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TOWARD A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: ECOWAS AND PEACE AND SECURITY POLICY COMMUNITIES IN WEST AFRICA

OLAWALE ISMAIL

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ABOUT THE SERIES

"African solutions to African problems" is a favorite mantra of the African Union, but since the 2002 establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture, the continent has continued to face political, material, and knowledge-related challenges to building sustainable peace. Peacebuilding in Africa has sometimes been characterized by interventions by international actors who lack the local knowledge and lived experience needed to fully address complex conflict-related issues on the continent. And researchers living and working in Africa need additional resources and platforms to shape global debates on peacebuilding as well as influence regional and international policy and practitioner audiences. The APN Working Papers series seeks to address these knowledge gaps and needs by publishing independent research that provides critical overviews and reflections on the state of the field, stimulates new thinking on overlooked or emerging areas of African peacebuilding, and engages scholarly and policy communities with a vested interest in building peace on the continent.

TOWARD A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: ECOWAS AND PEACE AND SECURITY POLICY COMMUNITIES IN WEST AFRICA

OLAWALE ISMAIL

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The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 and has since evolved into a robust subregional group promoting economic integration across its members in several spheres, including commerce, transportation and telecommunications, energy and agriculture, monetary and financial policies, and peace and security.¹ To fulfill objectives in these fields, ECOWAS established decision-making structures and policy development processes that include the Authority of Heads of State and Government (AHSOG); Council of Ministers (COM); a Community Court of Justice; an Executive Secretariat and Parliament; and other specialized commissions. The existence of these principal units notwithstanding, the ECOWAS decision-making and policy development process integrates other intervening variables that feed into the different channels of policy formulation and incidentally guide the trajectory along which policies emerge. This analysis focuses on ECOWAS's nuanced (and complex) decision-making process as it relates to peace and security issues and the extent to which peace and security policy communities (including training and research institutions, academic and technical experts, and civil society activists) are engaged.

ECOWAS's decision-making and policy development processes have evolved as the organization has changed from a purely economic integration

institution into an entity dealing with political and security matters, especially in the context of the 1993 revised ECOWAS treaty (ECOWAS 1993) and the 2006 institutional reforms that reaffirmed its supranational status. The spate of armed conflicts and insecurity in West Africa in the 1990s transformed ECOWAS's institutional foundations and policy agenda, especially by putting peace and security issues at the epicenter of regional integration projects (Cilliers 1999), and the organization has developed key policies since the end of the Cold War that continue to shape the region's peace and security dynamic. This includes the 1999 adoption of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (ECOWAS 1999); the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (ECOWAS 2001); the 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF); and the ongoing development of a regional security sector reform (SSR) policy. Very little is known about the evolution of such policies, however. How are they conceived and developed, who does what, when, and how? More specifically, through what mechanisms and windows does ECOWAS engage key stakeholders (academics, civil society actors, and practitioners) in the development of its peace and security operational policies, and how do they feed their knowledge and experience into the policy development processes?

The following analysis maps and describes ECOWAS's decision-making and policy development process on peace and security with a view to highlighting three things:

- How ECOWAS develops or evolves its peace and security operational policies—that is, the stages, actors, and institutions or units involved
- The role of and interaction between policymakers, academics, and civil society activists in ECOWAS's process for developing peace and security operational policy, especially the relative influence of different categories of actors in the policy development loop
- The opportunities and options for improving the interaction between policymakers and academics and civil society actors with a view to developing a community of practice dedicated to sharing experiences, knowledge, ideas, and resources on peace and security

The focus is on peace and security operational policies designed to translate or implement existing normative and institutional frameworks. The frameworks include the 1993 revised ECOWAS treaty, the 1999 Mechanism, and the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, while the operational policies for implementing them include the 2008 ECPF and the SSR policy currently under development. The ECPF is used as a case study on account of its centrality to ECOWAS's contemporary and future peace and security activities, the cross-departmental and cross-cutting coverage of issues involved, its currency, and the visible involvement of the broader policy community in its development.

The focus is also on the Political Affairs Directorate, given its central role in developing the Mechanism, the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and the ECPF and its mandate to implement them, as well as its mandate to support mediation efforts and the Council of the Wise and to support and serve the Mediation and Security Council (MSC) and AHSG on peace and security issues.²

The analysis is, unfortunately, limited by the absence of open source materials on the subject. While the literature on peace and security in West Africa—including the role of ECOWAS and reviews of its peace operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and Côte d'Ivoire—is extensive,³ little or no research and few publications are extant on ECOWAS's institutional setting and its process for developing peace and security policy. The little available information includes that contained in ECOWAS's website and fleeting mention and reference in a few publications. This discussion relies instead on the author's more than ten years of studying, observing, and engaging in ECOWAS activities (including participation in policy-related workshops, seminars, and conferences), knowledge of peace and security issues in West Africa, and interviews and informal discussions with serving and former ECOWAS staff and experts on West Africa's peace and security.

The first section below provides a broad overview of ECOWAS's central decision-making process and is followed by a more detailed assessment of the peace and security policy development process, using empirical examples. The next section maps extant mechanisms and windows of engagement and interaction between ECOWAS policy actors and other stakeholders in the peace and security policy development cycle, while the following two discuss key milestones and challenges in ECOWAS's interaction with the broader policy community and stakeholders, respectively. After that come

discussion and reflections on the ECOWAS policy development cycle in relationship to decision-making models, followed by ideas and suggestions for transforming ECOWAS's engagement with other policy stakeholders into a community of practice. A conclusion summarizes the key ideas and observations presented.

ECOWAS'S INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

The context for understanding ECOWAS's peace and security policy development process is the organization's mandate and overall institutional framework, especially for decision making. Three legal and institutional reform documents are central to understanding both: the 1999 revised ECOWAS treaty; the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping, and Security; and the 2006 institutional reform process.

The 1999 Revised Treaty

The revised treaty contained important provisions that reshaped ECOWAS's peace and security mandate and decision-making processes:

- Article 3 reaffirmed that the purpose of the organization is to promote cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa. The union was to raise the living standards of the region's peoples, maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations between member states, and contribute to development in Africa.
- On peace and security, article 4 restated the principles of collective self-reliance, nonaggression, cooperation and harmonization of policies, and interdependence. It highlighted the importance of the peaceful settlement of disputes; of the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights; of accountability, economic and social justice, and popular participation in development; and of the promotion and consolidation of democracy in the region.
- The organization's commitment to regional peace and security was reaffirmed under article 58, which called on member states "to work to safeguard and consolidate relations

conducive to the maintenance of peace, stability and security within the region.” The regional security provision listed areas of collaboration, such as control of borders and immigration; conciliation, mediation, and peaceful settlements of disputes; creation of a regional peace and security observation system and peacekeeping forces where appropriate; provision of electoral assistance and observation; and the setting up of detailed protocols on political cooperation, regional peace, and stability.

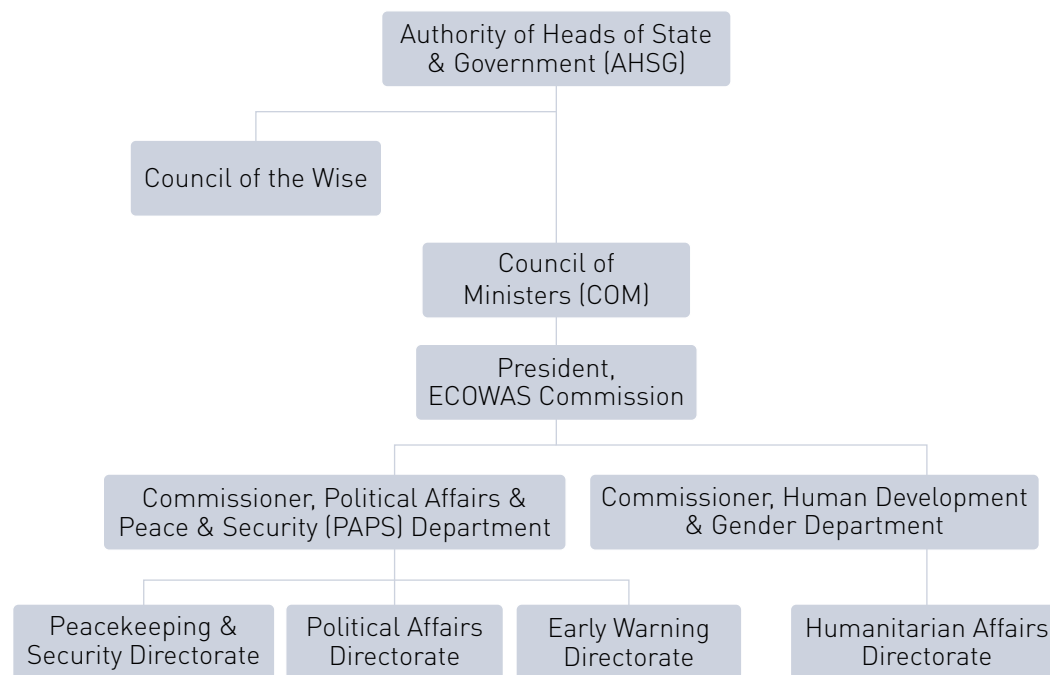
- The treaty extended recognition to other, nonstate actors in ECOWAS’s regional integration process, including women groups, the private sector, and the media, to signify a more inclusive and robust perspective and approach to peace, security, and development.

Institutionally, the revised treaty established the Authority of Heads of State and Government (AHSG), the Council of Ministers (COM), the Community Parliament, the Economic and Social Council, the Community Court of Justice, the Executive Secretariat, the Fund for Cooperation and Compensation, the Specialized Technical Commissions, and “any other institutions that may be established by the Authority.” Of these, the AHSG, COM, and the Executive Secretariat play important roles in decision making and policy development on peace and security (see figure 1):

- According to article 7, the AHSG is the supreme organ of ECOWAS. It is the highest decision-making organ that oversees the functioning and implementation of ECOWAS objectives, and delegates powers and refers matters to other organs, especially the COM (article 7).
- Article 10 established the COM, which is second in ECOWAS’s hierarchy. It comprises ministers from member states and is responsible for making policy recommendations to the AHSG and approving the budgets and work plans of all organs.
- The Executive Secretariat, established by articles 17–19 and later transformed by the 2006 reforms into the ECOWAS Commission, is headed by a president, who acts as the legal representative of ECOWAS, implements decisions of the AHSG and COM, prepares draft budgets and work plans, submits periodic reports to the AHSG and COM, and prepares

and submits proposals and studies needed for the efficient functioning and development of the community.

FIGURE 1: A Section of ECOWAS's Institutional Framework Showing Peace and Security Directorates



Based on ECOWAS, "Early Warning / Observation Monitoring Centre: Organogramme," Political Affairs and Peace and Security Department, http://www.comm.ecowas.int/dept/h/h2/en/h2_organ.pdf (p. 2), accessed October 20, 2014.

1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping, and Security

The AHSG 1990 Summit in Banjul, Gambia, created the Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) as an ad hoc mechanism for managing ECOWAS's intervention in Liberia's armed conflict, including overseeing mediation and peacekeeping activities, under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). The ad hoc measure and experiences from ECOWAS's intervention in Liberia eventually kick-started policy reviews and reformulations on peace and security.

The 1999 ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping, and Security was established against the backdrop of lessons learned from ECOMOG's peacekeeping activities in the 1990s. The protocol highlighted the key roles of three principal organs in peace and security: the AHSG, the Executive Secretariat, and the SMC (transformed by the protocol into the Mediation and Security Council [MSC], and empowered under article 7 to make and implement decisions on behalf of the AHSG).

The MSC is modeled after the United Nations Security Council, as it makes decisions on behalf of the AHSG. Article 17 of the 1999 protocol provides for the creation or transformation of three specialized institutions to assist the MSC in matters of peace and security:

- The Defence and Security Commission, established by article 19, comprises military chiefs and heads of security sector agencies in member states whose job is to examine administrative, technical, and logistical needs of peacekeeping and to assist the MSC in formulating the mandates and terms of reference for peacekeeping missions, appointing the force commanders, and deciding on the missions' composition.
- The Council of Elders (now referred to as the Council of the Wise) was established by article 20. It is an ensemble of eminent personalities and individuals capable of using their influence, good offices, and reputations to mediate, negotiate, and facilitate the peaceful settlement of conflicts.
- ECOMOG, according to articles 21 and 22, is the regional standby peacekeeping force responsible for observing and monitoring ceasefires; peacekeeping and the restoration of peace; humanitarian intervention in the wake of disaster; enforcement of sanctions and embargoes; preventive deployment; and peacebuilding, disarmament, and demobilization.

In addition, articles 32 and 35 of the protocol created the Offices of the Special Representative of the Executive Secretary as the political head of peacekeeping missions.

Finally, the protocol established a regional early warning peace and security observation system (the Early Warning System) for conflict prevention, in accordance with article 58 of the revised treaty. The observation system

collects and analyses information for use by the AHSG, MSC, and Executive Secretariat.

The 2006 Institutional Reforms

In 2006, the AHSG approved the institutional transformation of ECOWAS, centrally upgrading the Executive Secretariat into the ECOWAS Commission headed by a president and a vice president with seven sectoral departments, each representing a cluster of directorates and headed by a commissioner. The number of sectoral departments was increased to fifteen in 2013, largely as a political balancing act to facilitate a commissionership for each of the fifteen ECOWAS member states.

These changes have not affected the institutional configuration for peace and security. Instead, the reforms increased ECOWAS's powers and strengthened its supranational status so it might adapt better to the international environment and play a more effective role in the regional integration and development process.⁴ The reform also established a new legal regime, whereby the adoption of protocols and conventions was replaced with the passage of community acts (covering all supplementary acts, regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations, and opinions), with the AHSG passing only supplementary acts to complete the treaty process.

The reform process also reconstituted and strengthened the role and powers of the Political Affairs and Peace and Security (PAPS) Department, specifically as the hub for planning and implementing policies and decisions on peace and security in West Africa. PAPS is divided into three directorates: Political Affairs, the Early Warning and Observation and Monitoring Centre, and Peacekeeping and Security. Each is headed by a director and is subdivided into divisions. The Political Affairs Directorate has four divisions: International Cooperation, Democracy and Good Governance, Electoral Assistance, and Mediation and Facilitation. Each division is structured to be staffed by a division head, a section head, and a program officer (ECOWAS 2014a).

KEY STEPS IN THE ECOWAS PEACE AND SECURITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The peace and security policy development process in ECOWAS follows the complex trajectory often associated with intergovernmental institutions. Here, based on interviews and interactions with ECOWAS officials, observations and participation in ECOWAS activities, and fleeting mentions in some ECOWAS documents, I highlight seven generic steps in ECOWAS's peace and security policy development cycle and provide the example of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF). The ongoing development of a security sector reform (SSR) policy, including the initial Development of Guidance on Democratic Governance and SSR, follows the same trajectory (ECOWAS 2013).

Information from interviews with key informants suggests the existence of internal administrative guidance notes relating to the development of policies; however, such official documents are not publicly available. Moreover, the seven steps discussed here have become standard practices (or conventions) identifiable with ECOWAS's policy development processes within the broader peace and security policy community in West Africa.⁵ Still, the peace and security policy development process is hardly linear; it varies based on time exigencies, political dynamics, the nature of the subject matter, and funding. The seven steps presented here are the main phases, though in practice they could be operationalized into more than seven steps (as indicated in the eleven steps of the development of the ECPF in table 1 below).

Step 1: Internal Needs Assessment and Identification

In the first step, the relevant ECOWAS divisions identify a need, in terms of emerging peace and security issues or challenges in West Africa, on the basis of one or more of the following: continuous media reports, early warning reports and briefs, published research findings and analysis by academics, events in other regions of Africa and internationally, or the policy development process at the African Union, United Nations, or other international institutions. Alternatively, the need may arise from decisions and resolutions of the AHSG and COM, with the COM given the task of responding to a rapidly emerging peace and security issue; this was the case with the problems of maritime insecurity and piracy and illegal trade in drugs and

narcotics. This was also the case in step 1 of the development of the ECPF (see table 1).

Once the need is identified, internal discussions take place, and policy development is approved through the commissioner for PAPS. In most cases, the policy development work is included in the annual work plans and budgets of divisions that are approved by the COM. The essential actors in identifying policy needs and preparing background briefing notes are the director for political affairs, heads of divisions and sections, and program officer for each section. These officials are generally expected to keep track of development relevant to their functional portfolios across West Africa through interaction with civil society groups, academics and research institutions, media, national government agencies, and other intergovernmental agencies, such as the African Union and the United Nations Regional Office for West Africa (UNOWA). In reality, the process of needs assessment and identification by ECOWAS is apparently more ad hoc than systematic; for instance, it is unclear what role, if any, is played by the data gathered by the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate in the deliberations and decisions of the COM and AHSG, or in need identification and policy development as a whole.

Step 2: Concept Note and Proposal Development

In the second stage, the relevant program officer and the head of section work with the head of division to develop an initial concept note that details the nature of the issue (or problem) requiring a policy response, its impact on peace and security in West Africa, ECOWAS's possible perspective on the problem, and an approach to addressing it. The concept note also details the legal basis for ECOWAS's policy needs with reference to the relevant sections of its statutes (protocols, conventions, treaties, resolutions, and so forth).

The concept note forms the basis for a full policy development proposal, including specific work plans and budgets. A draft of it goes through a process of internal discussion and fine tuning, with the involvement of other directorates as appropriate. Where the concept note overlaps the mandates of other directorates, interdirectorate (or departmental) meetings are held and steering committees are formed to secure acceptance of the policy across the organization and jointly devise strategies for implementing it.

To provide background for ECOWAS's perspective and approach, the full proposal and work plans included in the concept note generally review available knowledge on the matter at hand, including official data and statistics, research findings, findings of civil society groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working on the matter, and relevant policies and activities of national, regional, and international agencies. The initial identification and listing of academics, research institutions, civil society groups and NGOs, national and international government agencies, humanitarian and charitable organizations, and multilateral and intergovernmental agencies that might be relevant to the policy development process also take place in this phase. This is reflected in step 2 in the development of the ECPF (see table 1).

Step 3: Identification and Hiring of Consultants and Experts

Once the concept note, including the full proposal, work plan, and budget, has received institutional approval, the relevant heads of division and section and the program officer commence implementation. This often starts with an open call (through advertisement and expressions of interest) for consultants to develop initial draft policy proposals based on contemporary research and analysis of the subject. In general, the number of consultants to be hired depends on the scope of the subject and policy to be developed, but most cases involve a minimum of two. Clear administrative procedures for selecting them on the basis of open tender (advertisement) are often guided by such criteria as competence, regional balance (i.e., a system of making ECOWAS processes reflect its member states, especially ensuring participation by citizens, experts and consultants from Anglophone and Francophone member states), gender, and so forth. Occasionally, especially when under time pressure, ECOWAS uses a fast-track approach, targeting specific experts with exceptional knowledge on the subject.

Ideally, this stage is when extant research and analysis feed directly into the policy development cycle and experts based in academic institutions, civil society groups, or NGOs generally have the greatest latitude to influence peace and security policy content. The influence may come through a literature review that provides the research findings and perspectives of the experts and scholars on the subject, or from an academic consultant knowledgeable in the field. This is reflected in step 3 in the development of the ECPF (see table 1).

Step 4: Discussion, Review, and Validation of Draft Policy

The draft policy proposals are subjected to a rigorous review process by a select group of researchers, civil society activists, practitioners, policy actors from other institutions, and other stakeholders at policy development workshops. The participants are generally identified, selected, and invited by the relevant ECOWAS division, which considers expertise, gender, the spread of regions represented, and the relative numbers of academics, practitioners, and civil society activists. The resulting list tends to reflect ECOWAS's delicate political sensitivities, including the demands for inclusion and representation by its fifteen member states and the underlying divisions and tensions between Anglophone and Francophone states. The consultants present the draft policy proposals with reference to the empirical evidence and clear logic that support them, and the proposals are critiqued with reference to the diverse experiences and perspectives of academics, civil society activists, and practitioners and the empirical realities of West Africa. This was the case in steps 4, 5, and 6 of developing the ECPF (see table 1).

Step 5: Review and Finalization of Draft Policy

Following input from experts, ECOWAS's consultants and the relevant head of division review and fine tune the draft policy proposal. In most cases, proposed changes are identified and agreed upon during the workshops. The workshops also serve a validation function for draft policy proposals. This is often the final window for academic, civil society, and practitioner experts to influence the proposal's peace and security content, as was the case in steps 7 and 8 of developing the ECPF (see table 1). The draft policy document is submitted officially to the Commissioner for PAPS and the director of the Political Affairs Directorate by the relevant head of division.

Step 6: ECOWAS Administrative Processing and Approval of Draft Policy

The internal bureaucratic process kicks in with a series of intra-ECOWAS final review sessions and assessments and further fine tuning by the legal unit to align draft policy content and language with standard ECOWAS templates and ensure coherence with other legal statutes. The draft is then prepared for presentation, discussion, and approval by the relevant ECOWAS

organ, often the MSC, COM, or AHSB. This is reflected in steps 9 and 10 in the development of the ECPF (see table 1).

Step 7: Political Approval of Draft Policy

In the last stage of policy development, final rounds of checks, debates, and review (and amendments) take place before the draft policy document becomes a legal document—that is, a policy approved by the relevant organ. This is reflected in step 11 in the development of the ECPF (see table 1).

TABLE 1: The ECPF Policy Development Process (February 2006–January 2008)

Step	Date	Main Step	Activity	Result
1	February–April 2006	Internal needs assessment	Internal needs identification and development of initial ECPF concept	Concept note
2	April–May 2006	Concept note and proposal development	Internal distribution, discussion, and revision of ECPF concept	Internal acceptance of ECPF concept note
3	June–July 2006	Identification and hiring of consultants and experts	First draft of ECPF Policy	Draft ECPF Policy by consultants
4	August 2006	Discussion, review, and validation of draft policy	Formal intra-ECOWAS (interdepartmental) consultation on draft ECPF Policy	Internal acceptance of draft ECPF
5	August–October 2006	Discussion, review, and validation of draft policy	Continued consultation and updating of draft ECPF Policy	

Step	Date	Main Step	Activity	Result
6	November 2006–February 2007	Discussion, review, and validation of draft policy	Consultation with partners and experts through a series of workshops, seminars, and meetings	External acceptance of draft ECPF
7	March–April 2007	Review and finalization of draft policy	Review and updating of draft ECPF Policy	Second draft of ECPF
8	June 2007	Review and finalization of draft policy	Experts' meeting on second draft ECPF in Banjul, Gambia	Rigorous review and fine tuning of draft ECPF
9	July–September 2007	ECOWAS administrative processing/ approval of draft policy	Consultative meeting of member states experts and government representatives in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to validate the draft ECPF	Review by and acceptance of member states of draft ECPF
10	October–December 2007	ECOWAS administrative processing/ approval of draft policy	Finalization of draft ECPF Policy	Finalized draft ECPF
11	January 2008	Political approval of draft policy	ECOWAS's MSC meeting to discuss draft ECPF	Approved ECPF

MAPPING ECOWAS'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BROADER PEACE AND SECURITY POLICY COMMUNITY

The centrally armed conflicts in the Mano River Basin in the 1990s transformed the nature of ECOWAS's peace and security agenda for West Africa, including the development and implementation of policies. A noticeable change was the increasing engagement of nongovernmental actors in ECOWAS's activities—a process in line with the declaration to involve a broader range of stakeholders in the integration process under the 1993 revised ECOWAS treaty. Here I map five official (institutionalized) channels and platforms of contact and potential engagement between ECOWAS and the broader peace and security policy community in West Africa in the post-Cold War era.

Civil Society Platforms and Coalitions

Over the past decade, ECOWAS has interacted with a series of civil society groups in West Africa engaged in research and analysis of peace and security issues and governance in general. Specifically, in 2003, representatives of such organizations, in collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission, created the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF). The forum was endorsed by the AHSG as a platform for coordinating and infusing civil society perspectives into ECOWAS peace and security policies and activities, promoting civil society participation in West African integration, and facilitating communication, interaction, and cooperation between ECOWAS and civil society groups.⁶

WACSOF's official activities and thematic interests run parallel to those of ECOWAS, including on peace and security issues. Human security in the form of freedom from fear and want at national and regional levels is a cross-cutting theme for WACSOF, according to its official declaration, with subthemes including peace and security; agriculture and food security; environment and climate change; women and gender; democracy and governance; human rights; health and HIV/AIDS; migration and free movement; economic development; and trade and investment.⁷ In reality, WACSOF's impact has waned since 2009 on account of breakdowns in its internal coherence, poor leadership and (mis)management, withdrawal of financial support by development partners, and deterioration in relations with ECOWAS.⁸

Beyond WACSOF, ECOWAS also engages with specialist civil society networks and coalitions working on and expert in peace and security issues, such as small arms and light weapons, security sector reform, election observation, and women, peace, and security. In most cases, ECOWAS has engaged with specialist civil society coalitions to develop policies, work plans, and projects relevant to their respective areas of expertise. In other instances, such coalitions have partnered with or provided their technical expertise to ECOWAS in support of policy formulation and activities:

- The African Security Sector Network (ASSN) and the West African Network for Security and Democratic Governance (WANSED) play a central role in ECOWAS's SSR initiatives, which benefit not only from the research and analyses published by their members but also from the technical experts they supply to advise, design, and review draft policy proposals, undertake needs assessments, carry out background research, and design SSR-related projects.⁹
- Women's groups such as the Women Peace and Security Network Africa work with a variety of stakeholders, including ECOWAS, to promote women's perspectives on and participation in peace and security.¹⁰
- The West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) undertakes advocacy activities on small arms and light weapons and collaborates with security agencies on issues related to their control and misuse. The organization was active in campaigning for the implementation of the 1998 Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons, its transformation in 2006 into the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials, and its ratification and entry into force in 2009.¹¹ WAANSA works with ECOWAS to disseminate the regional convention and increase awareness of it at the grassroots level.¹²

Since 2012, ECOWAS has expanded this form of engagement to areas and issues of political governance by initiating policy development and programs for political parties (for example, the Forum of West African Political Parties), human rights commissions, anticorruption institutions, and so on.¹³ Civil society groups and experts become directly or indirectly involved in these efforts through their membership in these institutions at the

national level or by designing and delivering capacity-building activities in consultation with ECOWAS.

Formalized Relationships with Research and Training Institutions

Over the past decade, ECOWAS has formulated a series of working arrangements with training and research institutions working on peace and security issues in West Africa within and outside the region. In November 2005, while at the fourteenth meeting of the ECOWAS Defence and Security Commission to develop West Africa's brigade of the African Standby Force, the military chiefs of the member states endorsed three institutions as regional training centers of excellence (TCEs) for peace operations. These were the National Defence College of Nigeria (NDCN) for strategic training, the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Ghana for operational training, and l'École de Maintien de la Paix (EMP) in Mali for tactical training (Franke 2010, 192–93). Subsequently, ECOWAS established a formal relationship with the TCEs through the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that obliges them to deliver training on the military, police, and civilian components of peace support operations to member states' contingents, ECOWAS staff, and civil society groups in West Africa. The TCEs also provide technical support for (including the hosting of) ECOWAS's mission planning, training exercises, and development of operational procedures, and they undertake research and analysis on West Africa's peace operations and peace and security generally.¹⁴

ECOWAS also signed MOUs with some international research institutions, namely, the Conflict, Security and Development Group (CSDG), King's College London, and Humanitarian Dialogue. The relationship covers the provision of technical advice and support, support for capacity building, and the feeding of findings from peace and security research and analysis into ECOWAS activities. For instance, researchers at the CSDG contributed to the development of the ECPF and its activity plans, especially to thematic strands on SSR, natural resource management, and women, peace, and security. Also, since 2008, the CSDG has consistently deployed young West African professionals in peace and security to ECOWAS to support its operational efficiency; ECOWAS has absorbed some of them into its service.¹⁵ Similarly, in 2013, Humanitarian Dialogue supported ECOWAS's creation of a Mediation Facilitation Division in the Political Affairs directorate by deploying consultants to undertake background research and develop operational mandates, procedures, and staff profiles.¹⁶

The Policy Analysis and Strategic Planning Unit (PASPU) Experiment

In 2006, ECOWAS established a Policy Analysis and Strategic Planning Unit (PASPU) within the Office of the Executive Secretary (now the Office of the President of the Commission), with the exclusive mandate of facilitating ECOWAS's communication and interaction with academics and researchers working on socioeconomic, political, and security integration issues in West Africa. PASPU was charged with compiling a list of experts and researchers on regional integration, good governance, conflict prevention, and peace and security with a view to developing a database (and resource book) ECOWAS could use to identify short- and medium-term consultants.¹⁷ The PASPU initiative also aimed to create opportunities to embed seasoned experts within ECOWAS for specified periods of time to undertake research and contribute to ECOWAS's policy and program development.

Although PASPU's thematic coverage transcended peace and security, it was dominated by those issues. For example, the pioneering coordinator was a Nigerian peace and security expert. The PASPU initiative was discontinued in 2008–9 following the withdrawal of financial support by ECOWAS's development partner, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). The extent to which the envisioned database and resource book on researchers and experts on and in West Africa were accomplished is unclear.

Special Lessons-Learned Conferences and Review Initiatives

Since 2007, ECOWAS has sought to involve regional researchers, academics, and civil society activists in reviewing and extrapolating from lessons learned from its peace and security activities and to obtain their recommendations. These efforts have taken two forms. The first was a special book project initiated to independently document, review, and identify ECOWAS's experiences in and lessons from ECOMOG operations in the 1990s. ECOWAS contracted with a senior peace and security academic to undertake the research in 2007, and the draft manuscript was submitted to the organization in early 2009. The manuscript has yet to be published as planned, however.

The second effort has involved convening special “lessons-learned conferences” of the broader peace and security policy community to review ECOWAS’s peace and security activities. Three major conferences organized by ECOWAS have brought together policy and civil society actors, academics, and practitioners from across West Africa:

- A February 2005 workshop on “Lessons from ECOWAS Peacekeeping Operations: 1990–2004,” held in Accra, Ghana, included ECOWAS staff and regional and internal experts (ECOWAS 2005).
- A March 2010 conference on “Two Decades of Peace Processes in West Africa: Achievement, Failures, and Lessons,” took place in Monrovia, Liberia, and included over 150 participants, including former heads of state, ministers, government officials, researchers, media members, civil society activists, and policy actors from within and outside the region. Held against the backdrop of the “African Year of Peace and Security,” as designated by the African Union, the event was designed to consolidate gains made in conflict prevention, management, resolution, and peacebuilding by evaluating interventions over the previous twenty years, for the purpose of learning lessons, building on achievements, and strengthening the regional peace and security architecture (ECOWAS 2010, 4).
- The February 2014 “Experts’ After-Action Review of ECOWAS’s Intervention in Mali,” held in Akosombo, Ghana, was organized to assess and draw lessons and recommendations from ECOWAS’s role in Mali’s multidimensional crises. Participants included researchers and experts in political, military, and security issues, civil society organizations, research institutions, and TCEs (ECOWAS 2014c).

Short-Term Consultancies

Finally, ECOWAS interacts and engages with the broader peace and security policy community through short-term research and policy development consultancies. As described previously, ECOWAS uses external experts to undertake background research, draft policy proposals, design activity plans, review policy, and validate proposals and involves them in activities that span the broad spectrum of the policy development cycle, including institutional capacity building, technical reviews, and evaluations.

The consultancies are guided by specific terms of reference that outline the work to be done, time frame, and deliverables. They tend to last for ten to twenty-five workdays (which may be spread out over a longer period of time, depending on the magnitude of the work) and are tied to specific activities, such as developing or reviewing draft proposals and participating (by presenting draft documents) in policy development workshops. The consultants are either hired directly by ECOWAS or deployed by development partners, technical partners (such as TCEs and research institutions), and specialist civil society networks; recent examples include the deployment by the ASSN and WANSED of technical experts on security sector reform issues to support ECOWAS's SSR policy development process and the hiring by Humanitarian Dialogue of two consultants to help ECOWAS develop a mediation facilitation division.

According to one ECOWAS official, to date,

ECOWAS does not have a functional database or record of consultants within and outside the region—the PASPU initiative was aborted, and not much came out of the plan to build an experts database. In reality, the process of identifying and hiring consultants continues to rely heavily on personal contacts and recommendations, prior engagement with ECOWAS, national and regional quota balance, and availability.¹⁸

In all cases, ECOWAS is involved in the hiring process, and, in most, the expert consultants are selected on the basis of nationality and regional representation, gender, and assumed competence in the subject area.

MILESTONES IN ECOWAS'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BROADER PEACE AND SECURITY POLICY COMMUNITY

The peace and security challenges of the 1990s and ECOWAS's responses since then have combined to change ECOWAS and the landscape of West Africa in at least three important broad ways:

- The transformation of ECOWAS from a largely economic integration institution into a political–security ensemble, with peace and security becoming key drivers of integration. At a minimum, regional security has strengthened regional integration, as attaining peace and stability has come to be

regarded as the key to achieving the fundamental objectives for which ECOWAS was established.

- The rapid development of norms, institutions, policies, and strategies related to peace and security.
- The transition from an ECOWAS made up of states to an ECOWAS made up of citizens, which has led to the recognition and greater involvement of nonstate actors—experts, civil society organizations, and activists—in ECOWAS’s peace and security activities.

The broad changes manifest in five thematic areas of growth and achievement, which are explored below.

Infusion of Experts into the ECOWAS Workforce

The number of peace and security experts from academic and research institutions, civil society groups and specialist networks, and coalitions working in ECOWAS (as part of the organization’s staff) has increased in the past decade. People with doctoral degrees head the Political Affairs, Peacekeeping and Security, and Early Warning Directorates in the Political Affairs and Peace and Security Department, and a majority of division heads and program officers have backgrounds in civil society groups and TCEs or experience in working with them.

The participation of the broader peace and security policy in ECOWAS’s policy and activities cycles is a key factor in increasing the recruitment of such experts. Series of short-term engagements (as consultants), participation in ECOWAS’s policy development workshops, and attendance at review conferences tend to improve communication, interaction, and familiarity between ECOWAS and experts and plug members of West Africa’s peace and security policy community into ECOWAS processes. For instance, according to an ECOWAS official, “The current director of political affairs was initially hired as a consultant and deployed by a development partner to ECOWAS to support [coordinate] the development of the ECPF and was later appointed by ECOWAS as a director. The consultancy work endeared and exposed the current director to the ECOWAS system and officials.”¹⁹

Similarly, a program officer in PAPS was recruited from one of the TCEs, and two of the young West African professionals deployed to ECOWAS from CSDG were absorbed into ECOWAS in different capacities after their initial

six-month deployments expired. In fact, a core objective of the CSDG fellowship program is to help build the capacity of African peace and security institutions, including ECOWAS, by training and deploying young African professionals to work in these institutions for specified time periods.²⁰

Institutionalization of Experts' Workshops and Consultations

The practice of including experts in workshops and seminars is now a convention in ECOWAS's peace and security policy development cycle. In fact, it may be said to be the hub in the cycle—that is, the point at which the critical work of generating draft policy proposals and subjecting them to rigorous conceptual, policy, and practitioner debate and review takes place. According to an observer, “It is impossible for ECOWAS to develop any peace and security policy or undertake activities nowadays without involving external experts from academic institutions, TCEs, and civil society groups. These external experts give legitimacy to ECOWAS peace and security policies and initiatives.”²¹

Emerging Cadre of Regional Experts and Analysts Working on or with ECOWAS

A significant gain for ECOWAS has been a growing interest among scholars and practitioners in researching and analyzing the organization and its peace and security activities. Since the 1990s, ECOWAS peace and security has been emerging as a field or discipline of study with a growing body of literature, especially pertaining to ECOMOG peace operations, conflict mediation, and norm setting. Unlike in earlier years, notable academics, researchers, and analysts have been getting involved with ECOWAS peace and security initiatives within and outside West Africa. Through the research and publication activities of a burgeoning cadre of experts on ECOWAS, knowledge of these initiatives is documented, enriched, and disseminated. Cutting-edge research and ideas from these emerging specialists have influenced policy agendas by prompting new policies or review of extant policies, assessing impacts of policies and activities, and identifying gaps in research, policy, and practice.

Institutional Cooperation with Research Institutions and TCEs

In theory, the formalization of official relationships between ECOWAS and research and training institutions within and outside West Africa represents a significant milestone. The institutionalized interactions provide legal channels and platforms for communication and the sharing of experience and resources, furnishing official windows for feeding findings from research, training, and practice into policy processes and enhancing the prospect of evolving a community of practice. While ECOWAS's relationship with the TCEs was formed and coordinated in connection with a specific policy initiative—the African Standby Force—its boundaries extend to peace and security issues broadly defined. For instance, some of ECOWAS's initiatives on maritime security and counternarcotics emerged from research interests and activities pioneered by the TCEs.

The operationalizing of ECOWAS's MOU with the TCEs poses some problems and challenges in terms of the effectiveness of the relationship and the quality of research carried out. According to one official,

ECOWAS's relationship with the TCEs hardly extends beyond the MOU document. It is a relationship of convenience, for fundraising purposes and holding seminars or inviting people from the TCEs to ECOWAS events. . . . The TCEs have myriad internal problems and are hardly able to add value to the work of ECOWAS to the level envisaged in the MOU.²²

Still, the very existence of institutionalized channels of communication and interaction could be considered a milestone.

Increased Interface of Research, Policy, and Practice

Finally, ECOWAS's increased interaction with academic experts, civil society groups, and practitioners has facilitated debates and reflections on the conceptual, policy, and practical aspects of peace and security issues in West Africa. ECOWAS's engagement with broader policy communities allows the organization to gauge regional public opinion and perception accurately, test new ideas and initiatives, review and evaluate the workability and impact of its policies and activities, and disseminate information, such as new norms, protocols, and community acts.

CHALLENGES OF ECOWAS'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BROADER POLICY COMMUNITY

Any assessment of ECOWAS's policy development process, including its engagement with experts and the broader peace and security policy community, is hardly complete without identifying gaps and challenges. Here I identify five broad challenges: ECOWAS's political undercurrents; its capacity gaps and complex bureaucracy; the variable quality of research and analysis by TCEs and other institutions; its ad hoc system of identifying and engaging experts; and funding issues.

ECOWAS's Political Undercurrents

Restating the political and politicized nature of ECOWAS is fundamental to understanding the challenges to its policy development process. Complex politics are typical of multilateral and intergovernmental institutions and require careful balancing in the design of policies and activities, including the identity of experts and consultants and the numbers and national distribution of participants at policy workshops.

Political considerations challenge ECOWAS's engagement with the broader peace and security policy community in three ways. The first is the imperative of a quota system that requires broad representation of member states (and their citizens, as represented by experts, civil society activists, and practitioners) in ECOWAS's activities. This imperative often undercuts competence and the capacity to add value in the selection and engagement of policy community actors, especially as the pool and distribution of capable peace and security experts, research and training institutions, and civil society groups vary significantly across West Africa. In reality, the core of highly skilled peace and security policy community actors is concentrated in a few countries—namely, Benin, Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and, most significantly, Nigeria (Vogt 2010, 13)—which has led some analysts to describe ECOWAS and its peace and security agenda as expressions of a Pax Nigeriana (Adebajo 2004a, 2004b).

Second are the underlying political tensions and divides between Anglophone and Francophone countries—the so-called “Spirit of Fashoda”²³—that have haunted ECOWAS since its inception. These undercurrents have historically influenced ECOWAS's approach to peace and security, with Anglophone

countries assuming greater responsibility (by taking leading roles) where and when crises occur in other Anglophone countries, and Francophone countries doing the same with other Francophone countries. This was the case in the 1990s in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and more recently in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Mali, where intervention forces and mediation efforts were led by Anglophone and Francophone countries, respectively. The tensions also manifest in sharp divisions and disagreements along similar lines during ECOWAS policy workshops, meetings, and seminars. Such policy-related disagreements may reflect genuine differences in socioeconomic, cultural, and political systems and orientations.

Third are the language barriers presented by ECOWAS's three language zones—English, French, and Portuguese—and the logistical challenges they pose for ensuring that presentations, statements, and draft policies are understood by all members. All this further complicates ECOWAS's policy development processes.

ECOWAS's Acute Capacity Gaps and Complex Bureaucracy

Of the twenty-six professional positions in the Political Affairs Directorate, only seven are currently filled,²⁴ as are only two of the recommended nine support staff positions. This translates into serious gaps in ECOWAS's capacity for internal debate and policy development, with implications for the quality of those processes. Why such capacity gaps exist at ECOWAS's hub for peace and security planning is unclear, but one respondent noted, "There is a recruitment embargo in ECOWAS, and it is only lifted in exceptional circumstances, such as when any currently filled position becomes vacant or there is recognizable need."²⁵ A civil society observer also remarked that "it is an unfortunate stalemate. . . . There is heightened risk that the wrong persons might be recruited and that will create additional problems. . . . There are fears that trying to recruit in the context of current ECOWAS politics will be about political representation and balancing, rather than competence being the decisive criterion."²⁶

A related challenge is ECOWAS's complex bureaucratic system, where policy development processes and activities are consistently slowed down or sometimes truncated by administrative rituals. This could be a consequence of the capacity deficits. According to a civil society activist, "When we work with ECOWAS, delays, poor communication, and ad hoc approach are what to expect. . . . Nothing, man, happen for a long time and then

suddenly things are rushed, or sometimes things get started and you never hear about it again.”²⁷

For instance, as mentioned earlier, the manuscript of the review of ECOWAS’s experiences from ECOMOG operations has yet to be published after having been submitted officially in 2009. Why this is the case is unclear, but the consultant who put the manuscript together indicated that in the process of internal review, the manuscript has got trapped (or lost) in ECOWAS’s bureaucracy.²⁸

Capacity deficits and inefficient bureaucracies also underlie the poor planning and coordination and the misalignment between military and political components that have beset ECOWAS’s peace operations since the 1990s (Ismail 2011, Olonisakin 2000a, 2000b, Adebajo 2002, Aning 1999, Cilliers 1999).

Variable Quality of Research and Analysis by TCEs and Other Institutions in West Africa

The onset of socioeconomic crises and the introduction of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) from the 1980s decreased the quality of education and the capacity for cutting-edge research and analysis in developing countries, including those in West Africa. According to one expert, “The TCEs and other research institutions suffer from poor funding and inadequate research infrastructure and facilities.”²⁹

Although the training provided by the TCEs is invaluable for peace operations, the worth of their research and analysis outputs varies substantially and is sometimes questionable. A cursory assessment of their websites reveals mostly outdated publications, the absence of consistent, authoritative publication series, and some ongoing research programs hardly reflective of current ECOWAS policy priorities. The research and analysis interests of the TCEs and other academic institutions in West Africa are driven by funding opportunities rather than ECOWAS’s priorities, and where common interests exist, they are often opportunistic.

In addition, some of the more influential research on peace and security in West Africa is increasingly being produced by research institutions outside the region. This does not presuppose a dearth of West African scholars and experts; indeed, people of West African origin remain the leading experts

on ECOWAS and its peace and security agenda. Mainstream research institutions, including TCEs, are institutionally weak on research, however, as a majority of West African experts are based in institutions outside the region or operate from specialist networks, such as civil society groups. These include, for example, senior members of ASSN, who are some of the leading experts on SSR in West Africa.

Similarly, a 2010 *Report on the Mapping Study of Peace and Security Engagement in African Tertiary Institutions* noted that capacity in peace and security research and studies varies within and across regions, and that while curriculum and course designs on related issues in tertiary institutions in Anglophone West Africa were advanced, inadequate resources weakened the overall quality of their delivery and impact (Vogt 2010, 7–8).

All of this raises concerns about the effectiveness and value of ECOWAS's relationship with TCEs and mainstream research institutions in West Africa.

Ad Hoc System of Identifying and Engaging Experts

In spite of ECOWAS's institutionalization of expert engagement and consultation in policy development processes, noticeable gaps exist in its actual workings. In practice, ECOWAS apparently has yet to develop systematic ways of identifying, selecting, and engaging experts; the process remains ad hoc and often guided by the personal knowledge and contacts of officials, considerations of political balancing, and time-related exigencies. As noted earlier, ECOWAS has neither a functional database or compendium of experts nor an official, centralized documentation of which experts did what and when and the quality of the work done. Knowledge and information about previous and ongoing engagement with particular experts rest with individual officials scattered across the organization.

These conditions raise concerns about lack of transparency, clarity, and quality control. According to one respondent, "The quality of work and contribution by experts in ECOWAS's workshops is uneven. . . . There are some who merit to be around the table and others who know little about the issues and contribute insignificantly."³⁰

Funding Issues

A general lack of adequate funding for ECOWAS, TCEs, and mainstream research institutions on peace and security in West Africa affects the level, frequency, and quality of engagement across the board. On the supply side, the TCEs and mainstream institutions in West Africa are dependent on government subsidies (often inadequate) for recurrent expenditures and rely on donor sponsorship for actual research activities, which has implications for ECOWAS for the ownership and relevance of research activities.

On the demand side, ECOWAS has hardly any funding for sustained research activity, such as the commissioning of medium- to long-term research by academic and research institutions. The organization's engagement is, rather, at the level of individual researchers and experts, often for short-term research and policy engagement needs. Even for some of the short-term and policy development work, the funding levels are relatively low, with implications for the quality of the experts contracted. ECOWAS has yet to endow any professorial chair or institute research program in the TCEs or mainstream institutions in West Africa. Furthermore, although ECOWAS created the Peace Fund in 2003 for timely response to urgent peace and security challenges, very little of it is used for nonemergency peace and security activities, such as policy development work and engagement with the broader policy community.

All this underlines ECOWAS's dependence on development partners (or donors) to underwrite substantial portions of its mainstream peace and security policy development activities and interventions. Not unexpectedly, successive lessons-learned conferences have recommended that ECOWAS explore intra-West African sources of funding for its peace and security agenda.³¹

DECISION-MAKING MODELS AND ECOWAS'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE POLICY COMMUNITY

Although no single framework essentially defines the institutional nature of ECOWAS's leadership structure in terms of decision making, a number of models are relevant.

Organizational Procedures View

The “Organizational Procedures View,” presented by Turpin and Marais (2004), suggests decisions are the output of standard operating procedures invoked by organizational subunits. Each of the core units of ECOWAS highlighted earlier is assigned standard operating procedures in relationship to other units. For instance, the AHSG determines the general policy direction of the community and harmonizes and coordinates the economic, scientific, technical, cultural, and social policies of member states while overseeing the functioning of community institutions. Subunits develop policies and conduct activities within the overall context of AHSG strategic direction. In this way, peace and security policies and activities become the output of standard operating procedures invoked by respective subunits in relationship to each other.

Turpin and Marais’s approach builds on Huber’s (1981) “Program Model,” which emphasizes organizational decision-making behaviors and policies as the consequence of programs and programming. Because these are slow to change, according to Huber, organizational decision-making processes and outcomes are largely predictable from historical data. It is interesting to note how the expectation of certain outcomes can be understood based on a reflection of set historical facts about respective member states. Taking a more negative perspective, Das and Teng (1999) refer to the model of organizational procedures as the “Avoidance Model,” which views decision making as a systematic process aimed at maintaining the status quo at the cost of innovation. Krabuanrat and Phelps (1998), on the other hand, regard Turpin and Marais’s approach in a positive light, referring to it as a use of codified organizational experience.

Garbage Can Model

The “Garbage Can Model,” presented by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972, 1–3), describes decision making as “organized anarchy.” It assumes a pluralist environment with multiple actors, goals, and views and focuses on the fragmented and chaotic nature of decision making in organizations, rather than the manipulated and predetermined outcomes implied by other models. This model does not negate the primary role played by standardized processes initiated by the various units and subunits of institutions such as ECOWAS; rather, it underlines how decision making is shaped by the random, unofficial contexts in which interactions among official actors occur

and the dynamics of such interactions. In essence, decisions and policies are outcomes of several relatively independent streams and processes in an organization. The “garbage can” is constructed and symbolized by the fusion of multiple streams, including streams of problems, of solutions (looking for issues to which they might provide an answer), and of participants (whose attention is divided and who come and go).

Interaction of Actors within Institutions

The third relevant approach is linked to the contention by Schlager and Blomquist (1996) that the goal of formulating a political theory of the policy process is to explain how interested political actors interact within political institutions to produce, implement, evaluate, and revise public policies. They offer a methodological comparison of three approaches that, to varying degrees, can be associated with the policy formulation process employed by ECOWAS. These include the “Institutional Rational Choice” (IRC) model, which was previously analyzed by Sabatier (1991); the “Politics of Structural Choice” (SC), as developed by Moe (1990a, b); and the “Advocacy Coalitions” (AC) framework, also fashioned by Sabatier (1988).

Institutional rational choice. IRC theory conceives of public policies as institutional arrangements and rules that permit, require, or forbid actions on the part of citizens and public officials. Policy change results from actions by rational individuals trying to improve their circumstances by altering institutional arrangements (Bromley 1989). IRC explanations of institutional change further entail some presumptions about the individual actors and key critical characteristics of the “decision situation” in which the actors behave. Thus, IRC defines policy change in terms of actions taken to change institutional arrangements within a decision situation that is partially shaped by institutional arrangements.

Politics of structural choice. Moe’s (1990b) model of the “Politics of Structural Choice” (SC) conceives of public policies as purely institutional arrangements. While he acknowledges that institutional changes can be viewed as resulting from the efforts of rational individuals to solve problems that call for collective action and cooperate for mutual gains, he proposes that this mainly economic theory of institutional development be supplemented by a political theory that views institutional development and modification as political processes involving conflict over power (Moe 1990b). Moe views the formation of public policies (and the organizations that implement them) as

arising from the interaction of interest groups, politicians, and bureaucrats within the context of democratic politics. His “decision situation” includes a two-tiered hierarchy of political action, in which one tier is the internal hierarchy of the agency and the other is the political control structure linking it to politicians and groups.

Advocacy coalition. Paul Sabatier (1988) advocates an “Advocacy Coalition” (AC) framework that highlights multiple major actors and other variables at work in the process of policy change. Policy development and change is viewed as a function of (1) the interaction of competing advocacy coalitions within a policy subsystem; (2) changes external to the subsystem, such as changes in socioeconomic conditions; and (3) the effects of relatively stable system parameters, such as constitutional rules and basic social structures. The policy subsystem is the unit of analysis for understanding policy change, with the other two sets of factors constraining and affecting it.

The AC framework also emphasizes the role of information and learning as motivating factors in the process of policy development and change; thus, the policy process is conceived of as a continuous and iterative process of policy formulation, problematic implementation, and struggles over reformulation, rather than the unidirectional progression implied by heuristic stages (Sabatier 1988). Overall, the AC framework characterizes policy change as resulting from changing preferences or beliefs on the part of critical actors, as opposed to explaining it as a consequence of the appearance of new actors with different sets of preferences (Schlager and Blomquist 1996).

Comparison of the Three Models

The comparative work of Schlager and Blomquist (1996) notes that while each model has promising components, it nonetheless falls short of providing a full explanation of the processes of policy formation and change. For instance, with respect to ECOWAS, the potency of the IRC model shines through its suggestion of policy change resulting from actions aimed at improving circumstances by altering institutional arrangements within a decision situation. It appears to underline the motivation behind the creation of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) in 2008. Even though major conflicts in places such as Sierra Leone and Liberia had long been resolved, ECOWAS saw a need for a defensive framework that would serve as a reference for member states in their efforts to strengthen human

security. With the aim of improving circumstances, decisions were made to adapt the existing institutional mechanisms to create space within the ECOWAS system for cooperative interaction that could advance conflict prevention higher on the agendas of member states. More critically, this policy was underscored by the need to trigger timely and targeted multi-actor and multidimensional action to defuse potential threats in a predictable and institutional manner.

As in many fields within political science, Shlager and Blomquist (1996) explain, theories of the policy process are hard to delineate firmly because they overlap with and draw upon several related endeavors. Although the IRC model and, to a greater extent, Moe's SC model may be limited in their relevance for understanding ECOWAS's engagement with experts, the AC framework is somewhat useful to our understanding of the interaction between traditional actors in ECOWAS and "external" entities (that is, in the broader policy community). The AC model stresses the role of multiple major actors, which in the context of this study can be enumerated as ECOWAS, experts, research and academic institutions, civil society groups, and specialist networks.

Furthermore, our appreciation of the AC model is deepened by understanding what the model refers to as "other variables" at work in the process of policy change—actors such as academic experts, (social) scientists, and civil society activists who are constantly engaged by ECOWAS in a professional relationship guided by the concept formulation, analyses, syntheses, and theoretical reinforcement required for the process of making policy decisions.

The AC model also places primacy on information and learning as motivating factors in the process of policy change. This feature again represents what academic experts indirectly bring to bear on the policy process by contributing empirical knowledge and field experience. In fact, Howlett, Ramesh, and Perl (2009) base their identification of phases in policy formulation in which academics are involved—especially the appraisal and dialogue phases, when policy advisors and decision makers gather relevant information about the problem before evaluating policy options—on this perspective of the relationship between the policy process and academia. During the appraisal phase, ECOWAS accepts input about the issues and possible solutions. Academics and experts may contribute reports, analysis of data, and conclusions to observations regarding the policy problem. The dialogue

phase involves communication among stakeholders with different points of view. This phase is again an opportunity for academics and experts in different areas to participate in debates about different policy options. In both the appraisal and dialogue phases, the participation of academics and other experts complements the work of policy advisors on policy formulation.

OPTIONS FOR BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The task of bringing about a peace and security community of practice in West Africa requires clear interests, actions, and strategies on both the supply and demand sides. Here I highlight some of the activities that can promote an effective community of practice in West Africa.

Supply Side

The supply side relates to options available to experts, researchers, consultants, and civil society activists (and the broader policy communities) in West Africa for improving their interaction, engagement, and influence in ECOWAS's peace and security policy development processes.

Create courses and training modules on and for ECOWAS. On the supply side, the TCEs, mainstream academic and research institutions, and civil society coalitions in West Africa could explore and create specialized modules and training courses focused on ECOWAS as an institution and broaden and improve existing courses on peace and security issues (for example, electoral management, disarmament, and demobilization and reintegration). This would generate research and analytical interests among students and also serve as a learning resource for ECOWAS staff—for instance, as part of induction and refresher programs—as well as for civil society groups and media.

Invest and promote policy-relevant research. Given that the sources of most research and analytical projects undertaken by most members of West Africa's policy community are external, their efforts contain obvious gaps and misalignment with ECOWAS's peace and security agenda. Accordingly, a more systematic alignment of these activities with ECOWAS's priorities is imperative. This requires better coordination between ECOWAS and development partners (or donors) to identify shared interests and priorities on the one hand, and experts, civil society groups, and research institutions

consciously seeking to interlock their research agendas with ECOWAS interests on the other hand.

Define clear knowledge transfer strategies. Beyond conducting research, members of West Africa's policy community do not appear to have clearly defined strategies or a road map for infusing their knowledge and research findings into and influencing policy processes. Some of the current windows for engaging with and influencing ECOWAS policy processes are demand (ECOWAS) driven. The development by West Africa's peace and security policy community of such road maps and strategies for connecting with ECOWAS policy processes and activities is vital.

Forge effective institutional relationships with ECOWAS. Beyond its interaction with TCEs, ASSN, WANSED, and WAANSA, very little institutional relationship exists between ECOWAS and most of the rest of West Africa's peace and security policy community. Much of the current interaction is with individual experts or on an ad hoc basis. Mainstream research institutions (such as universities and research institutes), experts' networks, and civil society groups could benefit by either developing (institutionalizing) relations with ECOWAS or resuscitating existing channels of official relations (for example, WACSOF and TCEs). With regard to reviving existing channels, it will be important to transcend the ritual of signing MOUs by tying relationships to concrete sets of activities and deliverables through, for instance, research initiatives.

Demand Side

The demand side reflects opportunities available to ECOWAS for improving its engagement and interaction with and contributions to West Africa's policy communities in the development of peace and security policies.

Develop a functional database and systematic process for engaging experts. The development by ECOWAS of a systematic process for engaging experts—involving a functional database, selection criteria, and quality assurance mechanisms—could transform the organization's engagement with West Africa's peace and security policy community in at least three ways: (1) through the potential for building institutional memory and tracking experts' engagement and the impact of their contribution on policy development processes; (2) by improving transparency, clarity, fairness, and best practices;

and (3) by helping institutionalize a research, policy, and practitioner interface by promoting sustained engagement with thematic experts.

Establish an ECOWAS university for peace and security and a research fund. Beyond establishing strong institutional relationships with academic and research institutions, ECOWAS should invest and participate directly in policy-relevant research and analysis. The conducting of virtually all peace and security research outside of ECOWAS is highly unlikely to be sustainable over the long term. ECOWAS could explore the United Nations University model, with a multicampus system structured to reflect ECOWAS's own thematic priorities, including peace and security. Similarly, ECOWAS could set up a peace and research fund, dedicated to its core peace and security themes: peace operations, small arms and light weapons, natural resource management, piracy and maritime security, terrorism, mediation, and women. This would promote the undertaking of more policy-relevant research by West Africa's policy community and facilitate greater interaction and sharing of ideas and resources.

Increase the capacity of ECOWAS staff. ECOWAS must address the deficits in its staff, who are too few in number and not always hired for the right reasons. Having less than 25 percent of its positions filled naturally limits ECOWAS's ability to build and sustain fruitful interaction with West Africa's peace and security policy community and produce prompt and effective policy responses when the need arises. Reducing the gaps in staff capacity could transform ECOWAS's slow and inefficient bureaucracy, as well as increase points of contact and networking opportunities with experts, activists, and practitioners.

Invest in fragility assessment through mainstream research institutions. African peace and security institutions, especially the African Union, have shown increasing interest in switching their emphasis from crisis intervention to crisis prevention. ECOWAS fashioned the ECPF for similar purposes. Pre-crisis conflict and fragility assessment (research into the structural and remote causes and risks of large-scale political and security crises, especially armed conflict) is a critical component of the new policy focus that could transform ECOWAS's engagement with experts, TCEs, mainstream research institutions, and civil society groups through the development of appropriate templates, frameworks, and methodologies.

CONCLUSION

The institutional framework of ECOWAS's decision-making and policy development processes is marked by seven phases: needs identification and assessment, concept note development, identification and selection of consultants, experts' policy workshop and consultation, review and finalization of draft policy proposals, administrative approval (including legal drafting), and final approval by the relevant policy organ. Research institutions, experts, and civil society activists contribute to ECOWAS's peace and security policy development process thanks to extant relationships between ECOWAS and civil society coalitions and platforms (e.g., WACSO, ASSN, and WANSED), ECOWAS's MOU with training centers of excellence (KAIP, EMP, and NDCN) and academic institutions, the establishment of the (now defunct) ECOWAS policy analysis and strategic planning unit, the convening of special lessons-learned conferences and research initiatives, and short-term consultancies.

As described, the key milestones in ECOWAS's engagement with the broader peace and security policy community in West Africa include the infusion of experts into ECOWAS's workforce; the institutionalization of experts' workshops and consultations; the emergence of an expert cadre whose research, analysis, and practitioner work supports ECOWAS's peace and security agenda; formalized institutional relationships with training and research and civil society (practitioner) organizations; and the increasing interaction of research, policy, and practice.

Also highlighted are the challenges to ECOWAS's engagement with other peace and security policy stakeholders in West Africa, which include ECOWAS's political undercurrents (with tensions and divisions between Anglophone and Francophone member states), its capacity gaps, the variable quality of research by training and research institutions in West Africa, an ad hoc system of identifying and selecting consultants and experts, and funding issues.

Assessing the exact scope of influence exerted by West Africa's policy community on ECOWAS's policy development process or tracking how particular research ideas and findings become adopted as part of policy is beyond the remit of this study and calls for further research. Nonetheless, this study identifies practical ways of improving ECOWAS's engagement with experts, civil society activists, and practitioners and evolving a community

of practice. On the supply side are the establishment of courses and training modules for and on ECOWAS, investment in policy-relevant research, clear strategies for knowledge transfer, and effective institutional relationships. On the demand side, ECOWAS could develop a functional database to provide a systematic means of identifying and selecting experts to serve as consultants, increase the capacity of its staff, establish a West African university for peace and security and a research fund, and form partnerships with research and training institutions to conduct fragility assessments.

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NOTES

1. The author acknowledges the research assistance of Akinola Olojo and the insights provided by Babatunde Afolabi in the course of researching and writing this paper.

2. See ECOWAS Commission, <http://www.comm.ecowas.int>, accessed October 20, 2014.

3. Some of the earliest works on the subject by West African scholars include Aboagye 1999, Vogt and Aminu 1996, Vogt and Ekoko 1993, and Vogt 1992.

4. See "ECOWAS Commission at a Glance," http://www.comm.ecowas.int/dept/index.php?id=p_p1_commission&lang=en, accessed October 20, 2014.

5. Babatunde Afolabi (former programming officer at PAPS who worked on the development of the ECPF and PhD candidate at the School of International Relations, University of St. Andrews, UK), telephone interview with the author, February 16, 2014.

6. See West African Civil Society Network, "WACSO History," <http://www.wacsof.net/index.php/en/about-wacsof/2013-07-10-14-52-13>, accessed October 20, 2014.

7. See West African Civil Society Network, "About WACSOF," <http://www.wacsof.net/index.php/en/about-wacsof>, accessed October 20, 2014.

8. Interview with a former WACSOF senior program officer, Accra, Ghana, January 17, 2014. In some cases, the names of interviewees have been withheld in order to protect confidentiality.

9. Interview with a former board member of ASSN, London, February 6, 2014; See also African Security Sector Network, "Continental and Regional SSR Outreach," http://www.africansecuritynetwork.org/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=64&Itemid=170, accessed October 20, 2014.

10. See WIPSEN-Africa, "Past Activities: 2012," <http://www.wipsen-africa.org/wipsen/activities/past/>, accessed October 20, 2014.

11. See United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa), "The Entry into Force of the ECOWAS Convention on SALW," November 20, 2009, http://unrec.org/index/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=152%3Adeclaration-by-the-president-of-the-ecowas-commission&catid=39%3Apolitics&lang=en, accessed October 20, 2014.

12. See United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Regional Initiatives for Disarmament and Non-proliferation: Portfolio 2012–2015," October 2011, <http://unrec.org/docs/portofolio.pdf> (p. 15), accessed October 20, 2014.

13. Presentation by a serving PAPS program officer at an ECOWAS workshop, Lagos, Nigeria, December 5, 2013.

14. Ken Abotsi (senior policy advisor, GIZ West Africa), interview with the author, Accra, Ghana, January 18, 2014.

15. Dr 'Funmi Olonisakin (director of CSDG), informal discussion with the author, London February 6, 2014. See also Conflict, Security and Development Group, "CSDG/ECOWAS," February 19, 2010, http://www.securityanddevelopment.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=183&catid=40&Itemid=83, accessed October 20, 2014.

16. Babatunde Afolabi, telephone interview, February 9, 2014.

17. See ECOWAS, "Questionnaire for a Resource Book Project on: 'West African Scholars and Research Competencies in Regional Integration, Good Governance, Conflict Prevention, Peace and Security,'" <http://www.ecowas.int/ips/ii/security/en/doc/questionnaire.pdf>, accessed October 20, 2014.

18. Confidential telephone interview, February 13, 2014.

19. Confidential telephone interview with an ECOWAS official, February 10, 2014.

20. 'Funmi Olonisakin, informal discussion with the author, London, February 6, 2014.

21. Ken Abotsi, interview with the author, Accra, Ghana, January 18, 2014.
22. Confidential interview with an ECOWAS official, Accra, Ghana, January 18, 2014.
23. This is a shorthand term for Anglo–French rivalry in Africa (Chafer and Cummings 2010, 1130).
24. ECOWAS 2014a. The seven serving professional staff at PAPS are the commissioner, director, liaison to the AU, head of the Division of International Cooperation, head of the Division of Democracy and Good Governance, senior program officer for political affairs, and program officer for electoral assistance.
25. Confidential telephone interview with a serving ECOWAS official, January 30, 2014.
26. Telephone interview, February 17, 2014.
27. Interview, Accra, Ghana, January 17, 2014.
28. Amadu Sesay (author of the manuscript), informal telephone discussion with the author, November 10, 2013.
29. Interview, Accra, Ghana, January 18, 2014.
30. Confidential telephone interview with a serving ECOWAS-PAPS official, January 8, 2014.
31. For example, see ECOWAS 2014b.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Olawale Ismail holds an MPhil in international relations from the University of Cambridge and a PhD in peace studies from the University of Bradford. Ismail has written on a wide range of African security issues, including regional security, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, peace operations, security sector reform, radicalization, and terrorism. He is currently the head of research at International Alert in London. He previously worked at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and at King's College London.