STATE OF WEST AFRICA: A SURVEY OF SECURITY LANDSCAPE[1]

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ABSTRACT

West Africa is a highly complex region full of potentials and difficulties. The region is made up of 16 states. With the exception of Mauritania, the remaining states constitute members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). A defining feature of the state of the West Africa sub-region has been the characteristic failure of states to provide and/or guarantee public safety. This paper attempts to briefly map the state of West Africa with emphasis on security situation in the region. It contends that the region's landscape is characterized by various security threats, differing in their nature, manifestation and intensity. The major security threats were surveyed under two broad categories: state-related security challenges and non-state actors related security challenges. The imperative of addressing these security and governance challenges have inspired the adoption of several regional mechanisms and instruments for enhancing security, development, and conflict management in the region. Some of these mechanisms, instruments and conventions were briefly highlighted. It concludes that

whilst ECOWAS can facilitate enactment and adoption of frameworks for enhancing security within the region, member states need to do more to ensure that their territory does not provide conducive environment for the emergence of threats to human security, peace and development.

INTRODUCTION

West Africa is a highly complex region full of potentials and difficulties. Despite the region's heterogeneity in terms of the size and endowments, it shares a common feature of multiple layers of insecurity, associated with conflicts and crime at community and national levels, often across borders and with regional ramifications.[1] As a result, the region has been among the world's most unstable regions and has a dramatic modern history characterized by endemic internal conflicts, protracte civil wars, interstate conflicts, coups and transnational organiz crimes.

Since attaining independence almost all West Africaι states have experienced coups d'etat. For instance from independence up to 2004, West African states experienced 44 successful military coups, 44 failed coups, 82 coup plots, seven civil wars and a number of other political conflicts. A recent compilation reveals that between 1958 and 2008, West Africa had the highest number of coups in Africa, not only in each decade but also overall, and accounts for 44.4 per cent of Africa's coups.[3] Of the 16 states in West Africa, only Cape Verde and Senegal have avoided military coup d'etat. In addition, more than 35 armed groups have been operating in, and destabilising, two-thirds of the 15 ECOWAS member states since 1998. The consequence of its coup-proneness has largely informed the interpretation of security as regime security. The interpretation of security from the regime security perspective created the condition for coups and counter-coups, giving rise to conflicts and insecurity in much of West Africa.

At the heart of this cycle of coups, conflicts and insecurity is the weakness of the political institutions and structures that define what constitutes security and how it is to be achieved in the society. The result is that West African citizens have been exposed to high level of insecurity and vulnerabilities either from repressive state security institutions or domestic and transnational organized networks with various levels of sophistication.

Although progress has been made in some respect in addressing some of these security and governance deficits, the region is still considered very vulnerable and weak. It is in this light that this paper attempts to briefly map the state of West Africa with emphasis on security situation in the region. This paper is structured into five parts. The second section provides an overview of the nature of states in the region, while the third section maps the state of West Africa in terms of the nature of security threats prevalent in the region. The fourth section presents the regional efforts at addressing the security and governance challenges confronting the region, and the fifth section concludes the paper.

WEST AFRICAN REGION IN PERSPECTIVE

West Africa is a region made up of 16 states. Apart from Mauritania, the remaining states constitute members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The region is composed of a variety of states in terms of the territorial size, colonial history, economic strength, internal cohesion, and external linkages. It comprises eight francophone states, five Anglophone, and two lusophone.[4]

Figure 1: Political Map of ECOWAS

Source: http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/ECOWAS/
Background.html
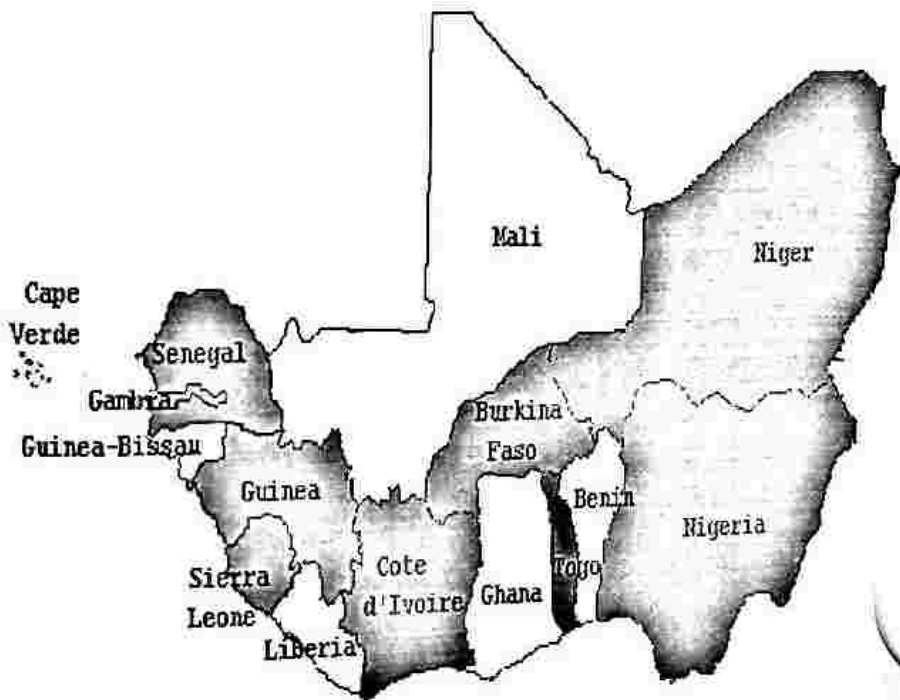
For a long time, West African states were dominated by their colonial powers. The colonial ties still survive till date and not only influence the dynamics of the internal political economy of these states, but also their relations to each other. Despite these divisions, West African states have made effort at regional integration for collective approach to the region's quest for peace, security and development. A notable achievement in this regard is the formation of the Economic Community of West African States in 1975. The fifteen member states are at different levels of development and stages of state building. They are equally confronted with different kinds of security, governance and developmental challenges.

A majority of West African countries are generally regarded as poor although they are potentially rich in terms of endowment with natural resources. For instance, West Africa contains approximately 32 per cent of Africa's total natural gas reserves. Nigeria holds the region's largest proven reserves with 185 trillion cubic feet (Tcf). In addition, proven reserves are also located in Côte d'Ivoire (1.0 Tcf), Ghana (840 billion cubic feet; Bcf), and Benin (40 Bcf). The population of the countries of West Africa constitutes about 32 per cent of the African population. Yet a high proportion of the population of most states in the region live in poverty and majority of the youthful population are without employment.

The region is generally reputed as one of the world's poorest regions. The combined gross domestic product (GDP) of the ECOWAS states in 2005 stood at $139 billion as shown in table 1 below. However, this overall performance hides some disparities. For instance, Nigeria's GDP of $78 billion is larger than the combined GDP of all other ECOWAS countries, representing some 56 per cent of the regional aggregate.

Table 1: Economic and Demographic indicators of West African (ECOWAS) States

Country	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2005E (Billions of U.S.$)	Real GDP Growth Rate 2005E (percent)	Real GDP Growth Rate 2006F (percent)	Per Capital GDP, 2005E	Population 2005E (millions)
Benin	$4.3	4.8	5.2	$604	7.1
Burkina Faso	$5.2	3.5	4.2	$407	12.7
Cape Verde	$1.1	5.9	6.2	$2,136	0.5
Cote d'Ivoire	$16.3	1.1	2.2	$937	17.3
Gambia	$0.5	4.5	4.7	$348	1.5
Ghana	$10.2	5.7	5.9	$484	21.0
Guinea	$3.0	3.0	3.3	$357	8.2
Guinea-Bissau	$0.3	2.3	2.8	$223	1.4
Liberia	$0.5	7.5	6.8	$137	3.6
Mali	$5.3	5.8	6.2	$441	12.1
Niger	$3.3	3.5	3.8	$268	12.5
Nigeria	$78.0	5.9	6.4	$611	127.7
Senegal	$8.1	5.8	5.2	$780	10.4
Sierra Leone	$1.1	6.9	6.3	$205	5.5
Togo	$2.1	2.8	3.5	$417	5.1
Regional Total/Weighted Average	$139.3	5.0	5.5	$624	246.6

Source: http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/ECOWAS/Tables.html

Although West African states achieved political independence relatively early, they have failed to attain high degree of political stability. Hence, the variety of states in the region includes countries at different stages of democratization, from consolidating democracies such as Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal to post conflict societies such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, governance fragility such as Niger, Guinea and Guinea Bissau, and coup-ridden states like Mauritania.

UNDERSTANDING THE STATE OF WEST AFRICA: MAJOR SECURITY CONCERNS

The West African landscape is characterized by various security threats, differing in their nature, manifestation and intensity. However, we will survey the major security threats in the region under two main themes, namely state-related security challenges and non-state actors related security challenges. We shall begin with the non-state actors related threats.

Non-State Actors Related Security Challenges: The security challenges in West Africa that are related to the activities of non-state actors have come largely in the form of transnational organized crimes. West Africa is known to be one of the poorest regions on earth, characterized with different kinds of governance, security and developmental challenges. A 2009 report by the United Nations office on Drugs and Crime[55] United Nations Office on Drug and Crime[4] (UNODC) identified West Africa as a region suffering from a combination of factors that make it vulnerable to organized crimes. These crimes include, but are not limited to human trafficking, oil bunkering, maritime piracy, cigarette smuggling, illegal dumping of toxic waste, drug trafficking, and terrorism. Undoubtedly, these transnational trafficking flows are attracted by and aggravating the special vulnerability of this region. These are discussed below:

Transnational Terrorism: The threat of growing transnational terrorism in West Africa is another key issue that is now receiving

attention at security desks, both nationally and internationally. West Africa, which is characterised by porous borders, weak governments and ineffectual national security systems, is very vulnerable to transnational terrorism. In particular, there are concerns about the growing operational reach of the Algeria-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), whose fighters are now active in large tracts of the central Sahara and its southern fringe, the Sahel.[5]
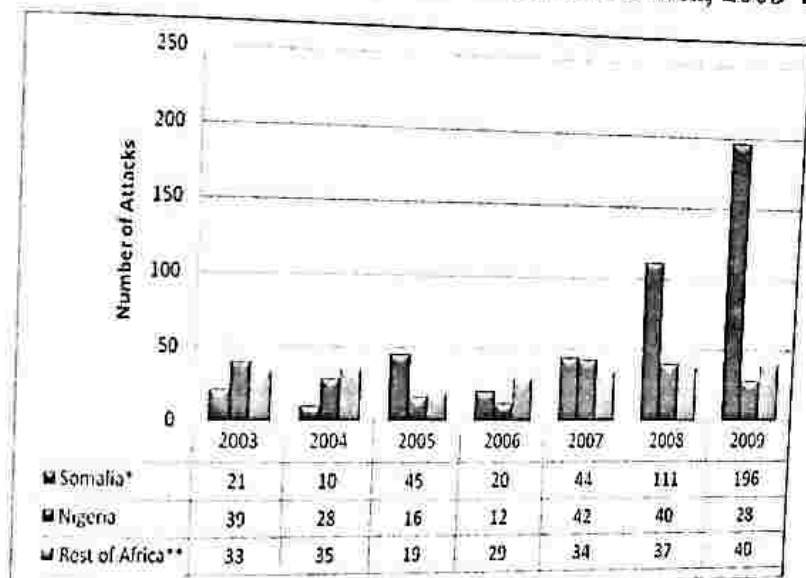
Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation: The proliferation, easy access and misuse of small arms and light weapons endanger the security of people, communities and states in Africa; and West Africa is no exception. Small Arms are the main weapons used in armed robberies, intra and inter communal feuds, local wars, armed insurrections, rebel activities and terrorism. They are used to facilitate drug trafficking, smuggling and other such crimes.[6] A study entitled *Africa's Missing Billions*[7] has implicated the proliferation of SALW in the fifteen years of conflict that cost Africa approximately $300 billion between 1990 and 2005. The evidence also suggests that at least 95 per cent of Africa's most commonly used conflict weapons come from outside the continent. The most common weapon is the Kalashnikov assault rifle, the most well-known type being the AK-47, almost none of which are made in Africa. Africa harbours an estimated 30 million illicit weapons, making it home to 75 per cent of the world's conflict. In the West African sub- region, it is believed that no fewer than eight million small arms are in circulation, with more than half in the hands of insurgents and criminals. Although the link between small arms proliferation and conflicts, crime and insecurity remains a major issue of dispute in the literature, there is a common agreement that the presence of SALW adds a complex layer to the intensity and lethality of armed confrontations.[8] As Ginifer et al[9] had noted, excessively available arms, particularly SALW, are often an important factor in the escalation, intensity, spread and duration of conflict and violent criminality, which obstructs and undermines peace-building and humanitarian and development aid.

Oil Bunkering/Smuggling: The large scale theft of oil in Niger Delta, commonly known as *oil bunkering* or oil smuggling, still remains a threat not only to rule of law in Nigeria, but also to regional security in West Africa. The UNODC has tersely argued that "one of the greatest threats to the rule of law in West Africa is rooted in the smuggling of a licit commodity: oil. This is despite the fact that only one ECOWAS country produces large amount of oil: Nigeria".[10] A report commissioned by Royal Dutch Shell estimates the amount of oil stolen each year by bunkerers or vandals in Nigeria at 100 million and 250 million barrels. At an average US$60 per barrel, the theft translates to a loss of about US$15 billion each year.

Regrettably, the value of the oil stolen in West Africa is comparable to that of cocaine flow, but is even more directly linked to instability, since the proceeds are used in the procurement of sophisticated weapons. As Onuoha has rightly noted, "oil bunkerers and pirates operating in the coastal regions of Nigeria use part of the proceeds from this illegal business for the procurement of sophisticated weapons. Their activities are linked to small arms and light weapons proliferation, in their aim to outspend and outsource perceived enemies in the acquisition of sophisticated weapons".[11] The result is that the dynamics of oil bunkering is contributing to SALWs proliferation and circulation in the region, which in turn, contributes to maritime piracy along the West African coast.

Maritime Piracy: The prevalence of maritime piracy along the coastline of West African states remains another security threat to the interests of both littoral and landlocked states, including the security of international merchant shipping.[12] An observer of the trend of maritime piracy in African waters would notice the concentration of pirate attacks in three main regions in the continent, namely; East Africa (Somali coast and the Gulf of Aden in the Horn of Africa), West Africa (Gulf of Guinea) and the Mozambique Channel/Cape sea route in Southern Africa.[13]

Figure 2: Reported Cases of Pirate Attacks in Africa, 2003–2009

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
■ Somalia*	21	10	45	20	44	111	196
■ Nigeria	39	28	16	12	42	40	28
■ Rest of Africa**	33	35	19	29	34	37	40

Source:[14]

Notably, maritime piracy in Africa has not been evenly distributed. However, waters off the coast of West Africa have remained the second most dangerous waters for merchant shipping in Africa. Between 2001 and 2008, the majority of attacks (54 per cent) occurred in West Africa, and only eleven nations experienced ten or more attacks during these years. In the last three years, between 2006 and 2008, the geographical concentration has been even starker: four countries (Somalia, Nigeria, Ghana and Tanzania) accounted for 85.8 per cent of all pirate attacks in Africa.[15]

Other Transnational Trafficking Flows – Human, Drug, Cigarette, Medicine: Apart from the transnational organised crimes sampled above, other forms of transnational criminal activity that originate from or transit through West Africa include drug trafficking, cigarette smuggling, human trafficking/smuggling (including illegal migration), dumping of toxic waste, counterfeit medicine, among others. Together with other factors like poverty and widespread unemployment, these criminal transnational trafficking flows contribute to instability and insecurity in the region.

State-Related Governance and Security Challenges

Apart from security threats posed by the activities of transnational organised criminal groups, West Africa is still vulnerable to instability and conflicts emanating from the nature and character of politics in some states. In terms of the character of insecurity that is related to the internal workings of some states in West Africa, the threat of insurgency, unconstitutional changes of government and state fragility are prominent. These are discussed briefly below.

Unconstitutional Changes of Government: A recurrent source of threat to security, peace and stability in West Africa has been the crisis of unconstitutional changes of government, which in itself is a product of governance failure in some West African states. Forms of unconstitutional changes of government have been a perennial source of conflict and descent into anarchy in some African states, especially in the West African region. The concept of unconstitutional changes of government encompasses military coup d'etat against a democratically elected government; intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government by armed dissident groups and rebel movements; the refusal by an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning party after free, fair and regular elections; and any form of unpopular amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments of a state to allow the incumbent to seek for extension/fresh term of office.[16] For instance, West Africa has experienced at least 58 coups and attempted coups. Between August 2008 and March 2009 alone, there was a military coup in Mauritania; a military junta took control in Guinea after the death of President Lansana Conte on 22 December 2008; and, after repeated skirmishes, the president of Guinea- Bissau was assassinated by his own troops. Another case of unconstitutional change of government was the unpopular amendment or manipulation of the Constitution of Niger by President Mamadou Tandja in 2009, which eventually culminated in the February 2010 coup. On 4 August 2009, President Tandja organised a controversial referendum that changed the Nigerien

Constitution. The new Constitution allowed President Tandja to extend his term for three more years without a vote, scraped term limits, and gave the President broader powers under a fully presidential government.[17] Before and even after the August referendum, the ECOWAS has constructively engaged the administration of President Tandja to ensure that Niger is restored to democratic normality. An ECOWAS mediation group, led by Gen Abdusalami Abubakar, was already mediating between Mr Tandja and his political opponents until the coup of 18 February 2010 that swept President Tandja from office. The group that calls themselves the *Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy* (CSRD), promised to turn Niger into an example of "democracy and good governance" and save its people from "poverty, deception and corruption". The military's seizure of power, although well received by a cross section of the Niger public, may complicate the governance crisis in the country if the international community, ECOWAS in particular, fails to keep effective tab and influence on the planed restoration of democratic government by the current junta.

Insurgency: The West African region is home to states that have been battling with lingering insurgency and rebellion. There remain many active rebel groups in the region. Some states in West Africa have continued to experience varying degrees of internal conflict and violence as seen in the Casamance region of Senegal. The Tuareg rebellion in Niger is equally complicating the security landscape of the region. In 2007 a new Tuareg group, the Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ), launched a campaign of attacks across the north. The longstanding smuggling and nefarious activities of Tuareg nomads has seriously disrupted the tourist industry, which is an important source of income for local people, particularly around the desert town of Agadez. In the case of Nigeria, the lingering crisis in the Niger Delta has led to production shortfalls due to violent attacks on oil infrastructure and facilities by militant groups operating in the region. As a result of attacks on strategic installations and

facilities in the region, oil production in Nigeria has dropped 20 per cent since 2006, with a cost to the Nigerian economy estimated at US$202 million between 2005 and 2008.

Fragile States: Although the concept of 'fragility' or 'state fragility' lacks a precise definition that is accepted by scholars, development practitioners, international organizations and states, it still remains relevant in appreciating the diversification processes in developing states due to the double dynamics of conflict and state erosion.[18] Generally, fragile states are considered to have capacity problems, which usually prevent them from adequately dealing with complexities arising from the political, economic, environmental, and social management of their societies. They are usually states with very weak and faltering governance processes and institutions that deny the political authority the ability to maintain law, order and security within the state's territory. In terms of fragile statehood and governance performance, West Africa is home to states operating at different levels or margins of fragility. For instance, Sierra Leone and Liberia are post-conflict states that are struggling to recover from years of protracted armed conflicts. Although Sierra Leone is picking up faster in its reconstruction process, the same cannot be comfortably said about Liberia. Post-conflict Liberia is confronted with rising incidence of crimes, especially armed robbery, murder, and rape.[19] On the other hand, Guinea Bissau is under threat of narco-trafficking, leading security analysts to brand her a *narco-state*.[21] In fact, the assassination of Joao Bernado Vieira, the President of Guinea Bissau, on 2 March 2009, reveals simmering political discontent and the potency of the narco-trade for undermining internal political stability with ramifications for regional security. Elsewhere in Cote d'Ivoire, the lingering crisis still remains far from being resolved. Once considered a rare example of African political stability and economic success in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire has joined the ranks of countries afflicted by governance failure and instability less than three years after experiencing its first successful coup d'etat.

REGIONAL EFFORTS AT ENHANCING SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The security environment in West Africa has been changing since the last two decades. The region as we have highlighted is confronted with several security challenges that undermines peace, stability and development in the region. These challenges are being tackled at two levels, individually by states and collectively by the ECOWAS. The imperative of addressing these security and governance challenges have inspired the adoption of several regional mechanism and instruments for enhancing security, development, and conflict management in the region. Some of these mechanisms, instruments and conventions aimed at collective suppression of these challenges are as follows:

Protocol on Non-Aggression (1978) and Mutual Assistance in Defence (1981): In realization that peace, security and development are inextricably linked, the organization had adopted the Protocol on Non-Aggression in 1978 and that on Mutual Assistance in Defence in 1981. These were the provisions under which the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was deployed to Liberia in 1991. Nevertheless, it was an ad-hoc mechanism.

Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (December 1999): In a bid to institutionalize this mechanism for greater effectiveness and accountability, the Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security was adopted in December, 1999. The objectives of the Mechanism are to :

- Prevent, manage and resolve internal and intra state conflicts
- Implement the relevant provision of the protocol
- Strengthen cooperation in conflict prevention, early warning, peacekeeping and security

- Maintain and consolidate peace, security and stability within the community
- Constitute and deploy a civilian and military force to maintain or restore peace.

The Mechanism works through the following institutions:

- The Authority of Heads of State and Government is the supreme institution of ECOWAS responsible for directing all actions concerning the responsibilities of the Protocol. All decisions taken by the Authority are binding on Member States.
- The Mediation and Security Council (MSC): It comprises 9 Member States; 2 of which are the serving and immediate past chairpersons of the Authority, and the other 7 are elected for a 2-year period. The MSC takes decisions on behalf of the Authority on issues of regional peace and security. The MSC meets at 3 levels: **Ambassadors** of member states accredited to the Executive Secretariat in Abuja. They meet monthly or as frequently as the situation demands. **Heads of State and Government** meets at least thrice a year in ordinary session or in extraordinary session as the situation demands. At the **Ministerial** level, Foreign Ministers of member states meet as often as necessary, or quarterly.
- The Commission Headquarters, headed by the President of the Commission, is tasked primarily with carrying out all decisions of the decision-making bodies of ECOWAS. As concerns this Protocol therefore, it initiates actions for conflict prevention, management, resolution and peace-keeping. These may include facilitating mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, etc. Among his key officers, the President of the Commission has a Commissioner directly charged with Political Affairs, Peace and Security. He in turn is assisted by 3 Directors responsible for Political Affairs, Peacekeeping and Security, and Observation and Monitoring.

The Commission for Political Affairs, Peace and Security contributes to achieve the goals set out for ECOWAS by implementing the mechanism and related protocols. It therefore pursues a number of strategic objectives which are to promote regional peace, security and stability by addressing the root causes of conflict; mitigate and resolve tensions, disputes and crises through preventive diplomacy, mediation, sustained by timely warning; assist in the return to post-conflict normalcy through peace building activities; and promote security and free movement by assisting in the control of transborder crime, international terrorism, proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, and anti-personnel mines.

The Mechanism also provides that in the event of a conflict breaking out in a member state, the President of the Commission shall appoint a Special Representative of the President of the Commission (SRPC). The SRPC (formerly Special Representative of the Executive Secretary, SRES) heads the activities of ECOWAS in the target country, the same way as the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General (SRSG). So far, 4 SRPC (formerly SRES) were appointed and sent to deal with the conflicts in Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Guinea Bissau, and currently, Guinea Conakry.

ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (December 2001): The major stake of this protocol is development of rule of law, consolidation of democracy and adoption of common principles of good governance, including prohibiting all forms of unconstitutional changes of government in the ECOWAS region. It provides an important institutional platform in the process of building a regional democratic political governance framework in support of economic and social development in West Africa. For instance, this instrument was invoked in October 2009 when the regional body imposed sanctions on both the republics of Niger and Guinea due to developments that were considered as threats to the consolidation of democracy in the respective states.

ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials (June 2006): SALWs proliferation has been a major contributor to conflict and insecurity in the West African region. The ECOWAS has long recognized the destabilizing impact of SALWS in the region. In a bid to contain the proliferation and circulation of arms and weapons in the region, the ECOWAS adopted the Moratorium on Small Arms and Light Weapons in October 1998. Subsequently, the ECOWAS member states signed and adopted this framework into a convention, now known as the *ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials* (June 2006). This instrument was equally invoked in October 2009 when the regional body imposed sanctions on the importation or transfer of arms to both the republics of Niger and Guinea.

ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, (January 2008): The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework provides the institutional mechanism for strengthening the human security architecture in West Africa. The idea is to create space with the ECOWAS system and in Member states for cooperative interaction within the region and with external partners to place conflict prevention and peace-building at the top of the political agenda of Member States in a manner that will trigger timely and targeted multi-actor and multi-dimensional action to diffuse or eliminate potential and real threats to human security in a predictable institutional manner. The ECPF comprises fourteen components that span the chain of initiatives designed to enhance human security in the region, namely, Early Warning; Preventive Diplomacy; Democracy and Political Governance; Human Rights and the Rule of Law; Media; Natural Resource Governance; Cross-Border Initiatives; Security Governance; Practical Disarmament; Women, Peace and Security; Youth Empowerment; ECOWAS Standby Force; Humanitarian Assistance; and Peace Education.

Apart from these mechanisms, the ECOWAS has established several promising conflict prevention and security-enhancing organs to help underpin the Commission's effort at achieving peace, security and development in the region. Such outfits include the Early Warning System, the Council of the Wise, and Special Mediators. In particular, the Department of Early Warning, including its Zonal Bureaus has been involved in gathering information on potential flashpoints of crisis for transmission to the Commission for the development of initiatives to resolve such crisis or preventing the degeneration of crisis to overt violence.

CONCLUSION

What we have done in this paper is to briefly map the security landscape of the West Africa region with a view to demonstrating the major threats bedevilling it as well as highlighting efforts undertaken collectively at the regional level to contain these threats. What is very clear here is the fact that West Africa is confronted with various security and governance challenges that are undermining human security and development. Some of these threats emanate from the nature of the internal political economy dynamics of these states. Also the international criminal networks have exploited the weakness of states in the region to sustain their activities which are not only undermining security within and across states, but also hold out serious implications for international security.

The imperative of achieving security and development has seen the articulation and implementation of various mechanisms, conventions, protocols and other binding instruments designed to contribute to the suppression of threats to security and stability at the region. Whilst ECOWAS can facilitate enactment and adoption of frameworks for enhancing security within the region, Member states need to do more to ensure that the sub-region does not provide conducive environment for the emergence of threats to human security, peace and development.

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