ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS) AND PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES IN MALI AND BURKINA FASO

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in peacebuilding efforts in Mali and Burkina Faso. Through a comprehensive analysis, it examines ECOWAS's effectiveness in peacebuilding, specific outcomes in Mali and Burkina Faso, challenges faced, and cooperation with other stakeholders. Findings reveal ECOWAS's significant contributions to conflict mediation, peacekeeping, and humanitarian aid in Mali, leading to security stabilization and dialogue facilitation. Similarly, in Burkina Faso, ECOWAS's focus on capacity building and conflict prevention initiatives positively impacted stability. Challenges include internal dissent, external pressures, and funding shortages. However, ECOWAS demonstrates a commitment to regional cooperation and engagement with stakeholders. Recommendations to enhance ECOWAS's peacebuilding effectiveness include prioritizing internal cohesion, proactive diplomacy, resource mobilization, and conflict prevention strategies. Implementation of these recommendations can strengthen ECOWAS's role in promoting sustainable peace and stability in West Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is an institution whose emergence was informed primarily by economic considerations. Its original mandate, thus, pertained to addressing economic development and "the narrow security issues of economic integration as the basis for self-reliance" (Ben-zur, Toole 2020). Nevertheless, the organization's mandate would undergo significant changes because of the intersection of various political dynamics, which necessitated linking economic integration with security.

This increased understanding informed a sequence of moves that ultimately culminated in dramatic changes, famously the mainstreaming of issues of human rights, security, and peace into the strategy for survival while preserving the organization's initial mandate of promoting and consolidating "co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union" (ECOWAS Revised Treaty, 1993, Article 5). A direct consequence of this modification was the introduction of Article 58, which legitimized regional security and made it an obligation for constituent states to collaboratively work to

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preserve and consolidate relationships necessary for maintaining regional security, stability, and peace (Malu, 2003).   More so, Owa and Owa (2020) states that regional integration in Africa has been under aegis of numerous perspectives and it has been inspired by a lot of indices, beyond the frontiers of Africa. He further stated that delineating some conceptual perspectives categorization has to do with governance, regional integration and development and democratic nuances for regional integration. According to Owa, Chukwudi, Elumelu and Apeloko (2024), amidst the prevailing landscape of instability, the southern and western regions of Africa have suffered from conflicts and violence, thereby experiencing an unfair proportion of the turmoil.

ECOWAS's expansion of core functions to encompass conflict management has placed it at the forefront of resolving conflicts. This idea is underscored in clear terms by the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF). For over two decades, the organization has consistently battled an ever-expanding complex of conflicts, riddling the West African sub-region, making it one of the "most conflict-ridden regions" (Codesria, 2011). Within the past two decades, the organization has continued intervening in Mali and Burkina Faso. These two countries have witnessed disturbing acts of violence that have overwhelmed the capacity of their various national governments. Burkina Faso and Mali are overshadowed by serial cases of insecurity, forced migration, and population displacements with the specific demonstration of their peculiarity as a given country in the Sahel region. The increasing threats of attacks from violent armed groups such as the Ansarul Islam, the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM), and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) have affected various aspects of Burkina Faso society. The violent armed group's attacks in Burkina Faso from 2015 to 2019 show that attacks have steadily increased in frequency, lethality, and sophistication (Ben-Zur and Toole, 2020). The attacks affect civilians, governance symbols, the defence and security forces, local leaders, and political figures (Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, 2021). The activities of these armed groups are also exacerbating the increasing tensions between farmers and herders, resulting, since 2019, in the

displacement of more than 1.5 million people as at December 2021 (ACAPS, 2021). From 2014 to 2018, the serial cases of terrorist infiltration and military coups d'état have resulted in undermining human security perspectives such as food insecurity, community-level tensions, population displacement, exposing the ill-equipped and security forces failures, poor access to state security service, weapons proliferation, and election volatility. The military coup d'état on 24 January that ousted President Christian Kabore by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba saw the removal of Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba by Capt. Ibrahim Traore on 30 September 2022. These security lapses of poor governance and the influx of the military in politics deepened the rollback of democracy in Burkina Faso. Increasing violence and attacks by jihadist groups in Burkina Faso against the civilian populations and security forces have enhanced forced migration, resulting in record-breaking numbers of people forced to flee inside the country and across international borders (United Nations High Commission of Refugees, 2021).

ECOWAS AND PEACEBUILDING

ECOWAS's involvement in peacebuilding dates back to the early 1990s, with its interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone gaining significant attention from scholars. According to Acharya (2002), ECOWAS's peacekeeping operations in Liberia during the 1990s were crucial in ending the civil war and facilitating the transition to democratic governance. Also, Akinboye (1999); Owa, Odey, Nabiebu, Alobo, Ugbe, Ipuole and Owa (2023) held that a leading state in the sub-region, Nigeria coordinated the establishment of ECOWAS monitoring group in 1990 for the purpose of peacekeeping in West Africa. Similarly, Ibhawoh (2018) argue that ECOWAS's intervention in Sierra Leone helped restore stability and paved the way for post-conflict reconstruction. Scholars have debated the effectiveness of ECOWAS's peacekeeping operations, particularly in terms of achieving sustainable peace and stability. Ouedraogo (2017) contends that while ECOWAS interventions have been successful in ending immediate conflicts, they have often failed to address underlying socio-economic and political grievances, leading to a recurrence of violence in some cases.

Conversely, Aning and Appiah (2019) highlights ECOWAS's role in facilitating peace agreements and building institutional capacity in conflict affected countries, arguing that its interventions have contributed to long-term peacebuilding efforts.

Several challenges have hindered ECOWAS's peacebuilding efforts, as identified by scholars. Mathieu (2016) point to issues such as limited resources, logistical constraints, and coordination challenges among ECOWAS member states, which have impeded the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. Moreover, Autesserre (2014) highlights the influence of external actors and regional power dynamics on ECOWAS interventions, noting the complexities of navigating political interests and ensuring impartiality in conflict resolution processes.

Scholars offer various recommendations to enhance ECOWAS's effectiveness in peacebuilding. Afolabi (2020) emphasizes the need for increased regional cooperation and institutional strengthening within ECOWAS to address emerging security threats and promote sustainable peace. Nwokeji (2020) identifies institutional capacity constraints, funding shortages, and the lack of coordination among member states as key challenges. Moreover, political interference and divergent national interests often impede the effectiveness of ECOWAS interventions, as noted by Aning and Embrey (2018). Assessing the impact of ECOWAS peacebuilding efforts remains a complex task. Okumu (2016) emphasizes the importance of context-specific analysis in evaluating ECOWAS interventions, highlighting instances where peace agreements brokered by ECOWAS have led to sustainable peace and those where challenges persist due to underlying structural issues. In conclusion, ECOWAS's peacebuilding efforts significantly contribute to West Africa's regional stability. While the organization has successfully mediated conflicts and promoted peace, challenges such as institutional capacity, funding, and political dynamics continue to pose obstacles.

ECOWAS AND PEACEBUILDING IN MALI AND BURKINA FASO

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has played a significant role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts within the West African region. Mali and Burkina Faso, two member states of ECOWAS, have experienced various forms of political instability and conflict in recent years. In the case of Mali, ECOWAS launched a military intervention in 2013 known as the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) to address the security crisis sparked by the Tuareg rebellion and subsequent Islamist insurgency. According to Lyall and Hultman (2019), AFISMA's primary mandate was to assist the Malian government in restoring territorial integrity and combating Islamist extremist groups in the northern region. The authors argue that AFISMA's mandate evolved to include broader objectives, such as promoting political stability and reconciliation in Mali. Furthermore, Bah, (2004) Adejumo, Owa and Ojie (2021) posit that ECOWAS under the leadership of Mali undertaken successful peace negations with Tuareg rebels and adopted a moratorium on importation, exportation and the manufacture of small arms and light weapons in West Africa. Also, Bah, (2004) Adejumo, Owa and Ojie (2021) assert that ECOWAS Commission also launched a small arms programme based in Bamako, Mali, as a capacity-building programme for member-states and civil society organizations to deal with the problem of small arms proliferation.

Scholars have identified various operational challenges and constraints faced by AFISMA during its deployment in Mali. A study by Schulte et al. (2017) highlights logistical constraints, inadequate troop levels, and coordination challenges among contributing countries as key factors hampered AFISMA's effectiveness. Additionally, the authors note the complexity of the security environment in Mali, including the presence of multiple armed groups and the vastness of the territory, as significant challenges for AFISMA's operations. The effectiveness and impact of AFISMA have been debated among scholars and policymakers. In a comprehensive assessment, Duiker (2018) argues that while AFISMA succeeded in halting the advance of Islamist extremist groups and restoring territorial control to the Malian government, its impact on long-term security and stability in Mali remains uncertain. The author emphasizes the need for sustained international support and political solutions to address the root causes of conflict in Mali. AFISMA's success and effectiveness were contingent upon regional and international cooperation.

A study by De Carvalho (2016) examines the role of regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) in facilitating the deployment of AFISMA and coordinating international support for the mission. The author underscores the importance of multilateral cooperation in addressing complex security challenges in Africa.

Scholarly works on AFISMA also offer insights into lessons learned and future implications for peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts in Africa. For instance, Diouf (2019) highlights the importance of comprehensive political strategies, including dialogue and reconciliation processes, alongside military interventions like AFISMA to achieve sustainable peace in conflict-affected countries like Mali.

Similarly, in Burkina Faso, ECOWAS intervened diplomatically to facilitate the peaceful transition of power following the popular uprising that led to the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré in 2014. Several studies have analyzed the outcomes of ECOWAS interventions in Mali. One study by Smith (2018) examines the role of ECOWAS in mediating the conflict between the Malian government and various rebel groups. The author argues that while ECOWAS-led peace negotiations have resulted in temporary ceasefires, underlying grievances remain unresolved, leading to a cycle of violence. In contrast, a report by the International Crisis Group (2019) highlights the positive impact of ECOWAS military intervention in weakening Islamist extremist groups and restoring territorial integrity in northern Mali. The literature on ECOWAS interventions in Burkina Faso is relatively sparse compared to Mali. However, a study by Diallo et al. (2020) examines ECOWAS' role in facilitating the democratic transition in Burkina Faso following the ousting of President Compaoré. The authors argue that ECOWAS' diplomatic engagement and pressure on the transitional government contributed to the successful organization of free and fair elections, ultimately leading to the restoration of democratic governance in Burkina Faso.

Despite ECOWAS' efforts, challenges and limitations persist in Mali and Burkina Faso. These include the proliferation of arms and illicit trafficking across porous borders, weak state institutions, and governance deficits. Additionally, the persistence of underlying socio-economic grievances and ethno-political tensions complicates efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability in the region. ECOWAS interventions in Mali and Burkina Faso have yielded mixed outcomes. While ECOWAS has significantly addressed immediate security threats and facilitated political transitions, underlying structural challenges continue to hinder long-term stability and development in both countries. Future research should focus on identifying strategies to address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of ECOWAS interventions in promoting peace and security in the West African region.

REGIONAL COOPERATION AND COORDINATION IN PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS

Regional cooperation and coordination are vital elements in fostering effective peacebuilding efforts, particularly in conflict-prone regions like West Africa. This literature review aims to assess the extent of collaboration between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other key actors, including international organizations, neighboring countries, and local stakeholders, in peacebuilding endeavors. Furthermore, it analyzes the impact of this collaboration on the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives, drawing insights from case studies in Mali and Burkina Faso. ECOWAS has established partnerships with various international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and European Union (EU) to enhance peacebuilding efforts. For instance, ECOWAS and the AU jointly deployed the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) in response to the crisis in Mali, demonstrating collaborative efforts in conflict resolution (UN News, 2013).

Neighboring countries within the ECOWAS region contribute troops and resources to peacekeeping missions, illustrating regional cooperation in peacebuilding. For example, Nigeria's involvement in peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone underscores the importance of regional solidarity in conflict resolution (Agbu, 2017).

Involving local stakeholders, including civil society organizations, community leaders, and religious institutions, is crucial for sustainable peacebuilding. ECOWAS has recognized the significance of engaging local actors in conflict resolution and reconciliation processes, as evidenced by its support for community-driven peace initiatives (ECOWAS Commission, 2018). Collaborative efforts between ECOWAS and its partners have contributed to the stabilization of conflict-affected regions and the restoration of peace in West Africa. The successful mediation of political crises in Liberia and Sierra Leone with ECOWAS involvement highlights the effectiveness of regional cooperation in achieving sustainable peace (Hänggi & Aning, 2015). Ugwuerua, Owa, Owa and Okongo (2020) held that despite of the efforts, it would undermine the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) existing level of integration, especially the recently Common External Tariff (CET).

Despite notable achievements, challenges persist in realizing the full potential of regional cooperation in peacebuilding. Issues such as limited resources, divergent interests among stakeholders, and the complexity of conflicts hinder the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives. For instance, the protracted crisis in Mali underscores the need for sustained regional engagement and comprehensive strategies to address underlying grievances (Hänggi & Aning, 2015). The conflict in Mali presents a complex security and governance challenge, requiring multifaceted approaches to peacebuilding. While ECOWAS, alongside international partners, has supported peacekeeping missions and mediation efforts, the persistence of violence and instability underscores the need for long-term engagement and community-based approaches to conflict resolution (Ba & Johnson, 2020). Burkina Faso has faced escalating security threats from extremist groups, exacerbating internal displacement and humanitarian crises. ECOWAS, in collaboration with regional and international partners, has provided support for security sector reform and conflict prevention initiatives.

However, the evolving nature of the conflict highlights the importance of adaptive strategies and sustained regional cooperation in addressing emerging security challenges (Chofor, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The Liberal Institutionalism Theory was adopted. It posits that international institutions play a crucial role in shaping state behavior and promoting cooperation among states (Keohane & Martin, 1995). Rooted in liberal thought, liberal institutionalism emerged in the aftermath of World War II as scholars sought to understand and address the causes of war and mechanisms for peace (Moravcsik, 1997). Unlike its realist counterpart, which emphasizes the primacy of state power and self-interest in international relations, liberal institutionalism emphasizes the significance of international institutions, such as international organizations, treaties, and norms, in shaping state behavior. One of the central arguments of liberal institutionalism is that international institutions facilitate cooperation among states by providing a forum for negotiation, monitoring compliance with agreements, and resolving disputes peacefully (Abbott et al., 2000). Moreover, liberal institutionalists argue that international institutions contribute to the development of shared norms and values that foster cooperation and mutual understanding among states (Checkel, 2001). Through regular interactions and exchanges, states internalize common principles of behavior, such as respect for human rights, democratic governance, and the rule of law, which contribute to a more stable and cooperative international order. Despite its contributions to understanding international relations, liberal institutionalism has faced several criticisms. Critics argue that liberal institutionalism tends to overlook power disparities among states and the role of power politics in shaping international outcomes (Keohane & Martin, 1995). Moreover, skeptics contend that the interests of powerful states often constrain international institutions and may not always promote cooperation or address global challenges effectively (Moravcsik, 1997).

Furthermore, some critics question the ability of international institutions to adapt to changing geopolitical realities and address emerging threats, such as terrorism, climate change, and pandemics (Abbott et al., 2000). They argue that the proliferation of international institutions may lead to overlapping mandates, inefficiencies, and bureaucratic inertia, undermining their effectiveness in addressing complex global issues.

Despite these criticisms, liberal institutionalism remains relevant in contemporary international relations. In an increasingly interconnected world, characterized by globalization, interdependence, and transnational challenges, international institutions continue to play a vital role in facilitating cooperation, managing conflicts, and promoting global governance (Checkel, 2001). From the Liberal Institutional perspective, the application of the theory of liberal institutionalism to explain the engagements of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in peacebuilding efforts in Mali and Burkina Faso involves analyzing how this regional institution promotes cooperation among its member states to address security challenges and foster stability in the region.

OBSTACLES FACED BY ECOWAS IN PEACEBUILDING IN MALI AND BURKINA FASO.

ECOWAS was prompt to condemn the coup in Mali and take actions, primarily sanctions, to restore constitutional order even though it decided early to prepare a military intervention (BBC News, 2022). The political actors were willing and acted to promote the quick resolution of the conflict, using diplomatic and economic means first, resorting to the threat of using force, and finally committing their forces (Cilliers, 2014). However, there were dissenting voices in the way of solving the crisis that played against the unity of effort. The first was internal, coming from Burkina Faso, whose leader was more prone to a dialog than to an intervention, and initiated contact with rebel groups that were not well received by Bamako (Kibazo, 2019). The second was external, coming from Algeria, which feared the consequences of an intervention in Mali and tried to delay the decision to launch an intervention (Cilliers, 2014).

As soon as the French intervened, their fears were confirmed with the Amenas hostage crisis in Algeria, where terrorist groups affiliated with insurgents in Mali retaliated by taking hostages at the Algerian gas facility, which resulted in 39 hostages being killed (Eybers & Bicaba, 2015). The Mali government also played a role under the influence of their military, which delayed ECOWAS actions (Cilliers, 2014). The opposition to the presence of foreign troops in Mali was not a motive to delay the deployment planning (Cilliers, 2014). However, it weakened the responsiveness that ECOWAS could have given to the crisis by

being able to deploy earlier (Cilliers, 2014). Once the resolution 2085, authorizing the AFISMA was adopted in December 2012, ECOWAS planned for a nine-month window for the deployment of the troops (United Nations Security Council, 2012). The situation worsened in January, and Mali had to call France to intervene because ECOWAS was not ready (Cilliers, 2014). However, by the 28th of January 2013, 1,900 troops, among which 1,350 were from ECOWAS, were already deployed in Mali (Cilliers, 2014).   UN resolution 2085, mentioned earlier, authorized the deployment of AFISMA to contribute to "the rebuilding of the capacity of the Malian Defense and Security Forces, and to support the Malian authorities in recovering the areas in the north of its territory under the control of terrorist, extremist, and armed groups and in reducing the threat posed by terrorist organizations" (United Nations Security Council, 2012). The mandate later emphasized the need to provide security and humanitarian assistance to the civilian population without undermining the legitimacy of the Malian authorities (Cilliers, 2014). The Malian authorities wanted their military to play an important role in the liberation of the North, which was understandable. However, as the mandate suggested, their capacities needed to be rebuilt before they could cope with the insurgent threat (Cilliers, 2014).

ECOWAS troops deployed had undergone different training in the previous years under the ESF's operationalization concept (Simons, 2016). However, the funding of the authorized mission was not done under an UN-funded logistic package, which would have guaranteed suitable logistic support. It relied on a voluntary support fund by international donors, meaning member states of ECOWAS deployed on a self-sustainment basis first, while a funding process would be further developed (Cilliers, 2014).

The funding of the mission was a key impediment to its success. ECOWAS, on its own, could not accomplish its mandate without proper funding. The mandate was clear but hardly achievable by the ECOWAS troops, given the funding problem.

The AU Assembly agreed to provide US$50 million for the swift deployment of the AFISMA, and a conference of donors, organized on January 29, 2013, gathered enough promises to cover the one-year mandate, while troops already deployed started to face difficulties on the ground.

The clear and feasible mandate was not met in this crisis, as the Mali forces were far from being able to participate in the offensive operations, and the AFISMA founding was not sufficient. The report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on AFISMA also highlighted that at the donor conference on January 29, 2013, pledges of up to US$455 million were recorded, covering the need for the mission's first six months. With the member states having to take the three first months at their expense, the mission could run for the first nine months if the pledges were honored.

By the end of July, 2013, only a third of the US$455 million pledged to th UN-trust, which was established to support the operation with 76 contributions from states, had been received. There were serious concerns about the mission's future and the lack of financial resources of the TCC, ECOWAS, and the AU. The inability of the regional and continental organizations to finance the AFISMA was suspected to be the impetus behind the implementation of MINUSMA to overtake AFISMA and solve the funding problem (Al Jazeera, 2021). Despite the modest contributions given by some member states and their efforts to support their troops, ECOWAS did not have the financial resources required for the logistic support for AFISMA. The AU pledged US$50 million for the swift deployment of the force, but in the long run, it did not have the capabilities to support it financially. Beyond that, ECOWAS also engaged in peacebuilding subsequently in Mali through various diplomatic engagements. At the diplomatic level, the ECOWAS Authority appointed Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, former Nigerian President, as Mediator to Mali. He engaged with the protesters under the aegis of M5-RFP, which insisted on the departure of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. However, the inability of the ECOWAS mediation to strike a compromise between the Keita government and the M5-RFP led to the coup d'état of 18 August 2020. However, through ECOWAS' mediation efforts, an 18-month transitional government was set up with a civilian prime minister and the transitional authorities agreed to an electoral calendar to restore democracy in January 2022. A coup within a coup occurred in May 2021, which impacted the timeframe for elections. The transitional authority presented a timetable to hold elections within a period of between six months and five years, which ECOWAS found 'unacceptable', and the regional body immediately imposed economic and financial sanctions on Mali, including the closure of land and air borders. Economic Community of West African States' sanctions against Mali suffered from the divisive politics where some regional countries expressed reservations about ECOWAS's sanctions and enhanced cooperation with Malian de facto authorities. Regarding regional cooperation and coordination, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has worked with various actors to respond to the Mali and Burkina Faso crises. On 23 April 2018, the President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, Mr. Jean-Claude Brou, and the United Nations (UN) Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the ECOWAS Commission and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office on a partnership in peacebuilding. A signing ceremony took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York, on the margins of the High-Level Meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace convened by the President of the General Assembly. The purpose of the MoU was to provide a framework and strengthen cooperation between the ECOWAS Commission and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office to support peacebuilding and sustain peace in West Africa. The MoU will further strengthen the coordination of efforts between the two entities and contribute to a more predictable and strategic partnership in the areas of conflict prevention, political dialogue, national reconciliation, democratic governance, and human rights (United Nations, 2018). Such partnership was crucial to rectify historical instances of lack of coordination between ECOWAS and the United Nations. The ECOMOG missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone occurred without prior UN authorization due to internal divisions within ECOWAS and the UN.

The UN Security Council held several informal consultations, some in response to ECOWAS' requests for assistance, but took no immediate action. After difficult negotiations, the UN sent military observer missions to Liberia in 1993 (UNOMIL) and Sierra Leone in 1998 (UNOMSIL) to help ECOMOG implement its mandates under the respective peace agreements. While the UN retained UNOMIL, resource constraints forced the partial withdrawal of ECOMOG troops from Sierra Leone in 2000.

The UN responded by transforming UNOMSIL into a peacekeeping mission, UNAMSIL. Difficulties that confronted the UN-ECOWAS cooperation in Liberia and Sierra Leone included lack of clear mandates, disparities in logistics and remuneration, and divergent approaches to issues such as sanctions, and elections. As such, even though there were some useful consultations between the UN Security Council and ECOWAS, the above factors created disconnect between the political decisions that were made and their implementation in the field. ECOWAS withdrew its troops from Guinea Bissau after a few months due to a lack of financial and logistical support from the UN and the international community. After questionable elections in 1999, the UN established a Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS). The response of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to the various conflicts in Mali has been designed as part of a series of broader initiatives. The intervention of ECOWAS in the Malian conflict of 2012 was the culmination of a multilateral effort.

Incontrovertibly, the regional bloc maintained a key relationship with the African Union. Diplomatic and political efforts in the Malian crisis began in early 2012 through the various summits of ECOWAS and meetings of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU. Already in December 2011, in anticipation of potential regional ramifications of the Libyan crisis, the AU Commission (AUC) and the UN Secretariat jointly undertook a multidisciplinary fact-finding mission in the Sahel region from December 7 to 23. On March 14-15, 2012, the two institutions organized a joint experts meeting in Addis Ababa that analyzed the report of this fact-finding mission and developed a series of recommendations on how best the AU and the UN, work together with countries of the region and other international partners, could assist in addressing the numerous challenges identified in the Sahel (Cilliers, 2014).

In the context of growing concern at the turn of events in northern Mali, the PSC held a ministerial level meeting in Bamako, on March 20, 2013, to examine and endorse the conclusions of this joint AU-UN experts meeting.

With the military coup, ECOWAS and the AU not only condemned the unconstitutional change of government, particularly occurring as it did at a time when they were striving to address the armed rebellion in the north, they also made concerted efforts towards the restoration of constitutional order in the country. ECOWAS had appointed President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso as its official mediator in the Malian crisis.

The latter negotiated a Framework Agreement for restoring the constitutional order, which was signed on April 6, 2012, with the military junta. In accordance with the Malian Constitution, this Agreement saw the transfer of power from the head of the military junta, Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, to the Speaker of Parliament, Dioncounda Traoré. In June 2012, a Support and Follow-up Group on the Situation in Mali (SFG) was established under the AU, ECOWAS, and the UN co-chairmanship. The SFG held its inaugural meeting in Abidjan on June 7, 2012. This meeting, and subsequent one, ensured a more inclusive and coherent transitional government in Mali, which was important for the success of other aspects of the international community's engagement in the country. The AU and ECOWAS also decided to engage in dialogue with the armed groups while not excluding the military option in support of the diplomatic one, or in case the latter failed. After these groups had indicated their readiness to negotiate under the mediation of ECOWAS, the mediator urged them to articulate their demands for dialogue with the Malian authorities clearly. More formal talks were held in December 2012, which were interrupted by the aforementioned attempt by armed groups to move southwards in early January 2013, and the subsequent international military intervention.

Meanwhile, the SFG held five meetings between June 2012 and November 2013. ECOWAS also held several summits, including emergencies, during the same period. The AU and ECOWAS had a two-fold approach to the situation in Mali: giving priority to diplomatic and political efforts while preparing for an eventual military intervention should the first option fail. This explained the preparations for a military deployment in parallel to diplomatic efforts. First, ECOWAS took steps toward deploying a stabilization force in Mali (MICEMA) in early 2012. With the active involvement of the AU, UN, and other partners, several planning meetings were convened for this. As time passed, however, it was decided to broaden the scope of the mission from a regional level to a continental one. Chad and other countries outside of West Africa had expressed readiness to contribute, and it was observed that the involvement of countries such

as Mauritania and Algeria, which are also outside of the ECOWAS space, was crucial for the success of efforts in Mali. Thus, by the relevant decisions of ECOWAS, the PSC, and UN Security Council Resolution 2085 of December 20, 2012, it was decided to deploy AFISMA.

The Mission was mandated, among other things, to support Mali in recovering its territories under the control of terrorist and armed groups, maintain security, and consolidate state authority throughout the country. It was also tasked with supporting the Malian authorities in creating a secure environment for the civilian-led delivery of humanitarian assistance and the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees. On 25 April 2013, the Security Council replaced AFISMA with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). MINUSMA was given a robust mandate with the right to use 'all necessary means' to perform its tasks, including protecting civilian centers and taking proactive steps to 'prevent the return of armed elements to those regions' (Cilliers, 2014).

FINDINGS

Data was collected from secondary sources and analyzed in a descriptive method. It was observed that the effectiveness of ECOWAS interventions in Mali and Burkina Faso correlates positively with improved levels of peace and stability in the respective regions. ECOWAS, as a regional organization, has undertaken various interventions in response to the intricate security challenges faced by both countries. These interventions encompass diplomatic efforts, peacekeeping missions, capacity building initiatives, and humanitarian aid provisions. In Mali, ECOWAS deployed the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), later transitioned into the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), demonstrating a commitment to sustaining peace and stability. Similarly, in Burkina Faso, ECOWAS has been actively supporting efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism while providing crucial humanitarian aid. The effectiveness of ECOWAS interventions can be gauged through metrics such as the success of mediation efforts, impact of peacekeeping missions, level of cooperation among member states, and efficacy of humanitarian aid delivery. These indicators suggest that ECOWAS interventions have played a pivotal role in improving peace and stability in

Mali and Burkina Faso, despite persistent challenges.

From the information gathered, it is suggestive from further observation that political, economic, and social challenges in Mali and Burkina Faso negatively influence the overall success of ECOWAS peacebuilding efforts. The presence of armed insurgencies, ethnic and religious divisions, weak state institutions, resource constraints, and limited coordination among member states collectively hinder ECOWAS' ability to foster sustainable peace and stability in the region. These challenges create an unstable environment for dialogue and negotiation, complicate peacebuilding efforts due to fragmented armed groups, and exacerbate tensions, making reconciliation difficult. Weak governance structures and corruption further impede efforts to establish effective conflict resolution mechanisms, while funding shortages and logistical challenges hamper operational effectiveness.

Also, the extent of regional cooperation and coordination between ECOWAS, neighboring countries, and international organizations positively influences the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives in Mali and Burkina Faso. Collaborative efforts enhance access to resources, build consensus, leverage regional influence, and promote inclusivity in peacebuilding processes. Qualitative analysis supports this hypothesis, highlighting collaborative initiatives between ECOWAS, the UN, neighboring countries, and local stakeholders. However, further quantitative analysis and empirical data are necessary to strengthen this assessment and provide a more robust understanding of the relationship between regional cooperation and peacebuilding outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis has undertaken a comprehensive examination of ECOWAS's peacebuilding efforts in Mali and Burkina Faso, shedding light on both the organization's commendable successes and the formidable challenges it encountered in its pursuit of fostering stability and peace in West Africa. The findings reveal that ECOWAS has played a pivotal role in mediating conflicts, deploying peacekeeping missions, and providing humanitarian aid, particularly in Mali, where its efforts significantly contributed to stabilizing the security situation and fostering dialogue among conflicting parties.

Similarly, in Burkina Faso, the organization's focus on capacity building and conflict prevention initiatives has positively impacted security challenges and promoted stability.

However, amidst these accomplishments, it is crucial to acknowledge the persistent challenges that have tested the resilience of ECOWAS's peacebuilding endeavors. Internal dissent among member states, particularly regarding the preference for dialogue over military intervention, has hindered the organization's ability to make prompt and unified decisions. External pressures from neighboring countries, coupled with funding shortages, have further complicated the implementation of peacebuilding measures, limiting the operational effectiveness of peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aid efforts.

Despite these challenges, ECOWAS has demonstrated a commitment to regional cooperation and coordination by engaging with international organizations, neighboring countries, and local stakeholders. Collaborative efforts with the UN, regional cooperation through initiatives such as the Support and Follow-up Group for Mali, and inclusive engagement with local stakeholders underscore the organization's dedication to bolstering peacebuilding initiatives in the region. To enhance its effectiveness and overcome the identified challenges, ECOWAS must consider a multifaceted approach. Strengthening internal cohesion among member states, engaging in proactive diplomacy to address external pressures, mobilizing adequate funding and resources, fostering enhanced collaboration with international organizations and local stakeholders, and prioritizing conflict prevention strategies are essential steps for ECOWAS to consolidate its role as a key factor in promoting sustainable peace and stability in West Africa. While ECOWAS has made significant strides in its peacebuilding efforts, this thesis underscores the imperative for concerted efforts to address the remaining challenges. By implementing the recommended strategies, ECOWAS can not only navigate the complexities of regional dynamics more effectively but also reinforce its position as a crucial force for positive change in the pursuit of lasting peace in West Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis conducted in this thesis regarding ECOWAS's peacebuilding efforts in Mali and Burkina Faso, the following recommendations are proposed.

1.   ECOWAS should prioritize efforts to enhance internal cohesion among member states through continuous dialogue, consensus-building mechanisms, and shared strategic planning sessions.

2.   Establishing regular fora or summits dedicated to discussing peacebuilding strategies and addressing internal differences can help foster a unified approach towards regional stability.

3.   ECOWAS needs to engage in proactive diplomacy with neighboring countries and other external stakeholders to address external pressures that hinder its peacebuilding efforts.

4.   Strengthening diplomatic ties with neighboring countries and regional actors.

5.   ECOWAS should prioritize mobilizing adequate funding and resources to support its peacebuilding initiatives through increased contributions from member states.

6.   ECOWAS should continue strengthening collaboration with international organizations.

7.   Enhancing engagement with local stakeholders, including civil society organizations, community leaders, and grassroots movements, is essential for ensuring the inclusivity and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.

8.   ECOWAS should prioritize capacity building and the empowerment of local actors to participate actively in peacebuilding processes.

9.   ECOWAS should prioritize conflict prevention strategies as a key component of its peacebuilding efforts.

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