Cairo Policy Briefs

The Role of RECs in Peacebuilding in Africa:
Past Experiences & the Way Forward

Kwesi Aning
Ernest Ansah Lartey

1 Omar Makram Street, Tahrir
Square, Cairo, Egypt

p. +202 27 92 89 50
f. +202 27 92 89 40

info@cairopeacekeeping.org
www.cairopeacekeeping.org

About the Authors

Kwesi ANING presently serves as the Director, Faculty of Academic Affairs & Research (FAAR), Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), Accra, Ghana. He also serves as Clinical Professor of Peacekeeping Practice at Kennesaw State University, Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. In 2005, he served as the African Union's first counter-terrorism expert based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Ernest Ansah Lartey is a researcher at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), Accra, Ghana. He is also a course instructor and a lecturer at Centre. He has served as election security and electoral violence analyst in Ghana. His research interests include security sector reform, peacebuilding and election security. He has published several papers covering these interests.

Disclaimers

Acknowledgments

The Role of RECs in Peacebuilding in Africa:
Past Experiences and the Way Forward

Kwesi Aning, Ph.D
Ernest Ansah Lartey

Introduction

Since the adoption of the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU) was adopted in 2000 at the Lome Summit (Togo), and entered into force in 2001, the AU has sought to assert its authority over the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in the region. This is evident in the measures taken within the transformed peace and security mechanisms which now emphasize a shift from the principle of non-interference to that of non-indifference in the internal affairs of member states. For instance, within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), a great deal of authority is conferred on the Peace and Security Council (PSC) to take measures to prevent conflicts and also to restore peace in post-conflict environments.[1] More specifically, the mandate of the PSC includes taking measures to 'promote and implement peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction activities to consolidate peace and prevent the resurgence of violence'.[2]

These efforts were further enhanced by the adoption of the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy document in 2006. The PCRD is the overarching policy instrument that allows the AU to engage in post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa. And even though full implementation of the PCRD is yet to take effect, the AU has already made some significant strides, as is evident in its direct engagement in Darfur, South Sudan, Somalia and Mali, where it has deployed hundreds of African troops and a few peacebuilding experts to support post-conflict stabilization processes and to contribute to laying the foundations for political and socio-economic recovery in these countries.[3]

---

[1]. See AU. 'Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union', Art. 2(1). [hereinafter The PSC Protocol]Available from http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/organs/psc/Protocol_peace%20and%20security.pdf. Accessed: 5 November, 2014.

[2]. Kwesi Aning and Naila Salihu, 2013. 'The African Union and ECOWAS'. In Mats Berdal and Dominik Zaum eds. *Political Economy of Statebuilding: Power after Peace*. New York, Routledge.

[3]. See Kwesi Aning & Festus Aubyn. 2013. 2013. 'Challenges in Mali: historic duty to ensure peace', *New Routes*, No. 2; Esther Pan, 2005. *African Peacekeeping Operations*. Council on Foreign Relations. http://www.cfr.org/world/african-peacekeeping-operations/p9333. Accessed: 17 November, 2014.

The ECOWAS Institution

Through the principle of subsidiarity, the AU shares responsibility with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).[4]in ensuring that its activities are fully implemented in the regions. These institutions are also mandated to develop regional mechanisms to address conflicts and to support post-conflict peacebuilding efforts that fall within their respective regions.

This paper will focus on the regional peacebuilding efforts within West Africa. This is because West Africa hosts four of the six countries currently placed on the United Nations (UN) Peacebuilding Commission's (PBC) agenda.[5] Coincidentally though, all of the six countries on the Commission's agenda are from Africa. However, given that the majority of these countries are from West Africa, it will be important to assess the approaches to peacebuilding from a regional perspective. Thus, the role of ECOWAS in driving the peacebuilding processes in the region is most critical. ECOWAS currently includes 15 member states within West Africa.[6] It was established by the ECOWAS Treaty in 1975 primarily to ' promote co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa'[7]. However, following the collapse of both Liberia and Sierra Leone, the mediation and intervention role of ECOWAS inboth countries in the late 1980's and early 1990's, this treaty was revised in 1993 to give more authority to ECOWAS in the maintenance of regional peace and security, including peacebuilding[8].

ECOWAS Role in Peacebuilding

In general, two broad categories of roles can be associated with the RECs, and in this particular case ECOWAS: these are the direct and indirect roles, which respectively correspond, first, to norm setting, and secondly, to norm execution role in peacebuilding. The paper will first discuss the norm setting role.

Norm Setting Role of ECOWAS

---

[4]. In addition to ECOWAS, there are seven (7) other RECs recognised by the African Union. These are: the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), East African Community (EAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA) and Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN SAD).

[5]. The six countries currently placed on the PBC agenda are Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Burundi and Central African Republic (CAR).

[6]. The ECOWAS member states are Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togolese, Ghana, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

[7] . See Article 3 of the ECOWAS Treaty at http://www.comm.ecowas.int/sec/index.php?id=treaty&lang=en accessed 1 December 2014

[8] See Article 58 of the revised ECOWAS Treaty at http://www.comm.ecowas.int/sec/?id=treaty&lang=en

Similar to the AU, norm setting is associated with the mandate granted to ECOWAS to set the normative and policy frameworks to regulate the conduct of ECOWAS member states and their activities. A number of these norms are enshrined in existing protocols and conventions. To start with, the 1999 Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (often referred to as the Mechanism) institutionalized structures within the ECOWAS system for the management and resolution of conflict. For example, the Mediation and Security Council (MSC), the Panel of the Wise, the Early Warning System, and the Standby Force are all key organs that help in the prevention and resolution of conflict. In addition, the Mechanism prescribes enhancement of cooperation in the areas of conflict prevention, early warning, peacekeeping operations and the control of cross-border criminality, international terrorism and the proliferation of small arms.[9] In many respects, cross-border criminality, terrorism and illicit circulation of small arms are cross-cutting issues that affect countries irrespective of whether they are in a post-conflict phase or not. In actual fact, they carry the potential of derailing both peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts, especially in fragile regional contexts such as West Africa.[10]

The Supplementary protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of 2001 establishes the democratic convergence criteria to regulate the conduct of political affairs in member countries. It essentially enjoins member states to adopt democracy and rule of law in their political and governance systems. This is further buttressed by the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) adopted in 2008. The ECPF essentially affirms, in Section VII, the supranational status of ECOWAS to address peacebuilding in three distinct ways:

- Responsibility to Prevent: involving measures such as preventive diplomacy and early warning to address direct and root causes of intra- and inter-state conflicts that put populations at risk;
- Responsibility to React: focusing on enforcement measures such as deploying military troops (i.e. ECOWAS Standby Forces (ESF)) to respond to grave and complex humanitarian disasters; and
- Responsibility to Rebuild: taking actions such as security sector reform (SSR), and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) to ensure recovery, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation in the aftermath of violent conflict, humanitarian and natural disaster.[11]

---

[9]. See para. 3 of the Preamble of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework; Kwesi Aning. 2004 'Investing in Peace and Security in Africa: The Case of ECOWAS', *Conflict,   Security, & Development*. Vol. 4, No. 3.
[10].See for example, Kwesi Aning, 2010.   'Understanding the nexus between human security and small arms in Africa: the case of Ghana', in *Protecting Human security in Africa*, ed by Ademola Abass (Oxford: OUP) September; Fatau A. Musah, 2009. *West Africa: Governance and Security in a Changing Region*, New York: International Peace Institute.
[11]. Para. 41, Section VII of the ECPF.

Thus far, it can be seen that ECOWAS has adopted a preventive approach to peacebuilding by first implementing measures to overcome the direct and root causes of conflict, and secondly, taking measures to prevent the risk of relapse to conflict. This means that the provisions contained in the ECPF have far-reaching operational consequences, and apply to countries in democratic transitions, as well as those transiting from conflict. In this regard, it can be argued that ECOWAS's approach to peacebuilding is one that cuts across the divide of conflict prevention on the one hand, and post-conflict reconstruction on the other hand. By this approach, a contrast is drawn between the AU's PCRD where peacebuilding is viewed from a post-conflict perspective, whereas the ECPF views peacebuilding from a conflict prevention perspective. This conceptual contrast is interesting because despite the opposing perspectives, there is an ultimate goal -inherent in those perspectives - to bring both post-conflict countries and transition states to the same level of a liberal democratic peace.[12] This, therefore, eliminates the perceived contradiction that is often observed when a less critical view is adopted towards the two perspectives.

Norm Application Experiences of ECOWAS

ECOWAS does not only set normative frameworks to guide its member states. It takes steps to execute the norms, albeit with some difficulty. First, as an embodiment of these norms, ECOWAS has tried to assert its supranational authority for intervention in member states, especially in relation to enforcing democratic governance, human rights, rule of law and respect for constitutionalism.[13] As a result, it has taken steps in the recent past to sanction a few member states for breaching some of its avowed norms on democracy and human rights, and thus compelled countries such as Togo, Guinea, Mali and Niger to adopt constitutional rule.[14]The setting up of the regional early warning system has also helped to generate vital information that feeds into the MSC decision-making processes. Given the lessons learned in previous crises in the region where early response remained a challenge, this early warning mechanism became vital in preventing bloodshed in the recent political crisis in Burkina Faso, which led to the toppling of President Blaise Compaoré. ECOWAS, together with the AU and UN have shown a high level of political dexterity and sensitivity in the way they have dealt with the recent Burkina Faso political crisis.[15] However, it's important to note that the value of such institutional efforts towards the prevention of conflict in Burkina Faso and elsewhere in the West African sub-region, as opposed to a descent to violence and later bringing the countries to a peacebuilding agenda, cannot be overstated.

---

[12]. Aning and Lartey, 2010. op. cit.
[13]. Aning and Salihu, 2013. op. cit. p. 183.
[14]. ibid., p. 183.
[15]. See Peace and Security Council report, 'Popular Ousting of Compaore not Considered Contrary to AU Norms'. http://www.issafrica.org/pscreport/addis-insights/popular-ousting-of-compaore. Accessed: 12 November, 2014.

Second, it has become a standard practice that ECOWAS follows the electoral calendar of each member state. This allows the regional body to monitor political processes, especially towards elections. It must be said that through election observation, ECOWAS keeps focus on the conduct of elections in member states and monitors compliance with national constitutional stipulations by political actors. The institutionalization of the ECOWAS election observation missions offers opportunities for both post-conflict countries and fragile democracies in the region to benefit from more transparent elections and also to learn from each other's experiences. This practice gives further meaning to the protocol on democracy and good governance, while strengthening the rule of law and human rights in both post-conflict societies and fragile democracies.

Third and more importantly, ECOWAS's involvement in mediation and resolution of conflicts, especially in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, and most recently in Mali and Burkina Faso has often laid the foundations for UN multidimensional peace support operations in the region. This foundation has provided the international community with the prerequisites to support the majority of these countries on the path of post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery. This is true for countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and Guinea Bissau, which are among the six post-conflict countries that are currently benefiting from the UN PBC's support.

Further, in spite of the less direct role by ECOWAS in the UN peacebuilding processes, each of these countries continues to receive guidance and political support from ECOWAS. The PBC has, since its engagements in West Africa, acknowledged the importance of ECOWAS in some key aspects of its post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts in the region. This is demonstrated in the PBC's cooperation with ECOWAS, Mano River Union (MRU), countries of the Sahel-Saharan strip, and those along the West African coastline; to combat drugs and trans-border organized crime such as (the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, drug trafficking, human trafficking, illicit financial flows) and the threat posed by international terrorism.[16] While these threats have the capacity to erode gains already chalked by UN peacebuilding efforts, they can also undermine political stability and create further fragilities in West Africa. As observed in some of the PBC's review reports, confronting these threats will require joint responses through mechanisms such as the West African Coasts Initiative hosted in Guinea[17], and the Transnational Organized Crime Unit in Sierra Leone.[18]

---

[16].United Nations, 2012. 'Report of the First Review of the Statement of Mutual Commitments between the Government of Guinea and the Peacebuilding Commission'.
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=PBC/6/GUI/3 . Accessed: 18 November, 2014.
[17]. Ibid.
[18]. United Nations, 2012. 'Second Review of the Outcome of the High-Level Special Session of the Peacebuilding Commission on Sierra Leone'. PBC/6/SLE/2.
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=PBC/6/SLE/2. Accessed: 18 November, 2014.

In spite of its less active role in post-conflict peacebuilding activities, ECOWAS's presence is also felt in Guinea Bissau. This is in relation to the repeated threats of the militarized politics and criminality which must be addressed through wide-ranging economic and security sector reforms (SSR).[19] Since 2004, ECOWAS has provided a grant of US$500,000 to support the on-going SSR program in the country.[20]An additional US$4 million has been provided by both ECOWAS and Nigeria to support the government of Guinea Bissau to meet its financial obligations in the area of public sector salaries. Further, 'ECOWAS spearheaded the creation of International Contact Group on Guinea Bissau (ICG-GB) to serve as a platform for coordinating and harmonizing the intervention of the country's partners[21] with the dual objective of achieving political stability and economic recovery'. All this has culminated in the establishment of ECOWAS Mission for Guinea Bissau (ECOMIB), which together with the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Mission in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) is spearheading the effort of the ICG-GB to draw in more international support to Guinea Bissau. The renewed partnership between ECOWAS and the CPLP has resulted in an enlarged ECOMIB Mission to consolidate existing efforts in SSR and political reforms in the country.[22]

The Way Forward

Conceptually, and as already observed, ECOWAS's approach to peacebuilding is framed from a conflict prevention perspective. This perspective is different from the AU where in the same conceptual terms - peacebuilding is approached from a post-conflict perspective. However, both conceptual approaches uphold the same liberal and democratic peace principles.

Following this conflict prevention perspective, ECOWAS has shown leadership and capacity in its engagements in conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, and peacekeeping efforts in the region. However, the same capacity cannot be said of its post-conflict peacebuiding interventions, despite its visible presence in countries such as Guinea Bissau. The key lesson is that whereas ECOWAS has shown a demonstrable capacity in the area of peacekeeping, mediation and conflict resolution, there is a deficit in its capacity to undertake post-conflict peacebuilding. This is a shortfall which does not fully complement its key principles enshrined in the vast normative regimes governing conflict prevention and good governance. Therefore, the critical question is, does ECOWAS's strength only lie in responding to regional crisis? While being mindful of the risk of duplicating efforts, the visible presence of civil society and UN peacebuilding

---

[19]. Aning and Salihu, 2013. op cit., p. 183.
[20]. The amount was used to pay salary arrears owe to the soldiers in the country.
[21]. The known multilateral partners who are supporting the reconstruction of Guinea Bissau include ECOWAS, AU, UN, European Union (EU), the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (*Comunidade dos Paises de Lingua Portuguesa*, CPLP).
[22]See UN Security Council Forecast Report on Guinea Bissau. http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2014-02/guinea-bissau_7.php. Accessed: 18 November, 2014.

engagements may have accounted for ECOWAS's limited involvement in post-conflict peacebuilding in the region. It should also be noted that ECOWAS may not have the resources to establish presence in all post-conflict peacebuilding countries.

Based on the forgoing argument, the following recommendations are worth considering:

- *Strict application of normative regimes, thus compelling member states to adhere to the role of law and human rights*. (This will strengthen institutions to overcome state fragility and collapsed.)
- *Capacity building of ECOWAS in post-conflict peacebuilding*. (The current ECOWAS mission in Guinea Bissau could provide the expected learning experience to generate the desired institutional capacity in the region.)
- *Fostering closer collaboration between ECOWAS and UN Peacebuilding missions in dealing with cross-border and cross-cutting threats.*
- *Mobilizing and channeling civil society efforts towards regional peacebuilding initiatives*. (Civil society groups, including women and youth groups especially in the Mano River Union have driven the micro-level peacebuilding initiatives. This effort is often overlooked when assessing peacebuilding outcomes in the region.)
- *Fostering closer collaboration between PBC missions, CSOs and political authorities in the efforts towards capacity generation and transfer.*
- *Multiple partner involvement risks taking ownership away from beneficiary countries if capacity for leadership, mentorship and coaching are not factored into peacebuilding planning processes.*

Conclusion

It has to be said that ECOWAS's experience in peacebuilding may not be too dissimilar from what is obtained by other RECs. Therefore, like the UN and AU, the RECs peacebuilding interventions – even though limited in the regions-tend to focus more on macro-level peacebuilding processes. As already noted, this approach often overlooks community-based and local level peacebuilding initiatives, substantially relevant to achieving broad-based ownership and long-term sustainability. It is therefore noteworthy for the RECs, especially ECOWAS to embrace measures of inclusivity in their peacebuilding processes; this means creating the much needed political space for more CSOs engagements in the peacebuilding process. It is therefore argued that the more CSOs are integrated in the peacebuilding process, the better the prospects for sustainability.

====