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Potency of ECOWAS mission strategy in resolving electoral conflict in West Africa: A case of Côte d'Ivoire

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Conflict is inevitable in all human relations, but when managed properly, the cost in human lives and properties are minimized. This paper examined the extent of ECOWAS Peace Strategy in resolving the Post-Electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and the efficiency of the ECOWAS Election Mission Strategy. In-depth interview research design was adopted, that is, both primary (structured interviews) and secondary (contextual review) techniques of data collection were used. Through a qualitative approach, a total number of 15 key-informants were interviewed using the cluster sampling method. The results showed that ECOWAS adopted the mechanisms of mediation, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, diplomacy, negotiation, election observation and litigation to bring about peace in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010. Furthermore, internal identity based conflict, lack of structural and strategic election management strategy, border insecurity, not being proactive, lack of stable military force and politics among its member states were discovered as factors militating ECOWAS in its efforts to bring about peace in the sub region, while proper funding, emphasis on education sector, legislature actions, use of sanctions and regional cooperation were recommended. The study concluded that lack of financial and technical resources has limited the intervention of ECOWAS in conflict resolutions to only political and diplomatic approaches.

Key words: Post-election conflicts, conflict interventions, ECOWAS, Côte d'Ivoire.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire has suffered from conflicts that hinder development since the failed coup in 2002 (Gberie, 2005). There has been an incidence of conflicts and civil war since then with the current major post-election conflict in 2010. Although Côte d'Ivoire is a member of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), France was the first to intervene in the 2002 conflict when it was declared a violation of human rights

before ECOWAS deployed army contingents of West African states known as the ECOWAS mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ECOMICI) (United Nations to Côte d'Ivoire, 2003; Gberie, 2005). The mandate of the ECOMICI included monitoring of the ceasefire, ensuring the disengagements of the insurgents from the areas that had fallen under their control, and disarming the rebel group (Gberie, 2005).

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After the situation that necessitates the deployment of an armed force, ECOWAS successfully mediated the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire through peace agreements such as the Linas-Marcoussi agreement in 2003, the Accra III Peace Agreement in 2004, and finally the Ouagadougou Accord in 2007 (Laing, 2011). Another factor to ECOWAS success in 2002 was the relationship that existed between the members of the armed forces (ECOMICI, Forces Nouvelles and Licorne) which brought them together. Most of them were colleagues from the Côte d'Ivoire regular forces (Associated Press, 2011).

ECOWAS initiated and led the negotiations with the support of France that ended the ceasefire for the first time on 13 January, 2003 at the Lomé Agreement in Togo. This gave birth to the Linas-Marcousis Agreement in Paris, France. The Linas-Marcousis Agreement engaged governments of Francophone countries to define in detail with a timeframe an approach to achieve transparent and credible elections. However, this agreement encountered its own problems as Seydou Diarra (Former Prime Minister in February 2003 as part of a deal to end the 2002-2003 civil war) was removed and was replaced by Charles Konan Banny who was unable to take up his post in Côte d'Ivoire as result of the demonstrations in Abidjan. The situation was compounded by the ambivalent position of Laurent Gbagbo (then President) who referred to the Agreement as "proposals" (Gberie and Addo, 2004; Gberie, 2005). The ECOMICI forces were later subsumed under the UN flag as part of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) force on 5 April 2004.

The 2010 post-election conflict in Côte d'Ivoire

After the November 2010 presidential election which was held under the term of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement, it was argued that ECOWAS supranational role as the regional body was inadequate in de-escalating the post electoral violence that ensued after the announcement of the election result. The same arguments reflected in the presidential election of 2015 in the country. The diplomatic role played by ECOWAS was unable to get Laurent Gbagbo to vacate the seat for Alassane Ouattara, the acknowledged winner of the presidential election. The inability of ECOWAS to apply the use of force (as a last resort) in their mediatory role despite the declaration made on 24 December, 2010 created a vacuum that needed to be filled by a regional body. In essence, this study examined the factors that affected ECOWAS's role in resolving the Post-Electoral crisis in Cote d'Ivoire.

The combined team of Ouattara and Bedié in the 2010 presidential election runoff held on 28 November, 2010 dashed Gbagbo's hopes of winning (Cook, 2011). The UN-certified runoff results announced on 2 December, 2010 by Côte d'Ivoire Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) indicated Ouattara's lead in the election by 54.1% of the votes which was challenged by Gbagbo before the Ivorian Constitutional Council (Cook, 2011). The council reviewed and annulled the IEC results and declared Gbagbo president with 51.5% votes by invalidating the results declared by the IEC. National (the governments of Britain, France and the US), regional (ECOWAS, AU and EU) and international bodies entrusted the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General to certify the results. ECOWAS, AU and EU described the act of the Ivorian Constitutional Council as the government's attempt to inappropriately hold power against the will of the people (Loucoumane, 2010).

An ECOWAS summit held in Abuja on 7 December, 2010 endorsed the results of the presidential run-off declared by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to protect the credibility of the elections. This result was duly certified by the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations in Côte d'Ivoire in agreement with the UN Security Council Resolution 1765. Mr. Alassane Dramane Ouattara was recognized by most of the states according to the resolution as the President-elect of Côte d'Ivoire. The then president, Mr. Laurent Gbagbo was called upon to accept the outcome of the run-off presidential elections and hand over power to the elected president in the interest of the people of Côte d'Ivoire (Final Communiqué of Extraordinary Session of the Authority of Head of States and Government on Côte d'Ivoire, 2010). The acceptance of the run-off results by ECOWAS's was however criticized by some world leaders, including the AU's mediator (former South African president Thabo Mbeki). These leaders described the endorsement of Ouattara's win by ECOWAS as too quick (Zounmenou and Loua, 2011).

Intervention in the 2010 post-election conflict

The post-election conflicts immediately escalated to the level of human rights violation, which was condemned by a resolution on 23 December, 2010 by the United Nations Human Rights Council although Amnesty International criticized it as being insufficient (Zounmenou and Loua, 2011). A minimum of six people were killed during an attack carried out by the supporters of Gbagbo on 1 March during a rally by supporters of Ouattara. Foreign business and UN workers were also attacked (Voice of America, 2010). Several encounters between pro-Ouattara and pro-Gbagbo forces ended in the massacre (Amnesty International, 2010; BBC News, 2011; Andrew, 2011; Al-Jazeera English, 2011) until a joint UN and French intervention on 4 April, 2011 restored peace (BBC News, 2011). Intervention refers to a range of deliberate development, peace building, or humanitarian assistance or initiatives, which aims at positively influencing a conflict situation to foretell exacerbation of the conflict and

bring a reduction in violent conflict. An intervention in this sense has three distinct stages: planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (Demola, 2011).

The combined forces of the UN and France led the arrest of Gbagbo on 11 April at his residence (BBC News, 2011; Isakova, 2011; Voice of America News, 2011). Intervention in a conflict situation can take different methods or dimensions. One of these methods of intervention is the use of a peacekeeping mission. The objective of peacekeeping mission is to facilitate a peaceful conflict resolution. It could be carried out by regional, continental and international organizations as well as independent states, and coalition forces. However, ECOWAS did not use the last resort of force to prevent the massacre that resulted from the refusal of Gbagbo to accept the 2010 presidential run-off election results until the international agencies intervened (BBC News, 2011; Voice of America News, 2011).

This study drew attention to the effect of "sit tight syndrome" on the election. It examined the third party role of ECOWAS and focused on the weak intervention strategies adopted by the West Africa regional body in resolving the post electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. It also sought to add to the general body of knowledge and serve as reference materials to students and researchers on the subject matter.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

Côte d'Ivoire is a country in West Africa. It borders Liberia and Guinea in the west, Mali and Burkina Faso in the north, Ghana in the east, and the Gulf of Guinea (Atlantic Ocean) in the south (Redmond, 2009). The country gained independence on 7 August, 1960 under the leadership of Felix Houphouet-Boigny until 1993 when he passed on. Côte d'Ivoire, after independence kept a good political and economic relationship with neighbouring countries in the sub-region and also with the west, especially the Republic of France, its colonial master. The official language is French and the major religions are Islam, Christianity and various indigenous religions. The country was originally known in English as "Ivory Coast" until October 1985, when it was officially changed to Côte d'Ivoire. There was no conflict during the era of the first president from 1960 to 1993. The first coup-d'état in the country was organized in 1999 under the rule of the second president (Bédié). This was followed by a civil war in 2002 resulting from a failed coup-d'état. Although there was minor crisis in the country since 2002, the next major conflict was the post-election crisis in 2010. Côte d'Ivoire is a Republic with a strong executive power vested in the president.

The country is one of the 16 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Côte d'Ivoire was one of the first four West African countries that signed an agreement to form the West African Community in February 1965 but did not materialize. When the Treaty of Lagos was finally signed in 1975, Côte d'Ivoire was part of the 15 countries (Magazzino, 2016; ECOWAS, 2019).

Before the 2010 post-electoral crisis, Côte d'Ivoire was one of the largest economies in West Africa consisting 40% of the monetary union's GDP (Chafer, 2002). The economic base of the country is agriculture mainly smallholdings which attracted migrants from all over West Africa during the era of President Felix Houphouet Boigny (Niemann, 2011).

Methods of data collection and analysis

The researcher adopted the method of qualitative research comprising of in-depth interviews with key respondents, intellectual personnel on the nature and effect of the election management in Cote d'Ivoire and role of governmental and nongovernmental organisations in the crisis.

For this study, the researcher focused on analysing the role of ECOWAS in Côte d'Ivoire post-election crisis that resulted in the loss of lives and destruction of properties between 2010 and 2011 in relation to the presidential election of 2015 as well as evaluating the views and activities of some civil society groups and nongovernmental organisations that were present before, during and after the Côte d'Ivoire crisis. A total of 15 key informants were interviewed. The inclusion of civil society groups and NGOs in this study was because they are seen as closest entity to the people than the government or regional organizations. The findings were validated with secondary data from published articles, books, briefs and newspapers. Key informant who experienced the 2010 post-election conflict and are also expert in the field of political science such as electoral observers from ECOWAS Commission in Côte d'Ivoire, leaders of some of the civil society groups that played major role in the post-electoral crisis, leaders of some of the nongovernmental organisations, intellectual individuals (Professors and political science researchers) were part of the targeted audience. The eligibility of participants stemmed from their role in the observation and resolution of the 2010 post-electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, adoption of their documents as guidelines to electoral activities and their activities after the crisis now that relative peace is present in the country.

Data were collected using unstructured interview schedule, which provided an appropriate method for capturing more than structured answers (questionnaire type) regarding the communication model preferences of both ECOWAS and civil society groups in expressing their discontent and challenges in solving the crisis (Bohgard et al., 2009). A total number of 15 key informants were interviewed. The use of in-depth interviews helped provide more knowledge on the strategies and techniques employed by the parties in conflict to draw significant public support and loyalist to their cause. Questions bothered on the nature of the Côte d'Ivoire post-electoral crisis, the role played by the civil societies, NGO's and ECOWAS, the challenges encountered, and outcome of the resolution approaches adopted. Narrative technique and content analysis technique were used to analyse the primary and secondary data respectively. The procedure allowed each objective to be singled out and the required information from the responses critically extracted and analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ECOWAS Election Management Strategy

ECOWAS usually sends election observers to each member states during elections. The first group of observers are known as "long-term observers" or "fact-finding observers". Their duty is to monitor the conditions on ground if it is suitable for a free, transparent and above all democratic election, says a participant. Outcomes of the observation are documented in reports

to be submitted to the governmental committees and stakeholders, namely, civil societies, political parties and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to ascertain the reality on ground. Any undesirable conditions that will hamper free elections are resolved before final reports are prepared to the Chairpersons of the Committee of the Election Management Bodies (EMBs). A participant further explained:

"The long-term observers work within a period of one to two months before the elections, afterwards the short-term observers are sent for the election days. The short-term observers after arrival, dispatch themselves all over the territory of the country where the election is taking place.

Several criteria are considered in the recruitment of ECOWAS election observers. ECOWAS staff are also eligible to be recruited for this purpose. Election observers are trained at Kofi Anna International Peacebuilding Training Center (KAIPTC) in Accra, Ghana and certified. ECOWAS most often relies on the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) to identify NGOs to assist in the recruitment process. The AU and EU have been the main organization that supports the training of observers for ECOWAS. The EU regularly makes an open call to observers for trainings in Austria especially in the area of accessing funding for trainings and election observations. All cardinal points (North, South, East and West) in a country carrying out elections receive observers. At least two observers are sent to each region except in situations where initial survey revealed danger where less than the usual number will be sent to guard against both human and financial losses. Moreover, an observer can state that the posted location was not accessible due to pending danger. Population of regions or location of post is considered in deciding the number of observers to send to a place. Therefore, some locations may have more than two. Observers are not stationary; they circulate throughout the day and report in a systematic order their observation on daily basis to the election management commission.

Short-term observers of ECOWAS only operate at the polling stations where the voting is taking place. They move from one pulling station to another monitoring the conditions on ground if there are any irregularities. The long-term observers visit civil societies, government, political parties and other associations to ascertain if the environment is favourable for an election. They attend the opening of the polling stations and return to make observations at the closure also. Short-term observers are briefed based on the continuous report sent on the field to the electoral division cell of ECOWAS to review the political environment of the country and making suggestions on what could be expected as well as best ways to manage the situation before being dispatched to the field.

It is clear that observers cannot be everywhere at the same time and observe in full-time due to limited funding and manpower. To prevent bias in the work of observers, ECOWAS recruit only nationals of other countries beside the nation undergoing elections to have a greater chance of neutral reporting although it would have been less expensive to use national observers. The observation of a participant who was also an election observer stated that:

"The availability of funds to carry out election observation is a challenge to ECOWAS. They are sometimes funded by the European Union including extra interventions and a waiting force just in case of conflict during elections. Fund for election management is a problem in ECOWAS because member states do not pay their dues regularly."

Election management approaches of ECOWAS in the 2010 post-electoral conflict in Côte d'Ivoire

Diplomatic approach

In 2010, ECOWAS deployed pre-election fact-finding mission of five persons to monitor the readiness of the stakeholders for the elections in Côte d'Ivoire. According to a participant in the study:

"The stakeholders engaged on this mission included the electoral commission, the judiciary, the civil society organisation and the political parties."

Some of the information gathered by the mission included the preparedness of the electoral commission, the credibility of the whole electoral process and expectation of the stakeholders in the elections. The report of the fact-finding technical mission of ECOWAS showed credible, free and fair elections in both the first round and runoff in 2010 except little hitches in certain parts of the north. ECOWAS, as a "supranational organisation" does not need an invitation to observe election in any of the member states.

ECOWAS election observers usually use three forms out of the total of four (form A, B, C and D) to assess an election, thereby making the report of fact-finding mission credible and accepted by the organization. It was explained by a participant that:

"The form A gathers information on the opening of the poll on the election day, form B is generally on the commencement of the voting and form C covers the voting process including the closing of the poll. The fourth, form D which is not usually used is on the collation of results."

The second medium of observation was through the

Early Warning Mechanism in ECOWAS Commission that gathers information on all activities in member states. The Early Warning Mechanisms analyse and report potential conflict, ongoing or emerging conflict in the region and advice the president of the commission on actions to be taken. It also gives an outlook on the actors and the dynamics of the conflict or potential conflict. Through the findings of the Early Warming Mechanism, ECOWAS familiarised with the security challenges, tensions, and the feelings of discomfort by certain political stakeholders in Côte d'Ivoire (ECOWAS, 2014).

According to the second observer approach of ECOWAS, the post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire began when Bédié declared support for Ouattara in the runoff and made Gbagbo desperate to win without any major ally resulting in the manipulation of the process. The action of Laurent Gbagbo to unilaterally declare himself president without due course to the laid down procedure contained in the peace agreement, without recourse to the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and without recourse to the AU constitutive Act made ECOWAS take a stand and openly condemned the act (ECOWAS, 2001). Despite the outcome of the 2010 crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, the resident representative of ECOWAS in Côte d'Ivoire was of the view that;

"the credibility of the organization was tested and proven worthy by the process."

This was on the basis that; the report from the field on the first round of the 2010 election was accurate. ECOWAS witnessed the trend of the crisis by the uncomfortable security conditions Gbagbo created when the returns of the election were not in his favour that made the electoral commission move their base to a hotel to declare the results of the runoff. Moreover, the constitution of Côte d'Ivoire and peace agreement do not prevent the electoral commission from moving their base to a safe location like a hotel in this case (ECOWAS, 2001). Gbagbo violated both the peace agreement and the procedure of appeal of election results by declaring himself president. The peace agreement state that the UN through the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) must certify the results and whomever is certified stand elected until upturn by a constitutional court (United Nations Security Council, 2007).

Article 1 section 1 of the supplementary protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of ECOWAS gave the organization authority to interfere in the electoral crisis. Section 1 is about the Constitutional Convergence Principles and these are the most critical principle fostering good governance and democracy in member states (ECOWAS, 2001). Democracy goes beyond elections to build structural institutions to strengthen democratic values and practices in member states and ECOWAS adopted the diplomatic approach of constitution and agreements to achieve it. Based on the supplementary

protocol on democracy and good governance, ECOWAS concluded that Alassane Ouattara emerged as president of the 2010 runoff through a credible process (ECOWAS, 2001). Furthermore, a participant stated that:

"ECOWAS through their relationship with the European Union (EU) and the UN also announced sanctions on Côte d'Ivoire to frustrate Gbagbo out of the presidential seat for a peaceful transition of power."

Political approach

ECOWAS used an envoy as a political approach by appointed former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo to convey the offer of the organization to Gbagbo. The offer for a peaceful step down comprised of an exile abroad and a monthly stipend. The AU initially did not agree with the position of ECOWAS on the run-off outcome until a council meeting was called and ECOWAS presented their evidence to the situation. Moreover, an ad hoc high-level panel of five heads of state were formed to investigate the post-electoral conflict. The heads of states were; namely Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz of Mauritania, Idriss Deby Itno of Chad, Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania and Jacob Zuma of South Africa (ICG, 2011). On 10 March, 2011, AU released a communiqué endorsing the run-off results of the Independent Electoral Commission of Côte d'Ivoire.

The constitutional court which earlier nullified the run-off results and declared Gbagbo the winner was called upon by ECOWAS to swear in Ouattara as the president-elect of Côte d'Ivoire from the 2010 elections. The organization along with the rest of the international community admonished president-elect Ouattara to form a government of national unity and to take initiatives to promote national reconciliation (IPI, 2011). After AU realized that Gbagbo will not heed to the resolution, the organization made two additional and equally important proposals: (1) the appointment of a high representative to oversee the implementation of the resolutions; and (2) a timeframe of two weeks for parties to work out the modalities. All political approaches for a peaceful handing over of power was rejected by Gbagbo.

The Military approach of ECOWAS

When Gbagbo refused to cede power to the rightful winner of the 2010 presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire, ECOWAS had to issue a "threat" to him. According to a participant:

"The issue from ECOWAS was not a threat as such, but rather a mediation activity to speak to Gbagbo to respect the law of his country."

Heads of member states were involved in the process by engaging them to resolve the situation with Gbagbo as a colleague which he refused. All other mediation activities like the engagement of Obasanjo did not work. ECOWAS had no choice than to invoke the provision of its supplementary protocol (ECOWAS, 2001).

The aftermath was what could be described as "ECOWAS could bark but not bite". The peculiarity of the situation made it difficult for ECOWAS to come in with troops which could have caused the Gbagbo forces to attack Ouattara, who was still in the country at the Golf Hotel to be precise. It would have defeated the objective of the organization and lead to a lose-lose situation. Nonetheless, the approach of ECOWAS was the most developed peace and security architecture in Africa and the sub-region at the time.

The approach of ECOWAS as a regional organisation in resolving/mediating the issue in Côte d'Ivoire was observed to be appropriate as all available peaceful strategies were engaged for Gbagbo to step down according to a participant. However, the delayed effort of ECOWAS to use moderate force to ensure that the outcome of the elections was accepted by Gbagbo before the intervention of the French military forces was seen as weakness in the approach that made their effort lack robustness. The commendable approach of election observation and conflict resolution of ECOWAS lost relevance when it failed to successfully move Gbagbo out of power for the elected president to take over. The failure of ECOWAS followed by AU in resolving the situation prompted the intervention of the UN. Some of the participants observed that:

"The diplomatic action of AU in Côte d'Ivoire at the time that ECOWAS had resorted to force was the reason why ECOWAS backed out for UN and French troops to initiate military intervention. The lack of a standing force or army by ECOWAS was seen as a limitation to a military intervention in the post-election crisis in Cote d'Ivoire."

Although ECOWAS played a preventive, resolution and reconstruction role in line with the mechanism for conflict prevention, management resolution, peace keeping and security in the supplementary protocol on democracy and good governance, the outcome in Cote d'Ivoire could be termed as a failure to act on propositions (ECOWAS, 2001; Zounmenou and Loua, 2011). Moreover, the ECOWAS force was deficient to carry out the task evidenced by the support of Licorne (French troops on ground) to compel Nouvelles (pro-Ouattara force) to dislodge Gbagbo from power.

Since the intervention of ECOWAS in the Liberia and Sierra Leone crisis, the objectives of ECOWAS moved from just economic to include political and military intervention. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, ECOWAS is seen to have performed actively before and during the crisis. They adhere strictly to their various documents such as the Conflict Management Prevention Framework, Supplementary protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and ECOWAS Handbook on Election Observation. After the election result was announced and the crisis erupted following the declaration of the result, more action was expected from ECOWAS being the regional economic community to resolve the crisis. The lack of the use of force in addition to the diplomatic and political approach of ECOWAS could have informed and emboldened Gbagbo who now felt that nothing could be done to him or his troops if he refused to step down. Ultimately, force was the only medium for ejection of Gbagbo, which was carried out by the UN forces and the French troops.

Challenges of the 2010 post-election conflict resolution approaches in Côte d'Ivoire

Conflict resolution comes with common problems like financial and political challenges among others. ECOWAS was quick to stand firm on its protocols but lacked finance. The main funding states in terms of war have been Nigeria (Terwase et al., 2018). According to the State's Inspector and Chief of Staff of Former President Bédié, the slow decision of ECOWAS when force was needed after mediation failed gave hope to Gbagbo and his forces. Moreover, AU wanted a reorganization of the run-off until pressure was mounted through South Africa (because of the influence of South Africa in AU and their past relationship with Côte d'Ivoire) to accept the outcome of the already concluded and UN certified run-off results. The relationship with and strong role of South Africa in Côte d'Ivoire could be traced back to FrancAfrique Neo-Liberal system run by the first president of Côte d'Ivoire. The contradicting stands of AU and ECOWAS at the time of the elections was resolved when ECOWAS made a presentation at the AU Peace and Security Council meeting and requested that a high level panel should be set up made up of six head of states from African countries to carry out a fact-finding mission in Côte d'Ivoire, to find out who really won the election through due process.

ECOWAS was part of this technical committee to provide documentation for the fact-finding mission of the appointed head of states. Most importantly, the AU Committee was able to meet with all the parties including the head of the Electoral Commission which was then in exile in Ethiopia and the Constitutional Court which alerted the committee that the decision to give the mandate to Gbagbo was under duress according to a participant. The loyalty of the constitutional court to Gbagbo was based on the fact that the members of the council were appointed by the former President. Besides, ECOWAS was financially constrained in building forces and resources to carry out their position to the end.

The divided stand of ECOWAS member states on the decision of the organization was another challenge. Member states which agreed with the decision of

ECOWAS were willing to release resource to support the cause while other member states with varying opinions became a threat since they could counter any plan of the organization. Furthermore, a participant stated that:

"some of the heads of states in ECOWAS do not understand democracy because they practice little of such in their countries."

Unfortunately, Ghana which understood what democracy really meant did not have the military power to intervene in the crisis when called upon by ECOWAS. It is perceived that ECOWAS is a body with a name but within it are individual entities that operate their personal objectives and ambition for their countries outside what has been agreed on by members of the organization. There are a lot of opportunities to build the sub-region through ECOWAS if member states (heads of states) would put personal ambitions aside and focus on the development of the people in the region. To resolve some of these challenges, language barrier must be broken through exchange programs and backed by regional policies that encourage a positive perception of other countries (Betek et al., 2018).

Another school of thought of the challenge was the disjointed backing of continental (AU) and international organizations (UN) to ECOWAS in resolving conflict. A participant said that:

"If ECOWAS had an assurance with AU and the UN on the availability of their forces to implement military action, the situation would have been different. There was no assurance to declare a military or forceful removal of Gbagbo."

Although financial and logistic constraints were important challenges, the major, was the disunity within member states and at the continental level. It incapacitated the ability to reach a consensus on the necessary steps and actions needed to confront a conflict situation. This was the case of ECOWAS when Ghana refused to contribute troops or get involved in the Côte d'Ivoire conflict. The organization use to have a military force known as the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), but this is no longer functional. In addition, since the formation of ECOWAS, there has always been a division between the Anglophone and the Francophone speaking countries in West Africa. This could be one of the reasons why the President of Burkina Faso, Campaoré was given the mandate as chief mediator to mediate throughout the crisis.

ECOWAS's Election Management in 2010 - 2015 and preparation for 2020 Elections

Political conflict in Côte d'Ivoire could be dated as far back as 1993 when President Felix Houphouët Boigny

died and was to be replaced. A military coup in 1999 and the failed coup of 2002 further heightened the political tension and the likelihood of conflict even under democratic governance according to the Chief of Staff of Former President Bedie. ECOWAS has been in the scene since 2002 in resolving conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. Some of the intervention of ECOWAS were the negotiation of the first ceasefire; proposition and provision of buffer force; negotiation of peace agreements such as Accra, Lomé among others to stop crisis. Another example of these interventions was the Ouagadougou Agreement that facilitated the 2010 elections (USIP, 2003). A participant stated that:

"The framework of conflict mediation and crisis intervention set by ECOWAS paved way for other actors such as the AU, UN and the rest of the international community to intervene in the 2010 post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire."

The representative of ECOWAS in Côte d'Ivoire posited that there was no major conflict in the 2015 elections because the strongest opposition leader Gbagbo was no longer in the country and all radical followers of Gbagbo had been arrested. There was division within the strongest opposition party FPI. ECOWAS has issued the same declaration after observation of each election since inception. The declaration is to the effect that:

"We observed the election. The irregularities observed are not such as to impair the full credibility of the election."

This declaration is based on the number of cases recorded in an election. In situations, where irregularities would not affect the overall results, elections are accounted as credible. For instance, in 2010 and 2015 election in Côte d'Ivoire, the votes from certain regions (over 600,000) were cancelled because of the level of irregular incidence (ECOWAS, 2014). A participant stated that:

Parliamentary election was stopped in 2015 in some regions because of the level of violence that was observed."

The quantification of irregularities is a problem since wrong accounts could undermine the credibility of an election. In most of the cases, the numbers of incidences are used to quantify the irregularities before declaring the status of an election.

To see results from the education of citizens, a participant stated that:

"The timing of awareness creation for elections in Côte d'Ivoire has not been the best. ECOWAS and other continental and international organization usually rush into the country during the last two months of elections to

create awareness and expect a 100% results in terms of peaceful election."

This same approach of delayed public education about elections is already happening as the country prepares for the 2020 elections. A detailed organizational program should be designed by ECOWAS for the monitoring of elections in all West African countries which will resolve the challenge of two months' pre-election awareness. Every citizen especially political parties and die-hard followers need to be educated on the instruments, protocols and ECOWAS treaties on good governance in electoral processes. Currently, majority of the voting population comprise youth who have no knowledge of good governance and elections. By the year 2025, all 10-year-old citizens today will be ready to decide the fate of the country (voting age in Côte d'Ivoire is 18 years). If the trend of two-months' pre-election awareness and education is not stopped, there is a little change of success when it comes to free and fair elections without conflicts.

ECOWAS has several educative frameworks and institutions to implement such educative programs if they can be reinvigorated and made to be operational more than administrational. It is understood that the American democracy was not built in a month or two. Rather, it took at least two centuries of permanent civil education (Stromberg, 2011). A little more is required giving that democracy in Côte d'Ivoire and Africa is young.

The intervention strategies of ECOWAS in conflicts must be firm and pragmatic. This will be possible if structural and strategic methods in managing elections area improved. Credible, free and fair elections should be the responsibility of nations and not regional and international organizations. It is evident that organizations like the UN are not reported as key observers of the elections in USA, France among others although their representative may be on ground. This should have been the trend of elections in Africa. Unfortunately, national institutions can be easily manipulated by the contending political forces thereby making the presence of regional organizations such as ECOWAS relevant in managing elections in West Africa. A thorough and efficient observation of election is very expensive for even international organizations to bear. Therefore, the contribution of ECOWAS is commendable but requires consistent improvement especially in the area of education and awareness creation. States do not necessarily need ECOWAS, African Union, United Nations, France, and the United States to ensure that their elections are held in accordance with the principle of democracy. Moreover, election observation mission of ECOWAS is not an obligation. A participant stated that:

"It is unfathomable why parties of the same nation create an uncomfortable situation to the extent of human violation and destruction of lives and properties, in their *quest to overpower or rule the same nation they have destroyed."*

But to ensure the effectiveness of the regional organisation, ECOWAS need to structure its strategy to building responsible states in West Africa. By doing that, the role of regional organization like ECOWAS in the management of election will just be limited to ensuring transparency and even cease to be relevant with time. Public education about election process and awareness over the need for good governance and democracy would set the pace to achieve the target of no election observation in future according to some of the participants. The young ones must possess democratic norms and grow with it. The president of CIVIS-Côte d'Ivoire pointed out that making the Treaty of Good Governance, an essential instrument for education in West Africa at all levels of formal education and in youth organizations will reduce the number of hands recruited by political parties to carry out unruly activities during elections.

2020 election in view

Based on the prevailing conditions within the armed forces and the rivalry among competing candidates in the 2010 elections which resulted in a conflict, a participant stated that:

"there is a minor risk of conflict in 2020 according to the president of CIVIS-Cote d'Ivoire."

There was no conflict in 2015 because the army was fully under the control of President Ouattara. Currently, there is the problem of ex-combatants yet to receive the promises made to them amidst the possible instrumentalization of dissatisfied young people which would be because not all people can be satisfied by the output of a sitting president. Secondly, about 40 - 50% of citizens who were pro-Gbagbo are yet to be reached with the national reconciliation and social cohesion programme to reassure them of belonging to the same country and be content with their status. These too can cause a conflict due to the urge to take revenge. Finally, majority of the citizens are experiencing hardship caused by the increased living cost, as evidenced by the recent workers strike. There is therefore a probability of conflict from the stated problems and should be addressed before the election in 2020.

Awareness and public education about elections and politics is still very necessary if the ideology of the populace must be changed to avoid conflict in 2020. The issues that instigated the earlier conflicts were personal and could be revived anytime if appropriate preventive measures are not put in place for 2020. It was stated by participants that:

"The overheating of the political environment by individuals and groups must stop if conflict in 2020 must be prevented. Otherwise we should expect a repetition of conflicts."

The role of civil society groups in Côte d'Ivoire electoral crisis resolution

The constitution of Côte d'Ivoire recently recognized civil societies as an actor in the process of building democracy (Constitution of Cote d'Ivoire, 2019). Civil society organizations need to become more professional with a very clear and structured vision distinct from the 1960 definition that made everyone part of civil society according to a participant. A defined framework of operation is needed to transform the role of civil societies to yield similar benefits in other countries as seen in Benin, Nigeria, Ghana among others.

According to the President of CIVIS-Côte d'Ivoire, civil societies have actively participated in managing conflicts by the support provided to people affected by conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire since 2002. There is an up-to-date documentation on the active and perpetual involvement of civil societies in the conflict in the country. During the 2010 post-electoral crisis, NGOs provided humanitarian services especially to the displaced people. Civil societies frequently rang the alarm bell to alert citizens about the mistake of Ouattara by making use of confectionary argument in politics, although it was firmly criticized. In the same vein, the slippage of pro-Gbagbo elements also faced a lot of criticism by several NGOs and civil society. A participant stated that:

"The action of civil societies during the 2010 post-electoral crisis resulted in the killing of many and some of the actors were arrested."

There were several funding opportunities for civil societies to create awareness and train people on how to vote. The electoral system and civil societies operated actively in the first round of the presidential election because there was less of military involvement from the camp of the two opponents who went for the run-off.

Civil Society Organizations, such as Amnesty International monitors and evaluates the governance practices of sitting president and issue statements in relation to the type of rule being practiced in a giving time. Currently, the system in Côte d'Ivoire and most African countries do not give power to civil societies to openly criticize the activities of a ruling government. In Côte d'Ivoire, such organizations were tagged as enemies of the government or ruling party. This however failed to dissuade these organizations from pursuing their mandate of holding the government to account.

According to a participant who was currently the leader of the Ivorian Civil Society Convention (CSCI);

"Many citizens who were arrested during the crisis were released partly due to the continuous press statements and release from the biggest NGO in Côte d'Ivoire known as the Convention of the Civil Society of Côte d'Ivoire (CSC) or the Ivorian Civil Society Convention (CSCI), which brings together more than 200 of the main NGOs that exist in Côte d'Ivoire."

A regular consultation with civil societies in the region coordinated by ECOWAS will strategize and institutionalize the approach used. Reports and advocacy for democracy must be regular from the camp of civil societies to prevent another election conflict.

Conclusion

The need to maintain peace and stability in the West African region prompted the intervention of ECOWAS in electoral process of member states. The mediation strategy was adopted to proffer a solution to the post electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. Laurent Gbagbo was persuaded by ECOWAS to respect the result of the election and leave the office for Alassane Ouattara, the acknowledged winner of the 2010 presidential election. The mediation process failed to yield positive result because it was not backed up with force, which at that time seem to be the only option to remove Gbagbo and a stop the imminent violence. However, several factors seem to have thwarted the use of force. Some of these factors included; the division among member states, lack of support from the AU, the absence or inactiveness of the ECOWAS Standby Force and lack of adequate resources.

The election management strategies of ECOWAS in Côte d'Ivoire lacked both financial and technical resources to achieve set goals. When force was needed to calm the situation, the organization had no standing force to carry out her decisions thereby limiting the intervention approach to only diplomatic and political options. Currently, the limited funding for election observation cannot provide the needed information (maximum or total coverage of election conditions) for an efficient declaration of the status of an election without the citizens making it a responsibility to ensure free and fair election at each polling station. The existing approach of carrying out public awareness, conducted two months to election, has not helped in creating the awareness and voter education among the masses. The Treaty of Good Governance, and the supplementary protocols which became the foundation document in resolving the conflict should be transformed to an essential educational instrument for all levels of education and community awareness training. This could be done through the initiation of programs in synergy with the national representation of ECOWAS in every member state to educate the citizens on governance, elections and

electoral processes. This will ensure that majority of the citizens are aware of the provision of the protocol and treaty of democracy. ECOWAS already has several educative frameworks and commission to implement such education program when they are reinvigorated and made operational rather than administrative.

Although relative peace has been restored in Côte d'Ivoire, the post-election conflict peace initiative needs to be developed to return the country back to normalcy by building up structures that will aid the economic, social and political development. The political state of Côte d'Ivoire is very sensitive and necessitates pragmatic actions considering the fact that the country will be going for another election in 2020 despite the failure of the policy of reconciliation. There are risks such as pro-Gbagbo elements who are yet to be enrolled on the national reconciliation and social cohesion program, hardship evidenced by regular strikes and possible instrumentalization of dissatisfied young people, which should be critically addressed to prevent any form of electoral conflict in 2020. ECOWAS should, therefore, work with the civil society organizations in Côte d'Ivoire to improve the socio-political environment of the country. This will go a long way in unifying the country that was polarized into two factions by the 2010 post-electoral conflict.

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

1. Staff of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom
2. State's Inspector and Chief of Staff of Former President Bedié
3. The Resident Representative of ECOWAS in Côte d'Ivoire
4. Advisor for Military and Security Affairs of ECOWAS
5. The Representative of ECOWAS Staff in Cote d'Ivoire
6. President of CIVIS-Côte d'Ivoire
7. African Union and ECOWAS Electoral Observer
8. Lecturers at the University of Bouaké
9. Lecturers at the University of Felix Houphouet Boigny
10. Political scientists and staff of the "Centre de Recherche Politique d"Abidjan
11. Staff of SEPHIS NGO.
12. Students from University of Cocody at the Department of Philosophy.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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