



ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in conflict resolution within the West African sub-region. It critically analyses the organization's successes, failures, and the multifaceted challenges it faces in maintaining regional peace and stability. Drawing on secondary data and relevant theoretical perspectives, the paper assesses the effectiveness of ECOWAS interventions in various conflict

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: AN ANALYSIS OF ECOWAS ROLE AND CHALLENGES IN WEST AFRICA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70382/tijssra.v09i6.060>

Introduction

ECOWAS was established in 1975 as a regional organization for the promotion of economic integration and political stability in West Africa sub-region. Since the 1990s, it has added conflict resolution to its mandate and emerged as a major player in regional conflict resolution. ECOWAS has sent peacekeeping missions and mediated in political crises in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Mali and Guinea. The persistence of conflict in West Africa has posed significant threats to political stability, economic development, and human security in the region. Civil wars, coups d'état, insurgencies, and transnational crimes have challenged the efforts of ECOWAS as a regional organisations to maintain peace. Therefore, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) stood up as a central actor in promoting peace and security in the West African sub-region. Originally founded to foster economic integration, ECOWAS has progressively expanded its mandate to include security and



situations and highlights the structural, political, financial, and operational constraints impeding its performance. The study argues that while ECOWAS has demonstrated a commendable commitment to peace, the sustainability and impact of its interventions are often undermined by limited resources, political will, and external influences. Recommendations are provided for strengthening the organization's conflict resolution mechanisms to enhance its legitimacy and operational capacity.

Key words: Sub-region, Political will, ECOMOG, Protocol, ECOWARN, West Africa

conflict management, addressing peace and security challenges in West Africa. The region has been plagued by civil wars, military coups, transnational terrorism, and violent extremism, prompting ECOWAS to undertake active conflict resolution roles. Notable interventions include Liberia (1990s), Sierra Leone (1997-2000), Guinea-Bissau (1998-1999), Mali (2012, 2020), and The Gambia (2017). Adebajo (2002) noted that ECOWAS established in 1975 with the principal aim of promoting Economic integration among West Africa countries. Sesay (2003) emphasizes the organization's pioneering role in regional security, particularly through the establishment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). ECOMOG's interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone are often cited as milestones in African-led peacekeeping. Other scholars note that ECOWAS's legal and institutional frameworks, such as the 1999 Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security, have significantly shaped its peace building agenda, yet challenges of political will and sovereignty remain critical obstacles (Olonisakin, 2011). Despite its active engagement in Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security, ECOWAS continues to face several challenges that hinder its effectiveness. This paper explores these challenges in detail and suggests ways to address them to enhance the region's peace and stability.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Liberal Institutionalism theory as its theoretical framework. It posits that international and regional organisations play a vital role in fostering cooperation, reducing conflict, and promoting collective security. According to Keohane (1984), institutions help mitigate anarchy in the international system by creating rules, norms, and mechanisms for dispute resolution. Within the ECOWAS context, Liberal Institutionalism explains how the organization's frameworks and policies are designed to promote peace through cooperation among member states.



Methodology

The paper is a qualitative research, which relies on secondary data such as academic publications, policy documents, ECOWAS communiqués, and reports from international organisations such as the African Union and the United Nations. Content analysis was used to critically examine the challenges of ECOWAS interventions in conflict resolution.

Meaning of International Organizations

Scholars at different times had defined international organizations from different perspectives. No one definition had been accepted as the only workable definition of international organizations. According to Agidi (2015), no matter the perspective any definition of international organization comes from, there are certain key words that run across all the definitions. Asogwa (1999) defined international organization as multilateral structures or arrangements which are more or less permanent, linking different states, groups or associations based in different territorial units. He noted that international organizations are established by government and non-governmental bodies and they serve as device by which attempts are made to solve either specific or general problems by means of debates, persuasion and occasionally, coercion.

Plano and Otton (1988) defined international organization as a formal arrangement transcending national boundaries that provides for the establishment of an institutional machinery to facilitate cooperation among members in security, economic, social or related fields. It is also seen as any group of individuals from at least two of more different countries that have a formal institutional apparatus that facilitate regular interactions between members across national boundaries. Goldstein and Pevehouse (2009) described international organizations as concrete, tangible structures with specific functions and missions. The above definitions depicts that any organization across boundaries of nations that do not have visible structure cannot be described as international organization. Obi, Nzor, and Nwokoye (2008) defined international organizations as transnational organizations most usually set up by a charter, with a mission and vision transcending one state and geared towards performing specified functions. The above definition emphasized very much on constitution which is paramount for the operations of any organizations.

The above definitions has common visible line that runs across all of them and that is the fact that the international organization must transcend the boundaries of nations and also it must have specified functions to be performed for the benefit of members. We can therefore defined international organizations as assembly of sovereign states or institutions across the globe with the objective to cater for the interest of member states.



Evolution of International Organizations

The evolution of international organizations dates back to the time of monarchy where agreements were signed between ruling kings and queens of the periods. In most cases, there were hardly records to show that discussions took place on issues bordering the states. However, it was obvious that the various agreements between the monarchs were mainly diplomatic in nature. Akinboye and Otttoh (2007) noted that by monarchs entering into diplomatic relations by way of treaties and alliances presumably signaled the first step towards the formation of international organizations are to be found in ancient and medieval history. Palmer and Perkins (2007) remarked that international organization has existed in many parts of the known world including China, India, Mesopotamia and Egypt. According to Mangone (1954) the treaties of the past are the first steps of international organizations. After the monarchical periods, signs of the development of international organizations could be noticed with various congresses held at different places across the globe, such as the Westphalia and the Vienna congress. It is widely accepted that the journey to the formation of international organizations began with the Westphalia congress and agreement. Mangone (1954) noted that no international organization was established by the peace of Westphalia in 1648, but the come together of practically every European state in a diplomatic conference, signaled the opening of a new era in international relations.

Many other international administrative agencies emerged and metamorphosed into various international organizations. This showed that there has been the eagerness and urged to have international organizations. According to Palmer and Perkins (2007) these various international administrative agencies arouse in response to the growing need for cooperation to solve economic and social problems which could not be handled satisfactorily by states alone or without planned coordination

After the formations of the earlier international organizations, the world had witnessed devastating wars. This had signaled the need for the formation of formidable international organizations for the purpose of preventing further war in the world. This led to the formation of the League of Nations after the First World War in 1919. According to Olson (1994) the first international organization with a global political mandate was the League of Nations which was designed to provide an institution through which its members acting collectively might identify threats to peace and take measure such as sanctions and even military action to stop an aggressor. Mangone (1954) stated that the League of Nations evolved with its wide array of institutions from the conferences of the preceding centuries. International organizations could be classified as following,

Universal or Global Organizations, Regional International Organization, Sub-regional International Organization, Multipurpose International Organizations, Uni-



purpose International Organization, Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), and Non-governmental Organizations' (NGOs)

The Roles of International Organizations in Conflict Resolutions

According to Huchhu (2023), international organisations fulfill adverse array of function ranging from diplomacy and conflict resolution to humanitarian aid and sustainable development. They facilitate dialogue between nations, promote peacekeeping efforts, coordinate responses to humanitarian crises and set international norms and standards. He further stressed that international organisations are the linchpin of contemporary global governance, reflecting humanity's collective aspirations for a more peaceful, just and interconnected world. International conflict resolution is concerned with the processed of removing tensions between states or maintaining them at levels consistent with peaceful pursuit by states of their goal.

In resolving conflicts in the world, international organizations, play certain roles.

1. **Improving communication between opposing forces:** Break down of communication between opposing forces usually escalates the conflicts. International organization acts as middleman to improve on the communication between opposing forces. This enables them to understand themselves and helps in reaching an agreement to end the conflicts. ECOWAS played the role of improving the communication between the opposing groups in the Liberia crisis. The AU and UN helped to improve the communication between the rebel groups and the Sudanese government in the Sudanese conflicts.
2. **Facilitating humanitarian co operations:** A major effect of conflict is humanitarian crisis, which results in poor health conditions, huge influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs), lack of food, shelter and clothing, lack of beddings and drugs. Opposing forces usually disrupts the IDPs accusing them of supporting their opponents. They could also disallow humanitarian's bodies from supplying them with relief materials. The international organizations help to ensure that relief materials are protected from the point of supply to delivery to the intended persons. International organizations also help to seek and persuade donors and humanitarian officers to carry out their obligations to the people.
3. International organization ensures promotion of peace to prevent spill-over effects to other areas, when there is a conflict. If not well handed, spillover effect could trigger the conflict to a larger scope even more than the initial coverage. The presence of international organization helps in preventing spillover effects and its attendant dangers.



4. **Serving as early warning mechanism:** The international organization determines what a threat to war could be. When conflicts start moving from a lower level to a higher level and signaling potential full blown conflict, the international organisations through her various organs could detect and issue early warnings that will help to resolve the conflict at its embryo stage. The United Nations through its organ the International Court of Justice (ICT) through its early warning mechanism helped to resolve the conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon over Bakassi Peninsula.
5. **Encouraging the belligerents to uphold the principles of international humanitarian law:** The major source of international law is the charters or constitutions of various international organisations. Every nation that signs and ratifies the various charters is bound by it. The international organisations ensure that nations obey the international law as it affects conflict, crisis, war and humanitarian operations.
6. **Providing essential services to civilians' population:** The international organization ensures that civilian populations are catering for at all time. They ensure that the necessary essential services such helping to build broken bridges, giving them covers and shield, providing transports, ensuring that facilities provided for them are protected. They also help in providing shelters, clothing and food delivery to all that needs it.
7. **Building civil military dialogue:** International organisations ensure that the relationship between civilian population and military in hostility area are cordial. This ensures that the military do not take advantage of their harmlessness to fight them. The international organization talks to the military and reminds them of the rules governing the operations of the military during crisis periods.
8. Identifying issues and trends that may signal escalating tensions of conflict before the outbreaks of hostility.

Challenges Facing ECOWAS in Conflict Resolution

Over the years, ECOWAS has played prominent roles in conflict resolution within the West African sub-region. Her efforts in conflict resolution have yielded notable and appreciable successes in ensuring peace and security within the sub-region. However, myriads of challenges have limited her efforts in one way or the other. Francis (2009) and Bah (2010) highlight operational weaknesses, including inadequate logistics, dependence on external funding, and uneven commitment among member states as challenges to ECOWAS conflict resolution efforts. ECOWAS has also been involved in the role of restoring democratic governance and its sustainability in many member states. Good



examples are her interventions in Sierra Leone and Liberia in the 1990s as well as 2017 intervention in The Gambia to avert a political crisis through diplomatic and military pressure. However, the following challenges and others, continues to inhibit her efforts

1. **Fund and Logistics challenges:** Most of the ECOWAS member states are too poor to the extent that they are not able to meet up their financial obligations to the organizations. Most of the ECOWAS member states face economic challenges, which make them unable to meet up with their financial obligation to the organisations in most times. The operations of the organization especially her conflict resolution efforts are limited by inadequate funding, which hampers logistics of the mission. According to Aning & Bah (2009), ECOMOG's interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone faced significant funding and logistical hurdles, affecting troop welfare, morale and operation.
2. **Belonging to too many other organizations:** Every nation belongs to more than one or two international organizations. As a result of these, their commitments to some issues of international organizations are heavily affected. This is usually in terms of finance, attendance to meeting and execution of policies. ECOWAS states overlap their membership with the African Union and the United Nations. This often times, create coordination challenges. Williams (2016) opined that the Mali crisis showed how fragmented mandates can delay responses and weaken conflict resolution efforts.
3. **External Interference:** There are involvements of external powers and influence from colonial masters like France, the US, and recently Russia in ECOWAS's regional strategic plans which most times run into conflict with ECOWAS mandates, leading to divided authority among member states. Marshall (2021) noted that external powers like France and the US have strategic interests in West Africa and their security operations can overshadow ECOWAS's role, creating parallel efforts that complicate coordination.
4. **Too many internal crises:** Most countries in the West African sub-region such as Nigeria and Ghana are saddled with internal crisis ranging from electoral, ethnic, religious or security issues. This sometimes affects their commitments to the organisations conflict resolutions agenda as they spend too much money and other logistics quelling internal crisis.
5. **Political Interests and Lack of Political Will:** The political interests of ECOWAS member states are inherently divergent in nature. This is laden with conflicting political differences and ideologies which hamper policy decisions on the activities of the organization. Also, ECOWAS's interventions often depend on the political will and Sovereignty concerns of member states. This can hinder consensus and cause delay of responses by member states. Murithi (2017) noted that 2016–2017



Gambian crises were affected by the challenges of the conflict of member states of national interests and the regional goals. According to Bolarinwa & Ezeibe (2022), the reluctance to intervene decisively in Guinea's 2021 coup was as a result of conflicting political and national interest of member states.

6. **Nature and Complexity of Conflicts:** Many conflicts in the West African sub-region are involving non-state actors, transnational insurgents, and jihadist such as the Boko Haram insurgency and ISIS are posing challenges to ECOWAS's peacekeeping efforts. Onuoha (2020) noted that the Boko Haram's activities and Sahelian jihadist networks surpass ECOWAS's traditional peacekeeping models.
7. **Poor Governance Among member states:** Member states' internal governance weaknesses often compromise conflict resolution. Corruption, political exclusion, and elite manipulation of ethnic divisions create environments conducive to conflict. Guinea-Bissau remains a case in point where poor governance derailed ECOWAS mediation efforts. Poor governance engraved with corruption in member states undermines conflict resolution. Vines (2013) stated that Guinea-Bissau's recurring instability illustrates how elite interests frustrate mediation and post-conflict recovery.
8. **Inconsistent Enforcement of Norms:** ECOWAS has legal instruments such as the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) to deal with members who derails the course of democracy in their state. However, enforcements of sanctions on erring states by applying this protocol has consistently remains difficult and has not been properly carried out when is needed to be done. According to Bolarinwa & Ezeibe (2022), the coups in Mali and Guinea reveal limits to ECOWAS's deterrence capacity
9. **Delays in Early Warning Systems:** Early warning systems are very crucial to conflict resolution agenda. In the ECOWAS, it has remained one of their strategies to prevent escalation of conflicts within the sub-region through its organ, the ECOWARN. Their activities would have recorded reasonable success in detecting early signs of conflict, but its efforts is being hindered by delayed of political responses. Bureaucratic hurdles and lack of decisive political action render the system less effective (Adetula, 2015)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Over the years, ECOWAS has played prominent role in conflict resolution within the West African sub-region. Her efforts in conflict resolution have yielded notable and appreciable successes in ensuring peace and security within the sub-region. However, myriads of challenges have limited her efforts in one way or the other. ECOWAS as an African based



sub- regional international organisation, has shown that African-led peace efforts can achieve success. To ensure the sustainability of such efforts, toward enhancing ECOWAS's effectiveness, the following steps could be taken to address the constraints.

1. **Sustainable Funding:** ECOWAS as an organisation should develop a permanent conflict resolution fund to be supported by all the member states and international partners. This will help to strengthen ECOWAS's financial autonomy and ensure equitable burden-sharing among member states. It will also enhance fast decision making and encourage greater political unity among member states.
2. **Strengthen Political Commitment:** Mechanism to promote strict adherence to ECOWAS protocols through diplomatic strategies should be put in place. This will help to ensure accountability, foster stronger political commitment and strengthen political consensus among member states to ensure unified responses to conflicts.
3. **Regularize summit meetings:** ECOWAS meetings should be regularized as a strategy and mechanism to build trust among member states for the purpose of resolving conflicts at its early stage and preventing further escalations of common crisis.
4. **Support Democratic Governance:** Election problems are very prevalent in West Africa and most crises could be traced to it. It is therefore important to invest in capacity-building for member states on rule of law, election monitoring, and anti-corruption. This will help stem down the crises in the sub-region.
5. **Improve Coordination:** West Africa shares common boundary with other sub-regions in Africa such as the Maghreb region (North Africa), Central Africa and East Africa. ECOWAS should improve coordination and expand partnerships with other sub-regions on conflict resolution. The already existing synergy with the AU and UN should be improved by establishing clearer frameworks for joint missions. ECOWAS must frequently collaborate with the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), and other regional bodies. While such collaboration is essential, it often results in mandate overlaps and strategic fragmentation, as seen during the Mali crisis in 2012 (Bah, 2014).
6. **Sanction Enforcement:** One of the major causes of the crises affecting the West Africa sub-region is unconstitutional seizures of powers. Punitive measures through the mechanism of sanctions should be applied consistently to deter unconstitutional takeover of powers within the government of the sub regions.
7. **Modernize Peace Operations:** The world is changing dynamically in every ramification on daily bases. ECOWAS should therefore invest in training personnel's for rapid response capabilities, specialist for asymmetric threats and



warfare, counter-terrorism and enhance the operational capacity of the ECOWAS Standby Force with better logistics, training, and rapid deployment mechanisms.

8. **Activate Early Warning Mechanisms:** There is urgent need to increase investment in early warning systems and preventive diplomacy to address conflicts before they get escalated. The ECOWARN unit should be given maximum support to act on alerts.
9. **Governance Reforms:** Support member states to improve governance, fight corruption, and strengthen democratic institutions.

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**AUGUST, 2025 EDITIONS. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF:
SOCIAL SCIENCE RES. & ANTHROPOLOGY VOL. 9**

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