

AN OVERVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS)

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The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established via a treaty on 28th May, 1975 in the then capital city of Nigeria, Lagos.

The major aim of the treaty was to promote economic co-operation and regional integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa. This was to raise the living standards of its peoples, maintain and enhance economic stability, as well as to foster relations among member states.

However, there was a slow progress in achieving these aims, which led to a revised treaty which was adopted on 24th July, 1993 and it reaffirmed the establishment of ECOWAS (***ECOWAS Revised Treaty; Article 2, 2001:23***).

ECOWAS was made up of 16 West African countries (now reduced to 15 since Mauritania withdrew in 1999). They include 8 Francophone (French Speaking), 5 Anglophone (English Speaking) and 2 Lusophone (Portuguese Speaking) countries.

These countries are Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. Others are Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau. Nigeria being the most populous member state of ECOWAS has an estimated population of 140 million as at 2006, ***(Nigerian Population Census Report 2006)***.

The least populous member state (Cape Verde) has a population of 0.473 million people ***(ECOWAS Treaty, 2001)***. The total population of ECOWAS as at 2003 is about 250 million ***(ECOWAS Annual Report, 2003)***.

As the ECOWAS is now more than forty (40) years old, it is pertinent to ask: what are its achievements? What are its problems or challenges? What are the prospects?

ECOWAS ADOPTION OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

ECOWAS experience, particularly in Liberia, led the community to expand its conflict resolution efforts to include conflict prevention especially in the area of democratic governance. In 1991, it adopted the Declaration of Political Principles (DPP) in which member states committed themselves to democratic governance, human rights and rule of law ***(Alli, 2009:36)***.

The Declaration also re-affirmed the objective of promoting better relations by ensuring a stable and secure political environment for peace and security.

This was re-emphasised in the ECOWAS Treaty of 1993 which formally assigned the Community with the responsibility of preventing and settling regional conflicts ***(ECOWAS Revised Treaty, 2001)***.

The new Treaty, made provisions for adherence to non-aggression between Member States, maintenance of peace, stability and security, as well as peaceful settlement of dispute. ECOWAS Member States were to affirm and adhere to the promotion and consolidation of democratic system of governance (**Article 4j, 2001:7**).

In spite of the Revised Treaty, ECOWAS conflict resolution efforts through ECOMOG operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire though successful, had some shortcomings.

According to the Chief of Staff, ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), **Brig. General H. Lai (2012)**, the legal instruments were at variance with the conflicts and there was no unanimity on how to resolve the conflicts operationally. Furthermore, the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which is the peace-keeping force of ECOWAS, operated without political leadership on the ground and so the Force Commanders (FCs) had to combine the functions of political and military leadership.

As a result of these shortcomings, the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peace and Security (also referred to as the Mechanism) was adopted in 1999 (**ECOWAS Mechanism, 1999:8**).

Thus, ECOWAS adoption of democratic principles was a prelude to the Mechanism which was to strengthen conflict resolution in order to enhance integration in the West African sub-region.

ECOWAS MECHANISM FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

ECOWAS initiated several documents and protocols to tackle conflicts, bad governance and political instability so as to achieve economic integration. The important ones are the protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (MCPMRPS) and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (DGG). Others include the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) and the Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) (*Ogwu and Alli, 2009*).

The initiatives were based on the importance of preventing conflicts through democratic principles and good governance.

ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security (MCPMRPS) was adopted in December 1999, (*African Peace Review, 2000:27*). It was drawn from the principles provided in the United Nations (UN) Charter, the African Union (AU) Charter or Constitutive Act. Others are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. It reaffirmed the commitments that had been made in some protocols. They are Protocol on Non Aggression signed in Lagos in 1978 and the Protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defence which was signed in Freetown in 1981, (*African Peace Review 1999:12*).

There are also the provisions of the Declaration of Political Principles of ECOWAS, relating to Freedom of People's Rights and Democratization which was adopted in Abuja in July 1991. The Protocol relating to the Mechanism elaborated systematically, the

criteria and objectives of ECOWAS interventions into states experiencing civil conflicts in West Africa. It also provides for guidelines for the implementation of the Mechanism, managing conflicts, financing and consolidating peace and security within the West African sub-region.

ECOWAS FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MECHANISM “MCPMRPS”

The framework for the Mechanism includes some institutions namely, the Authority of Heads of State and Governments, Mediation and Security Council (MSC) and Executive Secretariat, **(ECOWAS Mechanism, 1999:9)**.

The framework also provides for 3 organs to assist the Mediation and Security Council. They are the Defence and Security Commission (DSC), the Council of Elders and the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF).

The Authority: The Authority is made up of Heads of State and Government of Member States. It is the highest decision making organ of the Mechanism **(Article 4)**.

However, according to Brig. General Lai (2012), Chief of Staff, ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) at the Commission’s headquarters Abuja, the Authority has not been proactive enough in preventing conflicts.

Mediation and Security Council (MSC): The Mediation and Security Council is the core structure of the Mechanism. It was initially comprised of nine member states, seven of them to be

elected by the Authority while the remaining two are the current and previous Chairmen of the Authority (**Brig. General Lai, 2012**).

The MSC is mandated to take decisions on issues of peace and security in the region on behalf of the Authority and implement all provisions of the protocols. The relationship between the Authority and the MSC can however, be hampered by personality clashes between the members. An example was the leadership struggle between former Presidents Wade of Senegal and the late Eyadema of Togo over the Ivorian negotiations (**African Peace Review, 2000:29**).

This created problems for the ECOWAS Mechanism. It was only resolved when the leadership went to former President John Kuffor of Ghana and there was progress in Ivorian Peace process. The membership of the MSC has increased to ten.

Executive Secretariat: The Executive Secretariat is mandated to initiate actions for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peace-keeping and security in the region. These responsibilities may involve fact finding, facilitation, negotiation and reconciliation (**ECOWAS Mechanism 1999, Article 15**). The Mechanism has some intriguing dimensions and greater potential to deal with peace and security in the broadest terms. It shows that ECOWAS had abandoned the trial-and-error approach for a formal peace and security structure.

The Defence and Security Commission (DSC): The Defence and Security Commission, now Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff

(CCDS), is charged with scrutinizing and assessing the technical, administrative issues, logistics requirements and peacekeeping operations. It also formulates the mandate of the peacekeeping force, defines the terms of reference, appoints the Force Commander and determines the composition of the contingents.

The Council of Elders: The Council of Elders is made up of eminent personalities within Africa. It acts as mediators, conciliators and facilitators. They include women, traditional rulers, religious and political personalities. According to Brig. General H. Lai, General Yakubu Gowon, one of the founding father of ECOWAS and former military head of state of Nigeria was elected as the first council's Chairperson.

ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF): ECOWAS standby military force is made up of personnel from national defence forces in West Africa to respond to emergency situations in the region. The main tasks of the force involves observation and monitoring, peacekeeping, humanitarian intervention and enforcement of sanctions among others, **(Brig. General Lai, 2012).**

The 6,500 ECOWAS Standby Force includes the Main Brigade and a Task Force, which will deploy in 14 days instead of the 30 days previously planned, in conformity with the African Union standards. The Force strategic training is conducted by Nigeria's National Defence College (NDC) Abuja while the operational training is provided by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Centre in Ghana. The tactical training is carried out at a centre in Bamako, Mali.

Available record shows that the force structure of ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) includes Main Brigade, Command, Staff and line officers amongst others.

ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network: The ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) is an observation monitoring tool for conflict prevention and decision making. Its establishment and functioning are defined by the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. ECOWARN is made up of two operational branches. One branch is the Observation and Monitoring Centre based in Abuja, Nigeria while the second has 4 regional offices. Available record shows that the capitals of zones 1 to 4 of ECOWARN are at Banjul, Ouagadougou, Monrovia and Cotonou respectively. According to Brig. General Lai (2012), the Situation Room in the Abuja Centre requires upgrading with state of the art equipment and adequate infrastructure to link monitoring centres. The ECOWAS Mechanism for conflict resolution provided the structures required to address the root causes of conflict and enhance economic integration in West Africa.

ECOWAS PROTOCOL ON DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

The Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance was adopted on 21st December, 2001 to reinforce the “Declaration of Political Principles” and the “Mechanism”. The Supplementary Protocol is a 28 page document with 50 Articles

which set out the constitutional convergence criteria for community membership (**ECOWAS DGG Protocol, 2001:5**). It is based on the principles of good governance, respect for the rule of law, separation of powers and the independence of the Judiciary. Others are the promotion of non-partisan and responsible press and democratic control of the armed forces. In addition, the Supplementary Protocol commits Member States to ensure poverty alleviation, uphold defence and promote international norms regarding basic human rights, including the rights of minorities, children, youth and women. It advocates for strict adherence to constitutional norms which assists conflict resolution and integration.

ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK

The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) was signed on 16th January, 2008 at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. It is designed to serve as a reference for the ECOWAS system and member states in their efforts to strengthen human security in the region (**ECOWAS Framework, 2008:9**).

The ECPF comprises 14 components that span the chain of initiatives designed to strengthen human security and incorporate conflict prevention activities as well as aspects of peace building.

The components are Early Warning, Preventive Diplomacy, Democracy and Political Governance, Human Rights and the Rule of Law, as well as Media. Others are natural resource governance, cross-border initiatives, security governance, practical disarmament, women, peace and security, youth

empowerment, ECOWAS Standby Force, humanitarian assistance and peace education. This framework signifies that preventing conflicts is an integral foundation for regional integration and development.