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Support to ECOWAS to prevent and manage conflicts and security threats in West Africa

The Challenge

Over the past decade West Africa has continued to struggle with old and new forms of conflict and insecurity, including rebellions, violent extremism, communal violence, piracy, land-use conflicts and election-related violence. These challenges reflect deep-seated problems such as poor governance, economic stagnation, poverty, inequality and injustice, climate change and the marginalization of vulnerable groups such as women and young people. These root causes are magnified by the rise of extremist ideologies, the spread of illicit small arms and light weapons, the activities of organised criminal networks, corruption and poor management of natural resources, and the zero-sum nature of politics.

Most of these challenges cannot be solved by one country alone but require the institutions and member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to devise and implement joint regional strategies. However, despite well-developed policy frameworks, significant levels of political will, and valuable practical experiences in managing peace and security threats, ECOWAS continues to face challenges, including gaps in institutional and operational capacities and difficulties regarding coordination and implementation. These challenges cut across ECOWAS institutions, member states, and civil society groups in West Africa.

Our Approach

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the European Union (EU), the ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations (EPSAO)



Project name	Support to the ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations (EPSAO)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
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project supports the ECOWAS Commission in tackling these challenges by strengthening capacities in four crucial policy areas: peace support operations, conflict prevention, security sector reform and governance (SSRG) and electoral affairs.

Strengthening ECOWAS mechanisms to promote and maintain peace and stability

EPSAO works with the ECOWAS Commission and the regional Training Centres of Excellence/Training Institutions (TCE/TI) to improve the deployment readiness of the ECOWAS Standby Force by providing need-based training for military, police and civilian staff. The project also supports coordination and liaison between the ECOWAS and African Union (AU) in an effort to strengthen the implementation of the African Peace and Security Architecture.



Implemented by



National Center for the Coordination of
Response Mechanism in Guinea Bissau

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Left: Youth4Peace Nigeria
Consultations 2019, Abuja
Right: Brainstorming Workshop
West Africa Peace and Security
Innovation Forum, 2020, Lagos

Enabling ECOWAS to manage erupting or existing conflicts

To enhance implementation of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework as well as the Women, Peace and Security agenda ECOWAS with the support of the EPSAO project develops capacities in the areas of early warning, preventive diplomacy and mediation. In this context EPSAO provides assistance to the ECOWAS Commission for the establishment of National Early Warning and Response Mechanisms in five member states and for the strengthening of civil society-led early warning and national peace infrastructures in selected ECOWAS member states.

Contribute to the creation of a secure and safe post conflict environment

The project supports ECOWAS in promoting the implementation of its SSRG policy framework in member states. It also provides assistance to the ECOWAS Commission to support ongoing SSRG efforts in The Gambia and it strives to strengthen the national ownership of the Gambian reform process by supporting capacity building and sensitization measures for civilian oversight bodies and security sector actors.

Strengthening ECOWAS' capacities to support non-violent electoral processes

The project supports the deployment of experts to strengthen ECOWAS long-term observer missions and it assists the Commission to engage with its member states on the implementation of recommendations of election observation missions. EPSAO works with the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) to foster exchange and capacity building of national Electoral Management Bodies, including regarding the gender dimension of electoral processes. The project also supports civil society efforts to prevent and manage electoral conflicts and monitor electoral processes.

Partners

The principal political partner is the ECOWAS Commission, specifically, the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, the Early Warning Directorate as well as the Social Affairs and Gender Department.

Other beneficiaries include:

- ECONEC
- the TCEs and TIs: Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra, École de Maintien de la Paix Alioune Blondin Beye in Bamako, the National Defense College in Abuja and the Centre de formation au déminage humanitaire in Ouidah
- Civil Society Organisations.

Impact

With the support of the EPSAO project, consultations between the ECOWAS Commission and 210 young peace actors from all 15 member states were supported in 2019. The results are reflected in the continent-wide study on the role of young people in the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa and in the AU framework document on Youth, Peace and Security in Africa. With both documents, the African Union and ECOWAS for the first time have a broadly coordinated framework to better involve young people in peace and security processes.

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In cooperation with Economic Community of West African States
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