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EXAMINATION OF THE ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK (ECPF) AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS SINCE 2008 IN THE PREVENTION OF MAJOR CONFLICT IN WEST AFRICA.

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INTRODUCTION

The Economic Community of West African States, also known as ECOWAS, is a regional political and economic union of fifteen countries located in West Africa. Collectively, these countries comprise an area of 5,114,162 km 2 (1,974,589 sq mi), and in 2015 had an estimated population of over 349 million. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is made up of fifteen member countries out of which eight of these are French-speaking, five are English-speaking, and two Portuguese- speaking. The Economic Community of West African States Member states: BENIN, BURKINA FASO, CAPE VERDE, CÔTE D’IVOIRE, The GAMBIA, GHANA, GUINEA, GUINEA BISSAU, LIBERIA, MALI, NIGER, NIGERIA, SENEGAL, SIERRA LEONE, TOGO. The union was established on 28 May 1975, with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos, with its stated mission to promote economic integration across the region. A revised version of the treaty was agreed and signed on 24 July 1993 in Cotonou. Considered one of the pillar regional blocs of the continent-wide African Economic Community (AEC), the stated goal of ECOWAS is to achieve “collective self-sufficiency”; for its member states by creating a single large trade bloc by building a full economic and trading union. ECOWAS also serves as a peacekeeping force in the region, with member states occasionally sending joint military forces to intervene in the blo’s member countries at times of political instability and unrest. In recent years these included interventions in Ivory Coast in 2003, Liberia in 2003, Guinea-Bissau in 2012, Mali in 2013, and The Gambia in 2017.

It is in furtherance of this that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has, over the years, proven its capacity to undertake successful conflict prevention, peacemaking and conflict resolution under the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security of 10th December 1999 (hereafter referred to as the Mechanism). The Institution has achieved remarkable success in fulfilling its mandate by containing violent conflicts in the region and carrying out conflict prevention interventions through preventive diplomacy initiatives - fact-finding missions, quiet diplomacy, diplomatic pressure and mediation. The institution has also established several promising conflict prevention organs to underpin its mandate, including the Early Warning System, the Mediation and Security Council, Offices of the Special Representative, the Council of the Wise and Special Mediators. However, the implementation of the preventive aspects of the Mechanism has at times, lacked a strategic approach. It has been characterized by weak internal coordination, underutilization and misdirection of existing human capacities as well as the deployment of limited instruments. In particular, the distribution of roles and responsibilities between ECOWAS and Member States, between ECOWAS and civil society, as well as between ECOWAS and external partners is weak, resulting in the utilization of limited instruments, piecemeal interventions and late response to crises.

ECPF OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the ECPF include the following;

1. Mainstream conflict prevention into ECOWAS policies

and programmes;

1. Increase understanding of the conceptual basis of

conflict prevention;

1. Build awareness and anticipation, and strengthen

capacity within member states and civil society to

enhance their role in conflict prevention and

peacebuilding;

1. Increase understanding of opportunities, tools and

resources related to conflict prevention and

peacebuilding;

1. Increase awareness and preparedness for cooperative

ventures between ECOWAS, member states, civil

society and external partners in pursuit of conflict

prevention and peacebuilding;

1. Strengthen capacity within ECOWAS to pursue

concrete and integrated conflict prevention and

peacebuilding;

1. Enhance ECOWAS’ anticipation and planning

capabilities in relation to regional tensions; and

1. Generate a more pro-active and operational conflict

prevention posture from member states and the

ECOWAS system.

AREA 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.

ECPF INITIATIVE

The development of a strategic framework to underpin the preventive aspects of the Mechanism has, therefore, become imperative. ECOWAS Member States bear primary responsibility for peace and security. However, as steps are taken under the new ECOWAS Strategic Vision to transform the region from an “ECOWAS of States” into an “ECOWAS of the Peoples”, the tensions between sovereignty and supranationality, and between regime security and human security, shall be progressively resolved in favor of supranationality and human security respectively. Consequently, civil society shall play an increasingly critical role alongside Member States in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. In this order of things, the principal role of ECOWAS shall be to facilitate creative conflict transformation interventions by Member States and civil society. To this end, the purpose of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) is to serve as a reference for the ECOWAS system and Member States in their efforts to strengthen human security in the region. Achieving this objective requires effective and durable cooperative interventions to prevent violent conflicts within and between States, and to support peace-building in post-conflict environments. The ECPF is intended as follows: a comprehensive operational conflict prevention and peace-building strategy that enables the ECOWAS system and Member States to draw upon human and financial resources at the regional (including civil society and the private sector) and international levels in their efforts to creatively transform conflict. A guide for enhancing cohesion and synergy between relevant ECOWAS departments on conflict prevention initiatives in order to maximize outcomes and ensure a more active and operational posture on conflict prevention and sustained post-conflict reconstruction from the ECOWAS system and its Member States.

CASE STUDY: THE GAMBIA

This seeks to assess the integration of the focuses of the ECPF during the crises in Gambia

OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLCIT IN THE GAMBIA

The **ECOWAS military intervention in the Gambia** or the **ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia** ([abbreviated](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbreviation%22%20%5Co%20%22Abbreviation) **ECOMIG**) – code-named **Operation Restore Democracy** – is an ongoing [military intervention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_intervention) in [the Gambia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gambia) by several West African countries. The intervention was launched to resolve a breakdown of internal order in the government of the Gambia that resulted from a dispute over the country's presidency. The dispute had led to a [constitutional crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016-17_Gambian_constitutional_crisis) in the country. The intervention began in January 2017, and in June 2017, the term of the ECOWAS military mission was extended by a year.

The brief period of open conflict at the beginning of the mission was precipitated by the refusal to step down from power of [Yahya Jammeh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahya_Jammeh), the long-standing [President of the Gambia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_Gambia), after he disputed the victory of [Adama Barrow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adama_Barrow) in [the 2016 presidential election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gambian_presidential_election%2C_2016).

As a result of the intervention, Jammeh was forced to step down and go into exile two days after the initial military incursion. Following his departure, 4,000 ECOWAS troops remained in the Gambia to maintain order in preparation for Barrow to return and consolidate his presidency. Five days later, Barrow returned to the Gambia while requesting the ECOWAS troops (now numbering about 2,500) to stay for at least six months to help him firmly establish order. Although there were a few reports of isolated minor clashes during the first few hours of the military incursion, there were no reports of casualties in the initial conflict. In the following months, two people have been reported killed and about ten injured in incidents surrounding protests against the continued military presence in the community.

ECOWAS AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS IN THE GAMBIA

The Gambia had been a member of ECOWAS ever since the organisation was created in 1975. Initially formed to promote economic cooperation and integration in West Africa, beginning in the 1990s ECOWAS assumed a more political role following the wave of political reforms and the growing number of protracted domestic violent conflicts in the region. The revised ECOWAS treaty (1993) and especially the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention (1999) and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) formally enshrined the commitment of the organisation to promote democracy and good governance and to adopt what was later to be called the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Electoral observation had been part of the ECOWAS mandate since the revised 1993 treaty, but responsibilities were further clarified with the 2001 protocol. The ECOWAS Commission created the Electoral Assistance Unit in 2005, and this is roughly the moment when ECOWAS began to systematically observe all national elections in member countries (Hartmann 2013: 42). Electoral observation requires an invitation from national authorities, and in a quite unusual step, President Jammeh refused to allow the ECOWAS Observation Team to monitor the December 2016 presidential elections (ECOWAS 2016c).

Following Jammeh's original concession of defeat, ECOWAS, together with the AU and the UN Official Representative for West Africa, congratulated the Gambian people and its leaders for the smooth and peaceful election and transition (ECOWAS 2016a). When Jammeh later changed his position, ECOWAS was quick to react, calling on the Gambian government to “abide by its constitutional responsibilities and international obligations,” going on to state,

It is fundamental that the verdict of the ballots should be respected, and that the security of the president-elect, Adama Barrow, and that of all Gambian citizens be fully ensured. (ECOWAS 2016b)

According to ECOWAS, the reversal of position by President Jammeh was unacceptable and threatened peace not only in The Gambia but the entire West African subregion. ECOWAS leaders thus decided to send a mediation commission to Banjul. As acting ECOWAS chairperson, Liberian president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf headed the delegation that travelled to Banjul on 13 December 2016, together with the presidents of Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone (respectively: Muhammadu Buhari, John Dramani Mahama, and Ernest Bai Koroma), and the UN Special Representative for West Africa (also a former ECOWAS Commission president), Ghana's Mohammed Ibn Chambas. Despite the high-ranking composition (comprising all Anglophone heads of state within ECOWAS), however, the commission did not manage to convince Jammeh to modify his position.

Following the failure of this first mediation, ECOWAS heads of state were apparently convinced that they needed to adopt more credible sanctions. When asked whether the UN would consider military action to force Jammeh's departure, Chambas did not rule out this possibility (Farge and McAllister 2016). At their regular summit on 17 December 2016 in Abuja, they decided upon the following course of action: ECOWAS would continue mediation efforts through President Buhari and President Mahama, and request that the AU and UN endorse their decisions. The heads of state would attend the inauguration of President-elect Barrow, to be sworn in on 19 January 2017 in conformity with the Gambian Constitution. ECOWAS would be obligated to take all necessary means to strictly enforce the results of the elections (ECOWAS 2016d). To that end, ECOWAS placed standby forces on alert and formally authorised them to intervene militarily if Jammeh did not step down.

Further negotiations between Buhari and Jammeh in Banjul ended on 13 January without any breakthrough, and as the deadline of 18 January approached, the option of military intervention became more realistic. On 14 January, Barrow travelled together with the ECOWAS mediators to Bamako to meet most of the other ECOWAS heads of state, who were attending the France–Africa Summit there. UN Special Representative Chambas declared that ECOWAS would ask the UN Security Council to approve the deployment of troops to The Gambia if Jammeh refused to cede power (*Vanguard* 2017).

ECOWAS chiefs of staff gathered on 14 January in Abuja to discuss the preparations for the establishment of the ECOWAS Military Intervention in The Gambia (ECOMIG). On 18 January, troops (most from Senegal, with contingents from Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, and Togo) started to move towards the border with The Gambia (which is surrounded by Senegalese territory), and together with Nigerian forces also implemented a naval blockade. In the afternoon of 19 January, under the sponsorship of ECOWAS and in the presence of many international diplomats, Adama Barrow was sworn in as president in the Gambian embassy in Dakar, Senegal. The same day, the UN Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 2337, expressing its full support for ECOWAS's quest “to ensure, by political means first,” that “the will of the people of The Gambia as expressed in the results of 1st December elections” be honoured, though the Security Council did not endorse military action according to Chapter VII of the UN Charter (UN 2017). On 19 January, some troops nevertheless invaded Gambian territory, but the invasion was quickly halted by a last-minute negotiation by Mauritania's president Abdel Aziz, Guinea's Alpha Condé, and Ibn Chambas. Under the imminent threat of military invasion, with thousands of Gambians fleeing to Senegal, and with Jammeh's own army chief pledging his allegiance to President Barrow, Jammeh eventually agreed to step down and go into exile. The ECOWAS contingents then secured the territory, and it was decided that ECOMIG would stay for a further three months in The Gambia, as requested by President Barrow.

ECPF AND IMPLEMENTATION

Looking at the progress made by ECOWAS, it is clear that achievements have been made in terms of the policies and frameworks guiding peace and security. In this regard, a key accomplishment is the acknowledgement of the need to address root causes of conflicts in its protocols and frameworks for peace and security, including constitutional issues related to separation of powers and zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes, or maintenance, of government. Beyond this, issues of popular participation, decentralization of power and democratic control of the armed forces are addressed as well as efforts to transform ECOWAS from an ‘ECOWAS of States’ to an ‘ECOWAS of the Peoples’, bringing the organization’s conflict prevention efforts closer to the concept of human security. Nevertheless, while ECOWAS policies within peace and security are highly developed, the fact remains that they are often lagging behind in implementation. This is an issue that can be attributed both to a shortage of political will among member states and a shortage of capacity. In terms of capacity, constraints in human capacity and administrative support systems have limited ECOWAS’ capacity to execute programmes and absorb committed resources. A highly centralized decision-making structure causes further bottlenecks within the ECOWAS Commission.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, it is clear that the ECPF is a useful initiative with potential to contribute to the reduction of conflicts and improvement in human security in the West African sub-region. However, the realization of these objectives depends largely on the successful implementation of the document. This requires broader stakeholder participation at the state, ECOWAS and international community levels.

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