

Suggestions for an ECOWAS Action Plan

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Over the last two decades, ECOWAS has developed a normative framework for security sector governance (SSG) in West Africa which is encapsulated in the peace and security architecture developed. This normative framework provides the basic elements of an emerging common understanding of SSG. However, it is widely acknowledged that there is a wide gap between this normative framework and the actual practices of states and non-state actors on the ground. Today, there is an urgent need to implement ECOWAS existing regulatory procedures, but also to establish a conceptual framework which would go beyond the provisions of these texts which proved to be insufficient in promoting and enforcing security governance.

The following initiatives should be undertaken in order to promote democratic governance in the West African region.

At the ECOWAS level

Authority of Heads of state and governments

- should amend the 1999 Mechanism, article 19, to broaden the duties and responsibilities of the Defence and Security Commission (DSC) beyond the current peacekeeping role (to address transnational threats and criminality).
- should develop a collective regional approach to intelligence.

Council of Ministers

- should adopt a regulatory framework with a sanction regime on non-statutory armed groups;
- should adopt a regulation or a decision on private security companies;
- should adopt a regulation/decision clarifying the relationships between formal and informal security and justice actors.

Establishing a coalition of “reform-minded” states

States which have already undertaken a reform process of their security sector should act as sponsors of a common SSG concept and should work to maintain it on the ECOWAS agenda.

Capacity building for the ECOWAS Parliament in SSG

- Supporting Capacities-building initiatives for the Parliamentarians.
- Hiring one SSR expert to work on a permanent basis with the Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, Defence and Security Standing Committee.
- Once the capacities have been built, The Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, Defence and Security Standing Committee should report twice a year to the relevant ECOWAS Authorities.

- The Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, Defence and Security Standing Committee should organise an annual session for all the Defence and Security Committees of the member-states, in order to facilitate exchanges between member-states' Parliaments on security issues.

Setting up an SSR Support Funds at the COWAS level

- Setting up what could be called "ECOWAS Security Sector Development Funds" to be contributed to by development partners as well as ECOWAS member-states and earmarked exclusively for security sector reform, and administered by a structure isolated from political influence.
- Conducting Scoping Survey of Resources: a comprehensive survey of available materials for training and capacity-building would be essential.
- A resource Mobilization strategy should be defined.

Enhancing ECOWAS security organs meant to assist the SMC (standing mediation Committee)

There is a need for existing (and future) instruments of regional security coordination, such as:

- the Chiefs of Defence Staff Committee,
- West African Regional Police Chiefs Committee,
- Correctional Associations,

ECOWAS Commission

Office of the President

An SSR expert should be hired by the Department of External Relations. Working closely with the Office of the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), this Officer should be responsible for:

- ensuring efficient and effective coordination of resource mobilisation: this Officer will act as an interface with international donors;
- developing a communication strategy on ECOWAS' approach towards SSG.

Raising SSR awareness among ECOWAS' Commission Offices and Departments

To assist in the mainstreaming of SSG in the activities of the Offices of the Commission, ECOWAS Training on 'Security Sector Governance: Challenges and approaches' should be updated regularly (at least once a year).

Office of the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS)

Early Warning System

We need a holistic understanding of the security sector in its West African and African specificities. There is a need for an ECOWAS appropriated mapping out study to present a comprehensive view of the security sector and governance in the region.

ECOWAS should particularly urge research to

- develop an in-depth analysis of security governance as it is practiced by governments within the ECOWAS region;

- map national security systems in the sub-region ;
- map non-state security and justice providers in selected localities in the sub-region;
- study challenges of Harmonisation and making recommendations.

The ECOWAS Department of Early Warning (DEW) in charge of the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) should be entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating the collection of information relating to the security and defence forces of the region. The zonal bureaux should adopt a “participatory regional approach in data gathering” as stated in article 45.d of the ECPF.

Peace Keeping and Security Department

The human resources of the Peacekeeping and Security Department should be reinforced with two SSG officers.

More generally, ECOWAS should

- assist member states to develop national security strategies fully informed by a collective sub-regional approach to security and security risks;
- facilitate interaction between non-governmental regional networks involved in SSG;
- promote strong Justice and Rule of Law institutions across the sub-region and strengthen collaboration and coordination between security and justice advocacy organizations and networks;
- develop a priority community policy for support to the transformation of the security system in Guinea, Guinea Bissau and TOGO;
- foster partnerships: enhance the capacity of ECOWAS to engage with national level programmes and external partners interested in supporting them.

Developing ECOWAS’s Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacities

Institute an SSG Monitoring and Review Mechanism: Install M&E within APRM type format.

ECOWAS member-states

Ratifying ECOWAS security instruments (to ensure cohesion across the region)

To show and demonstrate their political will, West African states have to support ECOWAS derived mechanisms and peace architecture by ratifying and implementing all of the security instruments.

Launching National security dialogue among all national stakeholders and Setting up a National Security Policy at the strategic level

Once the capacity is in place, ECOWAS experts will assist member states to develop national security strategies fully informed by a collective sub-regional approach to security and security risks.

Every West African state should define and adopt a National Security Strategy which should derive from a comprehensive assessment of the West African security environment. To design the document, an interagency and fully participatory process should be launched at the governmental level.

Reforming the Security Sector Legal Framework

The objective of the legal framework must be, in particular, to firmly anchor accountability and oversight (internal as well as external).

Creating interagency units in charge of coordinating SSG at the governmental level

Every ECOWAS member-state should create an interagency unit at the highest governmental level. Such a unit would be responsible for coordinating the launch of reform processes in each sector (defence, police, justice, customs, water/forests, etc) of the national security system and to liaise with civil society.

Improving the management of the security sector in the executive branch

Management capacity has to build comprehensively and across the board, particularly in the line Ministries (Defence, Interior, etc.). This means enhancing the capacity of civilian policy, planning, implementation, and management organs, including their role of internal oversight.

Restructuring and right-sizing national security agencies

Article 74.g of the ECPF urges ECOWAS member-states to “launch initiative to restructure and right-size national security agencies in post-conflict environments”. The following reforms could contribute to restructuring the security system in a way that meets the needs of the strategic environment.

- Maximising the ability of the security sector to protect the citizens and to promote public security
 - Maximising the ethics of the security services
 - Maximising the professionalism of the defence and security forces
 - Building the skills necessary to deal with emerging criminal insecurities
 - Maximising the ability of the armed forces to protect the state and its territory: improving operational effectiveness
 - Restructuring the defence and security forces to make them operational for peace missions
 - Involving the defence forces in development projects
 - Taking into account the institutional and organisational features inherited from colonial rule

Integrating the security sector into a system of democratic governance

- As stated in article 74.n of the ECPF, there is a need to train and strengthen the oversight and supervision institutions by making them more familiar with the functioning of the security system.

- It is particularly important to involve the Parliaments in the control and supervision of the security sector (especially in budgetary and financial management); Develop the relations between the ECOWAS Parliament and the member-states Parliaments;
- Also reinforce the capacities of the Public Account Committees, Ombudsman, ...

Strongly integrating civil-society organisations in SSG

- Networking (regional, south-south, north-south) can be a real learning environment as well as a way of pooling scarce capacity
- bring in civil society from the cold through collaboration with Parliament and (where possible) with security institutions (e.g. police-community relations)
- much external funding has been available to support civil society work in the areas of security and justice, and should be exploited
- training programmes and internships are also available at a number of specialized institutions for qualified persons (see below)

Addressing trends towards the increasing privatisation of SSR support

Regulating the activities of local non-state and non-statutory security and justice providers

In line with Article 53.n which urges states to “enhance the effectiveness and fairness of traditional courts to complement the work of the justice system”,

Addressing the gender gap

Special attention needs to be paid to the ‘gender gap’ in reforming security delivery and governance, particularly in the light of the prevalence of SGBV in post-conflict contexts

Developing and/or clarifying the relationships with external actors

The ECOWAS SSG agenda must be responsive to the role of external actors. However, external actors cannot be seen as homogeneous. There is also a need to make a distinction between:

- The African Union. It is essential that the ECOWAS approach to SSG, reflects and feeds directly from continental frameworks such as the Common African Defence and Security Policy and the NEPAD Peace and Security Agenda. SSG in West Africa must be seen as a way to develop a regional integrated approach to joint peace operations within the framework of the AU as well as contributing to the implementation of the PCRDP (Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy).
- The United Nations. As stated by the ECPF, ECOWAS SSG conceptualisation must be seen as an input into the current UN dialogue process on a common SSR concept. There is also a need to mainstream SSG-related issues in the regional conflict prevention framework jointly drawn by ECOWAS and UNOWA (United Nations Office for West Africa);
 - Multilateral actors with specific interests such as the EU;
 - The bilateral actors. Some former-colonial powers have been deeply involved in the governance of the security apparatus of their former colonies since independence. There is a need to submit to the scrutiny of the National Parliament any defence or security/military cooperation agreement. Such agreements should be in accordance with SSG democratic principles. The same should apply to the agreements signed with new major bilateral players.

