. "To better protect civilians from terrorism, a respondent in Amataltal said, the government must create jobs, because when people do not have jobs and what they need, terrorists or other thugs can easily lure them with money."

### 5) Mitigating feelings of discrimination and exclusion among minority groups

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[17] Van Tongeren P. (2022) Local Peace Committees and How They Relate to Governments and Peace Agreements: Examples from Five African Countries. In: Allen S.H., Hancock L.E., Mitchell C., Mouly C. (eds) *Confronting Peace. Rethinking Political Violence*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67288-1_8

Another best practice that we learn from the interview data is that taking measures to mitigate or address anti-government grievances generated by feelings of discrimination and marginalization among minority groups is one of the most effective strategies to prevent violent conflict, armed insurgencies and terrorism. Beside unemployment, the lack of economic opportunities, and difficulties in meeting one's basic human needs, some respondents identified the feeling of discrimination and marginalization by some (minority) ethnic communities as a source of frustration and a driver of violent conflict, anti-government grievances, and terrorism in Niger and Burkina Faso. From the interviews, feelings of discrimination were found both in Niger and in Burkina Faso to be a key cause of grievances among some communities against the government and a major driver of radicalization and enrollment in terrorist groups. This is consistent with cross-national research by James Piazza and others who have found that socio-economic discrimination and political exclusion of minorities are strong predictors of terrorism.[18] One respondent in Dori advised: "The government must also avoid giving the impression that it favors certain villages. You will see villages where there are a road, clinics, schools, and others that do not even have a road or a clinic. This kind of discrimination makes it easy for people who feel disadvantaged to join armed groups against the government."

The chart below summarizes the best practices that emerge from the interview data, based on the number of references made by respondents to the initiatives or activities that were considered best practices for conflict prevention, countering violent extremism or peacebuilding.[19] The codebook (in Annex 4), which contains the results of the thematic coding and analysis of the interview data and the number of references for each code that was created, provides more information on the initiatives and activities that respondents identified as the most effective or as best practices.

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[18] See James Piazza and Todd Sandler (2011). Poverty, minority economic discrimination, and domestic terrorism. *Journal of Peace Research*, *48*(3), 339–353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310397404. See also James Piazza (2012). Types of Minority Discrimination and Terrorism. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, *29*(5), 521–546. https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894212456940
Choi, S.W & Piazza, J. A. (2016). Ethnic groups, political exclusion and domestic terrorism. *Defence and Peace Economics*, *27*(1), 37–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2014.987579

[19] The codebook (in Annex 4), which contains the results of the thematic coding and analysis of the interview data and the number of references for each code that was created, provides more information on the initiatives and activities that respondents identified as the most effective or as best practices.

Chart 4. Best practices



Best practices for promoting peace and security

| Practice | Value |
|---|---|
| Joking kinship between ethnic groups | 1 |
| Religious Education combined with Vocational Training | 1 |
| Mediator dialogues | 1 |
| Use of social media for early warning and peace education | 3 |
| Decentralization and political inclusion of minorities | 4 |
| DDR and socio-economic reintegration of former combatants | 5 |
| Recruiting and training local people in the military and… | 5 |
| Locally-led collaboration between local and international… | 6 |
| Public denounciation system | 6 |
| Citizen watch committees | 9 |
| Local peace committees | 17 |
| Creating job and economic opportunities for the youth | 30 |

## Concluding remarks

This study has sought to identify what has helped the people of Amataltal in Niger and Dori in Burkina Faso to maintain a relatively satisfactory level of peace and security amidst the jihadist storm that has been sweeping across the Sahara-Sahel region since 2011. The presentation of the study results offered here has been deliberately focused on the research questions and relevant recurrent themes highlighted by the respondents, leaving aside other interesting insights that one could retrieve from the rich interview data. A few concluding remarks could be made to close this study for the time being. First, peace does not come about randomly out of nowhere. It is the outcome of an intentional commitment and work of community members and local leaders who come together, often with the support of outsiders, to establish conditions for living and working together in a way that excludes violence and fosters constructive relationships among them. In other words, just like war, one does not wage and maintain peace cheaply and passively.

Secondly, the relative peace and security enjoyed by Dori, Amataltal, and the larger Agadez region resulted from initiatives taken by local actors who understood that peace cannot be

obtained only through military means, it requires local solutions, involving local leaders and the whole population, to satisfactorily address security, development, and governance issues. The theory of change underlying the conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives mentioned by the research participants suggests a human security approach that seeks to meet the basic human needs of the population without any discrimination, that involves local people and their leaders, and that is fully informed of the realities of the local context.

In short, the peace activism of local leaders, the commitment of the population to peace and social cohesion, and the establishment of local infrastructures for peace, especially locally-led peace committees, the offer of economic opportunities to youth, and a more visible, positive presence of the government have made a critical difference in terms of peace and security between Dori, Amataltal, and Agadez and other localities affected by jihadist terrorism in Niger and Burkina Faso.

This relative success, however, was not achieved without any obstacle. Respondents in both countries mentioned the lack of adequate financial and logistical resources to conduct their activities, the difficulties of communicating, travelling, and mobilizing people, and the difficult relationships that local civil society actors and international partners often had with government officials whenever they took a critical stance.

Research on local violence prevention and peacebuilding initiatives, designed and led by local actors, sometimes with external donors' support, has been bringing these last decades more and more evidence that such initiatives have effectively helped preserve peace, rebuild relationships between groups after violent conflict, and even prevent violent extremism such as in Dori and Amataltal. For example, Benjamin Maianga has shown how some local communities in southern Kaduna (Nigeria) have used (or could use) local traditions and practices such as ritual healing, storytelling, and the moral code of Pulaaku to overcome identity-based and socio-political rivalries as well as intergroup competition over land between Fulanis and other ethnic groups, and between Christians and Muslims, by leveraging their "shared identity, history, and cultures of peace".[20]

Pointing out that the democratization and other state-building strategies recommended by the post-cold war dominant liberal peace paradigm have not resulted in any sustainable peace in

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[20] Maiangwa, Benjamin. Peace (Re)building Initiatives: Insights from Southern Kaduna, Nigeria. Washington, D.C.: *RESOLVE Network*, 2021. https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2021.22.lpbi.

South Sudan from 2005 to 2013 despite various peace agreements, Emmaculate Asige Niaga observed that local approaches such as people-to-people dialogues could do better in sustaining peace in this country.[21] Even though this is easier said than done, especially in ethnically divided societies, all this research calls attention to the fact that local people are not only recipients of peacebuilding but are, and can be, change agents and key actors of violence prevention and peacebuilding initiatives in their societies.

In a study of inter-community conflicts that occurred between 2018 and 2019 in Burkina Faso, the National Office for the Prevention and Management of Community Conflicts (ONAPREGECC) observed that "For their resolution, the populations favor traditional organs and mechanisms which outperform modern organs and mechanisms with a rate of 56.7% of opinions expressed."[22] Similar opinions were also voiced by many research participants in Dori, Amataltal and Agadez. Nevertheless, if local conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms are often satisfactory, one should not forget that most of the armed conflicts and violence that local actors try to prevent or manage are most often driven by structural deficiencies—e.g., corruption, poor economic performance, poor governance, state fragility, weak security apparatus, illicit transnational flows—that people at the local level in Amataltal or Dori cannot fix with their local mechanisms. Local mechanisms need, therefore, to be supplemented with effective strategies to build strong states with strong institutions that can effectively fix these structural deficiencies.

**Future research paths**

The participants, while answering our research questions, raised, through their comments, other questions that are worth further investigation. First, there is the question of the role and effectiveness of the use of force by government security forces, pro-government militias or self-defense groups, and foreign troops to counter terrorism and restore peace in the Sahel and other terrorism-affected regions of the world. Even though no one denies that a timely and competent military response is necessary, and in some cases, a quick, effective military intervention is desperately needed when a terrorist attack unfolds, more and more people wonder why the increase

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[21] Liaga, Emmaculate Asige. Towards Local Approaches and Inclusive Peacebuilding in South Sudan. Washington, D.C.: *RESOLVE Network*, 2021. https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2021.23.lpbi.

[22] See synthesis of the study by Cryspin Laoundiki, « Conflits communautaires au Burkina : Les Hauts-Bassins, le Centre-nord et la Boucle du Mouhoun en tête de liste », *Lefaso.net*. https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article110318

of government military expenditures and large military deployments in terrorism-affected regions such as the Oudalan and Soum provinces in Burkina Faso, and in Tillabery and Diffa in Niger have not resulted in fewer terrorist incidents and improved security for civilians in these localities.

Second, some civilians became the targets of terrorist groups after collaborating with the government and the security forces who failed to protect them, and other civilians felt compelled to join the terrorist groups for security reasons. It has been observed in several places that civilians living in terrorism-affected regions face security risks whether they accept to collaborate with the government forces or with the armed terrorist groups. This came out clearly in a comment by one respondent in Niger: "In all our countries, the populations feel threatened. When the military comes, they kill, when the terrorists come, they kill. But who will be an accomplice of whom and who will work with whom? The poor populations are afraid of the terrorists and they are also afraid of the military. So the military must find a strategy that will make the people feel confident with the army. And when there will be this collaboration, it will avoid many blunders." Therefore, further research is needed to establish the operational and ethical conditions under which civilians can be encouraged to collaborate with the government and the military in counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism, and what needs to be done to foster trustful and secure civilian-military cooperation in conflict zones.

Finally, a third question that needs further investigation is the exact role that compliance with human rights norms should play in counterterrorism. If, as previous research indicated, the violation of people's physical integrity rights tends to fuel terrorism,[23] and on the other hand, fear of being accused or prosecuted for human rights abuses often impedes a timely intervention of the government armed forces in battlefields where lines between armed militants and noncombatants civilians are often blurred, how can the international community and human rights advocacy organizations help government security forces achieve military effectiveness and protect civilians while reducing risks of human rights abuses?

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[23] See James Walsh & James Piazza (2010). Why Respecting Physical Integrity Rights Reduces Terrorism. *Comparative Political Studies*, *43*(5), 551 577.https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414009356176

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# Annex documents

**Annex 1- Semi-structured interview questionnaire**

**Key Informant Semi-structured**

 **Interviews Questions**

**Title of Project:** Safe Havens Amidst the Jihadist Storm

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Susan Allen, Carter School, George Mason University

**Other Investigators**: Mathieu Bere, Carter School, George Mason University

**IRBNet number:** 1722477-1

1.What does peace mean for you and for most people here in Amataltal (or Dori)?

- For you here in Amataltal/Dori, when can you say that there is security? When can you say that you have peace?

- In other words, what are the concrete signs, the indicators that people refer to here to say whether they are safe? Or that they live in peace with each other?

2.From your experience, what has been the most effective way to achieve peace as you understand it? What has worked best in the initiatives that you took to ensure security in Amataltal/Dori?

3.How many terrorist attacks have you recorded here in Amataltal (or Dori)?

4.According to some reports, Amataltal (Dori)has recorded few attacks by jihadist armed groups compared to other localities in the region and the country, how do you explain that?

5.What initiatives have been taken here in Amataltal (or Dori, if in Dori) to prevent these groups from settling here, recruiting youth, spreading their extremist views of Islam through preaching or social, cultural activities, and attacking the civilian population?

6.With whom did you conduct these initiatives?

7.How did the implementation of these initiatives go?

8.What are the difficulties and the obstacles you encountered in implementing these initiatives? And more generally in trying to promote peace and resolve conflicts within your community?

10.How did you overcome these obstacles?

11.Which initiatives have been the most effective or successful in preventing violent extremism or resolving conflicts? What opportunities have contributed to implement the good practices?

12.Beyond the military counter-terrorism operations that the government and foreign armed forces conduct here, do you think that there are other more effective ways for the government to deal with the armed jihadist groups?

13.What could the government do to better to protect civilians or reduce attacks against civilians?

14.What could civilians do to contribute to protect themselves from terrorist attacks?

**15. Participant information /Demographics:**

**Nationality**

**Ethnic affiliation**

**Religious affiliation**
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Christian (Catholic)
- ☐ Christian (Protestant/Evangelical)
- ☐ Animist/African Traditional Religion
- ☐ No religion

**Region of origin**

**Place of residence**

**(Dori or Agadez)**

**Age**

☐ 18-25

☐ 26-30

☐ 31 -50

☐ 51 -60

☐ 61-80

**Gender**

☐ Male

☐ Female

**Level of education**

☐ Did not go to school

☐ Koranic school

☐ Primary school

☐ High school

☐ Professional school (professional training after high school)

☐ University

**Professional or social status**

Prior to the last interview question regarding comments to the last question, participants will be reminded: 'Please, do not mention the specific names of any victims you discussed during the interview or in your comments.

**Have you or one of your family members, friends, or acquaintances been directly victim of terrorism?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**Any comment?**

**Annex 2- A Bouli**

**Annex 3-Table summarizing key initiatives and local indicators of peace and security**

| | Initiatives | Local indicators of peace and security | Changes/ Observations | Signs/evidence of increased peace or improved security |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dori (Burkina Faso)** | -Greater government presence and investment providing more security, more education and employment opportunities to people<br>-Locally initiated and led peacebuilding initiatives that promote tolerance, social cohesion, and development :<br>-Interreligious peacebuilding through joint Christian-Muslim leadership commitment;<br>-Community development projects bringing farmers and herders together through the "boulies"; youth mobilization for peace through the Reseau des Jeunes Lucien Bidaud;<br>-Religious education programs combined with vocational | -People can move around freely without any fear<br><br>-Muslims and Christians can eat together (including when Christians eat pork or drink alcohol)<br>-People of different ethnic and religious groups can live together in harmony without any hostile interaction<br>-People do not feel threatened in any way<br>-People can live, work, and even pray together without any problem<br>-The presence of security forces that give people | -Only one terrorist incident recorded in Dori between 1970 and 2019, not in the city of Dori itself, but outside the city on the road between Dori and Seytenga. | -Strong commitment of local populations for peace<br>-Inter-marriage between people of different ethnic and religious groups<br>-Friendly collaboration between people of different religious and ethnic groups for development and for peace<br>-Rejection of extremist groups and extremist narratives by local people<br>-Level of easiness of violent extremist organizations to recruit militants in a locality<br>-Number of violent incidents perpetrated by VEOs and |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | trainings and placement to provide income-generating activities to the youth (esp. koranic school students) and foster social cohesion<br>-Space/opportunity offered to minority groups to voice their concerns and advocate for their rights (see Tartit)<br>- Youth Mobilization and concertation framework for peace, through which the youth conduct awareness campaigns and other activities for peace (such as tea-debates) | the feeling that they are protected<br>-Number of attacks and other violent incidents recorded<br>-Possibility for herders to milk their cows every morning, pasture their animals, or take them to the market and sell without any impediment | | recorded in a locality |
| **Amataltal/Agadez (Niger)** | Locally initiated and led peacebuilding initiatives that promote tolerance, social cohesion, and development (Peace caravans, peace committees, citizen vigilance committees, Reintegration and use of former combatants for peacebuilding, income-generating projects for the youth and former | -People can access markets to sell their goods and buy what they need<br>-People can access transportation and move around safely<br>-People can access schools and healthcare centers (i.e basic social services) | | |

| | combatants, role played by religious and traditional leaders such as the Sultan…) | -There is twinning, harmony between communities<br>-People (especially young people) have a source of income that allows them to support themselves<br>-Live and move around without fear of being attacked by terrorists or bandits<br>-There is free movement of people and goods<br>-Low rate of violence<br>-Low rate of migration towards other countries or places<br>-Social cohesion<br>-People can freely do their work and meet with each other | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Joking kinship (between the Tuaregs and other ethnic communities such as the Zarma and Haoussas) forbidding fighting between their members who see each other as cousins and whose ancestors taught them not to fight each other. | -People go about their business normally, without any problems<br>-The government security forces are present everywhere and protecting the people | | |
| | People from the Air region suffered much from the Tuareg rebellions and do not want to go through the same painful experience again. | | | |
| | A peace agreement that includes former rebels in the decision-making processes of the country (inclusive governance) and provides economic opportunities to former combatants (instead of repressing them) | | | |
| | Peace committees (with representatives at the communal, regional, and national levels) | | | |

| | Peace caravans and other sensitization activities | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | The contribution of former combatants to peacebuilding after the Tuareg rebellion in the Agadez region ("the one who starts a fire is better positioned to know how to put it out" a respondent) | | | |
| | Monitoring of disputes between members of rival communities (e.g. Fulani and Daoussaks) by some members of these two communities who network and communicate through Whatsapp and then intervene when a conflict breaks out in order to avoid violent escalation | | | |
| | The intervention and mediation of traditional or religious leaders | | | |
| | The broadcasting of well designed radio programs to counter extremist narratives | | | |

| | and for peace education | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**Annex 4 – Codebook (list of thematic codes created in NVIVO from an analysis of the interview data with number of times they were referred to by respondents)**

BEP-Safe Havens Amidst the Jihadist Storm

Codes

| Name | Description | Files | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Best practices | Initiatives or practice that local actors find most helpful or effective in preventing and revolving conflict or building peace. | 1 | 2 |
| Citizen watch committees | | 2 | 9 |
| Creating job and economic opportunities for the youth | | 2 | 30 |
| Religious Education combined with Vocational Training | This is a program initiated for the talibes that consist in providing them with religious education and vocational training in order to give them an income-generating opportunity and reduce their vulnerability to recruitment by jihadist groups. | 1 | 1 |
| DDR and socio-economic reintegration of former combatants | | 2 | 5 |
| Decentralization and political inclusion of minorities | | 1 | 4 |
| Joking kinship between ethnic groups | | 0 | 0 |
| Local peace committees | | 2 | 17 |
| Locally-led collaboration between local and international actors for peace | | 2 | 6 |
| Mediator dialogues | « The mediator dialogues are a platform that we have put in place to bring citizens to discuss with decision-makers on issues related to security. Citizens must sit down with decision-makers and the various stakeholders at the communal level to discuss their problems and seek solutions. This has made it possible to understand that one can often find solutions to one's problems locally without having to go through the national level. The solution does not always come from elsewhere. » Respondent in Niger | 1 | 1 |
| Public denounciation system | It is a system that was established by the population themselves to monitor suspicious persons and | 2 | 6 |

| Name | Description | Files | References |
|------|-------------|-------|------------|
| | activities, thieves and criminals,in order to denounce and report them to the authorities. | | |
| Recruiting and training local people in the military and intelligence | | 2 | 5 |
| Use of social media for early warning and peace education | | 2 | 3 |
| Causes of the relative peace and security | How respondents explain the relative peace and security in Amaltal-Agadez and in Dori | 1 | 4 |
| Commitment of former rebels to democracy for change | Former rebel leaders and combatants, after the signing of the peace agreements that ended the Tuareg rebellion decided to seek change no more by arms but through a peaceful democratic process, by vying for elected positions and participating in elections. | 1 | 15 |
| Commitment of the population to peace and security | | 2 | 19 |
| Decentralization and political inclusion of minorities | | 1 | 9 |
| Dedication of people to reconciliation and community welfare | People are open to and accept initiatives that will foster reconciliation, support for the vulnerable people, and the welfare of the whole community | 1 | 2 |
| Divine protection | | 1 | 3 |
| Establishment of local infrastructures for peace | Those are structures and mechanisms created locally to prevent and manage conflict, identify and mitigate threats to peace and security within the region. They include the regional peace and security commission, the local peace committees, the religious observatory, the Sultanate of Air, and the committee for inter-religious dialogue. | 2 | 17 |
| Existence of employment and economic opportunities for youth | The existence of job opportunities that keep the youth busy and of economic opportunities that provide them with sources of income have been cited by many respondents as key factors for the preservation of peace and the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism. | 1 | 3 |
| Vocational training that creates income-generating activities for the youth | | 2 | 13 |
| Favoring local solutions | | 2 | 4 |

| Name | Description | Files | References |
|------|-------------|-------|------------|
| Geographic position | According to some respondents, the geographic position of Amataltal/Agadez and Dori makes them less vulnerable to terrorist attacks than other regions | 2 | 7 |
| Greater government presence and social services | This includes not only the physical presence of government offices and services but also government-run social services, public infrastructures, and security forces such as the military, gendarmerie, police, and tribunals. | 1 | 5 |
| Higher level of education of the population of Dori | The higher level of education of the population in Dori makes them less vulnerable to the manipulation and indoctrination of Muslim extremists. | 1 | 1 |
| Impactful role played by women | The Association of Women against War in Agadez mobilized, conducted some advocacy and awareness campaigns to advocate for peace and educate people about the need to preserve peace. As spouses and mothers, they played an important role besides their husbands and children to avoid war. | 1 | 1 |
| Joking kinship between ethnic groups | Joking kinship is a practice and a tradition between members of some ethnic groups that allows them to tease each other and never get angry at each other. | 1 | 2 |
| Local peacemaking expertise | Wisdom and expertise in peacemaking or conflict resolution acquired by local people from past experiences of conflict. | 2 | 4 |
| Mingling of different ethnic groups | | 2 | 6 |
| Peace activism of local leaders | Local leaders (mayors, traditional and religious leaders…) initiated, with the support of external actors, activities to promote peace and social cohesion among the populations. | 2 | 26 |
| Inter-religious dialogue and tolerance promoted | | 1 | 13 |
| Peace agreement | | 1 | 7 |
| Peace committees | | 2 | 25 |
| Peace education through peace caravans | | 2 | 32 |
| Rejection of jihadist ideology and militants by the population | | 2 | 13 |
| Sharing of water points and grazing areas | | 1 | 1 |
| Socio-economic reintegration of former combatants | | 1 | 3 |

| Name | Description | Files | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional non-discriminatory democracy | In Dori, there is no rigid hierarchy and discrimination among the tribes like in Djibo or in the Oudalan province where the Bella are considered as an inferior class and join the jihadist groups out of frustration to protest again this rigid traditional hierarchy. | 1 | 1 |
| Trustful civil-military cooperation | | 2 | 3 |
| Drivers of terrorism | | 1 | 1 |
| Drug trade and consumption | | 1 | 1 |
| Grievances against government | Perception that they are being marginalized, excluded, or discriminated politically | 2 | 9 |
| Discrimination | Several respondents mentioned that feelings of discrimination have fueled anti-government grievances in some communities and pushed some individuals towards jihadist groups. | 1 | 1 |
| Local conflicts | Local conflicts, e.g., conflicts between herders and farmers, between the Peulhs and other sedentary ethnic groups like the Zarma in Niger or the Mossi in Burkina Faso have often leveraged by jihadist groups to recruit militants. | 1 | 4 |
| State fragility | The absence, weak presence, and inability of the state to provide basic social services or meet citizens' basic needs and expectations | 2 | 9 |
| Unemployment | | 2 | 5 |
| Effectiveness of local peacebuilding and conflict prevention strategies | Initiatives that respondents identified as having contributed to more peace and security in their region. | 0 | 0 |
| Awareness raising & peace education | | 2 | 39 |
| Commitment and involvement of key leaders | | 2 | 4 |
| conflict monitoring and mediation by local leaders | | 2 | 5 |
| Impactful role played by women | The Association of Women against War in Agadez mobilized, conducted some advocacy and awareness campaigns to advocate for peace and educate people about the need to preserve peace. As spouses and mothers, they played an important role besides their husbands and children to avoid war. | 1 | 1 |
| Local peace committees | | 2 | 16 |
| Monitoring of extremist narratives | It consists in monitoring extremist narratives (preaching, speeches) in order to identify them early | 1 | 3 |

| Name | Description | Files | References |
|------|-------------|-------|------------|
| | and prevent them from fueling conflict and violence. | | |
| Participatory community dialogue and problem-solving | Meetings usually led by elders, community leaders, traditional and religious leaders with other stakeholders to resolve reported conflicts and problems. The participatory community dialogue and problem-solving efforts have included in Niger initiatives such as mediator dialogues, citizen watch committees, as well as local peace committees and community action committees in Burkina Faso. Respondents both in Burkina Faso and Niger cited them as successful local initiatives and best practices. | 2 | 20 |
| Radio programs | Well-designed radio programs broadcast through community radio stations | 2 | 3 |
| Vocational training that creates income-generating activities for the youth | | 2 | 19 |
| Local Indicators of Peace | How people understand and define peace or what peace means for them in their local context. These indicators express the peace that people want to see and how they measure it. | 0 | 0 |
| A well-functioning economy | A well-functioning economy that provides jobs and economic opportunities, and good economic conditions were cited repeatedly as an indicator of peace and security. | 1 | 3 |
| Ability to meet one's basic needs without emigrating | | 2 | 2 |
| Access to a social security system or social capital | This indicator measures to what extent people can rely on external resources or help when they can in need, for example a state-run social assistance program or family solidarity. In traditional Africa, one could count on members of the extended family or village to survive. | 1 | 1 |
| Access to basic social services | This indicator measures to what extent people feel or perceive that it is possible and easy for them to access basic social services, such as healthcare and education services. It measures two things: the existence of such services in their area, and the physical and financial accessibility of these services. | 1 | 1 |
| Animals are not stolen and can graze anywhere without restriction | For nomadic pastoralist communities, a threat to their animals is perceived as a threat to their livelihood, means of existence, survival, and culture. | 2 | 5 |

| Name | Description | Files | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Freedom and easiness of movement for persons and goods | Measures to what extent people perceive moving and transporting goods from one place to another as easy, and how free and safe they feel in doing so. | 2 | 29 |
| Harmonious relationships | | 2 | 13 |
| No gunshot heard in that place | For one respondent, a simple indicator that can help measure the level of safety or security in an area is whether there are gunshots or no. One feels in areas where there is no gunshot. | 1 | 1 |
| No human flight from that place | People are not fleeing their villages or trying to emigrate, for example to Libya, Algeria or Europe. | 1 | 1 |
| No proliferation of arms | People do not need to acquire arms because they feel safe and protected by the state who has the monopoly of the legitimate use of force. | 1 | 1 |
| No threat to one's life and activities | | 1 | 4 |
| Number of violent conflict or attack | The low number or absence of violent conflict or attack is often cited by some respondents as an indicator of peace or security. However, a respondent reported that in some villages there may not be any violent conflict or attack, but people suffer from attacks that occur in neighboring villages because it prevents them from attendant the market. | 2 | 19 |
| Absence of violence | No incident of violence as attacks, robberies, rape, or human rights abuse. | 2 | 15 |
| Place selected by refugees and IDPs for asylum | | 1 | 1 |
| Possibility for people to gather and celebrate social events | The possibility for people to meet, to gather and celebrate social events such as weddings, festive activities has been emphasized by several respondents as a sign that there is peace and security in a locality. For example, in Amataltal and the whole Agadez region, the possibility for people to come from various places for the annual traditional camel race is a key indicator of peace. During the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s, there were no more camel races. | 2 | 7 |
| Reassuring presence of law enforcement personnel | | 2 | 6 |
| Respect of others and respect of life | | 2 | 2 |
| Social cohesion expressed through sharing of everything among people | Social cohesion expressed through acts of solidarity and sharing of everything, including water points and grazing areas for nomads, has been cited by several respondents as an indicator of peace. | 2 | 12 |

| Name | Description | Files | References |
|------|-------------|-------|-----------|
| The principles of justice, equality and human rights are respected | | 1 | 1 |
| Young people do not engage in illegal emigration or activities | | 1 | 1 |
| Military action as solution | What respondents think or say about military action taken by national armed forces or foreign troops to counter terrorism and maintain peace. | 2 | 51 |
| Obstacles to local peacebuilding & conflict resolution | Obstacles and difficulties encountered by local people in working for conflict prevention and peace. | 0 | 0 |
| Abuses of security forces | Cattle breeders and merchants whose interests are defended by the Association of the Rugas complain about a systematic racketeering system set up by some security forces and about some abuses that they experience, which prevents them from trusting and collaboration with the security forces. | 1 | 1 |
| Difficulties in mobilizing people | | 1 | 2 |
| Government corruption or lack of transparency | | 1 | 1 |
| Inadequate-abusive government response to terrorism | | 1 | 2 |
| Insecurity in some localities | Another challenge we face in the implementation of certain activities is security. It is really with fear in the belly that we go to certain localities. | 1 | 3 |
| Lack of financial or logistical resources | | 2 | 15 |
| Lack of training on terrorism and jihadism | | 1 | 1 |
| Lack of trust towards women | A woman peacemaker and leader pointed out the lack of trust towards women in their society is the major challenge that women peacemakers face. | 1 | 1 |
| Mobility of the nomadic populations of the Sahel | The people of the Sahel are mostly nomads who move around with their herds, making it difficult to have a consistent participation of the same people in activities. | 1 | 1 |
| Negative perception of CVCs by some local leaders | | 1 | 1 |
| Politicization of ethnic communities | « Politicians often use ethnically-based neighborhoods to mobilize people. Often, it is | 1 | 1 |

| Name | Description | Files | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| | difficult to convince community and neighborhood leaders that we are not in politics. » | | |
| Potential informants not feeling protected | Civilians often complain that they do not feel encouraged to give information or collaborate with the security forces because they are not protected. Some were killed after providing information to the security forces. | 2 | 5 |
| Slow response or lack of response of SDF in case of attack | | 1 | 1 |
| Unwillingness of civil servants to serve in desert areas | | 1 | 1 |
| Suggestions for more effective peacebuilding and conflict prevention | | 2 | 49 |