5 Civil society organisations and the ECOWAS peace and security agenda

A case study of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)

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Introduction

West African civil society organisations (CSOs) have played important roles in the promotion and implementation of the ECOWAS' peace and security agenda. There is increasing recognition that CSOs often have unfettered access to conflict zones and are in direct contact with perpetrators as well as victims, allowing them to provide unique types of information needed in conflict prevention, management, and transformation. Conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone marked a watershed for the specialisation and professionalisation of West African CSOs in the field of peace and security (Beck, 2001). Community leaders, women's groups, media actors and the private sector, including businessmen and -women, have demonstrated their influence in waging conflict and seeking peace and stability as pre-conditions for sustainable development. These actions include addressing the structural and immediate causes of conflict, building the capacity of actors to prevent and mitigate violence, and support the rebuilding of societies after conflict. They also engage in peacebuilding activities before, during and after violence. These have been achieved largely through, among other things, advocacy, capacity building, policy and programmatic interventions, and research. Despite these achievements, the emergence of new threats such as terrorism, pandemics, cyber-crime, transnational organised crime and climate change continue to threaten the region. Addressing them requires enhanced collaborative approaches by all stakeholders including CSOs. In this regard, the collaboration between CSOs and ECOWAS is germane.

ECOWAS Vision 2020, which seeks to deliver meaningful development and promote an 'ECOWAS of the Peoples', provides an even greater impetus to engage CSOs on issues of peace and human security in the region. This chapter assesses the contributions of CSOs towards the consolidation of the ECOWAS Peace and Security Agenda, based on a case study of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). It argues that the significance of CSOs in peace and security goes beyond traditional activities of monitoring and policing governments, although influencing policy is a key factor in realising the ECOWAS vision of the peoples and bridging the gap between policymakers and their constituencies.

West Africa's peace and security context

West Africa has been one of the most politically dynamic and challenging regions of Africa. Since the 1960s, the region has registered one of the highest rates of coup d'états in the world. Violent conflicts occasioned by civil wars, ethno-religious conflicts, political crises, etc., have led to instability and reversals in the developmental gains made by several countries. In recent decades, the region has experienced some of the most horrendous fratricidal conflicts. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau witnessed civil wars that have brought untold hardships to millions of people, destroyed property and infrastructure, resulting in the near-collapse of the state, while threatening the stability of neighbouring countries (Obi 2009). Huge amounts of scarce resources meant for human and economic development have been diverted to peacekeeping efforts through the combined efforts of ECOWAS, the United Nations (UN) and the international community.

Most recently, West Africa has become synonymous with rising levels of radicalisation and violent extremism. Across the Sahel–Sahara zone, countries such as Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso are burdened with high levels of insecurity emanating from the activities of extremist groups such as Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), etc. Continued attacks on local and trans-border communities in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon by Boko Haram and the attacks in Mali, the Grand Bassam area of Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, indicate the expanding nature of the threat and its destabilizing consequences. AQIM and Boko Haram are two of the deadliest groups currently operating in the region.

Despite efforts to prevent violent extremism and counter-terrorist activities across the region, new groups such as the Ansar ul Islam in Burkina Faso are operating with a level of sophistication that increases in ferocity with each attack. This has been further exacerbated by declarations of affiliation by these groups to Islamic State (ISIS). Terrorist groups in West Africa have access to weapons such as plastic explosives, rocket-propelled grenades, surface-to-air missiles and light anti-aircraft artillery believed to have been sourced from Libya following the toppling of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi regime (Aning, Okyere & Abdallah, 2012).

The presence of large caches of weapons has contributed to the high level of violence in West Africa. Out of an estimated 500 million arms in circulation in the global market, about 7 million have reportedly made their way into Africa (GIABA, 2013) in addition to locally manufactured arms in West Africa. This can be attributed to the aftermath of the Cold War, civil wars, armed conflicts, and the proliferation of weapons from the Arab spring. Mali was instrumental to a negotiation process within the institutional framework of ECOWAS for a regional freeze on the import, export and manufacture of small arms and light weapons in West Africa. However, the country has since regressed significantly since the outbreak of an insurgency in 2012.

Additionally, transnational organised crimes such as fraud, drug and human trafficking, money laundering, smuggling, piracy, hostage taking and kidnapping are also common. These crimes are facilitated by porous borders, corruption, weak or fragile states and lack of institutional capacity. West Africa is a key transit hub for narcotics (cocaine and heroin) from South America and destined for European and North American markets, and as a re-distribution and consumption point. In some countries, such as Guinea-Bissau, narco-enterprises have succeeded in corrupting state officials, leading to the disintegration of state institutions and their authority. Another area of concern relates to the spate of cybercrime. According to Adeniran (2011), the modernisation of criminality among Nigerian cybercriminal groups, for example, has been enabled by the internet and youth unemployment, lack of social support and a general deterioration of conditions of living in the country. The most prevalent forms of cybercrime include fraud, Automated Teller Machine (ATM) spoofing, hacking, impersonation, identity theft and so-called '419' scams, also known as advance-fee fraud.

Challenges to peace and security emerge during democratic transitions and in West Africa. Elections are characterised by deep tensions fueled by factors such as ethnicity, which candidates often exploit; winner-takes-all political contests, which makes parties and candidates want to win at all cost; relative lack of confidence in the neutrality of election management bodies and allegations of electoral malpractice. Election disputes across the region are often marked by outbreaks of violence – as witnessed in Burkina Faso, 2014, and 2015, Benin 2019, Côte d'Ivoire 2011, Guinea 2012-2013 and 2018, and Nigeria 2015, and 2019 – with elections often causing great anxiety among the populace. Regrettably, a few leaders still nurse ambitions of long-term rule, even if that means manipulating and influencing constitutional changes to extend their stay in power beyond constitutional term limits. Such practices are exacerbating the crisis of political stability and undermining good governance in a few countries across the region.

On the human security front, conflict arising out of struggles between competing groups for access to, and control over natural resources continue to pose new threats. Droughts, linked to climate change have led to increasing migration of individuals and communities from drier zones, in search of farming and grazing land and water resources. Consequently, farmer-herder conflicts have become a common feature, threatening the peace and security landscape. Also, meningitis, cholera, and Lassa fever are endemic in the region, and epidemics and pandemics such as Ebola and most recently Covid-19 have exhibited the region's vulnerability in the face of widespread disease outbreaks. Given the fragile state of health infrastructures and shortages of vaccines and medications, the outbreak of epidemics and diseases pose formidable threats to the lives of West Africans.

Despite the provisions of ECOWAS's Conflict Prevention Mechanism and emphasis on detecting conflicts early, before they lead to incalculable consequences, organised violence, and the looming threats of a breakdown of law and order are evident. Realising that issues of governance have been one of the roots of conflicts in West Africa, ECOWAS leaders signed a Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) to specifically address

matters relating to democratisation and governance. However, these remain a major challenge in most member states because of wide gaps between signing protocols, ratifying and implementing them. Events in the Gambia in 2017 when ECOWAS insisted that Yahya Jammeh hand over to the winner of the December 2016 elections, Adama Barrow, despite the former's initial refusal to do so, demonstrated ECOWAS's continued zero-tolerance for unconstitutional changes of government in the region.

The Principle of an 'ECOWAS of the peoples'

Since its inauguration on 28 May 1975, ECOWAS has been promoting economic cooperation and regional integration among its 15 member states. Also, from the early 1990, it progressively created Africa's most sophisticated mechanisms of regional peace and security (Obi 2009). Member states recognised that peace and security were necessary ingredients for economic development and that economic strategies had to be complemented by initiatives that addressed human development, social infrastructure, health, the environment, and ethnic and political conflicts. The Liberian war of 1989-1996 was largely responsible for bringing regional security to the core of ECOWAS's integration agenda. By August 1990, there were 225,000 Liberian refugees in Guinea, 150,000 in Côte d'Ivoire, and 69,000 in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, 5,000 people had been killed and about 3,000 Nigerian, Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean citizens were held hostage by the rebel National Patriotic Front of Liberia led by Charles Taylor (Aboagye, 1999).

In June 2007, the Authority of Heads of State and Government adopted a landmark resolution through its Vision 2020, which aimed to transform the organisation from an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of the Peoples (see chapter 4 in this volume). The resolution resonates with the spirit behind the formation of the organisation, seeking to create a borderless region where populations have access to its abundant resources and can exploit them through the creation of opportunities under a stable environment. The peace and security pillar of Vision 2020 is aptly captured in the ECOWAS Strategic Plan. It envisions a secure and socially cohesive West Africa devoid of conflicts, whose leaders and people place a high premium on peace and collective regional security; and the effective operation of an ECOWAS regional defence and security system that will combat the proliferation of SALWs and illicit drugs. There will be conscious and sustained collective effort to eliminate social discrimination or exclusion; and a demonstrably strong drive to inculcate acceptance of the socio-cultural diversity as a positive factor that enriches life in the region.

ECOWAS has advanced a paradigm shift from a unilateral and state-centric approach to peace, security, and development, to multi-stakeholder participation working in partnership with civil society (See chapters 4 and 7 in this volume). The revised 1993 ECOWAS treaty called on the regional community to co-operate with regional CSOs and encourage the broad participation of citizens in the integration process. This marked an important change in both the structure and character of West African cooperation marked by a shift towards a more

people-centred agenda as opposed to the “overly state-centric approach of the past” (WACSI, 2009). To ensure its collaboration with CSOs and bring to fruition the spirit behind an ECOWAS of the Peoples, the organisation created a platform for interaction with CSOs, the Forum of Associations Recognized by ECOWAS (FARE). The association has a membership base of about 30 CSOs, representing different expertise and constituents of civil society in the region, and tries to bridge the gap between ECOWAS and the citizens of the community.

Similarly, in 2003 ECOWAS spearheaded the creation of the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF). WACSOFF is a network of CSOs and operates at the national level, with a regional coordinating secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria. The logic for creating a regional civil society forum was based on the need to ensure the input of community citizens in ECOWAS policy formulation processes and increase dialogue between CSOs and ECOWAS. CSOs from within the region have been working with ECOWAS in implementing various instruments including, the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, signed in Lomé on the 10 December 1999 (1999 Mechanism); and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) of January 2008. The framework seeks to address operational and structural conflict prevention and provides entry points for civil society participation. This resonates with the global shift in the focus of peace and security from a state-centric to a human security agenda, and consistent with operationalising the principle of an ECOWAS of the Peoples.

This principle undergirds WANEP’s partnership with ECOWAS and shows the possibilities and prospects for improved civil society engagements with Regional Economic Communities (RECs). In line with this partnership, WANEP maintains a liaison office in the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja to facilitate the interface between ECOWAS and civil society on matters relating to conflict prevention and mitigation. This is an opportunity that has enabled CSOs to contribute to the peace and security agenda of the region. WANEP has influenced policymaking to end violence and deadly conflicts in the region through its numerous analytical policy briefs, which provide incisive ideas on what the threats and vulnerabilities are; who the actors are and what their agenda and undeclared intentions are; and what needs to be done by whom, how and why.

WANEP-ECOWAS Partnership

In West Africa, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and CSOs at large working for peace and development have demonstrated their passion and perhaps their capacity to complement government efforts. Unfortunately, these organisations in the past were side-lined in peace processes, especially at the peace negotiation table. However, due to significant contributions by CSOs in the areas of the environment and sustainable development, human rights and women’s issues, conflict prevention and peace building, governments and international actors are increasingly recognising the role of civil society in governance and have even started to build partnerships with civil society. There

are many CSOs with experience in grassroots development, engaging in political processes, policy formulation, influence and effecting change, which also requires political leverage (WANEP, 2012). However, WANEP became an obvious choice for ECOWAS, considering its expertise in peace and security, its structure and wide coverage of the region.

WANEP was formally launched in 1998, with a vision of a West Africa at the pinnacle of justice and peaceful coexistence. The mission of WANEP is to enable and facilitate the development of mechanisms for cooperation among civil society-based peacebuilding practitioners and organisations in West Africa by promoting cooperative responses to violent conflicts. It also provides the structure through which these practitioners and institutions regularly exchange experiences and information on issues of peacebuilding, conflict transformation, social, religious, and political reconciliation; and promoting West Africa's values as resources for peacebuilding (WANEP, 2016a).

With a network of community-based, national, and regional networks in various peace and security thematic issues, WANEP has continued to build strong synergies with stakeholders and partners to ensure a transformation and paradigm shift from reaction to prevention of violent conflicts. In 2002, it entered into a formal agreement with ECOWAS through the Capacity Building Program in Conflict Prevention and Good Governance. The aim of the partnership was to mobilise civil society in West Africa in salient thematic areas that affect regional peace and stability. ECOWAS and WANEP share the conviction that CSOs can make governments and state structures more responsive through participation in political processes, policy dialogue, monitoring, and advocacy campaigns. CSOs can also help share and collate information/data on early warning of emerging crises via monitoring, analysis, and communication strategies. This will help raise awareness, as well as develop options and strategies for early response. In this regard, political will for response through lobbying and campaigns is mobilised and domestic audiences sensitised.

The challenges, failures and shortcomings in resolving West Africa's multi-faceted crises, and the quest to right the wrongs and errors of the past were the driving force behind the elaboration of the framework document that provides the opportunity for collaboration between ECOWAS and WANEP. The partnership between WANEP and ECOWAS was sealed by a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2004. The MOU had three broad objectives: a) to enhance the conflict prevention capacity of CSOs in West Africa; b) to enhance the conflict prevention capacity of ECOWAS, and c) to build and enhance collaboration between CSOs in West Africa and ECOWAS in matters of conflict prevention. WANEP's primary focus was the operationalisation of the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN). The MOU has been consistently renewed¹, with the most recent targeting the decentralization of early warning, being for five years, ending in 2019. This experience of collaboration between WANEP and ECOWAS has been highlighted as the best practice for building alliances with CSOs in conflict prevention; and is a point of reference currently being examined by other RECs such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (WANEP, 2017).

ECOWARN is an important component of the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, especially on preventive measures. It is made up of an observation and monitoring system located at the ECOWAS Commission, with four zonal information and reporting bureaus in Cotonou (covering Benin, Nigeria and Togo); Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger); Monrovia (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ghana); and Banjul (the Gambia, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal).

To further strengthen and complement ECOWARN, WANEP launched its West Africa Early Warning and Response Network (WARN) in 2010 as an integral part of its peacebuilding strategy. Subsequently WANEP developed the National Early Warning System (NEWS) in all the 15 ECOWAS member states. NEWS strives to respond to critical demands for pertinent information relating to human security and violent conflicts, especially at community level. Through NEWS, CSOs are involved in filtering, monitoring and analysing information on possible threats to human security at the community and national levels. Early warning information is shared with ECOWAS and other stakeholders on a regular basis; for example, as daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly reports, as well as conflict censuses and assessments. WARN and NEWS have been of immense value in the promotion of peace and security in the region.

In support of ECOWAS's mediation and peacekeeping efforts in Sierra Leone during the war, a comprehensive impact assessment of the conflict was conducted shortly after Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels attacked Freetown in January 1999. The assessment provided an opportunity to hold discussions with civil society groups and key stakeholders in Sierra Leone to build a common strategy for the peacebuilding process. Arguably, these activities influenced key leaders and other key actors in the Sierra Leone conflicts to disband their forces in preference for negotiated peace through dialogue. For example, the leader of Armed Forces Revolutionary Council/Sierra Leone Army (AFRC/SLA), Johnny Paul Koroma, disbanded the AFRC/SLA. Similarly the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) proposed a joint conflict resolution committee, where politicians were engaged in a deep reflection about what type of Sierra Leone should result from post-war rebuilding efforts, and what type of vision and leadership were needed to bring this forth. The collaborative approach to peacebuilding encouraged NGOs to come together and to form the Network for Collaborative Peacebuilding, which allows for efficient coordination. WANEP-Sierra Leone continues to facilitate the activities of the Network for Collaborative Peace Building representing CSOs at the level of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

The West Africa Peacebuilding Institute (WAPI) was established in 2002 as the official training platform of WANEP to provide additional training for ECOWAS Commission staff, ECOWAS citizens, relevant agencies, peacebuilding practitioners, organisations and businesses in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It strives to overcome the gap in practice, knowledge, and skills in peacebuilding in the region and increase the number of competent, active peacebuilding practitioners. Since 2002, WAPI has trained over 500 practitioners

from ECOWAS, the AU, UN, state institutions, CSOs and corporate bodies in peacebuilding paradigms; natural resource governance and conflict management; human security and development; dialogue and mediation; youth and peace education; gender and peacebuilding; and early warning and early response. WAPI currently holds a training program annually at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Accra, Ghana, with which WANEP has signed an MOU. The MOU affirms the commitment of the two institutions to work together with ECOWAS in pursuit of peace and stability in West Africa through research, training, education, and mentoring.

In support of ECOWAS's dialogue and mediation efforts in West Africa, WANEP undertakes special interventions in dialogue and mediation with the aim of promoting inter- and intra-communal dialogue and peaceful coexistence, as well as to enhance the mediating capacities of communities and other relevant state and inter-governmental bodies. In addition, WANEP is a strong advocate for national peace architectures as a national and decentralised mechanism for responding to conflicts and mitigating their effects. In this regard, WANEP played a crucial role in the establishment of the National Peace Council of Ghana and is currently supporting the establishment of peace architectures in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria, and Niger (WANEP, 2007).

WANEP has contributed to the mediation of disputes at the communal and national levels in several countries, notably Ghana, Benin, Guinea, Nigeria, and Niger. An example of this was during the 2012 general elections in Ghana, where through the Joint Platform for Election Result Monitoring (J-PERM), results coming in from polling centres were jointly accessed in a coordinated situation room by the major political parties and representatives of the Electoral Commission, National Peace Council and other strategic stakeholders. Rising tensions were immediately defused where it became evident that the situation was going to deteriorate. With WANEP's support, the National Peace Council of Ghana convened a meeting with the two major parties (NDC and NPP), and Electoral Commission to brainstorm a way forward in order to allow the Electoral Commission to proceed to declare the results.

WANEP also supports the ECOWAS electoral unit and its commitment to peaceful transitions in West Africa, via its Civil Society Coordination and Democratic Governance programme. The programme provides an integrated platform for WANEP's engagement with diverse stakeholders to promote peaceful democratic transition and conflict-resolving processes/programs. It specifically collaborates with other CSOs to monitor and mitigate election-related conflicts with a view to promoting dialogue and peaceful elections. WANEP has developed a practice guide and training manual on managing election disputes in West Africa, which is in use throughout the region.

In Côte d'Ivoire, WANEP was able to mobilise CSOs, including religious and traditional leaders, in campaigning against the ethnically divisive politics deployed by some politicians, which literally divided the country into the government-controlled south and rebel-held north. WANEP-Côte d'Ivoire played a key role in facilitating CSOs' participation in the Flame of Peace ceremony that

symbolised the cessation of fighting and respect for the Ouagadougou Agreement between President Laurent Gbagbo and Guillaume Soro of FN, on March 4, 2007.² A monitoring committee was set up with other CSOs to provide quarterly reports on the implementation of the agreement.

Through its Women in Peacebuilding Program (WIPNET), which was launched in 2001, WANEP builds the capacity of women to enhance their roles in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in West Africa. It also supports the ECOWAS Gender Directorate in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security component of the ECPF, and promotes gender mainstreaming into peacebuilding and conflict prevention frameworks at the community, national and regional levels. WIPNET seeks to promote the involvement and participation of women in peace processes, following their enormous suffering in wars; and the under-valued and under-utilised conflict prevention skills of women and their leadership prowess, which is key in reversing their marginalization in the rebuilding of war-torn societies. The programme mobilised Liberian women as a pressure group to force the warring parties into signing the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement or Accra Peace Agreement for the resolution of the Liberian crises in August 2003 during the ECOWAS-led mediation process. The outcome of the Liberian peace process and the role of WIPNET have been widely acknowledged (WANEP, 2017). It led to the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia and former chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, and Leymah Gbowee, the former WANEP-Liberia coordinator for the WIPNET programme.

The WIPNET initiative preceded UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, demonstrating the flexibility and foresight of CSOs in promoting women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in West Africa. In collaboration with the ECOWAS Gender Directorate and the Women Peace and Security Institute of the KAIPTC, WANEP launched guidelines for the development and implementation of national action plans on UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions in October 2012. Since then, over 90 percent – 13- out of the 15 ECOWAS member states have developed and continued to implement their national plans on UNSCR 1325.

Children and youth in West Africa constitute a significant percentage of actors or victims directly affected by various conflicts that have bedevilled the region in the past three decades, as witnessed in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and more recently the violent extremism and religious fundamentalism ravaging northern regions of Mali, Niger and Nigeria. This has had physical and psychological impacts on children and young people, who have suffered massive abuse at the hands of armed militia groups and insurgents, as child soldiers or orphans, or as victims of sexual slavery, displacement, and torture. In this regard, WANEP launched the Nonviolence and Peace Education Program (NAPE) in May 2000 to address rising levels of children and youths' involvement in violent conflicts.

This is based on the conviction that the youth hold the key to future stability and development of West Africa. NAPE aims to promote the culture of non-violence

and peace within West African communities, with a focus on children and youth in schools and the informal sector. The programme works in harmony with the vision of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers of Education of institutionalising peace education in the region's schools. It promotes peer mediation and peace clubs, as well as peace education curriculums either as integrated or independent subjects at various levels such as schools, colleges, teacher training colleges and universities, and at the policy level.

WANEP sees peacebuilding not as an event but rather a process; when properly inculcated in the minds and comportment of children, youths, and adults, they will become agents of change. The acceptability and impact of the project motivated WANEP to capture its experiences through a practice guide that is now a referral document to institutionalise peace education policy and practice in West Africa (WANEP, 2001).

Challenges and prospects of CSOs contribution to the ECOWAS Peace and Security agenda in West Africa

In analysing the activities of CSO globally, Frerks (2006) noted eight sets of challenges that tend to undermine the activities of CSOs, especially in the field of peacebuilding, namely: 1) the problem of staying impartial during or after conflict; 2) representation or the problem of the democratic deficit; 3) the issue of quality and the question of institutional strengthening and partnering; 4) the complex nature of peacebuilding; 5) transparency and accountability; 6) measurability of impact, macro issues and power elites; 7) sustainability; and 8) "securitisation" of development. In looking at the West African context of civil society's role in conflict prevention, Ekiyor (2008) highlighted the many valuable contributions of West African CSOs, but focused on six areas of concern: 1) state-civil society relations; 2) narrow focus on NGOs; 3) weak and underfunded coordination mechanisms; 4) limited conflict prevention skills; 5) lack of policy influence; and 6) lack of documentation. Be that as it may, there are major challenges hindering the effective contribution of CSOs to the actualisation of the ECOWAS Peace and Security Agenda.

Insufficient funding

This has greatly inhibited the contributions of CSOs to the promotion of peace and security in the region. Moreover, a large portion of funding for conflict resolution and peacebuilding comes from external partners such as the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), USAID, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), and Austrian Development Cooperation, etc (see chapter 7 in this volume). Funds are usually short-term in duration and limited in scope, considering that some foreign partners are wary of CSOs in West Africa. With limited funds, external partners demand results within noticeably short and unrealistic timeframes, especially given the complex nature of conflicts in the region. However, there is little support for peacebuilding from the private

and business sectors in West Africa. Their contributions in the peace process have not been significant towards the consolidation of peace and security in the region (Eze and Suifon, 2012).

Unskilled workforce

While the number of peacebuilding practitioners in the region has grown, there is still a shortage of skilled personnel. In some instances, the situation can be exacerbated, especially when personnel intervene in conflict situations without requisite knowledge of the context and required skills to engage in the circumstance.

State-CSOs' relationship

In comparison with other RECs in Africa, ECOWAS has demonstrated leadership through its well-thought-out normative frameworks and involvement of CSOs in its peace and security agenda. However, some member states still perceive issues of peace and security as the sole responsibility of the state. To this end, many governments are suspicious of the motives of CSOs and see their activities as being tantamount to political opposition.

Weak coordination

There is weak collaboration among some CSOs, which often leads to duplication of efforts and lack of synergy necessary for advancing partnerships. This could be due to adversarial relationships between organisations over funding opportunities, rather than disagreements over collaboration for the collective promotion of human security.

Specifically, the challenge for WANEP in the promotion of peace and security stems from the fact that many state institutions and security apparatuses in the region are unable or slow in confronting emerging threats to peace, due to lack of resources or political will. In addition, corrupt and ineffective governance mechanisms in some ECOWAS member states undermine the gains of WANEP and ECOWAS in ensuring human security and development. This weak link between early warning and early response continues to threaten the sustained effectiveness of WANEP, as collecting, analysing, and reporting conflict early warning information is meaningless unless it is properly connected to early response.

Conclusion and recommendations

Civil society has emerged as an indispensable partner in peacebuilding in West Africa. It remains a critical factor in regional stability, peace, and economic development. In several countries, state legitimacy is either being undermined or contested, and citizens' trust in government has been eroded due to poor governance expressed mostly in the failure to provide social services. Also, the states in some ECOWAS member countries no longer have monopoly of the use of force.

Civil society has been at the forefront of rebuilding broken relations, especially in the crucial phase of post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation (Suifon, 2014). There have been significant improvements in the role of CSOs in the areas of conflict resolution and regional peacebuilding. Responses to conflict by ECOWAS and CSOs are improving in terms of speed and effectiveness. The ECOWAS-WANEP partnership is an emerging success story in relation to the capacity to detect and predict security threats in the region. While far-reaching steps have been taken towards implementing the “ECOWAS of the Peoples,” the prevalence of new and ongoing conflicts suggests that more work needs to be done. The involvement of civil society in the operationalisation of ECOWARN is an innovation that reflects global recognition of civil society in building peace and security. So far, the partnership has led to the establishment of an early warning system that draws its strength from information gathering. However, the challenge remains ECOWAS’s inability to effectively link early warning to early response (Opoku, 2007).

In charting a path for civil society collaboration with the state and intergovernmental organisations, and promoting its contribution to the ECOWAS Peace and Security Agenda, member states need to further interrogate the notion that peace and security should remain the sole responsibility of the state. This would entail an expansion of the notion beyond its current state-centric focus to embrace a people-centered ‘endogenous’ insistence on good governance and a renewed international commitment to greater egalitarianism in global decision-making. In this regard, emphasis on multi-disciplinary approaches involving a range of governmental and non-governmental actors in understanding their respective roles, and reliance on a broad partnership – including local communities, civil society, media, the private sector, humanitarian organisations and others – is key. Here are some recommendations:

- Expansion of partnerships with relevant CSOs to include directorates of the ECOWAS Commission other than Political Affairs Peace and Security.
- Annual contributions from the ECOWAS Peace Fund and other sources to regional CSOs in formal partnerships with the Commission.
- Organisation of an annual meeting between the Commission and CSOs on thematic issues to promote synergy and accountability.
- A review of ECOWARN indicators to ensure they capture current dynamics including violent extremism, piracy, and cybercrimes.
- ECOWAS member states should domesticate the ECPF as well as other ECOWAS strategic documents and ensure national ownership.
- The ECOWAS Commission should serve as an entry point for engaging national governments on key regional peace and security initiatives.
- CSOs should increase capacity building in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.
- CSOs should collaborate with relevant national and community stakeholders to ensure synergy and optimise results.
- CSOs involved in conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding should intensify their advocacy and insistence on preventive mechanisms, since they are cheaper (than mediating full-blown conflict) and less complex.

- CSOs should be engaged in the decentralisation of ECOWARN through the development and operationalisation of the ECOWAS National Early Warning Mechanisms and the establishment of peace architectures as aptly articulated in the policy document adopted by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government in Accra in 2014.

Notes

- 1 Both ECOWAS and WANEP renewed MOU for the sustenance of Regional Early Warning and Response Mechanism Available online: https://wanep.org/wanep/attachments/article/658/pr_sept_2014_WANEP-ECOWAS_mou.pdf
- 2 The Ouagadougou Political Agreement 4 March 2007 Available: <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/accord/ouagadougou-political-agreement-opa>

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