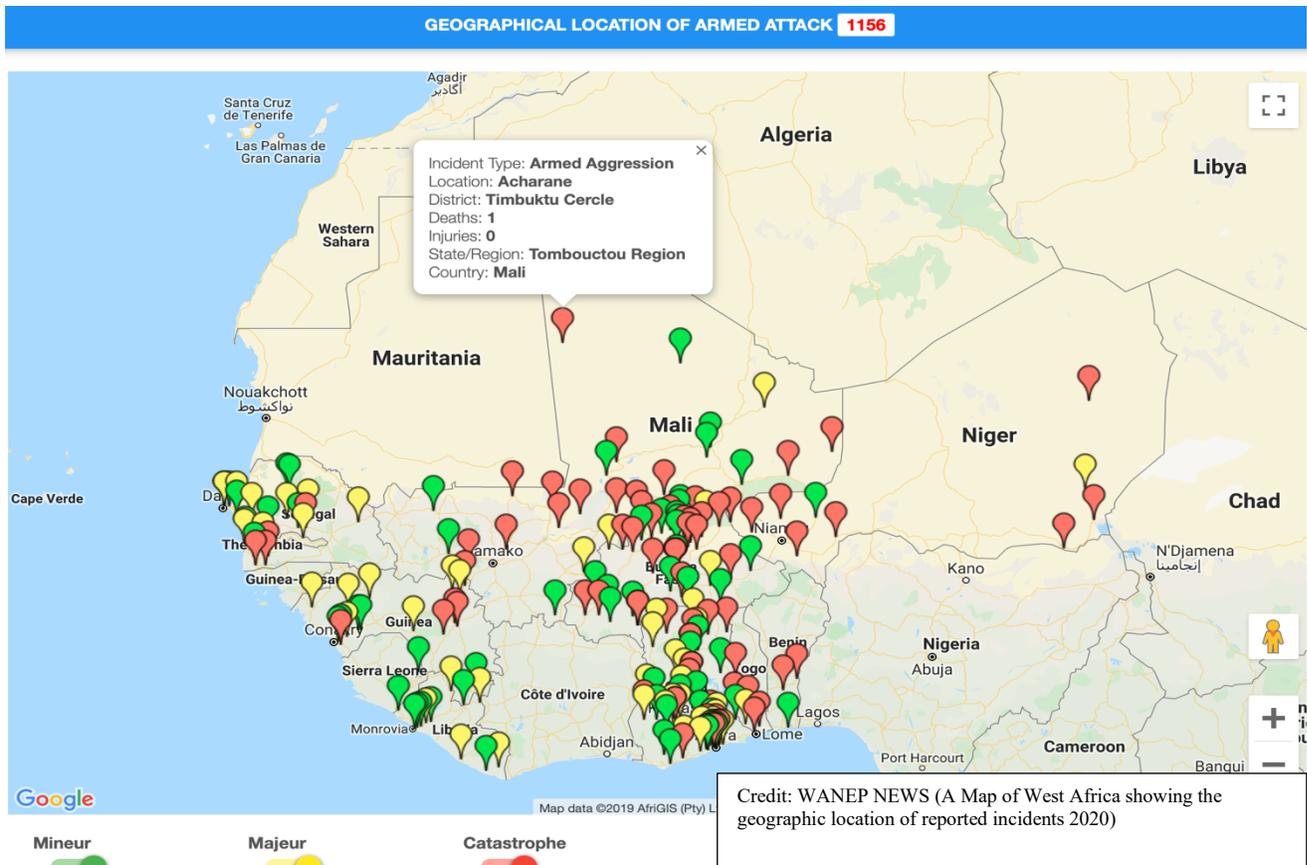




WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING OUTLOOK 2021

Potential Flashpoints and Simmering Conflicts in the Region



WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING (WANEP)

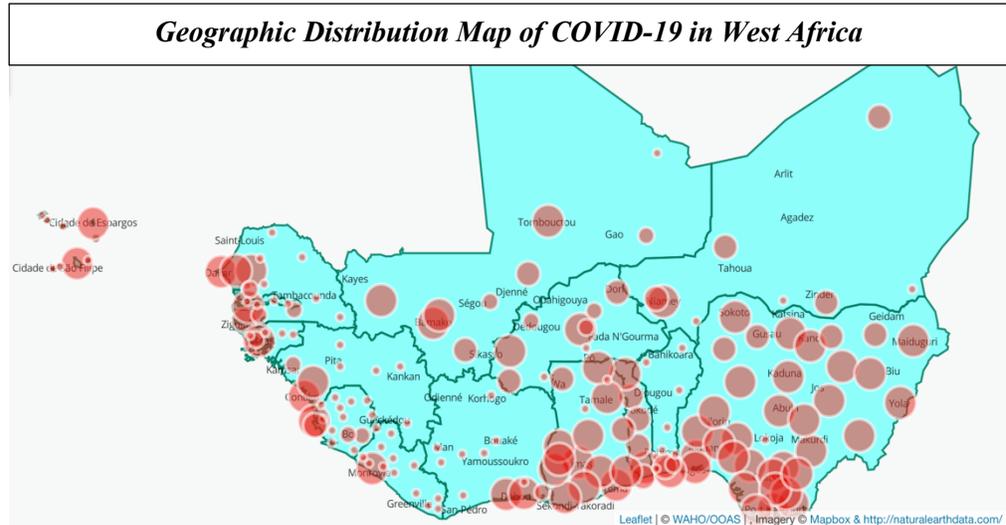
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

JANUARY 2021

Introduction

The peace and security environment of West Africa in 2020 was largely dominated by the spread and impact of COVID-19 pandemic, organised elections and political transitions. Since the first case of COVID-19 was recorded in the region in February 2020, a total of 244,213 infections have been confirmed with 3,263 fatalities as of December 31, 2020¹. A comparative assessment reported by

Africa Centre for Disease Control (AU-CDC), indicates that West Africa has the fourth-highest number of confirmed cases on the continent. (See Figure 1: Map



showing the Geographic Distribution of COVID-19 confirmed cases in West Africa). The most affected countries in the region include Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal and Cape Verde with each recording more than 11,000 cases within the reporting period. Also, available data indicates that the region has a Case Fatality Rate (CFR) of 1.29 per cent and a recovery of more than 215,600 persons, accounting for 88.3 per cent of confirmed infected cases as of December 2020². The high recovery rate has been attributed to young demographics and physical resilience in the region as well as proactive preventive efforts by States to enhance health facilities, public empowerment, strengthened disease surveillance, isolation and testing capacities, border closures and enforcement of routine COVID-19 protocols. Despite these efforts, seeming fatigue about adherence to COVID-19 protocols, coupled with the emergence of new variants of the virus have increased the risk of potential spikes in the spread of the pandemic and associated fatalities in the months ahead.

The pandemic has also had significant impacts on the socio-economic security of the region, especially small and medium scale enterprises due to the restriction measures by various governments. Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the West African economy was

¹ Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Joe Hasell (2020) - "Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)". Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus> [Online Resource] (Accessed 20/01/2021).

² West Africa Health Organisation. Available at: <https://data.wahooas.org/outbreaks/#/> (Accessed 20/01/2021).

projected to expand by 4.0 percent in 2020³. However, early assessment suggests that the economy is now projected to contract by -2.0 percent in 2020, 6.0 percentage points below the projected growth rate prior to the pandemic⁴. This is likely to affect growth largely due to a combination of factors, including decline in commodity prices, low financial flows, reduced tourism earnings and heightened volatility in the global financial markets. Given that women and youth constitute more than 89 per cent of the informal sector, they are most vulnerable in terms of the negative implications on their economic activities and household incomes⁵. This has the potential to increase inequalities and trigger protests by citizens against socio-economic hardships in the affected countries.

Public perception and conspiracy theories around vaccines also have the potential to undermine mitigation efforts against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in West Africa. Already, in the 2000s, Nigeria's polio immunization campaign was undermined by unfounded beliefs that vaccines would make girls sterile. Also, a mass deworming programme was rejected in several regions of Ghana in 2007, and also eight health workers were killed in Guinea in 2014, after being accused of spreading Ebola rather than preventing it⁶. More recently, the trial of a COVID-19 vaccine in Nigeria was met by protests and a State Governor falsely claimed that the COVID-19 vaccine is designed to kill people⁷. In light of these growing public perceptions on the negative side effects, superstition and religious views related to the vaccine, the quest to eradicate the virus in the region could be significantly hindered.

Besides the impact of the pandemic on the economic and health security of populations, recorded cases of epidemics, especially Lassa Fever and Meningitis in Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia also pose significant challenges to the already weakened healthcare systems and accessibility. In Nigeria, health authorities have reported more than 389 cases with over 160 deaths due to Lassa Fever and Meningitis 'C' infections in Edo, Ondo, Ebonyi, Taraba, Plateau, Kogi, Bauchi, Jigawa and Yobe States⁸. Similarly, Ghana recorded a total of 440 cases of Meningitis 'C' with 51 fatalities in the Upper West, Northern, Upper East, Ashanti and Central regions of the country in 2020⁹. Liberia recorded 24 cases of Meningitis 'C' cases with nine deaths mainly in Grand Bassa and Bong

³ West Africa Economic Outlook 2020: Available at: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/west_africa_regional_economic_outlook_2020-final.pdf (Accessed 20/01/2021).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2014/09/18/missing-health-workers-in-guinea-were-educating-villagers-about-ebola-when-they-were-attacked/> (Accessed 20/10/2021).

⁷ See: <https://africanarguments.org/2021/01/africa-has-a-history-of-vaccine-hesitancy-but-also-of-solutions-to-it/> (Accessed 20/01/2021).

⁸ WANEP-Nigeria, Monthly Bulletin, April – September 2020. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/01/2021).

⁹ WANEP Ghana Monthly Bulletin, April – September 2020. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/01/2021).

Counties¹⁰. As the data reveals, rising cases of Lassa Fever, Meningitis, together with COVID-19 have heightened health insecurity concerns in the region.

Amid the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries such as Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Niger and Togo organized multi-tier elections. The elections, to some extent, have contributed to democratic governance in the aforementioned countries. In addition, COVID-19 imperatives led to innovations such as the use of digital space for electioneering campaigns, voter registrations and other electoral activities. Also, the inclusion of medical personnel and COVID-19 protocol enforcement ambassadors in the electoral processes is a nodal example of innovations, especially in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Niger. However, election preparedness was challenged by the pandemic. For instance, voter registration exercise and election dates were rescheduled in Ghana, Guinea and Niger. The global dynamics of COVID-19 also limited participation of domestic and international election observation missions in the elections.

Notably before the elections, there were concerns about constitutional amendments of presidential term limits and lack of inclusivity in the electoral processes, especially in Togo, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Niger. Again, disagreements over the compilation of new voter register and concerns about the appointment of officers to the Election Management Bodies (EMBs) led to trust and confidence deficits among stakeholders in Ghana, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Niger and Burkina Faso. The effects of this were evident in a total of 517 incidents of demonstrations and protests in countries across the region. The figure also include rejection of electoral verdicts by opposition parties over alleged irregularities¹¹ in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Niger and Togo.

In terms of physical security, the region continued to grapple with recurrent terrorist and violent extremist attacks with a total of 709 cases recorded in Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali¹². Between 2019 and 2020, the fatality rate increased from 4,385 to 5,606, respectively, showing a difference of more than 1,200 deaths in 2020¹³. The humanitarian situation in the Sahel and Nigeria is also a cause for concern. By July 2020, over 3.4 million people had been displaced, including over 2.7 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in North-eastern Nigeria¹⁴. As of December 2020, about 1,074,993 IDPs, particularly women and children had been registered in 257 municipalities in Burkina Faso, with 68 per cent of these persons located in the five Northern

¹⁰WANEP Liberia, Monthly Bulletin, April – September 2020. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/01/2021).

¹¹WANEP NEWS. www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/01/2021).

¹² WANEP NEWS, Monthly Bulletin, January – December 2020. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/01/2021).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See: <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

Provinces of Sanmatenga, Soum, Seno, Bam and Namentenga¹⁵. Between January and November 2020, more than 438,900 people had been internally displaced, while over 1,151 schools had been closed, a situation that affected 350,000 children in the Central region of Mopti, Mali¹⁶. For many years, Niger has become a host country to populations fleeing conflict in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions. It currently hosts about 577,095 refugees (mostly from Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali) and 138,229 displaced persons, primarily in Diffa, Maradi, Tillabéri and Tahoua¹⁷.

Again, threats of organised crimes, especially kidnapping, human and drug trafficking as well as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons continue to disturb the peace and security landscape of the region. Kidnapping incidents remain a major security challenge across the 36 States in Nigeria as well as the north and central regions of Burkina Faso. Between January and December 2020, about 603 incidents were recorded with over 3,312 people including 361 females and 586 children being kidnapped in Nigeria¹⁸. Burkina Faso recorded 18 cases of kidnapping, mostly involving workers of humanitarian organisations in the North and central regions. Also, Niger recorded 10 incidents of kidnapping comprising aid workers in Tillabéri in June, 2020¹⁹.

Additionally, threats to maritime security and their consequences on human security present another considerable challenge in West Africa. Increased pirates' attacks on vessels have been recorded in the Gulf of Guinea. A record of 135 crew members were kidnapped from their vessels in 22 separate incidents in 2020, an unprecedented rise in the number of crew kidnappings since 2019²⁰. According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the Gulf of Guinea accounts for over 95 per cent of crew numbers kidnapped, globally²¹. The activities of pirates in the territorial waters of coastal countries along the Gulf of Guinea is a potential conduit for channeling arms and drugs to fuel insecurity in the region.

Furthermore, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), especially rape against minors were predominant in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, The Gambia and Burkina Faso. Between January and December 2020, a total of 6,484 incidents of sexual and gender-based violence were

¹⁵ See: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/josé-luengo-cabrera/detail/recent-activity/> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

¹⁶ See: <https://www.unicef.org/media/79446/file/Mali-SitRep-January-2020.pdf> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

¹⁷ See: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Niger%20operation%20update%20February%202021.pdf> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

¹⁸ Op. Cit. WANEP NEWS

¹⁹ See: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/25/armed-group-abducts-10-aid-workers-in-southwestern-niger> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

²⁰ See: <https://www.offshore-energy.biz/imb-piracy-gulf-of-guinea-accounts-for-95-of-kidnappings-in-2020/> (Accessed 20/01/2021)

²¹ Ibid.

recorded and most of the cases were related to violations committed during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and other restriction measures. This situation continues to impede the education and health of women and girls.

Climate change and its associated threats including droughts and floods that continue to affect food and human security is another cause for concern in Niger, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Guinea. For instance, heavy rainfall in Niger led to 45 fatalities with 226,000 displaced persons and 25,800 homes and properties destroyed including farmland, crops and livestock²². Between September and October 2020, Ghana also recorded torrential rainfall and flooding from the spillages of the Bagré Dam in neighbouring Burkina Faso which resulted in 10 deaths, displacement of over 1,500 persons and injury to 19 persons²³. It also led to the destruction of several houses, crops, livestock and farmlands in the Bawku West district in the Upper East region of Ghana²⁴. As of September 10, 2020, floods and strong winds in Burkina Faso had caused 13 deaths, 50 injuries and the displacement of over 563 persons²⁵. It also led to the destruction of 1,656 homes, 1,790 IDP shelters and over 250 tons of food²⁶. A total of 23 incidents including flash floods, windstorm, thunder and lightning strikes were recorded in Monrovia and Lofa Counties in Liberia; Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire; Bolongo District in Guinea; Banjul in The Gambia; and Nigeria's Abuja, Akwa Ibom, Borno, Ondo, Kwara, Taraba and Oyo States²⁷. Incidents of natural disasters, especially floods recorded in the period are manifestations of increased vulnerability of the region to climate change and its associated risks.

The West Africa peace and security outlook highlights the political stability and human security challenges of countries in the region in 2020. It further projects the risk of vulnerabilities and threats that inform specific early warning monitoring and intervention strategies in 2021.

²²WANEP NEWS. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/01/2021).

²³Ibid.

²⁴WANEP-Ghana, *NEWS Quick Updates*. September 7 and October 1, 2020. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/01/2021)

²⁵Op cit. WANEP NEWS.

²⁶Ibid. WANEP NEWS.

²⁷WANEP NEWS (April – September 2020). Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/01/2021).

Benin



The current political landscape is replete with disputes among political parties over the implementation of “*Certificat de Conformité*”²⁸ introduced in November 2019 by the Government of President Patrice Talon and approved by the National Assembly. The “*Certificat de Conformité*” enforced a party system reform that contributed to the reduction of political parties from over 200 to 10 State-recognized parties. While this sought to address the proliferation of political parties, opposition parties expressed concerns about the shrinking space for political participation, which continues to undermine the principles of multi-party democracy. These challenges manifested in the local elections held in May 2020.

Political Stability Challenges: Beyond the importance of the legislative and local elections to the consolidation of democracy, especially at the local level, the absence of key opposition parties in both the legislature and the Municipal Councils inhibits their participation in the 2021 presidential election. The new electoral law adopted in November 2019 requires presidential and vice-presidential candidates to be sponsored by at least 16 parliamentarians and/or mayors²⁹. This means that without such representation of parties in both governance structures, they are likely not to have candidates to contest in the presidential election for the first time in Benin. This has the potential to trigger protests and demonstrations by opposition parties and a section of civil society that could result in violence ahead of the election and beyond.

“Owing to these conditions, the credibility of the 2021 presidential election could be undermined with a potential risk of unrest that would heighten political instability in the country.”

Another critical aspect of the political stability of the country is intra and inter-party wrangling. While the intra-party conflict has led to further divisions in the front of opposition parties and weakened their base, inter-party conflicts between the incumbent government and key opposition parties also continue to generate tensions and violence in some regions in the country. For instance, former President Thomas Yayi Boni of the “*Forces Cauris pour un Bénin Emergent*” (FCBE) has resigned from the party on suspicion of political influence by the ruling government of President Patrice Talon. In 2020, the government also detained opposition figures, including Yayi Boni,

²⁸ The *Certificate of conformity*: It is the fact of the Decision N ° EL19-001 of the 1st February 2019 of the Constitutional Court of Benin. It is a mandatory requirement issued by the Constitutional Court for political parties to operate and contest elections in Benin.

²⁹ See: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/benins-local-elections-further-reduce-the-political-space> (Accessed 20/01/2021).

which led to protests and civil unrest – met with gunfire from the security services. While Yayi Boni was subsequently freed and allowed to leave the country, other opposition figures remain imprisoned. Former prime minister and current opposition figure Lionel Zinzou has been barred from running in any election in the next four years – including next year’s presidential election³⁰. Owing to these, the credibility of the 2021 presidential election could be undermined with a potential risk of unrest that would heighten political instability in the country.

Human Security Challenges: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restriction measures, Benin experienced economic recession in 2020. The real GDP slowed down by 5.5 percentage points by December 2020³¹. The pandemic is expected to result in a decline in cotton exports (57% of exports) and a reduction in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as there will be difficulties in accessing international financial markets due to the general reluctance of investors. Also, travel and tourism, which represents 6% of GDP and 5% of jobs in Benin are likely to fall³². This has affected employment, education, and health security of the country. Aside this, the informal sector of the economy which employs many women and youth have been devastated by the pandemic. In particular, the health crisis caused by the pandemic has a wider implication for access to primary and public healthcare, especially maternal and child health delivery as well as other diseases which remain a challenge. However, the World Bank has approved an International Development Association (IDA) fund of \$90 million to address the health crisis unleashed by the pandemic on population and healthcare systems in the country³³. The Economic Intelligence Unit has also projected that the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will grow by 2.4 per cent in 2021, and by 4.5 per cent in 2022, in line with rising external demand for cotton exports and improving internal political stability³⁴. However, if the lingering political tensions and violence persists in the year ahead, the realization of projected economic growth is likely to be inhibited.

In addition to negative fallouts from the COVID-19 pandemic, the unexpected unilateral closure of the land borders by the Nigerian Government in August 2019 had a socio-economic impact on Benin as a key exporter of foodstuffs and other commodities to Nigeria via the port of Cotonou. With the informal sector in Benin representing approximately 70 percent of GDP and 90 percent

³⁰ See: <https://21votes.com/benin-elections/> (Accessed 04/02/2021).

³¹ African Development Bank (ADB). *Africa Economic Outlook Amid COVID-19*. ADB, 2020. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/afdb20-04_aeo_supplement_full_report_for_web_0705.pdf#page=60 (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

³² Ibid.

³³ See: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/27/pef-allocates-us195-million-to-more-than-60-low-income-countries-to-fight-covid-19> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

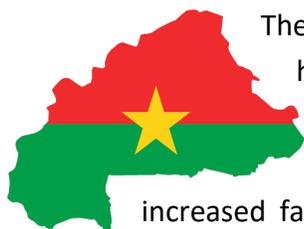
³⁴ See <https://country.eiu.com/benin> (Accessed on 25/01/2021).

of employment³⁵, a lot of petty traders transact in perishable consumer items such as tomatoes, poultry products, rice and many others across these borders. The prolonged closure of the border affected especially this sector and the Government projected customs revenue, bilateral trade and economic integration as well as other socio-cultural cross-border activities that support livelihoods of populations, especially border communities. The cumulative effect of this is evident in the slow-down of economic activities which have impacted the already strained economy.

Recommendations

- Regional and continental actors including ECOWAS and UNOWAS should intensify preventive diplomacy leading to multi-stakeholder dialogue and national conversation on inclusive participation in governance to mitigate the rising political tensions and disagreements ahead of the elections in 2021.
- The Government of Benin should create the space for engagement with political parties, CSOs, traditional and Faith-Based Organizations, women and youth groups to build consensus around the electoral laws and inclusivity in the electoral processes.
- The Government should intensify its support to the most vulnerable in the informal sector and also support businesses in the most severely affected industries (hotels, restaurants, transport, and leisure) with stimulus packages and other social plan to cushion the effects of the pandemic on the economy.
- The Government of Benin should foster existing bilateral talks to develop a joint trade agreement as well as cross border security management plan as a panacea to address the issues that led to the closure of the Nigerian border with Benin.

Burkina Faso



The lingering security crisis in Burkina Faso continues to affect the political and human security landscape of the country. Amid the spread of COVID-19, terrorist and armed groups attacks have heightened fragility of the state. The consequences of this are mirrored in the rising humanitarian crisis - increased fatalities, refugees flow, internal displacement, food insecurity, closure of schools, among others. Irrespective of the growing insecurity, the country was able to hold its presidential and legislative elections on November 22, 2020. This, to some extent, is a step forward to consolidate democratic governance in the political landscape of the country. Despite this, while there were no reports of major attacks on the election day, threats of violence prevented registered voters from exercising their franchise especially in identified hotspot areas

³⁵ See: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2019/10/29/the-effects-of-nigerias-closed-borders-on-informal-trade-with-benin/> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

of Northern and Central regions. According to the Electoral Commission, nearly 3,000 polling stations were not operational, affecting about 350,000 voters in those conflict affected areas³⁶. This affected participation, especially citizens in local communities in the affected areas. This casts a shadow of doubt on the legitimacy and capacity of state authority that is critical to building resilience against threats to security in the years ahead.

Political Stability Challenges: Against the backdrop of rising insecurity, the presidential and parliamentary elections held in Burkina Faso were generally peaceful. This is attributable to state preparedness, the role of civil society, the media, as well as international partners' support to the electoral process. Notably, there was no record of attacks and significant incidents of violence that could mar the outcome of the elections. As part of election preparedness, the "*Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante*" (CENI) registered 6,490,868 eligible voters including 23,048 Burkinabè in the diaspora, who participated in the elections for the first time³⁷. Women constituted 46.93 percent of the final list of eligible voters³⁸. The ruling "*Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès*" (MPP) Party candidate, President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was elected with 58 per cent of the votes to serve another 5-year term³⁹, while the main opposition party "*Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès*" (CDP) candidate, Eddie Komboïgo had 15.48 per cent of the vote⁴⁰. However, many opposition figures claimed the election was marred by bribery and irregularities⁴¹. The political stalemate that ensued was resolved by preventive diplomacy involving ECOWAS, UNOWAS and civil society groups

In the Parliamentary elections, no political party clinched majority of the parliamentary seats. The outcome of the parliamentary election indicates that none of the major parties have an absolute majority seat in the National Assembly. The CENI announced that the ruling party only obtained 56 seats, falling short of an absolute majority of 64 seats, out of a total of 127, while the opposition CDP won 20 seats⁴². This provides opportunity for consensus building and inclusivity in governance and decision-making process. However, the polarisation of the country along ethnic and political lines threatens consensus building in the legislature. In as much as the responsibility to reunite the country lies mainly on the shoulders of the Government, a space for

³⁶See <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20201126-burkina-s-kabor%C3%A9-wins-re-election-according-to-full-preliminary-results> (Accessed on 26/01/2021).

³⁷ See: <https://www.dw.com/en/burkina-faso-incumbent-kabore-wins-presidential-election-preliminary-results-show/a-55739023> (Accessed 21/01/2021)

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See: <https://www.africanews.com/2020/11/30/burkina-faso-elections-kabore-s-party-fails-to-win-majority-parliamentary-seats/> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

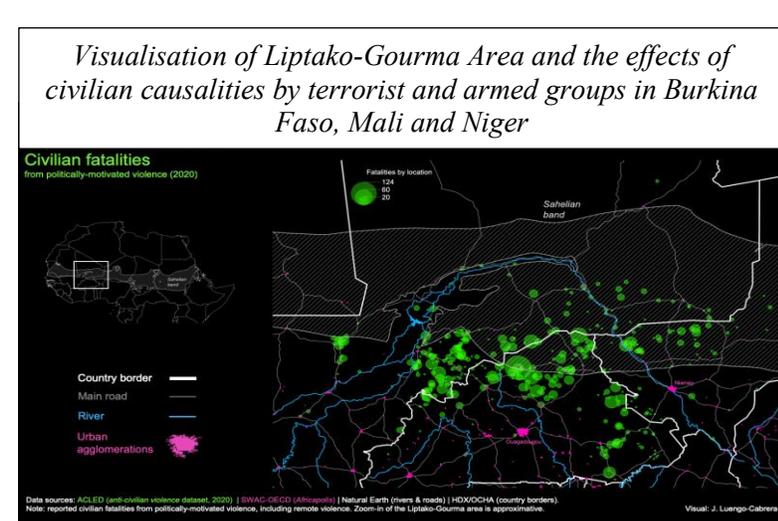
⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

dialogue with opposition parties and other stakeholders is imperative to generate trust and confidence of citizens in the governance and democratic structure of the country in 2021 and beyond.

Dwindling social cohesion, trust and confidence deficits in the security sector, are a cause for concern. A cascading effect has been evident in the spring up of self-defence groups such as Koglwéogo and Dozo as alternative security in hard-to-reach-communities. However, there have been public concerns over targeted attacks and human rights abuses perpetuated by these groups against citizens suspected to be collaborators of terrorist groups⁴³. Also, in 2020, there were 46 recorded incidents of ethnic and inter-communal violence in terrorist affected communities in the northern and central regions of the country⁴⁴. This has resulted in 215 fatalities and 83 injuries with destruction of business and private properties⁴⁵. It continues to serve as a veritable

“Besides the cross-border movements of terrorist and extremist groups into Burkina Faso, illicit trade including small arms and light weapons, drug trafficking, cattle rustling, and illegal mining continue to undermine security and stability of the country.”



ground and an opportunistic exploitation of terrorist and armed groups to weaken social cohesion and expand their operations beyond the affected communities. Notably, the Liptako-Gourma region that spans across Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali continues to serve as a fertile confluence of a host of terrorist and non-state armed groups' activities. Violent incidents related

to these terrorist groups have led to the death of an estimated 5,000 people in 2020 (as of 31 August) and triggered significant displacement of populations in the four affected countries⁴⁶.

⁴³Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), Peace and Security Report, March 2020. Available at: <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Burkina-Faso-Conflict-Insights-vol-1-.pdf> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

⁴⁴ WANEP Burkina Faso Monthly Bulletin (January – December 2020). Available at: www.wanep.org/news. (Accessed 20/02/2021).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See: <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/central-sahel-liptako-gourma-crisis-monthly-dashboard-10-20-october-2020> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

Besides the cross-border movements of terrorist and extremist groups into Burkina Faso, illicit trade including small arms and light weapons, drug trafficking, cattle rustling, and illegal mining continue to undermine security and stability of the country.

Human Security Challenges: Spiraling insecurity continues to impact human security in Burkina Faso. Despite the increased deployment of security forces, terrorist and armed groups in the country's Centre Nord and Sahel regions, continue to attack the police and military, civilians, schools, health centres, teachers and health workers, among others⁴⁷. As of December 2020, about 1,074,993 Internally Displaced Persons had been registered, with 68 per cent of them located in the five Northern Provinces of Sanmatenga, Soum, Seno, Bam and Namentenga⁴⁸.

According to UNHCR, by the end of the first quarter of 2020 alone, an estimated 350,000 people needed urgent access to adequate shelter and water in the face of complex humanitarian emergencies caused by desertification in remote parts of Burkina Faso⁴⁹. Also, between 2019 and 2020, the fatality rate increased from 1,800 to 2,400⁵⁰. More importantly, the humanitarian crisis has increased the vulnerability of women and children to SGBV. In the communities of Arbinda, Soum, a recorded attack on December 24, 2019 led to 35 civilian fatalities mostly women⁵¹. Also, attacks on Rofénèga, Nagraogo, and Silgadji villages between January 17 and 25, 2020, left over 90 civilians dead⁵². On February 1, 2020, at least 20 civilians, including a nurse, were killed in Lamdamol village, and on February 16, 2020, an attack on a church in Pansi village killed over 20 civilians, including the pastor.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also aggravating the already complex mix of crises in the country. For instance, the agricultural sector as well as small scale and medium enterprises which largely employ about 70 per cent of women and youths have been devastated by the associated restriction measures introduced by the government to curb the spread of the pandemic among populations⁵³. Also, about 80 per cent of the Burkinabe population is rural and relies on agriculture – crop farming and livestock production, and therefore is subjected to climate change variabilities and increased armed groups attacks. These dynamics continue to heighten humanitarian crisis, especially food insecurity and internal displacements. Despite efforts to

⁴⁷UNHCR News Briefing – Burkina Faso. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/4/5e8c3b614/unhcr-warns-chronic-lack-resources-contributing-new-crisis-burkina-faso.html#:~:text=Burkina%20Fa> (Accessed on 28/01/2021).

⁴⁸See: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/josé-luengo-cabrera/detail/recent-activity/> (Accessed 05/02/2021).

⁴⁹Op. cit. UNHCR News Briefing.

⁵⁰ WANEP NEWS Burkina Faso. Monthly Bulletin. Available at: www.wanep.org/news (Accessed 05/02/2021).

⁵¹ See: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/burkina-faso#> (Accessed 05/02/2021).

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³See: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/afdb20-04_aeo_supplement_full_report_for_web_0705.pdf#page=60 (Accessed 20/02/2021).

abate the threats facing the country, this trend is likely to increase human and state fragility in 2021, given the gaps in response strategies to the crisis.

Recommendations

- International partners through the G5 Sahel arrangement should expedite existing strategies and provide resources to the Government of Burkina Faso to mitigate the spread of violent extremism and other transnational organised crime in the country.
- The Government in collaboration with international actors and civil society organizations and the media should work towards ensuring national ownership of response strategies that will build resilience around the complex humanitarian emergencies and peacebuilding efforts in the country.
- The Government should strengthen partnership with international humanitarian agencies and the private sector to increase livelihood support to women and youths devastated by COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts to mitigate the impact on the socio-economic and health security.

Côte d'Ivoire



Despite the global economic shocks triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth was 7.4 per cent in 2018 and 2019 and was projected to remain above 7.0 per cent in 2020⁵⁴. However, compared with the initial forecasts, a 4.2-to-5.7-point loss in growth was recorded in 2020, due to downturn in the agriculture, transportation, tourism, manufacturing, construction, and trade sectors⁵⁵.

The health crisis will likely have a particular impact on public finance, with an increase in expenditure on health, social protection and direct aid to businesses, and a drop in budgetary revenues due to a decline in imports and a slowdown of activity in the private sector⁵⁶. These dynamics continue to affect the political stability and human security. Disagreements, shrinking political space for inclusive participation of opposition parties led to tensions and violence in the electoral processes. Incumbent president Alassane Ouattara's controversial third term bid in the October 2020 presidential elections, and alleged persecution of key opposition figures, especially the disqualification of Guillaume Soro and former president Laurent Gbagbo, increased political polarisation ahead and beyond the elections. These threats are likely to persist in the broader political space with consequences to the stability of the country.

⁵⁴ See: <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/cote-d'ivoire/cote-divoire-economic-outlook> (Accessed 20/01/2020).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Political Stability Challenges: The political disagreement and violence over President Alassane Ouattara’s third term presidential candidacy in the October 31, 2020 elections following the death of the Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly, the candidate for the ruling Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace RHDP coalition heightened tensions in the country. Pre-election context was also characterised by protests, demonstrations and boycotts by opposition parties and other interest groups for lack of consensus in the membership of the electoral commission and subsequent election activities. The protests led to violence and death of five persons which included four security personnel in Gagnoa and Daoukro⁵⁷. Also, the arrest warrant issued against the self-exiled Guillaume Soro by the Government was another source of concern. Both Soro and former President Laurent Gbagbo were disqualified from contesting in the elections. Such actions were perceived by stakeholders as politically motivated. Consequently, the election was marked by boycotts of the opposition, resulting in Alassane Ouattara’s re-election with 94.27 per cent of the votes⁵⁸. Exclusion of key opposition parties and fear of violence affected inclusive participation, as assessments from election observer groups indicated 53.9 percent turnout in the elections⁵⁹. This is further exacerbated by politicised ethnic division between the northern and southern regions of the country, with negative implications for national cohesion and stability beyond the election. Given the strategic geo-economic importance of Cote d’Ivoire in ECOWAS regional trade and integration, rising political tension in Cote d’Ivoire has significant ramifications on regional peace and security.

“Given the strategic geo-economic importance of Cote d’Ivoire in ECOWAS regional trade and integration, rising political tension in the country has significant ramifications on regional peace and security.”

Human Security Challenges: Sporadic incidents of violence were reported mainly in Abidjan, Gagnoa, Dakro, Divo and Bonoua, with at least 16 fatalities ahead of the presidential elections in 2020⁶⁰. The Dabou district witnessed the highest number of injuries with 67 cases and more than 50 people arrested between October 19-21, 2020⁶¹. According to Human Right Watch, about 55 people were killed and 282 injured between October 31 and November 10, 2020, due

⁵⁷ See: <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2020/08/cote-divoire-les-violences-des-voix-dissidentes-augmentent-a-lapproche-de-lelection/> (Accessed 20/02/2021).

⁵⁸The African Report. Available at: <https://www.theafricareport.com/48878/cote-divoire-ouattara-re-elected-for-a-3rd-term-with-94-27/> (Accessed on 29/01/2021).

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰See <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-24/sixteen-killed-in-ivory-coast-town-ahead-of-presidential-vote> (Accessed on 29/01/2021).

⁶¹Ibid.

to rival political clashes and excessive use of force by state security against opposition protesters following the disputed electoral outcome⁶². Also, several opposition members who rejected the results and formed the National Transitional Council to organise new elections were arrested⁶³. The escalating political crisis has led to more than 6,000 Ivorians fleeing to neighbouring countries, especially Ghana and Guinea⁶⁴.

The global pandemic led to significant income losses for households and the informal sector. A survey of 800 households conducted in April 2020, indicated that 71 per cent of households experienced a decrease in income and were unable to meet their basic living expenses⁶⁵. Only three out of ten households could pay for rent, water and electricity bills, and food⁶⁶. The survey data clearly show that the impact has been greater and widespread than anticipated and has worsened the living conditions of already vulnerable households⁶⁷. This has possible implications on household incomes, jobs, and businesses in the country in the short and medium terms.

Recommendations

- The Government, with the support of ECOWAS, UNOWAS and CSOs, should facilitate national conversations on inclusive electoral reforms, and a clear policy agenda to reconcile existing ethnic divides in the country.
- ECOWAS, UNOWAS and CSOs, should intensify political dialogue and mediation between key political figures to resolve the political crises and de-escalate the conflict in the country.

The Gambia



In the Gambia, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparation Commission (TRRC) set up by an Act of Parliament in January 2017 to investigate human rights violations during the 22-year rule of former President Jammeh, is expected to submit its findings and recommendations in July 2021. Notwithstanding this, inter and intra-political party disagreements continue to generate tension, protests and violence. Ahead of the presidential elections in December 2021, there are growing concerns surrounding the Draft Constitution and electoral reforms. For instance, a key

⁶²Human Rights Watch. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/02/cote-divoire-post-election-violence-repression#> (Accessed on 29/01/2021).

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴United Nations Human Rights office of the High Commissioner. Available at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26487&LangID=E> (Accessed on 29/01/2021).

⁶⁵The World Bank. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cotedivoire/publication/the-state-of-the-ivorian-economy-how-cote-divoire-could-rebound-after-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-boost-growth> (Accessed on 29/01/2021).

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

sticking point around the Draft Constitution is a clause that seeks to prevent President Barrow from resetting the clock to make him eligible for two more terms⁶⁸. Also, the Independent Electoral Commission’s proposal to replace the voting system – from marbles to ballot papers – has been met with mixed reactions mainly from opposition parties and a section of the civil society. Growing tension in mainstream and social media platforms also contributes to a waning social cohesion in the country. The manipulation of social media as a tool for ethnic exploitation and violent communication to stoke violent attacks against political opponents is a potential threat ahead of the 2021 Presidential election⁶⁹.

“The manipulation of social media as a tool for ethnic exploitation and violent communication to stoke violent attacks against political opponents is a potential threat ahead of the 2021 Presidential election.”

Political Stability Challenge: As part of preparations towards the December presidential elections, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is scheduled to commence general voter registration on January 14, 2021. However, this has been postponed due to logistical challenges relating to the procurement of materials for the registration exercise in addition to disagreements among members of parliament over the Draft Elections Bill 2020 which seeks to replace the “marble-drum and bell” voting system. While the marble system has been used over the years to support non-literate voter participation and reduce irregularities, it is increasingly becoming obsolete given the increasing number of political parties, voter population and delay in the collation and counting processes. These challenges could affect the electoral timetable and election preparedness with possible ramifications on election credibility.

A critical dynamic in the December 2021 election is that President Adama Barrow contests under his own National People’s Party (NPP) following disputes with the United Democratic Party (UDP) over reneging on his promise to step down after three years in power to allow a transitional government to organise fresh elections. This has heightened the stakes ahead of the elections in 2021, as relationship among ruling coalition has been characterised by tensions, acrimony and competing political interests.

Moreover, persistent protests by the “Operation Three Years Jotna (Three Years is Enough)” - a grassroots movement - demanding that President Barrow and the Coalition partners honour the

⁶⁸BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cdl8n2edeydt/the-gambia> (Accessed on 21/01/2021).

⁶⁹ https://www.wanep.org/wanep/files/2019/Dec/WANEP_The_Gambia_-_Policy_Brief_04-12-19.pdf (Accessed 05/02/2021).

three years coalition agreement made before the elections in December 2016, are a critical challenge ahead of the election in December 2021. A nationwide protest was planned to hold on January 19, 2020 amid heightened tension and fear of widespread violence and spread of the COVID-19⁷⁰. However, Civil Society Organisations and international partners intervened through dialogue with the group and political actors leading to the signing of a peace communiqué. This gain needs to be consolidated and sustained among the parties ahead of the December 2021 election.

On the Security Sector front, while gains have been made in reform processes, delays associated with the implementation of the new National Security Policy developed in 2019 and the extension of the mandate of ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG) portend significant challenges to internal security. Significant shortcomings are present in the area of law enforcement, both in terms of institutional operations and national infrastructure. Also, allegation of institutional corruption and acts of impunity in the Police have left citizens to reportedly pay for security services to facilitate investigations in cases, arrests and protection⁷¹. This undermines trust and state-citizens relations which is key to fostering social cohesion and stability ahead of the December 2021 presidential elections.

Human Security Challenge: In the face of the pandemic, the GDP growth for 2020 has been revised from 5.2 per cent to 1.9 per cent in December 2020⁷². Again, the GDP could fall into a recession, contracting by 3.1 per cent in 2021⁷³. The tourism sector, which constitutes the biggest foreign exchange earner and accounts for 20 per cent of the country's GDP has been the hardest hit⁷⁴, with arrivals set to decline by 28 per cent from 2019, for a loss of \$110 million in revenues and 20,000 jobs⁷⁵. Also, the decline of remittances from Gambians working in hardest hit Western Europe and United States, which account for 15.3 per cent of GDP, will disproportionately affect vulnerable groups (women, youth, and informal workers), with a negative impact on overall food security, poverty, and income inequality⁷⁶. In addition, the informal sector, which largely engages women and youths has also suffered severe shocks by the pandemic.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ *Conflict and Development Analysis – The Gambia*. A collaboration of Ministry of Interior of the Republic of The Gambia and West Africa Network for Peacebuilding – The Gambia (WANEP), with support from joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention and United Nations in The Gambia. 15 June 20.

⁷² World Bank Group. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia/overview> (Accessed on 01/02/2021).

⁷³ See: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/afdb20-04_aeo_supplement_full_report_for_web_0705.pdf#page=60 (Accessed 20/02/2021).

⁷⁴ Op. Cit. World Bank Group.

⁷⁵ Op. cit. www.afdb.org

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Already, the national unemployment rate hovers around 30 percent, with a rate of 40 percent affecting youth between the ages of 15 and 24⁷⁷. This pandemic shock would increase unemployment adversely affecting the livelihoods of the youth population in 2021. Given the rising public discontent against the economic hardships, and continued tensions and disagreements around the “3-year Jotna” demand and among political actors in the country, the risks of protests and demonstrations are likely in the lead up to the country’s elections.

The recent seizure of two tons of cocaine by the Drug Law Enforcement Agency at the seaport in Banjul is another worrying development in the country. The drugs have a street value of \$88 million⁷⁸. This reinforces international attention on the country as a veritable drug transit point to other strategic areas in the region and beyond. Given the dynamics of rising insecurity in the region, such illicit drug activity could fuel conflicts and operations of arms groups.

More importantly, food security in the country is threatened by increased activities of illegal fishing and over-exploitation of small pelagic fish driven by the rapid growth in fishmeal processing in the sub-region⁷⁹. This is further aggravated by increasing climate change and its impact on sea resources that support community livelihoods. The impact of this is already manifesting in depletion of fish stock and scarcity in the markets. This is affecting the prices of fisheries, especially lobsters and income of fishing communities in the country.

Recommendation

- There is the need for the Government to create space for inclusive participation and consensus building by key political stakeholders to address the disagreements around electoral and other legal reforms ahead of the elections.
- The National Council for Civic Education (NCCE), CSOs, the media and development partners should intensify collaboration in promoting peace and civic education through engagement with stakeholders including political parties, traditional and faith-based organisations, and women and youth groups on the disagreements on the marble to electronic voting system as well as improve public trust and confidence in the electoral process.
- The Government’s COVID-19 response should strengthen the provision of financial support to the informal sector and private businesses including the hospitality sector to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, especially targeting women and young people engaged in these sectors.

⁷⁷ See: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/812009/youth-unemployment-rate-in-gambia/> (Accessed 12/02/2021).

⁷⁸ See <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/cocaine-worth-88m-seized-in-gambias-largest-bust/2104256> Accessed (20/01/2021)

⁷⁹ See <https://chinadialogueocean.net/14247-sea-shepherd-helps-the-gambia-tackle-illegal-fishing/> (Accessed on 21/01/2021).

Ghana



The Presidential and Parliamentary election in December 2020, were touted as a further step in consolidating democracy in Ghana's political landscape. The elections were described by international and domestic election observers as generally peaceful, credible and transparent. However, there were cases of electoral violence recorded in some constituencies which resulted in five fatalities⁸⁰. In addition to this, the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) has also disputed the election results and currently contesting the validity of the Electoral Commission's (EC) declaration of incumbent President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) as the winner of the presidential elections at the country's Supreme Court. While this reveals parties' commitment and adherence to the rule of law, it has however put the country in a state of uncertainty due to the pending court decision in the post-election period. In September 2020, President Nana Akufo-Addo was elected by the 57th Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the ECOWAS as the new Chairman of the Authority. This comes with additional responsibilities in leading Member States of the regional bloc in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, security and governance challenges. Similarly, the Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was officially opened in Ghana and set to begin operations in 2021. The country also faces a huge task in galvanizing a post-COVID-19 economic recovery for both West Africa and the continent, as well as the current challenges to the multilateral trading system by consolidating and advancing the continental market integration objectives through the AfCFTA, in the years ahead.

Political Stability Challenges: The 2020 elections were organised in a challenging context. For instance, COVID-19 and associated restriction measures delayed the new voter registration exercise that eventually commenced on June 30, 2020. More importantly NDC, the main opposition party and a section of civil society opposed the process of compiling the new voter register by EC. This resulted in a series of public protests held in major cities of the country including Accra, Kumasi, Tamale and Ho. The protests and disagreements over the electoral process mirrored the deficit of trust and confidence in the EC by NDC. This was largely also propelled by the dismissal of the former Chairperson of the EC and her two deputies by the current President on grounds of abuse of office in line with Article 146 of the 1992 Constitution⁸¹. Amid these challenges, the EC was able to compile a new voter register and introduce innovations in data collection such as disaggregation of gender, people with disability and the aged from

⁸⁰Ghana Police Report. Presented at the National Peace Council (NPC) Election review and reflection session on January 23, 2021.

⁸¹WANEP. "Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2020: Building Confidence and Generating Trust amid COVID-19 Pandemic". WARN Policy Brief, June 2020. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 02/02/2021).

constituency to the national level. Also, an SMS platform for voter verification was introduced and the voter register publicised ahead of the elections to ensure transparency in the process. Again, all the EC election activities were laced with the enforcement of COVID-19 preventive protocols. Despite these efforts, 61 incidents of violence with five fatalities were recorded in the immediate and post-election period in the Odododiodio, Ablekuma Central, Awutu Senya East, Techiman South and Savulugu constituencies⁸².

Voter turnout was 79 per cent with incumbent President Akuffo Addo obtaining 51.3 per cent while former President John Mahama of the NDC obtained 47.3 per cent of the total valid votes cast⁸³. The result of the parliamentary elections was a split between the two main political parties with 137 seats each and one independent seat in a parliament of 275 members with no absolute majority. Remarkably, the Speaker of Parliament, the Right Honourable Alban Bagbin, was elected from the NDC which signals an opportunity to strengthen consensus building, dialogue and negotiations in the Parliament. With the leadership of the Parliament held by the opposition, it is expected that democratic governance will be reinforced through proper oversight and transparency in governance between the NPP and the NDC.

“Is the composition of Ghana’s Parliament an opportunity to strengthen consensus building, dialogue and negotiations or a potential for political gridlock in the years ahead?”

Again, the NDC is challenging the validity of the results at the Supreme Court, accusing the ruling party of manipulating the EC to announce a fraudulent election result. Prior to the court process, the NDC organised a series of protests of its party members including Members of Parliament (MP), resulting in clashes with security agents.

Human Security Challenges: A recent *“Business Tracker Survey”* report of the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) reveals that due to the ongoing pandemic, 115,000 businesses have permanently or temporarily closed down, and sales reduced by 36 per cent between April 2019 and April 2020. In addition, more than 45,000 workers (especially women in the hospitality industry) lost their jobs, while over 770,000 employees of businesses had their wages reduced⁸⁴. This was caused by

⁸²Ghana Police. Election 2020 – After Action Review Report to the National Security Council. Tuesday, 29th December 2020.

⁸³Electoral Commission, Press Statement. Available at: <https://www.ec.gov.gh/summary-of-the-2020-presidential-election-results-without-techiman-south-constituency-results/> (Accessed on 02/02/2021).

⁸⁴World Bank. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/08/03/covid-19-forced-businesses-in-ghana-to-reduce-wages-for-over-770000-workers-and-caused-about-42000-layoffs-research-reveals> (Accessed on 02/02/2021).

low supply and demand for goods and services as a result of the partial lockdown. An estimated 131,000 businesses faced challenges securing financial support to remain operational⁸⁵. Itinerant street hawkers and traders comprising women and young people were severely affected by the lockdown measures. Already the informal workers lack the benefits of formal employment and have therefore faced an increased risk of losing their livelihoods due to COVID-19.

Additional human security challenges were linked to reported cases of Cerebrospinal Meningitis ('C') outbreak in Ghana in April 2020. A total of 440 cases of Meningitis 'C' with 51 fatalities were recorded in the Upper West, Northern, Upper East, Ashanti and Central regions of the country⁸⁶. Between September and October 2020, Ghana recorded torrential rainfall and flooding from the spillages of the Bagré Dam in neighbouring Burkina Faso, Dimia and Guabluga Dams which resulted in 10 deaths, displacement of over 1,500 persons and injury to 19 persons. It also led to the destruction of several houses, crops, livestock and farmlands in the Bawku West district in the Upper East region of Ghana⁸⁷.

Recommendations

- The National Peace Council should foster partnership with CSOs, Traditional and Faith-Based Organisations, and the Media to find a mutually acceptable and sustainable dispute resolution mechanism to address the recurring political disputes between NDC and NPP and increase space for political dialogue and engagement.
- The Government should strengthen public health and safety education and enhance decentralization of responses to COVID-19 and Meningitis at the local community levels to ensure effective mitigation. The COVID Responses should also strengthen and sustain support to the informal sector, especially small and medium scale enterprises owned by women and young people to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on their socio-economic livelihoods.

Guinea



The Government of Guinea continues to roll out its National Socio-economic Development Plan (PNDES in French) focusing on agriculture, infrastructure, manufacturing and natural resource governance in 2020. The country was faced with an intense political opposition over the transparency of the constitutional amendment process initiated by President Alpha Conde to

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶WANEP Ghana Monthly Bulletin, April – September 2020. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/09/2020).

⁸⁷WANEP-Ghana, *NEWS Quick Updates*. September 7 and October 1, 2020. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 25/10/2020)

enable him run for another term in office, as well as presidential elections which were held on October 18, 2020. A referendum was conducted that voted for an amendment to the Constitution and paved the way for incumbent President Alpha Condé to contest for a third term despite protests from opposition and some Civil Society Organisations. With the presidential election held in October 2020, President Condé was declared the winner by the National Independent Electoral Commission with 59.49 per cent of the votes against 33.5 per cent for the main opposition candidate, Cellou Dalein Diallo⁸⁸. Opposition party's rejection of the outcome of the elections triggered a series of violent protests, resulting in fatalities, injuries and destruction of public and private properties. This occurred against the backdrop of pre-election protests, especially in Conakry and other cities.

Political Stability Challenges: Guinea's presidential election was conducted on October 18, 2020, amidst heightened political tensions and opposition to the third term bid of incumbent President Alpha Condé. Disagreements over voter register and the capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission to conduct credible elections escalated the threat of electoral violence. This is in addition to the disputed constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections of March 2020 by opposition parties and a section of civil society. While Guinea's Constitutional Court validated the electoral victory of President Conde in November 2020, the Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG) led by Cellou Dalein Diallo, rejected the outcome of the national referendum and the election on allegations of fraud and declared himself as the winner of the election.

“The current political crisis in Guinea could be ethnicised, with potential effect on the social cohesion and stability of the country in the years ahead.”

The exploitation of ethnic cleavages to divide Guineans into Malinke or Fulani affiliations to President Conde and Cellou Diallo respectively has heightened ethnic polarisation in the country. This continues to generate tensions and violence between the two main ethnic groups. As such, current political crisis in the country could be ethnicised, with potential effect on the social cohesion and stability of the country in the years ahead.

Human Security Challenges: Even though the Government of Guinea has taken steps to address the socio-economic challenges facing the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down GDP growth to 2.9 per cent in 2020 and expected growth of 7.6 per cent in 2021 subject to economic

⁸⁸*Jeuneafrika*. Available at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1062657/politique/presidentielle-en-guinee-alpha-conde-declare-vainqueur-des-le-premier-tour/> (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

recovery driven by mining and agricultural sectors⁸⁹. The fluctuating commodity prices coupled with socio-political uncertainties threatens the projected growth. According to the UNDP, about 80 per cent of the country's active population is unemployed with other social inequalities⁹⁰. Small and medium scale enterprises and the agriculture sector have been mostly affected by the restrictions measures. Given the socio-economic challenges and continued political tensions, risk of public discontent leading to public disorder is likely if the current conditions persist in the country.

Recommendations

- ECOWAS, UNOWAS and international partners should facilitate preventive diplomacy and dialogue with political parties, civil society and other trade union actors to widen the space for inclusive political participation and consensus building on the pathway for democratic stability in Guinea.
- ECOWAS should review its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to reinforce the two-term limit and other relevant clauses in protocol to forestall excesses of political actors in the region.
- The Government should strengthen partnership with development partners to roll out its COVID-19 economic recovery plan and enhance the provision of adequate support to the private and informal sectors devastated by the pandemic as mitigation for the impact on the population.

Guinea Bissau



After years of political disagreements and constitutional challenges over elections and leadership, Guinea Bissau conducted legislative and presidential elections in 2019. In April 2020, ECOWAS and European Union, recognized Umaro Sissoco Embaló of Movement for a Democratic Alternative G15 (MADEM-G15) as the President, paving way for the appointment of a new Prime Minister to form a government. The outcome of the legislative election indicates a re-configuration of the political landscape, with no absolute majority. Following the Parliamentary session of June 29, 2020, the African Party for Independence and Cape Verde (PAIGC) formed a coalition with three smaller parties to have a working majority in the National People's Assembly. While this new power configuration between the ruling government and the opposition PAIGC calls for collaborations through dialogue and bi-partisan consensus building, trust deficits and low confidence among key political players continue to

⁸⁹See <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/guinea/economy> (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

⁹⁰Ibid.

hinder such efforts. Another critical concern is corruption and organised drug trafficking which continues to threaten the stability of the country⁹¹.

Political Stability Challenge: President Umaro Sissoco Embaló has been sworn in after the elections organised by the National Electoral Commission (CNE). However, the country's Supreme Court is yet to pronounce judgement on the appeal lodged by former Prime Minister, Domingos Simoes Pereira⁹². The continued intra and inter party wrangling and disregard for institutional political authorities is another challenge to the country's governance stability. Years of military interference in politics, pervasive corruption and drug trafficking have contributed to undermine the efficacy of state institutional capacity. The newly elected government in Guinea-Bissau is likely to be saddled with challenges of improving public service delivery and resolving protracted political disagreements.

“The newly elected government in Guinea-Bissau is likely to be saddled with challenges of improving public service delivery and resolving protracted political disagreements.”

Human Security Challenges: The COVID-19 related restrictions have disrupted exports of raw cashew nuts, affecting the incomes of about 80 per cent of the population⁹³. Cashew nut sales during the marketing season (between March and July) are key to yearly household income, particularly in rural areas. While cashew accounts directly for about 11 per cent of the GDP, various other cashew-related value chain services provide substantial economic stimulus to populations making up 34 per cent of the GDP in total⁹⁴. The restriction measures, especially border closures have not only prevented trans-national trade distribution but also limited the movement of seasonal workers and the farmers' ability to manage the labour-intensive collection of cashew nuts⁹⁵. The cumulative effect of this is reflected in the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) unemployment index of 4.10 percent in 2019 which remained unchanged in 2020, the significant reduction in household incomes, food insecurity and the potential increase in national criminality ratio.

⁹¹Freedom House. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/guinea-bissau/freedom-world/2020> (Accessed. On 04/02/2021).

⁹²ISS PSC Report. Stand-Off following presidential elections in Guinea Bissau. March 27, 2020. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/stand-off-following-presidential-elections-in-guinea-bissau> (Accessed on 04/02/2020).

⁹³Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations. *Responding to COVID-19 Food Disruptions in Africa*. Update for the Period of 1 July-14 July 2020. 14 July 2020. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CB0551EN.pdf> (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid.

Guinea-Bissau also continues to grapple with persistent drug trafficking and organised crimes. For instance, in September 2020, an operation by Guinea-Bissau's Judicial Police led to the seizure of 2,000 tons of cocaine⁹⁶. This reveals the country's continued vulnerability as a conduit for drug trafficking, with significant consequences to state and regional security dynamics.

Recommendations

- The Government in collaboration with ECOWAS, UNOWAS, UNDP and other development partners should design a political stabilisation and community peacebuilding program of at least 3 to 5 years to ensure sustainable peace and political transition in the country.
- The Government should intensify collaboration and partnership with international partners to work towards strengthening democratic institutions and civil society groups to improve service delivery and mitigate threats to governance stability in the country.
- The Government should intensify partnership with the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), and other development partners to address the issues of organised crime and narcotics.

Liberia



Liberia conducted mid-term senatorial elections and referendum on December 8, 2020.

A total of 15 senators out of 30 were re-elected while a referendum was conducted to amend the presidential and House of Representative term limits in the Constitution from six to five years, and nine to seven years respectively. In addition, a vote on dual citizenship was also part of the referendum. While the senatorial election results have been published, the referendum results are yet to be declared. This has given rise to public speculations and uncertainties about the results. A critical concern among opposition parties and civil society is the fear of manipulating the presidential terms limit that will enable President George Weah to run for a third term.

There are also issues of corruption and economic mismanagement, ethnicity, and inter and intra-party tensions resulting in recurrent demonstrations and protests amid the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in a country already faced with a fragile economic and post-Ebola crisis of 2014⁹⁷. This continues to strain the implementation of the Government's Poverty Reduction and Prosperity agenda.

⁹⁶Op. cit. Freedom House.

⁹⁷Ibid.

Political Stability Challenges: The proposal to reduce the term limit of the President, members of the House of Representatives from six to five years and members of the senate from nine to seven years has generated divided opinion among the populations. On one hand is the perception that its limits on elected officials to achieve their set visions to the electorate, while on the other hand is the relevance of the amendments to the growth of democracy. Political trend in Liberia mirrors a growing regional concern over manipulation of term limits by member states as witnessed in Guinea, Cote

“The political trend in Liberia mirrors a growing regional concern over manipulation of term limits by member states as witnessed in Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire and Togo.”

d’Ivoire and Togo. Another political challenge is the contestation of the Montserrado Senatorial seat in the mid-term elections. Montserrado County includes the capital, Monrovia, with about a third of Liberia’s registered voters⁹⁸. The Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) lost the seat in a by-election organised in July 2019, to the Collaborating Political Parties coalition (CPP) candidate, Abraham Darius Dillon, a known critic of the Weah administration⁹⁹. The result of the senatorial elections will thus constitute a litmus test for President Weah’s popularity ahead of the 2023 presidential elections.

Human Security Challenges: The socio-economic situation in Liberia remains the lowest in the world¹⁰⁰, with a Human Development Index (2020) of 175 out of 198 countries¹⁰¹. About 80 percent of the Liberian population live on less than \$1.25 a day¹⁰². In 2019, the Liberian economy grew by 0.4 percentage due to weaknesses in the external sector¹⁰³. Macroeconomic stability has been restored with the implementation of an adjustment program supported by the International Monetary Fund. The COVID-19 pandemic has undermined the economic gains since the Ebola crisis in 2014 to 2016¹⁰⁴.

⁹⁸Aljazeera News. Available news: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/7/liberia-elections-to-serve-as-referendum-for-president-weah> (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰The World Bank. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/7/liberia-elections-to-serve-as-referendum-for-president-weah> (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

¹⁰¹UNDP. Available at: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/LBR.pdf (accessed on 04/02/2021).

¹⁰²Aljazeera News. Available news: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/7/liberia-elections-to-serve-as-referendum-for-president-weah> (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

¹⁰³African Development Bank (ADB). *Africa Economic Outlook Amid COVID-19*. ADB, 2020. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/afdb20-04_aeo_supplement_full_report_for_web_0705.pdf#page=60 (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

With about 63 percent being less than 25 years¹⁰⁵ and 60 per cent comprising ex-combatants, who face socio-economic crises, Liberia is faced with internal security challenges¹⁰⁶. This is contributing to spring up of criminal gangs, such as the “Kubahs” and “Zogoes” while other young people are increasingly involved in commercial motorcycling for livelihood support. Liberia is also confronted with recurrent floods during the rainy season (May-November). Heavy rains and windstorms in the capital Monrovia and surrounding counties washed away roads, destroyed bridges and polluted water sources¹⁰⁷. The affected families including women and children took refuge in religious and school buildings. Incidents of natural disasters, especially floods recorded in the period are manifestations of increased vulnerability of the country to climate change and its associated threats to human security.

In addition, domestic violence, sexual assault and rape are the most commonly reported violent crimes affecting women and children in Liberia. 2020 statistics from the SGBV Unit of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) shows that more than 600 cases of aggravated assault, sodomy with criminal intent and rape were reported during the COVID-19 state of emergency alone¹⁰⁸. Also, between January and July 2020, more than 150 SGBV cases were forwarded to Criminal Court E, the designated court for sex crimes, leading to 44 convictions and 42 acquittals¹⁰⁹.

Recommendations

- The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and CSOs should engage the Government of Liberia to intensify its Anti-corruption drive by strengthening the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) and the relevant legal frameworks to influence the fight against corruption in the country.
- CSOs, traditional and religious authorities should intensify engagement with the Government to strengthen democratic monitoring and accountability program that could stem potential excesses of political parties.
- CSOs including women and youth groups, traditional and religious bodies should facilitate national and regional dialogues to build consensus around the constitutional and political reforms in the country.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶UNFPA Liberia

¹⁰⁷ WANEP Liberia Monthly Bulletin (January – December 2020). Available at: www.wanep.org/news (Accessed 20/02/2021).

¹⁰⁸See: <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/front-slider/liberia-more-than-600-cases-of-rape-sodomy-abuses-during-covid-19-state-of-emergency/> (Accessed on 05/02/2021).

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

Mali



Prior to the overthrow of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in August 2020, Mali organised constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections in March 2020. While the elections constituted an important aspect of democratic governance in the country, the process was fraught with allegations of vote-buying, intimidations, fraud and threats of terrorism. Security deterioration, economic hardships and COVID-19 restriction measures exacerbated the growing unemployment among the youths. This led to public discontent and a series of protests by young people, opposition coalitions, CSOs and religious groups, culminating in a military coup d'état on August 18, 2020, which suspended democratic governance in the country. Following sanctions and mediation efforts between ECOWAS and interim government, a Transitional Government arrangement was agreed upon with an 18-month timeline to organise credible elections that returns the country to democratic governance in line with the ECOWAS protocol on Democracy and Governance.

Political Stability Challenges: Concerns over alleged rigging of the recent 2020 local elections triggered a series of public agitations and demonstrations by a coalition of Civil Society Organisations and political parties which increased tensions and violence in Mali. These unresolved grievances, among others, led to the

“Given the rising insecurity and associated humanitarian crisis in the country, there is the possibility of exploitation by the military leaders to justify their stay in office beyond the stipulated agreed period.”

overthrow of the Government of President Keita by the Malian Armed Forces. While the military coup has truncated democratic governance, it also has the potential to add another layer of insecurity to the already varied threats facing the country's peace and stability. Also, Civil Society Organisations, opposition parties, women and youth groups have expressed concerns about lack of inclusive participation and equity of representation in the Transitional Government established by the military leaders to govern the affairs of the country towards the restoration of civil rule. Although the establishment of the Transitional Government appears to have abated the rising protests in the country, there are also uncertainties about the military leaders' commitment to the 18-months transition timeline. Given the rising insecurity and associated humanitarian crisis in the country, there is the possibility of exploitation by the military leaders to justify their stay in office beyond the stipulated agreed period.

Human Security Challenges: Increased activities of terrorists, violent extremist and armed groups, particularly in the North and Central regions of Mali continue to undermine human

security in the country. The southern parts of Mali including Koulikoro and Segou witnessed attacks. Between January and November 2020, there were 186 attacks in Mali, leaving 1,400 dead and 620 casualties¹¹⁰. As a result, more than 438,900 people have been internally displaced, while over 1100 schools have been closed affecting 350,000 children in the Central region of Mopti¹¹¹. Also, the heightened socio-economic crisis in the country has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic impact on populations. Mali already has a weak healthcare system that is unable to contain widespread health crisis. The 2019 Global Health Security Index ranked Mali 147 among 195 countries globally, with a score of 29 (of 100), placing it among countries least prepared to face the crisis and management of the epidemic¹¹². The additional pressure on the health system by the pandemic has hampered access to healthcare, further threatening maternal and child healthcare, as well as general public health in the country. Also, challenges arising from SGBV, especially in the North and Central Mali continue to undermine women and girls' security.

Terrorism, intra and inter-communal violence and armed group attacks also continue to induce increased fatalities, internal displacement of population and food insecurity in the country. Climate change variabilities, especially persistent drought and floods affected the food security situation in the country. In December 2020, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that 4.7 million people in Mali will be affected by food insecurity in 2021, as a result of prevailing limitation to food production due to the pandemic and the security crises. In this regard, the Food Security organisations target 1.7 million people, representing 80 per cent of the people in need under the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan¹¹³.

Recommendations

- There is the need for the international partners to intensify engagement and provide technical support to the Transitional Government while accompanying them in restoring state authority, resuscitating the 2015 Peace Agreement and preparing towards a transition to democratic governance as established by its mandate.
- The Government of Mali should intensify multilateral cooperation through G5 Sahel and other regional mechanisms to promote information and intelligence sharing, border security management, capacity building, and resource mobilization to counter the increasing activities of terrorist and armed criminal networks in the country.

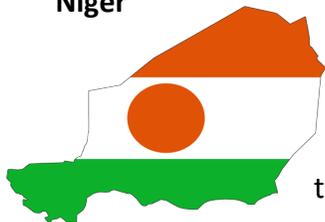
¹¹⁰See WANEP NEWS Mali (January to November 2020) (Accessed 27/01/2021)

¹¹¹See: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Mali%20Situation%20Regional%20Update%20-%20April%20-%20June%202019-.pdf> (Accessed 13/01/2021).

¹¹²African Development Bank (ADB). *Africa Economic Outlook Amid COVID-19*. ADB, 2020. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/afdb20-04_aeo_supplement_full_report_for_web_0705.pdf#page=60 (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

¹¹³Ibid.

Niger



For the first time since independence, Niger is preparing for democratic transition from an elected government to another. The incumbent president Mahamadou Issoufou is stepping down after completing his two terms in office which ends in December 2020. The presidential elections were conducted on December 27, 2020, amidst fears of insecurity especially in the Diffa, Maradi and Tillabéri regions. Niger's ruling party candidate, Mohamed Bazoum, will face former president Mahamane Ousmane in the presidential election runoff on February 21, 2021, after the two candidates could not obtain the 50 plus one per cent needed to win outright in the first round. The election is widely regarded as a positive step in consolidating its democracy, given its chequered political history. It also constitutes a significant step in stabilizing the governance landscape necessary for addressing the socio-economic challenges and the varied security threats facing the country. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated trade, tourism and food security in the country. This has further compounded the economic and humanitarian challenges facing the State.

Political Stability Challenges: The pre-election context of Niger was characterised by disagreements among stakeholders and allegation of lack of inclusivity in the electoral process. There was simmering tension between the opposition parties and the ruling party over the electoral law of 2016 which banned the main opposition leader, Hama Amadou, from contesting the presidential election as a result of his sentence for child trafficking in March 2017. The opposition parties described the sentence and his disqualification as a politically motivated 'witch-hunt' calculated to prevent him from contesting in the December 27, 2020 elections. It led to expressed public discontent and lack of confidence in the electoral process. Also, rising insecurity, especially in border communities of Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions limited voting processes in these areas. Despite this, the presidential election was organised and acknowledged to be credible by local and international observers. In the first round of the elections, Mohamed Bazoum of the ruling Nigerian Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS-Tarayya) obtained 39.33 per cent while his main opponent, Mahamane Ousmane of the Democratic and Republican Rally (RDR-Tchandjia) obtained 16.99 per cent of the total votes¹¹⁴. Given the high stakes in the run-off election, the risk of tension and violence is a cause for concern amid insecurity and the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

¹¹⁴France 24. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210102-niger-s-presidential-election-set-for-february-runoff> (Accessed on 05/02/2021).

Moreover, the border areas connecting Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali have been dogged by extremist groups operating in the Liptako-Gourma region and Libya. Terrorist and violent extremist insurgencies have not only led to fatalities but also injuries, internal displacements and refugees flow which are critical to the country's stability. Persistence of armed violence and weaknesses in state capacity to respond to these threats foreshadow persistent attacks in the coming years.

“Persistence of armed violence and weaknesses in state capacity to respond to these threats foreshadow persistent attacks in the coming years.”

Human Security Challenges: Rising insecurity emanating from terrorist and violent extremist attacks, inter and intra-communal violence and other armed groups and climate change variabilities continue to affect the humanitarian and human security situation in Niger. The humanitarian situation is further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic causing an exponential increase in needs. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection has increased from 2.3 million in 2020 to 3.7 million by February 2021¹¹⁵. Attacks against civilians in the Lake Chad region prevented 263,000 people in Diffa from returning to their homes¹¹⁶. Growing insecurity along the borders with Burkina Faso and Mali has exacerbated humanitarian needs in Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, where nearly 78,000 people have been displaced¹¹⁷. Deteriorating security on the border with Nigeria has also resulted in the movement of tens of thousands of people who have sought refuge in border villages of the Maradi region, in central Niger¹¹⁸. Between June and August 2020, about 1.9 million people will be food insecure, 190,284 internally displaced, 218,260 refugees flow from neighbouring Mali and Nigeria and 29,954 returnees¹¹⁹. Despite the progress made in the governance landscape of Niger, the incoming government will grapple with the challenge of responding to the growing humanitarian crisis and insecurity in the country.

Recommendations

- ECOWAS and international partners and the Government should strengthen synergy among the various forces within the G5 Sahel and the Multi-National Joint Taskforce (MNJTF) in the fights against violent extremism and terrorism in the Sahel region.

¹¹⁵See <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/urgent-humanitarian-funding-and-greater-protection-civilian-population-needed-niger> (Accessed on 05/02/2020).

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸ See <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8258en/ca8258en.pdf> (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

¹¹⁹Ibid.

- The Government through the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace (HACP) should initiate inclusive national dialogue with stakeholders including political parties, religious and traditional authorities, CSOs, women and youth groups and international partners to enhance social cohesion and state capacity to mitigate the rising insecurity and humanitarian challenges facing the country.

Nigeria



The Government of Nigeria has disbanded the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigeria Police Force, setting up Human Rights Committees in all states to investigate allegations of human rights abuses committed before and during the protests, as well as prosecution of perpetrators. The protests that began in October 2020, elicited global support against police abuse in Nigeria. In addition to this, persistent labour strikes and agitations continue to affect service delivery in the country. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had debilitating impact on the economy and health security of the populations. Furthermore, forays of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), ethnic and communal violence, organised crimes including armed banditry and kidnapping, and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, among others, are of utmost concerns to the peace and human security landscape of Nigeria.

Political Stability Challenges: The #EndSARS nationwide youths protests erupted on October 7, 2020, in response to youths' demand for the immediate scrapping of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Police Force for brutalities perpetrated. Notably, the youths in Nigeria were able to use the social media to mobilize both domestic and international support to bring Government attentions to their concerns, especially disbanding SARS and creating the space for youth participation in decision-making processes and investing in human capital development. The initial high-handedness of security agencies and exploitation by criminal groups led to the deaths of about 70 people, several cases of injuries and destruction of public and private properties¹²⁰. Data from WANEP NEWS shows a record of over 90 incidents of #EndSARS demonstrations across States, out of which 56 were violent¹²¹. Additional recorded fatalities include 155 deaths and 125 injures in Delta, Oyo, Lagos, Edo, Osun, Ondo, Kwara, Abuja, Kano, Abia, Anambra, Ogun, Enugu, Rivers, Ebonyi, Imo, Plateau with recorded injuries in Kogi and Gombe States¹²². Out of the total number of 155 fatalities, 32 were police officers and six military officers¹²³. Also, out of the total

¹²⁰BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54666368> (Accessed on 05/02/2021).

¹²¹ WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) (Available at: www.wanep.org/news (Accessed on 05/02/2021).

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

injured victims (125), 43 were police officers¹²⁴. In addition, 82 police stations and outposts were vandalised and burnt down, while 2083 inmates escaped from Correctional facilities in Edo (1993), Ondo (58) and Delta (32) States¹²⁵. In response, the Federal Government of Nigeria disbanded SARS and set up Human Rights Committees to investigate the crisis across the 36 states in Nigeria. While this contributed to curtailing the youth protests, the Government is yet to fashion out sustainable policies to address the socio-economic challenges facing young people in the country.

“Considering the already weak health systems coupled with COVID-19 impact, strikes and demonstrations by health workers have the potential to exacerbate the health security challenges facing populations in 2021.”

Recurrent labour strikes and demonstrations relating to poor conditions of service, especially by health workers, teachers and university lecturers also continue to affect public service delivery in the country. Between January and December 2020, Nigeria has recorded 406 public demonstrations and protests¹²⁶. While 317 of incidents of the protests were peaceful, 86 were violent which accounted for 173 fatalities and 180 injuries¹²⁷.

Considering the already weak health systems coupled with COVID-19 impact, strikes and demonstrations by health workers have the potential to exacerbate the health security challenges facing populations in 2021. Similarly, recurrent strikes by teachers and lecturers are affecting the educational sector of the country.

The protracted insurgencies of terrorist and violent extremist attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP, especially in the North-Eastern Region continue to weaken social cohesion and trust between states and citizens. The fight against Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies continues to affect State resources, given the recession in the economy that has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from the loss of lives and mass displacements, the Federal Government of Nigeria reported revenue losses of about \$14 billion (5.04 trillion Naira) annually to the conflict¹²⁸. Despite the efforts in countering terrorist attacks by the Federal Government, sporadic attacks by the extremist groups continue to persist.

¹²⁴ WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) (Available at: www.wanep.org/news (Accessed on 05/02/2021).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ WANEP Thematic Report, June 2019. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 05/02/2021).

Human Security Challenges: Violent extremist attacks inter and intra-communal violence, religious conflicts and organised crimes including armed banditry, cult violence, kidnapping and others continue to cause fatalities, injuries, internal displacements and refugee flows. Cumulative data of 2020 highlights 906 recorded deaths from extremist attacks by Boko Haram and the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) across communities in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States (North-West) between January and December 2020¹²⁹. Armed banditry attacks in Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto (North-West) and Niger States (North-Central) led to the death of 1,219¹³⁰. Kidnapping incidents were a major security challenge as over 3,312 people were kidnapped between January to December 2020. The mass abduction of school children in Nigeria by criminal groups remains a critical human security concern. There was an abduction of 344 students from the Government Science Secondary School in the Katsina State in December 2020 by armed bandits in the North-West region of Nigeria¹³¹. This continues to elicit local and national criticisms with concerns to the effectiveness of the nation's security architecture to deal with armed banditry and other related crimes in the region.

Amid insecurity occasioned by the effects of the lockdown across State, the vulnerability of women and children to Sexual-Gender Based Violence (SGBV) was prevalent. According to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, over 3,600 rape cases were recorded in Nigeria during the lockdown occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic¹³². The lockdown restrictions further resulted in reported cases of sexual assaults. The education of young girls is also affected by cases of SGBV and associated unwanted pregnancies, as well as stigmatisation in communities. Furthermore, the pandemic had far-reaching consequences on the economy, health, safety and security of the population as well. This was further compounded by other re-emerging health concerns, especially Yellow Fever and Lassa Fever in 2020. As of December 31, 2020, Lassa Fever recorded 244 deaths¹³³ while Yellow Fever recorded over 172 deaths¹³⁴.

Recommendations

- The Federal Government of Nigeria should intensify multilateral cooperation with the Lake Chad Basin countries to strengthen the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), especially in intelligence sharing and capacity building in order to respond adequately to the terrorist and violent extremist attacks in the region.

¹²⁹WANEP NEWS. Available at: www.wanepnews.org (Accessed on 05/02/2021).

¹³⁰See www.wanep.org/news (Accessed 05/02/2021).

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²See <https://allafrica.com/stories/202011190083.html> (Accessed on 05/02/2021).

¹³³See www.ncdc.gov.ng (Accessed on 05/02/2020).

¹³⁴See <https://www.afro.who.int/news/responding-yellow-fever-outbreak-nigeria-amidst-global-pandemic> (Accessed on 04/02/2021).

- The Federal Government should intensify engagement with youths through the creation of spaces for their participation in policy formulation and also provide economic opportunities to improve their livelihoods.
- The Government should strengthen the COVID-19 responses, especially economic incentives to small and medium scale enterprises and other economic activities in the informal sector, especially those owned by women, to contribute to resuscitating the fragile economy. This should further lead to the improvement of the health infrastructure to enhance resilience against the pandemic and other future health risks.

Senegal



Senegal continues to have internal political tensions and disagreements stemming from the disqualification of key political party candidates including Karim Wade and Khalifa Sall from contesting the 2019 Presidential elections on conviction of corruption charges. Also, the introduction of the *Law on 'Parrainage'* in 2018, which enjoins candidates to secure 52,000 endorsements from at least seven out of the 14 regions of the country, limited the space for participation in the 2020 local elections.

Political Stability Challenges: While the current constitutional amendment enjoyed the popular support of the civil society, recent utterances by key members of the ruling party and supporters of President Sall point to seeming efforts for third term bid in 2024. The controversy among political stakeholders over the introduction of the *Law on "Parrainage"* also continues to generate tensions in the political landscape. There are concerns by opposition parties about the use of the Law as a tool by the government to target political opponents and limit the space for their participation in the electoral processes. A number of political party candidates were ineligible to contest for the 2019 presidential and 2020 local elections because they were not able to obtain the requisite number of citizens signature required by the Law. Lingering political contestations over the law is a potential risk factor to political stability in the lead up to the presidential elections in 2024.

“Lingering political contestations over the Law on “Parrainage” is a potential risk factor to political stability in the lead up to future elections in the country.”

More importantly, Senegal is not immune from terrorist infiltration and recruitments, given its porous borders and proximity to the Sahel, internal conflict dynamics in the Casamance region, as well as other religious induced tensions. Reports suggest that young Senegalese nationals have

joined Islamist armed groups in Mali, Nigeria, and farther afield¹³⁵. In 2015, for instance, authorities detained dozens of local Imams for allegedly supporting terrorism while several were convicted in 2018 for recruiting “foreign fighters” and seeking to establish a local Islamic State affiliate¹³⁶. Also, in 2016, authorities arrested hundreds of people as part of a crackdown related to the Mali and Burkina Faso attacks¹³⁷. In 2017, two suspected Islamist foreign fighters were arrested in Dakar in relation to the Côte d’Ivoire attacks¹³⁸. These instances are indicative of the country’s vulnerability to terrorist infiltrations and potential attacks that could undermine the country’s longstanding stability.

Human Security Challenges: Senegal’s economic growth has been among the highest in Africa between 2014 and 2018, remaining above 6 per cent annually¹³⁹. The GDP growth was 5.3 per cent in 2019, down from 6.3 per cent in 2017¹⁴⁰. The services sector continues to be the largest contributor to GDP growth, while on the demand side, investment (+12.5%) and exports (+7.2%) were the strongest growth drivers¹⁴¹. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected Senegal's economic outlook. Growth has slowed down significantly to an estimated 1.3 per cent in 2020, with services (such as tourism and transport) and exports particularly devastated¹⁴². The Government has responded with containment measures and a comprehensive economic stimulus plan to mitigate the impact on population’s livelihoods. However, limited fiscal buffers and safety nets, weak healthcare system, and a large informal sector pose challenges to the economic response strategies. Given the sizeable number of the population, mostly women and young people engaged in the informal sector of the economy, the ripple effect of the pandemic continues to manifest in job cuts, unemployment and loss in household incomes, leading to public discontents.

Senegal is also a transit point for illegal migration and trafficking of cocaine from South America to Europe¹⁴³. Also, Cannabis is commonly cultivated in Casamance for domestic and regional markets¹⁴⁴. The drug trade continues to leverage networks used to smuggle duty-free cigarettes, counterfeit medications, small arms, and migrants and could constitute a veritable tool to fuel armed group activities with consequences on the country’s stability.

¹³⁵Congressional Research Service. *In Focus*. Updated February 22, 2019. Available at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10164.pdf> (Accessed on 07/02/2021).

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Op. cit. World Bank.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Ibid.

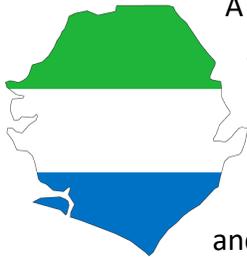
¹⁴³Op. cit. Congressional Research Service.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

Recommendation

- CSOs with support from NGOs and private sector should intensify engagement with political actors, CSOs, religious and traditional leaders to facilitate political dialogue and national conversations to address disagreements and tensions around electoral laws ahead of future electoral cycle.
- The Government should intensify multilateral cooperation, especially in intelligence sharing and capacity building in order to respond adequately to the terrorist and violent extremist threats in the country.
- The Government, through the security operatives and religious leaders, should strengthen community peace infrastructure along border communities to identify security threats from violent extremist groups and continue to build resilience.

Sierra Leone



A prominent development in the democratic governance in Sierra Leone is the amendment of the Public Order Act 1965, which effectively repeals the 55-year-old seditious Libel Section that hinders free speech and growth of the media landscape. The amendment of the law seeks to provide the libertarian environment for the media and the citizenry to hold duty bearers and right holders accountable in governance. Also, the country's restrictions on physical contact and targeted quarantining were effective in containing the Ebola epidemic has been replicated to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the economy and health systems. This notwithstanding, Sierra Leone remains a fragile state and the current socio-political environment is relatively challenged by rising crimes, political tensions and violence, controversies around the fight against corruption and fluctuating economic growth.

Political Stability Challenges: Sierra Leone has witnessed increased political tension since 2018 following its keenly contested presidential and parliamentary elections, which ushered in a second transfer of power from one party to another. The implementation of the recommendations of Commissions of Inquiry (COI) into allegations of corruption of the past Government is a notable contributing factor to the rising tension between

“Sierra Leone remains a fragile state and the current socio-political environment is relatively challenged by rising crimes, political tensions and violence, controversies around the fight against corruption and fluctuating economic growth.”

the ruling Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP) and the opposition All Peoples Congress (APC). The opposition party rejected the process of establishing the COI in January 2019 as unconstitutional and as a politically motivated "witch hunt" against its members. According to the Attorney General's office, 85 persons of interest mentioned in the report or "white paper" have appealed against the findings in the country's High Court. While this could possibly result in another long legal battle, there are also public concerns that politicians could exploit the cases to incite and mobilise ethnic sentiments to deepen divisions and tensions in the country.

Another critical concern in Sierra Leone is the closure of the borders in October 2020 by the Guinean Government and its troops illegally occupying the border town of Yenga in the Eastern province of Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone relies largely on the Guinea market for its external trade, transportation and exchange of goods and services. The shutdown has impacted on its external revenue and economic growth for 2020 and will affect the 2021 economic projections if the borders are not opened. Large and small-scale businesses have been affected, as transporters, farmers and producers of agro-based products have expressed concerns over their financial losses and livelihoods. Also, the continuous Guinean troops' occupation of Yenga threatens border security and socio-economic integration between the two countries. Given the degree of uncertainties surrounding the reopening of the border, the risk of continued tension and strained bilateral relations between Sierra Leone and Guinea in 2021 is likely.

Human Security Challenges: Economic growth in Sierra Leone has fluctuated since the outbreak of the Ebola virus and the fall in iron ore prices in 2014. This is further compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Real GDP growth, estimated at 5.1 per cent in 2019, is now projected to fall sharply to 1.7 per cent as a result of the pandemic¹⁴⁵. This has affected socio-economic activities including the informal sector and small and medium scale enterprises. Considering the already increased unemployment and poverty situation in the country, a further economic downturn could stimulate public discontent, leading to protests and demonstrations, with consequences on the country's stability.

Furthermore, sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated against women and children is another cause for concern in Sierra Leone. According to the Rainbow Centre Initiative, between January and August 2020, 2,245 sexual assault, 144 physical assault and 357 teenage pregnancy related to rape cases were recorded¹⁴⁶. The Sexual Offences Model Court which was established in August 2020, has received a total number of 141 cases and delivered eight sentences¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁵Op. Cit. Africa's Economic Outlook 2020

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷See: www.politicosl.com

Although it is an indication of willingness to address issues related to SGBV, the system is however slow in delivery of justice.

Recommendations

- The Government should strengthen bilateral engagement with the Government of Guinea to resolve the issues around the closure of land borders and occupation of Yenga by Guinean troops to foster trade, movement of goods, services and persons, as well as peaceful resolution of the occupation.
- The Government through the Ministry for Gender and Children Affairs should sustain partnership and collaboration with CSOs, NGOs, the media, religious and traditional leaders, women and youth groups, as well as international partners to increase public education and strengthen institutions to respond effectively to gender and sexual-based violence in the country.
- The Government should enhance COVID-19 containment measures, bail out small businesses to save jobs, and cushion livelihoods through expanded but properly targeted “MUNAFI” Loan Scheme (social protection program) given the limited fiscal space.

Togo



Amid protracted political disagreements, tensions, protests and violence, Togo organised Presidential elections on February 22, 2020, with incumbent President Faure Gnassingbé being elected for the fourth term. Prior to the elections, there were heightened political tensions over the controversial constitutional and electoral reforms that paved the way for President Gnassingbé to contest for a fourth term. The pre and post-election context was characterised by mass protests organised by a coalition of opposition parties known as C14 and a section of civil society. Heavy-handedness of state security agencies resulted in fatalities, injuries and destruction of public and private properties. This notwithstanding, an encouraging development in the country’s governance landscape in 2020, was the appointment of the first female Prime Minister, Victoire Tomegah-Dogbé, who in turn has appointed 11 women out of the 33 cabinet ministers.

Political Stability Challenges: Presidential elections held on February 22, 2020, returned the incumbent, Faure Gnassingbé, to power to serve his fourth five-year term after he secured 72 per cent of the votes under the ruling “*Union pour la République*” (UNIR) party, the main opposition candidate and former Prime Minister, Agbeyome Kodjo of the “*Mouvement*

Patriotique pour la Démocratie et le Développement” had 18 per cent¹⁴⁸. With the amendment of 1992 Constitution on term limit, President Gnassingbé can contest and remain in office until 2030. Persistent constitutional amendments to prolong the rule of the incumbent, repressive measures against political descent, lack of space and level playing field for inclusive participation of opposition parties and the citizenry are sources of disagreements, tensions and violence in the country. The pre and post-election protests organised by the opposition and civil society against the constitutional and electoral reforms, as well as the outcome of the elections, resulted in fatalities, injuries and destruction of properties. About 21 key opposition figures, supporters and members of the media were arrested while several others have fled to neighbouring Ghana and Benin. The political stalemate in Togo is likely to continue in 2021 and beyond given the persistent state repression against dissent, lack of space for dialogue among political stakeholders, and public protests by opposition parties, among others.

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The appointment of the country’s first female Prime Minister, Victoire Tomegah-Dogbé, is largely seen as an opportunity to break the political stalemate through dialogue in the country. The appointment was seen by some civil society and opposition parties as a bridge builder for sustained engagement with government on critical issues of governance and development. Already, since her appointment, there has been release of some political prisoners including opposition figures and supporters. Besides this, her appointment has brought to the fore the urgent need to address the chronic socio-economic challenges and inequalities against women in the coming years.

Human Security Challenges: Economic growth prospects have been severely undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared with initial forecasts, Togo recorded a loss of growth of between 4.6 and 6.8 per cent in 2020 largely due to the pandemic¹⁴⁹. This has a ripple effect on the economic situation in light of increased unemployment and poverty in the country. Poverty remains widespread, especially in rural areas where 69 per cent of households are living below the poverty line¹⁵⁰. Economic vulnerability is high among women because they have fewer

¹⁴⁸See France 24. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20200224-togo-president-faure-gnassingbe-wins-fourth-term-according-to-provisional-results> (07/02/2021).

¹⁴⁹World Bank. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/togo/overview> (Accessed 07/02/2021).

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

opportunities and are under-represented at high levels of decision making¹⁵¹. Female-headed households experience higher rates of poverty than male-headed households - 57.5 per cent against 55 per cent¹⁵².

Togo's health system is also weak and lacks resilience, with ratios of 5.3 doctors per 10,000 population, 27.4 nurses per 10,000, and 0.7 beds per 1,000¹⁵³. This situation is reflected in the country's ranking of 128 of 195 countries and 23 of 54 African countries by the 2019 Global Health Security Index, which assesses the preparedness of national health systems for epidemics and pandemics¹⁵⁴. Togo made significant progress in detection and norms but continues to lag behind when it comes to the medical system and infrastructure, prevention, the response system, and health-related vulnerabilities¹⁵⁵. The health sector is under-resourced, receiving only 4 per cent of the budget in the past three years¹⁵⁶. Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to overwhelm the already fragile health care systems, with impact on health security of populations.

Recommendations

- The Authority of Head of States of ECOWAS should reintroduce mediation effort through a selected technical expert team to undertake shuttle caucusing among stakeholders and interest groups in lead up to a national dialogue conference to discuss political inclusivity in Togo.
- ECOWAS and UNOWAS should intensify engagement with the Government, key political parties, CSOs, religious leaders and other stakeholders to continue the national dialogue to address political challenges in the country.
- The Government should strengthen collaboration with national and international development partners to seek vaccines and provide public enlightenment and willingness to be vaccinated in the country.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³African Development Bank (ADB). *Africa Economic Outlook Amid COVID-19*. ADB, 2020. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/afdb20-04_aeo_supplement_full_report_for_web_0705.pdf#page=60 (Accessed on 07/02/2021).

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.