



# WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING

## WARN POLICY BRIEF

DECEMBER 8, 2015

### TRANSFORMING WEST AFRICA'S PROTRACTED CONFLICT: TENDENCIES AND TENSIONS OF THE CASAMANCE CONFLICT

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Casamance province in Southern Region of Senegal with close proximity to Guinea Bissau and The Gambia has experienced protracted civil war between the Government of Senegal and the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) since 1982.

On December 26, 1982, the tension in Casamance erupted in a pro-independence demonstration, which was staged in the regional capital, Ziguinchor. Due to the inter-connections between the ethnic Diolas, Balantes and Mandingos of Northern Guinea Bissau and the Casamance, the Republics of Guinea Bissau and The Gambia have also become actors to the conflicts<sup>1</sup>. The conflict has been described as Africa's longest civil war and according to United Nations estimate; the fighting has killed over 5,000 people, internally displaced over 60,000, and sent tens of thousands

into refuge in neighbouring Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia<sup>2</sup>.

Several ceasefire agreements were reached in the 1990s, notably in May 1991, June 1993 and January 1999 respectively for a negotiated settlement yet peace continues to be elusive in the region. On 26th January 2000, the conflicting parties, the Government of Senegal and MFDC, once again signed the Banjul Peace Accord and on 30th December 2004, a rival MFDC<sup>3</sup> group signed the General Peace Agreement with the Government<sup>4</sup>. Most recently, on April 30, 2014 the leader of MFDC agreed to a ceasefire and peace talks<sup>5</sup>. Despite these various negotiations, the conflict continues to defy all kinds of solutions proffered by state and non-state actors at both regional and international levels.

This policy brief emanates from the proceedings of a consultative meeting on **"Revisiting the Dynamics of the Casamance Conflicts: Non-state Actors Perspectives"** convened by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, WANEP in Accra, Ghana from August 20 to 21 2015. The meeting was designed to develop new strategies and operational techniques, including ideas for a new level of partnership between state agencies and CSOs, which will contribute to the peace and security architecture to be adopted in the region. Participants drawn from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Civil Society Organizations (CSO), academia and research institutions from The Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Senegal attended the meeting. The policy brief summarizes the views of participants at the meeting as well as insights from WANEP's monitoring of the security dynamics in the Casamance region.

<sup>1</sup> Aïssatou Fall, KAIPTC MONOGRAPH No. 7 -Dec 2010

<sup>2</sup> David Seyferth: Senegal: An End to One of Africa's Longest Civil Conflicts? Africa Source; July 9, 2014

<sup>3</sup> December 30, 2004 - Representative of the Senegalese government and the MFDC separatist movement signed a peace accord in the Casamancais town of Ziguinchor, (Panafican News Agency, 12/30/2004, "Govt, MFDC sign peace protocol over Casamance")

<sup>4</sup> Senegal's Casamance MFDC rebels declare a ceasefire, BBC news Africa, April 30, 2014. The MFDC is composed of two main parts: a political and a military wing called Atika

<sup>5</sup> David Seyferth: Senegal: An End to One of Africa's Longest Civil Conflicts? Africa Source; July 9, 2014

#### West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

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

WARN 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 WARN 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.

## 2.0 CURRENT CONTEXT AND DYNAMICS OF THE CASAMANCE CONFLICT

The protracted conflict has pitted the Jolo people, a predominantly Christian group against the Government of Senegal. The current situation in Casamance remains volatile with devastating consequences in the region including proliferation of small arms, which have created a fertile ground for crimes, localized communal conflicts, and illegal trafficking of products such as timber. While several reasons may be attributed for the persistent tensions, some issues of concern include:

**Fractionalization of MFDC:** The fragmentation of the MFDC has constituted a barrier to the peaceful transformation of the conflict owing to the lack of centralized command centre. The fractionalization of the rebel groups has made negotiation with the right group cumbersome; and even when negotiations are reached, it affects the transformation of the conflict because most of the peace initiatives are not supported by the entire group. While the rapprochement between Ousmane and Niantang Diatta and Cesar Atoute Badiate in the Southern front is a good sign, the rift between the Southern front and the Northern Front controlled by Salif Sadio is a major threat given the different viewpoints in the peace process. This is evident in the fact that while the Northern Front wants to negotiate directly with the Government of Senegal, the Southern Front seeks an internal MFDC dialogue before any negotiation with the Government.

**Mistrust and Absence of Common Strategy by Member States:** The visit of the Senegalese President to the Gambian President to explore avenues for sustainable peace in the Casamance signals some level of commitment by the President of Senegal to involve presidents of neighboring countries in finding lasting solution to the conflict. However, the absence of a common strategy by the States occasioned by alleged mistrust by the Governments of the affected member states constitutes an impeding factor to the peaceful transformation of the conflict. In the absence of a political framework, the

leadership of the MFDC may not be encouraged to genuinely pursue peace. Hence, it is imperative that the issues are reframed to include participative governance and decentralization

**Proliferation of Small Arms:** Another factor exacerbating the conflicts in the Casamance is the proliferation of small arms and ammunitions. The presence of ex-combatants, who have fought in conflicts in other parts of the region and continent coupled with the proliferation of weapons, also contributes to the exacerbation of the conflict. The presence of mines and eruption of conflict among combatants results in cross border incursions and spread of arms such as the 2010 incident at the Foni border. Insufficient resources including personnel to fully implement the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Programme further exacerbate the situation.

## 3.0 MANAGING THE CASAMANCE CONFLICT: RESPONSE STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES

**Addressing Structural Causes of the Conflict:** The feeling of exclusion from decision-making, neglect of the region and lack of basic infrastructural development in the area constitute a hindrance to peace in the region. However, the provision of basic infrastructures by President Macky Sall in Casamance as part of crisis management mechanism to cushion the socio-economic effects of the conflict is a laudable development that should be sustained. Furthermore, there is an increased involvement of the Casamance region through the renewed sense of citizenship and sense of belonging to the Senegal and greater political participation

**Implementation of Peace Agreements:** While the implementation of the cease-fire agreements coupled with a growing rapprochement between government and the MFDC has enabled the Government to gradually regain control of zones hitherto controlled by the MFDC, the challenges of the full implementation of the peace accords have been inconsistent with each party trading blames. However, analysts have argued that the MFDC is not the only player at fault as the Government of Senegal has allegedly failed to support viable paths to peace because of the lack of coordination and follow-up of political and economic commitments. Be that as it may, the 2014 peace accord, which was facilitated by the Community of Sant'Egidio (Catholic Organization based in Rome), carries the promise of a resolution via several factors. These factors include sustained informal meetings, peace initiatives by diverse stakeholders, the Government's decision to cancel the arrest warrant against Salif Sadio, one of the leaders of MFDC, the release of the mine clearers held hostage by MFDC and the active role of mediation by the Community of Sant'Egidio.

**Regional Interventions and Implications:** despite the low-intensity of the conflict, it has taken a regional dimension. On one hand, the inter-

connectedness between the ethnic groups notably the Balantes, Diolas and Madingos of Northern Guinea Bissau and troubled Casamance region of Senegal has made Guinea Bissau's role in the conflict crucial. On the other hand, similar inter-connections, especially the fact that the MFDC rebels<sup>6</sup> are ethnic kinsmen of President Jammeh with allegations of the latter supplying the ammunitions used by the MFDC rebels makes the role of The Gambia crucial in the conflict. In a bid to transform the conflict, ECOWAS has taken diverse steps including a conflict assessment in 2013, which recommended closer collaborations with local civil society actors to complement government and ECOWAS efforts towards addressing the security challenges posed by the conflict. Although ECOWAS has established a coordinating unit in the region to facilitate gender integration in development towards the promotion of peace and security, the lack of an ECOWAS Protocol to ensure the implementation of public commitment made by governments of member states to end the conflict is a gap in the transformation of the conflict.

#### 4.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONFLICT

The conflict has claimed the lives of up to 5,000 people and created refugee flow into Guinea Bissau and The Gambia. A direct impact of the exodus of refugee is the strained regional relations, with Senegal allegedly accusing its neighbors of providing refuge and assistance to MFDC rebels for political leverage at various phases. The conflict has also prevented the Government of Senegal's participation in larger peacekeeping missions in West Africa and the continent as a whole. While President Macky Sall has pledged to deploy over 2,500 troops to peacekeeping operations in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Darfur etc., as long as the conflict persists, the Senegalese army will have limited capacity to intervene in peacekeeping missions within the region and the continent.

The exploitation of the region's extensive agriculture and tourism has been thwarted by the sporadic violence. Aside from destroying hundreds of villages, the fighting has rendered thousands of hectares of arable land, suitable for producing rice, vegetables and fruit unusable due to unexploded ammunition and landmines<sup>7</sup>. If the landmines are cleared, the farmlands could be used to grow fruit, vegetables and rice thus boosting agriculture in the region. The volatility of the region that accounted for approximately 50,000 visitors per year has drastically reduced tourist activities. The destruction of the tourist industry and the loss of agricultural production have crippled economic development in Casamance, leaving the region isolated and undeserved. According to reports, the combination of low-level conflict and widespread unemployment is a major cause of refugees fleeing Senegal.

#### 5.0 TRANSFORMING THE CASAMANCE CONFLICT

Strategies and options for transforming the conflict on short, medium and long-term basis include but not limited to the following measures:

##### Government of Senegal:

- Dialogue with relevant stakeholders including the diverse factions and also include neighboring countries of Guinea Bissau and The Gambia.
- Take the lead in mobilizing neighboring countries and the regional organizations to become active partners in finding a solution to the Casamance conflict and by extension, the Senegambia zone.
- Promote economic viability of the area in order to bridge the perceived economic gap between north and south as well as promote freedom of expression and association.
- Government of Senegal to promote gender equality in all areas including decision-making, dialogue and mediation and peace education. The Government should also respect and uphold the rights of the people, especially women and involve them in peace negotiations

##### The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS):

- Explore avenues for creating trust and confidence between presidents of affected member states as measures to promote peace in the region.
- Prevail on the Government of Senegal to collaborate with other countries, especially the neighboring member states, on the development and adoption of strategies to address the underlying causes of the conflict.
- Adopt protocols to back the communiqué on the Casamance conflict to ensure adherence by member states. This way, the regional bloc can ensure implementation of peace accords adopted by disputing parties.
- ECOWAS Parliament should also intervene in the dispute. The Parliament's Committee responsible for

<sup>6</sup> Monograph on Casamance Conflict by KAIPTC. Page 20

<sup>7</sup> [www.reuters.com/article/us-senegal-casamance](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-senegal-casamance)

conflict management should undertake a fact-finding mission on Casamance and prepare a report to the Parliament. The report should generate a declaration/resolution that would be submitted to the Authority of Heads of State and Government

#### **Civil Society Organizations and Media:**

- Should collaborate with government and other relevant stakeholders to facilitate dialogue between the Senegalese Government and the diverse factions of MFDC, including the political and military wings of the group.
- CSOs in the Casamance region should monitor implementation of projects to ensure that it reaches the targeted beneficiaries

- CSOs should serve as oversight institutions to monitor all development issues affecting the conflict zone, and ensure that information is disseminated to all sectors of the society as well as report on its implementation.

- In order to build capacity and confidence, CSOs should lead in the provision of skills acquisition and training for ex-combatants.

- The media should be trained on peace and conflict management to ensure conflict-sensitive reportage.

For a collective involvement and participation, women should be trained as mediators and negotiators to the Casamance Conflict.



**Authors:** Mfrekeobong Ukpanah and Moussa Drame

**Peer Review:** WANEP Regional Peace Monitoring Centre

**Quality Assurance:** Levinia Addae-Mensah and Queeneth Tawo

**Address enquiries to:** WANEP Regional Peace Monitoring Centre. Email: [pmc@wanep.org](mailto:pmc@wanep.org)

Email: [wanep@wanep.org](mailto:wanep@wanep.org)

Tel: +233 302 775 975/77; Fax: +233 302 776 018

Website: [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org); Design & Layout: Kwesi Enchill