**ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework and its Effectiveness**

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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 (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, adopted1 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 Defence (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.

The ECPF boldly attempts to address structural and operational prevention and peacebuilding by providing guidelines and entry points for actors to engage in conflict prevention initiatives. The ECPF defines conflict prevention as “activities designed to reduce tensions and prevent the outbreak, escalation and recurrence of conflict".

**Key Objectives of the ECPF are;**

1. Enhancing the conceptual basis for conflict prevention;
2. Mainstreaming conflict prevention into ECOWAS’ policies and programmes as an

operational mechanism;

1. Strengthening capacity within ECOWAS to pursue concrete and integrated conflict prevention and peace‐building initiatives using existing resources, such as the departments of the Commission; the Early Warning System; organs of the Commission, including the Council of the Wise and Special Mediators; and other ECOWAS institutions.
2. Strengthening awareness, capacity and anticipation within Member‐  States and civil society as principal constituencies and actors in conflict prevention and peace‐building;
3. Increasing understanding of opportunities, tools and resources related to conflict prevention and peace‐building at technical and political levels;
4. Extending opportunities for conflict prevention to post‐conflict environments by means of targeted restructuring of political governance, conflict‐sensitive reconstruction, development and other peace‐building initiatives;
5. Enhancing ECOWAS’ anticipation and planning capabilities in relation to regional tensions
6. Generating a more pro‐active and operational conflict prevention posture from Member‐States and the ECOWAS system;
7. Member‐States and the ECOWAS system; Increasing awareness and preparedness for collaborative ventures between ECOWAS, Member‐States, civil society and external constituencies (RECs, AU, EU, UN, IFIs and Development/Humanitarian Agencies) in pursuit of conflict prevention and peace‐building.

**Method of Achieving the Objectives Include;**

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

These wide ranging objectives and components convey two fundamental shifts in ECOWAS’ approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding:

1. **There will be more coordination among ECOWAS institutions and agencies on conflict prevention:** To date, proper coordination and consolidation among ECOWAS institutions working on conflict prevention related initiates have been weak. For example, hitherto, initiatives such as ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Mechanism (ECOWARN), initiatives that promote good governance, democracy, gender equality and youth empowerment, have operated in isolation, causing overlap and inefficient use of resources. Therefore, it is significant that the ECPF aims to coordinate these initiatives to avoid duplication of efforts across the region.
2. **Successful implementation of the framework hinges on collaboration between multi sectors and actors:** Effective collaboration among civil society, ECOWAS states and external actors on conflict prevention has been limited. While there are isolated examples of civil society working with governments and external agencies such as the United Nations to intervene in conflict situations in the region, the need for a systematised approach that prioritises collaboration among these actors for wider impact is pivotal. It is therefore important that the ECPF recognises this existing gap and aspires to address it.

**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>
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