THE CHALLENGES OF BUILDING REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE: AN APPRAISAL OF ECOWAS EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

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The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 with the main objective of promoting economic integration of its fifteen member states. However, international systemic dynamics, and the volatility of the crisis in the sub-region, constrained ECOWAS to take on the challenges thereby extending its mandate to address security issues. ECOWAS established a peace and security architecture known as ECOWAS Mechanism. It has since 1990 engaged itself in peace making, peace keeping, peace building and preventive diplomacy and monitoring of early warning signs for destructive conflict. The Mechanism provides the framework for a sub regional peace and security observation system otherwise known as the Early Warning System (EWS), the system facilitates the monitoring and reporting of conflict early warning signs in all member states to the Authority of Heads of States and governments through the president of the commission. Although the Regional body has attained substantial level of progress in its security structure, it is however, saddle with a number of challenges in the process of its operationalisation as a system. This paper explores the EWS, as an important instrument in tackling security challenges in West Africa. The study is base on extensive evaluation of the existing literature, complemented with interview conducted on the area.

Keywords: Regional security, Conflict mechanism, Security architecture, Early warning, Early response.

Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a sub regional organization in Africa, established in 1975 with the main objective of promoting market integration of its 15 member states. It was envisioned to achieve the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers among member states and ultimately lead to the formation of an Economic Union. The community has, as its central objectives, the promotion of cooperation and development in virtually all fields of economic activities, particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and in social and cultural matters, for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its people, of increasing and maintaining economic stability of fostering closer relationship among its members and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent' (ECOWAS Annual Report, 2006:5).

However, face with challenges informed by international systemic dynamics particularly the demise of the Cold war and the volatility of the crisis in the sub-region, pushed the organization to become entangled in security commitments. In 1999, ECOWAS *Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping an d Security* was established with the main objective of addressing security challenges in the region. The Mechanism was born out of series of experience in regional crisis it intervened, first in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau. The regional body has an outstanding security architecture that has attained substantial level of development. It also carried out several mediation and intervention efforts that yielded positive results, however, in spite of these laudable achievements the goal for which it was established is still face with numerous challenges. The efforts have been piecemeal, mandates are often overlapping or unclear, and strategy has not been sufficiently preventive to stem the tide of insecurity, (Uzoechina, 2014). This research paper examines critically the development and achievement of the Regional Early Warning System (REWS), the challenges it is facing and ways to improve its performance basing extensively on review of existing literature complimenting it with field research carried out in September 2014. The paper began with the conceptual and theoretical discuss on early warning, and then proceed to examine peace and security in ECOWAS, and finally explore the role of ECOWAS Early Warning System.

Research Objectives

The objective of the paper is to examine critically, the operation of the Regional Early Warning System (REWS), its achievements and existing challenges and ways to improve its performance.

Methodology

The method adopted in the course of this research is content analysis using both primary and secondary sources. Data from the records of activities in the ECOWAS Commission, specifically Early Warning Directorate and an informal interview with key officials at the EWD, and West African Net Work for Peace Building (WANEP) (civil society officials) was obtained, also, documentary materials, ECOWAS instruments-Treaties, protocols, and communiqués etc as well as the internet sources.

Literature Review

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Austin, (2004) in the Berghof Hand book on conflict Transformation, defined an early warning system from an academic perspective as: "any initiative that focuses on systematic data collection, analysis and/or formulation of recommendations, including risk assessment and information sharing, regardless of topic, whether they are quantitative, qualitative or a blend of both' (Austin, 2004:2). Within early warning, three components can be differentiated: first, estimating the magnitude and timing of relative risks of emerging threats; secondly, analyzing the nature of these threats and describing plausible scenarios, and thirdly, communicating warning analyses to decision makers.' (Woocher 2008:3).

Early warning requires "near real-time assessment of events that, in a high risk environment, are likely to accelerate or trigger the rapid escalation of conflict" (Gurr 1995, p.137). Kenneth Boulding saw "early warning" as a similar to networks of weather stations that would enable scholars to identify 'social temperature and pressure and the prediction of 'cold or warm fronts' the task of social data stations was to monitor particular areas of potential conflict and to seek ways to act early enough to nip a potential conflict in the bud. (Uyangoda, 2005: 18)

Austin, (2004) noted that "three underpinning questions remain at the base of any early warning endeavour. These include whether early warning systems can effectively identify the causes of conflict;

predict the outbreak of conflict; and most important of all, mitigate that conflict. Central to the idea of early warning within the framework of conflict prevention revolves around information gathering and forecasting early enough indicators of emergence of conflict. Effective early warning involves the collection and analysis of data in a uniform and systematised way. In this sense, the aim of early warning is to strengthen the capacity of end-users to identify critical developments in a timely manner, so that coherent response strategies can be formulated to either prevent violent conflict or limit its destructive effects (Cilliers, 2008). Kiplagat, (1995), noted that 'developing a set of indicators for an early warning apparatus especially in Africa can serve as socio-political barometers of the level of actual or potential conflict in African countries. These indicators according to him includes: the refusal of a country to permit refugees to return home; large numbers of citizens fleeing a state, particularly when those fleeing are prominent leaders, like intellectuals and politicians; growth in the numbers of displaced persons; significant growth in security budgets, changes in the structure of the security forces, and increases in personnel recruited into such branches of the security forces as the police, paramilitary organisations, and the secret service; and a significant increase in the size of prison populations, especially the numbers of political and quasi-political prisoners.

Similarly, Tshimba, (2014), stressed that, While, preparedness, prevention and mitigation, as the three pillars of an early warning system, are of critical importance in understanding the purpose of such a system, that even if the detection mechanism is perfect, it is of no use unless there is the capability for a timely reaction. That, the provision of information alone does not constitute early warning per se, such information should serve a specific purpose. One of the critical issues he argued 'is the origin of the information and data, and the time frame in which it has been developed. The receiver of such a forecast and what is done with the information provided become critical in determining the success or failure of an early warning system. (Tshimba, 2014:3)

Early Response

Early response on the other hand means: 'any initiative that occurs in the latent stages of a perceived potential armed conflict with the aim at reduction, resolution or transformation. The term mechanism will refer to the individual units of an Early Warning System, such as data collection, data formatting, data analysis, with the understanding that there is a relationship and process between these unities for the system to operate' (Austin, 2004:23). As contained in the training manual on developing capacity for conflict analysis and early response, "early response is the process of using information gathering from early warning systems to design actions aimed at preventing violent conflict. The action could be the development of a policy or programme as well as strategies to prevent conflict at different levels using specific entry points.

In developing proactive-structures for conflict prevention and security in any given society, early warning and early response are indisputable tools. Its effectiveness largely depends on the swiftness of the early response to avert the likelihood of dispute and disagreement deteriorating into violence.

Mostly, the challenge face in West Africa and Africa in general, is the failure to constructively respond to warning signs of conflict. These failures were attributed to political reasons, preference of reactive rather than proactive strategies by some leaders and reasons related to lack of adequate resources to do so(WANEP training manual:28).

From the theoretical perspectives, early warning and response is the development of strategic response to escalation of violent conflict and the presentation of options to critical actors (national, regional, and international) for the purposes of decision-making and preventive action. In achieving such framework, early warning must be aligned with early response (Suifon, 2005).

Lewis (2012) notes that, there are three basic tools of response to early warning: Military, economic, and political instrument. The military instrument refers to the use of limited force to prevent the escalation of emergent problem. The use of economic instrument involves using incentive to reduce the tension in the society. The political instrument entails fact finding mission, enforcement of human rights, establishing demilitarized zones, etc. Early response can be achieve by targeting at any body and is not

strictly reserved for one person or institution. The work can be done by governments, opposition groups, ethnic and religious communities, or military organizations. The agents of preventive actions can be governments, international organizations or national and international non-governmental organizations. The work is however, better achieve when all these organizations collaboration.

Historical Evolution of Early Warning

Early warning as a concept was believed to have first came about during the "….Cold War in the field of national military intelligence to enhance the capacity of predicting potential (ballistic) attacks (Simon and Neil, (2006:2), Stemming from military concept, early warning was later introduced into the United Nations system as an instrument to forecast natural catastrophes such as tsunamis and earthquakes. It then evolved to include armed conflict and communal violence. As argued Lewis, (2014) institutionalization of early warning system to promote human security and prevent violent conflict, became a reality in 1992 when the then United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali, in his landmark report, "An Agenda for Peace" established the link between emerging post-cold war security threats and human security concerns to early warning processes and preventive action. In the report, "he mentioned the valuable work of early warning system on environmental threats, the risk of nuclear accidents, natural disasters, mass movements of populations, the threat of famine and the spread of diseases" Ghali stressed further that 'there is a need to strengthen arrangements in such a manner that information from these sources can be synthesised with political indicators to assess whether a threat to peace exists and to analyse what action might be taken by the UN to alleviate it. (Boutros Ghali, 1992:P.23),

    With the gradual increased of insecurity in various regions across the globe so also did the initiatives frameworks and institutional processes in a bid to mitigate security. Among others are The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (1997), OECD-DAC Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation (2001), the Brahimi Report on the Future of UN Peace Keeping (2000), and the UN Secretary General's Report on Prevention of Armed Conflict (2001), as well as other landmark international and regional initiatives over the years have made early warning processes an integral aspect in dealing with the new security challenges of the world. Today, early warning is employed to predict, or respond to, both natural disasters and violent conflicts. Thus, "early warning efforts do not intend to suppress conflicts, but to respond to the trajectory of a conflict(Arnodo,2012:3), The objective of conflict early warning and crisis prevention initiatives, in this sense, is to prevent the use of violence (Ibid:3). Early warning and response systems were first developed in Africa in the 1970s to deal with drought and to ensure food supplies to avoid humanitarian disasters. In the 1990s, accelerated by the Rwandan genocide, early warning efforts expanded beyond natural disasters to include food security and refugees. More recently, early warning efforts have been used to address the prevention, management and resolution of violent conflict ... (CEWARN, 2006).

Security Challenges in West Africa

West Africa has been adjudged the most troubled region in Africa with numerous security threats and instability, although inter-state conflicts become something of the past, intra-state violence and conflict becomes the order of the day in most of the countries. In the last two decades West Africa witness civil wars that started in Liberia in 1989 later triggered fighting in neighbouring Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, and Guinea causing widespread death and destruction, and undermined development throughout the region. More recently the region experience increased arms proliferation and arms violence, ethnic conflicts, armed robberies and criminality. Stagnation of electoral injustice, ethnic and religious intolerance coupled with high level of poverty and unemployment. These key elements where viewed as basis upon which conflicts are fuel. Whereas, fractionalized political system, elite system, youth bulge, external support for local militia, and easy access of aggrieved groups to surplus small arms and light weapons serves as "triggers".

The political instability has led to large scale refugee crises, breakdown of the social fabric of societies, affecting growth and economic development, collapse of state institutions and destruction of infrastructures, spread of diseases, human rights violations, discriminations with cost and consequences to economic developments. The situation stimulates state collapse or failure leading to growing regional fragility as many states lack viable political and economic structures for growth and transformation and the possibility of building a prosperous West Africa (Lewis, 2014). Weak institutions and a lack of political will and resources continued to hamper efforts by countries of the region to protect human rights and combat impunity. Human trafficking and child labour also continued to be reported in some countries. According to the report of United Nations Office in West Africa (UNOWA), (2014), in Nigeria, multiple and increasingly violent attacks by Boko Haram continued targeting villages, markets, hospitals and schools, particularly in the north-eastern states. On 15 February, in two separate incidents along Lake Chad (Borno State), the group killed over 150 people. Similar attacked was carried out near Abuja and in the city of Jos. Bomb explosions on the outskirts of Abuja reportedly killed 70 people on 14 April and 19 people on 1 May. On 14 April, approximately 276 girls were kidnapped at the Government girls' secondary school in Chibok, Borno State. The leader of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, subsequently released a video claiming responsibility and stating that the girls would be subjected to forced marriages and slavery. The incident triggered general outrage and unprecedented mobilization against the group, as well as international support for Nigeria's efforts to ensure the safe return of the girls. Further attacks and abductions by the group in northern Cameroon and southern areas of the Niger signalled the regional dimension of the threat, (UNOWA, 2014:5)

The sub region continued to be affected by multiple security threats, notably transnational organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism and violent extremism, maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, cross-border security challenges in the Sahel and the Mano River Basin, and security challenges posed by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria and in the bordering countries of Cameroon, Chad and the Niger. The Niger continued to face cross-border security threats owing to the situations in Libya, Mali and Nigeria. The influx of returnees and refugees from north-eastern Nigeria into the border region of Diffa continued. On 7 May, authorities in the Niger reportedly arrested 14 Boko Haram supporters for planning to attack Government targets in the Diffa region and in Niamey (Ibid, 6). With regard to illicit drug trafficking, the report stressed that, 'the rising production of methamphetamine in some parts of the region was observed, as illustrated by the increasing number of clandestine laboratories being discovered and dismantled and by the more frequent seizures of illegal shipments originating from West Africa and reaching East Asia.

The sub region remains a transit zone for heroin from Asia and cocaine from South America. West Africa is also becoming a destination for drugs such as Tramadol, a synthetic painkiller available on the black market with higher dosages than medically authorized, which is leading to clinical dependence and addiction. Countries in the region continued to face capacity gaps with respect to national law enforcement and maritime domain management. This has hampered their ability to control illegal fishing and poaching in vulnerable coastal areas, jeopardizing the ecological balance and economies of the affected countries. The report point further that despite the political commitment and progress made by the countries of the Sahel in addressing security challenges through bilateral and multilateral initiatives, the incidents in Kidal, Mali, in May highlighted the persisting insecurity in northern Mali and underscored the need for a political solution through inclusive dialogue, (Ibid,:6). West Africa was associated with the interplay of historical factors, socio-economic crisis, legacies of authoritarianism and the politics of exclusion, international forces, and local struggles (Obi,2012) Leading to other manifestations such as bad governance and corruption, human rights violations, poverty, ethnic marginalization and small arms and light weapons proliferation among others.

Peace and Security Architecture in ECOWAS

The peace and security architecture is composed of Mediation and Security Council: under which fall the three Organs: the council of Elders, the ECOWAS Standby force (ESF) and the Defence and Security

Commission (DSC); Commissioner/Directorate: Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security/PAPS/Directorate for PAPS; Technical Committee: Defence and Security; Peace Support/Standby Force: ECOMOG/ESF; The ECOWAS Early warning System: (which include Directorate, observation and monitoring zones (ECOWARN), (Regional Early Warning System); Peace fund: funding mechanism; Parliamentary Oversight (ECOWAS Community Parliament (Committee for Defence, Security and Integration (ECOWAS Protocol, 1999) Recognizing that early warning requires the involvement of state and non-state actors, article 12(3) calls on the regional organizations for their active role in early warning activities, Accordingly, ECOWAS collaborates with West African Civil Society Forum (WASCSOF).

WANEP vision is to enable and facilitate the development of mechanisms for cooperation among civil society-based peace building practitioners and organizations in West Africa by promoting cooperative responses to violent conflicts; providing the structure through which these practitioners and institutions will regularly exchange experience and information on issues of peace building, conflict transformation, social, religious and political reconciliation; and promoting West Africa's social cultural values as resources for peace building(WANEP Annual report 2007), this are to be achieved through Strengthening the capacity of peace building organizations and practitioners in West Africa to engage actively in the transformation of violent conflicts through the use of non-violent strategies; Develop a conflict prevention mechanism in West Africa to monitor, analyze and respond to conflicts; engender peace building policy and practices in West Africa; Promote a culture of non-violence and social responsibility among young people in West Africa; Strengthen the conceptual base of WANEP programs through research, documentation and Monitoring and Evaluation. Enhance policy formulation and influence on peace and human security through regional and international linkages and advocacy.

This civil society network consists of thematic groups, one of which is the peace and security cluster, headed by the West African Network for Peace building (WANEP). The focus of WANEP is on the ECPF, in particular to popularize the key documents and the civilian components of the ESF are areas where WACSOF/WANEP has been particularly active. Since the start of the partnership of the Early Warning Mechanism WANEP has rendered so much support to the course from its various national networks in operationalising the Early Warning Mechanism. It has established Early Warning at country level. This structure is supported by Zonal Bureau heads within the geo-political zones in the region coordinating early warning assessment reports for the WANEP and ECOWAS Commission. At the top of the ladder is the peace monitoring centre (PMC) giving support and coordination in the implementation/ of the Early Warning System (Lewis, 2012). However, critics have accused ECOWAS of only working with selected organizations that have the capacity to access the ECOWAS Commission (Ekiyor, 2008). For ECOWAS to be considered serious with its people cantered approach, it must seek to work with a wider set of civil society actors and organizations and to increase representation.

Also, important role player in security efforts is Inter – Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing in West Africa (GIABA). GIABA is a specialized agency of ECOWAS, which was established in 2000 and is responsible for the prevention and control of money laundering and terrorist financing in the region. Its mandate includes the development of strategies to protect the economies of member States from abuse and the laundering of the proceeds of crime; improvement of measures and intensifying efforts to combat the laundering of proceeds of crime in West Africa; strengthening co-operation amongst its members.

Establishment and Mandate of the ECOWAS EWS

Early Warning System was established in line with Article 58 of the revised Treaty and the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. The establishment of the regional Early Warning System derives from the legal instruments of

ECOWAS, namely, the Protocol on Non-aggression of 1978 and the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defence. These instruments mainly addressed matters of inter-state conflicts but in the 1990s, it became clear that these instruments were inadequate in the face of mushrooming intra-state conflicts in West Africa. The lessons learnt from initial interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone and later in Guinea Bissau by the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and the increasing need for the continent to develop initiatives to resolve burgeoning crisis led to the adoption of collective security mechanisms in the ECOWAS Region.

The revised Treaty of July 24, 1993 called for the creation of a sub-regional mechanism for peace. Article 58(2) of the Treaty sought to consolidate the experiences of ECOWAS in conflict management by setting up a mechanism for collective regional security. The Mechanism also required the establishment of a regional peace and security observation system and the deployment of peacekeeping forces where appropriate. Accompanying the Mechanism is the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, adopted at the 25th Summit of Heads of State and Government in Dakar on 21st December, 2001. This Protocol is meant to address the root causes of conflicts namely elections and accession to power, decentralisation of power and participatory democracy, women, poverty alleviation, human rights and education. The Protocol therefore is to ensure that democratic norms and values are well developed and entrenched in the sub-region through the involvement of all stakeholders in society. It identifies the various factors that have been responsible for social and political instability within the sub-region and provides the necessary mechanism through which they could be curbed in order to ensure peace and stability within the West African sub-region. These issues provide the basis for the development of indicators for monitoring and analysing of data towards conflict prevention. This Protocol therefore, establishes a clear and direct link between the observances of democracy and good governance standards in member states and peace as well as security prospects.

Structure and Function of the Early Warning System

The sub regional peace and security observation system known as "early warning system" or "the system" consists of an observation and monitoring system located at ECOWAS Commission Abuja, as well as observation monitoring zones within the sub-region (both make up the Early Warning Directorate, EWD) its mission includes Collecting, compiling , archiving, managing, processing and distributing information; monitoring issues on human security and other situations across the sub region for data analysis, policy articulation and preventive response options in real-time; provide sound Recommendations on contingency and Response planning; Provides support to ECOWAS' in management of delicate situations of conflict and instability, disruptions and disasters; and document the engagement of ECOWAS decision makers with potential conflict situations and issues (Interview ECOWAS officials, 22 September, 2014)

These observatories therefore, undertake risk mapping, observation and analysis of social, economic and political situations in the sub-region which have the potential of degenerating into conflict and present appropriate threat perception analysis. ECOWARN has four established zones as follows: *Zone 1*: Cape Verde, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Senegal with Banjul as the capital; *Zone 2*: Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, Mali and Niger with headquarters in Ouagadougou; *Zone 3*: Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, HQ Monrovia; *Zone 4*: Benin, Nigeria and Togo, HQ Cotonou. The Directorate works in partnership with representatives of ECOWAS Members States and Civil Society Organizations like WANEP, WACSOF and research Institutes. It also collaborates with other RECs and the AU in the establishment of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS).

Six analysts are based at the Abuja Observation & Monitoring Centre, and provide weekly reports as well as incident based reports. The analysts base their assessments on open sources together with reporting of incidents done in the member states, by two state representative and one civil society representative (separately). This reporting is sent to four zonal bureaus (headquarters), which are set up in Gambia, Benin, Burkina Faso and Liberia. Here, the information is processed, and then further channelled

to the Observation & Monitoring Centre in Abuja to enable the Department of Political Affairs Peace and Security to anticipate and react promptly to potential crisis situations (interview ECOWAS official, 22 September 2014; Elowson & Macdermott, 2010: p.31).

Synthesis of Decision Making process for Conflict Prevention
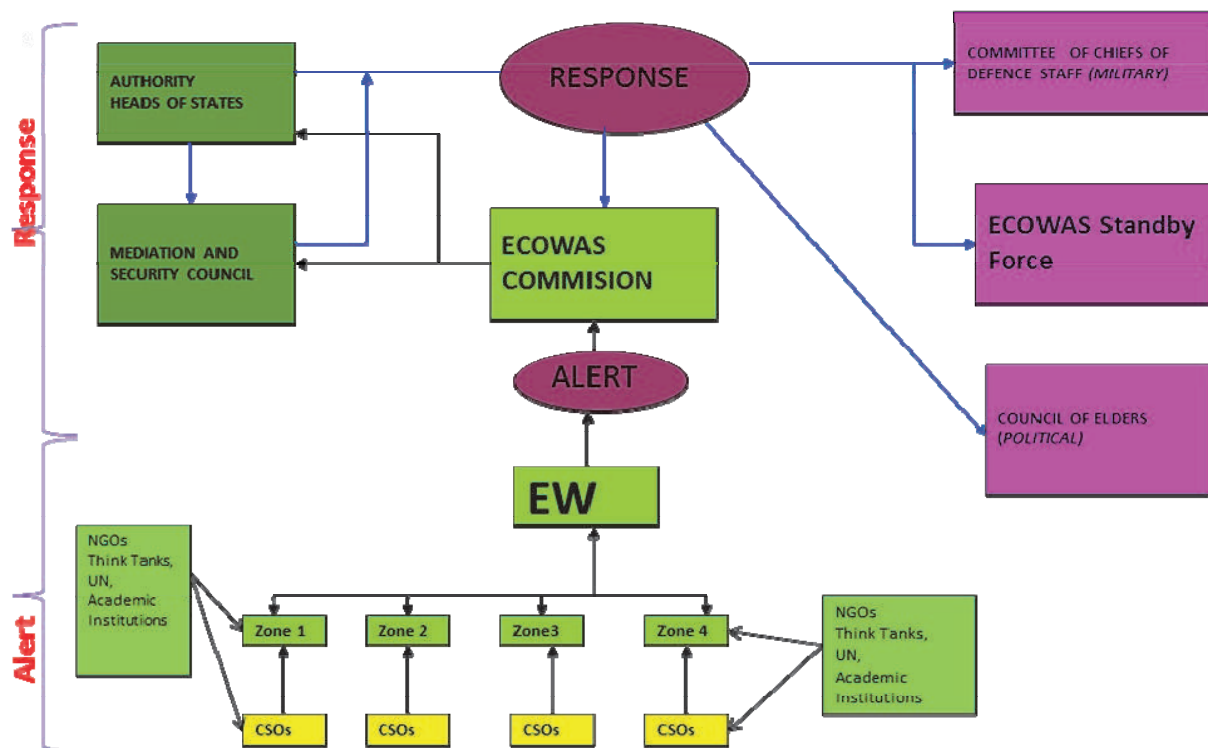
Source: Early Warning Observation & Monitoring Centre Abuja

There are four available options to diffuse any potential threat to security identified in the various zones and they include: (a) the setting up of a fact finding commission; (b) the use of the good offices of the Commission President; (c) calling on the services of a Council of the Wise; and if all else fails (d) the employment of military force. The Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC) (Early Warning Centre) is responsible for data collection and preparation of reports for the use of the Commission, in discharging this mandate, the centre collaborates with the UN, the African Union, research centres and a host of other relevant international, regional and sub-regional organizations.
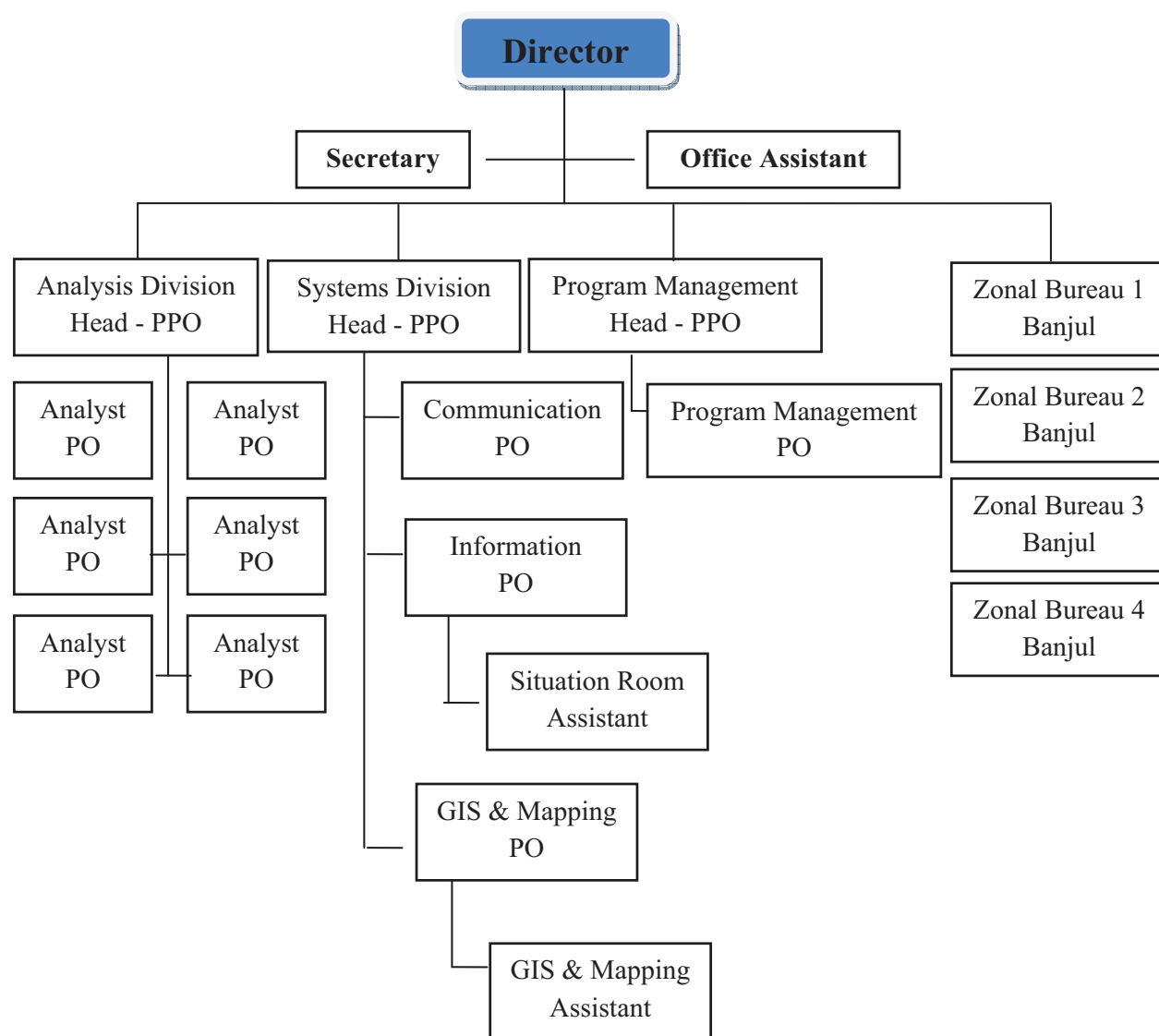
Structure and Functions

Organ Gram

The OMC has a Situation Room which serves as the centre for communication between the OMC and the Observation and Monitoring Zones. This is where all information for the EWD's reports is monitored and collated. The Situation room is also a venue for many Interactions including interdivisional meetings and daily briefings. The OMC comprises of the following: Analysis division; systems management division;

program management division. The Analysis Division is headed by a Principal Program Officer and presently has six other analysts who have responsibility to monitor and produce reports on peace and security situation in the region as well as other thematic areas and proffer response options for management's consideration. The System Management Division is headed by a Principal Programme Officer (Systems Manager). The Division has Communication, Information and Geographical information System (GIS) units. Program Management Division Headed by a Programme Manager, the division solicits international support for the Early Warning Directorate and ensures synergy among the different components of the Directorate.

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Secretary — Office Assistant

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- Systems Division Head - PPO
  - Communication PO
  - Information PO
    - Situation Room Assistant
  - GIS & Mapping PO
    - GIS & Mapping Assistant
- Program Management Head - PPO
  - Program Management PO
- Zonal Bureau 1 Banjul
- Zonal Bureau 2 Banjul
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- Zonal Bureau 4 Banjul

Source: Early Warning Observation & Monitoring Centre Abuja

This information shapes the process of drawing on regional security initiatives, in the area of drug trafficking, transnational criminal activities, arms proliferation, major governance deficits, humanitarian intervention, as well as regional socio-economic policies that will have a wider impact in securing and protecting the lives of the people of West Africa.
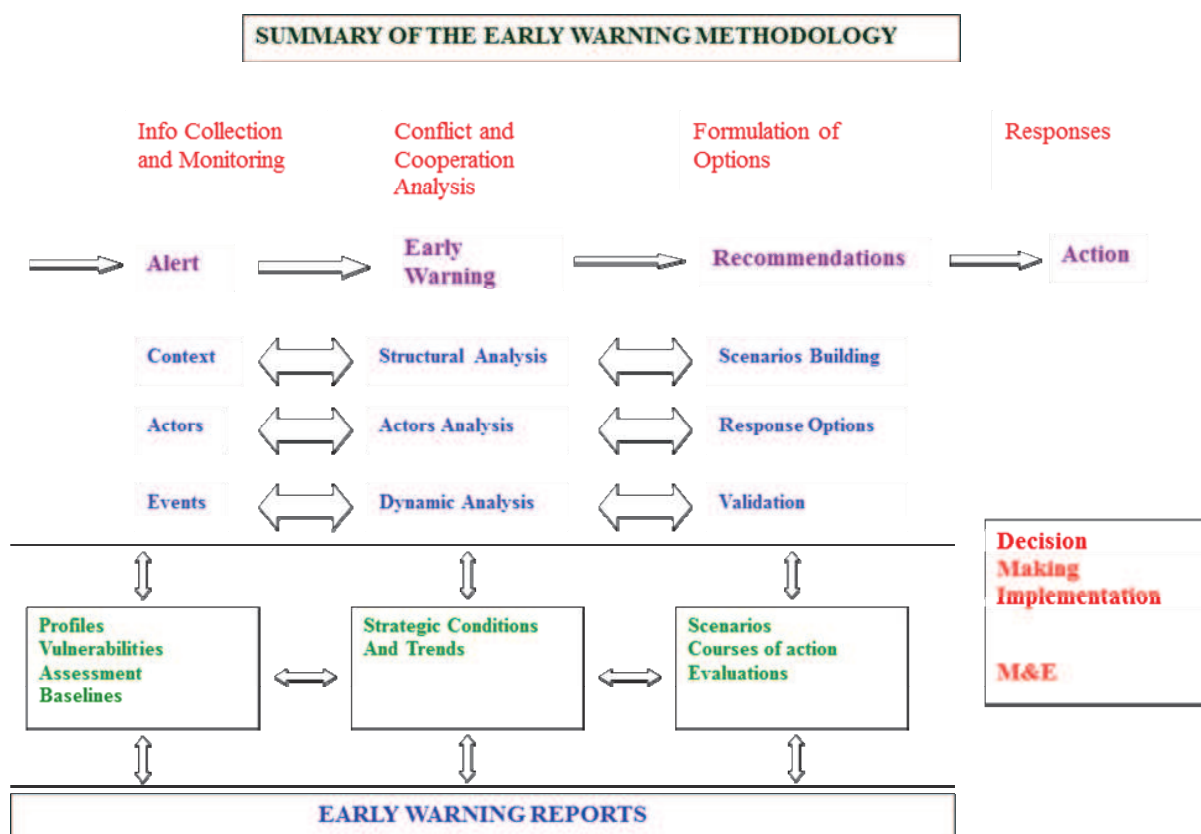
Source: Early Warning Observation & Monitoring Centre Abuja

Operational Status of ECOWAS Early Warning

The system has under went tremendous transformation since its inception, and it is heading towards full realization of its vision of having fully integrated and functional Early Warning System, providing the office of the President of the Commission with timely reports and analysis for effective responses in preventing and mitigating violent conflicts in the region. So far the commission intensified its outreach and collaborated with its various partners in enriching its data collection capacity. Recent developments include the following capacity building.

- The ECOWAS Geo-spatial data infrastructure (EGDI) policy. The EGDI policy which is meant to facilitate the identification, production and sharing of fundamental data sets needed to enhance information gathering in the Early warning Directorate and in the ECOWAS Region generally was finalized by the EGDI committee in, April 2013.
- The Directorate commenced the update of member States' Country Risk Assessment which earlier ranking in 2011 showed Mali and Nigeria as the most vulnerable Member States to conflict in the region. This new Assessment is being undertaken in view of the intensity of new political and security challenges within the ECOWAS space (ECOWAS Annual report 2013).
- The Geographic Information System (GIS) Unit intensified its engagement of Member States in soliciting data to be infused in the EWD's GIS equipment in order to have proper geospatial information for the enhancement of Early Warning analysis.
- Field Assessment missions introduced by the EWD in 2012 were intensified & now include joint Early Warning missions with UNOWA.
- Collaboration with EWD's multiple stake holders in information sharing and analysis were also enhanced in 2013. This has seen the AU's continental Early Warning System, CEWS and EWD's

implementing partner, WANEP, not only exchanging ideas and information but also collaborating on joint analysis. This has positive long-term effect on policy approaches to conflict prevention, resolution and management on the continent.

- The EWD has taken a lead role in organizing the PAPS Annual retreat as part of the efforts of the Department of political Affairs, peacekeeping and security to ensure cooperation, collaboration and coordination among its Directorates.
- The EWD has now concluded its participatory process in engaging CSOs, Experts and Research Institutions in researching the four identified conflict systems in the ECOWAS Region, i.e.; Sahara-Sahelo system, MRU System, Gulf of Guinea system and Sene-Gambia System. (ECOWAS Annual report 2013).

Institutional Challenges to ECOWAS Early Warning System

ECOWAS Early warning system is face with institutional, operational, policy and other structural impediment that challenges the commitment of the regional body as a whole. In the first place there is inadequate provision of resources including human and material which in itself constitute a major set back in the system's ability to carry out its monitoring and analysis and reporting effectively. Connected to that is inadequate and ineffective technological equipment to enhance and facilitate the collection, processing, and sharing of information. A recommendation was stressed during an AU CEWS Workshop on the need to staff it with trained experts and equip the Situation Room with adequate technological resources so that information is easily and readily available and accessible (Tshimba, 2014) The system also suffers from a lack of integration and co-ordination with other agencies and initiatives within ECOWAS performing prevention and peace building roles. For instance, civil society organizations play an important role in facilitating the work of early warning; they provide linkage to local communities that provide them with comparative advantages in accessing open-source information on potential conflict, which can be useful in strengthening the early-warning and response Mechanisms. Community-based organizations such as religious bodies and local radio stations can be veritable tools in monitoring and gathering information on conflict using indicators that differ from more developed data collection tools. Information gathered through such informal networks can be transmitted by more established civil society organizations to the regional early-warning and response mechanisms. Their connections, greater political independence, and more extensive experience in advocacy can improve the preparation of implementable recommendations for responding to conflict. However, they lack the necessary support needed to fully exploit their potentials. These constitute challenge that needs to be address by enhancing closer cooperation and provide the needed support to the civil society for an overall efficiency of conflict prevention.

There is challenge in frequency and reliability of reports on potential threats, technological challenges in the internet reporting process and coordination between zones and zonal bureaux and local actors in dealing with security threats (Lewis, 2014), others include quality of data inputs from the field monitors and timeliness in information gathering; accuracy in anticipating a conflict, the credibility attached to the prediction formulated, the decision by relevant players to act on the information provided, and the impact the action taken has on the conflict. Also, the gap between early warning and early response remains a major challenge. Moving from early warning to a response is particularly difficult given the limited financial, human, and material resources and some times lack of strong political will to respond to early warning alert.

For instance, early signs of potential conflict were visible in Mali with the growing Tuareg rebellion, while the army was not well equipped to face the insurgency. In Guinea-Bissau, the lack of response to long-term drug trafficking and the chronic tension between the military and political leaders were clear signs of brewing instability (IPI, 2012).

Other problems has to do with inadequate Expertise in Thematic Reporting and Statistical Analysis, finalization of budgetary allocation for the acquisition and installation of Video Conferencing

equipments, ECOWAS Early Warning System Lingual Translation; Training in Geographic Information Systems (GIS); decentralization of Response Mechanism at National levels.

The placement of one of the observatories in Burkina Faso, was criticize, because the country is viewed as notorious for supporting insurgencies in the sub-region. The government interference in the operation of the unit is highly probable. Hence the ability of the observatory to gather and disseminate critical information on this government will be adversely affected.

Other prevailing realities of structural issues are poverty and human security; employment and migration; crisis and conflicts; governance and democracy, food crisis, humanitarian disasters and environment. (Interview ECOWAS officials, 16 September 2014);   Insecurity and social tensions continued to affect the civilian population in many countries of the sub region, particularly owing to the situations in northern Mali and in north-eastern Nigeria. Humanitarian needs in the Sahel region increased, with over 20 million people being food insecure, as a result of a combination of both acute and chronic factors, such as the consequences of the 2011 food crisis, climate change, population growth and conflict.

Although macroeconomic indices are positive in most of the leading countries in the region especially Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana which projected growth rates of 8 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively. However, disparities in wealth distribution and socioeconomic development persisted, with increasing poverty and unemployment in several countries in the sub region leading to constant protest by workers and students over issues such as working conditions and the shortages of basic services in many West African countries (UN Security Council reports 2014). There is therefore, the need for a comprehensive early warning policy to integrate the emerging human security issues, such as food crisis, Humanitarian disasters, and gender and youth issues. Also, support the reinforcement of grassroots and National Early Warning Mechanisms for efficient result.

Conclusion

The success of ECOWAS as a regional body in addressing issues of peace and security largely depend on the commitment of the member nations. While it is on record that the regional experience yielded positive result, to which ECOWAS Mechanism and Early warning system are part of, ECOWARN, though, one of the continent most advanced early-warning systems, building security institution is still an on going issue. Given the security challenges in West Africa, there is need for a committed and proactive intervention. The EWS is face with a number of challenges ranging from institutional, operational, policy and other structural impediment. There is the need to demonstrate commitment to enhance the analytical capacity of the staff through periodic training programmes as well as through recruiting additional professionals in the field of conflict prevention.

Efforts to include people who better understand the whole dynamic have been initiated, through the opening of an ECOWAS website where civil society representatives can report on indications of conflict. There is need also to Increase the participation of local level stakeholders, who would serve the Early Warning system. Expanding the current set up of four zonal headquarters, to have a local Early Warning system in every member state could also be a way to increase its effectiveness and to reduce the risk of arbitrary, uninformed and biased reporting. *(Elowson & Macdermott, 2010:37).*

Equally, it has been stressed that over reliance on external funding and technical dependency could negatively impact on the perception of its independence. The regional body should Endeavour to be self reliant in resources and recruitment of its analyst. This is surely a key to ensure full stakeholder ownership of different organs of the Mechanism, its operation and direction. Effective operation of ECOWAS early warning system largely depends on the commitment of the leadership not only in ensuring effective functioning of the structures but also on addressing domestic structural and economic challenges being the root causes of the conflict in the first place.

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