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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 CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK**

. 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, adopted 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 Defense (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. Also, ECOWAS’ preventive diplomacy initiatives averted large-scale violence in countries such as Niger, Guinea and Togo.

The ECPF consists of 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).

**RELEVANCE OF THE ECPF FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION**

The relevance of the ECPF lies in its objectives, the outputs it attempts to attain, the issues it seeks to address and the method(s) with which it seeks to achieve its objectives. A careful consideration of the documents objectives and proposed outputs reveals a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach for conflict prevention in ways that address the current security challenges of the West African sub-region

**OBJECTIVES OF THE ECPF**

The objectives of the ECPF include the following;

* Mainstream conflict prevention into ECOWAS policies and programs
* Increase understanding of the conceptual basis of conflict prevention
* Build awareness and anticipation, and strengthen capacity within member states and civil society to enhance their role in conflict prevention and peace building
* Increase understanding of opportunities, tools and resources related to conflict prevention and peace building
* Increase awareness and preparedness for cooperative ventures between ECOWAS, member states, civil society and external partners in pursuit of conflict prevention and peace building
* Strengthen capacity within ECOWAS to pursue concrete and integrated conflict prevention and peace building
* Enhance ECOWAS’ anticipation and planning capabilities in relation to regional tensions and
* Generate a more pro-active and operational conflict prevention posture from member states and the ECOWAS system.

1. 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.

2. Close to two thirds of ECOWAS member states are considered less then fully democratic regimes, and good governance, compounded by high levels of corruption, remains an issue. In addition, the last five years have seen unconstitutional changes in governments in Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Niger. ECOWAS has sought to promote democracy in two principal ways. First, it has expanded its role in election monitoring, thereby seeking to prevent leaders coming to power through less than fair elections. Second, the adoption of the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001 practically translates into a zero-tolerance stance against unconstitutional changes of power, and grants the right to impose sanctions against such illegitimate governments. Whereas ECOWAS has made important inroads in promoting democracy in the region in the last five years, significant challenges remain. Successes include helping to install an interim government in Burkina Faso following the ousting of long-time president Compaoré in November 2014 and help prepare the country for democratic elections.