# PART I

## Understanding Conflicts in West Africa

# 1

# ECOWAS: From Economic Integration to Peace-building

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In considering the extent to which ECOWAS has played a role in responding to conflict in West Africa, one is often tempted to forget that the organisation was meant, at its origin, to foster economic integration and only got into the field of peace and security by default. In the last decade, but more importantly in the last few years, ECOWAS has played a significant role in addressing conflicts in the region. However, its capacity has been better demonstrated in the field of peacekeeping. While not directly responsible for post-conflict peace-building work in West Africa, ECOWAS has, through a number of activities, promoted peace-building in regional as well as certain national contexts. These include, for example, systematic collaboration with civil society, cooperation with development and other partners in activities aimed at meeting sub-regional security challenges.

The thesis of this chapter is that while ECOWAS has performed significantly well in regional peacekeeping, the extent of its involvement in overall peace-building in the region, at least until recently, has been comparably weak and less systematic. Indeed, peace-building in West Africa, especially after bitter civil conflict, has witnessed greater involvement by external actors, with ECOWAS playing a minimal or subordinate role. The chapter also argues that the regional organisation has sufficient capacity to be a decisive actor in the area of post-conflict peace building, just as much as it has been in peacekeeping. However, before this can be realised, a number of challenges must be overcome.

Discussion of the above argument comes under five sub-headings. The first section discusses ECOWAS' demonstrated capacity for regional peacekeeping, while the second looks at the challenges of peace building in West Africa, identifying the activities undertaken and the actors that have been involved. In the third section is a discussion of why ECOWAS has not been able to participate as much as it

should do in the process of peace building. The on-going efforts by the organisation to improve its peace-building activities are discussed in the fourth section while the fifth section offers a conclusion to the discussions in the chapter.

## Demonstrated Capacity in Conflict Management

ECOWAS has scored a number of continental 'firsts' in the area of regional peacekeeping. The organisation was the first in the continent to undertake a major peacekeeping mission (beginning with the deployment of ECOMOG in Liberia in 1990); it was also the first to collaborate with the United Nations in meeting the challenges of a complex emergency in the post Cold War world, while it preceded other regional organisations in evolving a workable security management mechanism[4]. Indeed, in the area of peacekeeping, the organisation has played a decisive role. Much has been written on the involvement of ECOWAS in regional peacekeeping, such that going into greater detail here serves no useful purpose.[5] Rather, what is presented here is a capsule summary of the ECOWAS role in a way that illustrates its capacity as an effective actor in regional peacekeeping, notwithstanding the obvious challenges.

Broadly speaking, ECOWAS involvement in conflict management can be brought under two headings: peacekeeping and mediatory diplomacy. Its peacekeeping capacity was demonstrated in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau.

Apart from the initial controversy surrounding the first ECOWAS intervention in Liberia given the questions raised about the role of Nigeria, it has been difficult to challenge the rationale behind the deployment of ECOWAS peace forces in regional conflicts since 1990. The 'declared' motivation in all the four countries where there have been peacekeeping and peace support missions have been similar: the desire to put an end to the carnage and destruction which, at the time of intervention, had resulted in the death of considerable numbers of civilians and had resulted in the complete collapse of law and order. Attendant to this was the effect of these wars on the neighbouring countries, especially through the massive influx of refugees and other cross-border issues, notably, small arms proliferation.

Going briefly into individual cases, it should be pointed out that before ECOWAS intervened in Liberia in 1990, there had been a complete breakdown of law and order and the government of the late Samuel Doe was on the verge of collapse. Indeed, the late President Doe was arrested by one of the warring factions and subsequently killed just as the regional peacekeeping force was settling down in the country. The Sierra Leone situation was similar to that in Liberia. The central government was too weak to meet the challenges posed by the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Furthermore, a significant part of the national army that was supposed to be defending the elected government had staged a coup and entered into an informal alliance with the rebels. Indeed, the catastrophic

consequences of this weakness had effects on the civilian population and some of the neighbouring countries. For example, more than a million persons were displaced and at least 300 000 refugees had fled to Guinea.[6]

In Guinea Bissau, the military coup had threatened the central government and not even the assistance from the Senegalese and Guinean governments could meet the challenge posed by the country's military force, which challenged the central government, while in Cote d'Ivoire, the central government was too weak to manage the complexities of security challenges posed by the rebels. Consequently, in all the cases, there were sufficient grounds to justify the deployment of ECOMOG (later ECOMICI in Cote d'Ivoire and ECOMIL in Liberia) in these conflicts.

On the whole, while there were rough edges in its military operations, which have been discussed elsewhere and widely published, ECOWAS has succeeded in establishing itself as an effective force when it comes to peacekeeping, and many aspects of its operations have become the focus of teaching in military institutions and training schools across the world.

The second area where ECOWAS has made its mark is in mediation in civil conflicts across the region. In Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau, ECOWAS performed major mediatory roles, admittedly with varying degrees of success. Many of the peace agreements signed to end the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone were signed under the auspices of ECOWAS, notably the Cotonou, Abuja and Accra Peace agreements on Liberia and the Lome Peace Agreement on Sierra Leone. Although the United Nations also played important roles in all these cases, the bulk of the initiatives that led to the settlement of the conflicts were undertaken by ECOWAS. Furthermore, the organisation was at the forefront of mediation in Cote d'Ivoire notwithstanding the role played by the AU and UN at different stages. Indeed, the organisation was determined to ensure peace that it was willing to set aside the recommendations by the South African President, operating on behalf of the African Union, on the ways of resolving the conflict in the country. The South African President's position was judged as being too close to that of the government of Cote d'Ivoire.[7]

ECOWAS has also played active roles in monitoring transitional elections in West Africa. While ECOWAS mediation efforts and peacekeeping missions could not be said to be have always been an unqualified success, they have been accorded recognition both within and outside Africa. At critical moments, the ECOWAS responses were not simply the best options on offer, they were the only real options on the ground and the perseverance of the organisation made it possible to achieve a settlement in Liberia and Sierra Leone in particular.

However, the crucial question that has always remained is what needs to be done in these countries after the cessation of armed conflict to ensure that violence does not recur to further stall the development efforts and compound the security

challenges of the country and the sub-region? The experience of Liberia, where armed conflict resumed from 1999-2003 despite the seven-year mediation and peacekeeping effort of ECOWAS/ ECOMOG from 1990 until Charles Taylor's election in 1997 is a case in point. Despite the massive investment in human and financial resources made by ECOWAS in bringing peace to Liberia during this period, crisis erupted once again under Taylor's rule. It is notable that Liberian factions signed fourteen agreements before the hard won peace settlement (Abuja II agreement) that led to Taylor's election in 1997.

Similarly, attempts to bring lasting peace to Sierra Leone suffered a reversal on two occasions. First was in 1997, when as mentioned above, parts of the army staged a coup in connivance with the RUF to oust the elected regime of President Kabbah. This coup occurred following a peace agreement between Kabbah's government and the RUF in October of the previous year. President Kabbah was reinstated in March 1998, when ECOMOG succeeded in overwhelming the forces of the AFRC and RUF in Freetown following an incident in February 1998. But in January 1999, the rebels once again succeeded in overwhelming the peacekeeping forces, when they invaded Freetown, abducting thousands of children while killing hundreds of ECOMOG soldiers.

There are several important messages in these stories of the recurrence of violence. Perhaps the most fundamental is that while enforcement action, and peacekeeping – the interposing of military personnel between warring factions to defuse crisis and establish a measure of order – certainly has a role in the process of resolving difficult conflict, this cannot, by itself, build lasting peace. Ensuring lasting peace will depend on the extent to which other conditions can be created. The creation of such conditions will be discussed before proceeding to examine the role of ECOWAS in building peace in West Africa.

## The Essence and Essentials of Peace-building

The challenge of building lasting peace whether in situations of violent conflict or in conflict situations that have not yet degenerated into violence is one that has consumed the attention of not just West Africans, but the world community as a whole. Since the 1990s, the international community has grappled with the challenge of consolidating peace and preventing a recurrence of armed conflict in states emerging from war. This has generally entailed the building of institutional and physical infrastructure and attempts at societal reconciliation. This process has been described as peace-building, post-conflict reconstruction, state building or, more controversially, nation-building.[8]

Peace-building was first conceived of by former United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros, Boutros-Ghali in his *Agenda for Peace* (1992) as part of a chronological conflict management cycle which included four sequential, even if overlapping activities including preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, peacemak-

ing and peace-building. The concept of peace-building evolved and has since been developed under various umbrellas including post-conflict reconstruction and state building. While it seemed logical to distinguish between these activities and prescribe neat application through specific phases of a conflict management cycle, the realities on the ground have required different dynamics. Indeed, neither *Agenda for Peace* nor its supplement, *Another Agenda for Peace* (Kofi Annan 1995), envisaged that peace-building could be applied before the onset of armed conflict as a primary prevention mechanism, rather than just a post-conflict activity to prevent a relapse into armed conflict.

The *Brahimi Report* of 2000 (United Nations 2000) also described peace-building as 'activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war'.[9] It was not until 2001 that the UN Security Council addressed the issue of sequencing by conceiving of peace-building as a longer-term mission that serves a preventive role both before and after conflict – a view that was also shared by the *UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in 2004*.[10]

Notwithstanding the range and intensity of international action to support negotiated settlements and move toward lasting peace in post-conflict settings, studies indicated that about half of peace agreements collapsed within five years.[11] More recent studies show that there is now a 44 per cent chance that where peace has been achieved, conflict will reignite within ten years.[12] Several factors have been put forward to explain the abatement or recurrence of armed conflict. Either conflicting parties reach a 'saturation point' or 'exhaustion level' because the use of violence to pursue their conflict is costlier than the reasons for which they went to war, or a peace agreement offers expectations that there will be redress for the injustices and grievances that underlined the conflict.[13]

In many instances, violence recurs either because the expectation of social, political and economic justice has not been fulfilled, or because peace processes emphasise the creation of structures far above the more intricate process of relationship building aimed at healing societies and reconciling people and groups previously locked in a bitter struggle. This is what Lederach refers to as the 'justice gap' and 'process-structure gap' respectively, in peace-building.[14] In Mozambique, Angola and Haiti, to Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, the international community has attempted with varying degrees of success to rebuild societies torn apart by brutal armed conflict and to prevent a relapse into violence.

It is therefore possible to distinguish between post-conflict reconstruction and state building in terms of the flexibility of application in different contexts. While the former remains obviously geared toward post-conflict settings, state building can conceivably be applied in both post-conflict settings and in other

fragile states not necessarily experiencing large scale armed conflict. This distinction has implications for the scope and nature of activities to be undertaken in these settings. In post conflict settings, international response must take into account a range of activities, including, for example, the continued enforcement of peace agreements, continued support for public order and safety, disarmament, demobilisation and effective reintegration of ex-combatants and structured arms control arrangements. The degree of permissiveness (for international assistance) also varies between post-conflict countries and other fragile states.

State building and post-conflict reconstruction invariably represent integral aspects of peace-building efforts and have various common dimensions, which are crucial for ensuring continued stability and preventing armed conflict or a relapse into violence. The broad categories outlined below give some sense of the nature of activities undertaken as part of post-conflict reconstruction and state building initiatives across different regions.[15] The overall focus in most cases is on restoring governance systems.

***Establishment of Safety and Security***

- Reconstituting the security establishment
- Ensuring public order and safety
- Securing territorial borders
- Reforming security sector governance

***Establishing or Strengthening Constitutional Governance***

- Constitutional reforms
- Strengthen mechanism for elections and citizen participation
- Guarantee of freedom for civil society and the media
- Guarantee human rights
- Strengthen key branches of government

***Strengthening Justice and Reconciliation***

- Rebuilding or reforming the justice system
- Strengthen oversight of security agencies
- Support truth and/or reconciliation bodies
- Promote balanced application of international justice systems
- Promote better systems for integrating excluded groups including women, youth and children

***Promoting Economic Justice and Growth***

- Equitable distribution, management and control of natural resources
- Reforming financial, economic and regulatory institutions

- Promoting trade and investment
- Strengthening the private sector
- Promoting job creation and developing human skills
- Extending social safety nets

***Recovery and Reconstruction***

- Rebuilding infrastructure
- Restoring public services
- Extending education and health facilities
- Extending social protection, in particular, for vulnerable groups

It now remains to be seen how ECOWAS has geared itself to respond to West Africa's current conflict dynamics.

## Peace-building in West Africa: Contents and Actors

To effectively address the ECOWAS response to peace-building challenges in West Africa, it is important to understand the nature of the conflict and security challenges that continue to confront the region. At the root of West African conflicts is a breakdown in governance systems and indeed, the absence of effective governance structures. The prevalence of this challenge in West African states, which have, at best, a recent history of political pluralism, means that pre-armed conflict peace-building as well as post-conflict peace-building are both legitimate goals to pursue in the sub-region. What is significant about West Africa's security environment is that even in states not experiencing generalised armed conflict, the threat of low-intensity conflict is real and has the potential to slow down economic and human development processes. In these situations of 'no war, no peace', low intensity conflicts do not pose a significant threat to international peace and security, but they are not sufficiently benign to allow for the continuation of normal development throughout the affected states. The Casamance conflict in Senegal, the Dagbon crisis in Ghana and the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria are few examples.

However, greater attention is often paid to situations of open armed conflict. This is understandable given the dire consequences of armed conflict for the states concerned and for the region as a whole. In any case, it is unlikely that the same states addressing the consequences of war in neighbouring states will themselves admit that they are also legitimate candidates for Peace-building assistance. Leaders do not always objectively deal with, or accept the idea that they bear some responsibility for a (potential) breakdown in governance, which might place their countries at risk of war. Thus, it is likely that only situations where a partial or complete collapse of the state has occurred will receive comprehensive regional attention in the foreseeable future.

The ending of armed conflict and the re-establishment of a crude semblance of stability is only a first phase in managing the complexities associated with armed conflict. In all situations however, the efforts to prevent a relapse into armed conflict, is as important, if not, in fact, more important, than the initial cessation of hostility.

Across West Africa, experience has shown that even after wars end, a relapse is always a distinct possibility. In the two cases where ECOWAS had assisted in establishing relative peace after collapse of state structures, the organisation has not been able to play a decisive role in peace-building. Generally, the process of peace building in these communities has entailed the re-establishment of institutions of governance. The failure of ECOWAS to play a lead role in this regard is significant. We will now look at aspects of the process of peace building in these states and the range of actors that have led the process.

In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, the processes of peace-building required fundamental reforms like the re-building of civil service, new national armed forces, security sector reform, the management of youth vulnerability and exclusion, educational rebuilding, re-orientation of social order, re-creation of harmonious inter-group relations, the management of natural resources, among others. These are issues that are demanding, both in terms of human and financial resources but, more often than not, the slender budgets of affected countries are unable to meet these demands. Consequently, external actors had inevitably come in to assist in the rebuilding efforts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. It should be noted that the need for institutional rebuilding also requires a gradual process of reconciliation and a re-tuning of societal mindset away from the bitter memories of war and accompanying brutality toward reconciliation. Only then can the process of rebuilding lead to a stable peace.

In Liberia, the level of engagement by the international community after Taylor came to power in 1997 was relatively low key. But following the relapse into conflict, Taylor's exit and the subsequent signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003, the United Nations has played a prominent role through its multi-dimensional peacekeeping mission, UNMIL. The UN took over from an ECOWAS mission – ECOMIL – which was initially deployed to maintain stability in the country. The scale of the UN involvement, post-Taylor, is significantly higher than in the 1990s when it contributed only a small number of Military Observers to operate alongside ECOMOG.

Similarly, in Sierra Leone, the UN stepped up its engagement in 1999 after the signing of the Lome Peace Accord. In 2000, an enlarged UNAMSIL took over from the ECOMOG force. Indeed, it was in Sierra Leone that the practice of 'rehatting' (i.e. swapping green berets for blue berets) regional peacekeepers into

UN peacekeeping missions began. We have subsequently seen this in Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire. The larger multi-dimensional peacekeeping missions that took over have often focused on activities that move beyond the policing action of classical peacekeeping.

New integrated UN missions now have expanded civilian components which look at addressing immediate consequences of conflict as well as issues that can create a challenge for peacekeeping in the longer term. These include, for example, human rights and justice, child protection, disarmament demobilisation and reintegration of people associated with fighting forces, civil affairs (beyond support of electoral process), HIV/AIDS and improving gender relations, among other activities. The recognition by the UN, that the short-term nature and relatively narrow focus of peacekeeping cannot guarantee the consolidation of peace, led in part to the establishment of the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) on 1 January 2006, the day after UNAMSIL's withdrawal was complete.[16] Its role is to assist the Government of Sierra Leone with the consolidation of peace. This is also the message underpinning the UN Peace Building Commission.

Broadly, the external actors that came to assist the West African states that had suffered collapse or serious destruction of their institutions can be divided into five. These were the United Nations, international NGOs, the European Union; governments of individual Western European nations and policy/academic institutions. The involvement of the United Nations in the area of peace building in both Liberia and Sierra Leone came in two forms: the peace building role of UN missions and the activities of various UN agencies mentioned above. In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, the peace missions, headed by the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSG), led the process. Various agencies of the United Nations also worked as part of country teams notably the UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP, and others contributed significantly to the consolidation of peace in these countries.

The European Union has contributed to peace building in these countries in three ways: first is through direct support to the governments of these countries or the sponsorship of specific projects; second is through the assistance offered to non-Government Organisations (NGOs) operating in these countries, for specific programmes including strengthening the capacity of civil society; and, third, is through the assistance that was given to the regional organisation, ECOWAS, in the re-building of its security architecture. While the affected countries are not the sole beneficiaries of this, the sharpening of ECOWAS security arrangement, as will be discussed later, has indirectly benefited the countries in their effort to maintain stability after bitter civil conflicts.

In terms of support to NGOs, who are part of the actors providing assistance in these post-conflict settings, international NGOs (INGOs) are often accorded pre-eminence over local NGOs and civil society groups. It is INGOs who receive the bulk of external funding and these resources in turn trickle down to local NGOs and civil society in general. Sierra Leone, in particular, is known for its well organised civil society. Local NGOs here complained about limited support from the international community, which tended to give more support to their international counterparts. They challenged the assumptions and arguments put forward by the international NGOs, for example, that local groups lack the appropriate capacity arguing that it was mainly Sierra Leoneans who implemented the projects of the international NGOs operating in the country. The debate surrounding the differences between international and local NGOs is one that will continue for sometime to come.

Individual Western European countries and the United States constitute the fourth set of actors. Under bilateral agreement with Governments and/or support to NGOs, the development agencies of several European countries (e.g. UK and Germany and Scandinavian countries) have offered assistance in different areas. At times, their support is routed via the UN and such support include, for example, the retraining of the national army or overarching reform of the security sector, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of people associated with fighting forces, and anti-corruption initiatives, among other things. The support provided by the UK Government for security reforms in Sierra Leone stands out in this regard. It is one of the few cases where a leading nation has made a ten-year commitment toward peace-building programmes in a war-affected African country rather than the relatively short term programmes of support that characterise most donor engagements in Africa. This approach of longer-term support is not widespread and appears to have been a one-off gesture by the regime of Tony Blair in response to the much publicised horrors faced by the people of Sierra Leone at the time.

The final actors are policy/academic institutions. The role of this category of actors is often not acknowledged in academic literature and policy papers looking at the nature of external assistance for war-affected societies in Africa. Increasingly, these actors are playing significant roles in different areas of post-war recovery, especially on security sector reform. A prominent example here is the initiative being facilitated by the African Security Sector Network (ASSN), which is coordinated in West Africa by the Centre for Democracy and Development), in collaboration with the Conflict, Security and Development Group at King's College London and the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces. These institutions have among other things developed a training programme for Liberian Parliamentarians on democratic oversight of the security sector. How-

ever, there is a longer-term objective to the support provided by these actors. This is to contribute to the development of a sound knowledge base on peace and security among Liberians. As part of their programme of support these institutions facilitated the establishment of a Centre for Conflict Transformation at the University of Liberia.[17]

There is, however, a more controversial aspect to the role played by external actors in war-affected countries in the region. Sometimes, external actors set agendas in the name of peace-building, which invariably raise questions about local ownership and usurpation of roles in ways that chip away at the sovereignty of the states in question. Perhaps the best example here is in the case of Liberia, where a string of external actors came together to introduce the idea of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP). Although it needs to be pointed out that ECOWAS was also among those who supported this initiative, other actors being the African Union, European Commission, IMF, Nigeria, Ghana, United States and the World Bank. The objective was to put in place structures to ensure proper management of the economic affairs of Liberia.

In its operation, the GEMAP has six components: financial management and accountability; improving budgeting and expenditure management; improving procurement practices and granting of concessions; establishing effective processes to control corruption; supporting key institutions; and capacity building. Under the arrangement, all state-owned enterprises will be reformed, and financial experts, with signatory powers will be recruited from abroad to supervise and assist their government counterparts. Much more importantly, an external supervisor with binding co-signatory authority will be brought into key governmental institutions like the Bureau of Customs and Excise, Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy, in order to promote transparency and accountability. The program was signed into law in September 2005, and it was to last for 36 months.

Opinions in Liberia have been divided on the issue of GEMAP, sometimes with strange alliances being formed to accept or condemn the programme. Those who support the program argue that some form of externally monitored initiative was needed to prevent graft in governance. Furthermore, an initiative that brought together the calibre of groups within the GEMAP was the only way to caution the government. On their part, those who oppose the GEMAP are concerned about the loss of sovereignty that comes with the external vetting of Liberian financial accounts.

Indeed, apart from the GEMAP case, Liberia has also experienced a situation in which the task of rebuilding its national army has been overseen by Private Security Companies. Since 2003 when the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement began, two American Companies have taken turns to over-

see the rebuilding of the armed forces – Dyn Corp and PAE. The role of Dyn Corp in particular has sparked allegations by civil society as well as Parliamentarians, of lack of transparency and respect for the legitimate authorities in Liberia, given Dyn Corps' failure to consult widely on this issue.[18]

In none of the cases described above has ECOWAS played a significant role. It now remains to investigate the reasons why ECOWAS has not occupied a central place in peace-building in West Africa in the same way that it has done in peacekeeping.

## ECOWAS and Peace Building: Explaining the Reduced Involvement

Several explanations can be offered for ECOWAS' inactive participation in international peace-building efforts in West Africa. The first is that the organisation has inadequate financial capacity to undertake the major initiatives required to place post-conflict societies on the path to reconstruction. This is especially the case with the rebuilding of collapsed infrastructure. Second and related to this is that ECOWAS lacks the technical capacity to support socio-economic and institutional infrastructure in a sustained manner. Indeed, the reality is that many ECOWAS member states are themselves ripe for pre-conflict peace-building required to consolidate democracy and prevent an outbreak of violence.

Notwithstanding these obvious challenges, ECOWAS has failed to capitalise on its true strengths which can potentially underpin the international Peace-building agenda in West Africa. The real value of ECOWAS lies in its superior knowledge of the region, deep commitment of many member states to regional security and integration, and a sound normative framework that can provide the basis for systematic Peace-building in the region. Indeed, the missing link in the external involvement in Peace-building in West Africa is precisely what ECOWAS has in abundance. – its commitment to relationship building, and a normative framework to implement a comprehensive peace building agenda. ECOWAS has not been able to make the best use of its own peace and security structures for sustained engagement in Peace-building.

Indeed, the missing link for a long time has been the absence of a framework for translating its normative instruments into operational tools. Two of such instruments are particularly worthy of mention. The first is its Mechanism for handling conflicts, which was institutionalised by the 1999 Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. The Protocol established a number of institutions to address peace and security. These include, for example, the Council of Elders (now Council of the Wise); the Authority of Heads of States and Governments; the Mediation and Security Council; the Defence and Security Commission; Special Representatives of the ECOWAS Ex-

ecutive Secretary; and the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) – all which perform different but inter-related functions.

The ECOMOG force remains an important component of the region's security architecture. Indeed, the 1999 Protocol called for the establishment of a stand-by force of a Brigade-size consisting specially trained and equipped units of national armies ready to be deployed at short notices. All the 15 ECOWAS states pledged one battalion each to the proposed force. Under the Protocol, the force was mandated to be used under four conditions: (a) aggression or conflict within a member state; a conflict in two or more member states; internal conflicts that threaten to trigger humanitarian disaster, pose a serious threat to sub-regional peace and security, result in serious and massive violations of human rights, and/or follow the overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically-elected government; and any other situation that the Mediation and Security Council deems appropriate. Indeed, ECOWAS forward looking approach in institutionalising ECOMOG is of great benefit to the continental body, the African Union, which established a peace and security architecture in 2003, including among other things, the African Standby Force, which composes five regional brigades and is to become operational by 2010. ECOWAS is the most advanced in that process with the establishment of the ECOWAS Brigade.

Another major aspect of ECOWAS security architecture is geared toward conflict prevention. This is the Early Warning System, whose responsibility is to collect and analyse information early enough to determine suitable responses to threats identified. The system relies on the ECOWAS Observation and Monitoring Centre. The System has four reporting zones, located in Banjul, Gambia (to cover Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Senegal; Cotonou, Benin (to cater for Benin, Nigeria and Togo); Monrovia, Liberia (to address Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone); and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (to manage Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger). In theory, the early warning system should trigger action through relevant departments of the ECOWAS Commission, including the development and implementation of policies relating to issues such as cross-border crime, drug trafficking and small arms and light weapons proliferation. The attempt in 1999, to develop a systematic response to all of these security issues is understandable given the immediate threats of armed conflict and cross-border security challenges that confronted the region since the 1990s.

ECOWAS initially reacted to regional security challenges as they emerged having not previously envisaged security problems of these types particularly in the Cold War period when bipolar rivalry kept a lid on potential conflicts resulting from governance deficit. However, the implementation of the 1999 Protocol has placed a strong emphasis on conflict and crises management rather than on structural prevention, which aims to tackle the factors at the root of destructive conflict, not least the poor governance arrangements that breed social and politi-

cal exclusion. The need to prevent armed conflict as well as consolidate peace by tackling the nagging issues underpinning conflict and insecurity later became apparent as some states relapsed into conflict.

To further consolidate regional peace security, ECOWAS, in 2001, adopted the second instrument relevant, the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. This Protocol allows ECOWAS to ensure a meaningful democratic process in the region. This is predicated on the belief that absence of credible democracy through strong institutions is at the centre of many of the region's security challenges. Yet many countries in the region have struggled to move beyond the symbolism of elections. Indeed the perception that elections are simply 'insrumentalised' to entrench a class of leaders in power has gained ground in the last decade given the number of questionable successions and contested elections that have occurred in the region. Indeed some of these events have given the impression of reversals of the earlier trend toward democratisation and not the consolidation of democracy.

ECOWAS' resolve to ensure democracy in the region was tested when the death of the Togolese leader, Gnassingbe Eyadema, resulted in a questionable transition that saw his son assume office as the new Togolese President**.** ECOWAS succeeded in ensuring a democratic process even if it still yielded the same outcome i.e. transition from father to son. It is important to note that the Supplementary Protocol is designed to address structural factors in all its member states, not only those emerging from war. It remains to be seen, however, whether and how the organisation can ensure that these principles are applied in states not at war or at peace, where leaders are expected to take the initiative and take necessary action.

The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), adopted in December 2007, provides, for the first time, a sound basis for a comprehensive peace-building agenda for West Africa. The ECPF is also consistent with the African Union's new Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development. For the first time, ECOWAS has a framework which encompasses all the principles outlined in several normative instruments and systematically ties together the goals of conflict management, consolidation of peace and the structural prevention of conflict to prevent outbreak of violence as well as a relapse of armed conflict in societies emerging from war.

To be certain, the ECPF adopts a human security approach, thus moving far beyond peacekeeping and stabilisation to addressing many of the fundamental threats to the security of peoples and individuals – 'the protection of human and democratic rights and the promotion of human development to ensure freedom from fear and freedom from want'.[19]

The components of the ECPF confirm the focus on the combined areas of security and development – both of which should be contained in any meaningful peace-building agenda. The issues covered in the ECPF include, for example,

conflict early warning, preventive diplomacy, democracy and political governance, cross-border initiatives, security governance, micro-disarmament, increasing women's role in the management of peace and security, ECOWAS Standby Force, humanitarian assistance and peace education. The interconnectedness of these issues emphasise the consistency between conflict prevention and peace building conceptually and practically. Peace building interventions in the region must invariably take these issues into account depending on their relevance to and the priority needs of the target environment.

How then can ECOWAS make better use of its existing structures to become a major player in peace-building? Notwithstanding its rough edges, ECOWAS has always been a forerunner in terms of developing an agenda for responding to crisis in West Africa. The ECPF will allow the organisation to further articulate a clear agenda for the consolidation of peace and for ensuring human security in West Africa. The lack of financial backbone and inadequate technical capacity in this field are not sufficient reasons to stay away from engaging at the forefront of peace-building. Indeed, in every post-conflict environment even if not across its member states, ECOWAS must present a clear set of principles, by which external actors must abide, if it wants to be taken seriously in peace-building processes in the region. Indeed, situations like Liberia, in which private security actors are determining the basis on which a national army should be reformed, should not have occurred if ECOWAS had an influential role and was able to insist on respect for its core principles. As ECOWAS proceeds to develop an implementation plan for the ECPF, it is important to take note of the AU Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development and reinforce some of the core principles outlined in that policy, not least that of 'local ownership'.

## Conclusion

ECOWAS has moved away significantly from where it was at the time of its founding. It will remain one of the greatest achievements of the organisation that it has succeeded in transforming itself from its original economic-focused organisation to being a strong force in the management of human security. It has now positioned itself better to deliver on an issue that remains a challenge to the international community – how to better connect the security and development community. Indeed, other regions of the continent are increasingly looking towards ECOWAS for leadership and direction on issues relating to peace and security.

However, for ECOWAS to further meet the desire of its population and assist countries that have fallen victims of major civil conflicts, it has to consolidate its security management structures and ensure that it plays a greater role in the area of peace-building. The need for agenda setting should not be taken lightly. It is a role that ECOWAS has the legitimate role to play in West Africa. Until it exercises intellectual leadership over the principles guiding peace-building in West Africa, it

will be difficult for Africa's external partners to accord ECOWAS with the respect it deserves in this field. However, the new ECPF remains a work in progress and those responsible for championing this project in ECOWAS are well aware of this. The sooner the framework is translated into concrete initiatives on the ground, the sooner ECOWAS can become the driving force behind peace building initiatives in West Africa. This is its rightful role.