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**EXAMINATION OF ECPF**

As part of the search for a lasting solution to the numerous security problems that confront the West African sub-region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in 2008, adopted the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), to serve as strategic framework for improving conflict prevention and human security. The adoption of the ECPF is an addition to several initiatives in the form of key protocols and conventions that aim at building a stable West Africa as prerequisite for social, political and economic development.

Some of the earlier initiatives by ECOWAS to promote stability in the sub-region include the Protocol on Non-Aggression (1978), the Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defense (1982); ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993); the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (hereafter the Mechanism); Declaration of Political Principles (1991); and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). Over the years, with the mandate provided under these protocols, ECOWAS has made significant contributions to the promotion of peace and security in Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, where violent conflicts took place. Also, ECOWAS’ preventive diplomacy initiatives averted large-scale violence in countries such as Niger, Guinea and Togo.

**RELEVANCE OF THE ECPF FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION**

The relevance of the ECPF lies in its objectives, the outputs it attempts to attain, the issues it seeks to address and the method(s) with which it seeks to achieve its objectives. A careful consideration of the documents objectives and proposed outputs reveals a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach for conflict prevention in ways that address the current security challenges of the West African sub-region.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE ECPF**

The objectives of the ECPF include the following;

 Mainstream conflict prevention into ECOWAS policies and programs;  Increase understanding of the conceptual basis of conflict prevention; Build awareness and anticipation, and strengthen capacity within member states and civil society to enhance their role in conflict prevention and peace building;  Increase understanding of opportunities, tools and resources related to conflict prevention and peace building;  Increase awareness and preparedness for cooperative ventures between ECOWAS, member states, civil society and external partners in pursuit of conflict prevention and peace building;  Strengthen capacity within ECOWAS to pursue concrete and integrated conflict prevention and peace building;  Enhance ECOWAS’ anticipation and planning capabilities in relation to regional tensions; and  Generate a more pro-active and operational conflict prevention posture from member states and the ECOWAS system.

**EXPECTED OUTPUTS OF THE ECPF**

It is expected that the pursuit of the above objectives would lead to the realization of the following outputs:  Guidelines on conflict prevention

 Guidelines for cross-departmental and cross-initiatives cooperation and synergy within ECOWAS on conflict prevention;

 Guidelines for cooperative ventures between ECOWAS, member states, civil society and external partners;

 An ECOWAS strategy on resource mobilization, advocacy and communication;

 The necessary bridge linking everyday conflict prevention initiatives to structural (strategic) conflict prevention; and

 Plan of Action and Logical Framework.

**AREAS OF FOCUS**

The ECPF focuses on a set of issue areas which, it is believed, when addressed would contribute to a stable sub-region. Referred to as the 14 components, they include (1) early warning; (2) preventive diplomacy; (3) democracy and political governance; (4) human rights and the rule of law; (5) media; (6) natural resource governance; and (7) cross-border initiatives. The rest are (8) governance; (9) practical disarmament; (10) women, peace and security; (11) youth empowerment; (12) ECOWAS Standby Force; (13) humanitarian assistance; and (14) peace education.5 On each of the 14 issue areas, the ECPF goes a long way to outline activities, capacity requirements and benchmarks for measuring progress. All the above components have links or relationship with existing ECOWAS protocols and conventions. Given the linkages to existing protocols and conventions, the implementation of the ECPF provides the opportunity for the implementation of their relevant provisions.

From the objectives, expected outputs and scope of the ECPF outlined above, it can be said that it is very relevant to conflict prevention. This is because it attempts to address the fundamental issues that have contributed to conflicts and political instability in West Africa.

**THE ECPF AS A NEW INITIATIVE**

The ECPF in its existing form is markedly different from past ECOWAS initiatives in several ways that need to be emphasized. First, the ECPF adopts a comprehensive approach to social, economic, political and security challenges in West Africa. This it does by establishing linkages between social, economic and political issues as the basis of conflict prevention in the sub region. The document is therefore based on the perspective that addressing these issues simultaneously would help in preventing conflicts in West Africa. Second, in addition to the wider scope it covers, it targets a wide range of actors (ECOWAS, states, civil society, donors, international organizations, the private sectors etc.). These actors are considered partners in the implementation of the ECPF. Third, unlike other documents, the ECPF provide specific details on the issues it seeks to address. These include activities, benchmarks for measuring progress and capacity requirements for undertaking the stated activities. In addition, plans of action for implementation would be developed on all the 14 components to ensure that issues relating to each component are adequately addressed. Finally, the ECPF, unlike other documents, brings together all existing ECOWAS initiatives to make their implementation very easy.

**IMPLEMENTING THE ECPF**

According to the ECPF, member states are supposed to commence implementation upon its entry into force. Once it has entered into force the implementation of document shall be premised on what it referred to as ‘the enabling mechanisms’.6 These include advocacy and communication; resource mobilization; cooperation; and monitoring and evaluation.7 The document identifies several actors that need to be involved in its implementation. These actors include ECOWAS, member states, civil society, the private sectors and the international community (AU, EU, UN etc.)

**ECOWAS ECPF’S RESPONSES TO THE MAIN CHALLENGES TO PEACE AND SECURITY**

In an effort to analyze the **effectiveness** of ECOWAS ECPF in addressing challenges to peace and security, the following sections offer an overview of the organization’s responses to the main sources of insecurity in West Africa over the past five years.

• **Armed conflict**- ECOWAS as an institution has been notably absent militarily in the two major armed conflicts ravaging the region in the last five years, namely the crisis in Mali and the Boko Haram insurgency. That said, many ECOWAS member states have been militarily actively in the African-led mission to Mali, AFISMA. The ECOWAS response to the Mali crisis was initiated after the March 2012 coup d’état, at which point the insurgency was already ongoing. The plan was to deploy the ESF as part of a multidimensional mission – MICEMA – that would constitute a regional response to the conflict. The main reason that MICEMA was not deployed was ECOWAS’s lack of financial and logistical resources for the mission and the organization’s inability to secure such support from the UN. Ultimately, the UN Security Council passed a resolution supporting the creation of the African-led mission, AFISMA, in December 2012. However, AFISMA did not have the logistical capacity to deploy quickly. This explains why the first external military response to the Mali crisis was the French Operation Serval in January 2013, rather than a regional or continental one. Nevertheless, although ECOWAS did not deploy militarily, it has remained actively involved in seeking to manage the Malian crisis through non-military means, particularly through its mediation efforts and by imposing a sanctions regime. Several issues relevant to our understanding of ECOWAS as a security actor is evident from the Mali experience. First, the organization’s lack of financial and logistical resources to deploy ESF in Mali highlights a significant hurdle for ECOWAS’s conflict management mission, as well as casting doubt on the ability of ESF to reach full operational capability by the end of 2015, the revised deadline for the African Standby Force (ASF). Second, it demonstrates the sometimes strained relationship between ECOWAS, the AU (which was central in the discussions surrounding the creation of AFISMA) and the UN. Not only did the UN authorize a similar support package to AFISMA that it had denied MICEMA, but the transition from MICEMA to AFISMA was also rife with tension. These experiences demonstrate the urgent need to improve interorganisational relations in order to allow for a more efficient response to future crises in the region. ECOWAS has had little or no involvement in the military response to Boko Haram, the armed group that has been launching attacks against targets in Nigeria since 2009. The main reason for this is that Nigeria has not requested any military support from ECOWAS. This is partly due to Nigeria being by far the most powerful ECOWAS member state militarily, something that makes ECOWAS military assistance less vital. Partly, the reason is linked to Nigeria’s national pride and preponderant role in the region and reluctance to accept help from smaller member states. Another reason why ECOWAS is not involved in the fight against Boko Haram is that the violence has spread to neighboring countries (Cameroon, Chad and Niger), partly outside of ECOWAS. This development made clear that the response needed to be trans-regional. Nigeria was ultimately convinced that it, together with Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin, needed to reactivate the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in October 2014 to defeat Boko Haram. On January 2015, the AU authorized the initial 12-month deployment of the MNJTF, consisting of up to 7,500 military and civilian staff. Despite ECOWAS being largely on the sidelines in the military fight against Boko Haram, the Nigerian response to the insurgency has had two major repercussions on the institution’s role as a peace and security actor. First, Boko Haram has made the organization prioritize what it refers to as terrorism as a regional security threat. As such, it has developed a counter-terrorism strategy that focuses not only on a military response, but also on preventive measures seeking to counter radicalization, such as good governance, dealing with unemployment, and social and/or ethnic discrimination. The focus on terrorism also means that ECOWAS sees an urgent need for ESF forces to receive counter-insurgency (COIN) training. This objective is partly being achieved through bilateral COIN training support that Nigeria is currently receiving from various international partners. Second, with Nigerian military forces heavily en gaged in the fight against Boko Haram, it is unclear whether Nigerian pledges towards ESF, which constitute 50-60 % of total troops, can actually be counted on if there is a need for it to deploy, either as an ECOWAS mission or as part of ASF.

**Democracy and governance deficits -** Close to two thirds of ECOWAS member states are considered less then fully democratic regimes, and good governance, compounded by high levels of corruption, remains an issue. In addition, the last five years have seen unconstitutional changes in governments in Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Niger. ECOWAS has sought to promote democracy in two principal ways. First, it has expanded its role in election monitoring, thereby seeking to prevent leaders coming to power through less than fair elections. Second, the adoption of the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001 practically translates into a zero-tolerance stance against unconstitutional changes of power, and grants the right to impose sanctions against such illegitimate governments. Whereas ECOWAS has made important inroads in promoting democracy in the region in the last five years, significant challenges remain. Successes include helping to install an interim government in Burkina Faso following the ousting of long-time president Compaoré in November 2014 and help prepare the country for democratic elections.

Similarly, although ECOWAS was criticized for supporting a transitional government that partly included supporters of the coup that took place in Guinea-Bissau in April 2012, ECOMIB, the ECOWAS mission responsible for supporting national security forces during the subsequent electoral process and security sector reform, has been hailed for helping to stabilize the country, as exemplified by the peaceful presidential election of 2014. In addition, ECOWAS was actively involved in seeking to ensure a lawful election process during the last Nigerian presidential election, work that included seeking to persuade the then current president Jonathan to accept the election result, a feat that was arguably crucial to preventing the election from turning violent. Hence, through this work, ECOWAS is contributing to creating a more democratic culture of governance in the region. Yet sanctions and threats of intervention failed to convince Ivorian president Gbagbo to accept the electoral results and resign in 2010. Gbagbo was finally deposed by security forces backed by French troops and UN peacekeepers, but only after 3,000 people had been killed in post-election related violence. A recent setback to ECOWAS’s democratization mission also highlights the difficulties ahead. At a May 2015 ECOWAS meeting, a proposal to limit presidential terms to two was ultimately suspended after Togo and the Gambia, the only West African states that do not already impose such a rule, voiced reservations. Whereas it is true that the proposal would have to receive unanimous support from member states for it to be ratified, experts suggests that the ultimate reason why the proposal was not voted in was because various West African leaders beyond those in Togo and the Gambia would prefer to maintain the flexibility to run for a third term by amending their constitutions. As such, this event demonstrates not only the uncomfortable tension between ECOWAS’s institutional agenda to democratize the region and the personal agendas of ECOWAS’s heads of states, but also reminds us of the influence of the latter in determining whether West Africa will continue to develop in a democratic direction. Despite ECOWAS having recently taken on a more prominent role in election-related activities, it has been less able to promote good governance issues linked to human security. All but two of the ECOWAS member states (the exceptions being Ghana and Cap Verde) have a low level of human development according to the UN. Although ECOWAS has undoubtedly contributed to improved economic growth in West Africa by promoting free trade within the region, the windfalls of such growth have so far not been directed adequately towards enhancing state capacity to provide social services and reduce youth unemployment, grievances that, if left unaddressed, can result in social protest or people turning to crime or taking up arms. The reason that ECOWAS has not been able to do more in this sphere is largely due to national economic policy ultimately being up to individual member states. Nevertheless, it seeks to alert its members to the links between good governance, human development and national security. As mentioned above, it does so partly through its new counter-terrorism strategy, which seeks to address the root causes of radicalization. It also does so through its early warning system, ECOWARN, that tracks indicators related to, among others, social protest, and reports on these security trends to the Commission.

Reviewing ECOWAS’s responses to challenges to peace and security in the last five years suggests that the institution’s conflict prevention tools are currently stronger than its conflict management tools. At present, ESF does not have the logistical and financial capability to deploy militarily. ECOWAS’s efforts to address the issue of logistics by building a depot in Sierra Leone are unlikely to solve the problem since it still does not have enough financial resources for either material or strategic airlifts. In addition, given Nigeria’s current internal security challenges, it is unclear whether it could spare its pledged troops for an ESF mission. This is a serious problem given that Nigeria is meant to contribute more than half of the pledged ESF troops. Despite these challenges, however, it is important to remember that ECOWAS has been quite successful in helping to stabilize the political situation in Guinea-Bissau through its small peacekeeping mission in the country, ECOMIB. In contrast, ECOWAS appears to have made significant inroads in its conflict prevention work. The general consensus among experts is that ECOWAS has accomplished quite a lot in the sphere of conflict prevention. ECOWAS’s work on democracy, especially as it relates to election monitoring, is often mentioned as an emerging area of success. Another arguably crucial component of conflict prevention is the early warning system, ECOWARN. Monitoring various indicators related to pandemics, social factors believed to be related to social unrest and armed conflict, it seeks to alert the Commission to emerging security threats. Yet, having discerned a critical disconnect between early warning and early response, the directorate is now seeking to develop a national early-warning infrastructure, something it believes will increase ownership and, subsequently, the political will and ability for member states to engage in early response. These efforts will be aided by a major grant from the US. In addition, the EU is devoting substantial funding to supporting the implementation of ECOWAS’s Conflict and Prevention Framework by seeking to strengthen the organization’s institutional capacity, with a special focus on the Office of the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security.