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**U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE  
OFFICE OF TRANSITION INITIATIVES**

**Country:** Burkina Faso  
**Program:** Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)/Burkina Faso  
**Funding:** \$3,000,000 in Transition Initiatives (TI) Funds  
**Fiscal Year:** 2018  
**Program Areas:** PS.1.2 Counter Violent Extremism  
PS.6 Conflict Mitigation and Reconciliation  
PO.1.1 Program Design and Learning  
PO.2.1 Administration and Oversight  
PO.3.1 Evaluation

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is submitting this report pursuant to the requirements set forth in the TI account heading of Division K of Public Law 115-141, the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2018. The provision directs USAID to “submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations at least five days prior to beginning a new program of assistance” with TI funds.

Accordingly, USAID is submitting this report in anticipation that USAID/OTI will begin a new assistance program in the Republic of Burkina Faso with TI funds. The program will initially work with local communities to bolster their resilience against violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and threats to Burkina Faso from other regional conflicts, especially on the border with the Republic of Mali. Combined with local government support to addressing these threats, USAID/OTI will work to encourage open dialogue with communities and civilian and security sectors to push forward with the Burkinabè Government's plan to address the increased VEO activity and counter VEO threats.

The initial objectives of the program are the following:

- Build trust between communities, security forces, and civil authorities;
- Provide immediate visible and tangible benefits from the Burkinabe Government's *Emergency Program for the Sahel*; and
- Strengthen inter-community cohesion to bolster a unified resistance against VEO threats.

To enhance regional stability and promote U.S. foreign-policy interests, USAID/OTI will use its flexible, innovative, and rapid-response mechanism to target key areas in Burkina Faso that are facing, or have faced, VEO threats and influence. This program will complement and enhance other existing USAID/OTI activities to address VEO threats and influence in neighboring Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon and broader USAID efforts in the Sahel region focused on humanitarian assistance and resilience, particularly livelihoods activities.

USAID/OTI will obligate an initial amount of \$3,000,000 in TI funding for the program, and anticipates the possible addition of future TI funds.

### **Country and Regional Context and Background:**

Burkina Faso occupies a strategic location between the Sahel and coastal West Africa. Its extreme northern Sahel region borders both Mali and Niger, and its capital, Ouagadougou, is a transit hub that connects major coastal ports in Cotonou, Lomé, Accra, and Abidjan to the wider Sahel. The victim of two terrorist attacks in the heart of the nation's capital, and increasingly frequent attacks along its border with Mali, Burkina Faso stands at the brink of crisis, but is poised to act as a regional leader and stabilizer. After three years of dramatic change, Burkina Faso is at a crossroads. On the one hand, the country has an opportunity to stand against a growing terrorist threat in the Sahel as a leader of the Group of Five (G5) Sahel, the inter-governmental partnership between Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, and strengthen its nascent democracy and counter violent extremism by building on the Burkinabe culture of tolerance and acceptance. Alternatively, without crucial assistance at this juncture, Burkina Faso could succumb to rising extremist tensions and the growing ranks of VEOs in Mali.

Given its position as a regional trade nexus, a weakened Burkina Faso is open to the presence and operations of VEOs, and would be a stepping stone for VEOs to extend their influence into West African coastal countries. Port infrastructure along the West African coast, which also serves to facilitate arms and the lucrative illegal drug trade from South America, could secure additional resources for VEOs and potentially expand their reach into South America and Europe. Northern Muslim populations across coastal West African countries have historically felt marginalized by southern non-Muslim ruling elites in coastal capitals, which could be an entry point for VEOs to destabilize and gain support and recruits. Coastal West African security forces already acknowledge the presence of VEOs in their countries for the purpose of extending economic links and supply lines.

Between 2016 and 2017, Burkina Faso noticed an increase in VEO attacks along the border with Mali and Niger in the Sahel Region, the most recent took place on March 2, 2018, in Ouagadougou. Development activities have largely excluded the northern region of Burkina Faso, where poverty is a constant challenge. Because of this, there is a large gap in equality and a lack of education, which increases vulnerability to ideological and religious fundamentalism in the North. As a response to the increased spread of VEOs from Mali, the Burkinabe Government developed the *Emergency Program for the Sahel* to respond to political and social challenges, and support socio-economic development, public security, and local governance and infrastructure. Its role as a member of the G5 Sahel, this Emergency Program, and strong political engagement have placed Burkina Faso at the front lines to improve the socio-economic and security challenges it faces.

A USAID/OTI program in Burkina Faso will continue to reinforce the increasing partnerships between the U.S. Government and governments in the region, and support the priority of the President's National Security Strategy to counter threats from VEOs.

### **Justification for a TI-Supported Program in Burkina Faso:**

There is a window of opportunity in Burkina Faso to address the rising threat posed by VEOs because of the nascent, but proactive, response of the Burkinabè Government to the crisis, the political will to improve relations between security forces and communities, and the potential for active civil-society participation in addressing the problem. USAID/OTI already plays an important role in the regional *Sahel Development Partnership Countering Violent Extremism* strategy, which is primarily focused on rapid community response on the front lines of conflict. While presenting some challenges, the operating environment in Burkina Faso allows for a wide range of USAID/OTI programming.

USAID/OTI was created to address complex political crises. Given its presence in Northeastern Nigeria, Southeastern Niger, and Northern Cameroon, USAID/OTI can leverage its regional experience, research, and partnerships to extend the regional strategy to counter VEOs in the greater Sahel. The USAID/OTI program would aim to complement the existing U.S. Government stabilization activities to address violent extremism, further VEO containment, and reduce opportunities for VEO to benefit from local economic dynamics and recruitment.

Based on over 20 years of transition expertise and relationship-building, USAID/OTI is positioned, structured, and staffed to provide a nuanced and flexible response in Burkina Faso. By closely coordinating within the U.S. Government on an interagency basis and, as appropriate, with the international community, these activities will create or preserve political space, and help set the stage for more profound longer-term change.

### **Proposed Activities:**

Building trust between local communities and Burkanabe security forces is essential to the successful implementation of the Government of Burkina Faso's (GoBF) plan to address growing VEO threats. USAID/OTI will work to respond effectively to U.S. national-security priorities by using the proposed funding for activities initially aimed at improving stability in areas in Northern Burkina Faso affected by violent extremism.

Initial activities designed to support U.S. foreign-policy and national-security objectives in Burkina Faso include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Building trust between communities and both security forces and civil authorities:
  - Support for roundtables to open increased dialogue with villages and the Burkinabè security and civil authorities and address local issues/concerns; and
  - Coordination with community leaders on the relaunched police de proximite to encourage communities' engagement with local elected officials to discuss issues that require cooperation between citizens and security forces.
- Provide immediate, visible, and tangible benefits before and during the roll-out of the

Burkinabe Government's *Emergency Plan for the Sahel*.

- Support for meetings and communications with local communities led by the Burkinabe Government regarding the launch;
  - Tangible small infrastructure, equipment, and supplies for community socio-economic infrastructure;
  - Bringing government leaders and civil society together for transparency and anticipated actions upon rollout of the Plan; and
  - Outreach with communities through media, peace caravans, and engagement with local leaders.
- Strengthen inter-community cohesion to bolster a unified resistance to VEO threats:
    - Promotion of Burkinabe identity to build on existing community acceptance and religious tolerance;
    - Reducing isolation of marginalized and at-risk groups;
    - Social coordination of community groups to solve local problems, including by building community support for initiatives by the Burkinabè Government to counter violent extremism.