4

Social Vulnerability and Conflicts: Elements for Regional Conflict Vulnerability Analysis

Mohammed J. Kuna

Introduction

The humanitarian consequences of recurrent violent conflicts in West Africa clearly demonstrate the need not only for a more coordinated regional approach in understanding their trajectories, but also for an integrated conflict management strategy capable of *mapping* and *anticipating* the proportion of populations' exposure to damage or conflict conditions, the potential factors or forces capable of causing damage, and the capacity of populations to absorb the impact of that damage or conflict. In the past two decades, devastating conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d' Ivoire Guinea Bissau, Senegal's Casamance region, Nigeria's Niger Delta and the northern parts of Niger and Mali underscore the complexity of both their trajectories and impact on West Africa. The profile of these and other less well-known conflicts demonstrate the limitations of conceiving these as local or localizable phenomena in the West African Sub-region; the sheer complexity of these conflicts that straddle concerns ranging from resources, state (in)capability, identity issues, demographic changes through to other internal and external social forces makes it imperative to fashion out a broader, more inclusive and less militaristic approach to conflict management than currently exists. In the past 25-30 years, a variety of mechanisms in the West African sub-region have been devised to address some of these conflicts, and just as the conflicts increased in complexity, so too have the management mechanisms. In general however, such mechanisms have been locked within a broad, though paralysing, framework, that emphasises the rigidity of national sovereignty and boundaries; the dominance, though often unacknowledged, of colonial experiences and ethos arising from membership of different sub-regional organisations and linkages with erstwhile

imperial powers; the projection of reactive, and predominantly militaristic strategies as the only possible mechanisms in conflict management; and a general focus on regime, rather than human, security.

The setting-up of a regional mechanism for conflict management by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) a few years after its existence has started transforming this dominant conflict management paradigm, as was demonstrated especially in the cases of the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. This evolving regional mechanism is, however, still too militaristic, still predominantly located within national, rather than regional, security frameworks, and largely *reactive* in its response to conflicts. Its whole architecture needs to be revised to have a strengthened *predictive* or *anticipatory* capability not just in addressing the trajectories/dynamics of conflict and peacekeeping, but also in the assessment of 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. These are essential first steps in a more inclusive, less militaristic conflict management. All conflicts, wherever and whatever their origin, have trans-border implications, and therefore defy the confinement of colonially constructed boundaries. A more coordinated regional approach to the identification not just of conflict trajectories, but also of estimating the differential degrees of the exposure of communities, groups, and individuals to the impact of conflicts together with an assessment of their capacities to absorb impact should constitute integral parts of the sub-region's conflict management architecture. This chapter attempts to isolate the key elements that could enter into this broader regional conflict management architecture.

The justification for this is not far-fetched. Exposure to conflict manifest differentially in populations depending on prior social differentiation, such that certain social classes, communities, or groups stand a greater risk of exposure to, and therefore may be more at risk from the impact of conflict than others. Exposure to risk and impact is one thing; the *capacity* of communities and groups to *absorb* the impact of conflicts is also differentially distributed. Furthermore, an overview of conflict trajectories in the sub-region makes it imperative to build-in an assessment of risk exposure as part of an overall regional conflict management mechanism. Studies have demonstrated the disruptive effects of certain natural conditions such as droughts, crop failures, epidemics and diseases and their capacity for causing uncertainty in peoples' lives. The availability of information in conditions of conflict or disaster could be critical in reducing uncertainty both for victims as well as for planners, thus making the planning of conflict management more organised. Similarly, a cursory survey of the conflicts in the sub-region shows that these not only have fairly common trajectories, but they often have common impact patterns within and across borders.

The intensification of the conflict in Liberia as from June 1990 and its spread to Bong and Lofa counties created a wave of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) over a wide area not only within the country, but by early 1991 had pushed people across the border into Sierra Leone and Guinea. Across the region, events and processes such as the intensification of ethno-nationalism and sub-nationalist identities; growing levels of state incapability; the deepening marginalisation of certain groups and communities vis-à-vis the growing wealth of others; involvement of foreign and diaspora interests in the sub-region's resource conflicts; changing demographic composition of the population in response to, among other things, the devastating impact of malaria and HIV/ AIDS; a growing army of a young, unemployed population; pressures of population movements as well as the dominance of authoritarian regimes and their continued influence on politics and society are fairly common, and have serious implications for a regional peace and conflict management architecture (Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters 1994; Rupesinghe and Tishkov 1996; Brubaker 1998, 1995; Shampa 2002; Deng 1996; Drayton 1995; Geschiere 1998). In general, therefore, the region not only faces broadly common security challenges; these challenges increasingly require coherent and harmonised strategies as we move deeper into the 21st century (Ball and Fayemi, 2004). The analysis of the probable impact of conflict, the differential degrees of exposure of communities and populations, and the capacity of such populations to absorb the impact of conflict is what a *vulnerability analysis* attempts to do. A deeper discussion of this concept is provided in section three; however, the objective of this chapter is to broadly outline the main elements of conflict vulnerability analysis (CVA) in the West African sub-region. It is not a CVA of the West African sub-region as such; that would involve detailed and country-specific assessments from which a composite regional vulnerability index (RVI) could be built. However, it raises some of the key elements that such an analysis could consider.

Against this background therefore, the chapter briefly conceptualises the notion of vulnerability and outlines its basic elements in the West African context. It is organised into six sections, including the introduction.

Section 2 reviews the existing regional mechanism for conflict management, draws attention to some of its limitations, thereby laying the ground for the necessity of a broader mechanism that encompasses a CVA. Section three conceptualises the idea of vulnerability as a tool of analysis in conflict management and transformation. Section four focuses on social vulnerability and conflict mapping, and identifies key elements for a CVA. Section five discusses the main determinants of vulnerability in West Africa, and argues that a regional CVA should and must include an analysis of the trajectories of conflicts. Section six concludes the chapter.

Conceptualising Social Vulnerability

In the past few years, conflict researchers have increasingly turned attention not just to the analysis of the causes, trends, and dynamics of conflict; but also to the degree to which given populations, communities, groups, societies, or entire countries might be *prone* to conflict. Although the analysis of a population's proneness to conflict or its *vulnerability* is a well-established method in the earth sciences concerned with the dynamics and impact of climate change on humans and in studies of poverty, it is only recently becoming an important segment of conflict discourse. In general, vulnerability is defined as the extent to which a community, service, or geographic area is likely to be damaged or disrupted by the impact of a particular disaster or hazard. It is the *propensity* of people, structures, and institutions, relationships of things to *damage* by a conflict or hazard. However, vulnerability also draws attention to a group's or community's capacity to absorb the impact of a conflict or hazard, and the speed with which that impact could be absorbed. As Aubee (2004) averred, social vulnerability is the 'characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of any form of natural or artificial hazard'. Thus vulnerability involves the assessment of risk, the identification of early warning signs, and the projection, on these bases, of the probable populations at risk, the probable risks and state of readiness or absorptive capacity of that population, as well as the damage-capacity of these risks. The scale and intensity of the destruction often reflect the nature and character of the hazard. In vulnerability analysis, the identification of vulnerable *elements* and *matching* these elements with destroyable things is important. Both in turn, depend on the *evaluation* and *quantification* of vulnerability.

Destroyable things could be *tangible* or *intangible*. In the case of floods for example, crops, livestock, machinery, equipment, infrastructure could be tangible things, while social cohesion, community structures, cultural artefacts, patterns of authority, and law and order intangible (Samarasinghe et al 1999).

Although vulnerability embodies *risk assessment,* (RA) and *early warning* (EW), both need to be clearly distinguished from *conflict vulnerability assessment* (CVA). Whereas RA attempts to 'evaluate the *potential* for violence in a given social context,' EW is restricted to '*anticipating* and *tracking escalation* in the shorter term from high risk' – usually political tension or sporadic violence – to open or high hostility conflict. While RA focuses more on long-to-medium term analyses, EW focuses largely on the 'systematic collection and analysis of information coming from areas of crises for the purpose of anticipating the escalation of violent conflict' and is 'applied to a more limited number of situations already singled out through risk assessment as high-risk (Samarasinghe et al 1999). Integral to CVA is RA, with the added critical element of an informed assessment of a populations' *capacity* to cope with risks or hazards, including the capacity for tension management,

ability to control violence when it breaks out as well as the capacity for the reconstruction of destroyed social fabric or physical infrastructure (Samarasinghe et al 1999; Blanch 2001; Wisner 1978).

Given the sketchy conceptual background above, attention can now move to social vulnerability. According to the UNDP (2002), social vulnerability reflects 'the degree to which societies or socio-economic groups are affected by stresses and hazards, whether brought about by external forces or intrinsic factors – internal and external – that negatively impacts the social cohesion of a country'. Social vulnerability assumes that the dynamics of conflict and its outcomes are differentially determined by vulnerabilities existing *prior* to conflicts embedded in broader power relations, and that these are crucial in understanding people's unequal opportunities for counteracting the impact of conflict. It seeks to apprehend and analyze the nature and dynamics of the forces involved in a population's vulnerability to violent conflict. As a tool of analysis, it deals essentially with the susceptibility of a population or community to conflict situations, hinging on the principle that violent conflicts are not only difficult to forecast, but that their impact is even more difficult to contain. In attempting to determine the proneness of populations to risk factors, CVA is the third and final stage of conflict assessment. CVA analysis begins with EW (detecting the early signs of potentially violent conflict), moves on to RA (assessing the risk of exposure of groups and communities), and ends with CVA (the determination of the probable impact of the identified conflict/hazard on identifiable populations/communities, the human and material resources that may be at risk, the capacity of the populations at risk to absorb the impact of the conflict or hazard, as well as the administrative and infrastructural facilities required during the conflict and in reconstruction efforts).

All four are *critical elements* for any prompt, efficient, and effective intervention in conflict management, very broadly conceived. In general then, a focus on social vulnerability could enable and better equip a conflict management mechanism identify the dominant characteristics of populations at risk, the type of resources (individual and community) available to these populations for coping with possible hazards, as well as existing processes and institutional mechanisms designed to deal with risks or disasters in a particular context in the event of a conflict outbreak.

Scholars convincingly argue that if the overall goal of CVA is to increase the capacity for anticipating, preventing, and in the extreme case mitigating the impact of conflict or hazards by identifying probable risk factors and their differential impact on diverse social and population groups, then at the minimum, such an analysis needs to take five key indicators into consideration (Samarasinghe et al 1999; Wisner 1978; Peader 2003). The first major element is a broad assessment of a population's or structure's '*initial well-being*'. This will include an analysis of the nutritional status, physical and mental health and morale of populations/groups at risk or, in the case of structures, its carrying capacity, structural condition,

availability of facilities such as water, electricity etc). Second, is an analysis of patterns of '*livelihood and resilience*'. This will involve an analysis of the 'assets, capital, income, and social networks' at the disposal of a group or population. Third, is an assessment of the mechanisms available for '*personal security or protection*' (e.g. personal security, type of house, location, etc). Fourth, is the availability of '*social security or protection*' (e.g. effective law enforcement agencies, focus on human rather than regime security, conflict prevention/mitigation measures, availability of and training in the provision of critical humanitarian services, gaps between outbreaks and response time, nature of intervention and so on).

The final key indicator is the existence of '*social and political networks and institutions*' (social capital, but also the role of institutional environment in setting good conditions for hazard precautions, peoples' rights to express needs and of access to preparedness).

However, these aspects of livelihood, simultaneously also indicators of vulnerability, are themselves embedded within broader social, economic, and political processes. To address vulnerability, it is necessary to consider these broad factors.

Only in this sense can vulnerability be seen as an outcome of a series of intermeshing factors, including access to resources, the diversity of income sources, the location of the social units in question in the broader social framework, the availability of support social networks, the existence of social infrastructure, as well as the institutional and organisational frameworks enabling prompt intervention when necessary. The presence or absence of formal and informal coping mechanisms such as social security, insurance, infrastructure, income, and social safety nets are also other significant considerations. Thus vulnerability is affected not just by the relative distribution of income, access to and diversity of economic assets; and by the operation of informal social security arrangements; it is also determined by the institutional arrangements that organise warning, planning, intervention, rehabilitation, and other services. The identification of populations at risk and their characteristics should be followed by an identification and mapping of risk factors. Some of the important risk factors across the West African sub-region include the high rates of poverty, youth unemployment, high dependency ratios, the high degree of the marginalisation of women, children and the elderly, increased levels of national and trans-border crime, especially trafficking (drugs and humans), poor institutional and organisational capacity to respond to emergencies, weak infrastructures to mention but a few.

Regional Conflict Management Mechanisms

Although the region has witnessed serious conflicts in the past two decades, it perhaps has, compared to other regions on the continent, broader and deeper experience in conflict management. One of the clearest indications of this

experience is reflected in the evolving ECOWAS peace keeping process as reflected in various *Mechanisms* established by ECOWAS for conflict management.

Thus, the *Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Defence* (1981), *Declaration of a Moratorium on Importation, Exportation, and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa* (1998; 2001), *Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security* (1999), *Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance* (2001), as well as the *Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED*, 2002) together constitute the institutional and legal foundation for a regional conflict management regime.

Amongst other things, and for the purposes of this chapter, Chapter 9 of the 1999 *Mechanism*, for example, holds that 'the Community hereby adopts a graduated strategy for building peace which shall be implemented as a continuum' wherein articles 42, 43, and 44 gave a detailed description of what this 'graduated strategy' meant. Article 42 for example, requested member states to be involved in 'institutional capacity building' for peace requiring the 'preparation, organisation, and supervision of elections in member states…' as well as to assist member states emerging from conflicts to 'increase their capacity for national, social, economic, and cultural reconstruction'. The cost of such an endeavour was not lost on the framers of the *Mechanism.* They insisted that 'all ECOWAS financial institutions' were enjoined to 'facilitate funding for reintegration and reconstruction programmes'. Similarly, Articles 43 and 44 underscored the significance of peace-building during and after hostilities, by noting that 'in zones of relative peace, priority shall be accorded to the implementation of policies designed to reduce degradation of social and economic conditions arising from conflicts' and that 'particular assistance would be rendered to '*vulnerable persons* – children, the elderly, women and other traumatised groups – in the society'.

These and similar articles have been further refined in subsequent decisions and instruments by various organs of ECOWAS, thus further extending the efficacy of the *Mechanisms*. It was along these lines that a set of *Early Warning Conflict Indicators* for West Africa was identified that could enable prompt intervention before a conflict develops into a major crisis. Similarly, four *Early Warning Observatories* (Banjul, Cotonou, Monrovia, and Ouagadougou) with focal points at country levels consisting of civil society and local authorities, a Coordination/ Analysis Centre and an Early Warning Early Response (EWER) Situation Room at the ECOWAS Secretariat were established to further extend and deepen the regional reach and efficacy of its conflict management.

Through these, an integrated plan for the management of regional conflicts gradually took shape. This has been further re-enforced by practical concerns, the most notable of which was the role of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as the *Community's* efforts in the resolution of the conflicts in Cote d'Ivoire.

However, good as this mechanism is, its efficacy in conflict management is limited by its inability to take within its purview a regional assessment of risk exposure and the probable impact of conflict on classes and communities within and across national boundaries. Since vulnerability is limited not just to classes and communities, particularly in contexts of a high degree of economic and social affinities, the impact of conflicts or disasters could indeed be massive and widespread, as they were on a number of occasions in West Africa. The conflict in Liberia – that spread to Sierra Leone and then spilled into Guinea – is one clear example. In such cases, the dimensions of vulnerability could cut across countries and affect regions, a dimension that requires a regional approach to the assessment of the nature and degree of vulnerability. Such analysis is critical especially when we acknowledge that conflict is an integral part of human existence, and that a capacity for the determination of vulnerability elements, vulnerable populations, a projection of the impact of these elements, and how these differentially affect populations are indispensable elements in conflict management. There is an increasing awareness within both academic and policy circles that an understanding of the differential and unequal access to the distribution of wealth tends to significantly affect propensities to hazards and risks. These differential abilities determine a groups,' communities' or individuals' risk or hazard thresholds, and that understanding how these interface with people's responses is an indispensable element in the management and transformation of conflict. Good as the *mechanisms* are the neglect or at the very least, the insufficient attention paid to a *regional* analysis of the elements, events, and forces that make certain populations *prone* to hazards or conflict is a critical missing element in the *mechanisms*. Furthermore, the influence of different national security architectures with their different operational ethos, the dominance of state-security paradigms in the management of conflict, the existence of too many early warning indicators as well as logistic problems in putting together intervention forces in cases of emergencies are also key limitations of the existing regional mechanism.

Nevertheless, the mechanism, given its operational contexts, has done fairly well. What remains is to examine ways to improve its efficacy. And this is what this contribution seeks to do.

Long incorporated into the studies of the impact of climatic change on humans and of poverty, conflict analyses are only gradually embracing the idea of *vulnerability*, and how certain populations, due to long-entrenched economic processes, may have higher risk exposures or propensities to the adverse effects of disasters or conflicts. A greater focus on the differential impact of disasters and the way and manner communities and groups respond is significant in enhancing the understanding of both the macro social forces involved in adaptation to conflict and the micro decisions groups, communities and individuals have to make in periods of hazards or intense conflicts. Individuals, groups and

1-ECOWAS.pmd 68 28/10/2011, 20:34

communities are not only differentially exposed to conflicts but pre-conflict conditions differentially determine, based on prior social differentiation, the impact of such exposure, influencing whether, and the extent to which, resources could be *mobilised* or *accessed* by victims in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Social vulnerability, the differential exposure to, and impact of hazards and disasters on groups as determined by long-term social disparities constitutes a potentially significant research area in fashioning efficient regimes of conflict management and transformation. It draws attention to how *exposure to hazards tends not only to be based on prior social forces in a conflict or disaster, but also on the way in which prior social contexts and relations of power accentuate or deepen impact and marginality*. Social vulnerability involves the identification of the *proneness* of a specific population, group, or class to the impact of conflict or disaster. It connotes a *predictive* quality (Samarasinghe et al, 1999) the strength of which lies in its ability to apprehend and make a reasonable projection of what *may* happen to identifiable population units under conditions of particular conflicts.

Social Vulnerability and Conflict Mapping

In the foregoing, it has been established that the focus of CVA is to determine the degree to which particular populations or its subsets are prone to the adverse impact of conflict, in addition to gauging the capacities of such populations to absorb impact.

This essentially raises three major questions. First, what are the social conditions or forces that make group conflicts probable within a specific social context? Second, what social conditions or social forces make certain populations or subsets of those populations more at risk from conflict outbreaks than others? And finally, what resources are available to these populations in the event of conflicts or disasters? In addressing these questions in the West African sub-region, it is imperative that we first identify and then map the trajectories of existing conflicts as well as understand their nature, forms, dynamics, and manifestations. The identification and mapping of risk factors in a CVA need to consider nine (9) main elements. These are the (a) identification and (b) location of *populations at risk*; (c) establishing *loss parameters,* (d) *determination of risk* (including the assessment of hazard occurrence probability and the nature and type of elements at risk), (e) *presentation of the risk*, (f) *scenario mapping*, (g) *potential loss mapping*, (h) *annualised risk mapping*, and (i) *hazard evaluation* (UNDP 2002).

These nine elements should yield sufficient information for the identification of the population clusters at risk, their major socio-economic and demographic characteristics, as well as the major players or stakeholders at the community and national levels who could influence the course of events based on which a conflict map could be constructed. In and through these elements, the location and proximate size of population clusters, communities and neighbourhoods within

national boundaries or across the sub-region could be constructed. Thus pressure on grasing land, drying water points, the expansion of both human and livestock populations as well as the impact of extractive industries has placed nomadic populations such as the *Fulbe* and *Tuareg* across the sub-region in a conflict situation with their more sedentary neighbours (Blanc 2004). This happens to be the source of some of the regional conflicts between pastoralists and sedentary populations in northern Niger, Mali, and Nigeria. Similarly, conflicts often lead to the definition of groups in terms of a number of characteristics, real or imagined, differentiating them from the *other*. In such cases, conflict groups assume certain identifiable characteristics or identities that here may be tied to geography and there to language, culture, religion, ethnicity and, recently residential locations, as we have seen in some of the conflicts in northern Nigeria. Such characteristics often overlap, but it is important to identify the salient identities, as well as the social conditions under which certain identities may be politically more active than others.

Determining broad socio-economic categories based upon sources and/or levels of income, assets, urban/rural location, education level is also a crucial element in the identification of populations at risk. Attempts should be made to identify the major stakeholders in terms of organised political or communal groups, as well as the social, political, and economic patterns of exclusion. CVA should also determine which groups bear the brunt of such patterns; establish dominant and subordinate groups in the political process, as well as the mechanisms for maintaining such dominance. It should determine whether marginalised groups are likely to deploy violence in redressing their positions, what groups are more likely to benefit from conflict, whether or not such groups have the capacity to incite it, what issues competing groups dispute or commonly agree on, and what groups are likely to play mediating roles in cases of outbreaks of conflict. Some of these issues are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Major Risk Elements and Possible Indicators

Element	Indicators
A Populations at Risk	Ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities; migrant and nomadic populations; marginal groups; youth; women and children
B Location	Urban or rural areas; neighbourhoods, community, local council, state, region, city, or trans-border; estimation of the number of people at risk
C Loss Parameters	Persons; livestock; buildings; water points; pasturelands; social relationships; market stalls and crops etc.
D Risk Potential	Neighbourhoods; recurrence or persistence of low intensity conflict; segregation of residential areas along clear 'ethnic' or 'religious' lines; proliferation of small arms and light weapons
E Characteristics of Risk Population	Identification of sources, and levels of income;educational educationa level; assets; exclusionary and marginalization Populations patterns; dominant/subordinate groups; sense of social injustice
F Demographic Characteristics of Risk Populations	Dependency ratio; gender characteristics; proportion of unemployed youth (educated and without formal education) in the general population; levels of education
G Stakeholders in Conflict or Potential Conflict	Identification of subordinate/superordinate groups; processes and patterns of social exclusion; beneficiaries of conflict and their capacity for incitement;
H Potential Loss Mapping	Lives, corps, livestock, savings, assets, infrastructure, social cohesion
I Conflict Mapping	Using information in A-H to create an informed CVA

Source: UNDP, 2002

The identification of risk elements and their possible indicators should be complemented by the identification of levels of violence and phases of conflict, for both are essential in order for CVA to retain its predictive quality. Scholars (Samarasinghe et al 1999) have identified five main levels of violence. These include: (a) *Peaceful Stable Situation*, reflecting a high degree of regime legitimacy where violence occurs only rarely if at all. (b) *Political Tension Situation* reflects an increasing level of tension and systemic strain characterised by sporadic violence resulting in fewer than 50 fatalities annually. (c) *Violent Political Conflict* is a context in which regime legitimacy is increasingly eroded, where the state has begun to lose total monopoly over the instruments of violence, and in which political assassinations,

terrorist acts, and violent government repression occur, although fatalities remain below deaths 100 annually. (d) *Low-Intensity Conflict,* characterised by open hostility and armed conflict among factional groups, regime repression and insurgency, and in which fatalities, while remaining below 1,000 annually, are often above 100. In addition, there is also displacement of the population that is below 5 per cent. (e) *High-Intensity Conflict,* characterised by open warfare among rival groups and/or mass destruction and displacement of sectors of the civilian population and in which fatalities exceed 1,000 deaths per annum.

Figure 2: Matrix of Loss Assessment

		Losses	
Consequences	**Measure**	**Tangible**	**Intangible**
Deaths	Number of people	Loss of economically active individuals	Social and psychological effects on remaining community
Injuries	Number and injury severity	Medical treatment needs, temporary loss of economic activity by productive individuals	Social and psychologica' Pain and recovery
Physical damage	Inventory of damaged elements, by number and damage level	Replacement and repair cost	Cultural losses
Emergency operations	Volume of manpower, man-days employed, equipment and resources expended for relief	Mobilization costs, investment in preparedness capability	Stress and overwork in relief participants
Disruption to economy	Number of working days lost, volume of production lost	Value of lost production	Opportunities, competitiveness, reputation
Social disruption	Number of displaced persons, homeless	Temporary housing, relief, economic production	Psychological,social contacts, cohesion, community morale
Environmental impact	Scale and severity	Clean-up costs, repair cost	Consequences of poorer environment, health risks, risk of future disaster

Source: Adapted from Samarasinghe et al, 1999 and UNDP, 2002

Social Vulnerability and Conflict Trajectories

Looking at the two major conflicts in the sub-region – Liberia and Sierra Leone – it seems clear that a number of common themes that could form a basis for such a regional mechanism are present. In both countries, weakening state capacity and legitimacy, the heightening of sub-national to the detriment of national forms of identity, the fragmentation of state power into factions supported by armed gangs, as well as the strong social, cultural and religious linkages in the countries of the Mano River Union clearly demonstrate the complexity of these conflicts. Conflicts in other parts of the region share similar trajectories, and we can point to a few. First, West African conflicts appear to be predominantly identity-based. This should hardly be surprising given the ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of the region, as well as the legacies of three different colonising powers. Such conflicts, particularly those between ethno-national groups, appear in the form of contentions for power either with similar other groups, or with the state itself. However, ethno national conflicts are 'often symptoms of other social forces, such as competition over scarce resources, modernisation, and state collapse' (Tilly 1975; Brubaker 1998). In addition to ethno-nationalism, other forms of tensions over religion, citizenship, and community are important conflict trajectories. The struggle over citizenship most clearly demonstrated in Liberia in the divide between 'indigenes' and 'settlers' has led to serious conflicts in the recent past, and could constitute a basis for a broader regional problem in the future across the sub-region.

Second, resource-based issues are some of the most intractable trajectories of social conflicts across the region. The most well known, of course, is the conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region; but the ongoing conflict in the northern parts of the Republics of Niger and Mali are also clear examples of this phenomenon.

Moreover, the shrinking of pasturelands, the growth of cities and more generally the expanding process of sedentarisation, changing demographic patterns, expansion in livestock, the impact of climate change on water sources and points all bring pressure to bear on the relationship between nomadic and sedentary groups that is becoming a serious conflict issue across West Africa. However, other economic assets and resources are no less significant conflict sources: markets, abattoirs, land.

Third, one recurring theme in the region's conflicts is declining state capability. Generally reflected in terms such as predatory, weak or failing states, the declining capability of the state raises a series of challenges to its 'stateness' as this encourages different contenders to its power. These contentions are significant, for they draw attention to issues of the constitution of the state itself, its legitimacy, degree of sovereignty, as well as the exercise of power. These three broad trajectories are further explicated in Figure 3 below. These could form the basis for the establishment of an instrument for the collection of baseline data for a CVA.

Figure 3: Conflict Trajectories and Possible Indicators

Trajectory	Manifes-tations	Indicators
Identity	Ethnicity	Ethnic tensions; the use of state power for the advancement of sectional or ethnic interests; Power representation of a specific ethnic nationality rather than a broader national arena; the Constructionand propagation of 'stereotypes' of specific ethnic groups as the *Other*
	Religion	Constructing, maintaining, and reinforcement of religion in exclusivist terms; intolerance demonstrated by practitioners, especially through proselytisation;
	Citizenship	Distinctions between 'indigenes and 'settlers;'
	Community	Disputes over freak accidents
Resource Based	Land	Struggle over pastureland, farmland, and so on
	Markets	Struggle for control of revenues
	Abattoirs	Struggle for the control of revenues
	Water Mineral Resources	Struggle for the control of rents; resource control;

Figure 3: Continued

State Viability	State Formation	Contentious state power: conflict arising from competition between groups or between elite and these groups for control over the state; existence of sub-national groups that may wish to form a separate state; perceived or eal group based injustice, and the inability to address same within available institutional mechanisms; such conflicts are usually framed in ethnic, religious, or other forms of sub-national identity
	State Legitimacy	Conflicts arising from contestations over the legitimacy of either the state or of existing government; dominance of authoritarian forms of rule of the military or 'democratic' type; conflation of regime and party; de-institutionalization and the flouting of 'rules of the game;' generalized insecurity and the dominance of personal rule; rigging in elections; length of tenure of rulers; corruption and loss of 'moral imperatives'for exercising power due to abuse of power
	State Dependency	Conflicts arising from the dominance of foreign interests, interventionism; total or partial loss of sovereignty through, for example, control by supra-national organizations (IMF & WB) or MNCs.
	State Capability	Frequent resort to state of emergencies, curfews, or extra-ordinary powers; privatization of the means of violence and the dispersion of violence from the state onto private, non-public forms; inability to ensure security and control crime and criminal violence; progressive deterioration in public services and state withdrawal from social provisioning
	Abuse of State Power	Predominance of predation as a mechanism of rule; control over or worsening operational climate for independent media; political assassinations, abductions, tortures, and extra-judicial killings; deployment of state power to personal rather than public ends; violation of the rule of law; criminalization of the state

Source: Adapted from Samarasinghe et al, 1999

Conclusion: Social Vulnerability and Capacity for Conflict Management

This chapter is a preliminary attempt to make a case for the inclusion of conflict vulnerability assessment in the conflict management mechanism in the sub-region. It drew attention to the significance of this concept, examined its possibilities, and its key indicators and major elements. The identification of conflict trajectories and their indicators is a significant step in CVA, and on this basis, region-wide baseline data could be collected to establish risk elements, risk populations, capacities of populations to absorb impact, institutional and organisation frameworks for responding to conflict situations and the availability of infrastructure to address conflict situations.

Such an analysis should revolve around a number of key questions. First, it should involve the identification of actual and potential risks as well as the populations at risk in the region. Second, what kinds of vulnerabilities does the sub-region face that cut across national boundaries and for which collective responses are not only possible, but also imperative? Third, what is the relationship between vulnerability and conflict? To these questions must be added corollaries: what types of groups and communities are potentially vulnerable to which types of risks? Some indicators have already been provided in the chapter n order to address these questions, however, it is important to reiterate that four sets of data are required: nature and sources of conflict nationally and regionally; the current national conflict statuses of ECOWAS member states; identification of potentially vulnerable groups, the capacities of potentially vulnerable groups to absorb conflict or hazard and existing infrastructure (including institutional plans) for addressing projected conflict conditions. Moreover, data on countries, groups and current crises, monitoring systems for armed conflicts, state viability, and so on are critical.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasise the identification of coping mechanisms. What possible mechanisms, strategies and capabilities are prevalent to which type of conflicts or risks? What images and rationalisations of vulnerability are dominant? Addressing these questions require data on: people's or communities management strategies and capabilities, identification of populations or groups at risk and, third, the identification of actual and potential individual, group and institutional responses available for specific risks.

In sum, a CVA analysis complements current efforts towards a more robust regional conflict management mechanism. It helps integrate Early Warning and Risk Analysis into a more robust management strategy, prunes down the currently too numerous early warning indicators, and assists in collecting region-wide conflict resolution and transformation data for the effective management of conflicts.