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The Human Security Imperative in West Africa: An Analysis of ECOWAS' Response to Emerging Non-Military Security Threats

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges of non-military human security threats in West Africa and also appraises ECOWAS credibility as a security actor in addressing these threats. The study utilised both primary and secondary data. For the primary data, in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 respondents who are chosen purposively from the ECOWAS Commission, Selected Embassies in West Africa and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nigeria. Secondary data were sourced from ECOWAS documents such as protocols establishing the various organs, institutions and modus operandi of the institution. The study revealed that ECOWAS mechanisms which include its various policies for addressing human security challenges in the sub-region are good, but they have not been effective due to some factors which include: lack of political will by member states to implement protocols, weak infrastructure within the member states and inadequate funding. Through the regional body, human security agenda has gained more importance in most of its member states. The study concluded that ECOWAS through its several policy frameworks has the capacity to address non military human security threats in the sub region. However, there is need for more synergy between the regional and national policy frameworks for effective response to these threats.

Introduction

The dissatisfaction with the focus of security studies during the cold war era which laid more emphasis on state security at the detriment of other aspects of human lives necessitated a new security paradigm (White, 2018). Thus, it brought about a paradigm shift from state to human as the referent of security efforts. The intellectual origin of this can be traced to the works of Buzan (1984 and 1997) where he argued for an alternative conception of the concept of security from the narrow military perception of the cold war era. However, Mahbub Ul Haq also attracted the global attention to the concept of human security in the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report of 1994.

The report gave an explicit definition of Human security from two main perspectives which include freedom from fear and freedom from want. The freedom from fear perspective refers to violent threats such as civil wars, terrorism, and armed robbery among others (Mark, 2004). The freedom from wants on the other hand refers to non-violent threats such as poverty, disease, hunger among others (Thakur, 2004). Collins (2013) argued that while violent threats have been at the core of security discourse, non violent threats should be given equal and adequate attention. In West Africa, Previous studies (Zabadi, 2005: Ismail, 2011: Dinshak and Dan Fulani, 2018) on ECOWAS and human security threats have focused more on military or violent threats. These include threats such as inter and intra state conflicts, cross border criminality, terrorism, proliferation of militia groups and ethnic crisis. These studies also advocated for a collective response through a regional framework in addressing these human security vulnerabilities. This is apposite because, security threats in the sub region are intertwine and this put a doubt on individual state efforts at pursuing national security (Aning and Atta-Asamoah, 2011). For instance boko haram crisis which started in the North Eastern part of Nigeria had spilled over to neighboring countries of Chad and Niger republic (Felter, 2018). Furthermore, banditry and farmer\herder crisis have also become an interstate security menace in the sub region for its prevalence in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. These violent or military security threats have been described as the cause of non military threats such as mass poverty and refuge crisis (Aning and Atta-Asamoah, 2011). Against this background, this article identified and discussed the challenges of human security in West Africa from the freedom from want perspective and also examines ECOWAS credibility as a security actor in addressing these threats. While the study acknowledged that there are numerous non-military human security threats in West Africa, the focus of the work will be on four major non-human security threats which include mass poverty, bad governance, food crisis and Epidemic Diseases. Poverty among many West African states represents some of the worst or highest levels in the world while many of its member states such as Niger and Sierra Leone are among the 10 least developed countries in the world. The sub region is also heavily reliant on the importation of food while there is also a challenge of food accessibility because of the dwindling purchasing power. Health insecurity in the sub region is evident in the chronic lack of access to medical facilities as well as rampant epidemics such as malaria, Ebola, Lassa fever among others. All these problems are exacerbated by the menace of bad or failed governance as many of its member states are ranked low on the Chandler's governance index. This is due to high level of corruption and mismanagement among the political leaders. These four threats are considered significant because of the direct and immediate impact they have on human lives as well as the impact they have had as causal factor of conflict and insecurity. Furthermore, the study also examines ECOWAS credibility as a regional security actor in addressing these challenges. This study is significant as it intend to show the symbiotic effects of human security threats from its two standpoints of freedom from want and freedom from fear and the need for an effective regional framework in addressing them.

Literature Review

ECOWAS and Human Security in West Africa

Literature on ECOWAS and Human security in West Africa are quite expansive while most have focused more on the freedom from fear perspective. In most of these articles, focus has been on the analysis of violent threats such as terrorism, trans-border crimes, inter and intra state crisis, arms proliferation and ECOWAS

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response to addressing these challenges. In his study, Olawale (2011) identified material and human destruction in violent conflicts, trans-border insecurity and dislocation as emerging human security threats that has attracted lesser attention on ECOWAS human security agenda. The main argument of the paper was that ECOWAS security agenda should extend beyond armed conflicts to include other violent threats such as terrorism; youth militias, refugee crisis and sub-national violence which have expose the citizens of the region to different degrees of vulnerabilities. While he noted that the ECPF of 2008 is a good effort by ECOWAS in promoting human security agenda in the region, the study noted that the objective of the framework is far from been realized. Nwangwu et al (2019) in their study on the relevance of ECOWAS as a regional framework focused on ECOWAS successes in the areas of peace and security, democratization and good governance as well as its protocol on free movement of goods, person and services. The sub regional body was described as a pertinent regional integration framework within the global political economy. While the work does not have human security focus, its recognition of ECOWAS efforts on peace, security and development shows that ECOWAS is making some progress on its human security agenda. According to Anning and Atta-Asamoah (2011), violent and protracted conflict in Sub Saharan Africa in the Post Cold War era is prevalent more in West Africa with negative implications for the region's stability. These include instabilities in West African states such as Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. This position is further buttressed by Gawi and Abdullahi (2024), as they argued that West Africa has been plagued with numerous security threats which include terrorism, armed conflicts and organized crimes. These threats are noted to constitute obstacles to regional stability in the area. In Akinyemi et al (2024), the resurgence of military coup in the sub region is described as a security threat that impedes ECOWAS quest for socio-economic development in the sub-region. Dinshak and Dan-Fulani (2018) writing from the narrow school perspective of human security identified arms trafficking, human trafficking and drug trafficking as human security challenges in the sub region and also examined ECOWAS efforts in addressing these challenges. The study concluded that lack of harmonious approach in responding to human security challenges in West Africa by ECOWAS is a major impending factor against ECOWAS in its effort to promote human security in the region. Ogwu (2008), arguing from the broad school perspective identified child soldiers, refugee crisis, HIV, transborder crimes, poverty and conflict as human security challenges that requires ECOWAS effort as a collective security mechanism in the region. While she extended her view beyond the freedom from fear component, her study did not take into considerations important human security threats such as endemic diseases, environmental degradation, food insecurity, mass unemployment. Osagie et al (2017) in their assessment of ECOWAS credibility as a regional security actor argued that ECOWAS as an institutional framework has been able to evolve conflict management strategy and security framework which has resulted in significant progress in conflict management in the region. The study further identified that issues of poverty, human right abuses and election fraud should be given adequate attention by the sub regional organisation. The essence of this is to strengthening the peace building efforts of ECOWAS as an institutional framework. The studies review noted various threats to human security in the West African sub region which include both military and non-military threats. However, these threats have not been interrogated within the broader context of an integrated and broader context of human security which the broad school signifies. Furthermore, ECOWAS as a credible security actor within the context of hegemonic stability

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theory has not been given much attention in previous studies. It is to this task that this study avails itself.

Research Methodology

Primary and secondary data were sourced for this study. For primary data, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted at the various departments of ECOWAS, which include: Political Affairs, Agriculture and Environment, Gender and Human Development, Trade and Free Movement, as well as Infrastructure. In addition, in-depth interview were conducted at the Department of Political Science of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies of six West African countries in Nigeria. These embassies include Liberia, Mali, Ghana, Benin Republic, Guinea and Sierra Leone and they are purposively selected to include stable and unstable democracies in the region. The respondents included five people in the senior cadre rank from ECOWAS who are deeply involved in the activities of ECOWAS which is the main organization that the work has as its focal point. The choice of the officers in senior cadre is essential as a result of the sensitivity of the information that was elicited from them. These respondents were able to give adequate information about the activities of their organization as regards human security in the sub region. For the academic institution, three respondents who have worked extensively on ECOWAS and related areas were interviewed. Lastly, two respondents each, who are senior members of staff, were interviewed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies of the six selected West African countries. These respondents were selected because of their familiarity with the various issues of insecurity in their countries and ECOWAS efforts at addressing them. Secondary data were sourced from ECOWAS documents, such as protocols establishing its various organs and institutions. Also data were collected from books, journals, articles, magazines, newspapers and unpublished literature. The data generated was analyzed through the use of descriptive content analysis. The research questions are segmented into themes while the responses of the respondents are coded and analyzed in line with these themes.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes the theory of hegemonic stability to explaining ECOWAS credibility as a regional security actor in addressing non military human security threats in the West African sub region. The Hegemonic stability theory is an International Relations theory which postulated that international economic openness and stability is only attainable by the presence of a single dominant state (Webb and Krasner, 1989). A hegemonic distribution of power in this context implies a condition in which a single state has a predominance of power that is relatively conducive to the establishment of a stable and open international economic system (Krasner, 1976). The theory was developed and popularised by several scholars such as Keohane(1980), Kindleberger(1973) and Gilpin(1984). Specifically, the theory's argument is that there is a causal relationship between hegemony and systemic stability. This means that for a system to be stable there must be an hegemon that will act as a stabilizer for the system. However, the hegemon alone cannot exercise a preponderant power but can play a dominant role in the constructing significant and essential rules for the system (Bergstein, 1975). The theory has been applied to explaining regional frameworks and political instability in developing countries with useful insights (Sotirios, 2007). Within the context of this study as and in relation to the credibility of ECOWAS as a security actor, Nigeria is usually considered as the hegemon in the sub region. This is due to its vast political, economic and military power which is also perceived as partially a determinant factor of ECOWAS credibility as a security actor.

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However, Nigeria as an hegemon within ECOWAS must operate on the basis of consensus with other member states and not unilateral use of force. In this regard, the theory is deemed useful and significant to this study in the following ways: First, it helps in examining the credibility of ECOWAS as an effective regional security with the capability to respond to non-military human security threats in the region. Thus, it is used to explain the reasons why in spite of the adoption of several protocols and agreements, little implementation has been observed. The study also utilizes the broad school approach to human security to explain the significance of its focus on non-military aspect of human security. This approach to human security indicated that human security is beyond violent security threats which mean that it combines both freedom from fear and freedom from wants (Kerr, 2013). These theories help to provide sufficient framework of analysis for explaining the subject matter of the study.

Non-violent Human Security threats in West Africa

Extreme Poverty and Human Deprivation

In West Africa, most states in the sub region in the last two decades have experienced development from the macroeconomic perspective (Oxfarm, 2021). For instance, out of ten fastest developing economies globally, six are in Africa while three of them are in West Africa (African Development Bank, 2020). These include Ghana, Cote d Ivoire and Benin Republic. This growth is unprecedented based on the fact that the economies of states in the sub-region have been underdeveloped for several decades since independence from colonial rule. However, a major problem with this macro economic development is that it has not translated to reduction in poverty and human deprivation in the region. The economic growth in the states that witnessed it was only successful in enriching the wealthy minority while the majority is getting poorer (Oxfarm, 2021). The most immediate consequence of rising poverty among the people of West Africa is rising inequality which eventually results in human deprivation (World Bank, 2016). While all forms of inequality cannot be linked with conflict and insecurity, the prevailing inequality in Africa because of its exploitative nature has been a cause of increasing human deprivation in the sub region. More importantly, poverty in West Africa by its nature is multidimensional and it is more common among the youths (Fonta, Yameogo, Tinto, Huyen, Natama, Compaore and Fonta, 2020: World Bank Group, 2020). Considering the youthful nature of the region's demography, this will have an adverse consequence on violence and conflict in the region. According to Hallum and Obeng (2019), inequality instigated by mass poverty among the people of West Africa is at a crisis level. This is because more people continue to fall into poverty despite an improved economic growth in the region. Table I and II on the next page is an illustration of the unemployment rate and multidimensional nature of poverty in West Africa.

Table 1

Population Size and Unemployment Rate in West African States

Countries	Population	Unemployment Rate
Niger	24,206,636	0.69
Nigeria	206,139,587	9.01
Gambia	2,416,664	9.64
Sierra Leone	7,976,985	4.6
Ghana	31,072,945	4.53
Senegal	16,743,930	7.1

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Countries	Population	Unemployment Rate
Burkina Faso	20,903,278	4.96
Guinea	13,132,792	4.35
Guinea Bissau	1,967,998	3.13
Mali	20,250,834	7.5
Togo	8,278,737	4.05
Liberia	5,057,677	3.3
Cote d'Ivoire	26,378,275	3.5
Benin	12,123,198	2.54
Cabo Verde	555,988	13.41

Statista, 2022 and World Bank, 2020

Table 2

Poverty Profile of Fourteen West African countries

Country	Multi-dimen-sional poverty indices	Intensity of depri-vation	National Poverty line	Popula-tion living below $1.90 PPP per day	Standard of living	Population in severe Multidi-mensional poverty
Nigeria	0.254	54.8	46.0	53.5	40.9	26.8
Sierra Leone	0.297	57.9	52.9	40.1	52.4	30.4
Republic of Benin	0.368	55.0	40.1	49.5	42.9	40.9
Senegal	0.288	53.2	46.7	38.0	33.0	32.8
Burkinafaso	0.519	83.8	40.1	49.5	42.9	40.9
Gambia	0.024	41.6	48.6	10.1	35.9	18.8
Guinea Bissau	0.372	67.3	69.3	67.1	44.7	40.4
Republic of Guinea	0.373	66.2	55.2	35.3	40.3	43.5
Ghana	0.138	30.1	23.4	13.3	47.2	10.4
Togo	0.180	37.6	55.1	49.8	50.9	15.2
Mali	0.376	68.3	41.1	49.7	39.3	44.7
Cote d' Ivoire	0.236	46.1	46.3	28.2	40.4	24.5
Liberia	0.320	62.9	50.9	40.9	52.1	32.1
Niger	0.590	90.5	44.5	44.5	42.4	74.8

World Bank Group, 2020

Note I: All figures are expressed in percentage.

Table 1 and II above shows unemployment rate and poverty level in the sub-region, while the degree of poverty level among the countries in the sub-region varies. The variation in the statistics of unemployment rates among West African states can be attributed to several factors such as economic diversification, macro-economic stability, infrastructure development, and insecurity. In states with diversified economies such as Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, as reflected on the tables, they tend to have lower unemployment rates compared to states with mono-cultural economies such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. Furthermore, countries with limited investment in human capital and critical infrastructure such as roads, ports, energy systems tend to have higher unemployment rates compared to those with high investments in these areas. However, these factors are the major reasons for the high level of unemployment across several states in the West African sub region. The mass

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unemployment in the sub region has resulted into high level of poverty as shown on table two. This is mainly because individuals without jobs are unable to earn a stable income thereby leading to reduced consumption and investment. The existence of economic insecurity in the sub region as make many individuals and groups to get involved in criminal activities or violent extremism as a means of economic survival. As a consequence, the growing insecurity in the region is undermining its development and worsening poverty level among the people. This is because lack of employment with a consequent rise in poverty has been identified as a causal factor of violence and criminality in the region (Anna, 2014). Hence, the issue of mass poverty in West Africa has ominous effect on conflict and insecurity in the area. This shows the importance of addressing human security threats in the West African sub region within the broader and integrated approach of the human security broad school. This is because both military and non military security threats both have a symbiotic effect for conflict and insecurity. Furthermore, as a result of the weakness of most states in the sub region, there is need for the willingness of Nigeria as an hegemon to provide resources for the purpose of collective peace and stability.

Bad Governance and Political Instability

West Africa for a long-time have experienced prolonged period of protracted violence, economic and political instability (UNSC, 2014). Many countries in the sub-region have been agonized by political crisis which was caused by authoritarian regimes, political corruption, and military coups that ravaged the sub region in the 20th Century and in the later part of the 21st Century (Bala and Tar, 2021). This suggests that, bad governance has been a major problem that has been plaguing the continent since independence. The civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote D'Ivoire in the 1990s and early 2000s were not just the only evidence of political instability in West Africa. This is because the majority of the countries in the sub region have experienced coup de tats and civil wars. According to George and Pita (2004), West Africa is the most politically unstable region in the world with the region's experience of about 42 coup de tats since 1963. Presently, the region is still politically unstable as a result of insurgent and terrorist activities in Mali, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger Republic. The activities of the terrorist groups have led to massive loss of lives and properties. More recently, there has also been a military takeover in West African countries of Mali, Republic of Guinea and Niger Republic. Many of these coup de tats and insurgent activities have been blamed on bad governance and corruption. According to Chandler good governance index of 2021 which ranked 104 countries globally, only five out of the fifteen member states of ECOWAS were ranked with very poor positions.

The table below shows the good governance index of five West African states

Table 3

Poverty Profile of Fourteen West African countries

	Leadership and Foresight	Robust Laws and Policies	Strong Institutions	Financial Stewardship	Attractive Market Place	Global Influence and Reputation	Helping People Rise	Position out of 104 countries Ranked
Senegal	36	77	67	68	62	94	83	71
Ghana	47	74	57	85	54	90	87	72

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	Leader-ship and Fore-sight	Robust Laws and Policies	Strong Institu-tions	Finan-cial Stew-ardship	Attrac-tive Market Place	Global In-fluence and Reputation	Helping People Rise	Position out of 104 coun-tries Ranked
Burkina Faso	67	89	91	80	75	103	96	96
Mali	81	94	100	79	99	102	104	100
Nigeria	98	85	101	88	97	72	98	102

Chandler Institute of Governance, 2021

The five West African countries that were ranked on the table are lowly placed while there figures demonstrates that there is high level of bad governance in the region. All the West African countries ranked as shown on the table lack strong institutions, attractive market place and global influence that is needed to attract investment for development. The prevalence of bad governance in the sub region can be identified as a major cause of rise in insecurity across the region (Yagboyaju and Akinola, 2019).

Diseases and Epidemic

The West African region is experiencing a recurring outbreak of epidemics which national health systems are not able to respond to adequately (WAHO, 2022). Some of the major epidemic diseases in the region include Cholera, HIV/Aids, Ebola, Polio and Covid 19. With the exception of Haiti, the sub-Saharan Africa which West Africa is an integral part accounted for 86% of reported global cases of cholera and 99% of deaths in 2011 (Martin et al, 2014). The disease has been more prevalent in the following West African Countries which include Togo, Ghana, Benin, and Guinea. Nigeria which is the most populous nation in the region has the worst cases of cholera with 3513 and 1803 cases in 2019 and 2020 respectively. These cases are just illustration of the nature of the cholera epidemic in the sub-region, as the disease is on the rise every year. While there has been a reduction in the outbreak of Ebola, HIV Aids, Polio and Covid 19 in Africa, they still exist in some West African states. For instance, transmission rate of HIV Aids is still very high in republic of Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea Bissau with adult prevalence of 2.70% and 3.4% respectively (World Fact book, 2021). However, Nigeria has the highest number of people living with HIV in the region with a population of about 1.8 million (Ibid). Ebola outbreak is also present in Guinea which recorded an outbreak in 2021(IFRC, 2022). Polio outbreak in West Africa has not occurred since 2016, but there is vaccine derived polioviruses in about six West African countries which include Ghana, Nigeria, Niger, Togo, Benin and Cote d'Ivoire(WHO, 2019). Despite the global spread and fatality of COVID 19, West Africa infection and fatality rate has been relatively low with 906,913 confirmed cases and 12198 deaths (Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat, 2022). In spite of these, weak health infrastructures and inadequate access to healthcare posed a serious threat to the management of epidemic diseases in the region.

Food Crisis

Food Insecurity in West Africa is basically of two forms. It includes lack of economic access to food in some countries, while in others; it is lack of both physical and economic access to food. More worrisome is the serious case of undernourishment in the sub-region as a result of the higher energy, low vitamin and protein in

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food production in the region. According to Mensah (2016), West Africa has made tremendous strides in reducing the proportion of hungry people by 60% thus achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1c target compare to her counterparts in the Eastern and Central Africa where progress is slow. In spite of this achievement, there is still about thirty-six million undernourished West Africans and several millions of people are faced with the problem of food emergencies every year (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015). Food insecurity is wide-spread and children are more vulnerable, with nearly 36% of children below 5 years suffering from stunting and 15% underweight (Ibid). In general, 37% of children in West Africa under age 5 suffer from stunting whereas 28.3% are underweight (Food and Agricultural Organisation, 2015). Civil insecurity, banditry and inter-communal conflicts, coupled with the disruption of livelihoods and the depletion of food stocks during the lean season, are among the factors that drastically limit the availability and access to food in the most affected areas (CILSS, 2017).

ECOWAS' response to challenges of Human Security in West Africa

The identified non-violent human security challenges in West Africa are numerous while the findings show that ECOWAS have undertaken numerous efforts in responding to these problems.

ECOWAS and Economic Security

Specifically, the organisation has developed a number of policies and protocols which aims at addressing the menace of poverty in the sub region. Some of these policies include:

- The West African Common Industrial Policy (WACIP) which was developed in 2010. Its purpose is to strengthen the integration process in the region with the aim of bringing the region out of poverty. Essentially the policy seeks to maintain a solid industrial base structure which is globally competitive and environmentally friendly. The essence of this is to bring about significant improvement in the standard of living of its people. Through the policy, ECOWAS aims at utilising the abundant natural resources in the member states and also to diversify and broaden the region's industrial production base. This is to be done by progressively raising the local raw materials processing rate from 15-20% to an average of 30 % by 2030. The objective here is create new industrial production capacities and also to upgrade the existing ones. WACIP as an economic initiative by ECOWAS has not been able to achieve its objective of creation. Specifically, it has not been able to increase the productive capacity of states in the region, especially in the aspect of food production. For instance, rice which is an essential commodity in the region because of its high level of consumption is still imported in huge quantity. The sub region spends approximately 4 billion United States dollars on the importation of rice every year (ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development, 2024). This has negative implication for food insecurity in the region because of its reliance on external source for food importation.
- The ECOWAS Protocol on free movement of goods and person which was adopted in 1979 seeks to liberalize people and good's movement within the sub region. It also intends to ease the living standard of the people and create opportunity for free market zone with mutual benefits.
- ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme which is a custom union that was developed in 2006 to promote inter-community trade by the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers to import and export of products originating from member states.

The most important among these policies is the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) which was adopted in 2008. As noted by a respondent:

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> ECOWAS in recognition of the enormous challenges to human security in the region and its implication for security developed a conflict prevention framework (ECPF) in 2008. The essence of the framework is to strengthening and promotes human security in the sub region through state and regional governance (Interview, 15.10. 2022).

The ECPF serves as a reference point for the regional body and its member states in their efforts to strengthen human security in the sub region (ECOWAS, 2008).The study revealed that ECOWAS conflict prevention framework and other policy frameworks have made some significant achievements at macroeconomic level in the promotion of economic security in the sub-region, but there is still a lot to be done. For instance, the economic performance of 2021 indicates a brighter economic environment in 2022 in the sub-region while the sub-region's economy grew by 3.7 per cent which is 0.7 percentage points lower than that of 2021(ECOWAS Report, 2022). Inspite of the complexity embedded in the global and sub regional environment in which the West African states are located in 2022, some economies in the sub-region had better economic performances in 2022, compared to 2021 as contained in the ECOWAS annual report of the year. These states include Niger, Guinea, The Gambia, and Togo. In spite of the achievement of economic growth in some member states, the success was threatened by the upsurge in inflation rate in the region. This is well captured in the annual report of 2022 as it stated that:

> Inflation rate in the region reached 21.1 per cent in 2022, against 12.9 per cent in 2021. The inflation rate was driven by the inflation recorded by the WAMZ countries, whose inflation reached 25.1 per cent in 2022, against 15.1 per cent in 2021. The WAEMU, which has historically had low levels of inflation, also suffered from this inflationary surge with an inflation rate of 7.3 per cent in 2022, against 3.5 per cent in 2021(ECOWAS Annual Report, 2022).

The inflation rate in the region has continued to worsen across its member states and they continue to experience an unprecedented upsurge in price of goods and services. Specifically, the inflation rate in the region in 2023 was forecasted at 20.9 percent, while Nigeria which is the largest economy in the region and Sierra Leone have recorded highest rate of inflation at 42.9 percent and 42.2 percent respectively (Statista, 2023). The inflationary surge in the region was caused by many factors which include supply chains disruptions, energy price increases and the depreciation of several national currencies in the sub-region against the euro and the dollar (ECOWAS Annual Report, 2022). As a consequence, poverty level in the sub region is getting worse despite ECOWAS efforts at addressing poverty and rising unemployment through its frameworks. This is shown on table two which presents information about multi-dimensional nature of poverty in the region. As noted by a respondent who is a scholar on regionalism:

> ECOWAS effort on the region's economy has witness relative success in the macro aspect of the economy of most of its member states while the micro aspect has witness little success with risen poverty index in most of the states in the sub region. This negates ECOWAS objective of improving living standard in the sub-region (Interview, 17.10. 2022).

In spite of the numerous policy frameworks that has been put in place by ECOWAS to address micro economic insecurity in the region, the result shows that ECOWAS successes on economy of the region has been relatively low. Basically, its efforts have contributed to the macro economic strength of states in the sub region which has been drastically affected by several other negative factors. The result also reveals that the organisation has not been able to impact negatively on economic development in the sub region. Hence, its credibility in this regard is fraught with the challenge of lack of implementation of many of its policies

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that has the capacity to improve poverty condition among the people of the region by its member states (Schofberger, 2021). For instance, in spite of the existence of a protocol on free movement of goods, persons and services across the sub region, the existence of conflicting national laws from member state has been a great impediment. This has given rise to the need for ECOWAS to re-establish norms for free movement and plan for implementation in other to address intra and interstate security threats that are militating against the success of the free movement protocol (Zanker, Arhin-Sam, Jegen and Bisong, 2021). This is because the success of the free movement protocol is critical for the promotion of economic prosperity in the region.

ECOWAS and Political Instability

ECOWAS response to bad governance and political instability among its member is through its National Early Warning and Response Mechanisms (NEWRM). In this regard, the organisation has undertaken a lot of activities for the effective and efficient deployment of the NEWRM through a participatory approach involving key stakeholders in the Member States. As noted by a respondent who is an ECOWAS official:

> The National Early Warning and Response Mechanisms (NEWRM) have been effective in preventing conflicts among states, most especially during elections. For example the measure helps to curb tension in the Nigerian general elections in 2015 and Gambia general elections from resulting into violent crisis that can engulf the country and the sub region at large (Interview, 18.09. 2022).

Aside from this, the organization in its effort to promote good governance has undertaken some efforts which included:

> The establishment of a civil society organization platform to institutionalize CSO involvement in the promotion of Accountability and Transparency; evaluation of the report on the human rights situations and the rule of law in the ECOWAS region; as well as the organization of a meeting to promote media involvement in participatory governance (ECOWAS Annual Report, 2016).

While the involvement of the CSOs and the media in transparency and accountability process in the region is an important effort by ECOWAS, the prevalence of pseudo-democratic regimes and their negative human right records is a negation of this effort. For instance, there have been massive human rights violations in the West African countries of Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria by armed groups which has resulted in deaths, displacement and injuries (Transparency International, 2020). The responses of the state security agencies have also resulted in wide spread of human rights violations such as extra judicial killings, enforced disappearance and torture (Ibid). This implies that CSOs and the media in most states across the region do not have free space to undertake their responsibilities. The regional organization in its effort to curtail widespread corruption in the region has also made some effort in this regard. According to a respondent, ECOWAS instituted Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundry in West Africa (GIABA) in the year 2000 as major instrument for combating the menace of corruption in the sub region (Interview, 18.09.2022). The framework based on further insights from the respondent is expected to be domesticated in the national laws of the member states. It is also expected that the member states should provide a strong retributive measure as deterrence against corruption in the region. More recently, ECOWAS organized a five days workshop for the training of law enforcement agents in the region on financial crimes investigation (Interview, 17.10.2022). The essence of the workshop is to strengthen the combat against the menace of corruption across its member states. While these efforts demonstrates the importance of regional framework in addressing

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human security threats in West Africa, low commitment from member states, unwillingness to share information and inadequate legislative are some of the impediment to the success of ECOWAS anti-corruption fight.

Specifically, political instability, corruption and bad governance are still a problem across West Africa sub region. Recently, there was a military coup in Mali (2020) and Guinea Conakry (2021) while the prospect for political instability in the region remain very high as a result of rising poverty and human deprivation among the people of the region. As shown in table ii, bad governance is still very much prevalent across West Africa while out of the recently ranked 104 countries globally by Chandler good governance index; only five West African states make the ranking in very poor and pathetic positions. The implication of this is that in spite of frameworks put in place to ensure transparency and accountability in the sub region, little result has been seen in few of its member states.

ECOWAS and Endemic Diseases

The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework of 2008 is the major mechanism for addressing the issue of epidemic diseases in the region. According to one of the respondents who is a staff of ECOWAS, he explained that:

> The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) guided by the ECPF has been active in combating epidemic diseases in the West African region and it has played vital role in coordinating and implementing strategies to prevent, detect, and respond to outbreaks of diseases such as Ebola, cholera, and Lassa fever (Interview, 20.10.2022).

Similarly, another respondent who is a senior officer at ECOWAS also noted ECOWAS efforts on the epidemic spread of diseases in the sub region, it was noted that:

> ECOWAS through the West African Health Organisation (WAHO) designed a strategic plan which is to cover the period 2009-2013. The main essence of this strategic plan is to improve the quality of health systems in the sub region and also to support health services in the member states (Interview, 22.10.2022).

An assessment of this strategic plan after the expiration of its target period shows that, it has a hybrid effect on health security in the region. This means that it was able to achieve some of its set target and others were not met. An assessment of the strategic plan of the 2009-2013 period revealed that WAHO was able to achieve in the following areas:

- increased harmonisation of regional health policies
- implementation of traditional health policies and legislation
- improved institutional capacity building
- development of human resources for health capacity of member states
- Improved availability and access to medicine

The assessment also showed that the strategy under achieved in the following areas:

- Ineffective implementation of strategies developed for the reduction of infant and maternal mortality
- Inadequate surveillance and response to epidemics
- Control and eradication of malaria and HIV aids
- Promotion of health research
- Development of e-health and strengthening of capacity for local production and supply of medicine

The defects associated with the 2009-2013 strategic plans resulted in the designing of another strategic plan which covers from 2016 to 2020. In spite of this effort, ECOWAS have had little effort in promoting health security

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to medical facilities and continued presence of infectious diseases in some of its member states.

ECOWAS and Food Security

Ensuring food security has been an item on ECOWAS agenda for promoting human security in the sub region. Specifically, the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) is the main instrument the organization is using to address the problem of food insecurity and malnutrition in the region. Through this policy, a number of activities have been undertaken to improve productivity, most especially that of strategic crops (rice, maize, cassava) and livestock products through the intensification of farming systems and as well as the restructuring of sub-sectors. As contained in the annual report of ECOWAS (2016), it was stated that:

> Regional Food Security Reserve is to serve as a regional instrument to complement national strategies which aim at combating food insecurity in the region. This forms ECOWAS initiative to guarantee food security for West Africans through the "Zero Hunger" scheme which aimed at overcoming hunger and malnutrition by 2025 (ECOWAS Annual Report, 2016).

Sequel to the above, ECOWAS in 2019 organize a conference as part of its effort ensuring food security in the sub region. The essence of the conference is for the implementation of bio-safety regulation in the Agricultural sector in other to ensure food security in the region and also to achieve a dream of zero hunger in the region the year 2030 (Interview, 18.09.2022).The implementation of the bio-safety regulation is expected to improve institutional, technical and human capacity in member states in their efforts to combat food insecurity in the sub-region (Interview, 11.10. 2022). In spite of these efforts by ECOWAS at improving food security in the sub-region in policy terms, access and availability of food still remain a significant threat in the region. For instance there has been a significant spike in food insecurity across Africa which West Africa is an integral part. Between 2019 and 2020 the population of people in West Africa countries of Burkina faso, Niger and Mali increased from 3.2 million to 12.7 million (African Center for Strategic Studies, 2021). Food insecurity in these countries is worsening by the protracted conflict of banditry and terrorism. About 27 million West Africans require immediate food assistance which was caused by economic and environmental malaise such as poverty, displacement, poor trading integration, high cereal prices and environmental degradation (World Bank, 2021). This worsening food insecurity in the region shows that ECOWAS efforts have not been able to subside the menace of food insecurity in West Africa.

Conclusion

This study examines challenges of human security in West Africa from the non-military perspective. It further assess the credibility of ECOWAS as a security actor with capacity to addresses these problems. Four non-military human vulnerabilities were examined and they include poverty and inequality (Economic Insecurity), bad governance (Political insecurity), food crisis (Food Insecurity), diseases and epidemics (Health Insecurity). The study revealed that the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) is the organisation's blueprint for addressing the hydra-headed problems of human insecurity in the sub region. Others include: ECOWAS protocol on free movement (1979),West African Common Industrial Policy(WACIP, 2010 and ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme(2006). The National Early Warning and Response Mechanism,(NEWRM) and Inter Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa(GIABA) are the organisation's two main instrument for the addressing the menace of political instability and mass corruption in the region. On epidemic

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diseases, the WAHO is ECOWAS main instrument for promoting regional health integration with the aim of improving access to standard health facilities. ECOWAP is the major policy instrument that ECOWAS is using to promote both financial and physical access to food across the states in the sub-region to ensure food security. This plethora of policy instruments used by ECOWAS to respond to non-military human security threats has a miniature effects on the human security profile in the region. This puts a doubt on ECOWAS credibility as a security actor in providing security efforts in the area. This is because its credibility is fraught with numerous challenges which include lack of political will by member states to implement protocols, weak infrastructure within the member states, endemic corruption and inadequate funding. This has resulted in worsening human insecurity in the sub-region. This finding is significant because it contributes to the existing body of knowledge on ECOWAS and Human Security in West Africa. This is through its interrogation of the non-military security threats in the sub region within the context of the broad school of human security. Thus it helps to demonstrate the symbiotic effect of military and non-military security threats on conflict and insecurity in the sub-region. Furthermore, the study is also significant by its use of the hegemonic stability theory to examine the credibility of ECOWAS as a security actor with capability to respond to these threats.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that there should be a broader and effective integration of national and regional frameworks for addressing non-military threats in the sub region. It is suggested that future research should focus on the exploration of how to achieve effective integration between regional and national frameworks in the sub-region. The exploration of this area of research is significant to reveal how a synergy under this arrangement can improve human security and regional governance in West Africa.

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