ECOWAS AND SUB-REGIONAL SECURITY IN WEST AFRICA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES (2014–2023)

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ABSTRACT

The paper assessed the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in sub-regional security in West Africa with a focus on the prospects and challenges faced by the sub regional body from 2014 to 2023. ECOWAS was established in 1975 to promote economic integration in West Africa. It has however evolved into an institution that plays a pivotal role in addressing security issues in West Africa, particularly in response to escalating conflicts, coups, and terrorism. This paper adopted the regional security complex theory to explain the nature of the interactions between the variables that make up the study. Qualitative methods were adopted for this study based on the use of secondary of data. The study relied on relevant publications like books, journals, magazines, internet sources and e-learning facilities for information. The major findings of this study revealed that ECOWAS has played a significant role in mediating conflict and facilitating peace negotiations by conducting and coordinating several peace support operations in the West African sub region in places like Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Chad, Nigeria and Burkina Fasso. The study recommended that ECOWAS should promote policies that support political stability and good governance within the member states.
Keywords*: Sub-Regional Security, Good Governance, Economic Integration, Terrorism, Political Stability*

1. Introduction

West Africa is at a critical juncture in its socio-economic and political development. On the one hand, it is well endowed in terms of natural resources, strategic location and large market and has great potential for development and peace, while on the other; it is confronted with a number of challenges that render its rather fragile institutions and post-conflict societies vulnerable to political instability, insecurity, economic crisis and violent conflict. For example, such threat is the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the sub-region, as is evident from the outbreak and aftermath of civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire, the Tuareg revolts in Niger and Mali and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Although the sub-region has one of Africa's most sophisticated peace and security architectures (Obi, 2009), it still faces formidable intra-regional security

challenges. Of note are the threats posed by the connections between the proliferation of SALW, violent conflicts, political unrest, civil wars and the activities of transnational criminal networks operating in the sub- region and peace, security and development in West Africa.

These networks are well established in some West African countries, which are regarded as hubs for global criminal networks that engage in illegal activities such as drug and human trafficking, arms proliferation, illegal mining of minerals, cross-border crime and smuggling and piracy. There are also reports of some criminals successfully infiltrating the highest echelons of security and border control agencies in some countries in the sub-region. The infiltration is particularly prevalent in countries with weak structures and limited capacities for promoting the rule of law (UNDOC, 2010). With their connections to government officials, these cross-border networks are able to undermine law enforcement efforts and operate with impunity. In some countries such as Nigeria, Chad, Mali, Ghana, *Cote d'Ivoire* and Niger, high levels of unemployment, weak governance and porous borders have rendered the sub-region vulnerable to transnational and violent cross-border crimes. In its 2010 annual report, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime asserts that:

> *"West Africa is a paradise for organized crime, offering ideal conditions for trafficking contraband: a strategic location, porous borders, weak governance, widespread poverty and extensive corruption. As a result, criminals and insurgents are exploiting the region. West Africa serves as a transit point between Latin America and Europe for US$ 1 billion-worth in cocaine, as a destination for counterfeit medicines and toxic waste, and as a source of stolen natural resources, particularly oil. Human trafficking, whether for forced labour or sexual exploitation, also occurs in the region"*
> (UNODC, 2023).

The security situation in West Africa keeps deteriorating. Both directly affected countries and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a sub-regional organization with the remit for management for regional peace and security, are overwhelmed by the menace from terrorist activities and other entities. ECOWAS has, in the past, been successful in managing intrastate conflicts in the region through troop deployments and mediation (Akokpari, 2016). However, with the inception of globalization and the post-September 11 world order, new and emerging security threats or challenges from terrorism, cybercrimes, and organized transnational and cross-border crimes have engulfed West Africa posed challenges to insecurity in ECOWAS West Africa sub-region (Kieh & Kalu, 2013; Marc, 2015). This paper examined the ECOWAS and sub- regional security in West Africa "prospects and challenges".

Insecurity abounded in West Africa sub-region over the last two decades. Efforts by the sub region's leaders to resolve this insecurity using various traditional security mechanisms were not effective. Traditional security mechanisms have included mediation by commissions, ad hoc committees, mediation by African Heads of State (mostly coup makers and former rebel leaders) and the use of the chieftaincy institution. Recent insecurity in the region has, however, revealed that the use of these mechanisms alone has not helped much in resolving the insecurity and preventing the outbreak of violence. Since 1990, ECOWAS has resorted to employing military intervention forces as a major part of its conflict resolution mechanisms. Though these interventions have created an atmosphere conducive for long-term political and diplomatic solutions to problems in the West Africa sub region, their legality is questionable (Gray, 2020).

The problem addressed in this study was how to underpin the ECOWAS security management framework with assessments that integrate the interconnectedness of the existing and the new and emerging security threat layers in West Africa (New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, 2018; Willemse, de Bruijn, van Dijk, Both, & Muiderman, 2015). The new and emerging threats not only present another strand of security problem; they also inherently overlap and complicate the sub- region's security threat variables (Onuoha & Ezirim, 2013). ECOWAS' security management strategies have failed in addressing the problem effectively (Akokpari, 2016; Marc et al., 2015). ECOWAS' security management efforts notwithstanding, West Africa keeps experiencing a continuously deteriorating security environment. This study provided answers to the following research questions:

i.   What is the nature of insecurity in West Africa?
ii.   What is the role of ECOWAS in the security of the sub-region of West Africa?
iii.   What are the security challenges faced by the ECOWAS in sub-regional security?
iv.   What are the potential solutions to the challenges faced in ensuring security within the West Africa sub-region?

The main aim of this study is to investigate ECOWAS and sub-regional security in West Africa, prospects and challenges. The specific objectives are to:

i.   To analyse the nature of insecurity in West Africa.
ii.   To analyse the role of ECOWAS in the security of the sub-region of ECOWAS.
iii.   To identify the security challenges of the ECOWAS sub-region of ECOWAS.
iv.   To proffer possible solution to the challenges faced by ECOWAS in ensuring the security of the sub-region of West Africa.

To achieve these objectives, this paper has been structured into six sections with the introduction as section. Section two is the literature review. Section three is the

methodology of the study. Section four discusses the prospects of ECOWAS in managing security in West Africa. Section discusses the challenges of ECOWAS in managing security in West Africa. Section six forms the concluding and policy recommendations of the paper.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Conceptual Clarifications
Sub-Regional Security

Traditionalists, adherents of the realist school of thought, define security as a freedom from any objective military threat to the state survival in an anarchic international system. Definition of security studies by Stephen Walt perhaps in the most explicit way expresses the traditional understanding of the problem. He defines security studies as "the studies of the threat, use, and control of military force" (Walt (1991), in Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998).

Sub-regional security is any attempt to reduce armed violence, either within or at the borders of what multiple actors agree to be a sub-region. There are at least four types of sub- regional security cooperation that we can envisage. (i) task-specific regional security cooperation within a formalized regional security organization; (ii) formalized security cooperation within a general-purpose regional organization; (iii) informal security cooperation; and informal security cooperation within general purpose sub- regional informal cooperation.

Good Governance

Good governance is the cornerstone of a functional, equitable, and progressive society. It refers to the processes, institutions, and systems through which public authority is exercised, decisions are made, and public resources are managed in a transparent, accountable, inclusive, and effective manner. In the 21st century, where globalization, democracy, and digital transformation are reshaping societies, good governance has emerged as a critical factor for sustainable development, human rights protection, and socio-economic progress. Without good governance, policies fail, public trust erodes, and development becomes unsustainable. The principles of good governance include participation, rule of law, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency.

Economic Integration

Economic integration refers to cooperative activities between newly industrialized third world countries, the industrialized countries such as China and United States of America, Japan and Britain and other, lesser-developed, nations of the Southern Hemisphere. Such activities include developing mutually beneficial technologies, services, and trading relationships. Economic integration can also be seen as

technical cooperation among developing countries in the Global South. It is a tool used by the states, international organizations, academics, civil society and the private sector to collaborate and share knowledge, skills and successful initiatives in specific areas such as agricultural development, financial assistance, urbanization, health, climate change, industrial development and technology transfer etc (Nchinda, 2017).

Terrorism
Hornby (2000), conceptualized terrorism as the use of violent action in order to achieve political aims or force a government to act. The United States Department of Defense cited by Terrorism Research (Undated), defines terrorism "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological." The people or individuals that carry out acts of terrorisms are known as terrorists. Characteristically, terrorism involves the following: Use of unlawful violence believing that violence will usher in a better system, use of unlawful and assorted dangerous weapons, motivated by goals that might be political, religious or ideological, secretive in membership recruitment and locations of residence, fewer in number comparable to the larger society they attack, have strong will and could die for the course they uphold, most times, operate as syndicates, derive financial and military supports from national and international loyalists and they are militant, they use coercion, intimidation and instil fears in people their tactics.

Political Stability
Political stability refers to the consistent and predictable functioning of a government and its institutions without significant disruptions, violence, or upheavals. It is marked by the peaceful transfer of power, adherence to the rule of law, low levels of political violence, and the legitimacy of leadership. Political stability is fundamental for social harmony, economic growth, and national development. When a country is politically stable, citizens and investors gain confidence in the future, while governance structures function efficiently. Conversely, political instability—characterized by coups, riots, weak institutions, or contested elections—can plunge nations into chaos and economic decline. A good political stability includes effective governance, rule of law, peaceful transition to power, low political violence and civic engagement and inclusion.

2.2 Theoretical Framework
Regional Security Complex Theory
The concept and theory of the 'regional security complex' were first presented by Buzan in 1983 in his book People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem

in International Relations, while its further development took place after the Cold War. The concept of regional security known as the Theory of Regional Security Complexes (RSC) was created by researchers forming the so-called Copenhagen School. Its representatives are Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, who, while researching security, questioned the commonly accepted approach oriented towards considering this issue solely from a political and military perspective. Instead, they adopted a broader view, claiming that it should be examined from the perspective of five dimensions: political, military, economic, social, and environmental (ecological) (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 10).

> *"The Theory of Regional Security Complexes – as conceived by its creators – is intended to provide a conceptual framework to explain the emerging new order of international security after the Cold War. It is based on the assumption that the regional level is the basis for security analyses. The national security of a state is too narrow, while international security is broader because it is based on relations between states. Furthermore, the state perspective tends to place the state "at the center" of events. The global perspective, on the other hand, is too broad and too general, because security issues are not the same or equally integrated everywhere in the world. Moreover, they vary from place to place. The sub- regional level, on the other hand, as an intermediate level between the two, binds the interdependence of national security and global security and constitutes the theatre where most of the activities related to the creation of international security take place. It should be added that relations between states at the regional level form a subsystem concerning the international system (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Regional security complexes are formed by the states that are part of them; therefore, the study of security from a trans-state perspective is not dictated by the desire to diminish the importance or role of states. According to the RSC theory, states are the primary actors in international relations because they are the ones that create regions and are responsible for the processes associated with securitisation and desecuritization. This allows for the creation and functioning of forms of existence such as sub-regional security complex"* (Hansen, 2011 & Szydzisz, 2019).

An additional advantage of the theory is that it minimizes the tendency to overestimate the role of world powers as the states that decide on the level of security in the world and this theory is adopted for this study because security is every reasonable person's business. In other words, security is every state business as seen in West Africa sub-region to protect their states' interest when attacked both internally and externally.

2.3 Empirical Review
The Nature of Insecurity in West Africa Sub-Region

The continuous nature of insecurity in West Africa has debilitating effects on the already fragile humanitarian and economic conditions and fledgling democratic governance of countries in the region (Collier, 2017; United Nations Security Council, 2017). According to the United Nations Security Council Report (2012), the combination of the civil wars and the emergence of new threats to peace and security in the region "have significantly diminished human capital, social infrastructure and productive national development assets".

Also, Human Rights Watch, in its briefing paper on West Africa to the UN Security Council in 2003 indicated that, there were increased cases of sexual and gender-based violence and reprisal killings, among others, across the sub-region (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Since the Liberian crises, ECOWAS has continued to formulate protocols and establish specialized agencies to confront and address emerging political and social problems in the sub region.

ECOWAS's Political Interventions in Mali

Mali, a state in West Africa, is landlocked state depending entirely on her neighbours and having no capacity to take independent action such as printing more currency notes of securing petroleum products (Crone, 2013). In November 2011, Mali experienced renewed clashes in the northern part between government forces and the Tuareg rebels that resulted to Malian conflicts, that was characterized by gross abuses and violations of human rights, deadly terrorist attacks on innocent citizens, government agencies and institutions, rape, human suffering, over throw of the democratically elected government, destruction of lives and property as well as the proliferation of armed groups in the Sahel region and other areas. The worsening humanitarian conditions of Malians necessitated the intervention of the ECOWAS so as to restore normalcy in Mali.

ECOWAS's intervention in Gambia

Following the disputed December 2016 presidential elections in The Gambia, both the African Union and the United Nations Security Council gave ECOWAS legitimate backing for intervening in the country politically. When Gambians went to the polls on 1 December 2016, few of them might have thought that this election was going to mark a watershed in the political history of their country. Never before in the 50 years since independence had a power change occurred through elections, and the strongly authoritarian regime of President Yahya Jammeh had shown little sign of erosion. Much to the contrary, under Jammeh even the slightest hints of independent political activity were repressed, and opposition leader Ousainou Darboe had ended

up in prison together with 19 other politicians for simply having participated in a demonstration calling for political reforms in April 2016.

In the run-up to the elections, the regime also refused to register international election observers (with the exception of a small African Union contingent), and it shut down the internet and text messaging services on Election Day. The Gambia in December 2016 was thus a highly unlikely context for the defeat of the incumbent in presidential elections. So, it took almost everyone by surprise when on 2 December 2016 the Electoral Commission of The Gambia declared opposition candidate Adama Barrow to be the winner of the election. Barrow had succeeded Darboe as leader of the opposition and had managed to secure the support of most of the fragmented opposition parties. Under the plurality electoral system, Barrow won with 43.3 per cent of the votes, with Jammeh obtaining 39.6 per cent and a third candidate winning the remaining 17 per cent (IEC, 2016). The real surprise was Jammeh's initial reaction. In a television speech, even before the official results were released, he conceded defeat and congratulated Barrow on his victory. He further said on television he would not contest the results and vowed to return to his farm "to eat what I grow and grow what I eat." A week later, on 9 December, Jammeh declared in another speech that he no longer had trust in the electoral process, and that he would not only contest the results as declared by the Electoral Commission but also, given some irregularities in aggregating results from one region, ask for fresh elections under a different electoral administration. The commission had in fact, on 5 December, readjusted the votes counted, reducing the number of votes won by each of the three candidates but ultimately confirming Adama Barrow's victory. On 10 December, troops were deployed on the streets of Banjul as a sign that Jammeh was still in control of the security apparatus. The offices of the Electoral Commission were occupied by the army on 13 December, and staff were hindered from entering the building. Jammeh no longer appeared committed to handing over power to the elected president by 18 January 2017, the legal end of his term in office.

The ECOWAS Commission created the Electoral Assistance Unit in 2005, and this is roughly the moment when ECOWAS began to systematically observe all national elections in member countries (Hartmann 2013: 42). Electoral observation requires an invitation from national authorities, and in a quite unusual step, President Jammeh refused to allow the ECOWAS Observation Team to monitor the December 2016 presidential elections (ECOWAS, 2016). Following Jammeh's original concession of defeat, ECOWAS, together with the AU and the UN Official Representative for West Africa, congratulated the Gambian people and its leaders for the smooth and peaceful election and transition (ECOWAS, 2016). When Jammeh later changed his position, ECOWAS was quick to react, calling on the Gambian government to "abide by its constitutional responsibilities and international obligations," going on in the state, it is fundamental that the verdict of the ballots

should be respected, and that the security of the president-elect, Adama Barrow, and that of all Gambian citizens be fully ensured. (ECOWAS 2016).

According to ECOWAS, the reversal of position by President Jammeh was unacceptable and threatened peace not only in The Gambia but the entire West African sub region. ECOWAS leaders thus decided to send a mediation commission to Banjul. As acting ECOWAS chairperson, Liberian president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf headed the delegation that travelled to Banjul on 13 December 2016, together with the presidents of Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone (respectively: Muhammadu Buhari, John Dramani Mahama, and Ernest Bai Koroma), and the UN Special Representative for West Africa (also a former ECOWAS Commission president), Ghana's Mohammed Ibn Chambas. Despite the high-ranking composition (comprising all Anglophone heads of state within ECOWAS), however, the commission did not manage to convince Jammeh to modify his position. Following the failure of this first mediation, ECOWAS heads of state were apparently convinced that they needed to adopt more credible sanctions. When asked whether the UN would consider military action to force Jammeh's departure, Chambas did not rule out this possibility (Farge & McAllister 2016). At their regular summit on 17 December 2016 in Abuja, they decided upon the following course of action: ECOWAS would continue mediation efforts through President Buhari and President Mahama, and request that the AU and UN endorse their decisions.

Further negotiations between Buhari and Jammeh in Banjul ended on 13 January without any breakthrough, and as the deadline of 18 January approached, the option of military intervention became more realistic. On 14 January, Barrow travelled together with the ECOWAS mediators to Bamako to meet most of the other ECOWAS heads of state, who were attending the France–Africa Summit there. UN Special Representative Chambas declared that ECOWAS would ask the UN Security Council to approve the deployment of troops to The Gambia if Jammeh refused to cede power (Vanguard, 2017). ECOWAS chiefs of staff gathered on 14 January in Abuja to discuss the preparations for the establishment of the ECOWAS Military Intervention in the Gambia (ECOMIG).

On 18 January, troops (most from Senegal, with contingents from Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, and Togo) started to move towards the border with The Gambia (which is surrounded by Senegalese territory), and together with Nigerian forces also implemented a naval blockade. In the afternoon of 19 January, under the sponsorship of ECOWAS and in the presence of many international diplomats, Adama Barrow was sworn in as president in the Gambian embassy in Dakar, Senegal. Under the imminent threat of military invasion, with thousands of Gambians fleeing to Senegal, and with Jammeh's own army chief pledging his allegiance to President Barrow, Jammeh eventually agreed to step down and go into exile. The ECOWAS contingents

then secured the territory, and it was decided that ECOMIG would stay for a further three months in the Gambia, as requested by President Barrow.

ECOWAS's Intervention in 2021 Guinea Coup

Guinea's political history reflects the conditions of its peers across Africa. It is characterized by military coup d'état and uncertainties that bred political violence and ultimately caused loss of lives and property. It is a history of crude pursuit of individual ambitions and the consequent deepening of division in a plural state. From independence in 1958, up until the 1990s when other states in Africa were transitioning to democracy, Guinea held firmly to its inglorious past of consistent political violence and uncertainties. A seeming new beginning appeared on the horizon with Alpha Conde's election as president in a bitter electoral contest in 2010 and subsequent re-election in 2015. This process of democratic transformation was frittered away with Conde's personal ambition of elongating his stay in office through the age-long derided act of constitutional amendment to legalize the incumbent's rights to contest elections after exhausting the initial two-terms as stated in the original constitution. The response to this "unstatesman like" act eroded the gains that had been recorded in the ten years prior. A section of the Guinean military reacted by toppling the Conde administration in a coup d'état on 5 September 2021.

The intrusion of the military in Guinea on 5 September, 2021 under the leadership of Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, hitherto, Head of the Special Task Force, lend credence to the position of modernization theorists on the military as a liberating force in a period of national instability. Aside the questionable manner through which Conde secured a third term in office, the coup plotters rationalized their action by making reference to the increasing misappropriation of surplus by the administration to the detriment of the Guinean masses. In Col. Doumbouya's words, "Guinea is beautiful. We don't need to rape Guinea anymore; we just need to make love to her." The peaceful nature of the coup d'état as well as its popular acceptance by opposition groups and the masses, provide some level of legitimacy for the intervention. The military intervention is, however, in direct contrast with the position of ECOWAS as stipulated in the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

The Protocol provides a range of consequential actions for ECOWAS member states that breach its provisions, especially military disruption of the democratic process. The ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council (an intergovernmental body composed of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the member-states of the organization) plays an important part in deciding ECOWAS course of action in countries where the democratic processes have been undermined by military intervention. The nine-member council guides ECOWAS' decision and action towards the restoration of the democratic process and the institution of a civilian administration. With reference to the Guinean case, ECOWAS first line of action on 8 September, 2021, was to

condemn the coup and issue a suspension order on Guinea as a member of the sub-regional body. Following the condemnation and suspension, ECOWAS intervened in the Guinea *coup d'etat* in September 2021, to revert Guinea back to democratically elected government.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach based on secondary sources of data from books, newspapers, magazines, internet sources, e-learning among others to examine the role of ECOWAS in regional security in West Africa. Secondary data are critical for understanding the historical and current dynamics of ECOWAS interventions and the challenges and prospects in regional security in West Africa sub-region.

4. Prospect of ECOWAS in Managing Security in West Africa
Strengthening Institutional Capacity

Effective institutions enable ECOWAS to efficiently coordinate efforts, mobilize resources, and address the complex and evolving security challenges in the region. This includes enhancing the capabilities of its security mechanisms, improving governance structures, and fostering better collaboration among member states to ensure timely and effective responses to crises. A crucial aspect of strengthening institutional capacity is enhancing the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), which plays a central role in regional peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts. Another critical component is improving the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), which helps identify and address potential conflicts before they escalate. Strengthening ECOWARN involves expanding its monitoring capabilities by integrating advanced technology and increasing the number of field monitors.

Promoting Political Stability and Democratic Governance

Political instability and governance deficits often underlie many of the conflicts and security challenges in the sub-region. By fostering democracy, ensuring peaceful transitions of power, and mitigating political disputes, ECOWAS has the potential to strengthen sub- regional stability and create a conducive environment for economic growth and social development. One of the key ways ECOWAS promotes political stability is through election monitoring and mediation in political crises. Electoral processes in West Africa have frequently been marred by irregularities, violence, and disputed outcomes, which have the potential to trigger larger conflicts. ECOWAS has been instrumental in deploying observer missions to ensure free, fair, and credible elections in member states. For example, ECOWAS's role in monitoring elections in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Liberia has been widely commended for fostering transparency and reducing tensions. Adebajo (2002) argue that these interventions are

critical in building trust in electoral systems and preventing the escalation of post-election conflicts. In addition to election monitoring, ECOWAS has established itself as a mediator in resolving political crises. The organization has played a pivotal role in brokering peace agreements and facilitating dialogue in countries experiencing political turmoil. For instance, ECOWAS successfully mediated in The Gambia's 2016 political impasse, ensuring a peaceful transition of power following disputed election results. Similarly, its interventions in Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire have been credited with averting potential conflicts and restoring constitutional order. ECOWAS's ability to act as a neutral mediator enhances its legitimacy and credibility as a regional body committed to democratic governance (Obi, 2009).

Strengthening governance frameworks in member states is another critical aspect of ECOWAS's role in promoting stability. Good governance, characterized by transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, is essential for preventing corruption and fostering public trust in institutions. ECOWAS has encouraged member states to adopt democratic norms and practices through the enforcement of protocols such as the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). This protocol emphasizes the principles of constitutional governance, respect for human rights, and the separation of powers. (Francis 2009) highlight the importance of these frameworks in creating a culture of democracy and reducing the likelihood of authoritarian regimes, which often destabilize the region.

ECOWAS's proactive role in addressing unconstitutional changes of government, such as coups d'état, which have been a persistent challenge in West Africa. Recent interventions in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, where ECOWAS imposed sanctions and mediated with coup leaders, demonstrate the organization's commitment to upholding democratic norms.

Addressing Emerging Security

The region west Africa face a growing array of challenges, including terrorism, transnational organized crime, piracy, cyber threats, and climate-induced conflicts. These threats transcend national borders, making regional cooperation and collective responses essential. As a regional security body, ECOWAS is uniquely positioned to tackle these issues by adopting proactive strategies, strengthening member states' capacities, and fostering international collaboration. One of the most pressing security threats is terrorism, with groups such as Boko Haram, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), and al-Qaeda-affiliated factions exploiting political instability, weak governance, and socio-economic vulnerabilities to expand their influence. ECOWAS has made strides in countering terrorism through its Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Plan of Action, emphasizing intelligence sharing, joint military operations, and civilian protection. However, sustained investment in

security frameworks and closer collaboration with international partners, such as the African Union and United Nations, are necessary for long-term success.

Transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and human trafficking, further undermines regional stability. West Africa has become a key transit hub for illicit drugs destined for Europe and North America, fuelling corruption, violence, and the erosion of state authority. ECOWAS's West African Action Plan on Drug Control and Crime Prevention focuses on strengthening border management, enacting legal reforms, and raising public awareness. Obi (2013) emphasized the importance of a comprehensive approach that combines law enforcement with socio-economic measures to address root causes such as poverty and unemployment. Piracy and maritime insecurity, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea, also pose significant threats to the region's economic and security interests. As a vital maritime route for global trade, the Gulf of Guinea has become a hotspot for piracy, illegal fishing, and smuggling. ECOWAS has collaborated with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to implement the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, promoting regional cooperation in maritime security. The ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS) further underscores the organization's commitment to safeguarding the maritime domain through joint naval patrols, capacity building, and information sharing.

Deepening Regional Cooperation

By fostering closer collaboration among its member states, ECOWAS can build a united front to tackle shared threats such as terrorism, transnational crime, and economic instability. Enhanced cooperation enables ECOWAS to pool resources, harmonize policies, and create synergies that strengthen the organization's capacity to promote peace, security, and development across the region. A key approach to achieving this is the harmonization of security policies and strategies among member states.

5. Challenges of ECOWAS in Managing Security in West Africa
External Influence

This presents a significant challenge for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in its efforts to secure the West African sub-region. This influence manifests through foreign intervention, geopolitical interests, and external funding, all of which can complicate ECOWAS's initiatives and undermine its authority. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of ECOWAS in addressing security challenges in the region. One of the most prominent forms of external influence is foreign intervention. Various global powers and regional actors have vested interests in West Africa, often leading to military or political involvement in local conflicts. For instance, countries like France and the United States have

engaged in military operations or support missions aimed at countering terrorism and stabilizing governments. While such interventions can provide immediate relief, they may also undermine the sovereignty of ECOWAS member states and create dependency on foreign powers for security, complicating ECOWAS's role as a regional authority.

The Legal and Institutional Framework.

The legal and institutional framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) presents a significant challenge in its efforts to ensure security in the West African sub-region. While ECOWAS has established various treaties, protocols, and institutions aimed at promoting peace and stability, gaps and inconsistencies in these frameworks hinder effective implementation and enforcement. One primary challenge is the inadequacy of legal instruments to effectively address contemporary security issues. Although ECOWAS has developed various legal frameworks, such as the Protocol on Non-Aggression and the Protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defense, these instruments are often outdated or insufficiently detailed to tackle modern security challenges, including terrorism, organized crime, and human trafficking. The lack of comprehensive legal provisions limits ECOWAS's ability to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging threats.

Coordination among Member States

Coordination among member states is a significant challenge for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as it strives to ensure security in the West African sub-region. Effective security cooperation requires a high degree of collaboration and commitment among member states, but varying political interests, levels of commitment, and operational capabilities hinder this process. Understanding these complexities is essential for evaluating ECOWAS's effectiveness in addressing regional security challenges. One primary barrier to effective coordination is the existence of divergent political interests among member states. Each country has its own national priorities, which can conflict with the collective goals of ECOWAS. For instance, some member states may prioritize internal political stability over sub-regional security initiatives, leading to reluctance in contributing troops or resources to ECOWAS-led missions. This disunity can result in fragmented responses to security threats, undermining the effectiveness of collective efforts.

Political Instability

Political instability is a significant challenge for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as it works to ensure security in the West African sub-region. This instability often manifests as coups, civil unrest, and governance crises,

complicating ECOWAS's efforts to maintain peace and stability. One of the primary ways political instability affects ECOWAS is through the frequency of coups and unconstitutional changes of government. In recent years, several member states have experienced military takeovers, undermining democratic governance and creating power vacuums. These events disrupt national stability and pose significant challenges for ECOWAS, which is committed to upholding democratic principles as outlined in its protocols. The organization's responses to such crises can be complicated by the need to balance intervention with respect for national sovereignty, leading to delays and inconsistencies in action and that pose challenge to ECOWAS in sub- regional security issues. Other challenges include Humanitarian crises represent a significant challenge for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as it endeavours to maintain security in the sub-region. These crises often arise from conflicts, political instability, and natural disasters, leading to widespread suffering, displacement, and destabilization. One of the primary contributors to humanitarian crises in West Africa is armed conflict. Ongoing violence in countries such as Mali, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso has resulted in severe humanitarian repercussions, including large-scale displacement of populations. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees often face dire living conditions, lack access to basic necessities, and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. ECOWAS is tasked with not only addressing the security aspects of these conflicts but also responding to the humanitarian needs of affected populations, which can stretch its resources thin (Aning, Kwesi, Sarjoh & Bah, 2010).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations
6.1 Conclusion
In conclusion, the study underscores the pivotal role of ECOWAS in fostering sub-regional security and stability in West Africa. Despite significant strides in establishing frameworks for collective security, the organization faces considerable challenges, particularly due to political instability, transnational threats, and funding limitations. These challenges have, at times, hindered ECOWAS's capacity to respond effectively to crises, revealing the complex dynamics that impact regional security efforts.

The study also highlights that while ECOWAS has the potential to streamline and enhance its security policies, success will largely depend on strengthening member states' commitment and capacity for collaboration. The reliance on external funding, though helpful in addressing immediate security needs, raises concerns about the sustainability and autonomy of ECOWAS's security interventions. Consequently, developing more self-sufficient funding mechanisms and enhancing local capacity are critical steps toward reducing dependency on foreign assistance.

Ultimately, for ECOWAS to achieve sustainable security and stability in West Africa, a multi-faceted approach is essential. Strengthening internal governance, investing in capacity-building, and fostering greater political cohesion among member states will enhance ECOWAS's ability to address regional security threats. With continued commitment to these areas, ECOWAS can further solidify its role as a cornerstone of peace and security in West Africa.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

i.   ECOWAS should promote policies that support political stability and good governance within its member states. This can be achieved through regular dialogue, mediation in times of political crises, and the enforcement of protocols that discourage unconstitutional changes of government.

ii. Member states should increase financial contributions to ECOWAS's security initiatives, enabling the organization to independently finance its operations. Establishing a regional security fund could reduce dependency on external aid and strengthen ECOWAS's capacity for swift, autonomous responses to regional threats.

iii. ECOWAS should establish a more robust framework for intelligence sharing among member states to address transnational threats effectively. Investing in a centralized intelligence database accessible to all member states can enhance real-time information sharing, especially in combating terrorism, organized crime, and insurgencies.

iv. ECOWAS should prioritize training programs for security personnel across member states, focusing on skills in intelligence gathering, crisis management, and counter-insurgency operations. Building local capacity will empower states to address security threats more effectively and reduce the need for foreign intervention.

v.   Economic growth initiatives should be integrated into ECOWAS's security agenda to tackle the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty and unemployment. Encouraging investment and creating regional economic opportunities can contribute to long-term stability and reduce susceptibility to radicalization and criminal activities.

vi. ECOWAS should refine its institutional frameworks to allow for rapid response to emerging security threats. This includes streamlining decision-making processes within the organization and ensuring that the ECOWAS Standby Force is adequately trained and equipped to respond swiftly to crises.

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