



KOFI ANNAN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING TRAINING CENTRE

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Implementing the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework: prospects and challenges

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❖ There is the need to improve awareness about the ECPF among the population of West Africa as pre-requisite for the full implementation of the ECPF.
- ❖ An ECPF Implementation fund should be created to help overcome financial challenges. Once created, member states of ECOWAS and donor community could contribute to it. Money in the fund could then be distributed among institutions which would be involved in implementation activities.
- ❖ There is the need to improve national ownership of the ECPF. This will help ensure smooth implementation of the document at the national level. One best way to improve national ownership is to organise stakeholders meeting and form implementation groups in each member state which will be responsible for sensitization and build support for it.
- ❖ ECOWAS should consider setting up an ECPF implementation task force to oversee the implementation of the document at the state level.
- ❖ Given that there are a number of civil society organisations already working on some of the issues covered by the ECPF, they must be involved in the implementation of the document from the very beginning.

Introduction

As part of the search for a lasting solution to the numerous security problems that confront the West African sub-region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in 2008, adopted¹ the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), to serve as strategic framework for improving conflict prevention and human security.² The adoption of the ECPF is an addition to several initiatives in the form of key protocols and conventions that aim at building a stable West Africa as prerequisite for social, political and economic development.

Some of the earlier initiatives by ECOWAS to promote stability in the sub-region include *the Protocol on Non-Aggression (1978)*, *the Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence (1982)*; *ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993)*; *the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security* (hereafter the Mechanism); *Declaration of Political Principles (1991)*; and *the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001)*. Over the years, with the mandate provided under these protocols, ECOWAS has made significant contributions to the promotion of peace and security in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau,

Liberia, and Sierra Leone, where violent conflicts took place. Also, ECOWAS' preventive diplomacy initiatives averted large-scale violence in countries such as Niger, Guinea and Togo.

Given that several initiatives have been undertaken by ECOWAS to promote conflict prevention since it was founded in 1975, it is important to raise a number of questions with regard to the ECPF. First, how relevant is the ECPF in respect of conflict prevention? Second, how different is it from existing initiatives that equally seek to promote sub-regional stability? Third, how is the ECPF to be implemented? And, what are the prospects and challenges of its successful implementation?

This policy paper answers the above questions by examining the ECPF. It also makes policy recommendations on steps that need to be taken to ensure the successful implementation of the ECPF. The paper concludes that the ECPF is an important initiative which when implemented would contribute to an improvement in human security, and calls for broader stakeholder participation in its implementation.

¹. The Conflict Prevention Framework was adopted by the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on 16 January 2008.

². The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, Section II, p.9.

Relevance of the ECPF for conflict prevention

The relevance of the ECPF lies in its objectives, the outputs it attempts to attain, the issues it seeks to address and the method(s) with which it seeks to achieve its objectives. A careful consideration of the documents objectives and proposed outputs reveals a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach for conflict prevention in ways that address the current security challenges of the West African sub-region.

Objectives of the ECPF

The objectives of the ECPF include the following;

- Mainstream conflict prevention into ECOWAS policies and programmes;
- Increase understanding of the conceptual basis of conflict prevention;
- Build awareness and anticipation, and strengthen capacity within member states and civil society to enhance their role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding;
- Increase understanding of opportunities, tools and resources related to conflict prevention and peacebuilding;
- Increase awareness and preparedness for cooperative ventures between ECOWAS, member states, civil society and external partners in pursuit of conflict prevention and peacebuilding;
- Strengthen capacity within ECOWAS to pursue concrete and integrated conflict prevention and peacebuilding;
- Enhance ECOWAS' anticipation and planning capabilities in relation to regional tensions; and
- Generate a more pro-active and operational conflict prevention posture from member states and the ECOWAS system.³

Expected Outputs of the ECPF

It is expected that the pursuit of the above objectives would lead to the realisation of the following outputs:

- Guidelines on conflict prevention;
- Guidelines for cross-departmental and cross-initiatives cooperation and synergy within ECOWAS on conflict prevention;
- Guidelines for cooperative ventures between ECOWAS, member states, civil society and external partners;
- An ECOWAS strategy on resource mobilization, advocacy and communication;
- The necessary bridge linking everyday conflict prevention initiatives to structural (strategic) conflict

prevention; and

- Plan of Action and Logical Framework.⁴

Areas of Focus

The ECPF focuses on a set of issue areas which, it is believed, when addressed would contribute to a stable sub-region. Referred to as the 14 components, they include (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; and (7) cross-border initiatives. The rest are (8) governance; (9) practical disarmament; (10) women, peace and security; (11) youth empowerment; (12) ECOWAS Standby Force; (13) humanitarian assistance; and (14) peace education.⁵ On each of the 14 issue areas, the ECPF goes a long way to outline activities, capacity requirements and benchmarks for measuring progress. All the above components have links or relationship with existing ECOWAS protocols and conventions. Given the linkages to existing protocols and conventions, the implementation of the ECPF provides the opportunity for the implementation of their relevant provisions.

From the objectives, expected outputs and scope of the ECPF outlined above, it can be said that it is very relevant to conflict prevention. This is because it attempts to address the fundamental issues that have contributed to conflicts and political instability in West Africa.

The ECPF as a new initiative

The ECPF in its existing form is markedly different from past ECOWAS initiatives in several ways that need to be emphasized. First, the ECPF adopts a comprehensive approach to social, economic, political and security challenges in West Africa. This it does by establishing linkages between social, economic and political issues as the basis of conflict prevention in the sub-region. The document is therefore based on the perspective that addressing these issues simultaneously would help in preventing conflicts in West Africa. Second, in addition to the wider scope it covers, it targets a wide range of actors (ECOWAS, states, civil society, donors, international organisations, the private sectors etc.). These actors are considered partners in the implementation of the ECPF. Third, unlike other documents, the ECPF provide specific details on the issues it seeks to address. These include activities, benchmarks for measuring progress and capacity requirements for undertaking the stated activities. In addition, plans of action for implementation would be developed on all the 14 components to ensure that issues relating to each component are adequately addressed. Finally, the ECPF, unlike other documents, brings together all existing ECOWAS initiatives to make their implementation very easy.

Implementing the ECPF

This section discusses the implementation of the ECPF and the prospects and challenges involved. According to the ECPF, member states are supposed to commence implementation upon

³ Ibid, Section VI pp 16-17.

⁴ Ibid, pp 17-18.

⁵ Ibid Section VIII, p 21.

its entry into force. Once it has entered into force the implementation of document shall be premised on what it referred to as 'the enabling mechanisms'.⁶ These include advocacy and communication; resource mobilization; cooperation; and monitoring and evaluation.⁷ The document identifies several actors that need to be involved in its implementation. These actors include ECOWAS, member states, civil society, the private sectors and the international community (AU, EU, UN etc.)

Prospects

The achievement of the ECPF's priorities and intended objectives would naturally derive from its successful implementation. But what are the possibilities that its implementation would be successful? It is the view of this policy brief that there are a number of opportunities for implementing the ECPF. The issues that the document seeks to address make it 'attractive' and could be used to mobilize funds from the donor community. Already there is growing donor interest to support the document. For instance, the Government of Denmark, under its Africa Programme for Peace (APP) supports activities at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) and ECOWAS aimed at implementing the ECPF. Also, German Technical Cooperation's (GTZ) assistance to the ECOWAS Commission includes support and coordination for activities on the ECPF at ECOWAS. Apart from the donor community, since conflict prevention is prominent on the agenda of the African Union (AU) and the UN, support for implementing the ECPF is likely to come from these organisations. The ECPF revolves around activities for which there are existing initiatives. This means that there is no need to re-invent the wheel. Moreover, there are civil society groups and institutions already working on some of the issue areas and could therefore be identified as partners in the implementation of the ECPF. Finally, at the just ended ECOWAS conference to assess its 35 years of existence, participants (including former and sitting heads of state, academics and policy makers) called for the immediate implementation of the ECPF.⁸ With such an endorsement, it is hoped that the implementation of the ECPF would enjoy broader support.

Challenges

In spite of the opportunities discussed above, implementing the ECPF could be beset by a number of challenges. First, there is low level of awareness regarding the document in the sub-region among policy makers and the general population. Another challenge is how to overcome the problem of lack of commitment of member states of ECOWAS to the implementation of documents they have signed. States in West

Africa are usually quick to sign regional document but they often do not back signatures with commitment to implementation. Given the history of member states of ECOWAS, the ECPF could suffer the same fate. Another challenge, which relate to the above, is how to create national ownership of the ECPF and integrate it into national projects. Improving national ownership of the document would help ensure that state-level institutions and stakeholders are committed to implement activities identified in the document and the accompanying Plans of Action. Another possible challenge relates to the raising of adequate financial resources to fund the implementation of the project. As a project to be implemented throughout the sub-region, and over a long period of time, the required financial commitment would be huge. But raising adequate funds for the implementation of the project may be difficult. However, if member states show commitment to implementation, funds could be raised at the national level to support state-level implementation.

Conclusions

From the above discussions, it is clear that the ECPF is a useful initiative with potential to contribute to the reduction of conflicts and improvement in human security in the West African sub-region. However, the realization of these objectives depends largely on the successful implementation of the document. This requires broader stakeholder participation at the state, ECOWAS and international community levels. Already activities have begun at the ECOWAS Commission to develop plans of action on the 14 components as the basis for the start of the implementation of the ECPF by policy makers in the West Africa. Since January 2010, KAIPTC has also begun a project on 'enhancing the operationalisation of the ECPF' through which it supports and complements ECOWAS efforts through awareness creation, policy research and workshops. Finally, there is growing donor interest and support for the implementation of the ECPF which are good indications of better prospects for the document.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussions the paper offers the following recommendations for the successful implementation of the ECPF:

- ❖ There is the need to improve awareness about the ECPF among the population of West Africa as pre-requisite for the full implementation of the ECPF.
- ❖ An ECPF Implementation fund should be created to help overcome financial challenges. Once created, member states of ECOWAS and donor community could contribute to it. Money in the fund could then be distributed among institutions which would be involved in implementation activities.
- ❖ There is the need to improve national ownership of the ECPF. This will help ensure smooth implementation of the document at the national level. One best way to improve national ownership is to organise stakeholders meeting and form implementation groups in each

⁶ See Section IX of the ECPF document.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See the report on ECOWAS International Conference 'Two Decades of Peace Processes in West Africa: Achievement – Failure – Lessons', Monrovia, Liberia 22-26 March 2010.

member state which will be responsible for sensitization and build support for it.

- ❖ Given that there are a number of civil society organisations already working on some of the issues covered by the ECPF, they must be involved in the implementation of the document from the very beginning.
- ❖ ECOWAS should consider setting up an ECPF implementation task force to oversee the implementation of the document at the state level.

About the Author

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About the International Institutions Programme (IIP)

The International Institutions Programme is one of four programmatic areas based at the Research Department of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC). The IIP has the objective of forging closer collaboration between the KAIPTC and partner institutions such as the Economic Community of West Africa State (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) for the purposes of supporting the conflict prevention, peace and security programmes of these institutions. Beyond these institutions, academic and donor institutions who work in the area of conflict prevention are also important partners. In the years ahead the Programme seeks to build valuable networks that allow it to achieve its objective of promoting peace and security through partnerships.

The Programme now operates two Projects: the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) and the Civilian Component of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). The ECPF Project, which covers a three-year period, has the objective of supporting ECOWAS in the implementation of ECPF through policy research, workshops and training programmes. On its part, the ESF Project has the objective of supporting the development of civilian capacity of the ESF through research, training and partnership programmes. The Project also works closely with the African Standby Force (ASF) of the AU.

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