

December 2025

Thematic REPORT



WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

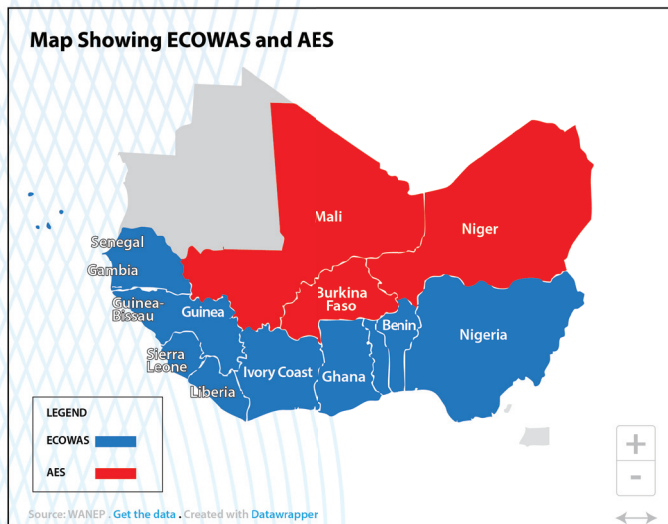
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ECOWAS-AES Partnership:
A New Integrative Agenda for
Peace and Security in
West Africa and the Sahel

1. Introduction

Since its establishment in 1975, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has remained the primary driver of regional integration and cooperation in West Africa. As provided in the Treaty of Lagos, the regional bloc was tasked with promoting economic integration through the free movement of people, goods, and services, and with consolidating a free trade area among its member states.



Since the 1990s, ECOWAS has established legal and institutional frameworks to safeguard democratic governance and prevent unconstitutional changes of government (UCG). It is important to underscore that democratic governance principles were integrated into ECOWAS's agenda to foster political stability following decades of coups, civil wars, and authoritarian rule in West Africa. The framework also aims to uphold the rule of law, protect human rights, and attract foreign investment across member states. This began with the 1991 Declaration of Political Principles, which enshrined commitments to freedom, human rights, and the democratisation of governance within member states. These principles were later institutionalised through landmark instruments, such as the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security, and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy

and Good Governance. Together, these frameworks represented a decisive shift from the non-interference norm that characterised ECOWAS in its early years toward a doctrine of non-indifference, enabling the organisation to intervene in cases of unconstitutional change of government or gross violations of human rights.¹

For almost two decades following these reforms, West Africa witnessed an unprecedented wave of democratic progress. Peaceful elections and transfers of power have earned ECOWAS widespread acclaim as a regional leader in enforcing democratic norms. ECOWAS has also contributed to regional stability through conflict prevention, mediation, and peacekeeping efforts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and, more recently, The Gambia.

It has demonstrated sustained leadership in advancing regional economic cooperation through initiatives such as the Common External Tariff (2015) and the Trade Liberalisation Scheme.² ECOWAS has invested in regional infrastructure, notably the West African Gas Pipeline and the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, to enhance trade and connectivity across the region. Before the recent spate of coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea, ECOWAS was among Africa's most assertive defenders of democratic governance.

Despite notable progress, ECOWAS faces criticism for its inability to curb constitutional manipulation, tenure extensions, unconstitutional changes of government, and rising insecurity across member states. Since 2020, the region has experienced seven successful coups and several attempted coups, undermining democratic governance and fueling political instability.³ These upheavals often stem from widespread dissatisfaction with poor governance, corruption, and the failure of civilian administrations to ensure security and deliver essential public services.

¹ Aning, K., & Bah, S. (2021). Regional Responses to Peace and Security Challenges in West Africa. KAIPTC Policy Paper. <https://www.kaiptc.org/publications/external-publications-of-kaiptc-staff/> (Accessed on 27/09/2025)

² ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme. Available at: <https://ecotis.ecowas.int/developpement-des-politiques/marche-commun/?lang=fr>

³ WANEP Peace and Security Outlook 2025. www.wanep.org (Accessed on 27/09/2025)

WANEP ALERT AND RESPONSE MECHANISM (WARM)

The WANEP Alert and Response Mechanism (WARM) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARM Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARM covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of

this agreement is to interface WARM with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

The cascading political conflicts and timelines that characterised the exit of the military-led Governments of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger from ECOWAS to form the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), as enshrined in the Liptako-Gourma Charter, present new challenges to the vision and spirit of regional integration for collective security and economic cooperation.



(L - R: The Military Leaders of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. Photo Credit: www.strategiesconsultingfirm.com)

It also undermines the gains achieved by ECOWAS over the past 50 years, as profound geopolitical shifts are reinforced by weaknesses in the organisation's decision-making and governance models, as well as by increasing neocolonial interference and interests. More critically, it highlights the limitations of rigidly enforcing democratic norms in fragile contexts, where such approaches can exacerbate existing political and security crises.

The implications of this realignment are profound, casting uncertainty over the future of regional integration and stability in West Africa. Notwithstanding this challenge, the AES countries and ECOWAS have reaffirmed their commitment to the free movement of goods, capital, and people, signalling a pragmatic approach to regional ties.⁴ This mutual interest can serve as an entry point to strengthen multilateral dialogue on economic and security cooperation, benefiting all parties and supporting the region's development and stability.

This thematic report examines the current and emerging challenges that undermine the regional peace and security integration agenda and highlights potential areas for future engagement. It also offers recommendations to strengthen political, socio-economic, and security cooperation and partnership in West Africa and the Sahel.

2. Structural Challenges of ECOWAS Regional Integration

Despite its achievements, ECOWAS' integration process is constrained by structural challenges that span political, institutional, socio-economic, and security dimensions. These interlocking challenges

have limited the organisation's capacity to deliver on its integration mandate and to respond coherently to emerging crises.

a. Political and Institutional Challenges

Political instability remains the most critical threat to ECOWAS' integration agenda. The erosion of constitutional order in several Member States has strained ECOWAS' democracy-promotion mechanisms, such as the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which mandates zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes of government (ECOWAS, 2001). Furthermore, the AES exit poses a challenge to the moral authority of ECOWAS within West Africa's governance and security landscape. In fact, the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance entrenches democratic norms, prevents unconstitutional changes of government, and promotes good governance. However, over the past two decades, civilian governments have often circumvented these provisions by manipulating constitutions and electoral laws, suppressing civil liberties, and weakening state institutions, among other measures. This has led to military interventions in democratic processes that continue to contribute to democratic backsliding and political instability across ECOWAS Member States. The firm positions of military leaders in coup-affected countries have undermined the organisation's authority to sanction or mediate political crises. The lack of moral responsibility among the highest decision-making bodies of ECOWAS constitutes a key challenge. Should this continue, it may embolden other states with weak democratic credentials or authoritarian tendencies to resist ECOWAS's mandates as well.

The ripple effects of this rupture are visible. Given the weakening commitment to signed obligations among Member States, ECOWAS, as a supranational organisation, has been constrained to re-examine its compliance strategies to ensure the regional enforcement of its protocols, given its limited oversight of States' sovereignty. This is exemplified by its flexible engagement with the military government of Guinea as it navigates its transition to democracy. Similarly, its measured response to political developments in Togo, Guinea-Bissau, and Côte d'Ivoire illustrates its cautious diplomacy toward member states.

Beyond institutional authority, public perception issues persist, as citizens often view ECOWAS as an elitist organisation disconnected from local realities and needs. Increasingly, civil society and popular movements view the organisation as overly influenced by external actors.⁵

⁴ ECOWAS keeps Free Trade Zone with AES Members until further notice. Available at: <https://www.ecofinagency.com/public-management/2901-46380-ecowas-keeps-free-trade-zone-with-aes-members-until-further-notice> (Accessed on 27/09/2025)

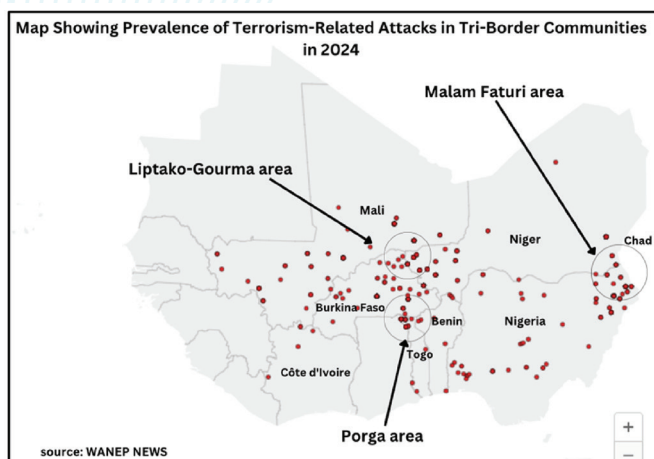
⁵ ICG. (2024). West Africa's Political Fragmentation and the Rise of the Sahel Alliance. International Crisis Group Report.

The sanctions imposed on Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso after the respective coups, while legally grounded in ECOWAS protocols, were widely perceived as punitive toward populations already suffering from insecurity and economic hardship. This public sentiment has deepened resentment toward the regional body, which the AES Governments capitalise on to justify and consolidate their rule and the interests of their citizens.

Unless ECOWAS undertakes substantive reforms to align its governance approach with citizens' expectations, particularly in areas such as security, inclusive politics, and equitable development, while realigning its strategies to ensure enforcement of its protocols, it risks further erosion of its credibility. Restoring legitimacy will require the organisation to recalibrate its normative framework, moving from democratic norms toward a more adaptive, context-sensitive approach that reconciles stability with governance reform. Without such recalibration, ECOWAS's credibility may continue to weaken, jeopardising its broader vision for regional integration and collective security.

b. Security Dimensions

West Africa and the Sahel are facing an increasingly interconnected security crisis in which violent extremist and rebel groups operate across



national borders with growing coordination and reach. Affiliates of AQIM, ISSP, ISWAP, and allied insurgents have consolidated control over key border zones, particularly in the Liptako-Gourma region, thereby enabling attacks to spill over from

core Sahelian theatres in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger into coastal ECOWAS states such as Benin, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire. According to the 2024 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), terrorism incidents in the Sahel over the past 15 years have increased by 1,266 per cent, and deaths increased by 2,860 per cent.⁶ Insecurity in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has intensified due to the strategic withdrawal of international forces and the limited capacity of national armies to secure vast and ungoverned spaces.⁷ Data from WANEP's National Early Warning System (NEWS) highlights the scale of terror attacks in the AES countries. For instance, Burkina Faso recorded 1,105 terrorist attacks in 2024, compared with 479 in 2023; Mali recorded 683 attacks, up from 294 the previous year; and Niger reported 332 incidents.⁸ The escalation in attacks, fatalities and mass displacement underscores that insecurity in the AES is no longer a contained national challenge but a shared regional threat system.

Despite rising insecurity and political tensions, AES and ECOWAS member states continue to share interlinked security, humanitarian, and economic interests. The persistence of cross-border attacks, population movements and criminal flows highlights the limits of fragmented national or bloc-based responses. Strengthening multilateral cooperation for integrated security, including joint early warning, coordinated civilian protection, and harmonised prevention and humanitarian strategies, remains essential to containing regional spillover risks and preventing further fragmentation of the West African security architecture.

c. Socio-economic and Humanitarian Concerns

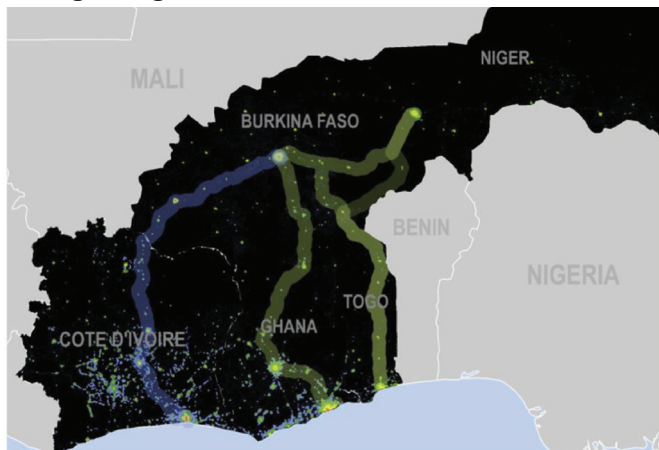
The withdrawal of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) from ECOWAS poses a serious threat to regional integration and the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment. This protocol underpins West Africa's economic cooperation by ensuring the duty-free movement of goods across borders. With the AES exit, new restrictions on movement and trade are likely to be implemented, which could potentially reduce regional commerce and business profitability.

⁶ GTI (2024). <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf> (Accessed 27/02/2025).

⁷ See <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2023/burkina-faso/> (Accessed 27/02/2025).

⁸ WANEP Peace and Security Outlook 2025. www.wanep.org (Accessed 10/07/2025).

As landlocked states, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger depend heavily on trade corridors through coastal ECOWAS members, including Benin, Senegal, Guinea, Ghana, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire. The Ouagadougou-Lomé corridor accounts for about



Map showing trade corridors through coastal ECOWAS members into AES
Credit: worldbank.org

40 per cent of all cargo into Burkina Faso, while the Ouagadougou-Abidjan corridor constitutes 30-35 per cent.⁹ Also, the Tema-Ouagadougou is of far greater importance for Ghana's external and internal trade flows compared to Burkina Faso, serving as the central axis connecting Ghana's northern regions to the more prosperous southern production areas and the port of Tema.¹⁰ In the case of Niger, the Niamey-Ouagadougou-Lomé corridor plays a significant role in the country's external trade, carrying 15-20 per cent of Niger's import transit. In 2022, Côte d'Ivoire accounted for 43.7 per cent of Burkina Faso's exports and 14.8 per cent of its imports, while nearly 60 per cent of Burkina Faso's vegetable exports and 90 per cent of its live animal exports went to Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. This suggests that the withdrawal will cost ECOWAS three founding members representing 16 per cent of its 424 million citizens and seven per cent of its GDP.¹¹ More importantly, political frictions could disrupt trade routes and supply chains, as seen in 2024 when tensions between Niger and Benin led to border closures and the suspension of oil exports, affecting both economies and border communities. Furthermore, political fragmentation weakens progress toward the "Eco" common currency, undermines cross-border infrastructure projects, and increases regional investment risks.

The exit has also heightened food insecurity in AES countries. Recent data from the World Food Programme (WFP) indicates that Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are among the world's hunger hotspots in early 2025, with 7.5 million people facing crisis, emergency, or famine conditions.¹² The loss of access to the ECOWAS Regional Food Security Reserve will deepen this vulnerability. The ongoing armed attacks in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso continue to create more Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees. Currently, there are 2.6 million IDPs across the three countries. The number of refugees has also increased by 3 per cent to 329,500.¹³ In 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that there were 3,859,400 displaced persons in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. In Burkina Faso, the ongoing conflict has resulted in the closure of 5,336 schools, affecting over 820,000 students and 24,000 teachers as of February 2024.¹⁴ In Niger, 937 primary and secondary schools remain closed nationwide, affecting 73,876 students (35,460 girls). Tillabéri is the region most affected, with 879 schools closed, affecting 70,566 students (33,872 girls).¹⁵ In Mali, UNICEF reported that more than 4 million students, including 1.8 million girls, were yet to return to school for the 2024-2025 school year.¹⁶

d. External and Geopolitical Concerns

The resurgence of geopolitical competition in West Africa has created new complexities for ECOWAS and AES. External actors, including France, Russia, China, Turkey, and the Gulf states, have deepened their involvement in security, infrastructure, and resource sectors due to divergent strategic interests. These external interests have weakened ECOWAS's member states' collective commitment to the Community's strategic goals, resulting in alternative alliances that undermine the strength of its common partnership to peace and security. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger's shift towards Russia, China, Turkey and other Gulf States reinforces the diplomatic polarity between the AES countries and ECOWAS.

⁹ Enhancing Burkina Faso Regional Connectivity (2019). https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/120971576492235825/pdf/Enhancing-Burkina-Faso-Regional-Connectivity-An-Economic-Corridor-Approach.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 20/01/2025).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ IFPRI. (2025). The ECOWAS breakup: Implications for West African food security and regional cooperation. <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/the-ecowas-breakup-implications-for-west-african-food-security-and-regional-cooperation/> (Accessed 20/01/2025).

¹² World Food Programme. (2025). Hunger Hotspots FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity November 2024 to May 2025 outlook. https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000162510/download/?_ga=2.28488956.1159682065.1737566926-2058505786.1737566926

¹³ Burkina Faso, Mali and Western Niger - Humanitarian Snapshot (as of 30 December 2024). Available at: <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-mali-and-western-niger-humanitarian-snapshot-30-december-2024>

¹⁴ See <https://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/articles/protecting-education-attack-eie-data-burkina-faso> (Accessed 27/02/2025).

¹⁵ [https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/unicef-niger-humanitarian-situation-report-no-1-reporting-period-1-january-31-march-2024#:~:text=However%2C%20by%20mid%2DMarch%2C,70%2C566%20students%20\(33%2C872%20girls\).](https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/unicef-niger-humanitarian-situation-report-no-1-reporting-period-1-january-31-march-2024#:~:text=However%2C%20by%20mid%2DMarch%2C,70%2C566%20students%20(33%2C872%20girls).) (Accessed 05/04/2025).

¹⁶ See <https://www.unicef.org/mali/en/press-releases/mali-students-will-return-school-new-2024-2025-school-year-november-4th-2024> (Accessed 27/02/2025).

3. Possible Areas for Cooperation and Engagement between ECOWAS and AES Countries

In terms of potential areas for collaboration and engagement, ECOWAS and AES may consider options within the framework of reintegration, security, and economic cooperation, as well as continued institutional dialogue and mediation to reinforce mutual trust.

A. Regional Security and Economic Cooperation

Strategic policy realignments and enhanced regional security frameworks are crucial for stabilising West Africa and the Sahel. ECOWAS, guided by the principle of sovereignty and subsidiarity, remains, despite recent challenges, the primary regional mechanism for peace and security. However, the AES and its divergence from the regional bloc highlight the need to rethink broader multilateral engagement and to coordinate a response to regional peace and security threats. Unlike the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the G5 Sahel, the Accra Initiative (AI) is recognised as an African-led effort to prevent the spillover of terrorism from the Sahel and to combat transnational organised crime in West Africa's border regions. Despite recent challenges, AI stands out for its practical approach. Notably, while its members are all West African states, the initiative operates outside ECOWAS structures as an ad hoc intergovernmental mechanism focused on information sharing, joint training, capacity building, and cross-border military operations.¹⁷ Within the framework of the proposed ESF deployment and the Accra Initiative, security cooperation can be enhanced by strengthening joint counterterrorism operations, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and border security patrols across ECOWAS and AES member countries. The AU may consider playing a critical role in forging a tripartite security arrangement among ECOWAS, AES, and development partners.

This framework could define clear obligations, joint deployment strategies, and coordinated operations, ensuring collective responsibility in tackling cross-border management to combat terrorism and other transnational organised crimes. Such an approach would necessitate a commitment from both institutions to leverage existing regional security mechanisms, such as the Accra Initiative highlighted above. In addition, reinforcing existing trade and movement protocols in the region will not only boost economic activity but also intensify social interactions and enable citizens of both blocs to

move freely within West Africa. It also creates new opportunities to reimagine infrastructure and other development projects that can benefit both blocs and their citizens. It is therefore commendable that ECOWAS has decided to maintain access to the free trade zone under its Trade Liberalisation Scheme (TLS) with the AES, despite the 0.5 per cent import levy imposed on goods from ECOWAS member states.¹⁸ Likewise, the decision by the AES leaders to maintain visa-free entry for ECOWAS nationals is commendable. It also suggests that the door remains open to further engagement and dialogue to address issues of mutual concern.

B. Institutional Dialogue and Engagement Opportunities

As the peace and security landscape in West Africa and the Sahel continues to deteriorate, the need to sustain continued dialogue and engagement between ECOWAS and AES cannot be underestimated. Amid distrust between AES and ECOWAS, a neutral third party could play a facilitating role in reconciling their positions. The AU's mediation role could help bridge the existing discord, ensuring that ECOWAS and AES align their strategies within a broader continental security and other cooperation frameworks. By fostering structured engagement, resource sharing, and joint operations, a more inclusive and effective security framework can emerge, promoting collaboration to mitigate threats that transcend borders and affect all countries in the region. In this regard, the following multitrack diplomatic approaches could be enhanced:

Track I (Official Channels)

- AU has offered a more conciliatory approach via informal consultations. (e.g., in March 2025, it held an informal "consultation" with Mali, Burkina and Niger under Article 8(11) of its protocol. These are early signs of possible diplomatic re-engagement.
- Coordination and harmonisation of bilateral and multilateral responses – the use of Ghana's leadership and the Offices of the Envoy to the Sahel States to continue to soften the ground, build confidence among states, and complement official diplomatic engagements.

¹⁷ The Accra Initiative and the Fight Against Terrorism in West Africa. Available at: <https://onpolicy.org/the-accra-initiative-and-the-fight-against-terrorism-in-west-africa/>
Op Cit. IFPRI. (2025). The ECOWAS breakup: Implications for West African food security and regional cooperation.

- AES Summits and thematic ministerial meetings serve as regional Track I spaces, although they are more intra-alliance than multilateral.
- Utilised the agency of military officers who have served with the military leaders and key decision-makers of the AES countries in various training centres and peacekeeping missions. This will facilitate more engagements.

Track II (Back-Channel and Civil Society-Led)

Opportunities exist for dialogue through civil society actors, traditional leaders, regional faith-based groups, women and youth networks, academics, think tanks, and other respected intermediaries, who serve as trusted voices to support its engagements in the AES member states.

Leverage cross-frontier ethnic, social, and religious affinities and identities to build trust, strengthen collaborative actions for peace, and foster a sense of shared destinies.

National Dialogue conferences held in Burkina Faso and Niger (in 2024 and 2025, respectively) featured the voices of CSOs, youth, and women, although they lacked

4. Recommendations

AU, ECOWAS and AES

1. AU, ECOWAS and AES should prioritise and Intensify Dialogue and Mediation: There is a need to intensify diplomatic solutions and mediation efforts through the AU and other credible African intermediaries to encourage the ECOWAS and AES to resolve strained relations and guarantee humanitarian corridors and promote regional trade and reintegration, while preparing a return to constitutional rule.

2. ECOWAS is encouraged to undertake Comprehensive Institutional and Policy Reforms¹⁹ to realign its mandate and frameworks with current regional and global realities. This includes reviewing the 1993 Revised Treaty and related protocols on democracy, governance, and security to move from rigid enforcement toward a more adaptive

model that accommodates transitional contexts while upholding democratic principles. The process should be inclusive and participatory, engaging citizens, traditional leaders, CSOs, media, women, youth, academia, and the private sector to strengthen legitimacy and ownership. The *New Agenda for Peace* and the proposed *ECOWAS Summit of the Future* should serve as a platform to reimagine ECOWAS's role, reaffirm its vision of an "ECOWAS of the People," and position the organisation to remain practical and relevant in a changing geopolitical landscape.

3. Developing a New Partnership Cooperation Framework:

ECOWAS and AES are encouraged to intensify their efforts to establish a comprehensive partnership framework to enhance regional reintegration, security and economic cooperation.

4. Increased Investment in Early Warning Initiatives:

Effective conflict prevention depends on robust early warning systems that detect existing and emerging threats to peace and security before they escalate. Investing in the civilian component of early warning at the regional and local levels will support the real-time collection of data and intelligence on potential conflicts, organised crime, and violent extremism within communities across both blocs.

5. Strengthen Local and National Peace Infrastructure:

These I4P will serve as platforms for increased collaboration at local, regional and national levels to strengthen civil-military response mechanisms for more coordination and engagements (dialogue and mediation) on early warning signals regarding potential conflicts within communities across both blocs.

6. Bilateral International partners: In pursuit of global efforts to counter terrorism, organised crime, and violent extremism-recognised threats to international peace and security, ECOWAS and AES bilateral partners are urged to convene a high-level conference to deliberate on these challenges and reinforce the role of global and regional partnerships in ensuring a coordinated and effective response.

¹⁹ Op Cit. Aubyn, F.K. (2025). Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and the Future of ECOWAS. Conference Paper presented at the ECOWAS at 50 seminar at the Nigerian Institute of international Affairs, Lagos, Nigeria.

CSO, Religious Institution and the Media

1. Facilitate Inclusive Dialogue and Confidence-Building: CSOs are encouraged to promote structured dialogue platforms between ECOWAS, AES, and affected communities to rebuild trust and foster collaboration. This can include convening track II and track III dialogues, joint civil society forums, and cross-border community engagements that highlight shared security, governance, and development concerns. Women and youth networks, in particular, should act as mediators and advocates for citizen-centred solutions, ensuring that the peace and cooperation frameworks reflect local priorities and human security needs.

2. Strengthen Civic Accountability and Policy Advocacy: CSOs should jointly develop an Advocacy and Accountability Framework to monitor commitments under a new ECOWAS-AES partnership. This includes tracking progress on peace, governance, and socio-economic initiatives, as well as producing regular policy briefs or scorecards to inform both regional institutions and the general public. Youth and women's organisations can champion inclusive governance and transparency, helping to ensure that regional cooperation delivers tangible benefits for communities rather than remaining elite-driven.

3. Promote Knowledge-Sharing and Institutional Capacity Building: CSOs, including youth and women's networks, should invest in strengthening their analytical and institutional capacities to engage with ECOWAS and AES mechanisms effectively. This involves building evidence-based advocacy through joint research, policy analysis, and the sharing of early warning data, particularly on security, governance, and development trends across the Sahel and West Africa.

5. Conclusion

West Africa stands at a defining moment. The formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and its withdrawal from ECOWAS reflect deeper frustrations with regional mechanisms that have struggled to deliver peace, stability, and inclusive governance. Despite shared histories and socio-cultural interlinkages, the region faces escalating insecurity, shrinking civic space, and stalled political transitions.

A new phase of cooperation must go beyond rhetoric or military measures. It should prioritise dialogue, institutional rebuilding, and citizen participation. While frameworks such as the Multinational Joint Task Force, the ESF, and the Accra Initiative illustrate regional goodwill, they remain constrained by weak coordination, limited funding, and political fragmentation. Any renewed ECOWAS-AES partnership must adopt a multidimensional approach that integrates security cooperation with governance reforms, infrastructure development, and economic development to enhance livelihoods. The progress of a new collaboration will depend on strengthening trust between citizens and state institutions, fostering local dialogue, and supporting cross-border cooperation. Sustainable peace in West Africa will not come from military posts or external interventions but from empowering communities, restoring accountable governance, and building a shared vision of regional unity grounded in trust and mutual responsibility.

The report interprets data from countries of the region. Therefore, for the sake of analysis, it considers only the absolute value of incidence instead of the values compared to population size of the affected countries.

Thematic REPORT



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