



The West African Region: Between Peace Dividends and the Road to Recovery

The recent trends in the West African sub-region display various contradictions. On the one hand, certain political and economic developments give reason for optimism. On the other hand, new and very serious threats have emerged over the last years which – if not addressed adequately – could undercut gains made and erode stability and security in the whole region. On the positive side, economic growth rates have been promising, and elections have become well established as the only legitimate way of changing the government. Despite remaining problems, as with the post-electoral developments in Côte d'Ivoire, no major conflicts have shattered the region in the recent past. The election-related experiences of Togo, Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria allow for cautious optimism. However, it has to be emphasized that elections are just the beginning of democratic processes and cannot replace institutional reforms, most notably in the security sector.

From 9 – 11 February 2012, KAIPTC and ZIF convened a high-level lessons learned seminar in Accra, Ghana, to take stock of the recent developments and dynamics in West Africa.

Lessons Learned Seminar jointly organized by the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in collaboration with the German International Cooperation (GIZ) Accra, 9 – 11 February 2012

The aim of the seminar was to (1) share country specific lessons learned in the region, (2) discuss cross-cutting issues and emerging threats affecting the region and (3) exchange experiences on two particular conflict management tools of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): Mediation and Election Observation. Participants discussed developments in Ghana,

Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Guinea while keeping in mind the dynamics in the wider sub-region. A re-occurring issue across all panels was the persistence of election-related conflicts often connected to open violence. All of the countries under review have either undergone an electoral process recently or are about to do so. This report captures the highlights and findings of the presentations and discussions of the seminar.

All quiet in the West? Recent trends and developments

Despite the positive political and economic developments in the sub-region, new threats have emerged that could jeopardize recent progress. As the Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa of December 2011 emphasizes, many of these threats are transnational in nature and to some extent profit from institutional weaknesses of many West African states:

(1) Transnational organized crime and drug trafficking have increased and continue to exploit the weak rule of law systems of many countries in the sub-region. This development goes along with increased political corruption and poses a structural security challenge.

(2) Maritime insecurity has become an ever greater challenge in recent years. This is not only evidenced by drug trafficking but especially by the escalation of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Furthermore, illegal fishing continues to undercut economic development and contributes to food insecurity in maritime states. National security forces lack the capacities to counter these developments.

(3) In recent years the sub-region has witnessed a rise in religious fundamentalism, which can provide fertile ground for violence and even terrorism. Extremist religious and political leaders play on these tendencies to recruit fighters among young poor, unemployed and uneducated people. The most worrying development has been the attacks carried out by Boko Haram in Nigeria which killed large numbers of civilians.

(4) The downfall of the Gaddafi regime and the resulting unrest pose several serious challenges to the stability of the Sahel region and the whole of West Africa. The forced return of migrant workers from Libya will increase the economic burden in the receiving communities. Moreover, the return of armed groups from Libya to their home countries, especially to Mali and Niger, re-escalates already existing tensions. The massive influx of small arms and light weapons (SALW) from Libya presents a further serious security challenge.

Ghana: Challenges on the way to the general elections in 2012

Ghana has undergone positive developments in recent years. Since 1992, the country has witnessed free and fair elections. A competent and respected electoral commission gives credibility to the electoral process and there exists a general atmosphere of free speech, independence of the

media and freedom of association. Furthermore, ethnicity has not been a primary problem in Ghanaian political affairs and the judiciary is being perceived as a fairly independent part of state power.

Yet, daunting problems remain and new challenges have emerged. The last elections in 2008, narrowly won in the second runoff by John Atta Mills, presented a major test for the resilience of Ghanaian democratic institutions. Election-related violence and negative propaganda of party media outlets were frequent and disturbing. One seminar participant stated: “Ghana barely made it.” Several specific challenges were highlighted during the session:

(1) There is great concern about the general state of Ghanaian political parties. In many cases, parties lack a real political agenda and an accommodation of democratic principles. They often appear to be mere platforms whose common denominator is the desire to win the next elections and gain control over state institutions. The recent discovery of oil reserves and the linked revenue streams have further increased the competition for public offices.

(2) The role of the media was viewed with concern. While the media have been free from state interference in the past, many media channels acted as platforms of partisan political mobilization instead of serving political education. During the 2008 elections, the media’s fierce propaganda for parties exacerbated tensions. This development goes hand in hand with a political climate characterized by populist statements rather than factual discussion of political issues of importance.

(3) A fundamental problem that has an impact on the electoral process is poverty. The precarious social conditions in which many Ghanaian citizens live provide fertile ground for populism, and can lead to cases of “vote buying”. It also ties into the development of armed groups under the control of affluent leaders trying to influence the electoral outcome. In 2008, partisan violence occurred in many of the so-called party strongholds.





In face of these challenges, participants warned against complacency in the run-up to this year's elections. If the necessary precautions to ensure peaceful elections were not taken, there could be serious consequences for Ghana. However, a mood of cautious optimism persisted among seminar participants, especially because of the positive role of the Electoral Commission, and the sound legal framework of the electoral process in Ghana in general.

Côte d'Ivoire: Towards post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation

The recent severe post-electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire was brought to an end by a joint international intervention comprising ECOWAS, the UN and other actors. Though the form of intervention has been a matter of debate, the joint action of ECOWAS states has been mainly seen as a positive development for the country and the sub-region. Côte d'Ivoire's economic and political success has always been closely linked to that of West Africa at large. With renewed economic growth and political stability, Côte d'Ivoire could once again be a driving force for the region as a whole.

However, the root causes of the Ivorian conflict that date back to the beginning of the 1990s remain. Many of these factors have not yet been dealt with and pose great challenges to the new government of President Ouattara.

(1) Côte d'Ivoire's former postcolonial one-party regime – characterized by a personalization of power – still casts a cloud over the country. The transition to a multi-party democracy that could open new ways of political competition has been incomplete and lead to conflict over the powerful

presidency. But it is encouraging that, for the first time, a president has been elected in a competitive electoral process which gives him a priori legitimacy. However, President Ouattara remains a representative of the old Ivorian political class and enjoys little support among considerable segments of society.

(2) The conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has been closely linked to an economic and financial crisis that supported an outbreak of violence. In this respect, the first months of Ouattara's presidency have been encouraging. The president is widely perceived as being capable to initiate an economic re-start in the country. Yet, increasing growth rates alone will not be sufficient for lasting stability. The distribution of the benefits from growth to all people and regions is the key. Here, regions and communities that have suffered most from conflict should be prioritized.

(3) The unique multiethnic and multinational composition of the Ivorian society has been a root cause for conflict over the last 20 years. The recent elections have shown that, especially in crisis situations, ethnic identity is still a major element in determining electoral outcomes and the support for a particular candidate. This problem remains largely unresolved and has to be taken very seriously.

President Ouattara faces pressing challenges in the near future. On the one hand, the reform of the security sector has to be an absolute priority because old members from the Gbagbo-era and ex-rebels uneasily coexist in the armed forces. On the other hand, the question of an independent justice is central to national reconciliation. So far, none of the ex-rebels in the armed forces has been prosecuted.



Guinea: Dealing with human rights, reconciliation and democracy

Since the election of the current President Alpha Condé in November 2010, the political transition has not been completed as legislative elections have still not been held.

Condé as the first president elected in free elections has the remarkable opportunity to consolidate democracy in Guinea. However, this opportunity is overshadowed by continuing human rights violations. Some issues are especially important in the Guinean context.

(1) The question of impunity has to be addressed. The judicial proceedings to bring the perpetrators of the 28 September 2009 massacre to justice must continue. It is unacceptable to families of the victims' relatives that those who have been identified as responsible for the massacres continue to occupy high positions in public office. Equally important, all security forces have to face justice for crimes committed.

(2) The role of ethnicity and its misuse for political ends remains a big concern in Guinea. Identity politics played a major role during the 2010 election and the outcome was largely determined along ethnic lines. There further exists a practice of discrimination and a tendency of ethnic bias in the public service which leads to the exclusion of certain parts of the population.

(3) An overly strong and unchecked executive power dominates Guinean politics. This is further exacerbated by the weakness of civil society due to its association with the transition government and ethnic-political cleavages. Therefore, legislative elections have to be organized as soon as

possible in order to defuse the current tensions and to bring back legitimacy to the legislature and the other constitutional bodies. Nevertheless, elections without a process of political reconciliation seem impossible.

In order to complete the transition process, Guinea's legislative elections have to be held in the near future. Therefore, strong support by the international community and ECOWAS is needed. Seminar participants were divided whether or not it was a mistake to dissolve the international contact group prior to the election of a National Assembly. Some criticized, this premature dissolution of the group "left Guineans alone with their fate." Others underlined the need of Guineans to find their own ways to communicate and deal with the recent political crisis.

Liberia: Consolidating the peace process

Participants agreed that Liberia has made great progress towards peace and democracy since the end of the transitional period in 2006. The constitution has replaced the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (ACPA) as the governing legal framework, and the branches of government function well and continue to respect these legal boundaries.

The 2011 elections presented a major test of democratic governance and the rule of law in the country. The Liberian National Election Commission successfully managed to organize elections, which were ultimately won by the Unity Party of President Johnson Sirleaf. Yet, the boycott of the election runoff and the post-electoral violent protests against the results highlighted the fragility of the peace process. Only through mediation



with opposition parties could the inauguration proceed free from violent disturbances. This showed that several challenges to the peace process remain serious and could overturn the gains made so far if not addressed:

(1) Corruption arguably remains the biggest challenge for the current government. Many public officials have been accused of corruption, but few have been prosecuted since the judiciary often lacks the resources or the interest to do so. The Liberian Anti-Corruption Committee (LACC) has called corruption an issue of national concern and a problem that is deeply entrenched in Liberian society.

(2) The judicial power, despite successes and support by the international community, lacks the capacities and resources to deliver justice in the whole country which has significantly undermined its credibility. The problem of customary law in rural areas remains and is unlikely to be resolved in the near future.

(3) Reconciliation remains a complex issue. “Justice and peace share a difficult relationship,” one participant said. The report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that demanded President Sirleaf to be banned from public office is still a matter of controversy. So far, no consensus has been reached on how to achieve justice and reconciliation. A common definition acceptable to all parties must be found in order to deal with this pressing issue.

There have been active efforts to change the institutional set-up to address root causes of conflict. One example is the adopted decentralization policy. However, the pace of progress in this area is still too slow. For example, no municipal elections have been held since 1985. But overall, these measures, combined with the support of UNMIL and the international community, have led to a recent period of relative political stability in Liberia.

Sierra Leone: A decade of post conflict peacebuilding

A decade has passed since the civil war in Sierra Leone. Participants agreed that important prog-

ress has been made during the last ten years, but that challenges lie ahead in the light of the 2012 presidential elections.

One characteristic of Sierra Leone is the lead role the UK has taken as donor country in the peace process. It acted as the main sponsor and driving force behind various reform initiatives in areas that were seen as vital to prevent future conflict. These reforms comprised restructuring the armed forces and the national police force, reforming the justice and the corrections sector, the public service sector reform and setting up the Anti-Corruption Commission. The strong UK role sparked discussion among participants whether such a donor-driven approach created a problem for local ownership of the reform efforts.

Another crucial actor in the post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding process has been the UN. While most peacekeepers were withdrawn in 2004, the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) helped to formulate and implement a peace consolidation strategy for Sierra Leone. However, certain challenges in the peacebuilding process still remain unaddressed:

(1) Peacebuilding initiatives in Sierra Leone have still to pass from immediate post-war stabilization to long-term development. The issue of resource governance will be crucial in this respect. With the recent discovery of oil, it is vitally important that the generated revenues are used to fund long-term development goals.

(2) Corruption still presents a major challenge in Sierra Leone. Participants felt that the work of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has been unsatisfactory up-to-date.

(3) Unemployment, poverty and social alienation among the youth remain a major threat to stability. Parties are increasingly misusing their youth organizations to stir up tensions on the way to the 2012 elections. If these problems are not addressed urgently they could feed new violence as they did during the civil war.

(4) Panelists highlighted the uneasy relationship between the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in

addressing the issues of justice and reconciliation in Sierra Leone.

A decade of post-conflict peacebuilding in Sierra Leone will culminate in the 2012 elections. The last electoral process in 2007 that led to a democratic change of government went remarkably smooth. Civil society played an important role in supporting the elections. With one observer in every polling station, it showed a massive field presence during the elections and was able to observe the entire electoral process. However, regionalism, overly negative party propaganda and some instances of violence were present and could become more serious in this year's elections.

Nigeria: The 2011 elections and post-election violence

Elections in Nigeria have always been linked to incidents of violence. Since the country returned to civilian rule in 1999, thousands have died in election-related violence. In light of the deepening political crisis and the continuous degeneration of the electoral process in Nigeria, the 2011 general elections were critical to the stability of the country. Fortunately, the 2011 electoral process – though not perfect – was widely regarded as a considerable improvement which helped to restore some of the legitimacy of the election mechanism.

However, this arguably most credible electoral process to date has been followed by some of the worst incidents of post-electoral violence Nigeria has ever experienced. The violence that erupted especially in the Northern provinces caught the security forces by surprise. Over 1,000 people were killed and many homes, churches and shops were burned and looted.

Some key lessons can be drawn from the 2011 elections, in particular from the work of the Independent National Election Commission (INEC).

(1) The marking of flashpoints by INEC before the elections was crucial when it came to tackling security threats. Before the elections, INEC talks with all stakeholders led to the formation of the Interagency Consultative Committee on Election Security.

(2) Credible leadership of the electoral body is crucial. The appointment of a respected figure, Professor Jega, as chair of INEC was an important step towards restoring credibility to the electoral process.

(3) Youth unemployment is a key factor causing post-electoral violence. Yet, this is not a challenge for INEC but for the government to tackle.

After the elections, the Boko Haram terrorist group made headlines with its violent attacks. The reasons for this immense eruption of violence are still unclear. While clearly characterized by sectarianism, the violence seems to be linked to socio-economic grievances of the populace – especially in the underdeveloped North of the country. These grievances need to be addressed in order to sustain the improvement of the electoral process up to the next elections in 2015.

ECOWAS

Conflict Management Tools

Mediation efforts in the region

In almost all election-related crises reviewed during the seminar, ECOWAS has played a major role in mediating between the parties involved. Two legal documents constitute the foundation for mediation efforts in the region: the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security (1999) and the recent Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF, 2008). Together, these two documents form a legal framework which establishes two principal instruments active in mediation on behalf of ECOWAS. First, the Council of the Wise, an institutionalized body composed of influential personalities and former heads of states. Second, the ECPF places non-institutional actors at the center stage of the mediation process. These are individuals who can be deployed as Special Mediators or Special Envoys by the President of the Commission of ECOWAS.

In general, the mediation effort takes place on multiple levels and often starts with mediation “behind the scenes”, a less visible but more effective method.

The involvement in Liberia and Guinea after their elections can be regarded as quite success-



ful examples of ECOWAS mediation. In contrast, the recent crisis in Côte d'Ivoire highlighted some limitations. Moreover, there are some general problems ECOWAS mediation has experienced:

(1) Anticipation of crises is often lacking and reaction takes too much time. This problem is partly structural and shared by most international organizations. Bureaucratic processes and interference by member countries prolong reaction time.

(2) Mediation is not institutionalized enough. The ad-hoc basis on which mediation efforts are currently undertaken is costly in terms of reaction time and financial resources. Though foreseen in the ECPF, a special mediation capacity within the Commission and databases listing qualified individuals are still lacking.

(3) Insufficient coordination with partner organizations for post-conflict mediation can lead to problems. The principle of subsidiarity should be applied to minimize confusions between different mediation efforts.

(4) Currently, members of the Council of the Wise are proposed by the current heads of member states. This can lead to conflicts of interest and have a negative impact on the perceived neutrality of mediation.

Election Observation Missions – Lessons Learned

Election Observation Missions (EOMs) have been undertaken by ECOWAS since 2006. The activities of the ECOWAS's Electoral Assistance Unit (EAU) are based on the Supplementary Protocol for Democracy and Good Governance of 2001.

In general, elections in the region display a steadily improving quality. In almost all ECOWAS member states there are multiple parties which participate in the electoral process and elections have become the legitimate way to form a new government.

Despite these general positive dynamics, electoral processes are still problem-ridden:

(1) Many countries lack a framework of dialogue between political actors, such as political parties and electoral bodies to discuss grievances with regard to the electoral process.

(2) A general mistrust of electoral bodies in many countries is reinforced by the capacity problems these bodies are experiencing, especially on the operational side of organizing elections.

(3) Independence of electoral bodies. States have to improve not only the legal but also financial independence of electoral bodies. Because of a lack of prepositioned funding, mobilization of financial resources takes a lot of work and time of the electoral bodies in many cases. This, in turn, creates a dependency on foreign donors in an area at the heart of state sovereignty.

(4) Lack of voter education. An educational effort is needed to sensitize the population with regard to the importance of the right to vote. Unfortunately, civil society as a traditional player in this field seems to be increasingly distant from the electoral process.

Moreover, EOMs on behalf of ECOWAS face the following challenges:

(5) EOMs have to be professionalized through training and the systematic use of databases to ensure a supply of qualified individuals to participate in the missions.

(6) To truly transform election observation into a conflict mitigation tool, it is necessary for EOMs to monitor the whole electoral process.

(7) Insufficient follow-up procedures. Until now, no measures are taken to ensure a productive use of the results of EOMs' work. Observation reports should be accessible to civil society organizations and other political actors.

Conclusion

Overall, the seminar highlighted that not all is "quiet in the West". The overview of the different countries clearly showed that opportunities exist, but multiple security dilemmas remain. These threats, mostly transnational in nature, may have

a huge destabilizing effect on the region, if not adequately addressed. There is a need to understand the interaction between internal and external pressures and how they affect state institutions and their ability to mediate internal tensions.

All participants agreed on the centrality of elections. Having improved in quality over the years, election-related violence still haunts many West African states. This violence is closely intertwined with the unanswered questions of youth unemployment, a lack of perspective, and media and party propaganda. Furthermore, identity politics remain central in many states in the sub-region and increased polarization of societies presents a serious threat to future stability.

The role of ECOWAS provides some key lessons learned. On the one hand, there exist many positive examples of successful mediation and election observation efforts. On the other hand, structural and capacity problems take their toll on the effectiveness of ECOWAS conflict management. In sum, participants noted that ECOWAS still has to move from an ECOWAS of states to an ECOWAS of the people. This will require the concerted efforts of all countries in the region.

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West Africa Project

The strengthening of regional conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding capacities is a key element of Germany's Africa policy. As one part of the BMZ-funded "Support to KAIPTC" project, the German Government asked ZIF in 2003 to closely cooperate with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Ghana and the ECOWAS-Commission in Abuja. Since then, ZIF has conducted the following activities with its partners:

→ Training

- 10 jointly conducted civilian training courses on "Election Observation and Basic Peacekeeping Skills" were held at the KAIPTC in Accra, five of these in English, two in French and two bilingual. Since 2004, more than 200 participants from West Africa have been trained.
- 30 experts from the region have been invited to Germany since 2004 to participate in the "Basic Peacekeeping Course for Civilian Experts" and various other specialization courses of ZIF.

→ Lessons Learned and Expert Seminars

- "West Africa - Peace Dividends and the Road to Recovery" (9 - 11 February 2012)
- "Linking Partners in Training and Recruitment" (13 - 15 October 2010)
- "Elections in Post-Conflict Countries - Lessons Learned from Liberia, Sierra Leone, DR Congo and Kosovo" (12 - 14 June 2008)
- "Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Liberia - Much Remains to be done" (1 - 3 November 2007)

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