Linking Early Warning, Political Governance and Women's Security in Liberia: Engaging the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) for Peacebuilding

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By
Istifanus S. Zabadi and Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso
Department of Political Science and Public Administration,
Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria
Email:sonsarezabadi@yahoo.com, jumoyin@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

How can conflict prevention also work as postconflict peacebuilding? How do the periodizations of conflict by external actors constrain the potentialities of national and regional solutions? Specifically, how can the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) serve the above dual purposes in Liberia and still enable the success of national, home-grown initiatives directed at conflict prevention and peacebuilding? This paper investigates the above questions in light of the historical role of regional actors (states, individuals, and ECOWAS- ECOMOG) in the Liberian conflict and its resolution, but aims to assess the institutional and political requirements for a successful deployment of three of the ECPF's fourteen components. The three specific components analyzed in this paper are (a) Early Warning; (b) Democracy and Political Governance; and (c) Women, Peace and Security.

The paper explores the linkages among these components and possible outcomes, employing a human security framework and a gender lens that eschews rigid periodizations and a separation of the public and private that compromises the 'peace' that men and women may achieve after conflict. This paper further interrogates the prospects of the ECPF engagement in light of existing efforts by other regional and international actors such as the African Union and the European Union, and especially in Liberia, a country riddled with actors having a multiplicity of mandates and operational and conceptual frameworks.

It may be concluded that though the relative success of the ECOWAS in regional peacekeeping and peacemaking engagements lends it some credibility in proposing the ECPF as a framework by which various actors may streamline their activities in Liberia, its effectiveness will continue to be restrained by political considerations and lack of will among the major actors involved in peacebuilding in Liberia.

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INTRODUCTION

> *Mr President: Some four years ago, I stood at this podium and told the story of a country exhibiting the symptoms of two decades of self-destruction: a criminalized and collapsed economy; a suffocating external debt overhang; dysfunctional institutions; destroyed infrastructure; a pariah nation in a state of decay; a people in a state of despair. All of this translated into hundreds of thousands in refugee camps, equal numbers of the talented in the Diaspora, thousands of women, youth and children struggling for survival. Today, I stand at the podium to report on the progress that can be made from the collective effort of a resilient people, a responsive partnership, and effective leadership. We have come to report to you, with confidence, that Liberia is well on the way to recovery.*

The above excerpt from Liberian President Sirleaf's speech to the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 24 September 2010, expresses the boundless optimism, as well as wistful appreciation of the progress made so far that characterises the Liberian government's approach to the challenges of post war peacebuilding.

In this paper we argue using a human security framework that peacebuilding in fragile post war African states like Liberia requires a multidimensional approach that begins as early warning, then proceeds concurrently with sound political governance and overall recognises in policy making and implementation the potential and actual roles of women in peace and security.

CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING: ONE AND THE SAME?

The extent and ramifications of complex emergencies around the world have thrown up a number of terms (Olonisakin, 2008). Amongst such terms are 'conflict prevention' and 'peace building'. It is often times, important to clarify these terms in order to fully grasp the scope associated with their use. In this regard, the aforementioned terms shall be defined in due course.

In a sense, conflict prevention can be seen as an 'all-encompassing term' for all efforts channelled towards the resolution of conflict. This is because the management and resolution of conflict, peace-making, peacekeeping and peace building are all undertaken in an attempt to prevent further conflict from occurring. It is therefore implied that conflict prevention can be identified with activities carried out to cross-out possible conflict before and after it occurs.

Conflict prevention as the anticipation of conflict that seeks to redress causal grievances to avoid the escalation of violent forms of conflict engagement or to curtail the re-occurrence of violent exchanges or some combination of these elements (Miller and King, 2005). In other words, the expression "conflict prevention" is commonly used to refer to action undertaken with the express intent to anticipate a conflict or forestall the possibility of its escalation into generalised and uncontrolled violence whether between two groups or at the level of society at large (Best, 2006).

Clarified in the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (2008), for its purposes, the term conflict prevention "refers to non-violent (or creative) conflict transformation and encompasses activities designed to defuse tensions and prevent the outbreak, escalation, spread or recurrence of violence."Most importantly, the ECPF (2008) also makes it clear that the emphasis of conflict prevention lies not in the actual prevention of conflict (conflict being a natural consequence of change) but in halting its capabilities to spur violence. In this regard, conflict prevention may be divided between operational prevention measures applicable in the face of imminent crisis and structural prevention measures to ensure that crises do not arise in the first place or, if they do, that they do not re-occur.

The point made in the previous sentence is definitely one to buttress; what is actually being prevented is not conflict itself, but the escalation of this conflict into violent forms. Therefore, the term 'conflict prevention' can be misleading, because theoretically none of the aforementioned aspects aspire to 'prevent' conflict as such. Instead, the aim is often to resolve a conflict at hand or more typically to prevent escalation or violent manifestations.

Speaking of peace building, its introduction by Boutros Boutros-Ghali in *An Agenda for Peace*, is acknowledged; as a core feature of international intervention in post-war societies, the concept has evolved and now applies not only to rebuilding in post-conflict settings but also includes conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction efforts (Smith-Hohn, 2010).

Miller and King (2005) point out that peace building comprises policies, programs and associated efforts to restore stability and the effectiveness of social, political, and economic institutions and structures in the wake of a war or some other debilitating or catastrophic event. Hence, it involves a wide range of international donors, aid agencies, and international, regional, community, and grassroots of civil society organisations. They emphasize that such initiatives have revolved around several foci amongst which in include:

- Assisting an end to military or violent exchanges through the decommissioning of arms, the demobilisation of combatants, and rehabilitation and reintegration programmes

- Providing humanitarian relief to victims

- Protecting human rights

- Ensuring security and related services

- Generating an environment of trust in order for social relations to function properly

- Establishing non-violent modes of resolving present and future conflicts

- Fostering reconciliation among the various parties to a conflict

- Providing psycho-social or trauma healing services to victims of severe atrocities

- Repatriating refugees and resettling internally displaced persons

- Aiding in economic reconstruction

- Building and maintaining the operation of institutions to provide such services, and

- Coordinating the roles of numerous internal and external parties involved in such interrelated efforts.

In summary, the concept of peace-building refers to efforts and interventions aimed at overcoming the root causes of conflict. Peace-building is about the attempts to overcome the root causes of conflict. Peace-building is about the attempts to overcome the structural, relational and cultural contradictions which lie at the root of conflict in order to underpin the processes of peace-making and peacekeeping (Best, 2006).

THE LIBERIAN CONTEXT

Taking a trip down Liberia's historical path, one can recall the harsh realities of an internecine civil war which lasted for almost 14 years leaving over 250 000 people dead, displacing approximately 500 000 people internally, and causing about 700 000 to seek refuge in neighbouring countries (Mbadlanyana and Onuoha, 2009). Aboagye (1999) explains that antecedents such as ethnocised patronage, sub-nationalism, political

exploitation, repression, exclusion, civilian misrule and military repression and dictatorships among other factors were indeed, causes of what became a deadly civil war.

In its Consolidated Final Report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia identified what it called, the 'root causes' of conflict in Liberia amongst which was, "Duality of the Liberian political, social and legal systems which polarized and widened the disparities between the Liberian peoples – a chasm between settler Liberia and indigenous Liberia."

Other root causes of the Liberian conflict identified in the final consolidated report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia are enumerated below.

1. Poverty. Governance, it's over centralization and the oppressive dominance of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy over the indigenous peoples of Liberia rights and culture.
2. The lack of any permanent or appropriate mechanism for the settlement of disputes, the judiciary being historically weak and unreliable.
3. Ethnicity and the divisive clustering of the "peoples" of Liberia.
4. Entrenched political and social system founded on privilege, patronage, politicization of the military and endemic corruption which created limited access to education and justice, economic and social opportunities and amenities.
5. Unfair discrimination against women and denial of their rightful place in society as equal partners.
6. Historical disputes over land acquisition, distribution and accessibility.
7. Lack of clarity and understanding of Liberia's history including it history of conflicts.
8. Identity and the crisis of identity engender disunity and undermine Liberian patriotism and sense of nationhood.
9. The gradual breakdown of the family and loss of its traditional value system.

Liberia made a fresh start in 2006 with the inauguration of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who represented for many, a clear break from the country's violent past. The Government of Liberia (GOL) in concert with external actors such as the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) set out to actualize plans for post-conflict reconstruction and peace building in order to strengthen security and consolidate the fragile peace in Liberia. Till this day, challenges avail and there are still on-going efforts to consolidate the peace and search for more effective channels through which peace building could be actualized.

If there are two lessons the post-conflict context of Liberia has taught us, it is that:

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a. The possibility of a relapse should never be ruled out especially in view of the challenges which continue to confront all the stakeholders committed to peace building in the country.

b. There is a dire need to record success significantly in the areas of post-conflict reconstruction and peace building because these two engagements are crucial to the consolidation of peace and security in Liberia.

ECOWAS OBJECTIVES AND INVOLVEMENT IN LIBERIA

The beginning of the idea of regional economic groupings in these sub regions can be traced back to the initiatives emanating from the United Nations economic commission for Africa (ECA), which made it abundantly clear that the most important key to economic progression in Africa lies in economic cooperation among African nations. Under the auspices of the ECA, a number of meetings with representatives were held:

- The Lagos conference on industrial coordination (November 1963)
- The Niamey conference of 1966. This conference was the major step towards the formation of ECOWAS. It was at this conference drafted articles of the association were prepared
- The Accra conference of April 1967 which saw the establishment and signing of association articles.

Also, an interim council of ministers was set up to draft the treaty for the establishment of the community the council met for the first time in November 1967 in Dakar and it was agreed that a treaty should provide for common agricultural policies, non discrimination in interstate trade, coordination in education, training and research, common industrial projects and methods of financing them. The coordination of development programs was also provided for, which set the stage for a common market rather than a looser form of economic cooperation such as free trade area or a preferential area.

Following the Accra conference, the heads of states of member states met in Monrovia in 1968. Nigeria and Ghana prepared "priority studies" of areas of cooperation which further expanded areas of cooperation agreed upon at the November 1967 meeting in Dakar.

In April 1972, President Gowon of Nigeria and President Gnassignbe Eyadema of Togo reactivated the formation process that led to the signing of the ECOWAS treaty. The two governments agreed on four guidelines in order to ensure the success of this treaty

- ECOWAS should cut across linguistic and cultural basis

- That a pragmatic and flexible approach should be adopted in the formation of ECOWAS

- That necessary institution must be set up to deal with specific issues for calling for immediate action

- That an open door policy should be adopted (to enable nations which could no join earlier on, the chance to do so)

President Gowon and Eyadema drew up proposals and solicited the support of twelve countries between July and August 1973. This led to the meeting called up in Lome from December 10th to the 15th of 1973. This meeting was purposed at drafting and studying of the treaty. This treaty was re-examined by experts in 1974 in Accra and in Monrovia in 1975.

Chapter II, article (1) of the ECOWAS revised treaty highlights the point where it states:

> *The high contracting parties of the treaty hereby reaffirm the establishment of ECOWAS and decide that it shall ultimately be the sole of economic community in the region for the purpose economic integration and realization of the objectives of the African economic community"*

The treaty was finally signed in Lagos on the 28th of May 1975 (although the protocol which launched ECOWAS was signed on the 5th of November 1976 at Lome). Having been subject to rule by different colonial masters, the West African countries were characterized different languages, administrative methods, economic and political structures. Hence the treaty needed to define the relationship between these nations which came together and harmonize their divergent past to a formidable regional organization.

The long term objectives of ECOWAS besides its large economic agenda is to secure peace and prosperity in its member states through programs aimed at creating a developed and integrated regional economy. Contrary to popular belief, the objectives of ECOWAS are not only economic as backed up in the communities revised treaty, chapter II, article 3 (2) where it states "in order to achieve the aims of ECOWAS in accordance with the relevant provisions of the treaty, the community shall by stages ensure harmonization and integration programs, projects and activities particularly in food agriculture and natural resources, industry, transportation and communication energy, trade, money and finance, taxation, economic reforms policies, human resources, education, information, culture, science and technology health service, tourism and legal matters"

The ECOWAS aims as provided under chapter 2, article (3) of the ECOWAS revised treaty are:

- To promote cooperation and integration leading to the establishment of an economic union in west Africa in order to raise living standards of its people and to maintain and enhance stability, foster relationships among states and contribute to the progress of Africa as a whole.

- The harmonization and coordination of policies of joint preproduction enterprises.

- Establishment of common markets.

- The promotion of a joint venture by private sector enterprises and other economic operators, in particular through the adoption of regional agreements on cross boarder investments.

- The adoption of measures for the integration of private sector.

- Establishment of a legal environment.

- Harmonization of national investment codes leading the adoption of a single community investment code.

- Harmonization of standard measures.

- The promotion of balanced development of the region, paying attention to the special problems of each member state.

- Encouragement of strengthening relations and promotion of the flow of information particularly among rural population, women and youth and so on.

- Adoption of a community policy which takes into account the need a balance between demographic factors and socio economic development.

- The establishment of a fund of cooperation, compensation and development.

- Any other activities that member states may decide to undertake jointly with a view to achieving the communities objectives.

For a while, it seemed as though the world was just watching as Liberia sunk deep into the abyss of armed violence, humanitarian disasters and state collapse. The Economic Community of West African States founded in 1975, originally set-up to foster economic cooperation amongst member states, was compelled to redefine its objectives to encompass efforts channelled towards the management of conflict in the sub-region. This was due to conflicts which weakened already fragile state institutions, degraded human capacity and

caused the erosion of previously developmental gains which gravely contrasted with, the purpose for which ECOWAS was established (Dunmoye, 2010).

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) established a Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to intervene in the Liberian crisis (Vogt and Aminu, 1996). The West African countries of Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and host country Gambia, agreed to send troops to Liberia. Under the name of Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, or ECOMOG, the soldiers headed for Freetown, Sierra Leone (Youboty, 2004).

To kick-start its mechanism for the resolution and management of the Liberian conflict, ECOWAS set up a Five-Member Consultative Group on Liberia, designated the Standing Mediation Committee (SMC), on 30 May 1990 (Aboagye, 1999). At the first session of the SMC in Banjul from the 7th to 8th August, 1990, it was noted that the destruction of life and property, the displacement of persons, the plight of foreign nationals particularly citizens of the Community, was of prime importance (Vogt and Aminu, 1996). These formed part of the rationale for the need for effecting peace in Liberia.

In addition to peacekeeping, the ECOWAS has also strived to assist in capacity building for key state personnel, security and governance personnel, capacity building of key government agencies including but not limited to the security sector and workshops organised for middle ranking, senior and professional executive of the Liberian government and other relevant officials.

The ECOWAS has been involved also, in the provision of postgraduate scholarships of Liberian students, and has seen to the funding and training of some security personnel. For example, as part of its efforts at capacity building, some Liberian policemen went to Nigeria for training.

Working in concert with CSOs, the ECOWAS has made efforts to succeed in post-conflict reconstruction in Liberia. CSOs such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) have worked effectively with the ECOWAS in order to see to the implementation of the Early Warning system.

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INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER ACTORS IN LIBERIA

McCandless (2008) tells that in January 2006, the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Unity Party-led government replaced the former warlord-comprised National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and immediately set out to ensure promised reconstruction-oriented deliverables through a four-pillar policy framework of security; economic recovery; governance and rule of law; and infrastructure and basic services. He points out that the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) comprising one of seven integrated missions presently in operation have worked to support the new government of Liberia in realising these aims.

The International Crisis Group Africa Report (2004) titled 'Rebuilding Liberia: Prospects and Perils', informs of the UNMIL undertaking the process of disarmament of about 48,000 to 58,000 combatants scattered throughout the country in December 2003. From the same source, information was gained that as of mid-January, 2004, some 9,000 UNMIL troops, out of an expected 15,000, were on the ground were deployed into strongholds of combatants.

McCandless (2008) observes that over the last two years, the United Nations in Liberia (UNMIL and the UNCT) and the Government of Liberia have increasingly focused on identifying the sources and dynamics of conflict and have begun to craft strategic policy and programming responses with conflict and peacebuilding in mind. He goes further to inform that the Government of Liberia and the UN have worked individually and together to further peace in Liberia and they are setting out various strategies to deepen their commitments.

Still taking a cue from McCandless, the information was gained that UNMIL's mandate has progressively included key aspects of peacebuilding. With the inauguration of a democratically elected government in January 2006 to end the post-conflict transition, UNMIL entered a peace consolidation phase, which lasted until December 2007, followed by a drawdown phase that will last three years.

The UN Mission in Liberia simultaneously developed a number of integrated frameworks and projects that have largely sought to respond to, and support the Government of Liberia's approach. The first major attempt, the UN Integrated Mission Priorities and Implementation Plan (IMPIP), was designed to bring together the various objectives and strategic directions laid out in key mission strategic planning documents, including the Integrated Mandate

Implementation Plan (IMIP) and the Results-Based Budgeting (RBB) framework (McCandless, 2008).

The ICG Africa Report (2004) noted that some challenges UNMIL had in Liberia, included, inability to monitor Liberia's borders effectively, action plans for disarmament and reintegration running late amongst many other problems associated with logistics and personnel.

Toure (2002) explains that because of its crucial role in transitions from war to peace, civil society has come to be seen, by many analysts as the vital link in the transition to and sustainability of post-war democracy. Ekiyor (2008) points out the visibility and influence of civil society in conflict prevention and peacebuilding which has grown globally. She insists that civil society actors have increasingly become vital forces in discourses, initiatives and programmes that foster peace and security from a "state-centred" process to one that is "people centred". She explains that this focus on people-centred security derives from the belief that fundamentally the sustainable security of states can only be attained through the security of its people.

Toure (2002) insists that civil society in Liberia has been a critical force in the movement for democratization and has the potential to play a crucial role in national reconciliation and peacebuilding. He informs that during the civil war, civil society groups collaborated on common issues such as disarmament and elections, threatening to withdraw cooperation from and reject any faction that came to power through bullets rather than ballots. He explains that though sometimes marginalized by warlords during the peace process, civil society's ultimate endorsement of the transition from war to peace in Liberia was critical to ending the war in 1997. Toure points out some groups which highlight the contributions made by CSOs to post-conflict peacebuilding in Liberia. These groups are Human Rights Groups, the Media, Women's groups, the Religious community and the Student community. These groups have in one way or the other played a role in post-conflict reconstruction in Liberia.

Examples of such groups are the Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFFEL), the Inter-Faith Council of Liberia (IFCL), Liberia Women Initiative (LWI) amongst others.

There are also a host of other agencies working in post conflict Liberia, probably hundreds of identifiable actors , with different priorities, mandates, values, modes of operation and donor constituencies to which they are accountable.

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THE ECOWAS CONFLICT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK

Like any ideal establishment, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has, from time to time, adopted various guidelines and plans to organise the order and manner of its affairs. These plans have been laid down in the form of documents referred to, sometimes as conventions, protocols or frameworks. Occasionally, reviews are carried out to close gaps discovered and strengthen the posture of these documents. For the ECOWAS, such documents compiled for security related issues include:

- Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security (1999).

- Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance, supplementary to the protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peace-keeping and security (2001).

- ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials (2006).

- ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), (2008).

These documents together, encapsulate the cumulative protocols, treaties and mechanisms that ECOWAS has put in place over the years to ensure that conflicts, bad governance and political instability do not combine to vitiate the aims, objectives and fundamental principles of ECOWAS, as stated in Chapter II of the Revised Treaty (Dunmoye, 2010).

The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework was adopted in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on the 16th of January 2008 in an attempt to synergize earlier protocols and frameworks with revised ideas and efforts at conflict prevention. Ibeanu and Ibrahim (2009) explain that the framework proposes the movement from an ECOWAS of the state to that of the people; a situation where the people are engaged with ECOWAS in issues of conflict prevention and resolution rather than the state.

Eyikor (2008) concurs that essence of the document lies in its position as a regional conflict prevention framework to guide the conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of conflict prevention initiatives in the Commission and Member States. She adds that this framework signifies the actualisation that preventing conflicts is an integral foundation for regional integration and development. Dunmoye (2010) agrees that the ECPF is designed to

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serve as a reference for the ECOWAS system and member-states in their efforts to strengthen human security in the sub-region. As the key document informing this study, this document shall be described below.

The ECPF contains eleven sections, spread within seventy-one pages. Preceding these sections is a Preamble which makes reference to articles which the Mediation and Security Council is mindful and conscious of and to this end, desirous to adopt a prevention framework encompassing all initiatives for enhancing safety of life and property, as well as the security of Member States and institutions in the region. This is followed by abbreviations enacted on the recommendations of the meeting of the Committee of Experts on Political Affairs, Peace and Security in Ouagadougou on the 14th and 15th of January 2008.

Section one no doubt the shortest, spells out the adoption of the ECPF in a sentence which goes thus: 'By Regulation MSC/REG.1/01/08, the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework is hereby adopted as set forth in the following paragraphs. The document appears to have been unanimously adopted by member states since there were no signatures shown.

Section Two delivers an introductory background to the ECPF, briefly making reference to past protocols and efforts made by the community in terms of the management of conflict and the willingness on the part of the community to enhance efforts to strengthen human security in the region. This section also explains three motives behind the ECPF:

i. A comprehensive operational conflict prevention and peace-building strategy that would facilitate the harnessing of human and financial resources by ECOWAS and Member States in order to creatively transform conflict.

ii. A guide for enhancing cohesion and synergy between relevant departments on conflict prevention initiatives in order to maximize outcomes and ensure a more active and operational posture on conflict prevention and sustained post-conflict reconstruction.

iii. A reference for developing process-based cooperation with regional and international stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, African REC's, the AU and UN systems, as well as development partners, on conflict prevention and peace-building around concrete interventions.

Section three gives operational definitions of terms such as 'Conflict', 'Structural factors', 'Accelerators', 'Triggers' and 'Cultural aggravators' explaining the context in which these

terms are used. Section four outlines the concept and scope of conflict prevention and prescribes a dual approach to conflict prevention. On one hand, it presents operational prevention measures and on the other, structural prevention measures.

Operational prevention strategies comprise those measures applicable in the face of imminent crises while structural prevention measures seek to ensure that crises do not arise in the first place or, if they do, that they do not re-occur. Structural prevention on the other hand, is often elaborated under peace-building initiatives and comprises political, institutional (governance) and developmental reforms, capacity enhancement and advocacy on the culture of peace.

Section five explains the context of the ECPF as operative within post-conflict states, so-called after being affected by internal conflicts whose ripples were instantly felt far beyond national borders in the forms of refugee flows, severe deterioration of livelihoods, health and nutrition standards, disrupted infrastructure, and the proliferation of weapons, violence and trans-national crime. The ECPF also operates within the context of emphasis on prevention and peace-building, including the strengthening of sustainable development, the promotion of region-wide humanitarian crisis prevention and preparedness strategy and the culture of democracy.

Section six outlines the aims, objectives and outputs of the ECPF whose overall aim is to strengthen the human security architecture. The intermediate purpose has to do with the creation of space within the ECOWAS system and in Member States for cooperative interaction within the region and with external partners to push conflict prevention and peace-building up the political agenda of Member States in a manner that will trigger timely and targeted multi-actor and multi-dimensional action to defuse or eliminate potential and real threats to human security in a predictable and institutional manner.

Section seven supplies the ECOWAS mandate and legitimacy for Conflict Prevention which is drawn from diverse but related regional and international normative framework documents. These include foundation and related legal documents of ECOWAS, AU, NEPAD and UN. Reference is made to legal instruments and guidelines from which legitimacy has been derived. Also, specific moral obligations on ECOWAS Member States to act are justified due to the unacceptable levels of deprivation in West Africa, as well as the destructive nature and spill over effects of contemporary regionalized internal upheavals.

These diverse sources for the development of the ECPF highlight the multidimensional and global nature of prevention. The ECOWAS conflict prevention approach and framework cannot be isolated from wider continental and international approaches (Ekiyor, 2008). The section also outlines three distinct ways which inform the legitimacy to intervene to protect human security; the Responsibility to prevent (address direct and root causes of conflict), to react (response to grave and compelling humanitarian disasters) and to rebuild (recovery, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation in the aftermath of conflicts or disasters).

Section eight outlines fourteen components intertwined with the initiatives drawn up to strengthen human security and incorporate conflict prevention activities (operational and structural) as well as aspects of peace-building. These components are:

1. Early Warning
2. Preventive Diplomacy
3. Democracy and Political Governance
4. Human Rights and the Rule of Law
5. Media
6. Natural Resource Governance
7. Cross-Border Initiatives
8. Security Governance
9. Practical Disarmament
10. Women, Peace and Security
11. Youth Empowerment
12. ECOWAS Standby Force
13. Humanitarian Assistance
14. Peace Education (The Culture of Peace)

We consider in the proceeding section three of these fourteen components, how they are designed to operate, the possible linkages among them, and their potentialities for contributing to postconflict peacebuilding.

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LINKING EARLY WARNING, POLITICAL GOVERNANCE AND WOMEN'S SECURITY FOR PEACEBUILDING

Early Warning

The Early Warning Mechanism is anchored on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1625 and is a core component of the elements of the Comprehensive Conflict Prevention Framework (Ibrahim and Ndongo, 2008).The conceptual underpinning of the Early Warning system is human security. By 2003, the human and financial costs of intra-state conflicts had become evident in their regional implications; issues such as that of child soldiers, uncontrolled armed militias and mercenaries, the movement of refugees and coup d'états, called for the operationalization of the ECOWAS early warning mechanism (Lamin and Ndinga-Muvumba, 2006).

It is clearly stated in the ECPF (2008), that the Early Warning component primarily addresses the mandate to furnish incident and trend reports on peace and security as well as real-time preventive response options, to ECOWAS policy makers to ensure predictability and facilitate interventions to avert, defuse or creatively transform acute situations of conflict, instability, disruptions and disasters.

Ndinga-Muvumba and Lamin (2006) concur that the early warning system has been designed to collect and analyse information systematically – as it happens in "real time". They explain that in order to ensure this occurs, early warning information must be timely, accurate, valid, reliable, verifiable and reflect on-going developments within West Africa. They explain further that the system's methodology for gathering information is an open system which differs from traditional security intelligence and relies on information shared by international actors such as the UN; regional organisations such as the AU; West African government agencies; the media; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and civil society.

Four zones were carved out with zonal bureaux in Banjul, Ouagadougou, Monrovia and Cotonou. These zones and the countries located within them are shown below:

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Figure 4.1   Mechanism of the ECOWAS Early Warning System
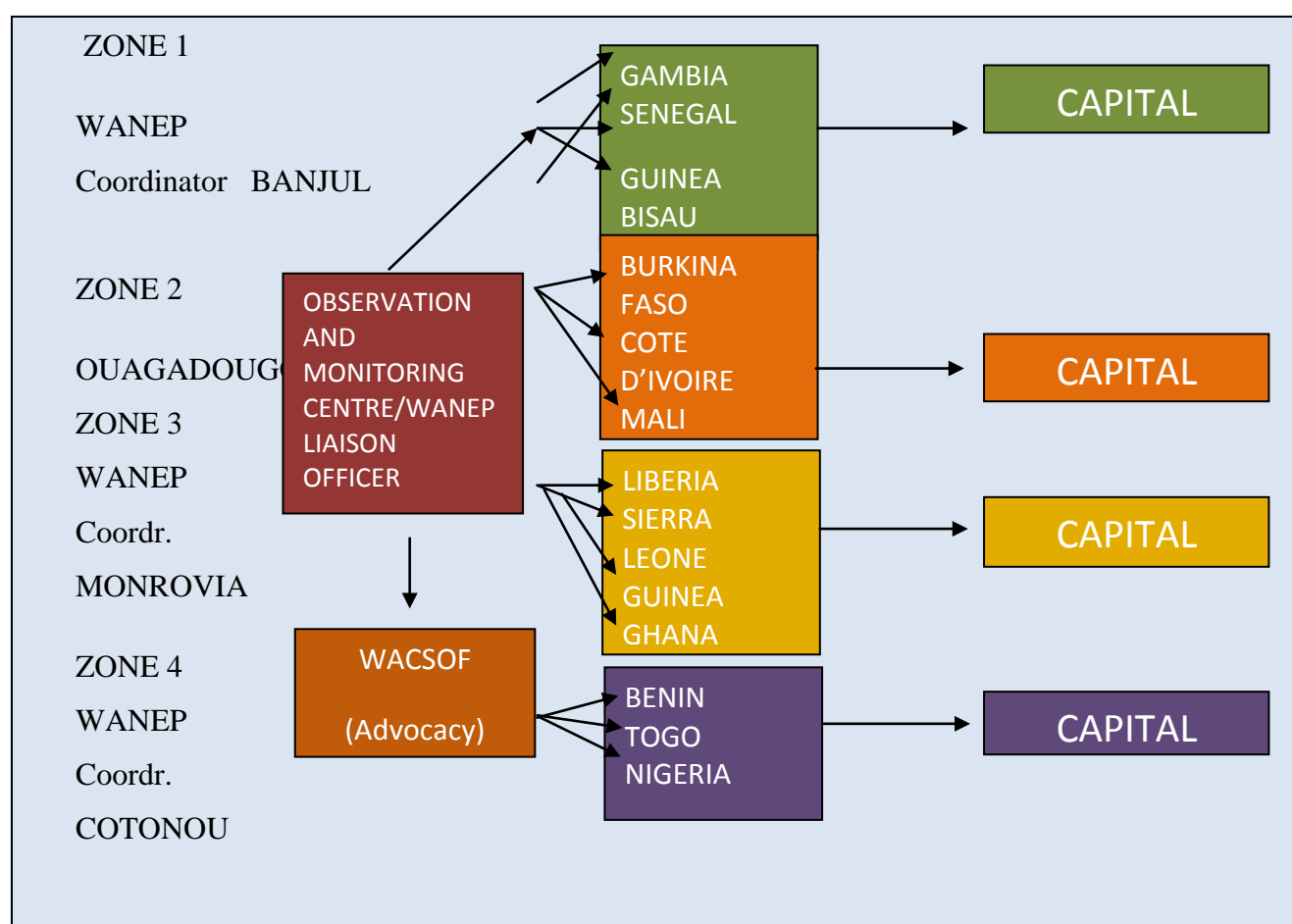
SOURCE: Ibrahim and Ndongo (Eds) (2008) *Resolving West African Conflicts: Early Warning Early Response*, Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited.

ECOWARN's methodology of analysis is both quantitative and qualitative. ECOWAS analysts produce situation reports by entering data into a computerised monitoring system according to 93 indicators. Monitors also record incidents based on field reporting and news items into the same system incidents and situation reports are analysed jointly to assess conflict trends in the sub-region (Dunmoye, 2010).The early warning system's four reporting zones and its information bureaus are collectively known as ECOWARN. As the diagram above has shown, two organisations are involved and are crucial players in the early warning mechanism. These are the West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP) and West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF).

Democracy and Political Governance

Most states in West Africa have been referred to, as failed or collapsed states. Democracy has not taken root fully in most member states and although government has gained increased

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importance as a key element of democracy, democratic institutions remain weak and the knowledge base concerning governance issues are low (Suifon, 2009).

Suifon (2009) also explains that one common denominator of the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau is the personalized autocracies of leadership that helped trigger the conflicts. Lack of democracy, coupled with entrenched ethnicity and ruthlessness only helped to give a semblance of credence to armed rebellion as the only means to confront dictatorship. Doe of Liberia, Stevens and Momoh in Sierra Leone, and Vieira in Guinea Bissau were all anti-democratic in every sense of the word and were themselves the seeds of violence as a means of governance (McCandless, 2008).

Liberia's history had been dominated by successive regimes of Americo-Liberians and later on, military juntas. The prospect of good governance was thus, not a reality; instead, self-seeking and selfishly interested rulers dominated affairs, neglecting those issues associated with nation-building and the growth of a viable economy. The end result was armed violence which brought about destruction of many lives and property. More examples abound when we consider such cases as Guinea, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire.

The objectives of Democracy and Political Governance, set out in the ECPF, are formulated:

i.   Create space and conditions for fair and equitable distribution and exercise of power and the establishment and reinforcement of governance institutions

ii.   To ensure the active participation by all citizens in the political life of Member States under common democratic, human rights and constitutional principles articulated in ECOWAS Protocols, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, NEPAD principles and other international instruments.

To this end, ECOWAS has taken upon itself, the mandate to facilitate the strengthening of the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary of Member States to promote efficient delivery, the enhancement of separation of powers and oversight responsibilities in governance. The ECOWAS is also to assist Member States to promote the professionalization of governance institutions by building and strengthening transparent, nonpartisan, efficient and accountable national and local institutions, in particular the civil service.

In January 2006, the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Unity Party-led government replaced the former warlord-comprised National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and immediately

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set out to ensure promised reconstruction-oriented deliverables through a four-pillar policy framework of security; economic recovery; governance and rule of law; and infrastructure and basic services. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), comprising one of seven integrated missions, have worked with the Government of Liberia in realising these aims (McCandless, 2008).

The ECPF (2008) outlines benchmarks for assessing progress in the promotion of Democracy and Political Governance. Some of these are:

i.   Adoption and/or enforcement of national constitutions that reflect the constitutional convergence principles contained in the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the African Charter on People's and Human Rights, and international norms and standards.

ii.   Grassroots awareness of supranational and international norms and standards of democracy and good governance, and the determination of national stakeholders to defend and promote democratic gains.

iii.   Public confidence in governance structure at all levels.

iv.   Adoption and/or enforcement of anti-corruption policies and enhanced transparency and accountability in the public sector.

v.   The holding of predictable and credible elections to determine the accession to, retention and exercise of power.

The third benchmark outlined above, is indeed very crucial to the consolidation of democracy in Liberia. Olonisakin (2008) contends that one of the major challenges which Sirleaf's administration has had pertains to the reassertion of authority especially in formerly rebel-held areas. Another challenge was the building of a new national army and reformation of the Liberian National Police. For those citizens who desire to live in a peaceful atmosphere, hope in the government is inevitable. The fifth benchmark above is soon to be tested, as Liberia goes to the polls in October this year.

In an interview with Freedom Onuoha, an expert at the African Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, the interviewee outlined what he called, 'challenges to democratic consolidation in Liberia'. Some of these are:

a.   Lack of an effective and functional security system.

b.   Poor economy

c. State of public infrastructure

d. Retinue of ineffectively rehabilitated and reintegrated ex-soldiers and ex-combatants which are a threat to security.

e. Ineffectual judiciary and law enforcement institutions.

f. Medical challenges such as HIV/AIDS

From the discussions on the component of democracy and Political Governance in the ECPF, it is clear to see that there is a laid out plan for the challenges mentioned above, to be addressed. If such protocols as that on Democracy and Good Governance are duly observed, improvements will certainly be recorded.

Women, Peace and Security

The Women, Peace and Security component of the ECPF aims to integrate and cement the roles and contributions of women in the design, elaboration, implementation and evaluation of conflict prevention, resolution, peace-building and humanitarian initiatives while strengthening regional and national mechanisms for the protection and advancement of women. This initiative undoubtedly draws inspiration from the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 of 31 October 2000 that reaffirms "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building", and stresses "the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."

Women and men experience conflict and post conflict differently. It is noted in the literature that different types of violence – political, economic, and social – coexist and overlap, and can be identified at four different levels – the individual, inter- personal, institutional, and structural (Moser and Clark 2001a). Violence and conflict erode levels of physical, human, natural, and social capital with differing effects on men and women (Moser 2001), and to portray women solely as victims denies them their agency. Other writers also warn against the kind of analyses that stereotype women in 'victim' roles in conflict. Judy El Bushra and Ibrahim Sahl (2005) observe that:

> *There [is] growing evidence that attempts to link 'gender' and 'conflict' could generate gender stereotypes of women as passive victims, and men as aggressive protectors of territory. It later became clear that women's experience of war, terrible though it is, goes far beyond the victim role:*

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women are also promoters of and participants in war in many instances. Men also suffer gender violence in war, often of horrific proportions (cf. Jacobs, Jacobson et al. 2000; Moser and Clark 2001b; Zarkov 2001).

Many authors agree that women's roles as victims in conflict situations are usually overemphasized to the detriment of other facets of their existence in such contexts. Tsjeard Bouta and Georg Frerks (2002) outline a conceptual framework for analyzing women in conflict and post conflict reconstruction that recognises seven roles of women: women as victims of (sexual) violence; women as combatants; women for peace in the non-governmental sector; women in formal peace politics; women as coping and surviving actors; women as household heads; women and (in) formal employment opportunities.

However, for women, attempts by various organisations to 'empower' women do not necessarily translate to increased opportunities and empowerment in the post war period. When NGOs and well-meaning humanitarian agencies target women for assistance, the effect may be contrary to the intention of empowering them. El Bushra warns elsewhere (El Bushra 2000) that the advancement of women's interests 'at a superficial, women-focused level that fails to challenge overall paradigms of gender differences leaves women with new roles to fulfil but no institutional leverage to fulfil them effectively'. Thus Chris Corrin (2004, p. 12) advocates the "post-war creation (rather than reconstruction) of new institutional and societal formations" as a means of addressing gender inequities and extend gender awareness in policy making.

This is the real challenge of the ECPF for it is one thing to advocate women's involvement in peacebuilding processes, and quite another to transform social structure that form an obstacle for the achievement of this goal.

CONCLUSIONS

The recognition of fourteen components to be actively deployed in efforts at a collective approach to strengthen West Africa's security architecture is a characteristic for which the ECPF should be acknowledged. These components have been properly drafted and extend into major areas in societal respects and efforts at what could be successful peace and security consolidation in post-conflict contexts. All fourteen components have a huge role to play, tackling the challenge of peace and security consolidation from different angles.

From the analysis in this study, the conclusion is valid that the three components of the ECPF emphasized in this paper are very much applicable to peace and security consolidation in

Liberia. We show here that political will on the part of Member States is indispensable and if offered, would guide West Africa to stability in the area of peace and security. Constraints to the documents are not necessarily inherent, but avail when its ability to work effectively in present-day West Africa is gauged. Such factors as resources and specific roles can be mentioned to throw more light on this fact.

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