

## **ECOWAS and Human Security in West Africa: A Review of the Literature**

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**Abstract:** The concept of human security has received widespread attraction from scholars of security studies and international relations. In West Africa however, the preoccupation of ECOWAS for long has been on efforts to save the collapse of state structures such that more attention has been on its military intervention. This review covers studies on human security in West Africa and ECOWAS efforts at tackling human security threats in the sub-region. It particularly looks at the literature relating to the triad interrelated human security threats of arms trafficking, drug trafficking and trafficking in persons (TIP) and ECOWAS efforts in addressing them. It observes in the end that the extant literature has covered several aspects of human security in West Africa but recommends the need for a study that highlights the interrelatedness of these threats. This will help shape the direction of policy especially for the sub-regional body and its impact on the security of its people.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The concept of human security as a shift from state security in the West African context and ECOWAS itself as a human security regime in the light of the nature of its interventions in response to the security challenges is reviewed. Arms trafficking, drug trafficking and trafficking in persons (TIP) which are three issues that have posed serious threats to human security in the sub-region discussed by several scholars are also captured. The purpose of the review is to highlight the focus of the contributions of scholars to the subject so far in order to identify gaps in the literature that will need to be filled by further research.

### **II. HUMAN SECURITY IN WEST AFRICA**

Abubakar, Omeje and Galadima (2010) acknowledged human security to be by far, the most significant dimension of conflict in postcolonial Africa. It is often in direct competition with the state- and military-centricity of security that characterised Africa in the cold war era. For them, human security involves meeting the needs of the most vulnerable individuals, groups and communities and includes human rights protection, environmental protection, health care, poverty alleviation and development. It is driven by people's needs and aspirations and their desire to alleviate existential and structural threats and fears. The authors affirm that the main focus of politics and the discourse about security in Africa is eradicating or mitigating social problems such as physical violence, armed conflict, poverty, hunger, extreme inequality, disease, unemployment, oppression, injustice, environmental degradation, corruption, mismanagement and so forth.

Hussein, Gnisci and Wanjiru (2004) have attempted to situate the concepts of security and human security in relation to the West African context. They identified "the protection of human beings and local communities from a variety of threats, ranging from individual to collective, and from physical to political, economic, social, or environmental" (2004,p.10). They saw the combination of the twin agendas of "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want" as an attempt to operationalise the definitions of the concept in these various components. It is this broader concept of security that underpins reconstruction processes in countries emerging from violent conflict such as in West Africa. The trio claimed that in West Africa, national recovery strategies based on reconciliation (at the national and local levels) sit alongside economic revival, institution building, Security System Reform, and the maintenance of peacekeeping forces in the country or zone affected by conflict, to consolidate the peacebuilding process. They identified violent conflict as detrimental to human security and given the interconnectedness and regional dimensions of African conflicts, they expressed the need for an overarching continental and regional strategy for peace and security.

Although the work is on human security, the authors still tended to place emphasis on the military perspective relating to conflicts and the role of security apparatus in ensuring peace which is what the present

study will want to draw attention away from because issues of human security go beyond concerns about armed conflict. It is in this regard that the contributions of The Sahel and West Africa Club/OECD (2006) which attempted to address human security in West Africa focused on various aspects of human security including social, health, environmental and natural disasters is a departure. It also included disasters of human origin, food security, challenges of governance and peace and security. It was acknowledged that human security is an extremely serious issue in West Africa because of the many internal conflicts which have undermined security in the sub-region over the past two decades. Political instability, civil wars, under-development and poverty have weakened governments (responsible for their populations' security) and rendered large sections of society increasingly vulnerable. It recognised the fact that many of the conflicts are regional therefore spreading insecurity far beyond the original crisis areas therefore synergising efforts to find sustainable solutions to the various challenges is essential in such a situation. As a priority, populations, especially the most vulnerable, need to be protected and their basic needs met. They need to be protected from all detrimental threats to their dignity and physical and moral integrity. The authors were of the view that "The challenges to human security concern not only countries shaken by conflict but also those emerging from conflict or at peace. They are linked to natural, human and political factors" (2006,p.10).

. This strikes a common cord with Hussein, Gnisci and Wanjiru (op.cit) who also saw the need for an overarching continental and regional strategy for peace and security due to the interconnectedness and regional dimensions of African conflicts which have been detrimental to human security. In this regard they recognised the fact that the African continent and the West African region, in particular, have developed their own security frameworks through the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU) and ECOWAS.

### **III. ECOWAS AND HUMAN SECURITY**

The question that comes to mind considering the foregoing this whether ECOWAS as an organisation has properly captured and is pursuing human security as an agenda in its framework. Peñas (2010) explored the main characteristics of human security and its application in developing countries, using the West African sub-region – particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – as a point of reference. He focused on comprehending through a human security perspective, how peace and security in Africa can be understood, and argued that ECOWAS constitutes itself as a human security regime. First, he maintained that although the fundamental elements of human security doctrine may be universal, it is important to emphasise the significant differences between the Western world and the Global South. For example, political instability and violent conflict in sub-Saharan Africa which is a cause of human security can be traced to its colonial legacy. This is because the state was created as a legal entity before the consolidation of the traditional elements present in the Western African states since their territories were arbitrarily delineated by European colonial powers. Making the provision of human security a reality must, according to Peñas be preceded first of all by the creation of a human security regime. He defined a human security regime as "a set of states whose citizens have not achieved freedom from fear and freedom from want, but do perceive their main security concerns as people-centred and have made reassurance arrangements to reduce the insecurity of people in the region"(2010,p.4). By this, he considered ECOWAS as a human security regime that can be used to turn the West African sub-region into a security community such as the European Union.

Ismail (2011) acknowledged that ECOWAS has indeed made efforts that have led to the decline in armed conflict in West Africa since the upsurge of the 1990s in Liberia and Sierra Leone that affected the entire sub-region. He however questioned whether this respite was an indication that peace and security was now guaranteed in the sub-region. He cautioned that "the lull in rebellions and the commendable recalibration of ECOWAS peace and security architecture, the extent to which extant conflict prevention and management mechanisms reflect or adequately takes care of current and emerging security threats is yet to be adequately tested" (2011,p.1). He interrogated how, where and why human security links up to the broader security debate in theory and practice focusing on the 'freedom from fear' component of the broader human security agenda. Ismail acknowledged the commendable formulation, provisions and comprehensive understanding of the security (mostly conflict) condition in the sub-region through the new ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF).

However, he contended that emerging sources of human and material destruction, displacement and dislocation, and trans-border insecurity in the sub-region were inadequately reflected and/or prioritised in ECOWAS' peace and security architecture. Ismail therefore concluded that while ECOWAS' current security architecture provided an invaluable asset to promoting human security as captured in the 2008 ECPF, this was only in potential and less in reality. Although the framework represented an innovative milestone in addressing insecurities connected to violent conflicts, they appear to still be poorly coordinated and there is lack of a coherent strategy for dealing with them in a crosscutting manner. Significantly, he highlighted the need for a West African perspective on human security that recognised and prioritised the pervasive threats to the security of individuals and communities.

Ismail has situated a major issue in the discourse on the role of ECOWAS in addressing the human security challenges in West Africa as that of the gap between theory and practice located in lack of a clearly defined human security charter with specific priorities formulated for the sub-region. Part of this lies in the need to target and properly tackle in a coordinated manner, those dimensions of insecurity that are interrelated and feed one another.

Tejpar and Lins de Albuquerque (2015) in their analysis of the challenges ECOWAS has faced in West Africa consider transnational crimes to be rife in the sub-region undermining the role of state structures. This has led to a lapse in the ability of these state structures to forestall the contributions of these crimes to regional insecurity. The sub-region has thus become a major hub helping in the proliferation of transnational crime not only on the continent but also being a major route to other continents.

In collaboration with the European Union and Interpol, ECOWAS has created the West African Police Information System. This initiative was created to foster intelligence sharing on transnational crimes between ECOWAS member states. Databases of such intelligence have been stationed in Ghana, Mali, Niger and Benin (Tejpar and Lins de Albuquerque, 2015).

The three critical domains that have impacted heavily on human security in the sub-region are arms trafficking, drug trafficking and trafficking in persons. These three are the bedrock of terrorism which is currently a major source of human insecurity in the sub-region. We will consider some of the literature on these challenges.

#### **IV. ARMS TRAFFICKING**

Arms trafficking is a major source of threat to human insecurity in West Africa. Keili (2008) stated that West Africa has for many years been the most unstable sub-region on the continent as a result of the availability and use of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) which is leading to tragic consequences, not only for combatants but also for civilians, who form the majority of casualties—people are losing their lives, their health, their families, their homes and their livelihoods. Small arms, especially firearms, are the primary tools used to kill, threaten and intimidate civilian populations in West Africa. Small arms play a significant role in many abuses, including rape, enforced disappearances, torture, forced displacement and enforced recruitment of child soldiers. When crimes have been committed with machetes, the victims were often initially rounded up with small arms. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 1999) and Le Sage (2010) have also highlighted the impact of SALWs on people especially civilian populations.

Berman and Florquin (2005), confirmed that “Armed groups are active in a majority of ECOWAS countries and represent a clear threat to regional and human security” (2005,p.15). They found out that in 2004 alone, regional instability contributed to the migration of more than 2.7 million people, an estimated half of whom were internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Page, Godnick and Vivekananda (2005) reviewed the development and subsequent adoption of the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small arms and Light Weapons in West Africa by ECOWAS was a significant step in the right direction in addressing small arms proliferation. They were of the opinion that the performance of the Moratorium presented a mixed and modest picture as its impact on the level of proliferation was more evolutionary than revolutionary. They stressed that although the Moratorium was declared in 1998, the necessary mechanisms and instruments for its implementation took a couple of years to articulate and operationalise. In addition, there was a clear lack of wider knowledge on its operation such that most of the information relating to the Moratorium was the result of NGO activities. This had the likelihood of giving an indication of some of the loopholes that generally characterised the reason for the failure of efforts towards arms control in West Africa generally.

The weakness of the Moratorium in addressing the challenge of small arms in West Africa led the ECOWAS to adopt a Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials in June 2006. For Keili (op.cit), the rapid ratification and comprehensive implementation of the ECOWAS Convention was all West Africa desperately needed to put an end to the challenges to security in the sub-region. Berkol (2007) who made an analysis of the Convention observed that problems in implementing the Moratorium did not arise solely from the fact that the instrument was not legally binding, but also from the lack of a specialised cell within ECOWAS responsible exclusively for the implementation of the Moratorium and endowed with sufficient means to do so.

#### **V. DRUG TRAFFICKING**

Drug trafficking has surfaced as a serious threat to human security in West Africa as the region has become a major hub for drug trafficking and other transnational crimes (Tejpar and Lins de Albuquerque, 2015). In a report prepared by the Studies and Threat Analysis Section and the Regional Office for Western and Central Africa of the United Nations office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2008), the authors declared that the emergence of West Africa as a major transit region for drug trafficking is more than just a drugs problem: it is a

serious threat to security. The report noted that apart from drug money perverting the weak economies in the region, drugs are also poisoning the region's youth since the foot soldiers in this growing trade are paid for their services with cocaine. Therefore, the vulnerability of West Africa to drugs and crime is deepening even further. This has been corroborated by Shehu (2009) who affirmed that socially and health-wise, the transiting of drugs through any given country means that some of it inevitably stays there, either as payment for services rendered or as a source of profit for the traffickers. Particularly he claimed that

Drugs will thus be consumed locally, with the dire effects on consumers that we all know. In a poor country, the disruptive effect on family and society is multiplied and magnified. Addiction sets in and the afflicted persons become a huge burden in all respects. They will steal to feed their habit, often from other family members. They will resell drugs at extremely low prices to earn their fix, thus contaminating their surroundings. They will use violence if necessary to obtain cash, or simply because they become frustrated and angry. A cycle of dependency, distress, poverty and crime sets in (2009,p.7).

He noted that this affects education as school attendance rates go down giving rise to high illiteracy rates especially among males which is already excessively high in West Africa. This leads to a high unemployable young men become angry, aggressive and violent and this cycle which needs to be broken rather continuous with the drug culture making things worse.

Obot (2013) reported that the highest prevalence of cannabis use in the world is in West and Central Africa and this drug has remained the most popular illicit substance across the globe. Particularly he stated that:

In 2010 some 12.4 percent of adults in West Africa aged 15-64 years had used cannabis compared with 4.2 percent and 5.4 percent in East and Southern Africa, respectively. While the average for our region is certainly much higher than the global average (3.8 percent) or the overall African average (7.8 percent) and has been consistently so for many years, it must be noted that reported prevalence of cannabis use can be much higher within high risk subgroups in some countries, e.g., 65 percent of street children in Sierra Leone reported smoking cannabis (2013,p.4).

Obot asserted that drug use is associated with a myriad of health, social, employment, security, and family problems with clear and often measurable impacts on the afflicted, the people around them, and society at large. Obot (op.cit) maintained that some forms of drug use (especially IDU) have a direct link to infection with HIV and hepatitis B and C. In terms of drug-related death, the Comparative Risk Assessment project drugs globally is about 200,000 and 41,000 in Africa.

Similarly, Brown (2013) noted several cases in States of the region such as that of Ghana which up to June 2011, had about 887 illicit drug users being treated at four psychiatric hospitals asserting that it is safe to assume that those seeking treatment at psychiatric hospitals are but a small fraction of local users. Throughout West Africa, the presence of drugs is engendering a growing user population and straining already weak health systems with no real mechanisms to cope. He concluded that governments in the sub-region compromised by drug trafficking have less to invest in health or education because those resources have been diverted to address the insecurity resulting from trafficking-related violence. Brown particularly affirmed that "On net, drug trafficking and other illicit trades represent the most serious challenge to human security in the region since resource conflicts rocked several West African countries in the early-1990s"(2013,p.6).

In Guinea Bissau high-level state authorities have been implicated in drug trafficking with some high ranking officers publicly admitting the involvement of some military officials in drug trafficking. Where the state that has the overriding security apparatus for the protection of the citizens is in the hands of criminals, human security is at great risk. Gberie (2013) has discussed this more elaborately in his work *State Officials and their Involvement in Drug Trafficking in West Africa*.

ECOWAS response to the drug trafficking challenge has centred around the Regional Action Plan to Address the Growing Problem of Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organised Crimes and Drug Abuse in West Africa (2008-2011). The Plan was derived from the ECOWAS Political declaration on Drug Trafficking and Other Organised Crimes in West Africa and African Union Action Plan.

Aning and Bah (2009) acknowledged these efforts by ECOWAS and add other initiatives by the organisation including the adoption of a Resolution relating to Prevention and Control of Drug Abuse in West Africa; Recommendation C/98 on the establishment of a Regional Fund for Financing of Drug Control Activities in West Africa; Decision on the establishment of a regional fund for financing drug control activities and Decision on establishing the inter-governmental action group against money laundering in West Africa. They however noted that although all these institutional frameworks exist, operationally, not much has taken place except the establishment of the Intergovernmental Anti-Money Laundry Group in Africa (GIABA) that has in addition to its primary mandate attempted to explicate the interrelated threats of drugs and money laundering.

The Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (ACSS) (2017) stated that there are counter narcotic collaborations between the international community and nations in the region as they work toward adopting the UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. Aning and Pokoo (2013)

alluding to this have pointed out that the predominant approach to drug trafficking in the region to date has been based on the international narcotics control regime which is centred on stemming the supply of drugs through law enforcement efforts. Rousseau (2017,p.6) points out that the nations in the region do not possess the necessary means to control and protect their territories making the movement of drugs through the region an easy task. Institutions and policy makers are therefore particularly ill prepared to respond to the human security threats posed by drug trafficking relating to health and developmental aspects which over time could constitute a greater security threat to West Africa than currently acknowledged. The ACSS (2017) has also pointed out that governments that lack the capacity to counter this illicit trade face the threat of state institutions becoming dysfunctional and the very foundations of the state being undermined. The need to explore alternative approaches to curbing the menace therefore becomes compelling.

## **VI. TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP)**

Olateru-Olagbegi (2004) traced the beginning of trafficking in persons (TIP) in West Africa to the 1960s which grew to an alarming proportion in the 1990s involving mostly women and children. The period recorded over 400,000 children working in Benin, approximately six hundred and fifty thousand (625,000) children in Cote D'Ivoire and over twelve million (12,000,000) children engaged in child labour in Nigeria. Within the period also, over ten thousand (10,000) Nigerians girls and women were engaged in prostitution in Italy constituting about 60% of all prostitutes in the sex trade in Italy. She indicated that the victims were deceived, coerced or cajoled to leaving their destination with the hope of better opportunities only to be trafficked for domestic work, farm labour and commercial sex. The children were forced into exploitative labour with the onerous terms usually determined by the traffickers while the women were engaged into prostitution in Europe and the Middle East and forced into repayment bonds. These victims were exposed to physical and sexual abuse thereby exposing them to risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. This agrees with The World FactBook (2014:1) that:

Trafficking in persons is modern-day slavery, involving victims who are forced, defrauded, or coerced into labour or sexual exploitation ... Human trafficking is a multi-dimensional threat, depriving people of their human rights and freedoms, risking global health, promoting social breakdown, inhibiting development by depriving countries of their human capital, and helping fuel the growth of organized crime.

The AU- COMMIT Campaign on Combating Human Trafficking 2009-2012 (2010) has expressed similar views describing it as a scourge to human beings. This is perhaps the reason why Sawadogo (2012:7) has described human trafficking as "an egregious and profound abuse of human rights. It maintains people in a state of dependence since it hinders the freedom of individuals, which is akin to modern-day slavery and thus a serious human rights violation". He also believed that it deteriorates human relationships by driving the trafficked persons from their families and regions, thus creating an atmosphere of social frustration and a negative influence on the dynamics of regional integration. This way, efforts by West African states to change the destiny of their societies is compromised. Sawadogo also enumerated several other negative effects of TIP to include impeding legitimate economic activities by the trafficked persons and disorganising the national economy as human trafficking activities constitute an economic loss to the country of origin of the trafficked persons. It can even be a potential source for financing terrorist activities, giving de facto roots to political and institutional insecurity at the national, regional, and international levels. In a word, it goes without saying that transnational human trafficking has a negative impact on West African regional endeavours to promote and implement good governance, a sine qua non for sustainable development. All of these either directly or indirectly impinge on human security in the sub-region.

Sachikonye (2010) linked the prevalence of trafficking in persons in West Africa to the effects of poverty as half of the region's countries were among the poorest in the world. This context not only facilitates TIP very well but also serves well to thwart efforts to curb it. The trade has emerged from the bastardisation of the age long cultural practice of fostering in Africa. Unfortunately the author noted, there appear to be a lack of mobilisation and mutual consensus by West African countries to deal with the complex nature of TIP including the inability of many countries to ratify the United Nations protocol on Trafficking in Persons. He concluded that the complexity of TIP needed a multitude of strategies to effectively counter and prevent it including communities, governments and NGOs all of which must then be tied in to the greater issues of poverty and development within the region.

Sawadogo (op.cit) stressed that with a few exceptions, trafficking in human beings remains a relatively low priority among officials in West Africa such that for criminal networks, West Africa was a "haven" and still presents a comparative advantage in reducing risks and consequently maximizing profits via transnational trafficking in human beings. The author acknowledged the efforts of NGOs in fighting TIPs in the West African sub-region but emphasised that their actions would have little effect without the cooperation and backing of the state which alone has the capacity and responsibility of protecting victims or witnesses who decide to testify against perpetrators of the crime. For this to succeed, he saw the need for a regional security framework to

combat transnational human trafficking which would guarantee civilian safety and advance the national interests of West African countries.

Towards this, some intergovernmental organisations engaged themselves to work with ECOWAS to produce an ECOWAS Declaration in December 2001 and Plan Action against Trafficking in Persons 2002-2003 which was later preceded by another plan of action 2008-2011. Again ECOWAS and ECCAS adopted a Joint Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons in 2006 with similar strategies to the ECOWAS Plan of Action. Olayemi (2010) the Advisor, Trafficking in Persons of the ECOWAS Commission spelt out the focus areas of these efforts to include legal framework and policy development; protection and support to victims of trafficking in persons; prevention and awareness raising; collection, exchange and analysis of information; specialization and training; travel and identity documents and monitoring and evaluation of the plan of action. Toward its implementation, the ECOWAS Anti-Trafficking Unit was established for the purpose of co-ordinating the efforts to combat trafficking in persons within the ECOWAS Secretariat.

Sawadogo (op.cit) has observed however that there has been a lack of coordination among the intergovernmental organisations engaged with ECOWAS that has led to a diversion of their strategies and led to contradictory demands on governments and societies involved which has hampered the efficacy of their actions. This suggests that ECOWAS itself take responsibility for the fight against TIP than rely heavily the goodwill of external aid who ordinarily come with their interests that may not more readily facilitate the speedy elimination of this “crime that shames us all” (Costa, 2000,p.3). It therefore means that there is the need for a more indigenous articulation of strategies that will help ECOWAS to properly address this challenge in West Africa.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

The review of literature on human security in West Africa and the efforts of ECOWAS to counter them have revealed that there is indeed a recognition of this challenge in the sub-region and the organisation is making attempts to manage it. The continuation of threats to human security in the sub-region and in some cases, their exacerbation means that the problem is probably not yet properly understood or that the approach is skewed. It appears from this review that most of the literature target one aspect of the threats or another. There is not much attempt to show the relationship between and among these threats: how these threats feed each other in such a way that a harmonised approach towards tackling them can be articulated.

Although Aning and Bah (2009) attempted such linkages, they identified governance, drug trafficking and arms trafficking as threats to human security. The inclusion of governance as a threat to human security does not flow with the drug and arms trafficking and obscures the relationship of the main threats. The present review recognises the increasing challenge of trafficking in persons as the proper third ‘party’ in the triad of threats to human security in the sub-region. These threats are related in that they use the same structures and routes and all of them feed one another and are also precursors to terrorism as their presence create a conducive environment for it to thrive. This review therefore recommends the need to undertake a study that properly captures the various dimensions of human security and especially the link among the most impactful threats and the coordinated approach needed to deal with them so as to help ECOWAS to evolve a coordinated method of addressing them.

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