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Workshop on South-South Cooperation for Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Africa

Regional Cooperation for Peace-building in West Africa

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary approaches to peace building and post-conflict reconstruction generally place emphases on community and national ownership, sustainability and regional solutions, governance and justice, cost effectiveness and affordability. For the most part, these core principles resonate with those around which the narrative of South-South Cooperation (SSC) as an alternative mechanism for increasing Africa's bargaining power in global affairs is framed. Stronger and deeper relationships among developing countries; side-by-side with the pivotal role of several emerging powers in the global south, have created a compelling context for mainstreaming SSC framework into conflict prevention, peacemaking, post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building efforts in developing countries. In specific terms, SSC framework has been integrated into regional cooperative arrangements such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and similar regional mechanisms, as well as into continental initiatives such as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). By the 1990s when the scale and intensity of intra-state conflict rose in Africa, regional economic communities (RECs) have become increasingly important players in the search for creative solutions for peace but also in terms of implementing post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD).

Still, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction and development enterprises in West Africa have not always been a complete success story as far as south-south cooperation is concerned. Unlike in other climes, peace building in West Africa usually involves multiple complex emergencies associated with the collapse of central administration (failed state phenomenon) and attendant consequences have had costly impacts on internal displacements persons and refugee; resettlement and post-war

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rehabilitation and reconstruction; civil service restructuring; democracy and elections; reconciliation; disarmament and arms control; security sector reform and management; justice and restitution (truth and reconciliation), etc. This type of paradox was responsible, in specific terms, for the ascendancy of politico-security issues in the work of ECOWAS that was purely conceived as an economic integration mechanism. Today, ECOWAS has become famous for its conflict prevention and management, peacemaking and peace keeping initiatives in member states; notably those in Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Guinea Bissau and to a much lesser extent, Cote d'Ivoire and Mali.

The paper sets off from the premise that there is need to appraise the existing framework for peace building in West Africa more closely by focusing on the opportunities and challenges facing ECOWAS as the multilateral platform for south-south cooperation. Given the complex challenges of post-conflict reconstruction; including in the two case study countries considered here- Liberia and Sierra-Leone-the paper will also examine bilateral post-conflict reconstruction initiatives involving other key south-south partners such as Nigeria, India, Brazil and South Africa in Liberia and Sierra-Leone.

A number of critical issues necessarily come to the fore. For instance, the paper interrogates the extent to which south-south cooperation frameworks at bilateral and multilateral levels have been successfully (or shortchanged) in conception and management of post-conflict reconstruction and development efforts in West Africa. Further, what are some of the political, economic, social, environmental and security constraints that hampered south-south initiatives in peace building and post-conflict reconstruction projects in Liberia and Sierra-Leone? What are the key lessons learnt from the experiences of administering peace and post-conflict reconstruction in both countries for building sustainable peace in West Africa. Also, can south-south cooperation at different levels be instituted as permanent framework for peace building in West Africa? If the answer is yes, at what point or in what circumstances, should this be introduced and entrenched.

Outline of Paper Presentation

(i). Introduction – The Contexts of Regional Cooperation for Peace-building in West Africa

➢ Achieving regional integration was a major concern of West African leaders after independence. Linked by commonalities of history, geography, and challenges, and aware of the weak sustainability of narrow domestic markets inherited from colonization, political leaders of the post-colonial West Africa, while continuing the integration project at the continental level, focused on setting up a wide space for regional integration, which transcends administrative, linguistic or political divides left by the colonial domination and administration modes.

➢ Prospects for integration into world markets for traditional West African exports under better conditions were limited in many respects due to structural weaknesses and the underdeveloped industrial base of West Africa countries. In this context, regional integration and cooperation afford an intermediate solution. The option for economic integration through regional cooperation was a clear choice and therefore not accidental.

➢ The framework of South-South cooperation in West Africa has been integrated into regional economic cooperation largely through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which was established in 1975.

➢ Stronger and deeper relationships among developing countries and the pivotal role of several emerging powers in the global south have created a compelling context for mainstreaming SSC framework into conflict prevention, peacemaking, post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building efforts in developing countries.

➢ Contemporary approach to peace building and post-conflict reconstruction with its emphasis on national and community ownership, sustainability, cost effectiveness and affordability, flexibility and adaptability, local knowledge and experience resonate with the core principles of South-South Cooperation (SSC) as an alternative mechanism for increasing West Africa's bargaining power in global affairs.

➢ Regional cooperation in peace-building resonates with changing UN Agenda for contemporary peace building; for instance, under the framework of the UN Agenda for Peace (1992); the expansion of the mandate of the UN Office for SSC (UNOSSC); and even the recent SDG Goal 16 around peace and security. For example, in a 1992 report the former UN Secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali states that 'regional

arrangements or agencies possess a potential that should be utilised in preventative diplomacy, peace-keeping, peacemaking and post-conflict peace-building'. The Report also notes that regional arrangements could help 'lighten the burden' of the UN Security Council, and, at the same time, 'contribute to a deeper sense of participation, consensus and democratisation in international affairs'

➢ The contrasting roles and experiences of Western powers in peace operations in African advanced the search for sustainable peace and development on the continent, by exploring local solutions. In the same manner, it would seem that the peacekeeping debacles in Somalia (1993) and Rwanda (1994) have increased the reluctance of western powers to sanction and participate in peace missions in Africa.

(ii)   Compelling Factors for Exploring Regional Cooperation for Peace building in West Africa

➢ Conflicts are rarely isolated within the contiguous West African borders. Many conflicts today are essentially regional in the sense that their geographical manifestations are not limited or defined by state boundaries. The dynamics of conflicts are influenced by shared ethnic, language or religious identities, such as the Liberian and Sierra-Leonean conflicts, the Boko Haram insurgency, among others. In some cases there are often regional dynamics that feed on and further modulate conflicts such as the current spate of trans-national organized crime syndicates in West Africa that use shared identity networks to smuggle goods and people across national borders.

➢ Regional and local approaches to peace-building are needed because many conflicts in West Africa are interlinked and interrelated. Many of the effects of these conflicts, such as refugees, international migration, and the smuggling of weapons and other illicit goods, are also regional in their manifestation and neighbours are often most affected, and thus also have the most direct interest to see them resolved.

➢ In some cases neighbours or others in the region are party to the conflict or benefit from it in ways that may not make them desirable partners in a peace-building initiative.

(iii). Framework for Regional Cooperation for Peace-building in West Africa

➢ The mutation of ECOWAS from an economic integration project into peace building and conflict resolution mechanism in West Africa. ECOWAS is

the most active of all the African RECs in terms of peace and security initiatives. Although, initially conceived as an economic integration mechanism, ECOWAS has become famous for its conflict prevention and management, peacemaking and peace keeping initiatives in member states. The peace initiatives undertaken by ECOWAS in Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Guinea Bissau and to a much lesser extent, Cote d'Ivoire and Mali have attracted global commendations. The seemingly intractable conflicts in West Africa brought out the grim reality that peace is the necessary foundation for economic integration

➢ The evolving conflict dynamics in West Africa in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War convinced its leaders to rethink the interrelationship between security and development and to raise security issues to the same status as the development agenda. ECOWAS accordingly enacted new statutes to reflect the new realities, adopting the Declaration of Political Principles on freedom, people's rights, and democratization in July 1991.

➢ ECOWAS in 1999 adopted the Protocol Relating to Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security, followed closely by the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001. Together, these legal instruments were designed to provide a comprehensive normative framework for confronting the new threats to human and regional security on a more permanent and predictable basis.

➢ Regional cooperation for peace building and conflict resolution is a key component of the AU African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The key components of the APSA are the AU Peace and Security Council; the African Standby Force (ASF); the Continental Early Warning System; the Panel of the Wise; and the Peace Fund. To implement the APSA, the AU envisions collaboration with the RECs to ensure 'full and effective functioning of the architecture. The RECs are therefore important pillars of the APSA, as they constitute the building blocks of the AU. Liaison officers for the various RECs have been appointed to the AU to improve coordination.

➢ Though ECOWAS is a subsidiary to the AU, its comparative advantage in West Africa and proactive stance on conflicts, as well as its internal organization and institution-building capacity, are often ahead of similar processes within the AU.

➢ Indisputably, states' commitment to their RECs appears much stronger than to the AU as they identify more intimately with local concerns. Given the circumstances and its internal capacity deficit, the AU will struggle to

exercise oversight of regional processes, including the development of the regional standby arrangements.

➢ The Revised ECOWAS Protocol recognises that member states 'bear the primary responsibility for peace and security', and that to transform ECOWAS from 'an ECOWAS of states into an ECOWAS of the peoples' it needs to resolve the tension between 'sovereignty and supra-nationality', and between 'regime security and human security'. The ECPF states that these tensions should be resolved 'in favour of supra-nationality and human security' and that 'civil society shall play an increasingly critical role alongside Member States in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security'

➢ Article 2 of the ECOWAS Protocol states that the ECOWAS member states recognise that 'economic and social development and the security of peoples and states are inextricably linked.

➢ ECOWAS aims to 'actively support the development of democratic institutions of Member States' and to 'assist Member States emerging from conflicts to increase their capacity for national, social, economic and cultural reconstruction' by urging all ECOWAS financial institutions 'to develop policies to facilitate funding for reintegration and reconstruction programmes. Recognising election as a potential issue of conflict, ECOWAS is determined to be 'involved in the preparation, organisation and supervision of elections in Member States' to help prevent 'social and political upheavals.

➢ Article 43 of the ECOWAS Protocol is devoted to peace-building during times of conflict, an activity that ECOWAS intends to take place in 'zones of relative peace' where priority should be 'accorded to implementation of policies designed to reduce degradation of social and economic conditions arising from conflicts'.

➢ Article 44 concerns post-conflict peace-building, but also encapsulates PCRD. Under article 44, ECOWAS undertakes to help consolidate negotiated peace; establish 'conditions for the political, social and economic reconstruction of the society and governmental institutions'; implement 'disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes'; resettle and reintegrate refugees and internally displaced persons; and help 'vulnerable persons, including children, the elderly, women and other traumatised groups in the society

➢ The ECOWAS Conflicts Prevention Framework also recognises the importance of moving beyond interventions and the need to 'support peace-building in post-conflict environments'. Thus, ECOWAS focuses on human security and emphasises the importance of the involvement of civil

society, and the need to focus on post-conflict activities, such as peace-building, to consolidate peace.

. (iv) Two Case Studies: Emergence of Complex Security Challenges in Liberia and Sierra-Leone (Peace building and State building)

➢ Liberia set the trail of state failure and collapse in the Mano River Basin in 1990, with spill-over effects in neighbouring Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire in what has been referred to as 'West Africa Bush War'

➢ The wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone confronted policy makers and mediators with a fundamental challenge: how to deal with armed non-state actors who appeared less interested in politics than plunder, and who, therefore, were extremely difficult to accommodate in any rational political settlement

➢ Two characteristics marked the mediation efforts. First, these conflicts were among the first post-Cold War conflicts in a region of little strategic value to the great powers. As a result, the mediation efforts for the most part were dominated by the intervention of regional players.

➢ The collapse of central administrative structures and descent into chaos

➢ Unprecedented humanitarian crises : refugee crises & IDPs; child soldering, maiming & amputation etc

(v)   ECOWAS Multilateral Initiatives to Peace-building and PCRD

➢ African solution to African problems. ECOWAS in 1990 dispatched ECOMOG to Liberia for a variety of geopolitical, humanitarian and security objectives. In 1997, the sub-regional peacekeeping force was subsequently deployed to Sierra Leone (1997), Liberia (again in 2003), GuineaBissau (2002) and Côte d'Ivoire (2002). By the end of the 1990s, ECOWAS and ECOMOG had become the key security and peace building institution and instrument.

➢ Built on existing protocols as previously discussed

➢ The ECOWAS Protocol is specific about peace building

➢ The lead role played by specific regional players; especially that by Nigeria in the task of scaling up peace building in Liberia and Sierra-Leone

➢ ECOWAS post conflict interventions in democracy, good governance state and peace building

➢ Constraints and challenges of ECOWAS multilateral approaches: political and ideological issues; suspicion and conflicting interests of key regional

players; funding and technical capacity deficiencies; sustainability and political will

- ➤ Effectiveness of Protocol on Good governance deployed in peaceful resolutions of many political crises across West Africa – Togo; Niger, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and recently Burkina Faso

- ➤ ECOWAS Intervention largely unprepared for but motivated by African brotherhood and Nigeria's hegemonic influence in West Africa

- ➤ Restoration of fragile peace but confronted by daunting post-conflict challenges – state building and peace consolidation; reconciliation, rehabilitation, reconstruction, infrastructural building; collapse economy; post-conflict transition political transition to democracy; civil service building; training of security personnel; etc….

- ➤ ECOWAS demonstrated a remarkable capacity to intervene quickly in violent conflicts. On the other hand, the UN possesses greater expertise and experience in sustainable peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, state building and peace-building. It also commands greater resources.

- ➤ ECOMOG interventions in West Africa often created the necessary bridgehead for the subsequent deployment of larger UN peacekeeping and international humanitarian missions

(vi) ECOWAS Success Story and the Nigeria Factor

- ➤ Some of the achievements of the West African states include: i. the restoration of peace to Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire; ii. Prevention of war through effective preventive diplomacy in Togo, Guinea Bissau and Burkina Faso iii. The adoption and implementation of institutional and legal frameworks for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peace-keeping and peace-building; iv. The adoption and effective application of constitutional convergence principles with an accompanying sanctions regime.

- ➤ The institutionalization of "home-grown" strategies in preventive diplomacy and military intervention. The establishment of the 'multinational interventional force to confront Boko Haram insurgency is very commendable

- ➤ ECOWAS' peace-building initiatives also incorporate leading civil society leaders from Liberia in its efforts. These included religious groups, academics, women's groups and others. In fact, shortly after it was set up, the SMC made Amos Sawyer, a leading Liberian academic an acting president

- Nigeria's role in regional security in West Africa is immense. As the key driver of integration, it has been the decisive force behind much of the progress of ECOWAS over the last fifteen years
- Nigeria was the central pillar behind the region's daring military interventions in the MRU in the 1990s, in terms of political commitment, funding, troop, and material contribution. At one stage, the country was reputed to have spent about $12 billion for the ECOMOG operations in Liberia, Sierra-Leone and Guinea.
- Nigeria committed enormous financial, military, and diplomatic resources to the seminal Liberian elections in 2005 to ensure their success. It threatened would-be spoilers with reprisals and convinced the eventual loser, George Weah, to accept the outcome and restrain his followers.
- Nigeria also led the processes to stabilize the political situation in Guinea-Bissau (2003) and Togo (2005). The country hosts the major institutions of ECOWAS and is by far the largest contributor to the regional body's budget, accounting for more than 60 percent of the total contribution.
- Bilateral supports for PCRD in Liberia and Sierra-Leone through capacity building in training military personnel in Nigeria's elite military institutions; economic supports through   concessionary sale of crude-oil; deployment of Technical Aid Corps (TACs) ; supports for rebuilding health facilities to contain Ebola, etc
- Protocol on free movement within the sub-region to facilitate rapid economic and political integration

(vii)   Challenges of Regional Cooperation for Peace-building in West Africa

- Ideological differences between Anglophone and Francophone especially in the early days of ECOMOG as manifested in the reluctance of francophone countries to contribute troops and provide logistic supports
- Personal interests of regional leaders in different conflicts and diabolical roles played in different contexts especially by Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, among others
- Chronic underfunding has been the bane of the African Union and the regional economic communities as they strive to meet the challenges of human and regional security. Often, member states are either reluctant or unable to make their financial contributions. ECOWAS has by and large succeeded in overcoming this handicap by devising the

innovative system of community levy, whereby 0.5 percent of taxes levied by member states on all imports entering the Community is automatically credited to the institution. The levy generates almost 80 percent of ECOWAS's annual operational budget

➢ ECOWAS is still beset by massive institutional capacity limitations connected to poor finance, weak internal coordination, piecemeal implementation of programmes, underutilization and misdirection of existing capacity and tensions and weak distribution of roles and responsibilities among ECOWAS, member states, civil society and extra-regional partners

➢ UN Agencies involvements and cooperation with regional players in peace building and post-conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone and Liberia – elections, governance, rehabilitation, reconstruction and infrastructural developments.

➢ More recent interventions in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire have been spearheaded (including taking strategic decisions) by major Western countries with substantial socioeconomic, cultural, political and historical ties: Britain in Sierra Leone, France in Côte d'Ivoire and the United States in Liberia.

➢ In these cases, the lead-Western country largely influenced and assumed important responsibilities for peace building activities, including security sector reform and political and governance reform. In Sierra Leone, Britain assumed responsibilities for security sector reform through the British Military Advisory and Training Teams (BMATT), while the United States did the same in Liberia (this provision was inscribed in the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement).

➢ In certain circumstances, security officials from these Western countries assume direct headship of strategic institutions in economic, security and even judicial areas. For instance, a British police officer headed the Sierra Leonean Police (SLP) as part of the largely British-funded police reform and training programme. To this extent, ECOWAS's presence, role and influence in strategic agenda-setting and implementation in post-conflict settings in the sub-region appears minimal in some regards.

➢ Dangers of overwhelmingly dependency on donors funding for multilateral SSC as exemplified in ECOWAS – highly dependent on western powers for funding. Since the return to electoral democracy in 1999, Nigeria has been less willing to shoulder the financial burden of ECOMOG. any peace building mission independent of UN support

(viii). Conclusions: Lessons, Constraints and Forward Looking Agenda

➢ Relative success recorded in regional initiatives in peace building and PCRD

➢ Capacity for sustained PCRD through regional framework weak due to political and socio-economic constraints.

➢ South-south /triangular cooperation seems a more viable approach as experienced in different contexts in West Africa

➢ South-south cooperation to tackle PCRD issues in Liberia and Sierra Leone profited from the role of a pivotal nation (especially Nigeria)

➢ What roles might South Africa play in terms of exercising the same agency as Nigeria, for instance, in SADPA and SADC

➢ Human security approach adopted by the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention framework has potential to promote sustainable peace and development in West Africa

➢ ECOWAS peace and security architecture resonates with that of AU; but ECOWAS far more experienced than the AU in peace building

➢ Critical linkage between security and development resonates with global agenda, especially donors.

➢ Need to harmonize various regional initiatives through collaborations

➢ Emphasis on good governance and promotion of same should be central to peace building in Africa. Preventive diplomacy through dialogue, negotiation and compromise necessary for consolidating peace. Recent story of successful resolution of the political crisis in Burkina Faso by ECOWAS is very instructive indeed.