Contributions of Early Warning to the African Peace and Security Architecture: The Experience of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)

Chukwuemeka B. Eze and Osei Baffour Frimpong

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the peace and security environment of Africa has been notably fragile. Throughout this 30-year period, the continent has been burdened with myriad security threats. At its outset, states such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Rwanda, and Burundi, to name only a few, descended into brutal intra-state conflict. While these countries have emerged out of these conflicts and embarked—however slowly or erratically—on a democratic path, the nature of threats to security has oscillated from large-scale intra-state

C. B. Eze (✉) · O. B. Frimpong
West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Accra, Ghana
e-mail: ceze@wanep.org

O. B. Frimpong
e-mail: obaffour@wanep.org

181

conflicts to insurgencies by armed groups and transnational organized syndicates, including human and drug trafficking and the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). Equally alarming is the convergence of terrorist and violent extremist groups into a new hybrid threat that recognizes no borders. They continue to exploit weaknesses and vulnerabilities of fragile states and conflict zones to unleash violence against civilian populations, and seize and control territories to challenge the legitimacy of the state. The consequences of these conflicts are evident in a cocktail of humanitarian crises that continue to exacerbate the fragility of states and human security on the continent.

The African Union (AU) established the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to address a multitude of existing and emerging security challenges facing the continent. Essentially, the APSA is premised on preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts in Africa through the African Union's established institutions—the Peace and Security Council, African Standby Force, Panel of the Wise, African Peace Fund, and Continental Early Warning System.

Given the weaknesses in conflict early response mechanisms in states, which have partly contributed to the continent's susceptibility to conflicts, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) of the APSA was designed to enhance anticipation, preparedness, and early response to conflicts across Africa.[1] Civil society organizations (CSOs) are recognized as strategic partners in bolstering the operationalization of the continental early warning systems at the regional and continental levels by providing early warning analysis and sharing information relevant to the mitigation of potential threats to peace and security.

It is against this background that the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), through its strategic partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the AU since 2002 and 2015, respectively, has been a key partner in developing and operationalizing conflict early warning systems to support peace and security at the national, regional, and continental levels.[2] Through the partnership, WANEP has contributed to the operationalization of ECOWARN, the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (WARN) which covers all ECOWAS member states. The WARN works to enhance human security in West Africa by monitoring and reporting socio-political situations that could degenerate into violent and destructive conflicts, and to inform policymakers on options for response. Over the years, the program has developed National Early Warning Systems (NEWS) in all

of its national networks in West Africa to help strengthen ECOWARN by providing more robust grassroots engagement and information into the systems. Given WANEP's years of partnership with ECOWAS and the AU in the area of conflict early warning and peacebuilding interventions in bolstering APSA, it is pertinent to bring such experiences into the body of literature on peace and security in Africa. Importantly, there are lessons to be drawn from the experiences of WANEP for Regional Economic Communities (RECs) across the continent.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the post-Cold War security context of Africa, highlighting the existing and emerging threats. The second section highlights the APSA, with particular emphasis on the early warning mechanisms and their utility in enhancing peace and security in Africa. The third section assesses WANEP's experiences in the area of conflict early warning and its contribution to the APSA. As a corollary to this, the lessons learned from WANEP's experience are examined with the view of promoting robust CSO partnerships with RECs. The final section argues that in order for the APSA to realize the value of early warning in peacebuilding, states, RECs, and the AU must strengthen and sustain APSA's partnership with civil society organizations as key agents in developing and operationalizing conflict early warning interventions.

OVERVIEW OF THE POST-COLD WAR SECURITY CONTEXT OF AFRICA

The security challenges facing Africa in the post-Cold War era are a combination of old and new issues. Although there has been a considerable decline in the number of armed conflicts, the underlying issues that gave rise to a host of violent intra-state conflicts in the late 1980s and the 1990s continue to prevail in parts of the continent.[3] The challenges of exclusion, marginalization, inequality, and the weakening of the state through corruption, nepotism, patrimonialism, and clientelism remain key drivers of insecurity in Africa.[4] In this regard, some contemporary threats are actually old issues under new labels. The end of the Cold War unleashed a number of factors that have underpinned insecurity on the continent. Prominent among them was a shift in superpower interests, which resulted in changes in policies that had promoted and preserved repression, exclusion, and dictatorships in several developing countries.[5] This rendered erstwhile military dictators susceptible to internal contestations over their legitimacy.[6] Greater external support for democracy

promotion, easy access to SALW, as well as enhanced interconnected-ness between individuals and communities facilitated by globalization, provided the impetus for discontented groups to organize themselves and demand change through various means, including the use of force.[7]

These factors unleashed an unprecedented surge in intra-state armed conflicts in the region. In addition to old threats, many new threats have been occasioned by advancements in technology, increased mobility of persons, proliferation and movements of arms, religious and ethnic mili-tancy, as well as global climate change. The spread of violent extremism and transnational organized criminal networks has become acute, espe-cially in the Sahel, East Africa, and West Africa. In Nigeria, a previously latent Islamic fundamentalist group, Boko Haram, has exploited the chal-lenges of weak state capacity to gain notoriety as one of the most violent extremist groups in the world. Boko Haram and its faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), pose a grave threat to human secu-rity and stability in that region. Since Mali's independence in 1960, a series of armed insurgencies have been launched by Tuaregs—a politi-cally and economically marginalized group—in the northern part of the country. As an ethnic group with a pastoralist lifestyle who are found in the Saharan parts of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Algeria, and Libya, the Tuaregs have been able to mobilize such affinal relations to confront the central government in Bamako in their bid to establish a separate state.[8] Since 2012, Tuareg secessionists have been joined by extremists claiming to wage jihad for the creation of an Islamic state in northern Mali, where arms, drugs, hostage-taking, and human trafficking have become a source income for criminal networks.[9]

The fall of Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, in 2011 led to a constel-lation of challenges that have added to the insecurity and instability in Mali and the Sahel, in general. It has provided the impetus for a host of armed groups, mercenaries, terrorist, and violent extremist groups including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar Dine, Ansaru, and Al Mourabitoun, further compounding insecurity in the Sahel. The spillover effect of secu-rity fragility in northern Mali is manifesting in extremist and armed attacks in neighboring Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso.[10]

Porous borders have also facilitated smuggling of SALW, human and narcotics trafficking, and illegal immigration on an unprecedented scale. The influx of SALW, in particular, has been fueling ever-more

violent actions by local armed groups, mercenaries, and bandits, causing enormous human security challenges.[11]

Furthermore, election-related violence has increasingly become a prominent threat to stability in most of Africa's nascent democracies. While elections are a key driver of democracy and good governance, the exigencies of power contestations coupled with electoral irregularities, continue to ignite animosities, tensions, and violence across Africa.

Farmer-herder conflict is another threat to peace and security in the West African sub-region. Though the phenomenon is not new in the security environment, it remains protracted, often unleashing tensions and violence between pastoralists and farmers in communities. Farming and herding activities are complementary and, together, they have constituted the basis of the economy of most states in the region for many centuries.[12]

Yet climate change has led to droughts, floods, and warming that has contributed to a significant reduction in resources such as water, land, and food, which support livelihoods in communities. This, in turn, has led to increased competition that often triggers ethnic and intercommunity violence.[13]

The African Peace and Security Architecture: Early Warning and Conflict Prevention

Owing to its realization of the importance of proactive measures to confront Africa's diverse security challenges, the AU, in Article 12 of its Peace and Security protocol, provided for the establishment of a Conflict Early Warning (CEWS).[14] The CEWS is responsible for facilitating the anticipation and prevention of conflicts and works closely with regional organizations to gather early warning information which is then submitted to the situation room at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.[15] Operationalization of CEWS is achieved through collaboration with the early warning elements of the eight AU RECs, with each REC using conflict indicators premised on the peace and security context in its region.

However, in terms of the development of early warning, the various RECs are not at the same level. So far, ECOWAS and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) operate with data collection and analysis, which feed into the AU's CEWS for response strategies, while other RECs are still in the process of creating mechanisms for implementation.[16] In addition, there are also differences in the implementation

of conflict early warning at the regional level. IGAD's early warning, for example, operates as an open information center while SADC's National Early Warning System (NEWC) is highly linked with the intelligence community within the region,[17] making the latter more state-centric. There are also variations in focus. Whereas ECOWAS places a heavy emphasis on human security through a broad range of thematic areas, SADC, on the other hand, focuses on threats emanating from socio-economic dynamics. Similarly, IGAD's early warning system, CEWARN, is mandated to mitigate escalation of violent conflicts, especially cross-border pastoral conflicts, through collaboration with established national early warning systems, while the East African Community (EAC) looks at security among member states, inter-state defense, intra-state conflicts, poverty, and issues arising from the sharing of cross-border natural resources, among others.[18]

Another integral element of CEWS is preventive diplomacy. Despite the challenges associated with its early response to some conflict situations, preventive diplomacy has been utilized by both the AU and RECs as a tool for intervening in conflicts, including election-related instability in Zimbabwe and Kenya in 2008.

Recognizing the imperative of non-state actors in developing and operationalizing early warning, Article 12 (3) of the AU's Peace and Security protocol calls for collaboration between RECs and CSOs in early warning activities.[19] Rarely is the need for cooperation with NGOs expressed so explicitly in official policy. Accordingly, IGAD relies on field monitors and local NGOs in pastoralist communities for early warning information.[20] In a similar vein, ECOWAS, through its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with WANEP, relies on early warning information and data analysis from the latter, amongst other sources, to respond to threats to security in various parts of the region. Through its partnership with WANEP, ECOWARN relies on open source information, focusing on human security. ECOWARN consists of an Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC) based at the Early Warning Directorate at the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja, Nigeria and National Early Warning Centers currently in the process of being deployed to replace the original four Zonal Bureaus in Benin, Burkina Faso, Liberia, and The Gambia. Each zone generates daily peace and security reports emanating from WANEP's Community Monitors to the OMC. WANEP's Peace Monitoring Centre (PMC), in collaboration with the OMC, is responsible for

collating and analyzing the early warning reports from Community Monitors before transmission to the President of ECOWAS for consideration and intervention.

ECOWAS's ability to foster strategic partnerships and cooperation with WANEP as a key agent of a sub-regional early warning system has contributed to making ECOWAS's early warning one of the most comprehensive and integrated systems for conflict prevention and management on the African continent.[21]

WANEP's Early Warning Contributions to Peace and Security in West Africa

Beyond WANEP's collaboration with ECOWAS in the area of conflict data gathering, analysis, and reporting into ECOWARN, there are several conflict early warning intervention programs and activities aimed at enhancing peace and security in West Africa and, thereby, contributing to the APSA at the regional level.

Through its MOU with ECOWAS and the AU, WANEP has institutionalized NEWS in almost all ECOWAS countries. This regional reach plays a key role in determining threats to security, analyzing them, and providing recommendations for early response and mitigation. Moreover, WANEP's comprehensive array of early warning and response reports— situation reports, thematic reports, policy briefs, quarterly reports, and yearly security projections for West Africa—continue to influence national and regional responses and mitigation of threats to security.

WANEP also provides technical support for community peacebuilding through the institutionalization of dialogue, mediation, and strengthening of existing traditional peacebuilding infrastructure in communities across the region. This helps to increase resilience against threats to peace and security and promotes local community ownership in peacebuilding in states within the region. In this regard, WANEP has been building the capacity of stakeholders in farmer-herder conflicts through dialogue and mediation in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, and Niger. Additionally, WANEP supports national infrastructures for peace, especially the National Peace Councils (NPCs) in Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone through capacity-building and collaborative peace projects. The NPCs have become a model for enhancing national resilience and are being replicated in other West African countries.

Democratic transitions remain a challenge to peace and stability across West Africa. Given the enormously high stakes involved in Africa's

"winner-takes-all" elections, electoral periods are often characterized by deep tensions, occasioning fears for life and property among the populace. In response, WANEP developed the Election Monitoring, Analysis and Mitigation program (E-MAM) to support regional and states' efforts to mitigate electoral violence. E-MAM monitors, analyzes, and reports on election-related violence in order to enable early response, and works to harness and develop local capacity for averting election violence. The program further enables ECOWAS and WANEP to gain access to community-based conflict information which is necessary for conflict prevention but was hitherto uncollected and unreported.

The program is currently implemented in all 15 ECOWAS member states to support the peaceful conduct of elections. In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, WANEP, in support of the Ministry of Interior, trained and deployed over 2,000 monitors and observers across the country to provide incidence reports at polling centers during the 2015 election.[22] An Election Situation Room (ESR) was also set up to support the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission to serve as an information management center to disseminate reports to stakeholders on potential threats. Similarly, in Nigeria, WANEP's E-MAM project created a space for validation of specific election violence and hotspot-mapping of potential risk areas across all 36 states in the country ahead of the 2019 elections.[23] Since its inception, E-MAM has contributed to enhancing local community ownership of peacebuilding and supporting existing local infrastructure for peace. A notable example is WANEP's support to Ghana's National Peace Council (NPC) in the area of preventing election violence.

WANEP designed the capacity-building project on dispute management for Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in West Africa to boost effective electoral dispute resolution. Participants from both Anglophone and Francophone countries including Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Benin have benefited from the program.[24]

In response to growing violent extremism as well as increased exploitation of children and youth, WANEP initiated peace education to inculcate the culture of non-violence, co-existence, tolerance, and respect for diversity. The program focuses on children and young people both in the formal and informal education sector to strengthen community resilience across the region. It also engages teaching and non-teaching staff as well as other duty bearers in communities—chiefs, elders, religious, and

opinion leaders, as well as family members—in the training of young people and children through dialogue and mediation clubs in schools and communities. In collaboration with governments, WANEP has also developed contextualized peace education curricula and teaching manuals and guides.

Of particular note is the incorporation of strategies for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) into peace education curriculum for schools in Nigeria and the Sahel. The CVE curriculum seeks to educate a critical mass of resilient citizens who can participate in the sustainable development of the Sahel region and Nigeria through good citizenship and contributions to the fight against violent extremism.[25] The peace education program in the Sahel also adopts a community mobilizing approach to achieve better social cohesion and resilience. WANEP has trained over 200 teachers in the application of the peace education manual and the establishment of peer mediation clubs.[26] Peer mediators have also experienced positive changes in their own lives,[27] and aggressiveness and bullying among students have reduced.[28]

Lobbying, advocacy, and sensitization are also pronounced in the nonformal approach WANEP adopts in its quest to create a broader space for youth engagement in decision-making at the community, national, and regional levels. This is aimed at bridging the chasm between youth and decision-making processes in their communities and mitigating intergenerational conflicts. Over time, this has helped integrate the "youth factor" into emerging discourses on peace and security in West Africa, as well as national and regional policies.[29]

In line with the growing recognition of the centrality of women to African peace and security, WANEP works through the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and West Africa Peacebuilding Institute (WAPI) programs to enhance the role and capacity of women in peacebuilding. It also supports the ECOWAS Gender Directorate in line with the Women, Peace, and Security component of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (EPF). The program was instrumental in mobilizing Liberian women as a pressure group to force the warring parties into signing a peace agreement in Accra during the ECOWAS-led mediation process. The WIPNET initiative also preceded the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, demonstrating the flexibility and foresight of CSOs in promoting women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. However, not all ECOWAS members have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) and strategies for effective

implementation of UNSCR 1325.[30] It has been noted that a lack of political will and technical know-how are some of the impediments confronting the development of the NAPs. In this regard, and in collaboration with the ECOWAS Gender Directorate as well as the Women, Peace and Security Institute (WPSI) of the Kofi Annan International Peacebuilding Training Centre (KAIPTC), WANEP developed guidelines for the development and implementation of NAPs on UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions in October 2012.[31] WANEP has also developed indicators in its early warning systems to monitor, report, and analyze various threats to security of women and children, which helps inform peacebuilding interventions at the national and regional levels. This contributes to filling the gaps in ECOWARN, which does not have specific indicators for the security of women.

More collaborative research is key to bridging the gaps between peacebuilding and policy-making, which has limited the effectiveness of early warning and conflict prevention across the continent. New platforms for engagement have been established with the University of Ghana, University of Ibadan, University of Cape Coast, KAIPTC, Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), and the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) of the Social Sciences Research Council, but more are needed to better understand and develop best practice in African peacebuilding.

The post-Cold War security environment of Africa continues to be dogged by varied threats. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, these threats are a mixed bag of old and new, but often the underlying causes of instability are the same. Governments and RECs need to do more to foster the key partnerships which allow CEWS to effectively respond and mitigate threats to peace and security at the local, national and international levels on the continent.

Key Recommendations

1. *Mend the gap between early warning and early response*. The persistent chasm between early warning and early response is one of the key lessons emerging out of WANEP's relatively short history. The effectiveness of a conflict early warning system is contingent on its capacity to anticipate real or imagined threats and inform appropriate institutions for early response and mitigation. However, this remains a challenge for CSOs operating in political environments

where power and decision-making are often viewed in zero-sum terms, and political calculations and sensitivities get in the way of action. Too often, early warning is not acted upon until it is too late.

2. *Motivate and sustain the ground-level elements of early warning systems*. As WANEP's experience has shown, effective early warning must be a "bottom up approach" whereby the community is engaged. Efforts should be made to link community to the state and regional elements of early warning in a more systemic way. Too often, the community level is under-resourced with many at this level serving as volunteers. The lack of funding at the community level often disempowers locals and limits the consistency of reporting incidents and evolving situations. Given that data is key to the effectiveness of early warning, this undermines the effectiveness of Africa's early warning systems.

3. *Ensure regular and long-term funding for early warning*. Funding has also been problematic insofar as it is mostly from external donors. Too often, the funds are short-term and limited in scope, and donors tend to demand results within unrealistic timeframes. More should be done to engage the African local private sector in supporting early warning in particular, and peacebuilding activities in general.

4. *Address the gender and youth dimensions of peacebuilding, and mainstream peace education in national curricula*. Gender, age, education, marriage, and access to resources all play a critical role in how power is distributed and performed at all levels of society. Despite the political rhetoric, patriarchy and the gerontocratic nature of politics at the local, national, and regional levels, continue to hinder the participation of women and youth in peacebuilding activities in Africa. African governments should develop, implement, and report out on the development and implementation of their National Action Plans in support of UN Resolution 1325. Furthermore, more must be done to mainstream peace education in national curricula across Africa in order to advance a strong culture of peace.

5. *Enhance collaboration among regional civil society organizations and regional economic communities*. Collaboration is essential to effective early warning and peacebuilding activities. But different, and at times competing, objectives among CSOs has limited their

cooperation, and thus weakened CSOs various platforms for engagement in peacebuilding. In addition, more could be done to enhance CSO collaboration with regional economic communities.

NOTES

1. Alex Vines, "A Decade of African Peace and Security Architecture," *International African* 89, no. 1 (January 2013): 89–109, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/23479335.pdf.
2. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), *Strides and Strains of Civil Society Organization in West Africa: The WANEP Story* (WANEP, 2017).
3. Linda Darkwa, "Enhancing Resilience Against Regional Security Threats in West Africa: An Overview of Emerging Security Threats," Policy Brief, LEC/PB/1, ISSN: 2458-7303.
4. Darkwa, "Enhancing Resilience."
5. Linda Darkwa and Philip Attuquayefio, "Analysis of Norm Diffusion in the African Union and Economic Community of West African States," *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 4, no. 2, Special Issue on African Peace and Security Architecture (Fall 2014): 11–37, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.4.2.11.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A0cae2204b818a5d1fb41adc81930220c.
6. Darkwa and Attuquayefio, "Analysis of Norm Diffusion in the African Union and Economic Community of West African States," 11–37.
7. Ibid.
8. Mathieu Bere, "Armed Rebellion, Violent Extremism and International Intervention in Mali," *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 60–84, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.7.2.03.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A2ba8f08a896c25d043b226e1f12e68b3.
9. Bere, "Armed Rebellion, Violent Extremism and International Intervention in Mali," 60–84.
10. International Crisis Group, *Tackling Burkina Faso's Insurgencies and Unrest* (International Crisis Group, 2019), https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/tackling-burkina-fasos-insurgencies-and-unrest.
11. African Union and Small Arms Survey, *Weapons Compass: Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa* (Switzerland: Small Arms Survey, January 2019), http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf.
12. Serigne Bamba Gaye, "Conflict Between Farmers and Herders Against the Backdrop of Asymmetric Threats in Mali and Burkina Faso," *Peace and Security Series* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2018).

13. Darkwa, "Enhancing Resilience Against Regional Security Threats in West Africa."
14. Peace and Security Protocol of the African Union, Article 12 (2001).
15. Birikit Terefe Tiruneh, "Establishing a Continental Early Warning System in the African Peace and Security Architecture: Challenges and Prospects," KAIPTC Occasional Paper 29 (2010), http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/6763~v~Establishing_an_Early_Warning_System_in_the_African_Peace_and_Security_Architecture__Challenges_and_Prospects.pdf.
16. Tiruneh, "Establishing a Continental Early Warning System in the African Peace and Security Architecture."
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Peace and Security Protocol of the African Union, Article 12(3) (2001).
20. Tiruneh, "Establishing a Continental Early Warning System in the African Peace and Security Architecture."
21. Jakkie Cilliers, "Towards a Continental Early Warning Systemfor Africa," *Institute for Security Studies*, April 02, 2005, https://issafrica.org/research/papers/towards-a-continental-early-warning-system-for-africa.
22. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), *Election Monitoring Analysis and Mitigation in West Africa* (WANEP, 2019).
23. WANEP, *Election Monitoring Analysis in West Africa*.
24. Ibid.
25. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), *Teaching Curriculum for the Fight against Extremism in the Sahel and Nigeria* (draft, WANEP, December 2018).
26. WANEP, *Teaching Curriculum for the Fight against Extremism in the Sahel and Nigeria*.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. WANEP, *Strides and Strains of Civil Society Organization in West Africa*.
30. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), *Compendium of WANEP Policy Briefs from 2002–2012* (WANEP, 2012).
31. WANEP, *Compendium of WANEP Policy Briefs from 2002–2012*.