

# Introduction

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The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 and comprises fifteen member states and has the total population of 280 million people. ECOWAS was established to address a specific problem with which it was confronted – economic development. Consequently, ECOWAS was originally conceived and established to address the narrow security issues of economic integration as the basis for self-reliance. However, with time, the leaders of the regional body realised that there was a strong nexus between economics and other broader security issues. Hence, in recent years, the organisation has begun to tackle a number of issues which were not originally envisaged to address.

After independence, most African states faced the challenge of addressing the legacies of long years of colonial rule, and economic development was one of the issues confronting these fledgling states. Individually, these states could not address such problem and therefore the need for a regional approach to it. The creation of ECOWAS provided the regional framework for achieving such a goal but like other post-colonial projects, the process of economic integration was undermined by the strong link with the economies of the former colonies, which led more to dependence than independence; and the unfavourable and unequal international trade regime established did not provide any basis for African countries to develop.

Long years of single party and authoritarian rule coupled with frequent regime change through military coups d'état made it impossible to pursue development in any stable environment. Politics therefore undermined economic development because most leaders were more interested in maintaining the status quo through power struggle than pay serious attention to development that would benefit the citizens of the respective states constituting the region.

Often, arbitrary regime change was aided and abetted by neighbouring states and this made it impossible to pursue any regional project with success as governments became suspicious of one other.

Accordingly, ECOWAS responded to the ugly situation by adopting two major security documents, namely, the Protocol on Non-Aggression (1978) and the

Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence (1981). These legal instruments constituted the beginning of the realisation by West African leaders that security was linked with economic integration.

By the end of the 1980s, new forms of challenges emerged in West Africa, which required new ways of addressing them. Unlike in the past when inter-state rivalries and conflicts were the order of the day, during this period, intra-state conflicts posed new challenges to ECOWAS. Although the region had experienced intra-state conflict in Nigeria (the Nigerian civil war) between May 1967 and January 1970, the conflict in Liberia and subsequently in Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire posed new challenges. The impact on the lives of West Africans; their regional and international dimensions; and their nature meant that ECOWAS could not afford to sit supinely to allow the conflicts take their natural course.

Consequently, when the Liberian civil war erupted, ECOWAS was swift in putting together troops to intervene in the conflict. For the first time, the regional body organised ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to intervene militarily in order to bring the carnage under control. It was also the first time a regional body like ECOWAS intervened in such conflict without prior authorisation by the UN Security Council (UNSC). The ECOWAS intervention raised a number of issues including legitimacy and legality. Questions were posed as to whether ECOWAS had any legitimate and legal right to intervene in such conflict. There were two major reasons for this debate. First, there was the erroneous view that Nigeria intervened in Liberia because of the personal relations between President Samuel Doe of Liberia and President I. B. Babangida of Nigeria. Secondly, some felt that it was questionable whether countries led by undemocratic military governments could promote democracy in war-torn Liberia.

Subsequently, the ECOWAS intervened in Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire in order to find solution to the crises in these countries. Without delving into the shortcomings and strengths of these interventions because they are covered in the papers in this book, what is important is that such interventions constituted the beginning of the effective involvement of the organisation in other security issues, which impinged upon economic integration.

Currently, intra-state conflicts on the scale of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire are declining but the region is plagued by conflicts in Senegal (Cassamance), Ghana (Northern), Nigeria (Niger Delta) and others. Moreover, there are transnational or trans-border security challenges that the region must confront if it should remain stable and secure. First, addressing the challenges of post-war reconstruction is a tall order. Second, the region is awash with Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and drugs trafficking; there are issues of money laundering and human trafficking, youth unemployment, and spread of the HIV/AIDS disease.

One other area which needs to be addressed within the context of this discourse is the gender dimension to conflicts as they occur in the sub-region. The praxis has more often than not been to pay attention to gender issues only during the post conflict period. In Sierra Leone for instance it was estimated that 250,000 women were raped during decade-long civil war.<sup>1</sup> Women in Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire faced similar ordeals and even in societies that are considered relatively stable; the situation of women demands serious attention.

However, there have been notable and positive developments within the region. Over the past five years, there have been democratic changes in West African states based on political pluralism. For example, in the year 2007, a total of ten West African countries conducted democratic elections. With the lingering poverty and impact of protracted conflicts, however, the holding of 'pro forma democracies' on their own will not be able to ensure sustainable peace and security in the region. There is thus the need to address the broader security needs of the people as part and parcel of the democratisation of West Africa. Thus, the nexus between politics and economics should be recognised as the basis for sound policy making at the national and regional levels.

Although ECOWAS relies on its member states to address the challenges narrated above, the organisation must understand the nuances and dynamics of the conflicts in order to play the role of facilitator and monitor of developments in the region. It must ensure that security is viewed from a holistic perspective, and that the new shift towards human security is not just about the physical security of the people. On the contrary, it should be about addressing the oppressive power structures that perpetuate human suffering. Hence, human security is also about emancipation. Such conceptual clarity is vital for sound and effective policy making in the region.

This book therefore provides a nuanced understanding and explanation of the broad range of issues that relate to the dynamics of conflicts in the region. It covers issues such as natural resource governance; the nexus between demography, environment and conflicts; youth vulnerability; gender; peacemaking; human security; internal and external dimensions of conflicts; Diaspora and conflicts; and the responses of ECOWAS to conflicts in the region. As a research effort, this process brings with it the value-added of retrospective analysis at a time when even the sub-regional umbrella (ECOWAS) is re-thinking its conflict intervention framework in a bid to effectively mainstream issues of human security within its security sector intervention paradigm.

Accordingly, in his chapter, Abiodun Alao argues that natural resources have entered the dynamics of conflicts in the region because the mechanisms for governing these resources in most countries in the region are deplorably weak,<sup>2</sup> and the sub-regional organisation overlooking the affairs of the region, ECOWAS,

still has considerable amount of work to do in order to manage the complexities of natural resource governance at the sub-regional level. By natural resource governance, Alao refers to 'the complex structures of considerations, internal and external, which come to play in the management (i.e. the ownership, extraction, processing, distribution and control) of natural resources'. Thus he covers the legal and political contexts for natural resource governance.

In their chapter, Andrews Atta-Asamoah and Emmanuel Kwesi Aning provide an analysis of the complex relationships between population composition, especially age distribution; environment and the dynamics that accompany the outbreak of conflicts in West Africa by using Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire as empirical case studies. They argue that the conflicts in the region have never been linked with the problem of youth bulge and the effects of economic downturns. They also point out the adverse impact of conflicts on environmental security. In this light, reference is made to the role of environmental issues in fomenting tensions in many forest and Sahelian areas. As they argue, the increasing desertification in West Africa constitutes an early warning indicator that must be addressed or else the region could degenerate into more deadly conflicts in the future.

Augustine Ikelegbe and Dauda Garuba probe the role of youth in the conflicts in West Africa. In this light, they examine the factors that make young people to get involved in these conflicts. According to them, although youth dominate some conflicts, they are not the drivers. However, there are conflicts that are driven and run by young people. The case of the Niger Delta exemplifies this assumption and therefore understanding and explaining their roles and character of youth involvement in such conflicts are crucial in understanding conflicts dynamics in the sub-region. Against the backdrop of the above, they pose a number of questions that are relevant to articulating policy options for addressing such a problem within the region. These relate to the origins of youth involvement; characteristics and trends of youth in conflicts; and policy measures for redirecting the energies of youth in order for them to realize their potentials in society.

Awa Ceesay-Ebo provides some critical insights into the gender dimension of the ECOWAS peace and security architecture in relation to UN Resolution 1325. In her contribution, she argues that in post-conflict environments, women are 'only sporadically involved in peace negotiations and agreements'. According to her, even where they are involved in peace-building in society, the views of women are not taken seriously. Yet in demographic terms, 'women are half of the human race'. Ebo points out that the role of women in such process can go a long way in sustaining peace and security.

Boubacar N'Diaye reflects on the internal and international dimensions of conflicts in West Africa. In his chapter, he argues that even though the conflicts in West Africa originate from objective socioeconomic, psychological, and political conditions in the confines of national boundaries, they are also influenced by the

sub-regional, regional, and global environments in which they occur. In this light, he provides a historical background to the region and subscribes to the definition of conflict as ‘a situation in which actors use conflict behaviour against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility’.<sup>3</sup> It also examines the nature of the African state and the implications for understanding the dynamics of conflicts in the region.

In her chapter, Funmi Olonisakin discusses the dynamics of conflict and peace-building in West Africa within the contexts of the role of ECOWAS. In her assessment of the role of ECOWAS, she writes that the organisation has demonstrated its capacity in the area of peacekeeping. However, its involvement in overall peace-building in the region has been comparably weak and less systematic. Indeed, peace-building in the region has witnessed greater involvement by external actors, with ECOWAS, playing a minimal role.

Ishola Williams provides personal insights into the process of peacemaking in the region. As someone who has worked in this area in the region, he explains why peace agreements are not durable. As he points out, most of the negotiated processes in Africa follow the same method, the same template and the peace accords are similar. In most cases, peace agreements are not respected because when rebels negotiate, they do so under pressure and often with carrots and sticks incentives. It is from the vantage point as a practitioner, both at national and sub-regional levels, that he discusses peacemaking with emphasis on the instruments, institutions, resources and capacity.

In his chapter, Mohammed J. Kuna examines the issue of social vulnerability and Conflicts in West Africa. He conceptualises the notion of vulnerability and outlines its basic elements in the West African context. He argues that a regional Conflict Vulnerability Analysis (CVA) should include an analysis of the trajectories of conflicts.

Therefore, he reviews the ‘existing regional mechanism for conflict management, and draws attention to some of its limitations, thereby laying the ground for the necessity of a broader mechanism that encompasses a CVA’. He argues, furthermore, that ‘such mechanisms have been locked within a broad, though paralysing framework that emphasises the rigidity of national sovereignty and boundaries’. He stresses that the evolving regional mechanism remains militaristic and is located ‘within national, rather than regional security frameworks, and largely *reactive* in its response to conflicts’. He calls for the revision and strengthening of the entire architecture in order for it to become predictive and anticipatory. In this way, it will contribute meaningfully to understanding the ‘probable impact of conflicts, the probable humanitarian assistance required, as well as identifying the salient conditions determining the differential exposure of communities and populations to conflicts’.

Given the fact that the West African Diasporas are closely identified and linked with conflicts in the region, Musa Abutudu and Crosdel Emuedo examine their increasing role as active players in them. As he points out, the proportion of migrants to the total population of West Africa is estimated to be 2.9 per cent with Nigeria alone having 15 million of its citizens living abroad. One of the factors that contribute to the increasing role of the Diasporas is the rapid development of new communication technologies which has made it possible to transmit information quickly and therefore enhancing the capacities to mobilise across continents on common causes.

Another issue raised by the authors is that because of the unfavourable conditions associated with living abroad where people are often discriminated against on the basis of race, xenophobia and other factors, people in the Diasporas have found it difficult to settle abroad. Hence, as a way out, they tend to focus on their countries of origin. Often these people are forced to flee their countries for several reasons ranging from economic hardships to political problems emanating from the key role they play in the struggle against authoritarian regimes. For others, relocation is a function of professional necessity. In most cases, these people lead the struggle from abroad. This raises the question as to whether Diasporas are conflict accelerators or moderators.

In his chapter on 'ECOWAS and regional responses to conflicts', Abdel-Fatau Musah writes that the regional body has always responded to changing events in the international scene. Thus, the initial attempts to address the issues of peace and security were informed by the realities of Cold War politics. These were reflected in the key normative documents on peace and security such as the 1978 Protocol on Non-Aggression, and the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defence, which were 'designed primarily to address external threats and aggression'. However, by the mid-1980s, new global dynamics and local responses had emerged to threaten ECOWAS' integration efforts. He therefore stresses that the recent transformation of ECOWAS from a Secretariat into a Commission, which gives the organisation some supra-national status, has implications for its integration drive at the institutional and programmatic levels including its work in the field of peace and security.

On the theme of 'ECOWAS and Human Security', Olawale Ismail observes that 'despite the lull in rebellions and the commendable recalibration of ECOWAS peace and security forces, the extent to which extant conflict prevention and management mechanisms reflect or adequately takes care of emerging and possible future security threats is doubtful'. Therefore, he critically interrogates how, where and why human security is linked with the broader security debate in theory and practice. Against this background, the chapter focuses on the 'freedom from fear' component of the broader human security agenda. He 'contends that

emerging sources of human and material destruction, displacement and dislocation, and trans-border insecurity in the sub-region are inadequately reflected and/or prioritised in ECOWAS' peace and security architecture'. Significantly, he highlights the need for a West African perspective on human security that recognises and prioritises the pervasive threats to the security of individuals and communities. Ismail is not convinced that the transformation of ECOWAS into a supranational authority can enable it respond to the challenges of human security challenges unless it clearly and effectively defines the human security normative principle of intervention (overriding sovereignty).

In the concluding chapter, Thomas Jaye makes the point that it is only through regional and collective efforts that peace and security can be consolidated in West Africa. The basis for this contention is that the security of any one state or country is indivisible from the rest of ECOWAS member states. He therefore argues that there is the need to give critical thought to the reforming of the security sector, not just in post-conflict societies, but in every country throughout the region. This point is important because of the nature, scope and dimension of transnational security threats and dilemmas facing the region. Finally, the chapter argues that as important as a regional approach to security sector reform is, it will remain inadequate to address the broader security needs of the people in the absence of a regional approach to people-centred economic development; thus rekindling the role of the state and such intergovernmental organisations as the ECOWAS in leading the way for policy direction.

