

West African Conflict Early Warning and Early Response System: The Role of Civil Society Organizations

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List of Abbreviations/Acronyms

AU	–	African Union
CADSP	–	Common African Defence and Security Policy
CBP I & II	–	Capacity Building for Conflict Prevention COMMISSION – Commission of ECOWAS, formerly known as ECOWAS Secretariat
CPAPS	–	Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security
CPMRD	–	Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution Department
CRS	–	Catholic Relief Services
CSOs	–	Civil Society Organizations
DfID	–	Department for International Development
ECOMOG	–	Peacekeeping Monitoring Group of ECOWAS
ECOWAS	–	Economic Community of West African States
ECOWARN	–	Early Warning System of ECOWAS
ISIP	–	Intervention and Special Initiatives Program of WANEP
KAIPTC	–	Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre
MECHANISM	–	ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security
MoU	–	Memorandum of Understanding
NEPAD	–	New Partnership for Africa’s Development
OMC	–	Observation and Monitoring Centre
OMZ	–	Observation and Monitoring Zones
UNDP	–	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	–	United States Agency for International Development
WACSOFF	–	West Africa Civil Society Forum
WANEP	–	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WAPI	–	West African Peacebuilding Institute
WARN	–	West African Early Warning and Response Network

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I. INTRODUCTION

The reality of state formation in post-colonial Africa is that, in many countries, the apparatus of governance began to crumble even before it could be fully consolidated.² A combined effect of mis-rule, widespread poverty and violent armed conflicts has produced a series of inter-linked crisis that question the continued reliance on orthodox state actors for bringing about social progress. Some of the searching solutions to these challenges have, on one hand, activated the case for regionalization³ to tackle transnational security and economic development challenges, while civil society organizations, on the other hand, continue to gain recognition as partners in peace building.⁴ The existence of regional institutions to address transnational insecurity issues is vital just as there is empirical utility in civil society collaboration in the context of sub-regional peace building.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded by 15 West African States in 1975 to pursue market integration goals in the sub-region. However, the outbreak of violent conflicts in Liberia and other West African countries in the 1990s and their transnational underpinnings which threatened sub-regional security compelled ECOWAS to pay increasing attention to peace and security matters. It is currently implementing a Mechanism⁵ on peace and security which includes the establishment of a conflict early warning database that would monitor the conflict situation in the sub-region to inform the design of effective early response strategies.⁶ The Mechanism is strengthened by a *Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance*⁷, adopted in 2001, which addresses structural issues such as injustice and bad governance underlying violent conflicts. As the primary security instrument that outlines the security architecture and strategy for the sub-region, the Mechanism and its *Supplementary Protocol* address the requirement of Article 58(3) of the Revised Treaty of ECOWAS (1993) which states that “detailed provisions governing political cooperation, regional peace and stability shall be defined in the relevant Protocols”.

Regarding the recognition of civil society organizations (CSOs) in this context, a United Nations report describes CSOs as “the prime movers of some of the most innovative initiatives to deal with emerging global threats.”⁸ Again, the preamble of the *Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU)* mentions, among other things, that the AU would be “guided by our common vision of a united and strong Africa and by the need to build a partnership between governments and all segments of civil society, in particular women, youth and the private sector, in order to strengthen solidarity and cohesion among peoples”.⁹ Furthermore, Article 24 of the *AU’s Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP) of 2004*, highlighting the roles of its implementing organs, states that the AU’s “Peace and Security

² Bratton, Michael, (April) 1989, Beyond the State: Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa, *World Politics*, Vol XLI, no.3 p407-430

³ See *Charter of the United Nations: We the Peoples of the United Nations – United for a Better World*. Available on the UN website at: <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/> (Retrieved: 22 February 2007, Chapter VIII; See also: *Cooperation between the United Nations and Regional Organizations/Arrangements in a Peacekeeping Environment: suggested principles and mechanisms*, March 1999. Available at: <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/peacekp/region/0399cooperation.pdf> (Accessed: 22 February 2007)

⁴ Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2002. Available at: http://www.au2002.gov.za/docs/key_oau/au_act.htm (Accessed: 21 February 2007). See also. United Nations General Assembly, A/58/817, 11 June 2004.

⁵ Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security, adopted 10 December 1999, ECOWAS. Available at: <http://wwwsec.ecowas.int/sitecedeoao/english/ap101299.htm> (Accessed: 16 October 2006)

⁶ Ibid. Chapter IV.

⁷ ECOWAS: *Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security* Dakar, December 2001 <http://www.sec.ecowas.int/sitecedeoao/english/protocoles/Protocol%20on%20good-governance-and-democracy-rev-5EN.pdf> (Accessed: 10 January 2007)

⁸ United Nations General Assembly, A/58/817, 11 June 2004.

⁹ Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2002. Available at: http://www.au2002.gov.za/docs/key_oau/au_act.htm (Accessed: 21 February 2007).

Council shall encourage non-governmental organizations, and community-based and other civil society organizations, particularly women's organizations, to participate actively in the efforts aimed at promoting peace, security and stability in Africa; and that when required, such organizations may be invited to address the Peace and Security Council.”¹⁰

ECOWAS has since 2001, taken steps to operationalize its conflict early warning system by soliciting the technical expertise of relevant CSOs. However, the implementation of the ECOWAS Early Warning System has not translated into the attainment of a sub-regional capacity to respond promptly to emerging conflicts or stop on-going ones. While the system is able to gather the needed early warning information, certain structural hurdles continue to frustrate the anticipated complementary relationship between early warning information and the design and implementation of early response strategies in the sub-region.

This paper assesses the partnership between ECOWAS and civil society organizations in the implementation of the early warning system. It explores options for strengthening this partnership to facilitate early response, contending, among others, that the role of civil society should go beyond early warning information gathering to include a recognized responsibility endorsed and supervised by ECOWAS to intervene (via mediation and/or conciliation) in community and national level conflicts. This point is made in recognition of the fact that in the context of early warning, “attracting attention to low-profile conflicts is problematic [while] shifting from macro-level political early warning to micro citizen-based warning and response systems has been slow.”¹¹ However, given the peculiar circumstance of West Africa, there is potential utility in the mediation role of sub-regional CSOs both on their own merit and as informal conflict prevention instruments of ECOWAS at the community level. After a conceptual discussion on the utility of CSOs, the next two parts briefly examine the evolving sub-regional security architecture as contained in the Mechanism. The remaining three parts then focus on an assessment of the ECOWAS – CSO partnership in the context of the sub-regional early warning and response. This is then followed by a conclusion.

10 Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy, African Union 28 February 2004. Available at: http://www.africa-union.org/News_Events/2ND%20EX%20ASSEMBLY/Declaration%20on%20a%20Comm.Af%20Def%20Sec.pdf (Accessed: 23 February 2007). This is a non-binding declaration.

11 See Early Warning and Response: Conceptual and Empirical Dilemmas, a publication by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, September 2006, p.7. Available at: http://www.gppac.org/documents/GPPAC/Research/Issue_papers_2006_-_2007_/1_Early_Warning_Early_Response.pdf

Conceptual Issues on the Utility of CSOs

The term “Civil Society” may be defined as the:

“intermediate realm situated between state and household (excluding family, friends and business), populated by organized groups or associations which are separated from the state, enjoy some autonomy in relations with the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their legitimate interests, values or identities.”¹²

The role of civil society in governance continues to generate mixed reactions from experts. Chris Allen, for instance, questions the portrayal of civil society organizations as the driving force behind democratization and the containment of the state, adding that the concept is theoretically weak especially as it has proven to be “diffuse[d], hard to define, empirically imprecise, and ideologically laden”.¹³ Reviewing existing literature on the subject, Allen contextualizes his argument in the philosophies of John Locke and Antonio Gramsci, teasing out a two-pronged argument which first, casts doubt on the over-rated value of civil society in governance and development, and secondly, renders the role of civil society (especially in developing countries) as something that is of more relevance to the backers of liberal democracy in Africa.

In a continent in which authoritarian rule have undermined human security and economic development, the role of civil society, Allen argues, reflects a fundamental tenet in development theory and practice that holds in disdain, existing official state arrangements and seek to get government off the backs of the people by elevating private and public non-state actors. This suggests that while on the global scale, the concept of civil society exists to protest official malfeasance (in developing countries) and thus provide a sense of security for donor resources, civil society is equally important domestically for the existence of the modern (post-absolutist) state, though it is inconceivable without the state.¹⁴

This does not suggest that civil society is equivalent to political opposition. Neither does it suggest that it must always operate in opposition to the state or international state-sponsored actors. At best, its role is about filling the gaps of resource (especially knowledge) deficiency occasioned by the long years of under-investment in key social sectors such as education and health which has affected the quality and availability of skilled human resources in these countries. Significantly, Africa alone produced 15 out of the 26 states on the World Bank’s list of failed states for 2006.¹⁵ Six out of the 15 countries are in West Africa. These are states rift with clientelism, failed public service systems, widespread poverty and more than half of the population earning less than US\$ 1 a day. As a result, the quality of their human resource endowments is weakened. Against this background, it becomes appropriate to consider an International Conflict Research study on state – civil society relations in transitional societies which concludes that the best chemistry in terms of state – civil society relationship should be complementary.¹⁶ In the area of fostering peace and security, one of the best forms of

¹² This definition is culled from a concept paper titled “Civil Society and Governance” used by researchers of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK in 1998. It borrows from the definitional discussions of civil society by British Scholar, Gordon White. Available at: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civsoc/public.doc> (Accessed: 17 October 2006)

¹³ Allen, Chris, 1997, “Who Needs Civil Society?” Review of African Political Economy, ROAPE Publications Ltd., No. 73, p329-337.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Engaging with fragile states: an IEG review of world bank support to low-income countries under stress” Available at: http://www.worldbank.org/ieg/licus/docs/licus_fs.pdf (Accessed: 20 February 2007)

¹⁶ Church, Cheyenne and Anna, Visser, 2001. Civil Society in Transition and the Role of Civic Forums, International Conflict Research (INCORE). Available at: <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/publications/occasional/civsoc.pdf> (Accessed: 11 December 2006)

collaboration could be expressed in civil society contributing knowledge and expertise to reinforce the conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts of the state.

As already indicated, the contribution of sub-regional peacebuilding civil society organizations to the effective implementation of the ECOWAS early warning and response systems, constitute an essential focus of this paper. Incidentally, institutionalist theorists also recognize the utilization of civil society expertise to the work of the state. For example, within institutional theory, cognitivists contend that the layer between international structures and human volition can only be filled by interpretation which depends on the body of knowledge held by actors at a given time.¹⁷ Hansenclever *et al* use the concept of *epistemic communities* defined as a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and with an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge, to argue that “a transnationally interacting epistemic community can serve as a central vehicle for international learning.”¹⁸ However, Hansenclever *et al* argue further that three conditions ought to prevail for an epistemic community to function effectively. First, there should be a high degree of uncertainty (preferably a shocking development that helps to overcome institutional inertia) among policy makers which would spur them on to seek help from an epistemic community. Secondly, there should be consensus among the experts on the issue in question for the emerging problem to be resolved on the basis of the technical merits of the options provided by an epistemic community; and thirdly, the members of an epistemic community must “become part of the bureaucratic apparatus” (i.e. gain access to the corridors of power) in order to influence regime formation and implementation.¹⁹

The outbreak of the Liberia civil war (1990s) provided, in this context, a justification for West African leaders to begin to intensify their quest for a more comprehensive framework that will guarantee sub-regional peace and security. With the loopholes in the then existing protocols²⁰ in relation to the emerging conflicts, a group of experts from civil society with the support of the government of Nigeria began to examine existing ECOWAS protocols and explore how ECOWAS could fashion out a document appropriate for the emerging conflict trends.²¹ Again, the appointment of the late Cheikh Oumar Diarra²² as the ECOWAS Deputy Executive Secretary (at the time) responsible for overseeing the adoption and implementation of the Mechanism proved helpful. The ECOWAS – civil society partnership should therefore be seen in terms of the ability of civil society organizations to make informed input into ECOWAS peacebuilding initiatives.

II. ECOWAS’ EVOLVING SECURITY ARCHITECTURE: ORIGINS AND STRUCTURE

17 Hansenclever, Andreas, Peter, Mayer, and Volker, Rittberger, (October) 1996. *Interests, Power, Knowledge: The Study of International Regimes*, Mershon International Studies Review, Vol 40, Supplement 2, p.206.

18 *Ibid.* p209.

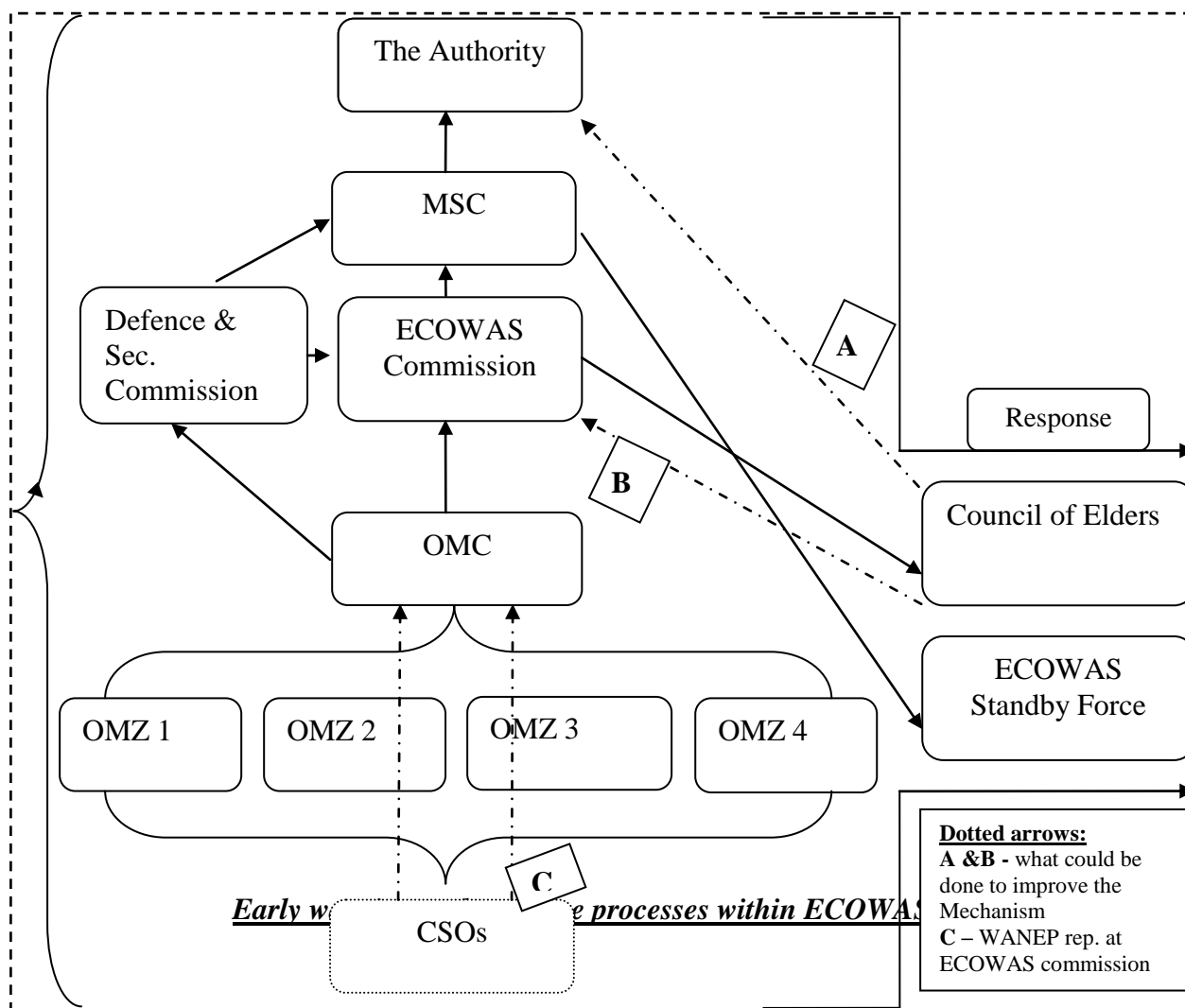
19 *Ibid.* p209.

20 Before the 1999 ECOWAS Mechanism, the existing primary security protocols were the 1978 Protocol on Non-Aggression and the 1981 Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Defence. While the Non-Aggression did not address conflicts originated by non-ECOWAS member-states, the protocol on Mutual Assistance paid no attention to purely internal conflicts no matter the implications on sub-regional security.

21 Interview with Dr. Emmanuel Kwesi Aning, Head of Department for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and Peacekeeping, KAIPTC, 26 February 2007. Among the insights Aning provides, Professor Margaret Vogt’s first book on Nigeria’s role in Liberia attracted the interest of academics and retired army officers such as Lieutenant General (rtd) Emmanuel Erskine of Ghana; General (rtd) Ishola Williams of Nigeria; and Dr. Jinmi Adisa of Nigeria who later teamed up to examine existing ECOWAS protocols in the light of emerging conflicts in the sub-region.

22 The late General Cheikh Oumar Diarra (rtd) worked with civil society in Mali. He was instrumental in the processes leading to the adoption of the 1999 Mechanism and served as the Deputy Executive Secretary, PADS, of ECOWAS. His experience in civil society and ECOWAS placed him in a better position to understand the essence of ECOWAS - civil society collaboration.

Until the adoption of the Mechanism in 1999, neither of the two key ECOWAS security protocols²³ (before 1999) envisioned a role for civil society organizations nor properly addressed the issue of a regional response to intra-state conflicts that threatened sub-regional security. The Mechanism sought to fill these gaps in order to strengthen the sub-regional response to conflicts. The figure below illustrates the linkages between the structures of the Mechanism.



²³ See the 1978 Protocol on Non-Aggression; and the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance

The main institutions of the mechanism are outlined under Article 4 namely:

- **The Authority** - made up of Heads of State of Member States with “powers to act on all matters” of security concern in the sub-region.
- **The Mediation and Security Council (MSC)** - made up of a Council of nine (9) Heads of State and Government elected from among members of the Authority, to implement the Mechanism on behalf of the Authority. It meets at the Heads of State and Government; Ministerial; and Ambassadorial levels.
- **The Commission** - Until 1st February 2007, when ECOWAS completed its internal structural reforms to reflect its integration agenda, the Commission used to be known as the Executive Secretariat. The reform strengthened the Commission (now headed by a President and a Vice President) and placed the departments of the then Secretariat under seven new Commissioners.²⁴ Reference to the Commission subsequently is in the light of the provisions of the ECOWAS Mechanism of 1999. The structure of the Commission was reviewed to cope with the broad demands of sub-regional security. First, the office of the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (formerly, Deputy Executive Secretary for Political Affairs, Defence and Security) was created to initiate and undertake all activities relating to the implementation of the Mechanism. The departments of Political Affairs; Humanitarian Affairs; and Defence and Security as well as the Observation and Monitoring Centre, were placed under the supervision of this Commissioner.

These institutions are aided by three technical organs in their work. Listed under Article 17, these organs are:

- **Defence and Security Commission** - It is constituted by the following representatives from Member States: Chiefs of Defence Staff or equivalent; officers responsible for internal affairs and security; and experts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Depending on the agenda, national heads of Customs; Drug/Narcotic Agencies; Border Guards; and civil protection force are invited to partake in its deliberations. Among others, it is tasked to formulate the mandate of a peace-keeping force; define the terms of reference of the Force; nominate the Force Commander; determine the composition of contingents; and examine reports of the Observation and Monitoring Centre and make recommendations to the Mediation and Security Council.
- **Council of Elders** - The President of the Commission is mandated to compile a list of eminent personalities in the sub-region, subject to the approval of the MSC, who “on behalf of ECOWAS, can use their good offices and experience, to play the role of mediators, conciliators and facilitators.”²⁵ The Council of Elders is composed out of this list and is deployed by either the ECOWAS Commission or The Authority. It reports to the Commission. However, as the dotted lines “A” and “B” in the figure above show, there could be utility in allowing members of the Council to initiate mediation roles and report back to the Commission or the Authority. This could help improve upon the effectiveness of the Council.

²⁴ See “New Commissioner Assume Duty”, 2 February 2007, Abuja. Available at: <http://news.ecowas.int/en/presseshow.php?nb=6&lang=en&annee=2007> (Accessed: 20 March 2007)

²⁵ See Article 20 of The Mechanism

- **ECOWAS Standby Force** - Formally known as ECOMOG, this Force is being transformed so that by 2010, it will comprise of military, police and specialized civilian personnel and in readiness for deployment.

Towards an Early Warning System

Early warning: - Chapter IV of the Mechanism establishes a conflict early warning database that would monitor the security situation in the sub-region. Essentially, an effective early warning system should translate into well-developed database, which can be used to predict, forecast and extrapolate on future conflict scenarios, relying on open source information as opposed to secret state-based intelligence gathering.²⁶ Its development could involve the harmonization of different methodologies, including a clear definition of what constitute the substance of conflict early warning information. In relation to early response, an early warning system should include: data collection; data analysis; assessment for warning or identification of different scenarios; formulation of action proposals; transmission of recommendations; and assessment of early response.²⁷ Known as The System, the ECOWAS early warning system is designed to capture data collected from the field by the Observation and Monitoring Zones. Lately, the coverage of the OMZs have been widened with the hiring of 15 national monitors while another 15 civil society network monitors have been hired by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) to complement the work of the national monitors. WANEP, through a memorandum of understanding signed with ECOWAS, has sponsored one position at the ECOWAS Commission (Liaison Officer) who provides civil society input to ECOWAS peace and security issues. In the above diagram, this show of progress is represented by the dotted lines “C” – showing a direct civil society input to the work of the ECOWAS OMC in Abuja, Nigeria.²⁸

Structurally, the Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC) located at the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja, Nigeria, is the apex of the System. It connects with the field through the four observation and monitoring zones (OMZs) headed by zonal bureau heads. Each zone oversees a certain number of countries. The bureau in Banjul (The Gambia) covers Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal; The Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) bureau, covers Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Niger; The Monrovia (Liberia) bureau covers Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone; while the Cotonou (Benin) bureau covers Benin, Nigeria and Togo.²⁹ Given the challenges of intra-sub-regional flights, there are clear question marks over the placement of Ghana for instance which is grouped with Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone when it could have been made to join either the Ouagadougou or Cotonou bureaus as Ghana is geographically closer to these zone.

The OMC is expected to produce three types of reports; Situation Reports; Incident Reports and Country Profiles. The country profiles are meant to provide the situational context; structural mapping of potential causes of conflicts; and background for analysis – giving insight into the long-term and short-term causes of conflicts as well as existing structures for

²⁶ The definition combines the separate perspectives of a civil society activist and practitioner and an academic highlighting at the essential attributes of a functioning early warning system for conflict prevention. See Ekiyor, Thelma, “Civil society’s perspective on ECOWAS’ early warning system”, Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town, South Africa, Paper presented at a seminar by the Centre for Resolution in collaboration with ECOWAS, and the UN Office for West Africa, 22 May – 2 June 2006 (Unpublished). See also: Cilliers, Jakkie, Towards a Continental Early Warning System for Africa – ISS Paper No. 102, April 2005. Available at: <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/papers/102/Paper102.html> (Accessed: 5 November 2006)

²⁷ Early Warning and Response: Conceptual and Empirical Dilemmas, a publication by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, September 2006, p.11. Available at: http://www.gppac.org/documents/GPPAC/Research/Issue_papers_2006_-_2007/_1_Early_Warning_Early_Response.pdf

²⁸ Please see above diagram.

²⁹ See Chapter IV of the Mechanism

peacebuilding. It informs the situation reports which provide updates as conditions that have security implications change. Incident reports dwell on particular incidents that impact on security.

With these reports, the OMC is expected to assess the political, economic, social, security and environmental indicators in the sub-region on a daily basis. However, as Jakkie Cilliers observes, “it only produces daily situational reports and occasionally, incident reports”.³⁰

III. ECOWAS EARLY WARNING AND EARLY RESPONSE: THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

One proactive development of ECOWAS’ early warning system is the involvement of civil society organizations in its establishment especially when funding for The System remains a major drawback. This has been the result of early agitation by civil society as it was “local communities that felt most acutely the results of deterioration and decay in the quality of public institutions and services that accompanied economic distress in many parts of Africa in the wake of failed development and structural adjustment programmes” of the 1980s.³¹ The AU has conceded its lack of in-depth analyses of conflicts which would have provided it with sound basis for taking decisions on intervention, and has called for training support for civil society organizations in Africa.³² Two CSOs considered in this regard are the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP); and the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF).

West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP): WANEP was conceived in 1998 as a coordinating structure for collaborative peacebuilding in West Africa, with the ultimate aim of building sustainable peace as a foundation for development in the sub-region. Over the years, it has facilitated the creation of a coalition of peacebuilding civil society organizations, spearheading their synergistic relationship with ECOWAS in sub-regional peacebuilding. WANEP operates as a peacebuilding network organization, with a sub-regional headquarters in Accra, Ghana; and 12 national network secretariats in 12 ECOWAS countries. The countries are; Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. It continues to work to cover Mali, Cape Verde and Niger.

The WANEP secretariat based in Accra, provides guidance and support to national networks in strategic planning and process management, and promotes information sharing among its members and associated institutions.³³ Its peace-building activities are in the areas of conflict prevention/early warning and response initiatives, capacity building, network development, conflict intervention, and active non-violence education. The following programs constitute the vehicles through which WANEP undertakes the above-mentioned activities: West Africa Early Warning and Response Network (WARN); Capacity Building and the West Africa Peacebuilding Institute (WAPI); WANEP National Networks; Women in Peacebuilding Network Program; Intervention and Special Initiatives Program (ISIP); Active Non-Violence Education; and Justice Building.

³⁰ . Cilliers, Jakkie, *Towards a Continental Early Warning System for Africa – ISS Paper No. 102*, April 2005. Available at: <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/papers/102/Paper102.html> (Accessed: 5 November 2006)

³¹ Africa Union Commission (CSSDCA/CIDO), *Civil Society-African Union consultative process: towards a new partnership*, Concept Paper for Implementation of the AU-Civil Society Component of the Danish Grant to the Africa Program for Peace, Addis Ababa, August 2005. Available at: <http://www.africaleadership.org/wrkshpdoc/AU-Civil%20Society%20Conference%20-%20Concept%20Paper.doc> (Accessed: 21 February 2007).

³² Ibid.

³³ Aden, Abdi et al. *Evaluation of the WNAEP Capacity Building Project - Final Report*, USAID, December 2004. Available at: http://dec.org/pdf_docs/PDACD993.pdf (Accessed: 30 October 2006)

WANEP collaboration with ECOWAS dates back to 1999 on issues of conflict prevention. However, the adoption of the ECOWAS Mechanism in that same year led to its formal commissioning by ECOWAS to conduct an assessment of ECOWAS' "conflict prevention capacity including its training needs with a view to operationalizing the 1999 Mechanism."³⁴

In specific reference to early warning, however, the involvement of WANEP in sub-regional early warning began in 2000 when it established the WARN to institutionalize a culture of prevention by building the capacities of communities and CSOs in the early detection of nascent violent conflicts that will bring about early warning as a basis for an informed early response.³⁵ This initiative was strengthened by a five-year partnership it forged with the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in 2001, to promote preventive peacebuilding by developing local and regional capacities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. With substantial financial support from USAID, the WANEP – CRS partnership is undergoing a two-phase implementation. Phase I, also known as the *Capacity Building for Conflict Prevention and Good Governance* – popularly referred to as Capacity Building Programme (CBP) - ended in 2004. Under that project, WANEP played the part of a sub-regional organization with technical expertise in conflict early warning and response as well as peacebuilding (CEWR/PB). Its expertise was sought to strengthen the capacity of ECOWAS and CSOs in West Africa to carry out work that reduces conflict and strengthens conflict mediation and peace at local and national levels.³⁶ Under this project, WANEP was to develop the conflict prevention capacity of ECOWAS; identify and strengthen the capacity of peacebuilding civil society organizations in the sub-region; link the two; and foster a better management and prevention of on-going and emerging conflicts in the sub-region. **Specifically, the operationalisation of the ECOWAS Observation and Monitoring System was the prime focus regarding the service that WANEP was to provide for ECOWAS.** Part of the project challenge was the development of a joint early warning database with indicators to monitor security threats in the sub-region.

A memorandum of understanding signed in this context between ECOWAS and WANEP in February 2004 committed WANEP to "provide training, technical assistance and on-site technical support to ensure that appropriate structures are in place to establish and strengthen linkages between CSO networks and ECOWAS, to increase the conflict prevention capacity and effectiveness of ECOWAS; and increase the OMC's capacity to collect and analyze data on conflict issues.

The above-mentioned MoU enjoined the ECOWAS office of the Deputy Executive Secretary for Political Affairs, Defence and Security (now Commissioner of Political Affairs, Peace and Security), in charge of the ECOWAS Mechanism to assist in getting access to relevant documents and key personnel; ensure ECOWAS' political support to the program; and facilitate civil society participation throughout the duration of the program.

Through this project, WANEP, among others, assessed the training needs of ECOWAS and peace-building CSOs in the sub-region; hired a Liaison Officer stationed at the ECOWAS secretariat to facilitate the WANEP – ECOWAS partnership; organized three consultative meetings between ECOWAS and CSO staff to develop action plans; trained some ECOWAS

34 CBP – Capacity building program of WANEP to build a sub-regional conflict prevention framework to achieve lasting peace, WANEP.

Available at: <http://www.wanep.org/programs/cbp.html> (Accessed: 16 January 2007)

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid. p.2.

zonal bureau coordinators in the development of early warning reports; developed a list server of sub-regional CSOs; and organized a sub-regional civil society forum at which key conflict indicators were identified. So far, a coalition of more than 450 peacebuilding CSOs has been formed in the 12 national networks of WANEP. With these range of activities, sub-regional CSOs acting through the national network secretariats of WANEP, were to become the civil society organizations on the ground to support the work of the zonal bureau heads in early warning information gathering.

While ECOWAS displayed a hesitant involvement in the initial stages of CBP I, a process review of the project revealed two major weaknesses worth mentioning: First, there was no provision in the design of the project that linked the activities of the WANEP national network coordinators with the zonal bureau heads of ECOWAS; and there was no clarity regarding how ECOWAS would use the information gathered - something that the review report described as a “key weakness in the design” of the project.

Under phase II of the WANEP – CRS partnership (July 2005 – June 2007), a follow-up project known as the *Enhanced Conflict Prevention Framework for ECOWAS and Civil Society Organizations*, was implemented. This focused on the establishment of community level early warning system in seven countries. ECOWAS is working with WANEP in the development of the ECOWARN database – an online database reporting system designed to capture data collected from the field by both ECOWAS Member-States monitors and WANEP’s network of monitors as a way of monitoring issues in the sub-region that impact on peace and security. Thus in each country, there is a pair of WANEP early warning monitor and ECOWAS Member-State Monitor all trained by WANEP. In essence, the information gathering reach of the ECOWAS early warning system has been widened.

West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF): WACSOF was founded in 2003 as the result of a joint initiative by International Alert, ECOWAS and the Centre for Democracy and Development, to give capacity building support to the ECOWAS conflict management mechanism and devise a framework for institutionalizing an ECOWAS – civil society interface that addresses broad human security issues in the sub-region, taking into account, the provisions of the African Union Constitutive Act of 2002; the NEPAD Mechanism of 2001; and the ECOWAS Mechanism of 1999.³⁷ With funding from the UK Department for International Development (DfID), initial consultative meetings in Abuja, Nigeria, on 30 May – June 1 2003, produced a communiqué that became the action plan that led to the birth of the West African Civil Society Forum - an umbrella organization which brings together sub-regional civil society organizations and other stakeholders to promote a range of activities geared towards the pursuit of democracy, peace and security, the rule of law, human development and integration in the sub-region.

Its membership reflects the emerging relationship between civil society and the state in post-conflict or fragile societies (i.e. a critical friendship). Operating in all 15-member ECOWAS countries, WACSOF is open to individuals representing civil society organizations as well as other stakeholders who are co-opted as associate members or observers.³⁸

³⁷ *Strengthening Human Security Capacities of ECOWAS and West African Civil Society*, International Alert, 30 May – 1 June 2003. Available at http://www.wacosof.org/info/ECOWAS_interim_report.pdf (Accessed: 14 November 2003)

³⁸ *Charter of the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF)*, West African Civil Society Forum, 12 December 2003m Accra. Available at: <http://www.wacosof.org/info/wacosof%20chater.pdf> (Accessed: 9 January 2007)

The operational areas that define the focus of the working committees of WACSOF are: food, agriculture and environment; ECOWAS and CSO relations; gender issues; governance, democracy and human rights; health, HIV/AIDS and education; Media, telecommunications, and information technology; peace and security; policy research and database; regional integration, economic development, trade and investment; and youth. The undertakings in these areas are expected to promote among others, democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and empowerment of the people, good governance, human rights, freedom and social justice and the promotion of ECOWAS and sub-regional integration in all the member countries.³⁹ WACSOF also undertakes election monitoring and observation throughout the sub-region. As a sub-regional CSO whose formation was collaborated by ECOWAS, WACSOF enjoys official recognition by ECOWAS as a regional civil society body.

WACSOF is noted for its Peoples Forum – its highest organ/activity held annually (but lately altered to become a biennial affair) to analyze the human security situation in the sub-region from a civil society perspective and make recommendations to the Meeting of ECOWAS Council of Ministers which serves as the major preparatory event for the ECOWAS Summit of Heads of State and Government. In effect, WACSOF makes an input to ECOWAS through the recommendations of the Peoples Forum to the ECOWAS Council of Ministers Meetings. As a focal activity, WACSOF engages in election observation as it believes, most conflicts in the sub-region are triggered by the way political leaders are elected. Part of its challenge is to ensure improved dialogue between the State and civil society in peacebuilding.

What CSOs can do

As a pointer to the potential contribution of civil society to early response to conflicts in the West Africa sub-region, Mr. Emmanuel Bombande of the WANEP comments that “an underlying assumption in Early Warning and in this context ECOWARN is that Early Response must be generated from Early Warning. Whereas in West Africa, the partnership between CSO and ECOWAS in ECOWARN is working towards this end, the results indicate significant progress in this direction. Civil Society analysis and recommendations on Guinea for example was well appreciated by ECOWAS to the extent that in the recent crisis in Guinea, ECOWAS became an effective mediator while the civilian population mounted the pressure to ensure commitment to change in leadership beginning at least with the Prime Minister. WANEP’s policy briefs were pointed on how to engage in response. In Cote D’Ivoire, WANEP recommendations about direct dialogue have recently resulted in the Ouagadougou accords.”⁴⁰ In similar advocacy measures, WANEP has on countless occasions highlighted precarious situations in conflict areas in member countries of ECOWAS through its periodic policy briefs which form part of its West Africa Early Warning Network programme.⁴¹ As a result of these sterling achievements, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations granted WANEP a Special Consultative Status to the UN.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Mr. Bombande reviewed an earlier version of this paper. The above form part of his comments.

⁴¹ See WANEP policy briefs at: <http://www.wanep.org/publications/pb.html> (accessed: 5 September 2007)

⁴² See WARN Policy brief, Cote d’Ivoire peace process, 31 May 2007. Available at: http://www.wanep.org/image/pb_ci_may07.pdf (Accessed: 5 September 2007)

IV. ECOWAS AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP: AN ASSESSMENT

There is no doubt about the thoroughness of the ECOWAS early warning framework - at least, on paper; it covers all 15 member countries. The involvement of civil society organizations in the operationalization of the System and the strengthening of peacebuilding CSOs to facilitate formal and informal conflict management mechanisms in the sub-region are quite encouraging. However, a number of operational challenges prevail. For instance, in West Africa, warning produces few actionable recommendations. Also a lack of political will resulting from the divergent calculations of the ECOWAS member states tends to impact negatively on intervention even when there is a clear need for one. Against the background of protracted conflicts and after more than six years of the adoption of the ECOWAS Mechanism, there is cause for an examination of the partnership between ECOWAS and civil society organizations regarding the operationalization of the System and the environment within which the emerging institutions of the Mechanism operate.

An article by Adekeye Adebajo has suggested that institutionally, the structures created by the Mechanism have failed to pick up conflict issues and deal with them as a system⁴³. The article points out that the lead actor in many of the ECOWAS interventions has often been the sitting Chairman of the Community.⁴⁴ These efforts are eventually complemented or taken over by other relevant external actors, thus diminishing the capability of the ECOWAS Mechanism.

However, a more recent publication has argued that institutions matter and that ECOWAS provides a “framework of cooperation among its member states in order to accomplish a distinctive set of policy goals, which are expected to be governed by African norms and values.”⁴⁵ Kwesi Aning further argues that the challenges faced by ECOWAS may be explained by the fact that the sub-regional body had historically overlooked the processes and procedures outlined by its own security protocols which have contributed to undermine the capacity of the ECOWAS security regime in confronting the security challenges of the sub-region.

For the purpose of this article, the issue is that the 1999 ECOWAS Mechanism mandates ECOWAS to, among other things; intervene in internal armed conflicts that have security implications for countries in the sub-region.⁴⁶ In that vein, ECOWAS’ conflict management mechanism would prioritize those conflicts that threaten the security of the state involved, the entire sub-region or other Member-States. However, given that these major conflicts begin as minor community level disputes which eventually escalate, and the fact that ECOWAS continues to struggle to contain the conflicts on the sub-region, there ought to be a way of managing community level conflicts with the direct participation of ECOWAS without challenging sovereign authority while at the same time dealing with the challenges of supra-nationality.

In this regard, an ECOWAS – CSO partnership should be informed by the challenges of supra-nationality and the individual political calculations of the constituent member-states. The partnership ought to embrace significant national-level activities that feed into the

⁴³ Adekeye, Adebajo, *ECOMOG: Problems, Progress, and Prospects*, Available at: http://www.ccr.uct.ac.za/fileadmin/template/ccr/Staff_Publications/Adekeye/Microsoft_Word_-_acdes_adebajo_ECOMOG_paper_revised_december_2004.pdf (Accessed: 5 February 2007)

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Aning, Kwesi, “*The transformation of ECOWAS: towards an emerging security regime*”, *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 10. No. 1, 2007

⁴⁶ See Article 25 of the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security, adopted 10 December 1999, ECOWAS. Available at: <http://wwwsec.ecowas.int/sitecdeao/english/ap101299.htm> (Accessed: 20 February)

broader regional conflict management framework. Indeed, given their presence on the ground and transnational characteristics, CSOs with the capacity to perform early warning tasks should be identified and recognized as direct informal agents working on behalf of ECOWAS to intervene in minor intra-state conflicts. They will then report on their successes/failures which would be circulated within the ECOWAS early warning framework of information gathering. In that case, not only will the challenges of supra-nationality be reduced, the profile of future large-scale conflicts will be immediately known before they escalate.

For this to happen, certain key areas of the existing partnership between ECOWAS and CSOs ought to be strengthened.

- **Training CSO staff in early warning:** It is important, in this regard for ECOWAS to team up with its three training centers of excellence in the sub-region,⁴⁷ to train peacebuilding civil society actors whose operations involve early warning. Such training must encompass early response.
- **From a network to a web:** The WANEP structure is based on national networks but as a regional project intended to facilitate responses to regional or transnational crisis, there ought to be the possibility for CSOs within the WANEP networks but in different countries to work collaboratively on transnational security projects such as transnational flow of weapons or cross-border human trafficking. This has been an objective of WANEP though it remains to be realized.

The development of the following sectors of society would also strengthen early warning information gathering and strengthen informal response mechanisms:

- **Strengthening the Media:** Media reports portray a mirror of social trends. Conflicts destroy the media infrastructure in the affected countries which affect the ability of the media to perform its role. For example, the market forces that sustain the media are replaced by a war economy during warfare. Regarding early warning, the structures designed to protect media freedom, such as monitoring and early warning networks are destroyed.⁴⁸ But the media is equally important in national-reconstruction when its activities are well coordinated. In Liberia, for instance, while the media fanned the civil war in that country, the UNDP, among other roles, had to place adverts in the local media to keep them in business as they were seen as important in information dissemination,⁴⁹ is helping to consolidate peace in that country. Additionally, in May 2005, the United Nations Office for West Africa organized a workshop on strengthening media and civil society awareness of conflict prevention and peacebuilding as well as cross-border issues in West Africa. Among others, the workshop sought to build the capacity of the media in West Africa, peacekeeping missions and civil society organizations on issues that have implications for peace and security in the sub-region. This is only an example that is worth emulating in terms of the design of a comprehensive strategy for improving media

⁴⁷ The Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KA IPTC) in Accra, Ghana; National War College of Nigeria; and the Malian School for the Maintenance of Peace. These provide training support to ECOWAS peace-building initiatives

⁴⁸ Edetaen Ojo, *Transitional Processes and Rapid Response Assistance to Media in West Africa*, Media Foundation for West Africa. Available at: <http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/15452/10881755731EdetanOjo.doc/EdetanOjo.doc> (Accessed: 7 December 2006)

⁴⁹ Hunt, Charles, (August 2006) *Public Information as a Mission Critical Component of West African Peace Operations* (KA IPTC Monograph No.5), www.kaiptc.org/upload/general/mono_5_hunt.pdf

output in the sub-region such that the security of journalists as well as the right of the people to accurate and educative information is simultaneously guaranteed.

While there should be a training program for media personnel – sensitizing them on early warning and response issues – there should be a conscious attempt to encourage sub-regional leaders to adhere to the aspects of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance that relates to plural media regime as well as increased training for media practitioners in early warning. Article 37 of the ECOWAS Supplementary protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, for instance, states that each member state shall work towards ensuring pluralism of the information sector and the development of the media. It adds that “Each Member State may give financial assistance to privately owned media” and that the distribution and allocation of such assistance should be done by an independent body freely instituted by the journalists themselves”. However, in many of the countries in the sub-region, journalists with critical views are persecuted for the slightest criticism of the state.

- **Engaging traditional authority:** In terms of the maintenance of law and order, the limited reach of many African States to the remote parts of their respective territories necessitates the resort to traditional practices and custom as a means of dispensing justice and maintaining order by traditional leaders to complement the work of the weak local authorities. It places these leaders at the heart of local level governance though their roles are under-estimated. Experience shows that the burden of responsibility on primary data collectors is great. The most difficult challenge is how to make them convey local practical and cultural knowledge they take for granted in a formal early warning and early response system. Although the growth of modern sovereign statehood on the continent appears to have diminished the prestige and authority of traditional leaders, many of them still wield tremendous social, economic and political influence within member states. In Ghana, chiefs are the primary custodians of land and this underpins the numerous localized disputes in the country. Mobilization for the anti- colonial struggle in the Ivory Coast was spurred on by chiefs who eventually joined the first generation of interest-led conservative political elites whose resistance to reforms in the 1990s partly explains the current state of affairs in that country.⁵⁰ Thus given their immense contribution to governance at the local levels, traditional authority can be a source of peace and it can be destructive as well. Its relevance to sub-regional conflict prevention initiatives is as crucial (if not more) as the States themselves. The cooperation of traditional leaders in the implementation of early warning and response systems is important. While there is the need for closer focus on traditional level governance for early warning purposes, there is an equal need for intensified training for traditional authority regarding their roles in early warning and response.

⁵⁰ Toungara, Jeanne Maddox, Generational Tensions in the *Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire*, African Studies Review, African Studies Association, Atlanta, Vol. 38, No. 2, September 1995 p.11-38. The article discusses Ivorian political development from the standpoint of the entry of various generations since the 1940s, tracking the linkage between generational characteristics and the ongoing crisis in that country.

V. THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE ECOWAS – CSO PARTNERSHIP

Seen as the most potent and recognized inter-state organization in the sub-region, the ECOWAS – CSO partnership reflect the emerging conceptual shift in orientation regarding state-CSO relation in fragile societies. The partnership reinforces the need for an inclusive handling of security at various levels of governance in the emerging era. Community ownership of security interventions can guarantee sustainability. As Thelma Ekiyor suggests, ECOWAS must explore the possibility of building on the existing collaboration with CSOs to address other human security issues such as the promotion of basic rights and fundamental freedoms.⁵¹

CSO involvement in the development of ECOWARN is cost effective as much can be done with less financial input. However, funding is also a challenge to most community-based organizations. But the correlation between security and development in the sub-region suggests that ECOWAS consider funding joint training for CSOs in early response strategies.

Although ECOWAS has invested heavily in establishing an indicator-based early warning database, a corresponding investment in man-power will yield a better impact. The OMZs and the OMC should ensure that persons within the early warning and response continuum have the requisite skills to monitor, analyze, catalogue and prepare reports for policy makers.⁵²

The main weakness of ECOWARN has been its inability to generate early response. The concern that the early warning system is incapable of picking up conflict issues on its own needs to be addressed. CSOs should be well trained to intervene in intra-state conflicts.

VI. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Out of the ECOWAS –CSO collaboration is emerging a potent framework with the capacity to detect and predict security threats in the sub-region. The collaboration is born out of the decision of West African States working together towards sub-regional security. The 1999 Mechanism presents a security blue print for enhancing sub-regional capacity for conflict prevention. While far-reaching steps have been taken towards its implementation, the prevalence of new and on-going conflicts suggests that more work needs to be done. The involvement of civil society in the operationalization of the ECOWAS early warning system is an innovation that reflects global recognition of civil society in building peace and security. So far, the partnership has led to the establishment of an early warning system that has its strength in information gathering. What is lacking is ECOWAS' ability to link early warning to early response. Here again, the major hurdle is how to circumvent the obstacles posed by state sovereignty which presently affects when and how to intervene emerging conflicts. The argument so far has centered on strengthening the capacity of CSOs to tackle intra-state conflicts and report on their success or failures so that information about large-scale conflicts can be known even as they escalate. Within the framework of this proposal, a further suggestion is that early warning-based CSOs must be given early response training. And there should be increased transnational collaboration among CSOs in early warning and response work.

⁵¹ Ekiyor, Thelma, *Civil Society's perspective on ECOWAS' early warning system*, Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town, South Africa, Paper presented at a seminar organized by the Centre for Conflict Resolution in Collaboration with the ECOWAS and the United Nations Office for West Africa in Accra, 22 May – 2 June 2006 (Unpublished)

⁵² Ibid.

This calls for greater role for expert institutions and individuals as well as funding. And critical as security is to the sub-regional development agenda, this is something that ECOWAS should be able to fund from internal sources, preferably through access to the Peace Fund. It also calls for studies into the conceptions of influence and power in the sub-region which will feed into the selection of members of the ECOWAS Council of Elders. This will make for the selection of a transparent Council that commands respect and will be able to do its mediation and facilitation work professionally.

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