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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. 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 bloc'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.

ECOWAS has 15 member states; eight of these are French-speaking, five are English-speaking, and two Portuguese-speaking. Member countries making up ECOWAS are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d’ Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo.

**ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK.**

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.

 For the purposes of the ECPF, human security refers to the creation of conditions to eliminate pervasive threats to people's and individual rights, livelihoods, safety and life; the protection of human and democratic rights and the promotion of human development to ensure freedom from fear and freedom from want.

The ECPF defines conflict prevention as activities designed to reduce tensions and prevent the outbreak, escalation, spread or recurrence of violence Conflict prevention strategies may distinguish between operational prevention (measures applicable in the face of imminent crisis) and structural prevention (measures to ensure that crises do not arise in the first place or, if they do that theydonotreoccur). The emphasis is not on preventing conflict per se (conflict being a natural consequence of change) but in halting its descent into violence3.

**THE INTENTIONS ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK.**

* 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. Within the ECOWAS Commission, it is primarily the Office of the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) that bears primary responsibility for operational conflict prevention policy and initiatives. However, the crosscutting nature of conflict issues means that PAPS has to work in close collaboration with other departments, such as Human Development and Gender, Communication and Legal.

* A reference for developing process-based cooperation with regional and international stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, African RECs, the AU and UN systems, as well as development partners, on conflict prevention and peace-building around concrete interventions.

The ECPF comprises fourteen components that span the chain of initiatives designed to strengthen human security and incorporate conflict prevention activities (operational and structural) as well as aspects of peace-building. They are:

* Early Warning
* Preventive Diplomacy
* Democracy and Political Governance
* Human Rights and the Rule of Law
* Media
* Natural Resource Governance
* Cross-Border Initiatives
* Security Governance
* Practical Disarmament
* Women, Peace and Security
* Youth Empowerment
* ECOWAS Standby Force
* Humanitarian Assistance
* Peace Education (The Culture of Peace).

**ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVES**

* Mainstream conflict prevention into ECOWAS‟ policies and programs as an operational mechanism.

* . Increase understanding of the conceptual basis of conflict prevention, and in so doing, interrelate conflict prevention activities with development and humanitarian crisis prevention and preparedness.

* Build awareness and anticipation, and strengthen capacity within Member States and civil society to enhance their role as principal constituencies and actors in conflict prevention and peace-building.

* Increase understanding of opportunities, tools and resources related to conflict prevention and peace-building at technical and political levels within Member States, the ECOWAS system and beyond.

* Increase awareness and preparedness for cooperative ventures between ECOWAS, Member States, civil society and external constituencies (RECs, AU, EU, UN, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and development/humanitarian agencies) in pursuit of conflict prevention and peace-building.

* Strengthen capacity within ECOWAS to pursue concrete and integrated conflict prevention and peace-building facilitation, and concomitant activities such as development and humanitarian crisis prevention and preparedness, in Member States using existing resources, such as the Departments of the Commission; the Early Warning System; supporting organs of the Mechanism, including the Council of the Wise and Special Mediators; and other ECOWAS institutions.

* Enhance ECOWAS‟ anticipation and planning capabilities in relation to regional tensions.

* Extend opportunities for conflict prevention to post-conflict environments through targeted restructuring of political governance, conflict-sensitive reconstruction and development, as well as humanitarian crisis prevention and preparedness, and related peace-building initiatives.

* Generate a more pro-active and operational conflict prevention posture from Member States and the ECOWAS system.

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK (ECPF) IN WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES.**

* A NEW SECURITY: THE ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK.

ECOWAS first took a reactionary approach to conflict, putting out fires. Learning from years of experience, however, it shifted to an approach emphasizing pre-empting and preventing conflicts from starting. The organization developed a robust strategy to employ structural and operational means of preventing conflicts across the sub region. The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) was adopted in 2008 by the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. It is: 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 (ECPF, 2008:7). Its overall aims are to strengthen human security architecture in West Africa, and to integrate conflict prevention and peace-building activities into its initiatives. It has fifteen components for which activities and measurable outputs have been developed. The components include: Early Warning; Preventive Diplomacy; Democracy and Political Governance; Human Rights and the Rule of Law; Media; Natural Resource Governance; Cross-border Initiatives; Security Governance; Practical Disarmament; Women Peace and Security; Youth Empowerment; ECOWAS Standby Force; Humanitarian Assistance; Peace Education; and Enabling Mechanisms. There is likely no other ECOWAS framework that has undergone more rigorous processes of scrutiny and inclusivity. Prior to its adoption, the strategic framework had undergone a conceptualization phase, wherein the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Adviser Dr. Abdel-Fatua Musah and his team analysed the particular threats to peace and stability in the sub region, and then identified specific actions tailored to counter those threats. This phase also entailed an internal ECOWAS review and contributions from relevant departments within the Commission. Following the production of a first ECPF Draft, the ECOWAS Commission convened workshops for peace and security experts from relevant intergovernmental organizations. These workshops, conducted between June and December 2007, included experts from the UN and the AU, leading civil society actors, ECOWAS Training Centers of Excellence, academic institutions and member states' experts on political affairs. They further fine-tuned the framework prior to its presentation for adoption by ECOWAS authorities in 2008.

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**.

ECOWAS has helped to management conflict in West African state 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.

**REFERENCE.**

* ECOWAS conflict prevention framework book
* THE ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK (ECPF): THE ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK (ECPF): EVOLUTION, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS- EVOLUTION
* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic\_Community\_of\_West\_African\_States