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PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

ASSIGNMENT

**EXAMINE 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 transformation from inter-state to intra-state conflict from the latter part of the 20th Century in West Africa brought a number of its economies to near collapse. As a result, the sub-region's security environment has often been viewed as one that continues to be precarious and unstable. Although conflicts are not always violent, those that have plagued West Africa at community, state and regional levels have been characterized by violence. For decades, countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau were crippled by conflicts and civil strife in which violence and incessant killings were prevalent.

While violent conflicts are declining in the sub-region, recent insurgencies in the Sahel region affecting the West African countries of Mali, Niger and Mauritania sends alarming signals of the possible resurfacing of internal and regional violent conflicts. More critical to add is the low intensity conflicts surging within notably stable countries such as the Casamance conflict in Senegal, the intermittent Dagbon chieftaincy crisis in Ghana and the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria to name a few. These conflicts have resulted in the 'destruction of lives and property, the internal displacement of people, a region-wide refugee crisis, poverty and disease, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, human and drug trafficking, illegal exploitation of natural resources and banditry'.

Violent Conflicts and Civil Strife in West Africa

Ending violent conflicts in West Africa remains one of the main challenges of the sub-region. This is possibly attributed to the sudden shift from inter-state to intra-state conflicts that characterized most part of the late 1980s through to the 21st century posing a new challenge of intra-state peace consolidation and conflict prevention. Particular for a number of actors including the sub-regional bloc, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which was set up to build economic integration. Nevertheless, over the years, states, the ECOWAS, Civil Society groups and the International Community have taken measures to resolve and end violent conflicts in the sub-region. Examples can be cited of ECOWAS' timely response to the violent civil wars that erupted in Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1989 and 1991 respectively through the deployment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Despite these efforts which have achieved some appreciable success, the cradle of peace and stability in the sub-region remains brittle and the possibility of a resurgence of seemingly ended conflicts is high. Buttressing the latter is the example of West Africa's first Republic state, Liberia, where the country relapsed into a second civil war in 1999 after ECOWAS Cease fire intervention ended the first civil war in 1996.² In the period between 2010 and 2011, Côte d'Ivoire almost plunged back into civil war after its disputed November 2010 election led to violent confrontations

between loyalists of then President Laurent Gbagbo and opposition Alassane Ouattara claiming the lives of over 3000 Ivoirians and displacing many. These few examples raise questions on the capacity and mechanisms used to resolve conflicts in West Africa and the effectiveness of these mechanisms to ensure sustainable peace in the sub- region.

INITIATIVES TOWARDS CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION IN WEST AFRICA

The outbreak of violent conflicts and civil strife in West Africa has led to several actions and interventions played by different actors. These actors include civil society organizations (CSOs), ECOWAS, the African Union (AU) and the international community.

At the sub-regional level, ECOWAS' involvement and efforts in addressing critical security challenges have achieved some noticeable success. In Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire, the deployment of peacekeepers through ECOMOG and the key mediatory role played by the sub- regional bloc helped salvage peace and stability, bringing an end to the violent conflicts. Additionally, the involvement of ECOWAS can be witnessed through its lead on the process of drafting and signing numerous peace agreements that resulted in the attainment of peace in several countries in the sub-region. These include but are not limited to the Linas-Marcoussis, Accra II & III, and Pretoria Agreements on Côte d'Ivoire; the Accra, Cotonou and Abuja Peace Agreements on Liberia; and the Lomé Peace Agreement on Sierra Leone. In terms of mediation, ECOWAS was involved in recent conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Guinea-Bissau to ensure that stability is restored. For instance, during the 2012 coups d'état in Mali and Guinea-Bissau, the ECOWAS Heads of States and Governments appointed H.E. Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso and H.E. Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria as mediators for the respective countries (ECOWAS 2012). The ECOWAS has furthermore been collaborating with civil society organizations to implement its Early Warning Mechanism (ECOWARN) which seeks to prevent and monitor conflicts in the sub-region. For instance, for the past eight years since the operationalisation of ECOWARN, ECOWAS has been working with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) to monitor elections in Ghana, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Conakry and other countries on the continent. In addition, the adoptions of the Protocol, Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in December 1999 and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework

(ECPF) in 2008, among other protocols, have helped enhance and affirm ECOWAS' role as a key player in conflict prevention and resolution in West Africa.

The efforts of civil society and women's groups within the sub-region cannot be ignored. Throughout the various violent conflicts and civil strife that West Africa has experienced, these groups have played a pivotal role in building lasting peace within communities and states. The initiatives of groups such as WANEP, West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), Mano River Union Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), and Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), among others, have brokered peace and ended violent conflicts in West Africa. For example, to end the Liberian war WIPNET, through Violent Conflicts and Civil Strife in West Africa.

Beyond the borders of Africa, the UN and the European Union (EU) have also been key contributors to the consolidation of sustainable peace in West Africa. The UN for example has been deploying peacekeepers into violent conflict territories in West Africa for decades. More recently, the global governance body has also been supporting ECOWAS in addressing the crisis in Mali and Guinea-Bissau. For instance, the Secretary General's Special Representative for West Africa, Said Djinnit, participated in the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council meeting on Mali and Guinea-Bissau took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on 19 May 2012.

In addition, the establishment of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) in January 2002 has assisted the region to address, inter alia, issues of human rights abuse, election violence, cross border insecurities, security sector reforms, drug trafficking and organized crimes as well as provide funding for the implementation of state and regional programs. The EU on the other hand, have been, among other activities, funding and supporting election observation and monitoring programs across the sub-region. Since 2000, it has deployed 78 Election Observation missions worldwide including missions to 10 West African countries - Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Ghana, Togo, Guinea Conakry, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Senegal.

Through these missions, EU has been working with local communities and state institutions to monitor, prevent and resolve election related violence in the sub-region.

CHALLENGES TO ENDING VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN WEST AFRICA

Despite efforts made to prevent and end violent conflicts in West Africa, the region continues to experience sporadic violence and volatile security challenges. The major challenge to ending conflict in West Africa can be attributed to the poor understanding of the fundamental causes of the conflict.

For example in the current Malian crisis, the misplaced understanding of the international community that the root cause of the conflict is the terrorist activities by Islamists in the region; thus, placing it in the context of 'fight against terror' has in part hindered the process of finding lasting solution for the conflict. In that it has shifted the focus from the deep seated root causes of bad governance, corruption, discrimination, ethnic marginalization, and unstructured military governance) to terrorist activities which is mainly an offshoot of the conflict. Other challenges identified by scholars include weak institutional structures; language barrier (Anglo- Francophone); lack of skills and expertise in conflict mediation and dialogue; lack of resources; lack of political will; lack of coordination between and among ECOWAS agencies and its partners; and non inclusive peace-building processes. These factors make ending violent conflicts in the region increasingly delicate and challenging. This they emphasized is affecting the implementation of the ECPF which was designed to 'strengthen human security and incorporate conflict prevention activities as well as aspects of peace-building'. This has in part is also affecting the work operation of the ECOWARN. For instance, recently, the regional early warning system was criticized for not detecting the signs that led to the April 2012 coup d'état in Guinea-Bissau as the early warning mechanism continued to grapple with internal and external coordination challenges.

Lack of resources of states and the sub- regional body also hinders the resolution of conflicts in the sub-region. Financial, human and material resources for conflict resolution have been some of the sub-region's challenges. For instance, most national security forces lack the requisite equipment and capacity needed to adequately disarm belligerent groups. For example, in the Malian conflict, lack of equipment and capacity of the national army has been noted as one of the challenges preventing successive governments from addressing the Tuareg rebellions since the 1960s. In Liberia also, despite the acclaimed heroic intervention of ECOMOG in 1996, material challenges such as lack of equipment, arms, sea and airlift capacities, and machinery to some extent, affected the effective implementation of the ECOMOG mandate which in part contributed to the resurfacing of the conflict in 1999 after peace was restored in 1997.

Additionally, lack of political will of governments of West African states to create transparent and accountable governance institutions, address human rights issues and implement signed peace agreements and resolutions is also a challenge hindering the resolution of violent conflicts in the sub-region. For example, in the 2010 post electoral violence in Côte d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo's defiance to the ECOWAS communiqué from the Abuja Summit on 24 December 2010, calling for him to step down, hindered the early resolution of the conflict;

further fueling the crisis as his loyalists continued to fight. Furthermore, limited involvement of women, local communities, grassroots organizations and civil society in peace-building and peacemaking processes perhaps contributes to the challenges impeding lasting resolution of conflicts in West Africa. Women play essential roles in peacemaking in their communities, homes and organizations however, when it comes to official negotiations and mediations, women's participation and representation remain nominal. In West Africa, the primary organs for conflict mediation in the ECOWAS Member States are the Council of the Wise (CoW) and the Special Representatives and Special Envoys of the President.

CONCLUSION

Ending violent conflicts and civil strife in the sub-region requires collaborative and collective efforts in (a) identifying the causal indicators of conflicts; (b) developing concrete strategies and programs to prevent, manage and completely resolve these conflicts; (c) documenting, managing and disseminating information on lessons learnt and best practices of conflict prevention and resolution, and peace-building across the sub-region; and (d) harnessing indigenous conflict prevention mechanisms while leveraging with contemporary mechanisms to adequately address present and emerging insecurities and violent conflicts. Although the sub-region is increasingly volatile to vicious conflicts, its rich indigenous cultural and social values such as respect, protection of human life, freedom, cooperation and tolerance; coupled with its diverse population and numerous civil society organizations are prospective strengths and, if well harnessed, could be a driving force for ending the preponderance of violent conflicts and civil strife in West Africa.