

REGIONAL CRISIS PREVENTION AND RECOVERY MECHANISMS IN WEST AFRICA: REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS EMPLOYING CRISIS PREVENTION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Executive summary:

Whole-of-Parliament Approach

Finding 1: Despite a reduction in major armed conflict the West Africa region still is one of the most conflict prone areas in the world with structural conditions that suggest potential for reversion to violent conflict in the short-to-medium term – this places an imperative on strengthening crisis prevention mechanisms and fostering the capacity of those stakeholders that engage with the mechanisms

Recommendation 1: When seeking to strengthen the role regional and national parliaments play in regional crisis prevention mechanisms a whole-of-parliament approach is strongly recommended; rather than focusing solely on traditional entry points, such as parliamentary committees that directly engage on peace and security issues.

Regional Crisis Prevention Mechanisms

ECOWAS

On paper, the ECOWAS protocols/ conventions provide a viable framework for addressing conflict and security issues; however, it is still unclear whether ECOWAS can translate these regional conflict prevention mechanisms into tangible results on the ground – especially considering the type of security concerns presently faced by the region.

Finding 2: The Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in 1999 and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001, unfortunately, the Mechanism does not include the ECOWAS Parliament and the supplementary protocol fails to define what the “empowerment and strengthening of parliaments” constitutes.

Recommendation 2(a): it will be important for ECOWAS to take the initiative and seek a broad consensus between community members as to what features define an independent, empowered and strong national parliament (**benchmarks**)

Recommendation 2(b): It should be noted that despite specific reference to promoting empowered parliaments in the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the Mechanism failed to include the ECOWAS Parliament as a primary organ of the community aimed at preventing and managing conflict.

Finding 3: The ECOWARN early warning system has been effective in working with and harnessing the extended resources/ skills of its civil society counterparts to assist it in achieving its objective and should be held up as an example of good practice; however, the mechanism as a whole still suffers from limited technical and human capacity and its available resources are not commensurate with its extensive mandate.

Finding 3(a): The development of technical and human capacity within the mechanism and WANEP will be essential for its continued evolution. Funding, whether through ECOWAS or international donors, should be sought to continue to build present capacity.

Finding 3(b): Assuming ECOWAS community members will be hesitant to authorize pre-emptive intervention in order to prevent escalation of local conflicts, ECOWARN should continue to focus on: (a) ensuring early warning information/ briefings are open source, therefore, can be used by an array of actors; and (b) through WANEP seek to foster closer relations with national institutions, such as parliaments, that could contribute to addressing crises as they arise, thereby mitigating the potential for conflict escalation. As the most representative institutions in

a democracy the inclusion of national parliaments in these early warning systems could build support in these institutions for them to play a more pronounced conflict prevention role.

Finding 4: Reducing poverty is a medium-term conflict prevention strategy aimed at addressing the structural conditions that make a country more prone to conflict. It is important to remember that ECOWAS' principal objective is to promote development through a unified economic community in West Africa.

Recommendation 4: Whilst ECOWAS should actively seek to strengthen mechanisms to manage emerging crises, it should simultaneously pursue its objective of building sustainable growth through a unified economic community, thereby ameliorating the structural conditions conducive to conflict.

ECOWAS Parliament

Finding 5: The ECOWAS Parliament has shown a willingness to engage on peace and security issues despite the fact the parliament does not possess formal power to do so.. Irrespective whether the ECOWAS Parliament chooses to play a more pronounced role in regional crisis prevention mechanisms through using soft power, explicitly through amendment of the Mechanism to give the parliament a defined role or through using the greater legitimacy it would exercise if directly elected, the ECOWAS Parliament should adopt a whole-of-parliament approach when dealing with crisis issues. The parliament needs to develop strategies or participate in mechanisms that will allow it, as an institution, to: (a) help manage crises when they arise; and (b) as a medium-term conflict prevention strategy, address the structural conditions that make the region more prone to conflict.

Recommendation 5: It is imperative that the internal capacity of the ECOWAS Parliament is strengthened so that it can play a constructive role in crisis management and conflict prevention. Initially efforts should focus on building the capacity of the Department of Political Affairs to support the Committee on Political Affairs, Peace and Security. However, as capacity develops within the parliamentary secretariat it will be important that the professional parliamentary staff that have been trained in conflict analysis also provide support to the other standing committees so that they can better understand the interrelationship between their portfolios, mandates and conflict prevention.

African Union and PAP

Finding 6: Compared to ECOWAS, the Pan African Parliament is more integrated into the African Union's crisis prevention framework. The African Union provides national parliaments with a structured platform through which to engage the crisis prevention mechanisms foreshadowed in the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council. Despite these clearer institutional reforms, it is unclear whether this has facilitated greater involvement by the Pan African Parliament in the regional crisis prevention mechanisms.

Recommendation 6: The African Union's crisis prevention mechanisms should be considered in circumstances where ECOWAS action or intervention could be construed as not being neutral or driven by an overriding concern for peace and stability in the region.

Overcoming Impediments to National Parliaments Engaging with Regional Crisis Prevention Mechanisms

Finding 7: After conflict, parliamentary institutions often remain weak in relation to the executive, armed groups and other non-state actors. Building effective democratic governance requires correcting this imbalance. External actors have a role to play assisting in the timely strengthening of parliaments after the cessation of conflict.

Recommendation 7(a): International actors and the parliamentary strengthening community should work with national parliaments to build their capacity and empower them to be an independent counterbalance to strong executives, thereby opening up politics.