

**REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL
ORGANISATIONS:
ECOWAS Conflict Mediation Efforts in the West
African Sub-region**

By

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In the words of the renowned African military-diplomat, **Lt. General Chikadibia Isaac Obiakor (2012)**, Regional Organisations (RO's) are in a sense, International Organisations (IO's) as they incorporate international membership and encompass geopolitical entities that operationally transcend a single nation state. They have been established to foster cooperation, political and economic integration or dialogue amongst states or entities within a restrictive geographical or geopolitical boundary.

They both reflect common patterns of development and history that have been fostered since the end of World War II as well as the fragmentation inherent in globalisation, **(Archer 2001:26)**. Most RO's tend to work alongside well established multilateral

organisations such as the United Nations, (**UNSG Annual Report 1995: ch.4**).

Examples of Regional Organisations include the African Union (AU), European Union (EU), the Organisation of American States (OAS) and a host of others including the eight Regional Economic Communities (REC's) in Africa, (**Straubhaar, 2012**):

1. Arab Maghreb Union (UMA)
2. Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
3. Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)
4. East African Community (EAC)
5. Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
6. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
7. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)
8. South African Development Community (SADC)

They were established for the purpose of achieving greater economic integration and they have been described as the **“building blocks”** of the African Union (AU) thereby making them central to the strategy for implementing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) especially in the maintenance of regional peace and security (**Rodrigo & Tavares, 2009**).

Yet, while the preference for regional and sub-regional approaches to conflict mediation have become pronounced in recent years, and even as the principle of **“in-area”** peacekeeping by (sub-) regional organisations is becoming rapidly established, this trend has also raised several questions and issues (**Ratner, 1995:83**).

First, it has been argued that regional approaches create a number of challenges for the UN Security Council (**Rubin 2003:3**). For one, there are many difficulties in defining a region, as conflicts usually consist of networks expanding outward from one or several conflict cores, spreading in ways that may or may not correspond to geographical regions.

From operational experience in peace-keeping as ECOMOG Force Commander in Liberia, **Lt. General Victor Malu (2012)** retorted, does a “region” defined in the UN Security Council to address the issue of refugees in a particular situation, coincide with that defined to address the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons? Does it coincide with the perspectives of regional actors, tribal warlords, factional leaders and religious war merchants?

Secondly, the regional approach saddles the UN Security Council with the difficulty of deciding the right time to approve or endorse a regional action as there are many phases of conflict management and resolution, ranging from conflict prevention to post conflict peace building, usually offer several possible instances for Security Council intervention, the option of regional approach raises the question as to what point Security Council should cede responsibility to a regional organisation (**Rubin 2003:12**).

Thirdly, in a world where sovereignty has been the pillar of the international system, the UN Security Council, in contemplating regional intervention, is faced with the dilemma of whether to strengthen the state and its sovereignty amidst conflict situations

or to endorse regional intervention which may weaken the state in question.

Fourthly, bearing in mind that most regional organisations were developed primarily for the promotion of economic integration and peaceful co-existence among nations, some of such organisations may not have developed the capacity to engage in areas related to conflict mediation and resolution. The UN Security Council may therefore have difficulty in endorsing intervention by such regional organisations that are still too fragile to cultivate coherence and demonstrate consensus of policy and action in the task of resolving internal conflict in a member state **(Rubin 2003:16)**.

Furthermore, concern has been expressed that the preference for regional approaches, especially in Africa and elsewhere in developing world, could lead to **“second tier”** of peacekeeping, whereby the developed world would carry out expensive, well-equipped operations in areas of strategic concern to them but leave poorly-financed and ill-equipped regional security organisations to take care of most third world conflicts as best as they can **(Cawthra, 1996)**.

In fact, on the assumption that most regional approaches may be poorly funded, it has been argued that a shabbily mounted regional operation would, in no time, suffer the corruption of its men, the perversion of its purposes and ultimately the subversion of its mandate. Again, with respect to the missions that have thus far been mounted by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) led Economic Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), it has been observed that:

Sometimes a lack of resources has forced contributing countries to develop creative financing schemes or prevented them from paying their soldiers. Such policies have engendered corruption and ill-discipline among participating officers and troops (**Berman and Sams, 2000:149**).

The validity of the regional approach has been called to question as it concerns peace building. Given the importance of peace-building as the ultimate phase of conflict resolution, the question has been asked as to how effective ECOMOG under ECOWAS has been in addressing the fundamental injustices and inequities that led to the Liberian conflict and in other countries, in the first place.

In other words, in post conflict situations, how has ECOMOG under ECOWAS contributed to rebuilding infrastructure, facilitating the transition from independent relief to sustainable economic growth, conducting of demining operations, demobilising and reintegrating ex-combatants, the resettlement and reintegration of displaced persons, coordination of post-conflict recovery and rebuilding of institutional capacity.

Thus, much as ECOMOG has been acclaimed for willingness and boldness in taking on regional peace and security responsibility, several questions also have continually trailed its operations in the West African sub-region.

These questions have made it imperative that the ECOMOG operation in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali and Gambia be studied systematically and comprehensively, in order to draw out **“challenges and lessons”** that could be

applied in developing a future model that is less controversial and more effective in regional conflict prevention, mediation and resolution.

International Organisations (IOs):

There are many ways of looking at international organisations and their roles in international system. Those with a distinct state-centric view of the world would argue that international organisations only are as strong as states allow them to be, while others would argue that states are not the only important actors, and that international organisations indeed have an important role in international relations.

Nonetheless, most scholars and politicians would agree that international organisations have increasingly become important within the areas of peace and security. Today international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), African Union (AU) and their regional organisations have developed an increasing arsenal of instruments – political, military, economic and civilian – to act within these areas and their role is only becoming bigger (**Archer, 2001:40**).

Of the 43 recorded conflicts between 2000 and 2005, five were terminated with one party victorious, while 17 or 40% ended as a result of a negotiated settlement. This development which began in the 1990s should be seen in the light of sharp increase in international efforts and interests in confining and ending conflicts on the negotiating table rather on the battlefield. Many of these negotiated settlements are being facilitated by

international organisations (*Human Security Brief, 2008:35-36*).

Lt. General C. I. Obiakor, (2012) stated further that the world witnessed in the last two decades of the twentieth century an increasing number of mediation and other forms of peaceful intervention efforts undertaken by Regional International Organisations (RIOs) with a view to ushering in economic development, peace and security.

In Central America, peace agreements were negotiated in El-Salvador and Nicaragua with the help of Organisation of American States (OAS). In West Africa, ECOWAS intervened in the armed conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Ivory Coast. The Arab League tried unsuccessfully as it turned out to mediate in the Iraq-Kuwait conflict. The European Union was involved in numerous intervention activities, ranging from good offices to peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia (*Elgstrom, 2001:40*).

In the words of **Lt. General Obiakor (2012)**, such regional mediation initiatives were conducted in conjunction with the United Nations and at other times, they were undertaken unilaterally.

OUTSIDER versus INSIDER MEDIATION

The answer to the question “who should be selected as a third party mediator?” was traditionally that the mediator should be a neutral outsider. According to this view, neutrality or impartiality is seen as a necessary tool in the armoury of the successful mediator (*Carnevale & Arad, 1996:40-41*).

The third party should preferably have no ties to any of the parties and no stake whatsoever in the conflict outcome; he or she is ideally not connected to either disputant, is not biased towards either side, has no investment in any outcome and does not expect any special reward from either side.

This concept of neutrality in a negotiation process can be empirically difficult in African setting due to African peculiar linguistic, tribal, religious, marital and migration relationships. However, it can also be argued that the term “**neutrality**” can never be absolute but a relative term which could mean, be interpreted, used or even understood by various peoples of the world differently based on their gender, age, tribe, religion, race and even their level of education and development. These traits were supposed to increase the credibility of the mediator and make him or her acceptable to all parties, but also to enhance his or her possibilities of getting information from the disputants and increase the legitimacy of the proposed solutions (**Kleiboer, 1998:29**).

Presently, this assumption is questioned by many mediation scholars. The idea of mediator neutrality is puzzling as any intervention that turns a dyad into a triad simply cannot be neutral (**Bercovitch, 1992:6**). Active intervention by a third party affects both the substance and the likelihood of an agreement (**Gibsonet, 1996:70-71**). If mediation is conceived as an extension of negotiation, as “**three-cornered bargaining**” with the mediator as one of the players, it is difficult to associate mediation closely with neutrality. Above all, it has been established that one of the core problems or challenges of

“neutral mediators” are their shallow knowledge of the remote and immediate causes of the conflict in question coupled with lack of in-depth knowledge of the economic, social, religious and historical backgrounds to the crisis area.

Indeed, there seems to exist, a consensus that “it is the mediators” resources and ability to effect change, rather than their perceived impartiality that determine their acceptability and effectiveness.

In fact, mediation analysts today assert that neutrality is problematic and that the effectiveness of impartiality is contingent; under some circumstances, impartiality results in efficiency, but this may be true in other contexts. Often, the best one can hope for is a third party that is not biased in the sense that he or she is willing to sacrifice the interests of one of the parties in favour of those of the other (**Hopmann, 1996:225**).

Conversely, Paul Wehr and John Paul (1996) suggested that effective mediation may also be performed by what they call **“insider-partials”**. Based on their observation of Central American mediation, they proposed that internality and partiality may under certain circumstances lead to successful mediation outcomes.

The insider-partials are the mediators from the conflict area e.g. ECOWAS member mediators who have a stake in the outcome of the conflicts in the West African sub-region and will have to live with the consequences of their mediation work.

The trust that parties feel for the insider mediator is a result not of perceived neutrality, but of the intimate knowledge of and

connections to the disputants that the mediator has. Interpersonal face-to-face relationships are important in ensuring that the parties to the conflict will accept the mediator (**Elgstrom 2001**).

Wehr & Lederach (1996) contend that the effectiveness of insider-neutrals may be particular to “more traditional societies” who rely heavily on interpersonal trust and personal relationships. They further suggest that this type of mediation should be seen as a positive complement to intervention by outsider-neutrals.

Mediation by regional or international organisations is a popular method of conflict management because it allows the parties to retain control over the outcome while gaining more flexibility over the process. Whether undertaken by regional or international organisations, mediation’s goals are: to stop violence and hostility, reduce fatalities and achieve a political settlement.

However, the conflicts in the West African States of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Ivory Coast (Cote D’Ivoire) have engendered a relatively sizeable amount of literature. A substantial part of this output has dwelt on the intervention of the regional peace-keeping force ECOMOG, under the leadership of the regional organisation, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the mediation and resolution of the conflicts in the above mentioned West African countries.

Among the earliest works of substance was the volume edited by (Vogt1992). The collective effort of 10 contributors drawn from

academia and the mass media represented an important and highly illuminating study of a process that was then unfolding. In their contribution to the work, **Gabriel Umoden (1992:11-28)** provides a brief history of Liberia, **Amadu Sesay (1992:29-54)** offers exhaustive analysis of the historical background to the Liberian Crisis. **Nwolise (1992:55-72)** dwells on the internationalisation of the Liberian crisis and its effects on West Africa. **Akabogu (1992:73-94)** highlights the factors that influenced the decision of the sub-regional economic organisation popularly known as ECOWAS to deploy a sub-regional peace-keeping force code-named “ECOMOG” and analyses the threat which the Liberian crisis posed to the cohesion of the sub-regional organisation, **Aderiye (1992:95-122)** provides a useful insight into how the first encounter of the ECOMOG sub-regional force with the various warring factions formed impressions which thereafter continued to influence the perceptions of all parties that were involved in the conflicts and **James (1992:123-146)** provides a political analysis of what the West African force (ECOMOG) met on ground when it landed in Liberia.

Furthermore, Vogt (1992:147-172) analyses the difficulties confronted by the ECOMOG forces as they confront the challenges of conflict resolution through the use of the peace-making strategies of peace-keeping and peace enforcement. **Obasi (1992:173-204)** details the processes through which the Liberian crisis was being negotiated and provides an incisive analysis of various stages of the negotiation process, **Adisa (1992:205-236)** explores the political background to the differing

perceptions of the West African leaders at the time to the concept of ECOMOG and also profiles four Force Commanders (FC), Nwolise (1992:312) analyses the process of implementation of the Yamoussoukro and Geneva Agreements, providing a good insight into the factors that influenced the perceptions of the warring factions and their attitudes towards the peace process, **Lawal (1992:313:330)** analyses the expectations of the Liberian people, their desire for a return to normalcy, their frustration with the obstacles that were stalling the peace process and the anxieties and aspirations of the Field Commander. Obasi (1992:331-336) surveys the various shades of public attitudes to the ECOMOG efforts, both in Nigeria and in the international community while Vogt (1992:367-374) concludes with an overview of the entire ECOMOG endeavour in Liberia and the prospects for the regional initiative to achieve a final peaceful settlement of the conflict.

While the study was important as a path-breaker, its major limitation was that it was published in 1992 and thus covered only what could be described as the beginnings of ECOMOG and the dawn of its operations in Liberia. On the ECOWAS effort in Liberia, for instance, **Jonah (1993:75)** observes that:

“The deployment of ECOMOG was initially criticized but with the passage of time, it came to be regarded as a good example of regional arrangements that can help provide stability”

Also in the same league, is **Weller's work (1994)** which, though a very useful compendium of important documents, was also published in 1994 and is not by any means analytical.

Since the mid-1990s, there have been several other published works on the subject, exhibiting varying degrees of depth, detail and significance. **Nwolise (1995:36-60)**, for instance, focuses on the ECOMOG initiative strictly from the standpoint of its impact on political stability in the West African sub-region. **Enahoro (1998:131-146)** examines ECOMOG as an experiment in sub-regional and multi-national intervention from the military point of view. **Alao (1993:335-350)** approaches the subject from the perspective of peacekeeping in sub-Saharan Africa, but dwells particularly on "the politics and intricacies" of involvement.

Olonisakin (2000) examines conceptual and legal issues in the ECOMOG operation in Liberia. **Aning (1999)** analyses ECOWAS policies in Liberia within the context of security in the West African Sub-region. **Olonisakin and Aning (1999:16-39)** examined the human rights issues brought about by humanitarian missions, particularly in instances of peacekeeping and peace enforcement. On the impact of ECOMOG operations on human rights in Liberia, they analysed how the institutional values of the parent organisation ECOWAS, affected the conduct of the troops and concluded with a discussion on the prospects for institutionalising human rights protocols under ECOWAS in the national legislation of member states, as a guide to future military operations. In effect, none of these studies covered the entire canvas of the ECOMOG intervention, even within the initial

Liberian theatre. But of specific importance however, **Olonisakin and Aning (1999)** observed that ECOMOG intervention in Liberia was unique in a number of respects:

First, it reflected the diminished international interest in Africa and confirmed that Africans would now have to take greater responsibility for their security problems.

Second, it reflected the willingness of the United Nations to assign roles to regional hegemony and regional organisations in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Third, it was the first military intervention by a sub-regional economic organisation.

Lastly, the intervention was among the first to legitimise a changing view of the concept of state sovereignty within an evolving New World Order, which would accord preference to the issue of human rights over ideology...

(Thenceforth) it was no longer fashionable to challenge interventions aimed at rescuing people threatened with starvation, disaster, death and suffering within a state, not least where such a state is sliding into anarchy

In spite of these novel features and unique attributes of ECOMOG intervention in Liberia and later in Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire, the missions, however suffered serious shortcomings and deficiencies. Therefore, these ECOMOG missions in West Africa definitely invite greater inquiry and scrutiny of the role of ECOWAS in the prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts. Indeed, the lessons of such study may go beyond the narrow concern of fine-tuning the ECOWAS

Mechanism and find wider relevance well beyond the sub-region.

As **Olonisakin (2000)** has pointed out:

“Although a study of the ECOMOG experience in Liberia and Sierra Leone is very important for the resolution of similar conflicts within Africa, there is also a global relevance”

As she rightly argues, the Liberian conflict was one of the many Post Cold War internal conflicts, several of which have illustrated the limitations of United Nations arrangements for peace as well as the shortcomings of traditional peace-keeping in dealing with internal conflicts. A study of the regional approach, therefore, as exemplified by ECOMOG, is necessary in order to understand the working and effectiveness of the initiative and assess how best to regulate regional initiative towards the resolution of future conflicts.

Aboagye (1999), in dealing with ECOMOG’s regional experience in conflict mediation, peacekeeping and conflict resolution, attempted to straddle all the issue areas dealt with by the various works cited above. His work, by every measure, represented a bold and very useful effort, particularly its illumination of the logistic and operational issues, which had never been addressed by earlier analysts. This is understandable, given his background as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Ghanaian Army and particularly his experience as ECOMOG Sector Commander who participated actively in the ECOMOG operations in Liberia. His study, however, suffers from the fact that it is largely dominated by the Liberian experience. Even though some attention was devoted to

Sierra Leone, there was no mention whatsoever of the ECOMOG conflict resolution efforts in Guinea Bissau and Cote D'Ivoire.

Indeed, the neglect of the Guinea Bissau experience is a major deficiency of virtually all works that have been published about ECOMOG interventions in West Africa thus far. It would seem that only **Abdulai (1999:8-33) and Obasi (2001)** have paid specific attention to this third leg of the ECOMOG role in conflict management and resolution in West Africa. Yet, the Guinea Bissau experience is important in several respects. As **Obasi (2001)** points out:

The Guinea Bissau mission is significant for three reasons.

First, comprising three Francophone and one Anglophone country, and without the involvement of Nigerian troops, it effectively dispelled the charge and insinuation that had always been made in certain quarters, that ECOMOG was basically conceived and had been employed continuously as a tool for advancing Nigeria's defence and foreign policy interests across the sub-region. Secondly, with the exclusion of Guinea and Senegal from participating at the request of the opposition group, the Guinea Bissau mission set the healthy precedent of a practice whereby a party's concern and demand, regarding force composition would be respected in mounting peacekeeping operations in future.

Thirdly, the operation indicated an improvement in the mandate and operational framework of peacekeeping operations in the sub-region.

Berman and Sams (2000) are among the few authors that have examined all the first three operations that were undertaken by ECOMOG. But their study was undertaken within a wider study of peacekeeping capacities and capabilities in Africa. Consequently and quite understandably, their treatment of all three regional conflict resolution efforts is rather brief and is lacking in some essential details. In the analysis of ECOMOG missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau, **Berman and Sams (2000)** further observed that:

“ECOWAS member states have distinguished themselves by their willingness to assume primary responsibility for promoting peace and security in the sub-region...Yet this willingness has sometimes undermined peace and security.

ECOMOG has inflicted casualties as well as incurred them – at levels that call into question the wisdom of its actions. Its neutrality has often been called into question which has limited its effectiveness”

This same issue was also captured by **Cawthra (1996:39)** who observed that:

The ECOMOG experience points to one of the most obvious inherent dangers in regional arrangements: that regional powers, will seek to use peace-keeping operations to advance their own strategic interests....(which) could undermine one of the basic principles of UN peace-keeping: Impartiality.

There are yet no detailed studies focusing on the ECOMOG operation in Cote D'Ivoire. Apart from presentations by scholars and reports by UN agencies and non-governmental organisations, the only notable works have been the analyses of the crisis and options for its resolution by **Sanda (2003)**, **Sanda (2004)**, **Shafiu (2005) and Fawole (2007)**.

However, while these works examined the crisis in Cote D'Ivoire and ECOWAS peace efforts in general, none of them analysed the ECOMOG operation specifically and its contribution to laying the foundations for the resolution of the conflict in Ivory Coast.

According to then ECOWAS Special Envoy to Ivory Coast, Ambassador **Ralph Uwechue (2011)**, the prompt management and resolution of conflicts in the West African sub-region especially in Ivory Coast was very key in saving more lives, property and infrastructure. He further stated that: apart from English, French, and Portuguese languages dividing us in West Africa, we still have our native Hausa, Yoruba, Fulani, Wollof, Ibo, Jollof and other languages that traditionally unite us as one people in West Africa. Therefore, African history must be documented by Africans especially the ECOWAS efforts in fostering unity, peace and security in Ivory Coast before these facts and figures are distorted and discredited.