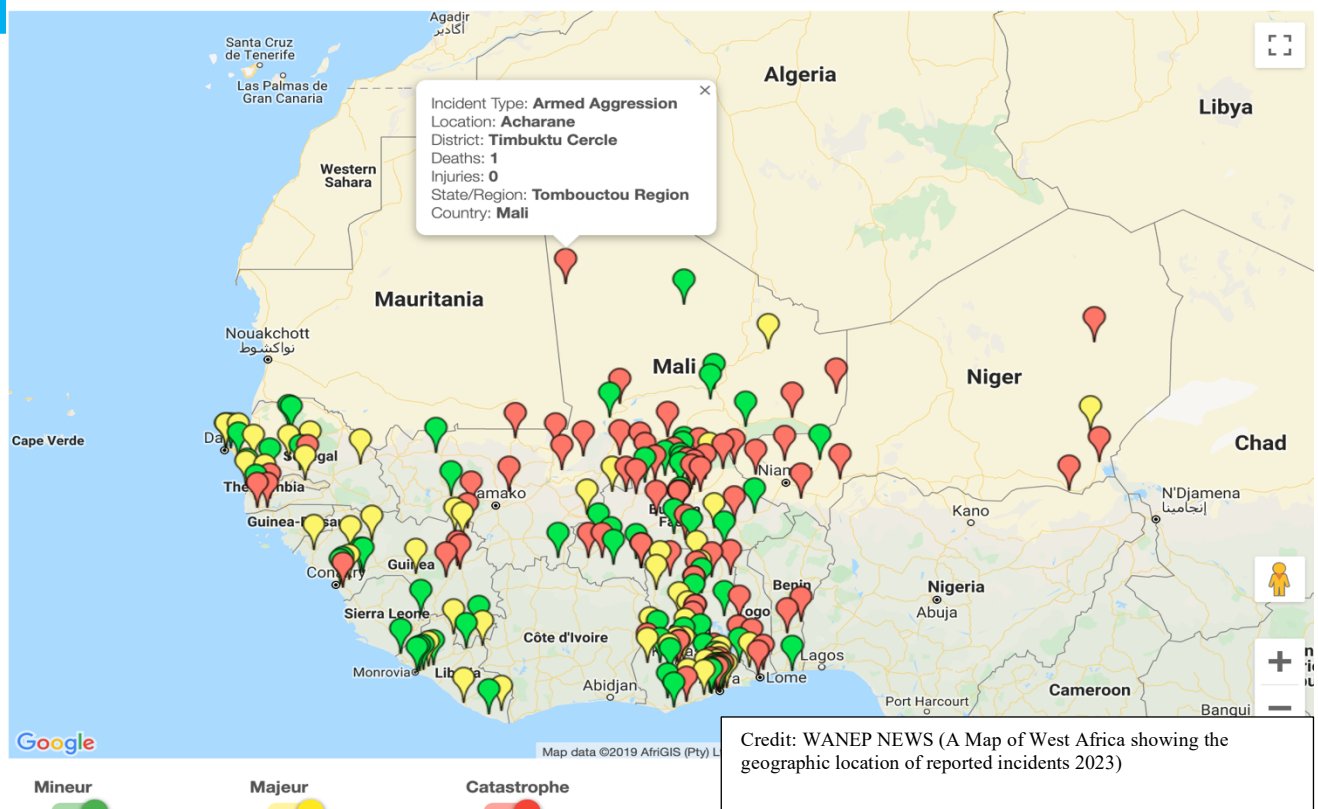




# WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING OUTLOOK 2024

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF ARMED ATTACK **1156**



WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING (WANEP)

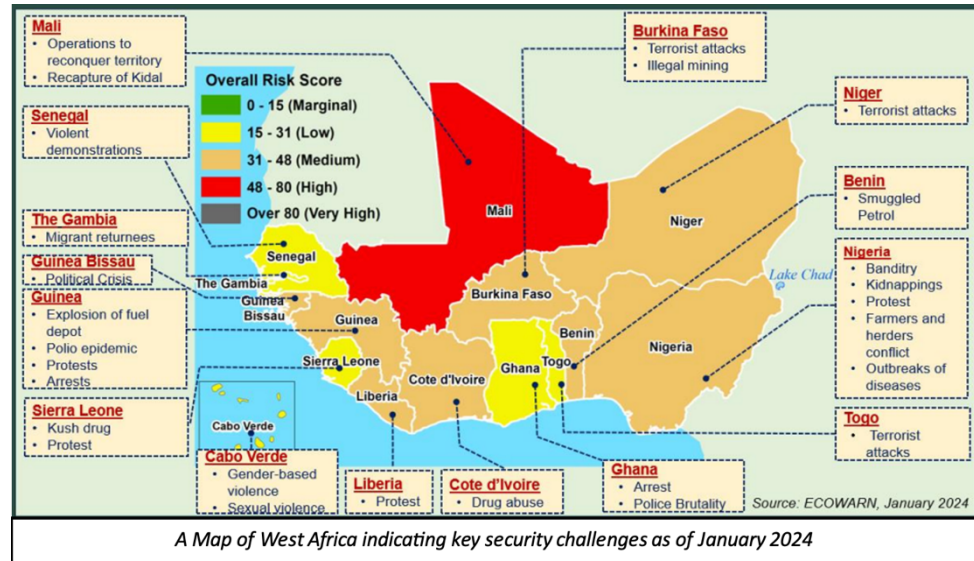
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

FEBRUARY 2024

## 1.0 Introduction

The peace, security and governance landscape of West Africa was characterised by a mixed fortune of progress and challenges in 2023. Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia successfully organised

presidential and legislative elections in February, June and October 2023, respectively. These elections and attendant political transitions were generally peaceful. In Nigeria, Bola Tinubu of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) was elected President



following his victory at the presidential elections conducted on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023. He took over from President Muhammadu Buhari who completed his two terms as enshrined in the country's Constitution.<sup>1</sup> In Sierra Leone, incumbent President Julius Maada Bio was re-elected for a second five-year term. While in Liberia, the main opposition leader and former Vice President Joseph Boakai was elected president following an intense election and run-off election with incumbent President George Weah. It marked Liberia's second peaceful democratic transfer of power since the post-civil war era. Equally significant were legislative and local elections held in Benin, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire and The Gambia in the review period. These elections constitute a step in strengthening democracy and good governance through a peaceful transfer of power amidst growing concerns about the dwindling culture of democracy in the region.

Despite some democratic successes achieved, the quality and credibility of elections in the region have been impacted by trends of electoral violence, intimidation of political opponents, and allegations of manipulation of results which affect the legitimacy and integrity of the electoral processes. In Nigeria, the main opposition parties challenged the presidential election results at the country's Supreme Court. In Sierra Leone, the All People's Congress (APC), rejected the outcome of the presidential election accusing the electoral commission of lack of transparency and inclusivity in the counting process.<sup>2</sup> These constitute a threat to democracy and also present symptomatic trends arising from protracted and unresolved political disputes with implications to the political stability of the countries and region.

<sup>1</sup> Independent National Electoral Commission. Available at [https://inecnigeria.org/?page\\_id=7246](https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=7246) (Accessed 12/12/2023).

<sup>2</sup> Sierra Leone's main opposition party rejects partial presidential poll results. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sierra-leone-main-opposition-party-rejects-partial-presidential-poll-results-2023-06-27/#:~:text=A%20provisional%20results%20sheet%20on,lack%20of%20transparency%20and%20inclusivity>. (12/12/2023).

The trend of Unconstitutional Change of Government (UCG) by the military through coups and attempted coups continues to increase in the region as exemplified by the overthrow of President Mohamed Bazoum who was overthrown by the Nigerien Presidential Guard on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023. The coup constitutes the fourth successful coup in West Africa in addition to Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea. It indicates a shrinking space for democracy with a growing threat to the ECOWAS peace, security and development agenda for the region. ECOWAS's response to these UCGs as enshrined in its Protocols has been the declaration of sanctions. However, diverse debates have emerged over the ECOWAS response strategy and its potential implications for further regional stability that is already fraught with economic and political uncertainties. Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and The Gambia recorded attempted military coups, while there were reported counter-coups in Burkina Faso and Guinea. Diverse debates on the drivers of this growing trend highlight widespread discontent amongst citizens over the nature and character of existing democratic structures and practices prevalent in the region which is exploited by the political elites while undermining popular participation and good governance. The complex mix of violent extremism and criminalities by non-state armed groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Islamic State in the Greater Sahel (ISGS) and Boko Haram further exacerbates regional peace and security.<sup>3</sup>

Socio-economic challenges arising from prevalent governance faultlines as well as global political dynamics have heightened human insecurity in the region. Reports indicate that these economic shocks have pushed an estimated 55 million people in Africa into poverty since 2020 and reversed more than two decades of progress in poverty reduction.<sup>4</sup> The West versus East geopolitics and divides arising from the Russia-Ukraine war constitute a reinforcing conduit for political instabilities in the region as exemplified by the competing influences of the West and Russia in the political conflicts of West Africa and ECOWAS. Meanwhile, West African states are still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic despite the various interventions at the national, regional and international level to ameliorate the impacts on countries' economies and livelihoods of populations. According to the African Development Bank Report, West Africa's economic growth has been tepid in the past three years – while the region recorded a growth rate of 4.4 in 2021, it regressed to 3.9 and 3.2 in 2022 and 2023 respectively.<sup>5</sup> Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in West Africa also decelerated to 4.1 per cent in 2022 and 4.2 per cent in 2023.<sup>6</sup> The impact was pronounced in countries whose local currency depreciated and had minimal fiscal buffer needed to cushion the effects of global inflation on domestic prices. Consequently, the UN Human Development Initiative Report classified most countries within the region among the least developed with a high rate of poverty in 2023.<sup>7</sup> The cumulative impacts on the security landscape of the region were evident in recurrent demonstrations, protests and

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<sup>3</sup> ACLED, (2023). Military Coup in Niger. Available at: <https://acleddata.com/2023/08/03/fact-sheet-military-coup-in-niger/> (Accessed 21/12/2023).

<sup>4</sup> Chatham House, (2023). *Annual Report: The Africa Programme in 2023*. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/regions/africa> (Accessed 21/12/2023).

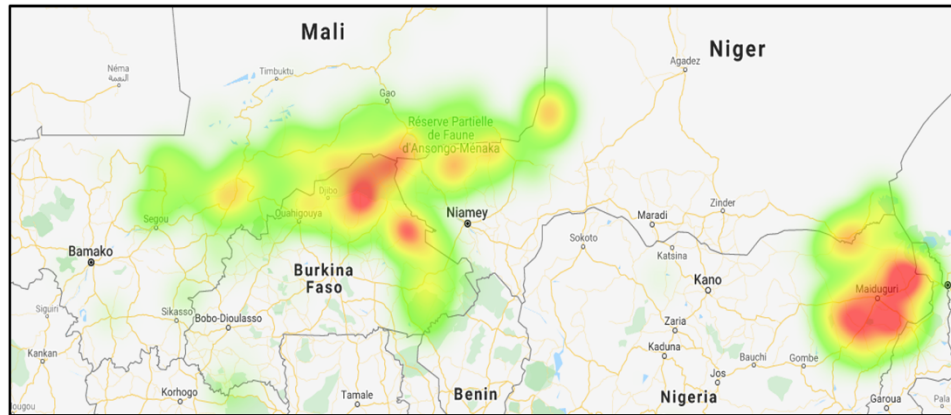
<sup>5</sup> African Development Bank Group (2024). *Africa's Macroeconomic Performance Outlook*.

<sup>6</sup> African Development Bank Group (2022). *West Africa Economic Outlook 2022: Supporting Climate Resilience and a Just Energy Transition*.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Development Programme and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, (2023). *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023: Unstacking Global Poverty: Data for high impact action* (Accessed 21/12/2023).

labour strikes which affected the existing fragile public service delivery systems and further fragmented social cohesiveness of communities across the region.

Forays and impacts of terrorism, transnational organised crimes and communal violence continue to expand within Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, as well as, the subsequent spillover to coastal states including Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo. The influx



Heat Map of Violent Extremism in Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso

[www.ecowas.int](http://www.ecowas.int)

of regular and irregular migrants and forced migration has added another layer to the humanitarian challenges and conflict dynamics in the affected communities within the coastal states. The spillover of the crisis in the central Sahel countries has become an existential threat to northern communities in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. Between January 2021 and October 2023, 882 security incidents were reported in the northern regions of the four coastal countries, including the emerging use of improvised explosive devices.<sup>8</sup> The frequent cross-border and internal displacement of populations has increased pressure on already weak social services such as health, nutrition and education and impeded access to limited vital resources including food, drinking water, and housing. Furthermore, it has heightened tension among communities while in some areas, has led to prejudice and violence against minorities.<sup>9</sup>

The year in review recorded gender and sexual-based violence, especially on women and children in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Rising armed conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies prevalent in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin Countries (LCBC) continue to weigh heavily on women and girls' security, impacting their access to education, health and economic livelihoods.

Climate shocks and slow-onset disasters are depleting existing natural resources including water, food, land, fisheries and biodiversity, particularly in the Sahel and Lake Chad which increases the vulnerabilities of communities to complex humanitarian emergencies. Other environmental risks recorded in the year include floods, fire outbreaks and road accidents. The threats of epidemics including the outbreak of Lassa and Yellow Fever, Cholera, Meningitis and Measles were prevalent in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone in 2023.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF (2024). Response to Coastal Countries Linked to Central Sahel Crisis Spillover Report.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

The analysis provided in the Annual Peace and Security Outlook of the region for 2023 reflects these dynamics as well as projects the risks of vulnerabilities and threats that could inform specific intervention strategies in 2024.

## 2.0 Democracy and Governance

General elections were held in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia in 2023. Ahead of the elections, these countries embarked on electoral reforms to ensure effective management and credibility of the electoral processes. These included amendments to the electoral laws to improve transparency in the collation and declaration of results, as well as improve women and youth representation in governance. These reform initiatives had varied outcomes in each country. In addition, Benin, Guinea Bissau, and The Gambia also organised various levels of elections within the reporting period. Nigeria’s presidential and legislative elections conducted in February and March 2023, respectively, were intended to utilize upgraded technologies to minimise incidents of election-related irregularities in the electoral processes. However, the elections were fraught with challenges including alleged systems manipulation, breakdown of biometric identification machines, failure in transmission of election results and eventual delay in the announcement of results. These challenges further demonstrate that technological solutions are valuable but insufficient in solving political problems when political interests have the incentive and ability to manipulate the technology. This has contributed to the growing distrust and lack of confidence of opposition parties in elections as well as some sections of civil society in the neutrality of the election management body and other democratic institutions. This was evident by organised protests led by the opposition parties against the outcome of the elections and the petition of the results in court on grounds of manipulation and alteration of the official results.<sup>10</sup> The petition trials followed a pattern seen in previous election-related cases in an attempt to overturn results that were not actualised.<sup>11</sup> The decision of the court to confirm the election results as declared



<sup>10</sup> UPDATED: Presidential election court sets judgement date for Atiku’s, and Obi’s petitions. Available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/619493-presidential-election-court-sets-judgement-date-for-atikus-obis-petitions.html#> (Accessed 09/01/2024).

<sup>11</sup> Nigerian Supreme Court Affirms President Tinubu’s Election Win. Available at [https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigerian-supreme-court-upholds-president-tinubus-election-win-2023-10-26/#:~:text=ABUJA%2C%20Oct%2026%20\(Reuters\),victory%20was%20marred%20by%20irregularities](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigerian-supreme-court-upholds-president-tinubus-election-win-2023-10-26/#:~:text=ABUJA%2C%20Oct%2026%20(Reuters),victory%20was%20marred%20by%20irregularities) (Accessed 12/12/2023).

by INEC has further reinforced public perception and distrust in the judiciary and the potential of that faultline impacting on future dispute management of elections in Nigeria.

Another challenge was the geopolitical, ethnic and religious dimensions related to the elections in Nigeria. The jettisoning of the zoning arrangement by the various political parties was a key subject of public conversations in the country. For instance, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), retained their presidential candidate from the North (former Vice-President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar) and a Southern, Governor Ifeanyi Okowa as Vice-Presidential candidate. This was viewed by many as a renege of internal party agreement to ensure geopolitical inclusivity in contesting for Presidential elections, particularly after eight years of northern rule led by former President Muhammadu Buhari. Although the All Progressive Congress (APC) observed the North-South power rotation, the choice of a Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket (Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, from the south and a Muslim/Senator, Kashim Shettima, a northern Muslim) had repercussions on internal party dynamics and national concerns over sensitivity of ethno-religious issues. These diversions from the norm raised concerns about the lack of consideration for Nigeria's geopolitical arrangement and religious pluralism in the nomination and election of Presidential and Vice Presidential aspirants. This is symptomatic of protracted ethno-religious tensions and conflicts as manifested in intra and inter-party disagreements as well as heightened tensions during the 2023 electoral cycle. Given this, the political landscape will continue to be tense and polarised in 2024 and beyond.

Electoral disputes and violence have been a critical concern in the political landscape of Nigeria. The 2023 elections were marred in some states by violence, physical attacks on election officials and destruction of voting materials. Between June 2022 and April 2023, data from WANEP NEWS recorded 265 violent incidents with more than 180 fatalities, particularly in Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Ekiti, Enugu, Gombe, Imo, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Lagos, Osun, Oyo and Rivers States. The data shows an increase in election-related violence recorded in 2023 compared to 152 incidents in 2019, while a decrease in fatalities from 626 in 2019 to 145 in the 2023 elections. The surge in electoral violence could be attributable to the spread of fake news, hate speeches and other forms of violence for political gains as well as heightened insecurity, especially in the Northern and Southern zones of the country. With this trend, the risks of violent escalations are higher in future elections.

Sierra Leone's multi-tier elections were held on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2023, amidst heightened political tensions and economic downturn. The elections were held against a backdrop of lack of inclusive participation of political parties in the appointment of the Commissioners of the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL), ethnic and regional polarisation as well as alleged politically motivated violence against members of opposition parties.<sup>12</sup> Before the elections, there were accusations by the main opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) and other political parties of interference and manipulation of state structures, persistent intimidations and unconstitutional dismissal of public workers in various sectors of the country. For instance, the High Court

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<sup>12</sup> Sierra Leone's 2023 General Elections: Challenges and Opportunities for Democratic Consolidation <https://wanep.org/wanep/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Sierra-Leone-PB5.pdf> (Accessed 12/12/2023).

judgement to remove 10 Members of Parliament from the opposition All Peoples' Congress (APC) paved the way for the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) to secure a majority advantage in Parliament in May 2019. Another contentious point was the Supreme Court decision affirming the Electoral Commission's proposal to conduct the 2023 Parliamentary and Local Council elections using the Proportional Representation (PR) system, rather than the constituency-based first pass-the-post-system that had been in place. On 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022, Members of Parliament from APC and SLPP physically attacked each other during a session debate over the Public Elections Regulations 2022, resulting in the expulsion of three Members of Parliament from the opposition APC. There were also reports of targeted arrests, detentions and trials of opposition leaders and their supporters for alleged public order offences and corruption charges. These events characterised the level of trust deficits among political parties which heightened tensions during the conduct of the 2023 elections. Even though the election process was adjudged to be peaceful by domestic and international observer missions, the result of the Presidential election was rejected by the opposition APC, accusing the Electoral Commission of irregularities and lack of transparency in the electoral process. Against this backdrop, the APC party instructed its elected officials not to participate in the governance process across the country as well as refused to petition the results of the elections in the Supreme Court. These actions reinforced their position and perception of the lack of objectivity of the judiciary and other democratic institutions within the political landscape of the country.

These dynamics notwithstanding, a political party dialogue process organised by the Independent Commission of Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC), and facilitated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Africa Union (AU), and the Commonwealth resulted in the signing of an agreement by political parties to commit to peace and also opened the space for continued political dialogue. In response to key commitments in the communiqué, the APC elected representatives have resumed duties in Parliament and Local Councils across the country. On 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023, the Government launched an Independent Cross-Party Committee on Electoral Systems and Management Review comprising political parties, the international community, civil society organizations and the media. The committee is responsible for reviewing the country's current electoral systems. Despite the agreement signed by political parties and other stakeholders, the underlying threats including accusations of political intimidation, violent attacks and the failed coup attempts in August and November 2023, are symptoms of a deeper political division that could wane the interest of the main opposition party in the activities of the committee. Also, it has the potential to undermine the electoral systems review process which has possible implications for the democratic stability of the country. Another action that may undermine inclusivity in the democratic process is the trial of former President Ernest Koroma on alleged treasonable offences related to the failed coup. In addition, reported reprisal attacks against the opposition members were evident as security forces conducted raids for alleged suspects.<sup>13</sup> While the opposition party has denied involvement in the attempted coup and condemned the attendant violence, there are concerns about the likely impact on political dialogue and the continued promotion of democratic practices in the country.

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<sup>13</sup> Sierra Leone's opposition APC denies being involved in attempted coup. <https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/sierra-leones-opposition-apc-denies-being-involved-in-attempted-coup/> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

Liberia's general elections and the presidential run-off were organised on 10<sup>th</sup> October and 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023, respectively. Despite some challenges related to the legality of the boundary delimitation and voter registration processes, limited logistics, and administrative capacity of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), domestic and international observers reported that the elections were well-managed, transparent and credible. The NEC declared Joseph Boakai of the opposition Unity Party (UP) with 50.64 per cent of the 1,608,395 valid votes cast, while incumbent President George Weah of the ruling Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) had 49.36 per cent of the votes in the run-off presidential election.<sup>14</sup> President Weah's congratulatory message to Joseph Boakai signals a further strengthening of Liberia's democracy in the post-civil war era. Despite this positive outcome, the country is faced with the perceived spread of corruption and a myriad of socio-economic challenges affecting the livelihoods of populations. According to Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perception Index, Liberia dropped to 145 in 2023, from 90 in 2016, out of 180 countries assessed globally.<sup>15</sup> This placed the country with the most significant decline in the fight against corruption in West Africa<sup>16</sup> – an indication that corruption in the country's public sector has worsened over the last six years despite efforts to curb bad practices. Also, the country remains among the world's poorest nations, ranking 178 out of 191 countries on the Human Development Index (2022).<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the Global Hunger Index (GHI) Report of 2022 categorises Liberia's level of hunger to population as "serious" with a score of 32.2.<sup>18</sup> Liberia also has a young population with a median age of 18.3 years and an unemployment rate of 2.29 per cent in 2023.<sup>19</sup> These are key challenges the new government will have to address to assuage the impacts on human security in the years ahead.

In Benin, the multiparty legislative elections conducted on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2023, represented a positive shift from the 2019 legislative elections which was boycotted by opposition parties. Out of the 109 members of the National Assembly, the opposition parties won 28 seats while the ruling coalition, Progressive Union for Renewal and Republican Bloc won 81 seats. The willingness of the opposition parties to participate in the elections is a strengthened opportunity for political reconciliation that mitigates the protracted political tensions and disputes in the country. Despite this development, there are reported indications of lingering controversy over the electoral and institutional reforms adopted in 2018 that continue to drive political disputes as the country prepares for the 2025 presidential elections.

The multiparty legislative elections of Guinea Bissau conducted on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2023 were contested by 20 political parties and coalitions. The results issued by the Electoral Commission indicated that 54 out of 102 seats in the National Assembly were won by a coalition led by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). Incumbent President Umaro Sissoco

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<sup>14</sup> NEC Results Portal. Available at <https://necliberia.org/results/> (Accessed 23/01/2024).

<sup>15</sup> Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perception Index. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>16</sup> CPI 2023 for Sub-Saharan Africa. <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2023-sub-saharan-africa-corruption-impunity-civic-space-access-justice> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>17</sup> Human Development Index Report, 2022. [https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf\\_1.pdf](https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf_1.pdf) (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>18</sup> Global Hunger Index (GHI) Report of 2023.

<https://www.globalhungerindex.org/liberia.html#:~:text=With%20a%20score%20of%2032.2,YouTube%20video%20is%20embedded%20here.> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>19</sup> Liberia: Youth unemployment rate from 2003 to 2022. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/812187/youth-unemployment-rate-in-liberia/> (Accessed 12/01/2024).



Embaló's Madem G15 party, won 29 seats, while the Party for Social Renewal (PRS) won 12 seats, the Workers' Party had six seats and the Assembly of the People United secured one seat.<sup>20</sup> Under the current political system, the majority party appoints the government but the President has the power to dismiss it in certain circumstances, often leading to political stalemates. A PAIGC majority in the National Assembly suggests that consensus building and bipartisanship would be a key tool in parliamentary deliberations and decisions. However, zero-sum political tussles continue to intensify competition between the President and opposition parties. In December 2023, President Embaló dissolved the National Assembly for the second time since he came to power in 2020, raising the prospect of further turmoil in the political landscape.<sup>21</sup> In addition to dissolving the legislature, the President accused the lawmakers and some members of his government of passivity in the face of violence and attempted coup. This development not only highlights the protracted political crisis but also undermines efforts to strengthen democratic governance in the country. The political deadlock and disagreement among stakeholders are likely to heighten tensions and undermine political stability in the country in the years ahead.

The Local government and Mayoral elections conducted in The Gambia in May and April of 2023 did not provide a majority winner amongst the political parties that contested. The ruling National People's Party (NPP) won a total of 53 seats out of 120 representing 44 per cent at the councilorship election and four (4) seats out of the eight local government areas, constituting 46 per cent while the opposition party won in all the four major administrative areas of The Gambia forming 50 per cent. The performance of the NPP in the election has been referred to as a sign of growing citizens' dissatisfaction with the ruling government's inability to address corruption, ethnic politics and other socio-economic faultlines in the country.<sup>22</sup> Another concern is the slow implementation of the recommendations of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparation Commission (TRRC) report presented to the Government in 2021.<sup>23</sup> Also, the Security Sector Reform (SSR) processes started in September 2017 led to the adoption of the country's first national security policy, but effective implementation of the SSR has been slow.<sup>24</sup> This is owing to several deficiencies, such as a lack of training, the politicisation of the security services and a loosely defined legal framework inherited from the regime of former President Yahya Jammeh. Further challenges are arising from an ongoing effort to adopt a revised Constitution expected to stabilise the democracy, peace and security of the country in 2024. However, there have been heightened public speculations and suspicions about the review process. A sticky point is a clause on the limitations placed on the use of executive powers by President Barrow to reset his eligibility to contest in the 2026 presidential election after the completion of his two terms by the end of 2025.

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<sup>20</sup> Guinea-Bissau opposition wins majority in parliamentary polls. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/8/guinea-bissau-opposition-wins-overall-majority-in-parliament-vote> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>21</sup> Guinea-Bissau President dissolves parliament after clashes. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/guinea-bissau-president-dissolves-parliament-after-foiled-coup-2023-12-04/> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>22</sup> The Aftermath of Gambia's Electoral Cycle: An Urbanite Rejection of President Barrow and his Party. Available at <https://alkambatimes.com/the-aftermath-of-gambias-electoral-cycle-an-urbanite-rejection-of-president-barrow-and-his-npp-party/> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>23</sup> FOROYAA (News, 2021) See: <https://foroyaa.net/trrc-to-submit-final-report-in-september/> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

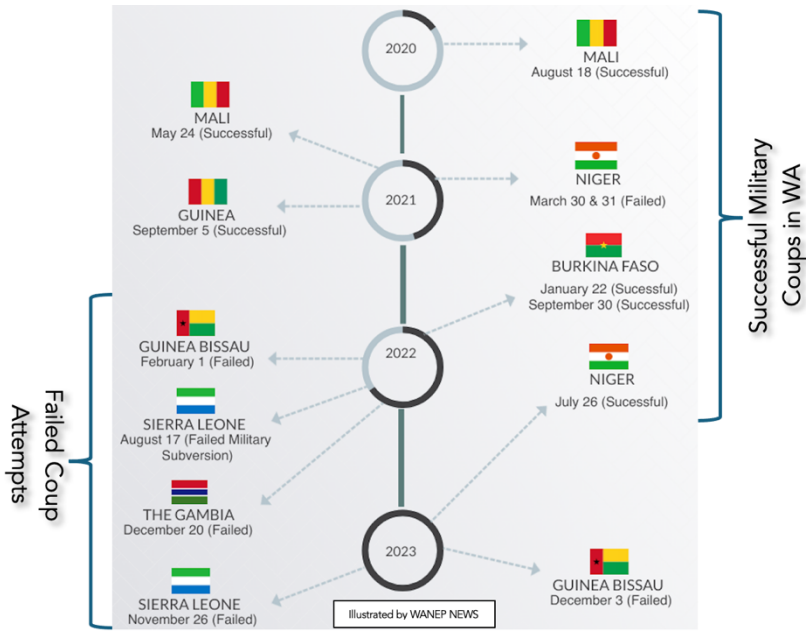
<sup>24</sup> Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Africa, PSC Report (2021). <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/the-democratisation-process-in-the-gambia-remains-fragile> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

In Cote d'Ivoire, the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) led by President Alassane Ouattara won 25 out of 30 seats in the municipal elections and 123 out of 201 municipalities in regional elections held on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2023. The RHDP also controls 56 of the 64 Senate seats.<sup>25</sup> The outcome of these elections which was characterised by reported cases of violence and accusations of a lack of transparency and inclusivity by opposition parties is a source of contestation and tensions in the already fragile political and security environment.

The Transitional Government of Mali organised a referendum on June 2023 to adopt a new constitution as part of the transition plan towards the return to democracy in 2024. The voter referendum has been criticized for low turnout as 39.4 per cent of 8.4 million registered voters participated in the process. According to the Election Management Body (EMB), 97 per cent of the votes were in favour of a new constitution despite the limited turnout in northern Mali due to security challenges. A reason for the low turnout was attributed to the boycott of the process by key opposition political leaders and a section of the civil society who criticised the lack of inclusivity as well as disagreements over some clauses enshrined in the draft constitution such as the indemnity clause which immunises current members of the Transition Government from judicial prosecution and their eligibility to contest as candidates in the democratic elections as proposed to be held in February 2024. These dynamics impact efforts for a democratic solution to Malian political crises and its democratic future beyond the Transitional Government.

The challenges of Unconstitutional Change of Government (UCG) through military coups, and attempted coups continue to undermine democratic governance and political stability in the region.

The Niger military coup of 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023 that overthrew the democratic Government of President Mohamed Bazoum is the fourth UCG in a region that is already grappling with the military governments of Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea. Since its independence in 1960, the country's political history has been dominated by military coups which have weakened the structure and systems for stable democracy and political stability. While the coup has strained diplomatic relations between Niger and ECOWAS as well as other international partners following the imposition of sanctions on the military regime, it has also galvanized cooperation with Burkina Faso and Mali through the establishment of the Alliance



<sup>25</sup> Local Elections in Cote d'Ivoire. Available at <https://democracyinfrance.org/local-elections-signal-the-death-of-coalition-politics-in-cote-divoire/> (Accessed 23/01/2024).

of Sahel States formed with the objective of mutual defence against external aggression or threats.

The recent announcement by the Alliance to withdraw from ECOWAS is an indication that the transition process to democratic governance as agreed with ECOWAS, especially for Mali and Burkina Faso has been significantly impacted. The Alliance's accusation of ECOWAS subservience to foreign interests, betrayal of founding principles and inhumane sanctions emasculating their economies<sup>26</sup> reflects the changing geopolitics as well as the lack of collective strength of the Community to address political and transnational insecurity that has threatened the development and stability of the region in the past decade. Prior to this action, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso had also withdrawn from the G5 Sahel and other joint security cooperations in the region.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the withdrawal of the French forces and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), undermines efforts to address the worsening violent extremism and terrorism crises in the Sahel and the region. The security vacuum has escalated the complexities of multilateral response to counter insurgency and armed conflict that is rapidly expanding and threatening the stability of the littoral states of the region.

Irrespective of the presence of the Wagner Group in Mali, the security situation continues to deteriorate as rebels and terrorist groups expand their operations from the initial north and central areas to southern regions. Terrorist expansion to the South is likely to disrupt economies of industrial gold mining and cotton production concentrated in the region. Meanwhile, the Government has more financial entanglement with Wagner and its subsidiaries for military assistance. In 2021, the Center for Strategic and International Studies report showed that Mali - one of the poorest countries in the world - was spending \$10 million a month on Wagner mercenaries, amounting to more than \$100 million annually.<sup>28</sup> On top of this, the group has gold and other minerals mining concessions under the deal struck with the military regime.<sup>29</sup> Already, trade and financial sanctions by ECOWAS against Mali in the first half of 2022 have dampened economic activities, increased social vulnerabilities and food insecurity.<sup>30</sup> Many of these effects were exacerbated by the rise in commodity prices including food, fuel and agricultural products, following Russia's war in Ukraine. These factors would have implications for the economic and security outlook of Mali in 2024.

Guinea's tangible pathways for a successful democratic transition are also impeded by the current stalemate between ECOWAS and the military authorities which hinders mediation efforts to restore constitutional order in the country. Another cause for concern in the current governance space is that unconstitutional changes of government and coups are becoming popular with each successful and failed attempt in the region. The reputation of ECOWAS as a

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<sup>26</sup> Ecowas: Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso quit West African bloc. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68122947> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>27</sup> Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force: Closed Consultations. Available at <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2023/11/group-of-five-for-the-sahel-joint-force-closed-consultations.php> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

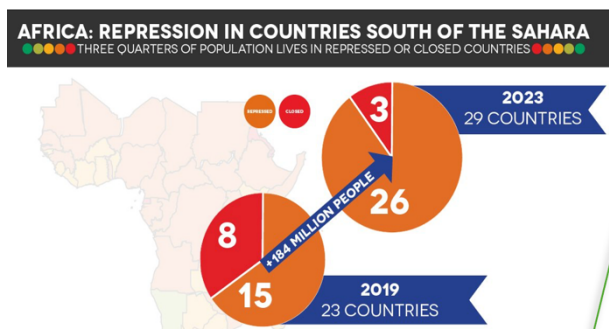
<sup>28</sup> Wagner in Africa. <https://www.dw.com/en/wagner-group-in-africa-what-are-the-stakes-after-prigozhins-death/a-66082570> (Accessed 12/02/2024).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Impact of ECOWAS Sanctions and the War in Ukraine. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2023/209/article-A001-en.xml> (Accessed 12/02/2024).

relevant regional community is also hinged on how it effectively deals with the current UCGs and political impasses in the region. The Community's responses to glaring attempts by leaders to amend constitutions to elongate their tenure in office, the string of coups in the region and the withdrawal of membership of the three central Sahel States, have been criticised for not doing enough to deter unconstitutionality, decline in electoral integrity as well as weak domestication and implementation of its Protocols and decisions in Member States. These recurrent political contestations in the region have the potential to taint ECOWAS' credibility and wane public confidence and trust in terms of its capacity to uphold democratic norms and consolidate the gains it has already made, and its ability to make further progress in democratic governance, integration and security in the region.

Other grounds for concern are the increased use of obnoxious laws to curtail dissenting views and human rights violations evident in the arrest of opposition figures, pro-democracy activists, and journalists, as well as the



By 2023, around 184 million more people live in repressed or closed countries south of the Sahara in Africa. The increment reflects both the population growth in these countries and the downgrade of countries over the years. In comparable terms, around 74% of the world population in 2019 lived in closed or repressed countries compared to around 66% in 2023.

In West Africa, press freedom violations have soared in the last year, including in countries ruled by military juntas. Following coups in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, Niger experienced a military coup in July 2023, which was followed by repression of peaceful dissent, including the arrest of renowned activist and journalist Samira Sabou.

(Source: CIVICUS – Monitor Tracking Civic Space 2019 - 2023).

killings of peaceful protesters in demonstrations, especially over the last three years.<sup>31</sup> These have contributed to shrinking the political spaces for inclusivity, and dissenting views and protecting the civil liberties of citizens in several countries in the region. Between January and December 2023, the region recorded 811 protests against economic hardships and political instabilities. This resulted in 271 fatalities and 561 injuries. While protests and demonstrations are fundamental elements of democracy, they could threaten social cohesion, peace and security when they break down into violence. Most countries in the region devastated by the economic downturn have resorted to borrowing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with stringent obligations to Structural Adjustment Programmes as conditions for assistance. These austerity measures are generating social unrest and citizen support for the unconstitutional change of governments.

The interface of global geopolitical conflicts and economic insecurity raises the stakes of the West and East struggle for influence in the region which jeopardises collective agreements for regional stability. The Russia-Ukraine crises as well as the Israel-Palestine wars constitute additional complexities given the political alignments of the Sahel countries to Russia to counter the historical French dominance in their former colonies. The impact of these instabilities is the snowball effect on food security, energy shortages and rising inflation. Existing records indicate that acute food insecurity had reached a 10-year record high in the Sahel with a worrying

<sup>31</sup> Rights Reversed: A Downward Shift in Civic Space (2019-2023). <https://monitor.civicus.org/rights-reversed-2019-to-2023/> (Accessed 12/02/2024).

expansion into coastal states.<sup>32</sup> This trend will continue to worsen the food and nutrition situation due to persistent insecurity and climate conditions that could trigger further population displacement, public discontent and protests across countries in the Sahel region.

## **Key Outlook in 2024**

### **Coups contagion and continued governance challenges**

- According to the International IDEA's State of Democracy in Africa report (2021), democracies in Africa decreased from 22 to 18 between 2015 and 2021.<sup>33</sup> In West Africa, the regional bloc has suspended four of its 15 members after their Governments were overthrown by the military. In addition, in the last three years, there have been records of failed coup attempts in Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and The Gambia. This suggests that democratic gains are being eroded by several constraints and challenges that reinforce the penchant for the return of the military into politics and governance. A recurring trend for these threats has been the widening discontent and distrust in democracy by the citizens who accuse the political elites of manipulating and abuse of existing democratic systems that prevent wider participation, inclusivity and consensus-building. There are growing concerns about malicious arrests and detentions of opposition figures, pro-democracy activists and citizens who dissent abuse of state power and authorities. Given these vulnerabilities across the region, there are potential risks of continued political and ethnic tensions as well as coup attempts that would undermine democratic governance and heighten political uncertainties in 2024.

### **Regional security stabilisation is critical**

- Since its establishment as a Regional Economic Community in May 1975, the current impasse faced by ECOWAS is considered a litmus test for its continued relevance not only to its political mandate but also to its 2050 vision for regional economic and social integration. Diverse analysis highlights the future credibility of ECOWAS will be dependent on how it manages and resolves the political crises as exemplified by the position of the AES countries, the tide of UCG as well as the weak or lack of commitment to its protocols and instruments by Member States. The rise of military takeovers and its popularity among citizens finds its justification in ECOWAS's weak implementation of its rules as recently presented by the AES as part of its reason for the withdrawal as Members of the Community. Wider criticisms also trail ECOWAS 'moral position' on matters of UCG while abuses to the democratic principles and ethos by its Members in violation of its Protocols remain unaddressed. The 'slippery' nature of the current political dilemma could define the trajectory of future coup attempts in other Member States which further weakens ECOWAS credibility and relevance in the region given the prevalence of economic, political and security complexities it faces at this time. A positive outcome is

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<sup>32</sup> World Food Programme, (2023). Food insecurity and Malnutrition in West and Central Africa at 10-year high as crisis spreads to coastal countries. Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/news/food-insecurity-and-malnutrition-west-and-central-africa-10-year-high-crisis-spreads-coastal> (Accessed 21 December 2023).

<sup>33</sup> State of Democracy in Africa report (2021). <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/sites/default/files/2022-11/state-of-democracy-in-africa-and-the-middle-east-2021.pdf> (Accessed 12/12/2023).

likely to reinstate its authority while strengthening its legacy and relevance as a regional bloc towards the achievement of its Vision 2050 agenda. To regain its credibility as a strong regional bloc, ECOWAS should maintain its commitment to resolving the crises brought about by the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, strengthening the obligation of its Member States to its Instruments and Protocols on Democracy and Good Governance.

### **Geopolitics and regional security**

- Geopolitics and the tensions between the West, Russia and China have triggered renewed political realignments, especially in countries of sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have aligned diplomatic relations with Russia and signed security cooperation with a Russian private security - Wagner Group as a strategy to counter the insurgency from extremist groups. Since the withdrawal of the French forces and other international peace support operations including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in Mali, armed non-state actors such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Katibat Hanifa have been exploiting the security vacuum to expand their frontiers of operations. The repercussion of these political and security crises is the likelihood of an increase in cases of impunity and human rights violations across the Sahel countries given the perception of non-obligation to Western-led multilateral cooperation by the Transitional Governments while armed non-state actors exploit and consolidate their operations in areas considered as ungoverned spaces with increasing cases of atrocities. It undermines the effort by ECOWAS to stem the tide of transnational crime and rising insecurity capable of leading to a surge in local protests and worsening state-citizen trust deficit in West Africa. Therefore, it requires multi-level advocacy, and diplomatic engagements to seek strategic policy alignments both at the level of the United Nations Security Council, and the Africa Union as well as multi-national cooperative mechanisms that are inclusive and enhance the position of ECOWAS to leverage its supra-national strength and role in Member States including the Sahel States.

### **Upcoming Elections in 2024**

- Ghana has successfully conducted eight elections since the country transitioned to constitutional rule in 1992, which have led to three peaceful power alternations between the two main political parties – the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the main opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC). Notwithstanding, tensions and violence remain protracted in Ghana's electoral cycle. Notably, disagreements over the electoral processes, ethnic cleavages, and allegations of abuse of power constitute recurring trends in its electoral processes. Similarly, politically motivated violence has been a recurring feature of Ghana's elections in recent times. For instance, the 2020 elections were characterised by some violent incidents that resulted in five deaths, including civilians and security officials in the Odododiodoo, Savelegu, and Tachimian South constituencies.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Myjoyonline (2020). 'Police Investigate deaths of 5 persons during 2020 general elections'. Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/police-investigates-death-of-5-persons-during-2020-general-elections/> (Accessed 30 January 2024).

Like the previous elections, it is worth noting that growing impunity among political actors and delays in the justice system to address petitions and other election-related offences could serve as motivation for violence and cause affected persons to use extra-judicial or other unlawful means to seek revenge. Concerning this, there is a potential that electoral violence could become cyclical, and result in reprisal attacks during every election. Already, there are growing tensions and disagreements among stakeholders, especially the NDC over the dismissal of the former Commissioners of the Electoral Commission (EC) on grounds of abuse in line with Article 146 of the Constitution.<sup>35</sup> Other concerns include the refusal of the NDC to participate in the Inter-Political Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) and the decision of the EC to use the Identify Card as the sole means to facilitate the new voter registration. A key outlook for 2024 is the waning trust and confidence of the NDC and a section of civil society in the neutrality of the current leadership of the Electoral Commission (EC). Another critical concern includes the ethno-religious factor, which poses significant risks and vulnerabilities to the country's stability. For the first time in the political history of Ghana, the presidential candidates of the main political parties, the NPP's candidate and incumbent Vice President, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia and NDC's flagbearer and former President, Mr. John Dramani Mahama are both from the northern region of Ghana, but adherents of the two major religions in the country. While John Mahama is a Christian, Mahamudu Bawumia is a Muslim. These dynamics serve as a litmus test to the country's religious and ethnic tolerance which is key to political stability in the lead up to the elections.

- In the last two decades, Senegal was widely acclaimed as a beacon of democracy and stability in West Africa. However, the decision by President Macky Sall to postpone the general election scheduled to take place on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024, on grounds of disputes over the candidate list was a threat to the political stability of the country. On 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024, Senegal's Constitutional Council delivered its decision to restore the presidential electoral calendar in accordance with Senegal's Constitution. Also, the assurances by President Sall to fully implement the Constitutional Council's decision and take the necessary steps to organise the election in a short timeframe demonstrated the resilience of the democratic structures in the country. Before this development, the political impasse was marked by violent demonstrations, arrests of protesters and political opponents as well as accusations of exclusion of key opposition political parties and their candidates from the electoral process. For instance, the arrests and detention of the opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko who was convicted on a separate charge of immoral conduct and sentenced to two years in prison.<sup>36</sup> The conviction led to multiple citizen protests and politically motivated violence that led to the death of more than 15 people in Dakar and other cities across the country.<sup>37</sup> Those events have cast a shadow of doubt on the confidence and credibility of the public in the electoral processes. Also, it

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<sup>35</sup> Article 146 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana\\_1996.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996.pdf?lang=en) (Accessed 20/02/2024).

<sup>36</sup> Senegal's Ousmane Sonko charged with fomenting insurrection. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/30/senegals-ousmane-sonko-charged-with-fomenting-insurrection> (Accessed 23/01/2024).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

has fractured the civic space, social cohesion and state-citizen relations with further implications for the peaceful conduct of the impending election. Thus, continued rising tensions and violence could undermine the possibility of mitigative responses that forestall political stability in Senegal before, during and after the election in 2024.

- In December 2023, President Embalo dissolved the National Assembly, which had been elected in June 2023, accusing the members of passivity in the face of violence and attempted coup. The opposition Pai Terra Ranka coalition led by PAIGC had an absolute majority in the previous legislature that was characterised by a lack of consensus building and bipartisanship. A new parliamentary election will be held, preferably in June 2024. However, the National Electoral Commission responsible for conducting elections is legally challenged to organise new elections as the tenure of the current Commissioners has expired. Given the current impasse, it is seemingly impossible for the various parties to agree on the composition of a new electoral commission ahead of the upcoming elections. Also, heightened political tensions and disregard for institutional political authorities continue to generate conflicts in the political landscape. These circumstances have the potential to negatively impact the peaceful conduct of the elections and the political stability of the country.
- Preparations for the 2024 legislative elections in Togo have gained regional and international focus. The last elections, in 2018, were conducted amid accusations of irregularities, exclusion, mass public protests and boycotts by the opposition coalition C14. In Togo, ethnic cleavages, a weak judiciary, abuse of incumbency and issues of exclusion, among others, are recurrent fault lines that continue to resurface and generate conflicts in every election. Notably, there is a continued lack of political will to ensure inclusive participation in political and electoral reform processes, including a return to the two-term presidential limit provisions in the 1992 Constitution, rising insecurity and socio-economic challenges in the country. This constitutes high-stake risks for the upcoming elections with the potential to negatively impact the peaceful conduct of the elections and political transition.

### **Key Resilient factors**

- Political and economic sanctions against the unconstitutional change of government, mediation efforts with countries in transition and preventive diplomacy undertaken by ECOWAS demonstrate its willingness to prevent the declining democratic values within the region. Also, the citizens and various civil society organisations in West Africa have commenced advocacy and consultations to engage the ECOWAS Commission and the Authority of Heads of State and Government to review the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance that will strengthen the Protocol, especially the adoption of a two-term presidential limit, respect for the Rule of Law, and human rights across the 15 countries in the region.



- ECOWAS, AU and UN have long-standing records of effective coordination and collaboration to support countries in transition. Typical examples are reflected in the conflict resolution and political transitions in Sierra Leone and Liberia between 1990 and 2003, as well as in Mali after the coup led by Captain Amadou Sanogo in 2012, providing an experiential learning curve for collaborative approaches for conflict transformation and support to fragile countries. This template and other existing policy frameworks such as the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, the AU and RECs on Peace and Security Councils, and other relevant international instruments can be utilised to enhance peace and security efforts in the region.

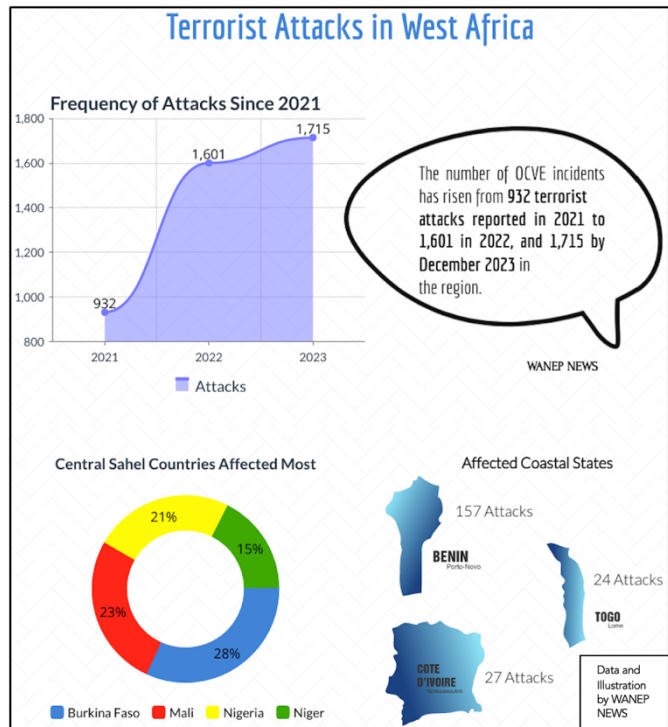
## **Recommendations**

- The leadership of civil society organisations in the region should consider the creation of a platform or coalition to undertake advocacy campaigns at track I and II levels to pressure representatives in Parliaments to bear pressure on the State to consideration of a review of the 2001 Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy, while ECOWAS should embark on shuttle diplomacy with the Council of the Wise to engage back door diplomatic shuttling with member states to influence the review and adoption of the Protocol to address the current dynamics in the region.
- The AU Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), especially through ECOWAS member states such as Nigeria, Ghana and Togo should intensify power mediation with continued bilateral engagement with ECOWAS to resolve strained relations with the countries in transition as well as find amicable political solutions to address the concerns of the Alliance of Sahel State.
- The need for the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) of ECOWAS to intensify partnerships with CSOs and international stakeholders to initiate sustained multistakeholder dialogues with political actors and other stakeholders in Senegal and Ghana that minimise distrust in the democratic process while mobilising confidence and commitment to the conduct of peaceful and credible elections in the two countries.
- Governments in West Africa, with support from AU, ECOWAS, UNOWAS and other development partners should strengthen multistakeholder collaboration to provide capacity building to enhance the operations of EMBs, security agencies and the judiciary to ensure effective election management and democratic policing to build trust and confidence among political parties and other stakeholders.

## **3.0 Organised Crime and Violent Extremism**

Terrorism and transnational organised crime remain a critical threat to peace and security in West Africa. Data from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS), indicate a comparative rise in levels of attack from 932 in 2021 to 1,601 in 2022, and 1,715 by December

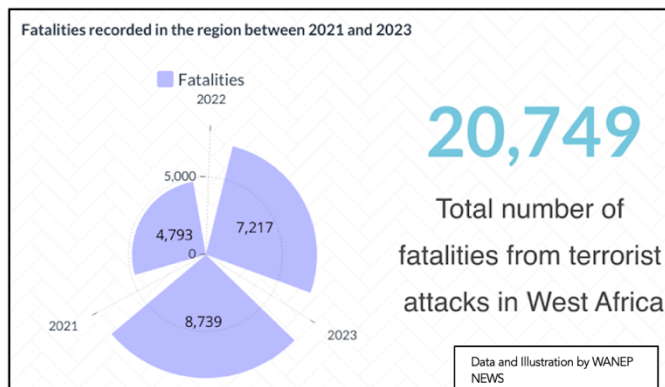
2023.<sup>38</sup> The four most affected countries are Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. Burkina Faso recorded the highest frequency of attacks accounting for 28 per cent with 479 attacks.<sup>39</sup> Mali recorded 394 attacks accounting for 23 per cent, while Nigeria and Niger recorded 361 and 263 attacks representing 21 and 15 per cent, respectively. The coastal states of West Africa recorded a cumulative total of 218 incidents which includes 157 attacks in Benin, 24 in Togo, and 37 in Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>40</sup> These attacks resulted in 8,793 fatalities across the region.<sup>41</sup> Security posts, worship places, cultural heritage sites, schools, mining communities and local authorities such as chiefs, religious leaders, teachers and opinion leaders were the main targets of attack in 2023.



Key among these attacks was the killing of 100 people by ISWAP and Boko Haram in Marte Local Government Area, Borno State, Nigeria in August 2023,<sup>42</sup> while in

September 2023, JNIM affiliated groups attacked soldiers and volunteer fighters in Koumbri, Yatenga Province in Burkina Faso that led to 53 fatalities.<sup>43</sup> Reported attacks in September 2023 at the Tombouctou region of Mali resulted in more than 60 fatalities.<sup>44</sup> Reported attacks in the Savanes region of Togo, led to 34 deaths in February 2023<sup>45</sup> while in Kpendjal Prefecture, two

civilians were killed by Improvised Explosive Device (IED) that also injured four soldiers.<sup>46</sup> In Benin, an unidentified armed group beheaded over eight civilians in the Atacora Department in May 2023, and another three persons were killed in the Alibori Department in September 2023.<sup>47</sup> The Ghana Government expressed concern that an escalation of violence in the northern region of Ghana bordering



<sup>38</sup> WANEP NEWS Monthly Bulletin (January – December 2023). www.wanep.org

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> See: <http://caert.org.dz/?p=3342#more-3342> (Accessed 11/12/2023).

<sup>43</sup> WANEP NEWS Monthly Bulletin (January – December 2023). www.wanep.org

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

Burkina Faso could benefit terrorist groups after unidentified persons attempted to destroy a bridge in Bawku, on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2023.<sup>48</sup>

State efforts within the region to counter increasing attacks and fatalities have resulted in recorded civilian casualties and human rights violations, especially in local communities. For instance, in December 2023, military airstrikes killed at least 85 people in Tudun Biri, Kaduna State of Nigeria.<sup>49</sup> In November 2023, at least 70 people were killed and several injured in a military operation at the village of Zaongo, Namentenga in Burkina Faso, when civilians were misjudged as militants.<sup>50</sup> The joint operation of Malian military and Wagner mercenaries in Soumpi, Tombouctou region led to 50 civilian fatalities in August 2023.<sup>51</sup>

A three-year comparative assessment indicates a sub-national and transnational expansion of attacks by armed groups beyond predominantly identified hotspots as well as reports of recruitments and payments, cattle rustling, animal poaching and illegal gold mining. Across the Sahel, the attacks by JNIM and its affiliates continue to impact communities along the borders. This includes Malam Faturi - a Northern Nigeria border community with Niger and Chad; the Liptako-Gourma area that intersects border communities of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali; Tinzauátene bordering Algeria, Mali and Niger and Porga community bordering Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. The vulnerability of these border communities to attacks is linked to the weak presence of state security, pre-existing ethnic tensions, prolonged and localised conflicts as well as exploitation of natural resources by armed groups.

The expanded operations of organised armed groups beyond the northeast and western areas of operation in Nigeria to the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja suggest deteriorating security infrastructure with implications on the ability of the State to maintain order and stability in the capital. The frequency and spread of attacks by armed groups in Burkina Faso beyond the initial areas of operation in the Sahel, Northern, Central-north and Eastern regions to the West bordering Senegal have led to the declaration of a state of emergency in 22 out of 45 provinces of the country.<sup>52</sup> The country has the highest victims of terrorist attacks in the world and in 2023, fatalities linked to armed violence increased by 77 per cent.<sup>53</sup> In Mali, terrorism has expanded across the North, Central and Southern regions following the withdrawal of the French and UN peacekeeping forces from the country. Between October and December 2023, there was an increase in the frequency of engagements between the Malian military and armed non-state actors over control of former UN military camps in Kidal and Gao.<sup>54</sup> Also, the country has experienced an increase of 150 per cent in fatalities linked to acts of terrorism in 2023, compared

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<sup>48</sup> Insights on Peace and Security Council (PCS). <https://amaniafrica-et.org/consideration-of-the-report-of-the-chairperson-of-the-au-commission-on-counterterrorism-in-africa-and-related-issues/> (Accessed 11/01/2024).

<sup>49</sup> Nigerian Army Drone strike Accident kills at least 84 Civilians. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/05/nigeria-army-drone-strike-accident-kills-civilians> (Accessed 27/01/2024).

<sup>50</sup> WANEP NEWS Monthly Bulletin (January – December 2023). [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Burkina Faso: Authorities impose state of emergency in 22 provinces. <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2023/03/burkina-faso-authorities-impose-state-of-emergency-in-22-provinces-from-march-30> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>53</sup> Insights on AU Peace and Security Council. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/consideration-of-the-report-of-the-chairperson-of-the-au-commission-on-counterterrorism-in-africa-and-related-issues/> (Accessed 10/01/2024).

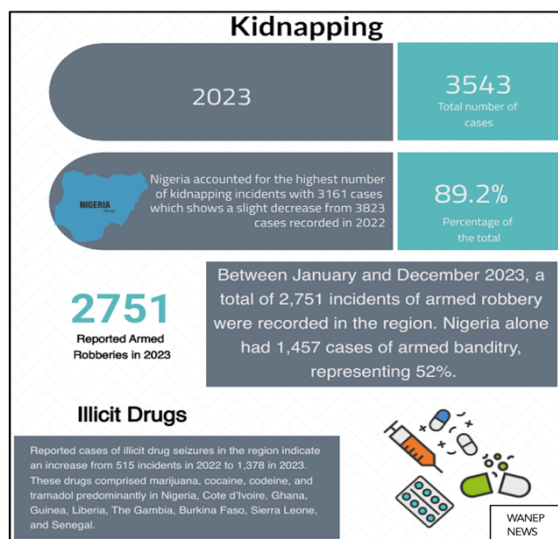
<sup>54</sup> Abandoned UN Camp Taken by Mali Rebels. <https://www.voafrica.com/a/abandoned-un-camp-taken-by-mali-rebels/7337044.html> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

to 63 per cent in 2022.<sup>55</sup> This illustrates a rapid deterioration in security conditions and increased vulnerability of the population as well as soldiers operating in the affected areas.

The humanitarian situation in the affected countries continues to worsen with the increase in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees and irregular migrant flows across the Sahel and Nigeria. In Burkina Faso, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance increased by 47 per cent, from 2.2 million in January 2021, to 4.7 million at the end of October 2023, due to the exacerbation of violence targeted at civilians and the lack of essential services such as health or education.<sup>56</sup> As of September 2023, more than 2.1 million people had been displaced representing an increase of more than 100 per cent compared to 921,000 in 2021.<sup>57</sup> Between January and December 2023, approximately 50 per cent of the 2.1 million people internally displaced in Burkina Faso were in the Sahel region with 80 per cent being women and children under 15 years of age.<sup>58</sup> In Niger, the frequency of armed attacks against the security forces and civilians has resulted in over 209,300 IDPs, especially in Tillaberi, Tahoua, Diffa and Maradi.<sup>59</sup> In Mali, over 8.8 million people required assistance by December 2023, representing a 17.3 per cent increase from 2022.<sup>60</sup>

Food insecurity is a key humanitarian challenge, in the central Sahel region and north-eastern Nigeria. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) estimates that 29 million people in the Sahel are food insecure with the number of hungry people set to reach a projection of 49.5 million people between June and August 2024.<sup>61</sup> The prevailing macroeconomic challenges, security and climate crises remain a potential factor in the deterioration of food security in conflict-affected countries.

Trend analysis reveals an increase in organised crimes such as armed robberies, kidnapping, human and drug trafficking and the proliferation of arms in the region. Between January and December 2023, a total of 2,751 incidents of armed robbery were recorded. Nigeria reported 1,457 cases of armed banditry, representing 52 per cent with 2,791 deaths and 1,065 injuries.<sup>62</sup> Incidents of



<sup>55</sup> Op. cit. Insights on AU Peace and Security Council.

<sup>56</sup> Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot. Available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-humanitarian-snapshot-31-october-2023> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Burkina Faso Crisis Response Plan 2023. Available at <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/burkina-faso-crisis-response-plan-2023> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

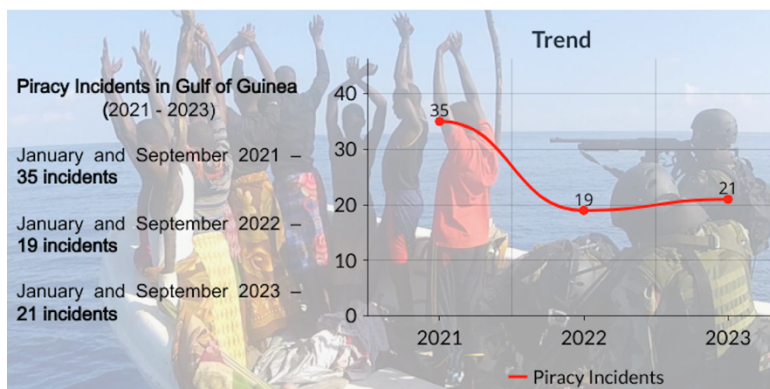
<sup>59</sup> UNICEF Niger Humanitarian Flash Update No. 5 (2023). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/unicef-niger-humanitarian-flash-update-no-5-20-october-2023> (Accessed 13/01/2024).

<sup>60</sup> UNHCR Factsheet on Mali. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/unhcr-mali-factsheet-november-2023> (Accessed 13/01/2024).

<sup>61</sup> Food insecurity and malnutrition have reached new highs in West and Central Africa. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/food-insecurity-and-malnutrition-reach-new-highs-west-and-central-africa-funding-address-acute-needs-dwindles> (Accessed 3/01/2024).

<sup>62</sup> WANEP NEWS Nigeria (April – December 2023). [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org)

kidnapping for ransom accounted for a total of 3,543 kidnap incidents in 2023. Nigeria recorded the highest number of kidnap incidents with 3,161 cases which shows a slight decrease from 3,823 cases recorded in 2022.<sup>63</sup> A total of 43 were recorded in Atacora and Alibori in Northern Benin in 2023.<sup>64</sup> Between April and June 2023, Ghana recorded 13 cases in the Savannah, Bono, Upper West, Upper East, Western, Eastern, and Central Regions.<sup>65</sup> Also, a total of 28 cases of kidnapping involving 38 aid workers comprising 31 national and seven international staff were recorded in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau in 2023.<sup>66</sup> This has a possible negative impact on humanitarian operations in the affected countries given the growing human security challenges in the region.



Incidents of crime in the Gulf of Guinea, especially along the coast of Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia were reported. Between January and September 2023, a total of 21 cases were documented compared to 19 for the same period in 2022.<sup>67</sup> Seventeen of the incidents were classified as armed robberies and four as piracy.<sup>68</sup> The increase in organised crimes in this

**Countries most affected include** Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. (Source: IMB Reporting Centre) region could be attributable to the sophistication of criminal groups and vulnerabilities to the socio-economic resources of the region. The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) Piracy Reporting Centre has predicted further deterioration of insecurity in the region, with risks to shipping vessel crew.<sup>69</sup>

Cases of drug trafficking and abuse remain prevalent and critical in the region. Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea recorded the trade and abuse of an illegal synthetic drug known as 'Kush'<sup>70</sup> among young people. Other reported cases of illicit drug trafficking and seizures indicate an increase from 515 in 2022 to 1,378 in 2023. These drugs comprised marijuana, cocaine, codeine, and tramadol predominantly in Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, The Gambia, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Senegal. Harmful drugs remain a key contributor to mental ill-health, crime, and violence among young people in West Africa.

<sup>63</sup> Nigeria Security Report 2023. <https://punchng.com/tags/2023-nigeria-security-report/#:~:text=Over%2010%2C000%20killed%2C%20abducted%20in,Report%20by%20Beacon%20Consult...> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>64</sup> WANEP Benin Monthly Bulletin (January – December 2023). [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org)

<sup>65</sup> WANEP Ghana Monthly Bulletin (January – December 2023). [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org)

<sup>66</sup> Aid Workers Security Data (2023). Available at

<https://www.aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/search?start=2023&end=2023&detail=0&country=BJ%2CBF%2CCI%2CGN%2CGW%2CLR%2CML%2CNE%2CNG%2CSN%2CSL> (Assessed 23/01/2024).

<sup>67</sup> Rise in Maritime Incidents and Piracy. Available at <https://iccwbo.org/news-publications/news/rise-in-maritime-incidents-and-piracy-reveals-latest-imb-report/> (Accessed 23/01/2024).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> "Kush" a form of synthetic cannabinoid routinely cut with an array of additives including acetone, the opioid tramadol and formalin.

The recurrence of farmer-herder conflicts, particularly in Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger led to a total of 380 incidents which accounted for 1,340 fatalities and over 200 injuries.<sup>71</sup> This trend is attributable to heightened competition over scarce resources between farmers and herders over water, land and pasture. Given the current security threats in the region, farmer-herder conflicts could be exploited by armed groups to exacerbate insecurity, especially in the central and southern regions of affected countries.

Other cases of violent conflicts in the region including inter-ethnic clashes and mob violence, are predominant in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Between April and December 2023, Ghana recorded a total of 91 incidents of ethnic clashes and mob violence with 43 deaths and over 30 injuries,<sup>72</sup> while Nigeria recorded 101 incidents of inter-communal violence with 286 fatalities.<sup>73</sup> The recurrent ethnic-related conflicts in Ghana could constitute a flash point of violence, especially in the predominant hotspots of the Northern region as the country prepares for general elections slated for December 2024.

## **Key Outlook in 2024**

### **Continued expansion of terrorism and transnational organised crime**

- The expansion of terrorist threats and linkages with transnational organised crime in West Africa remains palpable. Factions of Boko Haram and the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP) have extended their activities to Southern Nigeria and across neighbouring countries of Niger and Lake Chad Basin. According to the 2023 Global Terrorist Index (GTI) report, four out of the ten most impacted countries by terrorism were located in the Sahel region. Timeline analysis indicated that the JNIM and other extremist groups operating along the Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger borders have increased attacks to more communities beyond established hotspots. Beyond the Sahel, terrorist growing incursions into the coastal states of Benin, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire expose capacity gaps in State security institutions and effective multinational approaches to address this security trend. These expansions could likely continue in the years ahead.
- The ECOWAS counterterrorism strategy and the 2020-2024 medium-term Action Plan on countering violent extremism require a multistakeholder review and strengthening community resilience to respond to the surge in crime and conflict in the region. The implementation of the existing counterterrorism strategy and action plan do not seem to align with national priorities and actions to deter the growing multi-dimensional threats to peace and security in the region.

### **Strained diplomatic relations and international cooperation**

- Strained diplomatic relations and international cooperation continue to undermine and pose security threats across the region, especially in the Sahel countries. The UCGs in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger and their recent position to withdraw their

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<sup>71</sup> WANEP NEWS (April – December 2023). [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org)

<sup>72</sup> WANEP NEWS Ghana (April – December 2023). [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org) (Accessed 30/12/2023).

<sup>73</sup> WANEP NEWS Nigeria (April – December 2023). [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org) (Accessed 30/12/2023).

membership of ECOWAS exposes faultlines within the capacity of the Community to ensure the actualisation of the political transition plan as agreed with the military governments. The diplomatic relations between ECOWAS and the Alliance of Sahel State (also known as AES in French) comprising the three States in the Sahel continue to deteriorate which further affects any attempt to address expanding transnational crime that requires a regional approach for success. The Alliance members have also withdrawn their cooperation from various regional and international multilateral security arrangements including G5 Sahel, and there have been concerns around their active participation in other arrangements such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and Accra Initiative (AI). Also, their strained relationship with France and other Western countries has led to Mali's official termination of diplomatic and defence cooperation with MINUSMA as of 31 December 2023. Similarly, the non-cooperation of the Sahel countries to bilateral support from regional, continental and other international partners undermines collaborative efforts to restore democracy, good governance and security stability in the Sahel and the West Africa region.

### **A surge in organised criminal violence**

- The emerging trend of kidnapping and armed banditry in the region is gradually spreading to less prone countries such as Benin, Ghana and Togo. Analysis suggests that kidnapping has become a significant source of revenue for terrorist and criminal groups operating in the region. In October 2023, suspected JNIM operatives kidnapped members of the Fulani community in Materi in Benin and demanded a ransom of 15 Million FCFA (*Franc of the Communauté Financière Africaine*).<sup>74</sup> Similarly, recent reports have shown that more than 1 Billion Naira has been paid to various criminal groups as ransom in some high-profile incidents between January and December 2023 in Nigeria.<sup>75</sup> The trend in crimes, particularly kidnapping, does not only indicate the existence of alliances and collaboration between internal and external organised crime groups in carrying out their operations but also suggests the lucrateness of the payouts which has led to its commercialisation. This continues to elicit local and national criticisms with concerns about the effectiveness of the nation's security architecture in dealing with these violent incidents in the region.
- Illicit weapons proliferation has been linked to the growing spate of armed attacks, ethnic clashes, homicides and other crimes in the region. According to data from the Nigeria Security Report, 7,472 fatalities from arms-related crimes were recorded between January and October 2023.<sup>76</sup> Communal and ethnic violence was predominant in Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Ghana. For instance, violent clashes were recorded in April and May 2023 between sedentary Djerma and nomadic Fulani herders in villages and hamlets along the River Niger in Niger, resulting in several deaths and injuries. In Ghana, the protracted Mamprusi and Kusasi conflict in Bawku in the Upper East Region has spread to neighbouring districts like Bawku West, Pusiga, Garu Tempene, Bolga, Walewale and parts

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<sup>74</sup> Op Cit. Understanding the motives for kidnapping in north Benin is a crucial initial response to the security crisis.

<sup>75</sup> Beyond Abuja: 19 states battle kidnap-for-ransom. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/01/beyond-abuja-19-states-battle-kidnap-for-ransom/> (Accessed 10/02/2024).

<sup>76</sup> Nigeria Security Report 2023. <https://punchng.com/tags/2023-nigeria-security-report/> (Accessed 23/01/2024).

of the Bono region.<sup>77</sup> In the Savannah region ethnic conflict between Gonja and Mamprusis led to the burning of villages and 10 fatalities in June 2023.<sup>78</sup> The historical antecedent and protracted unresolved drivers of the violent dispute suggest that the conflict is likely to continue in 2024.

- Human trafficking and the sale of human organs have expanded in the last three years. Growing insecurity in the Sahel and socio-economic realities have created conditions for transnational organised crime to thrive in the region. It amplified the exploitation of young people exposed to risks associated with irregular migration within the region and across Europe through to the Canary Islands in Spain. An illicit network of traffickers exploits women and girls in sex trafficking across the region, while young victims are forced to work in cocoa harvesting farms in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire; palm wine extraction and other agriculture sectors in rural Nigeria; gold mining in Burkina Faso, and domestic service in urban cities across the region and the continent. Even though most States in the region have strengthened legislation and established institutional frameworks to combat human and organ trafficking, the efforts are often outweighed by the complexities of the issue, including weak implementation of policy actions, inadequate border security control, existing transnational networks, poverty, and cultural factors. Given this limitation, the trend is likely to continue in the years ahead.

### **Key Resilient Factors**

- ECOWAS, AU and UN continued engagement with the Transitional Governments in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The recent Extra-Ordinary Ministerial Session of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council held in Abuja, Nigeria on February 8, 2024, resolved to assess the challenges presented by the withdrawal of the AES countries, and the potential implications to the ECOWAS Vision 2050 and regional integration.
- The African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) at its 1163<sup>rd</sup> meeting held at the Ministerial level on 21 July 2023, on Community Responses to the Security Challenges in the Continent adopted a Communiqué<sup>79</sup> that emphasises a shift in the AU context of the implementation of the Africa Peace and Security Architecture towards the inclusive contribution of non-state actors in addressing the growing multi-dimensional threats to peace, security and development in Africa. The communiqué also reemphasized the integration of the community dimension into the early warning and early response mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery, stabilization and development. The important aspect of the communiqué is the decision to dedicate one open session each year to consider community responses to security challenges in Africa.

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<sup>77</sup> WANEP Ghana Monthly Bulletin (January – December 2023). [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org)

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> AU PCS 1163<sup>rd</sup> Meeting Communiqué (2023). <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/a-3> (Accessed 12/02/2024).



- The Transitional Governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have signed the Liptako-Gourma Charter, creating the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) as an architecture for collective defence and mutual assistance. The three countries committed to combatting all forms of terrorism and organised crime in their common area, as well as armed rebellion or other threats to their territorial integrity and sovereignty. This has led to the deployment of security personnel in cross-border communities. Military forces of the Alliance conducted joint security meetings and operations in the last quarter of 2023.
- Civic education through multistakeholders' engagement in terrorism and violent extremism in the region is an ongoing process. Civil society-led initiatives such as the Research and Action for Peace (REcAP) Network, coordinated by WANEP in partnership with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Danish Refugee Council, have been providing platforms for inclusive dialogue and strategic road maps that contribute to addressing violent extremism amidst political uncertainties in West Africa and the Lake Chad Basin.

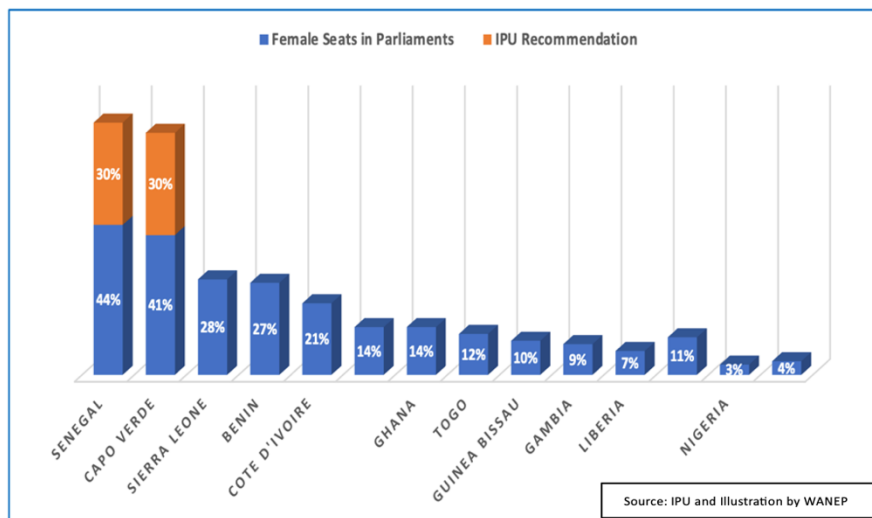
## **Recommendations**

- ECOWAS, AU and development partners should reinforce strategic dialogue and multilateral negotiations through key political influencers and the Panel of the Wise with the three Sahel States, to resolve strained diplomatic relations and ensure resumed cooperation that enhances response to terrorism and transnational organised crime in the region.
- The Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS should reconsider its commitment to a multistakeholder review of the region's 2020-2024 medium-term Action Plan on countering violent extremism, especially enhancing community resilience that responds to the expanding threat of crime and conflict in the region.
- Joint regional infrastructures for civilian-security intelligence monitoring and analysis should be encouraged and intensified to link kinetic and non-kinetic interventions for comprehensive mitigation of terrorism and transnational organised crimes in the region.
- National Peace Infrastructures should integrate Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) within their strategic framework to enhance the effectiveness of policy with community resilience programs to mitigate the impact of extremism and crime on citizens.

## **4.0 Gender, Peace and Security**

In West Africa, some States have advanced progressive governance policies and laws to create spaces for women and youth participation in political leadership that aligns with the global women and youth peace and security agenda. A good practice in this regard is the increase in women's representation in the Parliament of Sierra Leone. The Gender Equality and Women's

Empowerment (GEWE) Act 2022, was leveraged to ensure 30 per cent gender inclusivity of appointments and elected positions in the 2023 elections. This affirmative action led to the



increase of elected women in Parliament from 11 per cent in 2018 to 28 per cent in 2023.<sup>80</sup> In addition, 14 out of 66 Ministers and Deputies of the Government of Sierra Leone are women and young people constituting 21 per cent.<sup>81</sup>

Despite this positive development, the region is still challenged with

ensuring effective implementation of the WPS and Youth Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. The challenges include weak implementation of national and international policies and laws to protect youth and women’s rights as well as gender inclusivity in politics and decision-making processes. For example, in Nigeria despite the huge voting population of women, gender representation in politics remains weak and one of the lowest proportions in Africa. Twenty (20) out of 469 lawmakers are females in the country.<sup>82</sup> This is below the 35 per cent gender threshold in line with the National Gender Policy of 2006. Also, at the State House of Assembly level, no female representative was elected in 15 out of Nigeria’s 36 States.<sup>83</sup> Despite all political parties in Nigeria adopting the 35 per cent gender Affirmative Action in their party manifestos, implementation is weak. In Ghana, an analysis of results from the District Assembly elections in 2023 shows that a total of 4.1 per cent of the 243 Assembly members elected were females.<sup>84</sup> At the Unit Committee elections, 3,335 out of 5,666 female candidates for the Unit Committee election won, representing 12.8 per cent of the total elected members.<sup>85</sup> The low participation and representation of women in decision-making processes is attributable to entrenched gender inequality, intimidation and election-related violence fostered by socio-cultural and economic conditions. This could suggest the inadequate gender consideration by the State to ensure the protection of women.

The growing insecurity in the region continues to have an impact on youth, women and girls. A total of 345 healthcare facilities have been closed with women and children having limited or no

<sup>80</sup> Key Insights Report: Women Representation in Sierra Leone. <https://awokonewspaper.sl/key-insights-report-womens-representation-in-sierra-leone/> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Worrying Trends of Women’s Representation. <https://placng.org/Legist/worrying-numbers-for-women-in-10th-nass/> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> 2024 Inauguration of District Assemblies and Unit Committees: Women still underrepresented?

<https://www.modernghana.com/news/1293240/2024-inauguration-of-district-assemblies-and-unit.html> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

access to health services due to insecurity.<sup>86</sup> Transfer of patients has become difficult due to the unavailability of ambulances as well as limitations caused by the State of Emergency imposed in the 22 provinces of Burkina Faso. Also, more than 11,000 schools have been closed in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria affecting children's rights to basic education.<sup>87</sup> In addition, 22 per cent of Burkina Faso's educational facilities are still closed, affecting more than 880,000 pupils,<sup>88</sup> while some schools are closed down and transformed into temporary shelters for internally displaced people, notably in Boulsa in the Centre-Nord region. In Niger, 987 schools were closed in Tillaberi, Tahoua, Diffa, and Maradi as of October 2023, affecting 85,534 children of which 48.8 per cent are girls.<sup>89</sup> In Mali, a total of 391,961 people have been internally displaced<sup>90</sup> and over 1,545 schools closed affecting almost 516,000 children.<sup>91</sup> Insecurity and displacement in the Sahel continue to deny children access to education, entrenched child labour as well as recruitments into terrorist and armed groups.

There were also recorded cases of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in the region. For instance, Nigeria recorded 27,698 cases of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) between 2020 and 2023,<sup>92</sup> while Sierra Leone recorded over 8,670 cases of sexual assaults against women and girls between 2021 and 2023.<sup>93</sup> In Liberia, 2,675 cases of sexual and gender-based violence were recorded as of June 2023,<sup>94</sup> while Guinea reported 110 cases of rape against girls in 2023.<sup>95</sup> Perpetrators of sexual violence against women and girls in the region are mainly linked to members of the families, teachers and elderly men in the victim's communities. The involvement of family and community members in SGBV reveals a decline in social protection values and safety nets that protect women and girls in communities across the region.

## Key Outlook in 2024

### Continued Challenges in the implementation of the WPS and YPS agenda

Even though countries in the region have developed various generations of National Action Plans (NAPs) of UNSC Resolution 1325, effective implementation is still challenging. Challenges also exist in the development of NAPs on Youth Peace and Security (UNSCR 2250) and related laws in most ECOWAS Member States. This undermines the effective protection and promotion of youth and women's safety and security. Critical challenges facing the implementation of NAPs include inadequate budgetary allocation, weak capacity of state institutions and fragmented CSO

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<sup>86</sup> Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot. Available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-humanitarian-snapshot-31-october-2023> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>87</sup> West Africa, Sahel Requires Tangible, Long-Term Support to Eliminate Terrorism, Address Humanitarian Crisis. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15365.doc.htm> (Accessed 13/01/2024).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> UNICEF Niger Humanitarian Flash Update No. 5 (2023). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/unicef-niger-humanitarian-flash-update-no-5-20-october-2023> (Accessed 13/01/2024).

<sup>90</sup> UNHCR Factsheet on Mali. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/unhcr-mali-factsheet-november-2023> (Accessed 13/01/2024).

<sup>91</sup> Humanitarian Situation Report No. 10. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/150096/file/Mali-Humanitarian-SitRep-October-2023.pdf> (Accessed 3/01/2024).

<sup>92</sup> Federal Ministry Women of Affairs SGBV Dash Board. <https://punchng.com/fg-says-nigeria-records-27698-sgbv-cases-in-three-years/> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>93</sup> Rainbo Initiative Data (2021 – 2022). <https://rainboinitiative.org/our-data/> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>94</sup> Sexual violence in Liberia: End the Silent Epidemic, June 3023. <https://www.undp.org/liberia/blog/sexual-violence-liberia-end-silent-epidemic> (Accessed 12/01/2024).

<sup>95</sup> WANEP NEWS (January – December 2023). [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org)

collaboration as evident in countries across West Africa. Given the weaknesses of implementing existing gender laws and frameworks, the prevalence of political exclusion will constitute a prevalent threat in 2024.

### **Promoting youth and women's meaningful participation in peace and security**

The imperative to demand for state's accountability and responsiveness in the implementation of NAPs and related instruments on the minimum 30 per cent quota is key to gender-sensitive and inclusive governance, peace, and security. It reinforces the necessity for the implementation of key processes in line with ECOWAS and AU Peace and Security Architectures (EPSA and APSA) as well as the Continental Results Framework (2018–2028) to ensure improved monitoring of and reporting on respective Regional, Continental and National Action Plans.

### **Key Resilient Factors**

- At the national level, states have developed various levels of revised NAPs for the full implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda. It has led to the promulgation and activation of policy actions and advocacy for the protection, and promotion of women's rights and inclusion in peace and security processes. Although many countries in the region are at different levels in the process of formulating NAPs on UNSCR 2250, there are existing policies and laws to address issues of youth and their involvement in peace and security. Given the growing challenges of youth vulnerability to violence and conflict in the region, Government ministries and agencies on gender and youth should seize the opportunity to strengthen collaboration with CSOs, women and youth groups towards the development of or review and implementation of existing NAPs on women and youth peace and security.
- The ECOWAS Youth Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda promotes the involvement of youth in peace and security in the region. It recognizes the importance of engaging young people in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding efforts, considering their significant demographic presence and potential influence in society. Furthermore, the YPS Agenda complements and enhances the effectiveness of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) by ensuring the meaningful participation of youth in efforts to promote peace and stability in West Africa. These frameworks could be harnessed in empowering youths for constructive engagement with policy-makers at all levels.
- Continued capacity enhancement of women and youth through training and advocacy by women and youth groups, as well as CSOs to promote inclusive participation and empowerment of women and youth in peace, security and governance processes. Regional and national CSOs are providing women and youth mentorship programs and skills transformation interventions for the Sahel. Also, CSOs have developed advocacy activities on women, peace and security (WPS), monitoring and reporting progress on the implementation of the WPS agenda in line with the AU Continental Results Framework (CRF - 2018-2028). For instance, the women leaders network in Mali is leading advocacy targeting key stakeholders at national and regional levels to address the effects of the

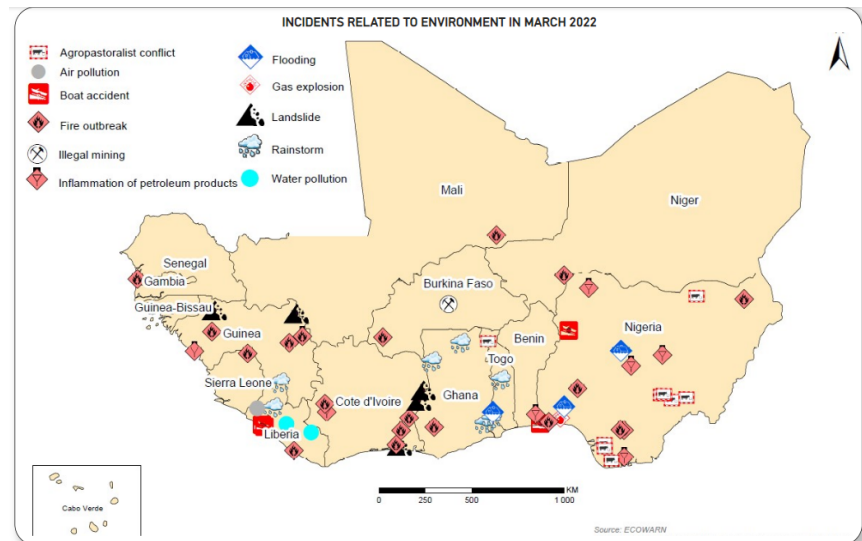
political impasse and sanction on the lives and livelihoods of women and their families in the country.

## Recommendations

- Governments and development partners should intensify engagement on UNSCRs 1325, 2250 and other WPS and YPS priorities. In countries with legislated gender quotas, the national frameworks should be strengthened through inclusive participation of all stakeholders in the review processes to set ambitious targets and enforce placement rules for gender parity in elective positions and appointments across various sectors in the country. Also, the development of NAPs on UNSCR 2250 is imperative and the lessons learnt from the NAP processes in Nigeria could serve as a blueprint for further adaptation and implementation in other ECOWAS member states.
- There is a need for AU and ECOWAS to exploit the regionalised CRF to support regular data collection, monitoring and reporting on the compliance of laws and policies promoting women’s participation, leadership, and decision-making in line with NAPs on WPS and YPS Agenda. It is also imperative for regional actors to consider providing technical support on the WPS and YPS Agenda for the AES countries.

## 5.0 Environmental Security

Climate change and its attendant multidimensional impacts on regional security were pervasive in the period under review. Climate change continued to exacerbate resource scarcity, particularly water, food, land, fisheries and biodiversity that support the livelihood security of populations across the region. Of utmost concern is

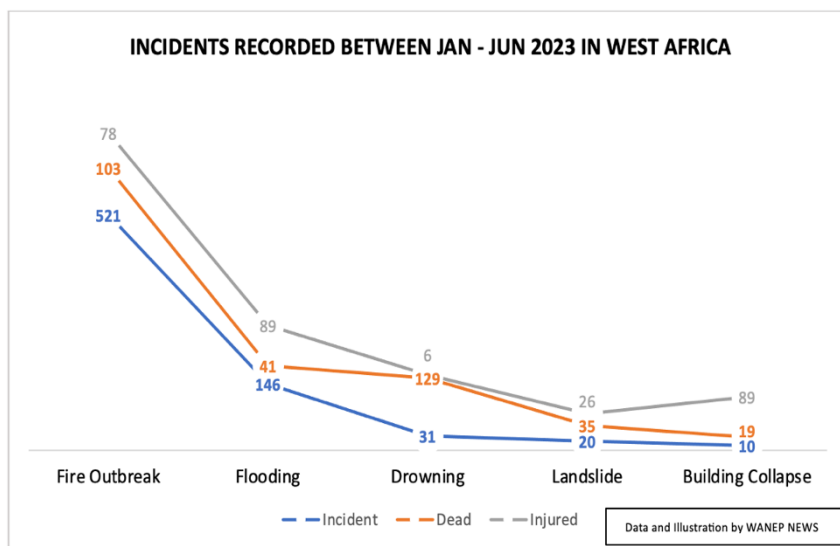


the adverse effects of the phenomenon on agricultural production, given its strategic importance to the economies of West African states. Humanitarian needs in the Sahel and the Lake Chad region overlap across West and Central African countries especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria Mauritania, Cameroon and Chad, as a result of increasing violent conflicts, rising poverty, climate change, and unprecedented food insecurity and malnutrition. For the first time in the Sahel, 45,000 people were forecasted to experience catastrophic levels of hunger in 2024.<sup>96</sup> Additional to this, owing to climate change’s impact, security incidents increased by 79 per cent

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

in the region causing massive population displacement and disrupting access to farming land and fodder between 2019 and 2023.<sup>97</sup>

The cumulative effects of climate change, conflicts, and the post-COVID-19 pandemic impact are partly related to the soaring prices of staple food items, fuel and agricultural products in the region. The number of people lacking regular access to safe and nutritious food is projected to rise to 48 million during the June-August 2024 lean season.<sup>98</sup> Within the first half of 2023, complex emergencies arising from adverse effects of climate change, conflicts and insecurity in the West and Central Africa region resulted in seven million children needing humanitarian assistance.<sup>99</sup> The consequences of the spillover of the climate-driven humanitarian crisis in the



Sahel continue to expand and impact coastal countries especially Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Ghana.

Incidents of extreme weather events such as severe flooding, drought, and rising temperatures arising from climate change were recorded in the reporting period. Flooding, especially during the peak period of the rainy season between September and October 2023

in West Africa, damaged basic infrastructure, and hampered access to humanitarian aid triggering sanitation, hygiene and health challenges in communities such as Zinder, Diffa and Tillaberi in Niger; localities in Jigawa of Nigeria; and coastal provinces of Brikama and Kerewa in The Gambia.<sup>100</sup> Between September and October 2023, approximately 299,000 people were affected by flooding across 10 countries, with Niger and Benin mostly impacted, while 20,000 houses were damaged or destroyed and 12,000 people were displaced by flood in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.<sup>101</sup> In addition, 381 fatalities from drowning or the collapse of settlements were reported in the period.<sup>102</sup> More than 7,000 hectares of croplands were destroyed, along with 99 schools and two health facilities between September and October 2023.<sup>103</sup> The fatality rate in the last quarter of 2023 increased to 1,000

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>United Nations Children's Fund, (2023). West and Central Africa Region. Humanitarian Situation Report. No. 1. 1 January to 30 June 2023. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/unicef-west-and-central-africa-region-humanitarian-situation-report-no-1-1-january-30-june-2023> (Accessed 21 December 2023).

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> OCHA (2023). West and Central Africa – Flooding Situation Overview.

<sup>101</sup> OCHA, (2023). West and Central Africa: Humanitarian Impact of Flooding – Overview. (From 1 September to October 2023). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ghana/west-and-central-africa-humanitarian-impact-flooding-overview-1-september-30-october-2023> (Accessed 27 December 2023).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

while 185,000 people were displaced and 66,000 houses including 10,000 croplands were damaged or destroyed.<sup>104</sup> A cumulative impact of flooding in 2023 affected the lives of 880,000 populations in the region.<sup>105</sup>

In Ghana, the release of excess water from the Akosombo Dam on 15 September 2023 led to the destruction of homes and farmlands, disruption in essential service delivery and displacement of populations in nine Municipal and District Assemblies.<sup>106</sup> Between 19 and 22 October, 36,000 people were severely affected while 4,000 internally displaced persons were recorded as a result of the dam spillage, according to the rapid inter-agency needs assessment report coordinated by the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) carried out.<sup>107</sup> The WANEP NEWS also recorded flooding incidents in the northern region of Ghana with five fatalities.<sup>108</sup>

To mitigate the global surging threat of climate change, the 28<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP28) hosted in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) between 30 November and 13 December 2023, provided the need to transition from fossil fuel energy systems. The agreement also involves global targets to triple the capacity of renewable energy such as wind and solar power, and double the rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030. The agreement to transition from fossil fuel marked a significant shift towards abatement of global greenhouse gas emissions and climate change's impacts especially in vulnerable regions such as West Africa. In recognition of this, countries in the region have already committed to the Paris Declaration. Similarly, significant populations in the region are rural and agrarian, relying on forest resources including firewood and charcoal for energy production and subsistence farming for sustainable livelihood. The region is also confronted with fuel price volatility. This calls for a strategic balance of access to the region's energy requirement while transitioning to renewable energy. These dynamics, coupled with the enormous financial resources required to facilitate energy transition, suggest that the region cannot achieve this goal without sustainable international financial support. Importantly, as agreed at the COP27 in Egypt in 2022 on the 'loss and damage' fund, which calls on developed countries that historically are the main contributors of warming, to provide financial support for developing countries devastated by climate change's impacts also took centre stage during the climate discourse at COP28. Owing to the continued disagreements among developed countries on how to fund the 'loss and damage' fund, limited progress has been made in providing climate financial incentives to support adaptation strategies in vulnerable regions, especially in West Africa, to alleviate the effects of climate change. Between 2013 and 2019, for instance, West African countries received a total of \$11.7 billion in international climate finance, an average of \$1.7 billion per year.<sup>109</sup> This equates to \$4.90 per person per year, an amount that does not even address the compound climate and does not meet the daily poverty threshold of \$5.50 in the region.<sup>110</sup> Given the limited or lack of

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> WANEP National Early Warning System, (2023). *Situation Tracking: Flooding in Ghana*. WANEP Early Warning Report. Available at: [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org) (Accessed 27 December 2023).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Casas, N.M., and Sanogo, A.R. (2022). *Climate Finance in West Africa: Assessing the State of of Climate Finance in one of the World's worst hot by Climate Crisis*. OXFAM Briefing Paper - September 2022.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

international financial support for capital-intensive infrastructure for renewable projects and adaptation strategies to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities in developing regions, West Africa is unlikely to attain their energy transition as envisaged by the COP28 agreements. This portends significant risks that will potentially aggravate the region's vulnerability to the debilitating effects of climate change.

Threats of epidemics including Dengue, Yellow and Lassa Fever, Meningitis, and Measles were also recorded in 2023 across communities in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, and Sierra Leone. By December 2023, there were reports of 102,817 suspected cases of Dengue Fever with 43,256 confirmed cases and 430 deaths in nine countries.<sup>111</sup> Also, Meningitis was reported in 11 countries with a total of 11,211 cases and 655 deaths. Chikungunya<sup>112</sup> disease outbreak was reported in Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mali in 2023.<sup>113</sup> Senegal was the most affected with more than 455 confirmed cases affecting 10 of the 14 Regions of the country. The persistence of epidemics across the region could be partly attributable to the increasing fragility of the healthcare systems, and low investments in the welfare and social systems across the region.

## **Key Outlook in 2024**

### ***Gaps in responses and limited international financial support to climate adaptation systems***

Given the existing gaps in national and regional responses coupled with the lack of international commitment to financial support to bolster climate adaptation strategies in the region as encapsulated in the COP27's agreement on 'loss and damage' fund for developing countries to enhance resilience, West Africa's vulnerability to climate change's adverse effects is likely to increase in 2024. Acute food insecurity reached a 10-year record high in Central and West Africa region due to climate shocks and insecurity as of June 2023, with an expansion of food insecurity into coastal countries, and severe hunger facing countries in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin devastated by security deterioration, while humanitarian assistance has been impeded by insecurity. This trend undermines the effective implementation of the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP), for instance, to mitigate the impact of climate change on food insecurity in the region in 2024.

## **Key Resilient Factors**

- ECOWAS, Regional Climate Strategy adopted in 2022 as well as the first Plan of Action (2022-2030) are in line with ECOWAS Vision 2050 which aims at establishing integrated, peaceful and prosperous communities, supported by strong institutions, respecting fundamental freedoms and working towards inclusive sustainable development. The AU Regional Stabilisation Strategy for Recovery of Boko Haram affected Countries in the Lake Chad Basin is also contributing to mitigating the impact of climate change and

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<sup>111</sup> Combined data from ECOWAS and WANEP Early Warning Thematic / Monthly Reports January to December 2023. (Accessed 28/12/2023).

<sup>112</sup> Chikungunya is a mosquito-borne viral disease caused by the chikungunya virus (CHIKV), an RNA virus in the alphavirus genus of the family Togaviridae. The name chikungunya derives from a word in the Kimakonde language, meaning "to become contorted".

<sup>113</sup> Op. cit. Combined data from ECOWAS and WANEP Early Warning Thematic / Monthly Reports.



humanitarian emergencies in communities in Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria. At the level of the United Nations, the UN Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSP) which covers the period 2018-2030 to address the complex humanitarian emergencies facing Sahel countries, focuses on six priority areas: cross-border cooperation, climate action, crisis prevention, women and youth empowerment, economic revitalisation, and renewable energy.<sup>114</sup> The overarching goal is to galvanise efforts to enhance peace and security in the region to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063.

## Recommendations

- ECOWAS should strengthen its position and negotiation with the AU to intensify multilateral engagement with the UN, EU, G7 and G20 to galvanise regional benefits from the COP27 resolution on the provision of funding for ‘loss and damage’, and also ensure that COP28 resolution related to fossil fuel emission regulation is not only addressed but also ensures that the economic implications for regional agenda including ECOWAS Member States is protected.
- ECOWAS should strengthen partnerships and cooperation with its Member States, AU, international partners and regional institutions on climate change including West Africa and Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and West African Science Service Center on Climate Change, and Adapted Land (WASCAL) among others, to fast track the implementation of ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy adopted in 2022 and first Plan of Action (2022-2030) in line with ECOWAS Vision 2025 and the actualization of the resolutions of COP27 and 28. This should also include the provision of sustainable capacity building to strengthen the skills of national disaster and risk management bodies, and early warning systems to effectively respond to climate-induced disasters including floods, droughts, and food insecurity in the Member States.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The peace and security landscape of West Africa was dogged with multi-layered threats of national, regional, continental and global in 2023. While strides were made in efforts by stakeholders to respond and assuage the impacts of the threats on human security and state stability, significant challenges persist. Against the backdrop of widespread concerns about the democratic governance decline within the region, Liberia successfully organised general elections adjudged by domestic and international election observer missions as transparent and credible which remarkably resulted in a peaceful political transition from the ruling Coalition for Democratic Change led by incumbent President George Weah to the opposition Unity Party (UP) led by former Vice President Joseph Boakai. Equally significant were the Nigeria and Sierra Leone general elections. Albeit concerns of lack of transparency in the counting processes, the elections led to peaceful political transitions with Bola Tinubu of the ruling All Progressive Congress elected

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<sup>114</sup> United Nations Organizations, (2018). UN Support Plan for The Sahel: Working Together for A Prosperous and Peaceful Sahel. New York: UN.

as President while incumbent President Julius Maada Bio was re-elected for a second five-year term.

Despite this significant progress, diplomatic efforts of ECOWAS and international partners to engage the Transitional Governments of Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger to facilitate the transition from military rule to constitutional multi-party democracy remain deadlocked, resulting in political uncertainties. Moreover, the expansion of violent extremist and terrorist activities in the region remains pervasive. Climate change and its attendant adverse multi-layered effects on resources including land, water, food and biodiversity support the livelihood security of communities across the region. Furthermore, the report has shed light on some peculiar challenges including conflicts, limited access to healthcare, limited inclusive participation in governance and decision-making processes, and sexual and gender-based violence against women, girls and boys continue to undermine the women and youth peace and security agenda in West Africa.

To assuage the impact of the complex and multi-layered effects of the varied threats to regional peace and security, there have been various interventions by critical stakeholders at the national, regional, continental and international levels. However, such responses have resulted in varied degrees of success and pitfalls that continue to thwart the effectiveness of intervention strategies. In this wise, effectively addressing the mutating and multifaceted peace and security challenges facing the region requires a robust multidimensional approach through partnership and cooperation with critical stakeholders at the community, national, regional, continental and global levels. While this may not instantly transform the tattered regional security, it will doubtlessly create an opportunity to harness the agency and value of the critical actors at various levels through inclusive participation to foster social cohesion necessary for strengthening the resilience of communities, human security and state stability in West Africa.