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MATRIC NO:16/SMS10/001

DEPARTMENT: Peace and Conflict Studies

COLLEGE: Social and Management Sciences

LEVEL:400

COURSE TITLE: Contemporary Wars in West Africa

COURSE CODE: PCS 412

ASSIGNMENT QUESTION

Examine the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) and its effectiveness since 2008 in the prevention of major conflict in West Africa.

 The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional organization that is made up of 15 West African countries established on 28 May 1975. Its main goal is the promotion of the economic integration among its members. Indeed, ECOWAS is one the five regional pillars of the African Economic Community (AEC). ECOWAS has three official languages: English, French, and Portuguese. ECOWAS also helps as a peacekeeping force, with member states occasionally sending joint military forces to intervene in the bloc's member countries at times of political instability and unrest. Recently these included interventions in Ivory Coast in 2003, Liberia in 2003, Guinea-Bissau in 2012, The Gambia in 2017 and Mali in 2013.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has completed a very important process of developing a regional conflict prevention framework to guide the conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of conflict prevention initiatives in the Commission and Member States. This framework signifies the actualization that preventing conflicts is an integral foundation for regional integration and development.

West Africa is characterized by intrastate armed conflicts and civil unrest leading to deaths, injuries, and large-scale displacement of persons. These conflicts and wars are interconnected to challenges of poverty, bad governance and weak states in the region. With Liberia, Sierra Leone evolving into democratic states and semblances of stability coming to Cote d’Ivoire, there is the hope that West Africa’s dark days of open conflicts are over and the region is on the trajectory to building strong viable peaceful and democratic states.

The role of ECOWAS in the region’s transition cannot be overstated. Since its establishment, ECOWAS has been at the forefront of promoting a regional approach to addressing issues of peace and security.

The eruptions of civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone necessitated the regional institution to prioritize the promotion of peace and security as prerequisites for regional integration; the main justification for its foundation.

The intervening role of ECOWAS through the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia and Sierra Leone pointed to the willingness of West African governments to expeditiously intervene in volatile situations in the region, hitherto, the approaches to conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding has been uncoordinated. Therefore, it is appropriate that a framework to guide the prevention of conflicts in the region has been adopted by the Heads of States and Governments.

ECOWAS draws its mandate and legitimacy to shape conflict prevention policy and practice in West Africa from diverse but related regional and international normative sources such as the Africa Union, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the United Nations (UN).

The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) is to serve as a reference for the ECOWAS system and Member States in their activities to strengthen human security in the region. Achieving this objective requires effective and durable cooperative interventions to prevent violent conflicts from occurring within and between States, and to support peace-building in post-conflict environments. For the purposes of the ECPF, human security is 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.

According to ECPF conflict prevention is an activity designed to reduce tensions and prevent the outbreak, escalation, spread or recurrence of violence. Conflict prevention strategies may distinguish between operational preventionmeasures 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 they don’t reoccur. The emphasis is not on preventing conflict but in halting its descent into violence which can be really deadly.

Some of the protocols and instruments informing the ECPF include ECOWAS instruments and protocols, e.g. the 1977 Accord on Non‐Aggression and Defense (ANAD), the 1978, Protocol Relating to Non-Aggression; this was later enhanced in 1981 to become the Protocol on Mutual Assistance and Defense (PMAD). However since 1981, this protocol has not been institutionalized or operationalized, the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment (1979), 1981, 1991 Declaration of Political Principles , Paragraph 2 of Article 58 of the 1993 Revised Treaty of ECOWAS which ‘commits Member States to cooperate with the Community for the purposes of reinforcing the appropriate mechanisms to ensure the timely prevention and resolution of inter and intra‐state conflicts; The Declaration of the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons (31st October, 1998), the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace‐keeping and Security (known as The Mechanism); and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

At the continental level, ECPF has been informed by the 2000 Constitutive Act of the African Union, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (July 2002).

Internationally, the ECPF draws from Article 52 of the UN Charter, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (October 2000), Recommendations of the UN High‐Level Meetings (1994 – 2004) and key recommendations from UN panels e.g. the UN High‐ Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (December 2004): “In Larger Freedom” – Implementation Report of the UN Secretary‐General on the findings of the UN High‐Panel.

These diverse sources for the development of the ECPF highlight the multidimensional and global nature of prevention. The ECOWAS conflict prevention approach and framework cannot be isolated from wider continental and international approaches.

Developments in global peace and security will affect ECOWAS’ implementation of the ECPF, and conversely, the lessons learned from ECOWAS’ experiences in implementing the framework will influence the adoption of similar frameworks, particularly on the African continent.

The ECPF boldly attempts to address structural and operational prevention and peacebuilding by providing guidelines and entry points for actors to engage in prevention initiatives. The document provides a conceptual understanding for conflict prevention. This is a critical foundation for implementing the framework. As the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding evolves, there are normative and definitional challenges associated with the concepts. A plethora of definitions on these concepts introduce confusion for actors working on preventive activities. By providing a conceptual framework for prevention, the ECPF clarifies ECOWAS’ approach and the raison d’être for prevention.

The ECPF comprises fourteen components that will help to achieve the objectives of ECPF in conflict prevention activities (operational and structural) as well as aspects of peace-building which 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).

The objectives of ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework are:

Enhance understanding of the conceptual basis of conflict prevention, this can be done by, interrelating conflict prevention activities with development and humanitarian crisis prevention and preparedness when it is needed.

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

Building of 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.

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.

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

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.

The intentions of ECPF are:

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 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.

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.

The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) has been effective since 2008 in the prevention of major conflicts in West Africa. ECOWAS first took a reactionary approach to conflict by 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. 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 analyzed 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.

ECPF has helped in the prevention and management of conflict in West African member states that 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.

The challenges of ECPF are:

Generating Political Will: With the adoption of the ECPF, the challenge for ECOWAS and the region is no longer the absence of a strategy for engaging in comprehensive conflict prevention but the political will to apply and implement the framework. Linking rhetoric about the importance and necessity of prevention to States taking preventive action is difficult. This has been one of the key impediments in achieving traction in implementing previous initiatives such as the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Mechanism ECOWARN. Member States have to be committed to implementing the framework. The ECPF points to engaging parliaments in the implementation process, this is critical to the success of its implementation at the national level. The process of presenting the framework to parliaments has commenced and this should continue across the region. However, this should be accompanied by a rigorous decentralized approach to generating political will which should involve working with local government authorities and traditional rulers.

Raising awareness of the ECPF: The ECPF should serve as one of the expressions of an “ECOWAS of the Peoples”. There should be a creative strategy for raising awareness of the framework among the region’s peoples. The implementation strategy should involve working with community-based organizations and actors to ensure that the objectives of the framework is owned by communities across the region. The ECPF document acknowledges that in the past ECOWAS has not adequately conveyed its successes or achievements. This communication gap extends to its past inability to inform the region’s citizens on its policies and initiatives. The ECPF calls for a communication strategy that will assist in localizing the framework. This strategy should incorporate components of educating the public on the purpose and the relevance of the framework to the lives of West Africans.

Coherence and coordination: Theoretically, the ECPF proposes to consolidate ECOWAS’ policies and initiatives on conflict prevention. However, “old habits die hard”. Implementing the ECPF will have to involve various departments in ECOWAS ceding their turfs and consciously including other related departments in programmes’ design and implementation to yield better results. For example, the ECOWARN, ECOWAS Gender and Development Centre and the ECOWAS Youth and Sports department should work together in generating women and youth’s participation in local level early warning and response. The restructuring of the ECOWAS secretariat to a Commission has started the process of enhancing collaboration among various departments. This principle of collaboration should be extended to initiatives implemented by ECOWAS at the country levels. Efforts should be made to promote similar cohesion among actors working with ECOWAS on prevention initiatives to avoid overlap (which usually triggers competition) and maximize efforts.

Cost of Prevention: Though it is widely acknowledged that prevention is cheaper that reaction; prevention is still very expensive. For the ECPF to be effectively implemented there needs to be adequate investment in the implementation process. This investment should not be limited to ECOWAS as an institution, but to the organizations and actors working on the ground that are often in close proximity to the conflicts and suffer directly from its consequences.

Thus, the proposal to set up a Fund for Conflict Prevention (FCP) to support “planned and unforeseen” interventions in conflict prevention is welcome. However, past attempts at raising financial resources at the regional level, through the Community Levy or the Peace Fund have been challenging and provide valuable lessons for the proposed FCP. Prevention is a process, not an event: The ECPF is the first step in implementing a long-term conflict prevention strategy in West Africa. The framework has simply provided the landscape for the tasking job of prevention to commence. Generally, conflict prevention in practice faces problems as it is extremely difficult to evaluate if specific prevention initiatives have been responsible for deterring conflict. In particular, the evidence of structural prevention of conflict is often intangible and is usually the product of multiple intervening factors. Therefore, it is important that all stakeholders involved in implementing the ECPF commit to long term impact rather than short term results which have typified the assessment of previous conflict prevention initiatives.

Finally, Conflict prevention is a very complicated task. ECOWAS is to be commended for attempting to address the challenges of prevention through the adoption of the ECPF. However, the real test will be in the implementation of the framework.