

Conflict Dynamics in West Africa: Background Analysis for the UK Government's Africa Conflict Prevention Programme

'Funmi Olonisakin

About this background paper

This paper was commissioned by the UK government to inform the development of the West Africa strategy of the Africa Conflict Prevention Programme. It discusses conflict dynamics in West Africa, examining the structural causes and triggers of conflict, as well as key actors and their interests, and makes recommendations on regional approaches to the issue of security. Overall, the paper discusses West Africa's security challenges, particularly those posed by conflict, taking the scope beyond country-focused analysis into a broader regional context. It takes a brief look at the future of security in West Africa by setting the discussion against the challenges of the past, the demands of the present and expectations for the future.

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CSDG's **Africa Peace and Security** programme seeks to enhance understanding of the dynamics of conflict and insecurity on the continent and to support local, national and regional responses to its development and security challenges.

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Abbreviations

DfID	Department for International Development
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECPF	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
ESF	ECOWAS Standby Force
GBP	UK pound
MARWOPNET	Mano River Women's Peace Network

This paper examines the structural causes and triggers of conflict, key actors and their interests, as well as conflict dynamics in West Africa; and makes recommendations on subregional approaches that might inform the development of a UK government West Africa conflict prevention strategy.

In the last 18 years, conflicts in West Africa have had important internal and external dimensions. While most of the conflicts have been ‘internal’ in their origins, they have been ‘subregional’ in their manifestations. The last two decades have seen a continuous response to the consequences and symptoms of these deep-seated conflicts. West Africa remains structurally unstable, and this is manifested in diverse ways. Some of the structural causes of conflict in West Africa include:

- troubled transitions from old authoritarian systems;
- weak democratic structures, culture and practice;
- low levels of economic development and disputes over natural resource management, including gross disparities in wealth among different groups within the same countries;
- systemic failures in the administration of justice and the inability of states to guarantee the security of the population;
- demographic change and limited social opportunities, including a growing youth bulge in West Africa;
- migration, organised crime and endemic corruption; and
- climate change.

All of these factors underlying structural instability in West African countries explain a pattern of weakly functioning institutions, which are invariably incapable of addressing grievances or the inefficiencies emanating from multiple factors such as patronage politics, inequalities, etc. While some states tend to retreat to familiar methods such as the use of patronage to destroy political challenges, the partially democratic systems in many states are largely incapable of safeguarding social services and providing security for citizens.

A wide array of actors and interests underline conflicts in West Africa. There are several identifiable, often conflicting interests at the local, national and international levels. One layer of local interests becomes visible when it is characterised by the existence of armed groups, either fighting for secession (not in the majority of cases) or seeking redress for certain injustices. At the national level, the issue of contention is often the extent to which the

ruling elites, who are expected to determine national interests, are working in the interest of the nation or to protect their own interests.

West Africa is clearly witnessing a reduction in the type of large-scale conflicts that engulfed the subregion¹ in the 1990s, although it remains vulnerable to violent conflict at both the national and subregional levels. The potential for escalation of current conflicts will depend largely on the degree of mutation in the structural processes and the type of decisions taken by critical actors. In the next five years, the issues that are likely to underline security and serve to escalate conflict are those that have already emerged. These include the politics surrounding the ownership, management and control of natural resources; managing the challenges of youth vulnerability and exclusion; violent elections; issues relating to religious radicalisation; border disputes; and the challenges of meeting populations' demands regarding post-war reconstruction. The key to addressing these challenges lies in the type of solutions offered by critical actors, which should ideally move from conflict response to genuine conflict prevention activity. Key conflict flashpoints are likely to remain the same as the ones currently occupying attention in the subregion. These include, for example, the Niger Delta, northern Nigeria, Guinea, Niger, Mali, the Gulf of Guinea and Casamance, as well as cross-border activities such as drug-trafficking, organised crime and other illegal activities. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly apparent that Francophone West African countries have significant potential for escalated conflict over the next few years.

A scenario in which there is reduced spread of violence in the subregion does not necessarily suggest that West Africa is shifting toward peace and stability. Rather, it indicates a situation of 'no war, no peace', in which the low-intensity conflicts raging within national boundaries are neither significant enough to pose a threat to international peace and security, nor sufficiently benign to guarantee the process of normal development. This is a 'make or break' moment for conflict prevention in West Africa. For the first time, the reduction in large-scale armed conflicts provides an opportunity to address the structural root causes of conflict and help the subregion transform the low-intensity conflicts into more stable environments in which longer-term development can be pursued.

The challenge for the international community and, not least, bilateral actors such as the UK is to resist the urge to 'follow open conflict', and instead consolidate the work done in earlier years through deepening conflict prevention and moving the structural processes discussed above toward greater stability. This means that the opportunity for the international community's presence on the scale witnessed in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, through various levels of intervention, including peacekeeping and peace-building activities, will become highly unlikely. Rather, other low-level, targeted interventions will become a real possibility and will require immense political will on the part of local and national political actors. This in turn will require even greater coherence and coordination among international actors representing the defence, diplomatic and development spheres. Among such interventions are those aimed at conflict management and reduction, including governance and security reforms.

1 In this paper, West Africa is referred to as a subregion of Africa.

Despite its capacity gaps, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its leading role in *norm setting* remains one of the most important factors moving the subregion toward peace. The role of ECOWAS in promoting reforms at the national level will be crucial in this regard. Without normative change and application at this level, it will be difficult to see the kind of structural change that can alleviate these conflicts. Some key states such as Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso will also need to take proactive steps to urge national leaders to abide by the agenda set out, for example, in the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF).

ECOWAS will require the support of the international community to implement key aspects of the ECPF, while remaining focused on developing its capacity to support peacekeeping efforts elsewhere on the continent. Balancing its West Africa-specific tasks with its subregional commitments will require careful prioritising. For example, while reducing its peace support operations focus in West Africa, the continued focus on the development of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) in support of the African Peace and Security Architecture must address vital capacity gaps, particularly the civilian aspects of peacekeeping.

Proposals for consideration in developing a subregional strategy

Regional processes

- *Strengthening normative frameworks:* There is a need to support implementation of the ECPF, for example, as part of a collective effort to address structural root causes. Among other things, this will also create an opportunity to strengthen subregional policy frameworks on drugs and integrated border security.
- *De-concentration of focus on the ECOWAS Commission:* Given the limited capacity of the Commission and the challenges discussed in this paper, it might be more rewarding to also cultivate more direct engagement with ECOWAS subregional centres and particular member states, which can be influenced to focus on specific components of the ECPF.
- *Encouraging champions of change among key actors in select states:* Reform-minded leaders in some states should be encouraged to champion specific components of the ECPF in their countries, while engaging through a subregional lens. Similarly, the ECOWAS Parliament and, within it, specific parliamentarians can be influenced to promote relevant aspects of the ECPF and other ECOWAS processes.
- *Capacity development:* The sustainability of the processes and structures created for conflict prevention in West Africa can be best sustained by building the capacity of existing leaders and champions of change, while supporting the development of a new generation of leaders in parliament and civil society who will ultimately provide valuable oversight of the systems of governance.

Partnerships

- There should be improved coordination with other bilateral and multilateral actors in order to add value to existing processes. One such actor is the UN Office in West Africa, which could improve its engagement with ECOWAS.
- Partnerships undertaken with ECOWAS should complement the Memorandum of Understanding between the African Union and the various African regional economic communities.

Critical issues and actors for policy engagement and other support

The following are some of the critical issues and areas for possible policy engagement and support:

- *elections*: safeguarding fair processes and promoting non-violent outcomes;
- *post-conflict settings*: ensuring better community reconciliation and support for job creation initiatives;
- *security sector reforms*: regulating legitimate internal security actors capable of providing security for the state and its citizens and ensuring effective parliamentary oversight;
- *drugs*: developing and strengthening subregional monitoring systems and border controls, including maritime security measures;
- *mediation*: regular engagement with leaders facing contentious elections;
- *security partnerships*: e.g. relating to the Gulf of Guinea;
- *Niger Delta*: supporting and conducting negotiations in partnership with internal stakeholders and other international actors;
- *youth and leadership development*: supporting capacity development toward addressing issues of concern to the successor generation; and
- *peace support operations*: focusing on ESF by giving particular attention to the training of civilian components of peace support operations and strategic communication, including developing the role of the media, particularly as it relates to managing expectations in post-conflict environments.

The following groups of actors are critical for policy and other engagement:

- *select governments*: to champion subregional reform on particular issues;
- *elected parliamentarians*: to strengthen legal frameworks through law reform and new legislation (land, gender, security), and public information through public hearings and partnerships with civil society; and
- *ECOWAS members of parliament*: to develop codes of conduct for security sector reform, etc. and champion aspects of the ECOWAS policy agenda.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The apparent atmosphere of tranquillity that the West African subregion experienced in the aftermath of the Nigerian civil war in 1970, which for a time made it Africa's most stable subregion, expired in December 1989, when civil war broke out in Liberia. With this outbreak, other conflict issues that lay dormant in the subregion, particularly under the cover of the Cold War, came unto the surface such that by the beginning of the 21st century, most of the countries in the subregion were contending with some kind of major security challenge. These included civil wars in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, political instability in Guinea, questionable political transition in Togo, ethnic conflict in northern Ghana, violent ethno-nationalism and resource-centred conflicts in Nigeria, and secessionist tendencies in Senegal, to mention just a few. In all cases, these conflicts have stunted growth and affected development, causing considerable concern for the population of the subregion, their governments and external agencies that have to respond to the changing nature of politics and security in the subcontinent.

This background document discusses West Africa's security challenges, particularly the challenges posed by conflict, taking the scope beyond country-focused analysis into a broader subregional context. It takes a brief look at the future of security in West Africa by setting the discussion against the challenges of the past, the demands of the present and the expectations of the future.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 provides a broad contextual analysis of conflict and security in West Africa, examining the structural causes of conflict. It also highlights factors that have contributed to reducing conflict in the subregion.
- Chapter 3 examines key actors and interests involved in subregional conflict and security.
- Chapter 4 discusses conflict dynamics in the subregion, focusing on the trends and triggers of violence. It discusses conflict flashpoints, while also looking at the factors and activities that have contributed to stability in the subregion.
- Chapter 5 maps future conflict scenarios and identifies key issues that should guide policy responses to the challenges posed by conflict and insecurity in the subregion.

Chapter 2

Conflict in West Africa: Contextual overview

In the last 18 years, conflicts in West Africa have had important internal and external dimensions. The internal dimension has focused on the differences among various units that comprise nation states, which are often the result of longstanding unresolved conflict with structural roots. The subregion's internal conflicts have included groups fighting among themselves over natural resources, chieftaincy matters and political differences; and sometimes against central governments over issues such as the management of opportunities and privileges coming from natural resources endowments. Such conflicts have often become internationalised due to spillover across borders in the form of flow of refugees and small arms and light weapons; as well as support provided to warring groups by external actors, including other governments, and kith and kin in neighbouring states. The external dimensions have two key features. One is the result of disagreements that emerge from border disputes, but these have been less prominent. The other concerns the spillover effects of internal conflicts into neighbouring states and the subregion at large.

Among recent internal conflicts that attained cataclysmic proportions are those in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire.² In many others, as in the cases of Nigeria's Niger Delta and Ghana's northern region, the manifestations of the internal context of conflicts have been slightly different, with armed groups in Nigeria's Niger Delta challenging the central government and multinational oil corporations,³ and different ethnic groups in Ghana fighting over land and chieftaincy supremacy.⁴

The wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone clearly demonstrated how internal conflicts in the subregion end up having wider subregional implications. Apart from refugees crossing borders to flee from war-ravaged countries, the nature of insurgency in the subregion created what has been described as 'mobile dissident' forces, whereby armed groups in one country

2 The conflicts in all these countries have attracted academic interests, especially as they have analysed different issues, including peacekeeping, inter-group relations, natural resource issues, governance, youth, etc. For more on some of these aspects of these civil wars, see, for example, Olonisakin, *Reinventing Peacekeeping in Africa*; Alao, Mackinlay and Olonisakin, *Peacekeepers, Politicians, and Warlords*; Richards, 'Why We Fight'; International Secretariat of Amnesty International, 'Sierra Leone Prisoners of War?'; Richards, 'Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone'; and Abdullahi, 'The Lumpen Proletariat and the Sierra Leone Conflict'.

3 For more on the agitations of the people of the Niger Delta against multinational oil corporations and the Nigerian state, see Okonta, 'The Disease of Elephants'; Wumi, Ayodele and Eni, *Boiling Point*; Douglas et al., *Oil and Militancy in the Niger Delta*; and Oronto et al., *Niger Delta*.

4 For more on this, especially the wider subregional implications of the conflict, see Kisumi et al., 'Conflict in Northern Ghana'.

move on to another once a task has been accomplished.⁵ The cross-border nature of many of these conflicts has resulted in situations where solutions to conflicts in the subregion now take a broader subregional approach.⁶

On the whole, in considering the context of conflict in the countries of West Africa, it has to be noted that while most of the conflicts are ‘internal’ in their origins, they have often been subregional in their manifestations, and, increasingly, the search for peace now includes this broader consideration.⁷ These subregional manifestations may not necessarily remain a prominent feature of the main conflicts of the next decade. This is further explained in Chapter 4 of this paper.

2.1 Structural causes of conflict in West Africa

The last two decades have seen a continuous response to the consequences and symptoms of deep-seated conflict in West Africa. Opportunities are at last emerging for key actors to address the root causes of conflict rather than just tackling the symptoms. As the situations of large-scale armed conflict witnessed in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire abate and gradually move into a period of relative stability, the most challenging threats to peace and security across the subregion, which were always relegated to the background, are now becoming the focus of subregional and wider international attention. The key questions are whether and to what extent these root causes provide a sufficient basis for violent conflict, and whether there are potential or looming shocks that can serve as triggers for escalation into larger crises in the subregion. It is important to examine how critical actors are affected by and can potentially respond to these underlying factors and conditions.

West Africa remains structurally unstable, and this is manifested in diverse ways. The structural causes of conflict in West Africa can be grouped into the following:

- a) the collapse of old patterns of relationships that provided the framework for collaboration among the many ethnic groups in most states, thus resulting in tensions between sub-national groups;
- b) weak democratic structures, culture and practice, and the consequent struggle for democratisation, good governance and reform of political systems;
- c) spatial inequality and social exclusion;
- d) the low level of economic development and disputes over natural resource management, including the gross disparities in wealth among different groups within the same countries and the consequent struggles for the reform of economic systems to ensure an equitable distribution of economic power;

5 This trend has now been recognised. After the war in Liberia, armed groups moved on to Sierra Leone. There is also clear evidence that the war in Côte d’Ivoire has fed significantly on the wider instability in the subregion.

6 An area where this has been widely acknowledged is regarding the issue of small arms and light weapon proliferation, where the countries of the subregion have all recognised the implications of the porosity of borders.

7 ECOWAS has begun to factor this into its subregional security management strategy.

- e) changes in climatic conditions;
- f) systemic failures in the administration of justice, and the inability of states to guarantee the security of their populations; and
- g) demographic change manifested in the growing youth bulge in West Africa, and limited social opportunities.

2.1.1 Troubled transitions from old patterns of relationships

The apparent collaboration and harmony forged within many communities and among ethnic groups under old authoritarian (including traditional) structures have slowly unravelled as West African peoples become increasingly exposed to more open and representative systems of governance. The threat of violence has increased on many fronts. While opening up spaces for expression and demands from citizens, the transition from the old authoritarian systems is yet to produce smoothly functioning democracies able to manage conflicting demands from citizens. Expectations have risen faster than opportunities for change can occur. New power holders are emerging across different communities, thus requiring a new balance of power in formal governance structures. Some of the demands are inter-generational in nature, while others relate to class or ethnicity.

Managing the transition from the old authoritarian structures and traditions to the new (and often imported) political structures requires a process of transformation in political culture – a factor that is little appreciated by all actors, who often focus on immediate outcomes and benefits rather than processes of engagement and bridge building. Across West Africa, however, the real challenge is that weak state structures have to grapple with the process of democratisation and often lack the capacity to consolidate democracy or to manage the fallouts (including violence) of the disparities between immediate public expectations and actual results delivered in the short term. At best, the subregion has superficial democracies and at worst autocracies masquerading as democratic regimes – both of which increase the risk of violent conflict in the long-term.

2.1.2 Weak democratic structures and legal frameworks/political systems

In general, West Africa is slowly inching toward liberal democracy, but the task of sustaining the little progress realised is daunting. The subregion appears to be caught in a mode of ‘two steps forward and one step backward’. A pattern has been established in which there is consensus among subregional leaders that elections are the only acceptable form of regime change. In line with the declaration of the Organisation of African Unity (now the African Union) in 2000 that rejected the unconstitutional takeover of power within its member states, the use of force to change political power is now generally regarded as unconstitutional in ECOWAS. This is despite the fact that the outcomes of the attempts to halt the unconstitutional takeover of power in Guinea-Bissau and Togo have been questionable. Nonetheless, the adoption of this approach is perhaps the single most positive development in the subregion’s move toward democratisation since 1990.

However, across the board, a pattern has emerged in which elections are simply ‘instrumentalised’ by the ruling elite, who use them as a means to legitimise old patterns. Beneath all this, the political system and patterns of leadership remain largely unchanged. Patronage politics continues to thrive as the ruling elite continue to dominate the political and economic space, largely by diverting benefits and opportunities in the system to networks of loyalists and supporters. This patronage system, accompanied by endemic corruption, ensures that the reach of the elite stretches beyond the formal institutions of governance into all spheres of life.

The weakness of state institutions in West Africa is both a cause and an effect of rule by patronage and corruption. In nearly all cases, political power is centralised in the hands of the executive branch of government. The legislative and judicial branches have remained too weak to provide the necessary checks and balances across the board. Indeed, the same method of governance permeates most institutions. State institutions are invariably little more than tools for securing the regime and sustaining the power structures that protect the interests of the elite.

Indeed, in many settings, the absence of a legal framework able to tackle the challenges of today has rendered some reform efforts severely weak. This is especially true of security sector reform. For example, the pre-independence Police Act of 1956 remains in force in Nigeria today, while similar archaic laws exist in Ghana in relation to the security sector. Consequently, internal security is structured to serve regime needs rather than the needs of the population. This is particularly the case in countries that have not been affected by violent conflict within the subregion. Similarly, the laws and policies around the management of natural resources create the potential for violence, but a radical change in these laws will mean a loss of power for the elite. Efforts to promote law reform in ways that benefit the citizens collectively rather than just a chosen few would be a good step toward addressing different layers of inequality. But at the same time, the risk of violence increases with every robust attempt to challenge existing power structures.

Much more than the laws and policies, however, the intentions, attitudes and behaviour of the ruling elite toward the management of natural resources are what count and are often the main indicators of whether a change in law and practice is indeed realisable. (This is discussed further below.)

2.1.3 Spatial inequality and social exclusion

Related to the discussion in section 2.1.2, above, is the issue of spatial inequality and social exclusion. Across West Africa, there are various examples of a wide inequality among groups or regions, which have at times been central to conflict and political instability. The ways through which this has been linked to conflicts are many, but two of these are noteworthy. Firstly, it has increased the tendency of rebellion against central government, secessionist tendencies and the rise of violent ethno-nationalism. Secondly, often at the forefront of many of the activities listed above are youths, who often see themselves at the vanguard of the struggle for the emancipation of their respective ethnic interests. In northern Ghana,

in the conflict between the Nanumbas and the Konkombas, this trend is noticeable, as it is in the case of Nigeria's Niger Delta. Côte d'Ivoire presents another example, where the flagrant exclusion of one group led to the escalation of conflict.

2.1.4 Level of economic development and distribution

Many West African states remain rooted to the bottom of the Human Development Index, and endemic poverty continues to ravage the subregion's population. Poverty in itself has not necessarily led directly to violent conflict in the subregion, but it is significant that the lives of millions of ordinary West Africans remain unchanged, despite reports of relatively high economic performance, with countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, among others, reporting growth rates in excess of 4 per cent, and with Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea at 6 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively.⁸ While the growth rate in the latter two countries is evidently the result of the recent (mid-2008) astronomical rise in the price of oil, Liberia's and Sierra Leone's growth derives more from the scale of international assistance to these post-conflict countries.

The economies of West African states remain severely weak. The real heartbeat of these economies is to be found in the unrecorded economic activities that take place on the margins of the state, and creative attempts are yet to be found for linking such activities usefully to the formal system. Necessarily, these informal activities are a combination of legal and illegal endeavours that are by accident or design not within the purview of the state.

Perhaps more importantly, the distribution of resources remains heavily skewed in favour of the elite and their extensive network of loyalists and cronies. This, combined with the lack of access to power and opportunity, which leaves ordinary people with little or no opportunity to realise their visions of happiness, is one of the greatest sources of tension in most West African countries. Yet this scale of inequality is not likely to tip into major armed conflict in many countries, because of several mitigating factors. In addition to ongoing reform processes, these mitigating factors include, for example, the social safety net provided by organisations such as religious groups, and to a large extent, diaspora remittances, which are now the second-largest source of capital flows to developing countries, behind foreign direct investment, but ahead of official development assistance.⁹ And this has had significant impact in many West African countries, particularly Liberia, Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria.

It should be noted, however, that conflict mitigation in this sense is more common in situations of economic exclusion, as opposed to exclusion, which touches on identity and citizenship, as seen in Côte d'Ivoire. Additionally, conflict mitigation of this nature also tends to work when perceptions of exclusion and marginalisation are widespread among non-elitist groups. Recent research on youth exclusion in West Africa demonstrates that the tipping point from marginalisation to violence is often not reached because young people have found creative alternatives for economic and social survival on the margins of the

8 UNECA, *Economic Report on Africa 2007*.

9 UNCTAD, *Economic Development in Africa*.

state.¹⁰ But where elite interests have been severely threatened, feelings of exclusion and marginalisation among youth have been exploited for the pursuit of elites' agenda, as seen, for example, in Liberia and the Niger Delta.

2.1.5 Management of natural resources

Conflicts over the ownership, management and control of natural resources are present in all the countries of the subregion, although the magnitude varies. As indicated earlier, part of the problem lies in unfair laws and/or policies dealing with the distribution of benefits accruing from natural resource exploitation. But the competition for and unequal distribution of natural resources are some of the factors at the root of conflict in the subregion. Apart from the obvious challenges posed by extractive industries often monopolised by the ruling elite to support patronage politics, land tenure conflicts have become a challenge across the subregion, and this is likely to increase as states begin to find workable solutions to problems of food insecurity.

Perhaps the most prominent conflict over natural resources in West Africa at this time is that in the Niger Delta. The issues at the centre of this conflict have shifted from the initial one of environmental degradation and compensation to resource control and, more recently, to 'budget monitoring' (e.g. monitoring how the Niger Delta ruling elite expend statutory revenue allocated to Nigeria's states in the Niger Delta region). The Niger Delta experience demonstrates that there is an important dichotomy to be seen when examining the role of natural resources as a structural root cause of conflict. This dichotomy lies between the management of oil revenue and the exploration of oil. While access to or control of oil resources tends to immediately throw up security concerns, the management of the revenue highlights major governance issues, which are root cause factors that entrench conflict and insecurity.

2.1.6 Land allocation and management

Tensions over land have sometimes revealed the incapacity of the political and social systems to handle such conflicts. The recent massacre in Harbel, Liberia, resulting from dispute over land is one example. The dimensions of land conflicts are diverse, and apart from the problems associated with ownership, management and control, there are other important dimensions to the problem. In West Africa, two other sources of conflicts over land are those between forestry and farming and those that pitch pastoralists against agriculturalists. Conflicts between forestry and farming, it should be pointed out from the outset, are not very common and they emerge largely out of misunderstanding between those engaged in basic farming and private and government agencies engaging in massive forestation. Examples of this are scattered across West Africa, with local farmers accusing government and private investors of marginalising them.

Much more profound, however, are the conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists, which in West Africa are largely post-1980 phenomena. In Nigeria, for example, prior

10 CSDG, *Synthesis Report on Youth Vulnerability and Exclusion in West Africa*.

to 1989, violent pastoralist conflicts rarely occurred, apart from in Tivland, where the conflict was reported as an ethnic one. In the post-Cold War era, however, there were increasing clashes between the two sides, resulting in casualties. Most of these have been in the northern part of the country, as in July 1999, when herdsmen invaded villages in the Karim Lamido local government area of Taraba State and allegedly killed 10 villagers.¹¹ Also, Fulani cattle herdsmen supposedly clashed with farmers in the south-western town of Iwo.¹²

Another country that has recorded conflicts of this nature is Mali, where differences over land usage are complex, because they involve not only farmers and herders, but also forest users and fisherpeople. The control over agricultural and pastoral resources has resulted in armed clashes, especially in the country's Fifth region, also known as the Mpoti region. In the post-Cold War era, one of the first major agricultural–pastoralist conflicts in Mali was the 1994 Koino conflict between the largely agricultural community of Noima and the pastoralists in Sirabougou-Peulh. This had its roots in the controversial decision of August 1982 to withdraw a plot of land that the Noima people had used for more than a century to create a livestock-raising area. Also in Mali, the historical conflict between the Sossobes and Salsabes over Townde–Djolel, a flood-plain grazing land, broke out again in December 1993.¹³ The Sossobes had occupied a disputed piece of land for three days, to the objection of the Salsabes. All efforts by the local security force, the gendarmes, to calm the two groups, who were armed with guns, spears and knives, failed, and a few days later conflict broke out.

Conflicts like these are not always within national borders. They could also be international, as was the case between Niger herdsmen and Benin farmers in 1999. The crisis erupted when Niger herdsmen took cattle into the neighbouring Benin for grazing, and the animals fell into local trapping devices that a farmer had set to protect his farm from invading herdsmen. In retaliation, the herdsmen killed the farmer, whose wife alerted the local population, and they in turn caught and killed the herdsmen. The ensuing conflict resulted in the intervention of the governments of the two countries. Cross-border pastoralist–farmer conflict also exists in northern Nigeria between Fulanis from Niger and the inhabitants of Jigawa State in Nigeria.¹⁴

While there are many conflicts between agriculturalists and pastoralists in West Africa, it is also important to point out that there are several ongoing interests in the subregion to address the problems. In Burkina Faso, for example, a central institution responsible for handling these disputes is the Tribunal Departmental de Conciliation.¹⁵ ECOWAS has also taken interest in the conflict between livestock and crop farmers. In January 2003 the Council of Ministers adopted a regulation and a number of recommendations on the social conflicts between these two groups.¹⁶ Part of the resolution deals with effective implementation of the rules governing transhumance and the establishment of a subregional framework

11 Ahmed Wakili, 'Herdsmen Invade Taraba', *Today*, 11–17 July 1999.

12 Adebayo, 'Contemporary Dimensions of Migration among Historically Migrant Nigerians'.

13 The tension between the two is rooted in history, and a bloody conflict broke out between them in January 1936.

14 *This Day*, 19 May 2004.

15 Managing disputes over land tenure in Burkina Faso has a history of its own; see Lund, *Land Tenure Disputes and State, Community and Local Law in Burkina Faso*.

16 In October 1998 the ECOWAS heads of state and government had already taken decisions on transhumance in the subregion.

for consultation in the area of pastoral resource management. In April 2004 an ECOWAS delegation on trans-border pastures made visits to three countries – Burkina Faso, Ghana and Togo.¹⁷ Development partners might want to consider giving support to subregional initiatives already begun by ECOWAS.

2.1.7 Climate change and forced migration

Closely related to the problem between pastoralists and agriculturalists discussed above is the problem of forced migration resulting from climatic changes. Due to increasing desertification, there is increased migration across the West African subregion, which has in turn increased competition for natural resources, particularly along traditional grazing routes. Ghana, for example, has experienced some tensions between Ghanaian populations and pastoralist Fulani herdsmen who have migrated from the Sahel in search of grazing land. The same applies in northern Nigeria in the example mentioned above. Such cases could also lead to tensions between neighbouring states. Similar migration patterns are becoming noticeable within countries such as Ghana, where people are relocating from the drier parts of the country in the north to the south. While no apparent conflict has resulted from such movements, the search for farmlands in the south by those migrating from the north points to a potential for climate-induced conflict in the foreseeable future.

2.1.8 Demographic change: The 'youth bulge'

According to the World Bank, much of the developing world is about to reach a historic peak in the size of its population of young people between 12 and 24 years.¹⁸ It is estimated that the population of youth in Asia and Latin America will reach a peak by 2010 and begin to decline, except for Africa, where the youth population will continue to rise until 2050.¹⁹ Thirty-one countries in sub-Saharan Africa are experiencing youth bulges (where those aged between 15 and 24 years account for approximately 40 per cent of the adult population). About one-third of these states are in West Africa. When one takes into account that current youth policies in most West African states define youth as those of 15–35 years of age, the magnitude of the youth bulge becomes even more apparent. In Nigeria, for example, current estimates put youth at 45 million of the total population of 134 million.²⁰ This was prior to the census of 2006. It appears, however, that Sierra Leone is yet to experience its youth bulge, as its youth population has consistently comprised about 32 per cent of the population since 1974.²¹

Whereas countries like South Korea have been able to utilise their youth bulge for greater economic productivity, with young people providing valuable labour and generating taxes to care for the very young and the very old, it has been impossible to do this in Africa. In West Africa, as in much of Africa, weak economic and political structures have had a nega-

17 *This Day*, 5 May 2004.

18 World Bank, *The Next Generation*.

19 Lam, 'The Demography and Economic of the World's Youth Bulge'.

20 CSDG, *Youth Vulnerability and Exclusion in Africa*. This is a DFID-funded project, which is based on case studies of seven West African countries – Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

21 Rashid, Abdullah and Gokai, *Youth Vulnerability, Exclusion and Coping Mechanisms in Sierra Leone*.

tive impact on the material conditions of the youth, in addition to an adverse effect on their social and political culture. With limited choices and opportunities, including lack of access to good education, employment and functioning health systems, West African youth have had to subsist on the margins of the state. Across West Africa, there is a common pattern of migration of young people from rural to urban areas, with the potential increase of large slum areas creating greater pressure for development and security.

Richard Cincotta aptly describes the possible outcomes of youth bulge without corresponding state capacity to absorb the growth:

This surge of adolescents virtually guarantees that the number of schooled youth will outpace job growth, leaving even educated young men underemployed, frustrated, and resentful of those who enjoy the opportunities they lack. While not the overt cause of armed conflict, these demographic factors can facilitate recruitment into insurgent organizations and extremist networks or into militias and political gangs – now among the major employers of young men and the main avenues of political mobility in weaker countries.²²

West African countries have experienced varying degrees of political turmoil in the last two decades, in which youth have played a central role. Indeed, the decade-long wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia placed youth and youth issues on the global agenda. The war in Côte d'Ivoire would later underline this factor. In Nigeria, youth have also featured prominently in massive sub-national violence since 1999. Even low-intensity conflicts, as in the case of northern Ghana, have also recorded cases of active youth involvement. For example, at the forefront of the conflict between the Nanumbas and the Konkombas is the Konkomba Youth Association.²³ Youth thus constitute a major challenge to post-war reconstruction, as well as to democratic consolidation in West Africa. A critical understanding of their plight, perspectives, aspirations and anxieties is crucial for policy formulation.

Interestingly, however, it is this negative perception of the role of African youth that has received greater media attention than the creativity, resilience and innovation that this group possesses. Indeed, with the degree of exclusion of youth from mainstream processes (economic and political) and the lack of access to decent jobs, education and health, it is surprising that violent conflict involving this group is not more widespread in the subregion. Apart from the mitigating factors discussed earlier, there is ample evidence to suggest that youth in the subregion have enormous agency and creativity in addressing their socioeconomic challenges. Failure by governments and other actors to tap into this creativity by up-scaling successful youth initiatives and ideas, while according youth the recognition they deserve and preparing them for leadership, will only continue the negative cycle and reinforce the stereotypes. Although the African Union has adopted a Youth Charter, while ECOWAS recently adopted a Youth Policy in addition to the youth component of the ECPF, the sub-region is yet to find an effective strategy for reversing the negative trend in youth engagement.

22 Cincotta, *Youth Bulge, Underemployment Raise Risks of Civil Conflict*.

23 Discussions with civil society groups from northern Ghana.

2.1.9 Systemic failures in the administration of justice and lack of capacity to guarantee citizens' security

All of the above factors underlying structural instability in West African countries explain a pattern of weakly functioning institutions, which are invariably incapable of addressing grievances or dealing with the inefficiencies emanating from multiple factors such as patronage politics, inequalities and widespread corruption. Some regimes tend to retreat to familiar methods such as the use of patronage to destroy political challenges, while the partially democratic systems in many states are largely incapable of providing social services and security for citizens. Gross violations of human rights, institutionalised in the state, are no longer a prominent feature of these transitional settings, but states are largely unable to guarantee the rights of their citizens and protect them, for example, from opportunistic behaviour and random human rights violations at all levels of society. This has had an adverse impact on foreign direct investment, added to which the elite have been able to maintain their stranglehold on the economy.

Thus, while illegal detention and torture and restrictions of citizens' and opposition groups' freedom of expression are not overt methods of control by many of the democratising states, religious intolerance, and ethnic and cultural discrimination are allowed to flourish. When the after-effects of patronage politics, such as uneven development, produce grievances and feelings of exclusion, the fledgling democratic institutions are often incapable of addressing them. The judiciary systems are weak, as the capacity to enforce legal decisions is generally absent. Legal action against the ruling elites and the state is virtually impossible. As such, abuse of citizens' rights by security agents, rampant corruption and abuse of office by public officials go unpunished, as insecurity and tensions in society intensify. Across the board, citizens have no recourse to the law and they are not assured of justice and fairness.

The lack of state capacity and, in particular, the absence of the rule of law have produced other fallouts, including destabilising and conflict-generating activities. Space has been created, for example, for other alternative centres of power, as well as service providers beyond the state. The failure of the state to respond to the security needs of the population has allowed other security actors to step in to occupy the vacuum for good or bad. In at least nine West African states, private and community security groups operate, with the blessing of the population in many cases. In the same vein, space is created for organised crime to thrive. The lack of state capacity to control the means of violence or, at least, regulate other actors creates the space for illegal activities and criminal networks to thrive. One prominent indicator of this is the seemingly free flow of small arms and light weapons in the subregion.

2.1.10 Migration, organised crime and endemic corruption

The Protocol on the Free Movement of Goods and Peoples across Borders in West Africa,²⁴ one of ECOWAS's major successes, ensures a free flow of goods and people (not without difficulties) across already porous borders, which then generates a corresponding flow of

24 ECOWAS, 1979.

criminal activities. The flow of small arms and light weapons remains a security issue, which can aggravate brewing tensions if not properly managed.

An emerging issue is the growing movement of Nigerian citizens into Ghana and what is being perceived in Ghana as a resulting rise in incidents of armed robbery in that country, often attributed to Nigerians, who have been present in large numbers for the past decade. Both countries had in the past harboured and subsequently expelled large numbers of the other country's citizens during periods of economic stress. The last expulsions were by Nigeria in 1985 (despite the existence of the Protocol on Free Movement at that time). Prior to that, Nigerians were expelled from Ghana en masse in 1969.

The issue of drugs has become a concern throughout West Africa, with Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, for example, becoming prominent transit points for cocaine and heroin coming from South America and Asia. There is reportedly an alarming increase in drug seizures from Anglophone West African countries in particular, with approximately 33 tons of cocaine, for example, intercepted en route from West Africa to Europe in the period since 2005.²⁵

Perhaps the greater concern in the movement of drugs in and out of West Africa is the huge potential for proceeds from the drug trade to fund political, economic and social action, not least violent conflict. West Africa's vast informal sector provides free space for the laundering of drug proceeds. An alternative group of actors can emerge, with influence on local and national politics in the states concerned, which can potentially serve to criminalise national politics and reverse the process of democratic transition in these countries. The fact that security agents and public officials have been implicated and sometimes found to be complicit in cases of drug trafficking, as was the situation in Ghana in 2006 and Guinea in 2007, compounds the problem.²⁶ This poses a real threat to the security of the whole sub-region. The lack of capacity in West Africa to strengthen border controls and patrol the coast makes this a major problem for the foreseeable future. It is important to pay greater attention to increasing capacity for maritime security and maritime resource management as part of an overall effort to link security and development initiatives in the subregion.

2.1.11 The Gulf of Guinea

The coastal area encompassing the 11 West and Central African countries has received unprecedented attention in the last few years, not least because of its strategic importance as a shipping route, as well as for its natural resource endowment, particularly offshore oil. Safeguarding the Gulf of Guinea has become all the more important, given the global energy crisis. But for all the reasons discussed earlier in this paper, it has been difficult for the countries in this coastal region to exercise effective control over the area. It is estimated that there is an annual financial loss of approximately two billion dollars due to growing crime and threats to security in the Gulf, including, for example, poaching, national and transnational

25 Aning, *Strategy Paper on Anti-Drug Trafficking in Anglophone West Africa*.

26 See <<http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2008/vol1/html/100782.htm>>, accessed on 14 July 2008.

crime, environmental degradation and disputed boundaries.²⁷ Yet this subregion remains one in which the competing interests of the United States, China and France are most apparent. The establishment of the US Africa Command and its initial search for a base in Africa (which has now been discontinued) are attributed in part to the US desire to counter China's growing influence in Africa. The Gulf of Guinea is one of the key locations of such interests.

The maritime boundary disputes include those between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula (which has now found a resolution, but will require continuous monitoring); between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea over an island close to the Ntem River; and between Gabon and Equatorial Guinea over the Mbane Island and Corisco Bay boundaries.²⁸ As the Bakassi issue has shown, the potential for armed conflict over these maritime boundaries is high, particularly when the disputed areas are strategic transportation hubs, or when they are rich in natural resources. A major challenge is that these disputes have made it difficult for the countries to address the subregion's security concerns collaboratively.

2.1.12 ECOWAS: Regional norm setting

The normative framework for peace and security established by the West African subregional organisation ECOWAS constitutes perhaps the most important factor pushing toward stability and security in West Africa. ECOWAS remains the most legitimate convenor of state actors in the subregion. The organisation has been able to build upon the ongoing democratic transitions within various member states to slowly evolve a culture of democratic governance by accretion.

It has been relatively easy, particularly for elected heads of state and governments, to demonstrate their apparent commitment to peace, democracy, good governance and sub-regional arms control by signing up to key normative instruments. Even leaders with weak democratic credentials do not want to be seen to be openly rejecting democratic values. The ECOWAS Treaty adopted in 1993 moved the organisation toward developing a more structured conflict management framework, and this was followed by the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in 1999, and that of Democracy and Good Governance in 2001. In January 2008 ECOWAS adopted its Conflict Prevention Framework, which was its first attempt to put an implementation framework in place for its norms. Perhaps even more significantly, the ECPF is designed to respond to the structural root causes of conflict in the subregion.

The ideas shaping ECOWAS's approaches to peace and security have come largely from its Commission,²⁹ and from creative partnerships with civil society. The ad hoc interaction between the Commission and civil society in the 1990s has metamorphosed into a more institutionalised partnership, demonstrated through, for example, its relationship with the ECOWAS Civil Society Forum.

27 Gilpin, 'Enhancing Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea'.

28 Ibid.

29 The ECOWAS Commission was formerly known as the ECOWAS Secretariat.

ECOWAS, however, faces a number of challenges when it comes to the implementation of its impressive norms. Until recently, one problem was the delay in securing the right level of ratification from member states before agreed norms could be implemented. This hurdle has now been removed, with the understanding that once a decision is taken (e.g. by the adoption of a protocol) at a summit of heads of state and government, the Commission no longer has to wait for ratification by member states. A second problem faced by the Commission is that it lacks adequate staff, both in terms of numbers and capacity, particularly those with competence on peace and security issues. However, the problem goes far beyond the issue of staffing.

What is perhaps the greatest challenge to ECOWAS's efforts to move the subregion toward peace and stability is the structure and working method of its internal bureaucracy. It has been difficult to transform the institutional culture within the ECOWAS Commission, as attempts by the leadership to overhaul the system have not yielded corresponding transformation in its methods of work, as many of its personnel remain stuck in the old organisational mode. Innovative thinking and potential for creative responses to subregional challenges appears to be limited to the Presidency of the Commission and a small team of advisers with input from experts in civil society and donor partners. Without a systemic change, it will be difficult to maximise the potential transformational impact of the organisation.

The structural causes discussed in this chapter will not necessarily lead to violent conflict in the subregion, unless the actors experiencing this structural instability or those driving it choose to pursue a violent course of action. The real challenge for critical actors is to shift from a conflict response mode to one of conflict prevention.

Chapter 3

Actors and interests

A coalition of interests underlines conflicts in West Africa. There are several identifiable layers of (often conflicting) interests at the local, national and international levels. One layer of local interests becomes visible when it is characterised by the existence of armed groups, either fighting for secession (not in the majority of cases) or seeking redress against certain injustices. At the national level, the issue of contention is often the extent to which the ruling elites, who are expected to determine national interest, are working in the interest of the nation or to protect their selfish ends. Indeed, in some countries, the contending issue has always been the clash between local claims and national interest. Perhaps the best place where this has manifested is the Niger Delta region. At the international level, where the subregion's development partners tend to have a common interest in ensuring peace and stability in West Africa, there is an apparent contradiction in the methods and approaches of external actors.

Six groups of actors can be identified in West African conflicts, including:

- actors controlling the means of violence in formal and informal settings, including militant groups fighting for a specific cause or representing specific ethnic or religious interests;
- national political actors;
- actors with the potential to wield economic power, including, for example, multinational corporations;
- social actors such as youth, religious groupings and other civil society groups;
- regional and continental organisations, including ECOWAS and the African Union; and
- external actors, including the United States and development agencies of Western European countries.

3.1 Security

With few exceptions,³⁰ West African states do not have a monopoly of the means of violence. Even so, state security establishments are often not perceived by the people to be responding

³⁰ The exception might include the few remaining autocratic regimes (e.g. Gambia, Guinea and Togo), and post-conflict states (e.g. Liberia and Sierra Leone), where security is being provided through the support of the international community following a period of disarmament and demobilisation.

to the security needs of the vast majority of citizens, but to those of the regime and the elite.³¹ The lack of response to security needs is evident in the patterns of protection offered, for example, by the police, who are likely to be more visible in affluent areas, guarding important economic areas and installations or providing services to multinational corporations. What is more, the police are recognised more for their abuse of citizens' rights, not least through extortion at checkpoints (a phenomenon that appears to be more structured in Francophone countries than Anglophone ones).³²

It is therefore not uncommon across the subregion for communities to assume responsibility for the provision of their own security. Non-state security actors are the legitimate security providers in many West African communities – a role typically played by youth and youth groups. While the roles of non-state security actors vary across the subregion, from volunteers in Guinea, to neighbourhood and private security watch in Ghana and vigilantes in Nigeria, alternative security forces have proven to be a force for both good and bad. Having emerged largely from ad hoc or other social arrangements (except for registered private security companies), non-statutory security providers are prone to politicisation by the elite, or themselves become excessive and arbitrary.

Perhaps the best-known manifestation of non-state provision of security has been the involvement of non-state armed groups as key actors in West African conflicts, especially those rooted in natural resources, ethnicity and religious differences. While these were dominant in Liberia and Sierra Leone during their civil wars, the end of these wars and the ongoing international effort to bring stability to Côte d'Ivoire has broken the subregionalised pattern of the conflicts, thus slowing down the trend toward 'mobile dissident forces' in the subregion.

However, in Nigeria, armed militant groups have become key actors in the Niger Delta region, where groups engaged in disputes with the government and oil multinational corporations have formed militant groups that have frustrated oil exploration in the region. Apart from militant groups in the Niger Delta, which consist of both militia and cult groups, another form of militant groups that have become active in Nigeria's security calculation are the ethno-nationalist armed groups, as in the cases of the O'dua People's Congress and the Bakassi Boys in the western and eastern parts of the country, respectively, who, despite being proscribed by the federal government, continue to play other roles as security providers in the south-west and east.

3.2 National political actors

As indicated above, there is a general tendency in the subregion for political leaders to prioritise elite interests and the security of the regime over the concerns of the rest of the citizens. This trend is typically supported by patronage politics. The executive arm of government

31 Ebo, *Security Sector Reform in Africa*; Momoh and Ibeanu, *State Responsiveness to Public Security Needs*.

32 See Olonisakin, 'Policing in Africa'.

remains dominant in most cases, with power centralised in the presidency or directly in the person of the head of state.³³ It is this over-centralisation of power that makes it difficult to reform the most valuable institution to the various regimes, the security establishment, which helps maintain their control and centralisation of power. Without a well-intentioned executive that is genuinely interested in democratic change, it is difficult to alter the role of the formal security establishment to one of ensuring citizens' security.

A no less prominent (even if less powerful) group of political actors particularly, in states undergoing democratic transition in West Africa, is the parliament. In many cases, the parliament has sufficient constitutional authority, but, either because of political exigencies or lack of a sound knowledge base, parliamentarians are unable to effectively perform their oversight role. Yet they offer a massive potential and can generate the desired multiplier effect if they offer leadership in the process of governance reform, thus serving to defuse crises and manage existing conflict. However, with few exceptions, elected parliamentarians in the subregion remain caught in patronage politics and play the politics of manipulation of the population alongside their counterparts in the executive branch of government.

3.3 Multinational corporations

Multinational corporations have become key actors in some of the conflicts in West Africa, especially in Nigeria, where multinational oil corporations have been deeply involved in the security calculations of the Niger Delta. These companies have become actors because militant groups perceive them as conniving with national governments in suppressing the agitation of the Niger Delta. Also, some companies have been targets of direct attacks, and their officials have been kidnapped or face the threat of being kidnapped by armed groups in the Delta. Some of these companies have also kept arms and have maintained security forces independent of the Nigerian state.³⁴ In Liberia, the role of Firestone has increasingly come under criticism by the local population and other observers, who argue that the terms of its contract with the Liberian government and the conditions of work of local community workers are unfair, and are a source of tension and potential source of violent conflict if not addressed. Overall, multinational corporations are actively involved the extraction of natural resources in at least nine West African states, under conditions that create potential sources of conflict and violence. However, in a number of situations, they have replaced the state by providing valuable social services. It is thus important to engage with these companies to ensure that they implement conflict-sensitive community programmes.

33 A study of the challenges of security sector governance across the 16 West African countries (not including Equatorial Guinea) indicated that over-centralisation, or concentration of powers in the presidency is a common problem in West Africa. See Bryden, Ndiaye and Olonisakin (eds.), *The Challenges of Security Sector Governance in West Africa*.

34 In a response to the article written by Jędrzet Frynas entitled 'Political Instability and Business', two members of the Shell Public Relations Department, Alan Dethridge and Noble Pepple, admitted that Shell owned 107 pistols in Nigeria. See Dethridge and Pepple, 'A Response to Frynas'.

3.4 Social groups

At the centre of almost all the conflicts in West Africa are the *youth*, who consider themselves a neglected majority in an unjust socioeconomic and political order. In many cases (as indicated above), youth have taken up arms against neighbouring communities, multinational corporations or central governments. The involvement of youth in conflicts in the subregion is also linked to the nature and extent of the youth bulge discussed in section 2.1.8, which places even greater pressure on already fragile governance systems with little or no capacity to respond to the needs of citizens across the board.

West African elites perceive the interests and needs of young people narrowly in terms of employment, in addition to which they are seen as a risk to society (e.g. as criminals and potential recruits for war), rather than people 'at risk'.³⁵ But young people feel excluded along economic, social and political lines, and, as such, employment is not a panacea. Addressing employment without the issues of representation and societal recognition will not address the primary concerns of West African youth. Members of this group have become more organised nationally and are beginning to improve their connections subregionally. They are a difficult group to ignore, not only because they are vulnerable to all types of insecurity, but also because they are the 'successor generation' and will eventually assume control of the power structures by one means or another. Additionally, this group is perhaps one of the most creative in terms of its ability to find innovative means of adapting and generating alternative solutions on the margins of the state. Governments have much to learn from them.

Religious groups have also been very active in certain parts of the subregion. With the failure of the state to respond to citizens' needs, not least during conflict and social upheavals, religious groups, including Christian churches and Islamic organisations, have stepped in to fill the void in many countries by providing disaster relief and other social support. Religious organisations have also been widely acknowledged as useful sources of mediation. Inter-faith groups were active mediators in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, for example.

But one must not ignore the significant role that religious groups have played, for example, in fomenting violence as a result of attitudes and messages of intolerance. The new age religious groups otherwise known as fundamentalist Christians or Pentecostals have emerged as potential purveyors of psychological violence, through messages and attitudes of this type. While they have not been identified as violent groups in any part of West Africa, they are sometimes seen as inciting similar attitudes of intolerance and violent behaviour among other religious groups, particularly Muslims.³⁶ The challenge posed for any effort to address this problem is that the subject of religion is one that remains sensitive in many communities, which do not readily discuss religious differences. This is compounded by the tendency for political leaders to manipulate ethnic and religious differences for their own selfish

35 This is reflected in many of the national youth policies in West Africa. Additionally, the ECOWAS youth policy, which is now being finalised, and the youth component of the ECPF have as an underlying premise that youth are a security risk who need to be found something to do, i.e. given employment.

36 Focus group discussions conducted by Conflict, Security and Development Group researchers in northern Nigeria in February and March 2008 revealed the widespread nature of this tendency.

ends. The reductions in inter-religious tensions in northern Nigeria, for example, have been replaced by an increase in intra-religious tensions between Sunni and Shia Islamic groups, exacerbated by external funding from Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Additionally, *diaspora networks* have sometimes been important actors, whose roles can serve to mitigate or escalate conflict in their home countries. The mitigating effect of diaspora remittances on conflict was discussed in section 2.1.4. However, in some conflicts, it is common for populations in the diaspora to contribute money and send it home to advance groups' interests. This, for example, was noticeable in the Ife-Modakeke conflict in Nigeria, where both sides were alleged to have set up websites on the Internet to solicit for financial contribution for arms procurement from their respective diasporas.³⁷

Diaspora populations have also been involved in the search for peace and in post-conflict economic recovery. Meetings and conferences have been held by these populations to assist in the search for peace at home. For example, in July 1999 a peace conference on the Warri crisis was organised by the diaspora population in Washington, DC. There is also the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora Project, organised by the Liberian population in the United States, which is ongoing. Leaders of countries recovering from civil conflicts have also tried to attract the diaspora population to assist in post-war reconstruction, as can be seen in the call by former President Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone in 2002 encouraging Sierra Leonean citizens living outside the country to come and assist in post-conflict reconstruction.

3.5 ECOWAS, the Mano River Union and the African Union

Since its deployment of troops to address the Liberian civil war in 1990, ECOWAS has been active in the maintenance of peace in West Africa, and is likely to remain a key driving force toward peace in the subregion for the foreseeable future. As discussed in section 2.1.12, the organisation has developed an impressive array of normative instruments designed to build peace and stability in the subregion.

The ECPF is the first attempt by the organisation to translate these norms into actionable work on the ground and to focus in particular on conflict prevention by addressing the structural root causes of conflict in the subregion, rather than simply responding to the symptoms of conflict. This is relevant also because it will help work toward the achievement of Millennium Development Goals, meet the New Partnership for Africa's Development benchmarks, fulfil the requirements of economic partnership agreements and contribute to the overall security agenda of the African Union. The reduction in large-scale armed conflict in the subregion has made it possible for the organisation to gradually shift its focus from peace operations to conflict prevention. Indeed, it is now conceivable that ECOWAS will rely less and less on ECOWAS Monitoring Group-type interventions in West Africa; rather, it is likely to contribute more to peace operations in other parts of Africa through the ESF arrangements.

37 See Alao, *Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa*.

The ECOWAS Commission, in particular, has served as an active facilitator and catalyst in the development of these norms, as well as facilitator and go-between for member states and West African civil society. The collaboration with civil society has shaped the conflict management work of ECOWAS and the movement toward a peaceful subregion, helping to slowly shift the approach of member states.

However, the ultimate decision in favour of change rests with the member states, some of which may not necessarily be inclined to push for change. ECOWAS political leaders have tended to behave differently in group settings at the subregional and global levels. While committing themselves to subregional and global normative instruments while abroad, at home there is a tendency to renege on or delay the implementation of these commitments. This notwithstanding, the commitments provide a framework for local civil society actors and the international community to make demands for change, albeit in limited ways.

The ECOWAS Commission is, however, severely limited in its capacity to support the implementation of the various norms. Apart from the human resource challenges referred to in section 2.1.8, there is an over-concentration of efforts of external partners on the Commission, without looking at ECOWAS subregional centres, which may be better placed to absorb other types of support.

Two other organisations are relevant to subregional peace and security in West Africa. One is the Mano River Union, which has served as a convenor of states in the neighbourhood – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, plus Côte d'Ivoire – and a forum for discussing immediate problems without depending solely on the convening of the whole subregion by ECOWAS. It is important to revive the use of the Mano River Union as such a convening forum for discussing common security challenges and addressing conflict early warning in cooperation with ECOWAS via its Zonal Bureau in Liberia and its special representatives in Guinea, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Similarly, the African Union remains an important part of the interests and work of ECOWAS, given the latter's obligation to implement aspects of the African Peace and Security Architecture in West Africa. The Memorandum of Understanding between the African Union and the various African regional economic communities, signed in January 2008 in Algiers, provides a new basis for structured collaboration and implementation of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

3.6 Hegemonic actors

Also important in understanding the subregional contexts of conflict and conflict management in Africa is the role of 'hegemons'. These are countries whose size and/or activities have made them dominant actors in a particular subregion. For a long time, such attention has been focused on Nigeria, whose size, population and wealth have made it the dominant actor in West Africa.³⁸ However, apart from Nigeria, there are other actors who are less

38 Adekeye Adebajo has discussed the role of Nigeria as a subregional hegemon in some of his writings; see, for example, his *Liberia's Civil War*.

wealthy but equally powerful because of the ‘spoiler’ role they have consistently played in the politics of conflicts in West Africa.

These countries have been described as ‘enclave’ hegemons, the best example of which is Burkina Faso. Indeed, in understanding the context of conflict in West Africa, the primary position of Burkina Faso has to be considered as a country that has been implicated in virtually all the conflicts in the subregion. Though small in size and wealth, the leadership of the country has been involved in sponsoring rebel movements in several of West African conflicts (e.g. Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire). Perhaps even more significantly, despite strong leadership, Burkina Faso itself is not devoid of the structural factors found at the root of conflict in West Africa, which are discussed in detail below.

3.7 Civil society groups

Overall, there is a tendency to see civil society actors as the more formalised groups, particularly non-governmental organisations. However, some of the most critical actors in civil society who can play positive or negative roles in driving or mitigating conflict are not necessarily part of mainstream organised groups.

Some actors that possess a potentially powerful base because of their capacity to mobilise, but are nonetheless often on the receiving end of the negative actions of many of the actors discussed above, are women. Policy and practice across West Africa remains gender blind in many respects, despite the clear indicators of inequalities and victimisation that deprive women of access. Women have been active peacemakers, particularly at the informal level, but they hardly feature in formal processes. The active roles played by women of the Mano River in the subregion’s peace processes were initially driven in large part by informal networks.

In terms of organised civil society networks, two groups are mentioned here, in addition to the ECOWAS Civil Society Forum and the overall civil society collaboration with ECOWAS in the development and implementation of its normative framework, as discussed in section 2.1.8. The first of these is the Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET). This is an organisation established in May 2000 that brings together women in the Mano River Union. MARWOPNET has been quite active in the subregion, especially in the search for enduring peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone. It has been recognised by ECOWAS and has been granted observer status at various peace negotiations in the subregion. The organisation participated in the women’s shuttle meetings that resulted in the Rabat Summit of the Mano River Union leaders. Recently, the organisation joined with three others to execute the DfID-sponsored Strengthening Citizen’s Security project in Sierra Leone.³⁹ It has also recently come up with a draft security early warning manual for the Mano River Union.

39 Other organisations that joined MARWOPNET in this project were the Conciliation Resources, the Search for Common Ground’s Talking Drum Studio, and the Centre for Development and Security Analysis, and it aimed at empowering civilians in two of Sierra Leone’s districts (Kailaun and Kenema) to be more involved in their own security. The pilot project ran from April 2007 to August 2008.

The second group that has begun to play a visible role in subregional security discourse is the African Security Sector Network, a network of African security analysts and practitioners, and policy actors. Among this organisation's recent activities are support for security reforms in Liberia in collaboration with Liberia's Governance Commission, and the provision of training seminars on security sector oversight for Liberian parliamentarians and, more recently, for parliamentarians in Mali, Benin and Togo.

Overall, civil society can either play a conflict-mitigating role or succumb to the manipulation of the elite and thus become no more than a source of reinforcement of the patronage system. It is important, however, to adopt a reasonable degree of flexibility in dealing with civil society, which remains an enormous resource across the board as an invaluable source of local knowledge, a potent early warning system and a crucial facilitator of change.

3.8 External actors

As indicated in section 2.1.11, West Africa in recent times has become the focus of international attention because of the enormous oil deposits in the Gulf of Guinea. Indeed, the United States has declared that by 2015, 25 per cent of its oil supplies will come from the Gulf, thus causing Nigeria and other oil-producing countries to assume enormous importance in global oil politics.⁴⁰ Fifteen per cent of US oil supplies currently come from the subregion.

The United States has increased its military presence in the Gulf of Guinea significantly since 2006. According to Jendayi Fraser, US under-secretary of state for Africa:

*Achieving coastal security in the Gulf of Guinea is key to America's trade and investment opportunities in Africa, to our energy security and to stem transnational threats like narcotics and arms trafficking, piracy, and illegal fishing . . . We share these interests in common with our Gulf of Guinea partners.*⁴¹

Also when discussing international interest, it has to be noted that those who have been involved have been state actors and multinational corporations. Indeed, while individual countries, such as the United States and, to a lesser extent, China and France, have come out clearly to indicate their interest in the subregion, as demonstrated, for example, by the US Africa Command initiative, many multinational corporations are working through their respective countries to advance their specific interests in West Africa. In short, many of the international interests have been motivated by expectations of national advantages, and many of these steps may not be in the long-term interest of peace in the subregion.

40 The increasing importance of the Gulf of Guinea in global oil politics needs further explanation here. Geographically, 'Gulf of Guinea' is a somewhat loose term, but it is widely believed to encompass coastal states in the Gulf of Guinea area. This includes West African states and other non-West African countries of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon and Cameroon. While geographically the expanse is extensive, it is widely believed that Nigeria, because of its population and the extent of its reserves, will be the key actor in the subregion. For more on the subregion, see Boit, 'Oil, Africa and the US'.

41 <<http://www.america.gov/st/washfileenglish/2006/December/20061219101202MVyelwarCo.1016352.html>>. Accessed on 14 July 2008.

In the last decade, Western European development agencies have become actively engaged in managing conflicts in West Africa. Many of these agencies have also been involved, for example, in promoting and supporting ECOWAS conflict management efforts, including the UK (DfID), Denmark (the Danish International Development Agency) and Germany (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit), among others.

Chapter 4

Conflict dynamics

West Africa is clearly witnessing a reduction in the type of large-scale conflicts that engulfed the subregion in the 1990s, although it remains vulnerable to violent conflict. The potential for escalation of current conflicts will depend largely on the degree of mutation in the structural processes under way and the type of decisions taken by critical actors. This chapter identifies the trends and triggers that can lead to the escalation of violence in the subregion. In the next five years, the issues that are likely to underline security and serve to escalate conflict are those that have already emerged. These include the politics surrounding the ownership, management and control of natural resources; managing the challenges of youth vulnerability and exclusion; issues relating to religious radicalisation; border disputes; and the challenges of meeting populations' demands regarding post-war reconstruction. It is important to emphasise that these are potential conflict triggers that on their own might not lead to violent conflict. The key to these challenges lies in the framework of solutions offered by critical actors, which should ideally move from conflict response to conflict prevention.

4.1 Natural resource management

The politics of natural resource management is arguably the most important trigger of conflict in West Africa, and this has become apparent in many of the ongoing conflicts in the subregion, not least in the Niger Delta. Oil is likely to continue to trigger conflict in West Africa because of the coalescing of four main factors:

- the high global demand for energy resources, which encourages foreign multinational corporations to exploit the internal weaknesses of natural resource governance in West African oil-producing states and consequently interfere in their domestic politics;
- the high rents that accrue from the resource, which in diverse ways can be linked to the corruption and greed on the part of the ruling elites of some of these countries and the heightening of expectations of the local population in oil-producing communities;
- the changing nature of politics, which has increased awareness on the part of civil society for accountable governance; and
- the effects of globalisation, which has raised a new set of considerations regarding the nature of the global response to energy politics.

The increasing importance of the West African subregion in terms of oil supplies, as noted earlier, is likely to increase the propensity for conflict in the subregion.

However, beyond the oil conflict in the Niger Delta, which has attained global interest and attention, other natural resources are likely to come to the fore. The resource whose importance to conflict will become most glaring is land. What further makes land vital to any discussion on conflict is that it is the 'abode' of most other natural resources – a characteristic that means that the controversies surrounding these resources often manifest through conflicts over the ownership, management and control of land.⁴² Virtually all the countries in West Africa have recorded conflicts over this resource. In recent years, the nature and scope of conflicts surrounding land have been further widened, especially because law reform has not caught up with present realities. As the subregion begins to grapple with the challenges of the global food crisis and as agriculture no doubt receives more attention, the potential for conflict within and between communities over land will become more acute, as will the conflict between pastoralists and agrarian communities.

Apart from land, conflicts are most likely to occur with other natural resources, especially solid minerals, oil and water, each of which is likely to trigger conflict for different reasons. For example, solid minerals are most likely to continue engendering conflicts because the structures of governance in most West African states have not taken into consideration how the ease of the disposability of these resources and their high profit margins could attract the attention of an array of interest groups, including armed groups, international business interests, political elites, criminal networks (e.g. laundering of proceeds from drug trafficking), local and international civil society, and multinational corporations, which could encourage and sustain conflicts.

The importance of water, with its links to conflict is increasing in West Africa. There are several ways in which water can be linked to conflict. The first is the ongoing practice in some of the countries in the subregion to privatise water. This policy, which has been encouraged by the World Bank, has been condemned across West Africa, especially as it runs contrary to the general belief in the subregion that water is a vital natural resource that should be freely available to all. Indeed, coalitions are now being formed in some West African countries to fight the plans by government to privatise water.⁴³ One organisation fighting water privatisation in Ghana has accused Britain of holding back aid money meant for Ghana until the process of privatisation is complete.⁴⁴ Another water-related issue that can trigger conflict is the management of international river basins. However, there are several ongoing cross-border

42 See Alao, *Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa*, 63.

43 In Ghana, the Coalition against Privatisation of Water was formed in 2001. This is a broad-based coalition of individuals and civil society organisations with five objectives: (a) a mass civil society campaign to stop the transfer of water supplies to foreign multinational corporations; (b) direct mass involvement in decisions about water sector reform alternatives; (c) the inclusion of public sector options in water supply and overall restructuring of the water sector; (d) full public disclosure of all documents and details of transfer proposals, bids and negotiations; and (e) access to water for all Ghanaians, backed by statutory rights to water by 2008.

44 In particular, they cite the pledge of GBP 10 million for the improvement of the water system in Kumasi.

initiatives looking at ways of managing these resources. This is evident in the increasing number of river-basin unions bringing together many countries in the subregion.⁴⁵

4.2 Religious radicalisation

Religious differences are likely to occur in only a few countries, even if their consequences can be devastating. Indeed, the country where religious issues are likely to have dominant attention is Nigeria, where the phenomenon has been a recurring issue in the last few decades. With the increasing radicalisation in the country, it is likely that violent conflicts will continue to occur there. There is increasing evidence that more radical Islamic groups are now emerging in the country. One of the groups, Al sunna Wal Jamma (Followers of the Prophet) was formed around 2001. Its members are highly educated and experienced in the handling of weapons. It is believed that they first set up a camp around Kanamma, a small town in Yobe, around late 2002 and early 2003, near Nigeria's border with Niger. What first brought them to public attention apart from their preaching and their calls for Islamic purity was their total lack of respect for local traditions, especially property rights. They farmed and fished everywhere, especially on sections of the bank of the Yobe River owned by particular families, claiming that 'everything belongs to Allah'.

Another militant group, Nigerian Taliban, emerged in 2002, demanding that all 12 states in the north impose sharia law. It also began attacking symbols of the government, especially the police. In April 2007 there was a new wave of attacks in Kano, where it accused the government of not enforcing Islamic laws strictly enough, while also condemning what it saw as an attempt to 'Christianise' Kano. This was after the Kano leaders sought to offset the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran, which are funding hard-line Islamist schools that some fear are educating a generation of extremists.

On the issue of the radicalisation of Muslims in Nigeria, one issue stands out distinctly. This is that often its expression is violent, and more often than not, that expression is seen in terms of a jihad or holy war, which has endorsement in the Quran. It is thus likely that Islamic radicalisation will continue to be a major issue in the calculation of security in the West African subregion, particularly given the potential for some radicalised groups to become violent.

4.3 Challenges of post-war reconstruction

Managing the complexities of post-war reconstruction continues to be a major potential trigger of conflict or its relapse in West Africa. This possibility has become more real because of the minimal success that attended the demobilisation and reintegration exercises in the

45 Some of these river-basin unions include the Mano River Union, bringing together Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea; the Volta River Union, comprising Ghana and Burkina Faso; and the Niger Basin Authority, constituting Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Chad.

subregion's war-affected countries. This particular conflict trigger can be better appreciated if it is co-considered with other triggers, especially the problems associated with youth, migration and organised crime. Currently, thousands of youth are unemployed in some of the countries emerging from war, especially in Liberia. While this problem has been widely recognised by the country, the wider subregional implications are often ignored. The part of the country where the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process was least successful was the Zwedru region that borders Côte d'Ivoire. Consequently, it is widely believed that arms are flowing between the country and the war-affected Côte d'Ivoire. This thus means that the implications of the problem go beyond Liberia into its immediate environs. The potential threat from the large armies of ex-combatants that remain at large without any meaningful reintegration cannot be ignored. Another real potential trigger of conflict in the Mano River Union region is the withdrawal of the United Nations (UN) without the achievement of the critical benchmarks that can guarantee security after withdrawal. One of the key lessons from such post-conflict environments is the need to manage expectations across the board.

4.4 Management of national elections

West Africa will witness a number of national elections in the next couple of years, and there is every indication that these are potential triggers of conflict. This is because the elections are likely to be bitterly contested, with rival factions employing illegal ways of attaining political power; or the infrastructure to ensure credible elections that can ascertain the choice of the population might not be available. In Ghana, for example, the two main political parties, the National Democratic Congress and the National Patriotic Party see the December 2008 election as an opportunity to settle old scores. Some parts of the country that are already known for other violence, particularly northern Ghana, are potential areas for such bitter rivalry.

In Côte d'Ivoire, ECOWAS has indicated that the resources to conduct the elections initially to be held later in 2008 (now likely to be scheduled for early 2009) are not available, and, as such, there are concerns that the election might end up being poorly managed.⁴⁶ This has enormous implications, especially as the presidential election is important for overall national reconciliation and peace consolidation. There is already rising concern that if Laurent Gbagbo emerges as the loser in the elections, it might be difficult to persuade him to relinquish power without recourse to violence.

When it comes to the management of elections, the real conflict triggers are shifting from the actual conduct of elections and the intricate technical work surrounding elections. Increasingly, the events following elections, such as vote counting and the reaction of key contestants to the results, are becoming potential triggers of conflict. Rigging at the vote-counting stage, including the falsification of results in key constituencies and/or the refusal

46 ECOWAS recently provided financial support to Côte d'Ivoire to assist the country in meeting parts of the financial costs of the election. This support eventually opened the way for other donors to provide assistance.

of key actors to accept the results of elections, even when the process of voting and counting has been fairly free, are potential problems to watch out for in West Africa, particularly in post-conflict situations, where parties involved in the elections were previously locked in long years of bitter struggle. Recent trends across Africa indicate that these are the problems upon which to focus attention. Persuading prominent political actors to accept the outcome of relatively free and fair elections when the results are not in their favour requires intense political work, which long pre-dates the elections. The donor community needs to recognise this and reassess its response to elections accordingly. Côte d'Ivoire will be one of the next tests of the willingness and capacity of the international community to move from a mode of conflict response to conflict prevention. Sierra Leone had a reasonably successful change of government, which was due in large part to active political engagement by the international community. This type of political engagement should continue, and not be limited to the time period immediately before, during and after an election.

4.5 Impact of global trends and changes

Global developments, such as the food crisis and the energy crisis, will have a knock-on effect on Africa as a whole. For a region that has long given priority to cash crops over food crops, the rising price of food globally, particularly rice, spells doom. Many West African states, such as Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, have continued to import rice, which is part of the staple diet in the subregion, despite the potential capacity to grow enough rice to feed their populations and the subregion as a whole. The rising cost of this staple food alongside the astronomical rise in the price of oil has the potential to trigger violent reactions from populations who cannot manage to meet the basic cost of living. The combination of this and the emerging issue of forced migration as a result of climate change can potentially aggravate residual conflict over land and the management of natural resources.

Chapter 5

Key flashpoints and future conflict scenarios

Some of the parts of West Africa where the above trends and triggers can result in full-scale conflicts and the rationale behind their selection are discussed below.

5.1 Niger Delta

The Niger Delta has become a key conflict flashpoint in Nigeria and is likely to remain so for some time to come. This is largely because there are many layers of conflict in the region, such that it will be difficult to address all of them. In his recent book,⁴⁷ Abiodun Alao identifies 15 layers of conflict in the Niger Delta, each with its causes and patterns of manifestation.

Although efforts are now being made to address some of these conflicts, it is clear from the ongoing initiatives that only aspects of them are currently receiving attention. It is likely that some of these issues will continue to create security concerns for the region. In terms of the pattern of its expression, conflict in the Niger Delta is likely to continue along the same path, with militants kidnapping foreign workers to get ransoms and clashes continuing between militant groups and members of the Nigerian security forces. This will continue to retain the potential to reduce oil production in the Delta.

5.2 Northern Nigeria

Northern Nigeria is likely to be a key flashpoint because of the incessant religious conflicts in this part of the country. Although the fallout from the imposition of sharia law in the region seems to be reducing, there are still grounds for concern about the security problems that can arise as a result of religious radicalisation. This is especially the case for a number of reasons. The first is the increase in Christian radicalisation in the form of ‘Pentecostal fundamentalism’, which is being presented as a counter to Islamic radicalisation. While in the past Christians have been passive in periods of religious violence, the experience from the 2006 Jos riots has shown that this pattern is changing. Increasingly, Christians are becoming more militant, and the implications of this for political stability in the region are enormous. The Plateau State crisis was caused by conflict between a Christian militia and Hausa Muslims.

47 Alao, *Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa*.

The second is the extent of financial assistance for Islamic radicalisation in the region. In recent times, funding for radicalisation seems to be coming from countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan and some other countries in the Middle East. Although development agencies of Western countries like DfID and the US Agency for International Development are also known to be funding activities that will mitigate the advancement of radicalisation in the region, as in the assistance being given to encourage broader educational opportunities instead of solely Islamic education, these are still comparatively few in number, and it is believed that radicalisation and violence are still key issues in northern Nigeria, and could be key trigger points at the next elections.

5.3 Guinea

Guinea has been at the centre of conflict concerns for some time, and it is likely that the situation in the country will continue to be of interest in the immediate future. There is clearly a crisis of power in Guinea, with an ailing president, weak executive authority and a national assembly still without a mandate. Although Ahmad Tidiane Souare replaced Lansana Kouyate as prime minister and head of government, this position is not entrenched in the constitution of the country. Despite the recent national dialogue and the statement by the army that it remains committed to the defence of civil power and that citizens will not see other revolts like the recent ones in which the military was clamouring for better pay (which was granted by the government), the possibility of a military takeover cannot be ruled out.

5.4 Casamance

In Casamance, cross-border ethnic alliance is now making the problem more regional than national, especially as this relates to Guinea and Gambia. This explains why ECOWAS has tried to ensure that these two countries are involved in the search for peace in the region. Civil society and zonal bureaus in both countries are now to be involved in the process. However, regional mediators have appeared insincere, in addition to which the conflict is viewed as a low-intensity one when compared with Liberia and Sierra Leone. Also in the Casamance, the presence of landmines is creating major concerns. There are attendant implications of this, because the resultant inability to engage in farming might aggravate the food crisis, which can again compound the insecurity. Finally, the problem of trans-border cattle rustling is one that will remain an issue for some time.

5.5 Northern Niger

The situation in Northern Niger, where the Tuareg-led rebels are fighting the government, is likely to remain unstable, especially as the rebels are expanding their militant activities. In June 2008 rebels abducted four French workers from a uranium mine in northern Niger operated by Areva, a French nuclear energy company. The rebels from the Niger Movement

for Justice have been calling for greater autonomy and a larger share of northern Niger's mineral wealth. The implications of this for the country are enormous, especially as the rebels have noted on their website that the kidnapping was to send a warning to foreign mining companies. With the demand for nuclear fuel increasing, the price of uranium has increased significantly and Niger's resource is in great demand. The government recently promised to provide military protection for the uranium mines and oil installations.

There have been frequent clashes between the Niger Movement for Justice and the army, but the government has ruled out talks with the rebels unless they first disarm. Calls for greater democratisation through administrative autonomy for the country's regions have also become a problem in a country with large regions, each more than the size of Gambia. Another important aspect of the conflict is that a Tuareg-led rebellion is also being fought in north-east Mali, which may have implications in terms of the regionalisation of the conflict.

5.6 Important cross-border issues and flashpoints

There are a number of cross-border issues that are likely to affect security in West Africa in the immediate future. Some of these are discussed below.

5.6.1 Drugs

West Africa has become a major transit point for drugs from Latin America; indeed, Guinea-Bissau has now attained the unenviable reputation of being a major centre of drugs going into North America and Western Europe. What is, however, more frightening is that members of the security forces are now involved in the process.⁴⁸ Indeed, the government has adopted a 'shoot to kill' policy against members of its security forces that are involved in the drug business. The problem involves people in very high places, and this is making its handling more complex and difficult. Experiences from other parts of the world have shown that the moment the security institutions are penetrated by the narco-mafia, there is a major security challenge facing the country concerned. Apart from Guinea-Bissau, other major drug routes in West Africa are via Gambia, Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria. It is important, however, to point out that in some of these countries there are ongoing efforts to address the menace of drugs.

5.6.2 Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau faces a particularly difficult challenge, as the drug trade threatens to undermine its leadership and economy. The country has become a major transit point for drugs transported from South America to several destinations in Europe.⁴⁹ Of particular concern are the reports that the military's patrolling of Guinea-Bissau's territorial waters has served to preserve the trade rather than control it – a situation that appears to receive the tacit support of the government in its effort to pacify the military and keep it out of politics.⁵⁰

48 This situation was confirmed by an ECOWAS official in a telephone interview, 7 July 2008.

49 See 'The Cocaine Web Spreads'. See also, Hagen, 'The Impact of Drug Trafficking on Guinea-Bissau'.

50 'The Cocaine Web Spreads'.

This situation has generated considerable tension among the country's leadership, with the head of the military in 2008, General Na Waie, taking additional measures for his own security.⁵¹ Furthermore, the alleged coup in August 2008 may have been due in part to the local power dynamics related to the drugs trade.⁵²

5.6.3 Illegal oil bunkering

Illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta seems to be serving as an exemplar for other parts of West Africa of how to go into the business of illegal bunkering. In Côte d'Ivoire, there is an apparent 'copy-cat' version of what is going on in the Niger Delta. Money lost to oil bunkering affects revenue that could be diverted to valuable social services. This situation is compounded by the fact that a complex network of actors are involved in this activity, including the army and militias.

5.6.4 Cross-border criminality

Cross-border criminality is also becoming a factor across the borders of Nigeria, Benin and Togo. Activities here include child trafficking, smuggling and armed robbery, among others. A major bank in Benin was reportedly robbed by armed men from Nigeria, who employed automatic weapons and escaped by sea using speedboats. While this may be a common occurrence in some parts of Nigeria, this was completely unprecedented in Benin, thus causing the authorities in the country major concern.⁵³ There are also continuing reports of crimes along the Badagry–Seme–Hillacondji–Aflao axis, including illegal activities such as extortion of citizens by security service personnel. These illegal cross-border activities remain a problem across the subregion, with many countries being adversely affected.

The increased external interest in Guinea-Bissau arising from concerns over the knock-on effect of drugs trafficking, as well as the rising interest in oil exploration in its territorial waters, might offer a chance for increased international engagement to address this problem. Overall, there are real concerns that the sheer magnitude of this drugs trade and its impact on a weak state like Guinea-Bissau will not only create wider instability for the immediate region, but also pose significant challenges for European countries like the UK, which have to deal with the impact of drugs arriving from transit points in West Africa. The US Department of Defense has shown increased interest in the impact of the drug trade on Guinea-Bissau and West Africa as a whole for other reasons, particularly the threat that these states might become fertile ground for criminal networks, not least terrorist organisations.⁵⁴

51 See 'Guinea Bissau: Need for a Democratic State'.

52 Hagen, 'The Impact of Drug Trafficking on Guinea-Bissau'.

53 It was confirmed during the ECOWAS Zonal Strategic Planning Meeting on Conflict Prevention and Peace-building in Banjul in July 2008 that this was a major challenge for all three countries in ECOWAS Bureau 4 (Nigeria, Benin and Togo).

54 See Walter Pincus, 'Counternarcotics Effort in West Africa Widens Pentagon's Purview', *Washington Post*, 30 June 2008, A9.

5.7 Future conflict scenarios

Current trends provide a strong indication that future conflicts in the subregion will most likely remain ‘internal’, and that the subregional dimensions of those conflicts will have a less destructive subregional impact. Thus, many states in the region confront the possibility of low-intensity conflicts contained largely (but not completely) within state boundaries.

The real threats to the scale of wider subregional instability are a possible reversal or unravelling of the armed conflict in Liberia and Sierra Leone and instability in Guinea. Any of these cases can potentially destabilise the greater Mano River region. The focus on internal conflicts contained within their immediate locales is also based on the assumption that conflicts such as those in Casamance, Niger and Mali will generally not become more regionalised than they already are and will in all likelihood not invite large-scale interventions through subregional or UN peacekeeping.

The chances of inter-state armed conflicts are significantly reduced. This is not only because a level of understanding now exists among many of the countries in the subregion, but also because of new norms and approaches that allow ECOWAS to offer a legitimate framework for conflict management.

A scenario in which there is a reduced spread of violence in the subregion does not necessarily suggest that West Africa is shifting toward peace and stability. Rather, it indicates a situation of ‘no war, no peace’, in which the low-intensity conflicts raging within national boundaries are neither of a scale significant enough to pose a threat to international peace and security, nor sufficiently benign to allow normal development. This is a ‘crunch’ moment for conflict prevention in West Africa. For the first time, the reduction in large-scale armed conflicts provides an opportunity to address the structural root causes of conflict and help the subregion turn the low-intensity conflicts into more stable environments in which longer-term development can be pursued. This will require diplomatic, development and defence actors to align their efforts around a common approach to conflict prevention.

The challenge for the international community and, not least, bilateral actors such as the UK is to resist the urge to ‘follow open conflict’, and instead consolidate the work done in earlier years through deepening conflict prevention by moving the structural processes discussed above toward greater stability. This means that the opportunity for the international community’s presence on the scale witnessed in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire through various levels of intervention, including peacekeeping and peace-building activities, will become highly unlikely. Rather, other low-level, targeted interventions will become a real possibility and will require immense political will on the part of local and national political actors. Among such interventions are those aimed at conflict management and reduction, including governance and security reforms.

The role of ECOWAS in promoting reforms at the national level will be crucial in this regard. Without normative change and application at this level, it will be difficult to see the kind of structural change that can alleviate these conflicts. Key states will also need to take proactive steps to urge national leaders to abide by the agenda set out, for example, in the ECPF. ECOWAS will require the support of the international community to implement key aspects of the ECPF, while remaining focused on developing its capacity to support peace-

keeping efforts elsewhere on the continent. Balancing its West Africa-specific tasks with its subregional commitments will require careful prioritising. For example, while reducing its peace support operations focus in West Africa, the continued focus on the development of the ESF in support of the African Peace and Security Architecture must address vital capacity gaps, particularly the civilian aspects of peacekeeping.

There are, however, several scenarios that can potentially reverse the trend toward sub-regional stability. One is that, as indicated earlier, the outcome of elections might lead to violence in Côte d'Ivoire. Similarly, succession to Guinea's President Conteh remains a looming issue. Institutions such as the Panel of the Wise might be very useful in undertaking pre-election consultations with key political actors to persuade them to pursue non-violent approaches even if the outcome of the elections is not in their favour. Persuading them to provide leadership to their supporters on the need for non-violent approaches will be one way of acting early. Additionally, influential external actors might be useful in persuading such leaders (through inducements) to seek alternative international employment opportunities if they are not elected.

5.8 Recommendations for subregional strategy development

Increasingly, there are a number of issues coming up as key areas to consider in policy formulation. I have identified below some key issues and areas of engagement that the UK government might want to consider in the formulation of its strategy towards contributing to peace, stability and development in West Africa.

5.8.1 Regional processes

- *Strengthening normative frameworks:* There is a need to support implementation of the ECPF; for example, as part of a collective effort to address structural root causes of conflict. Among other things, this will also create an opportunity to strengthen subregional policy frameworks on drugs and integrated border security.
- *De-concentration of focus on the ECOWAS Commission:* Given the limited capacity in the Commission and the challenges discussed in this paper, it might be more rewarding to cultivate more direct engagement with ECOWAS subregional centres, as well as with specific member states, who can be influenced to focus on specific components of the ECPF.
- *Encouraging champions of change among key actors in select member states:* Reform-minded leaders in some ECOWAS member states should be encouraged to champion a particular issue in the ECPF in their country, while engaging through a subregional lens. Similarly, the ECOWAS Parliament and, within this, specific parliamentarians can be influenced to promote relevant aspects of ECPF and other ECOWAS processes.
- *Capacity development:* The sustainability of the processes and structures created for conflict prevention in West African can be best sustained by building the capacity of existing leaders and champions of change, while supporting the development of a new

generation of leaders in parliament and civil society who will ultimately provide valuable oversight of the systems of governance.

5.8.2 Partnerships

- Improved coordination with other development actors and multilateral institutions is necessary in order to add value to existing processes. For example, increased engagement with the UN Office in West Africa might influence it to deepen its interaction and coordination with ECOWAS.
- Partnerships undertaken with ECOWAS should complement the Memorandum of Understanding between the African Union and the various African regional economic communities.

5.8.3 Critical issues and actors for policy engagement and other support

The following are some of the critical issues for possible policy engagement and support:

- *elections*: safeguarding free and fair processes and promoting non-violent outcomes;
- *post-conflict settings*: ensuring better community reconciliation and support for job creation initiatives;
- *security reforms*: regulating legitimate internal security actors and ensuring effective parliamentary oversight;
- *drugs*: developing and strengthening subregional monitoring systems and border controls;
- *mediation*: regular engagement with leaders facing contentious elections;
- *security partnerships*: e.g. on issues related to the Gulf of Guinea;
- *Niger Delta*: supporting and conducting negotiations in partnership with internal stakeholders and other international actors;
- *youth and leadership development*: supporting capacity development toward addressing issues of concern for the next generation;
- *peace support operations*: focusing on ESF, giving particular attention to the training of civilian components of peace support operations. Additionally, support should be given to governments and/or ESF units to better prepare for UN/African Union peace support operations, including, for example, developing capacity to undertake the much-desired wet lease arrangements for UN peacekeeping.

The following groups of actors are critical for policy and other engagement:

- *select governments and government officials*: to champion subregional reform on particular issues;
- *elected parliamentarians*: to strengthen legal frameworks through law reform, new legislation (regarding land, gender, security) and public information through public hearings and partnerships with civil society;
- *ECOWAS members of parliament*: to develop codes of conduct for security sector reform and good governance and to champion aspects of the ECOWAS policy agenda.

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Appendix

Upcoming elections in ECOWAS countries

Month	Country	Type of election	Date	Note
Nov. 2008	Guinea-Bissau	Parliamentary	16 Nov.	
	Côte d'Ivoire	Presidential	30 Nov.	
Dec. 2008	Ghana	Presidential and legislative	7 Dec.	
Mar. 2009	Guinea	Parliamentary		Postponed from Nov. 2008
Nov. 2009	Niger	Presidential and parliamentary		
June 2010	Guinea-Bissau	Presidential	Month and date tbc*	Month and date tbc, but last presidential elections were held in two stages in June and July 2005
Nov. 2010	Burkina Faso	Presidential		
Dec. 2010	Guinea	Presidential		Postponed from Dec. 2008
Jan. 2011	Cape Verde	Parliamentary		
Feb. 2011	Cape Verde	Presidential		
Mar. 2011	Benin	Presidential and legislative		
Apr. 2011	Nigeria	Presidential and parliamentary		
Sep. 2011	Gambia	Presidential	Month and date tbc	Month and date tbc, but last presidential elections were held in Sep. 2006
Oct. 2011	Liberia	Presidential and legislative		
Jan. 2012	Gambia	Legislative		
Feb. 2012	Senegal	Presidential	Month and date tbc	Month and date tbc, but last presidential elections were held in Feb. 2007
Apr. 2012	Mali	Presidential		
May 2012	Burkina Faso	Parliamentary		
June 2012	Senegal	Parliamentary	Month and date tbc	Month and date tbc, but last parliamentary elections were held in June 2007
July 2012	Mali	Parliamentary		
Aug. 2012	Sierra Leone	Presidential and legislative		
Oct. 2012	Togo	Parliamentary	Month and date tbc	Month and date tbc, but last parliamentary elections were held in Oct. 2007

* To be confirmed

Source: Based on IFES Election Guide, <<http://www.electionguide.org>>