WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING OUTLOOK 2022

Potential Flashpoints and Simmering Conflicts in the Region

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF ARMED ATTACK 1156

Incident Type: **Armed Aggression**
Location: **Acharane**
District: **Timbuktu Cercle**
Deaths: **1**
Injuries: **0**
State/Region: **Tombouctou Region**
Country: **Mali**

Mineur
Majeur
Catastrophe

Credit: WANEP NEWS (A Map of West Africa showing the geographic location of reported incidents 2021)

Map data ©2019 AfriGIS (Pty) L
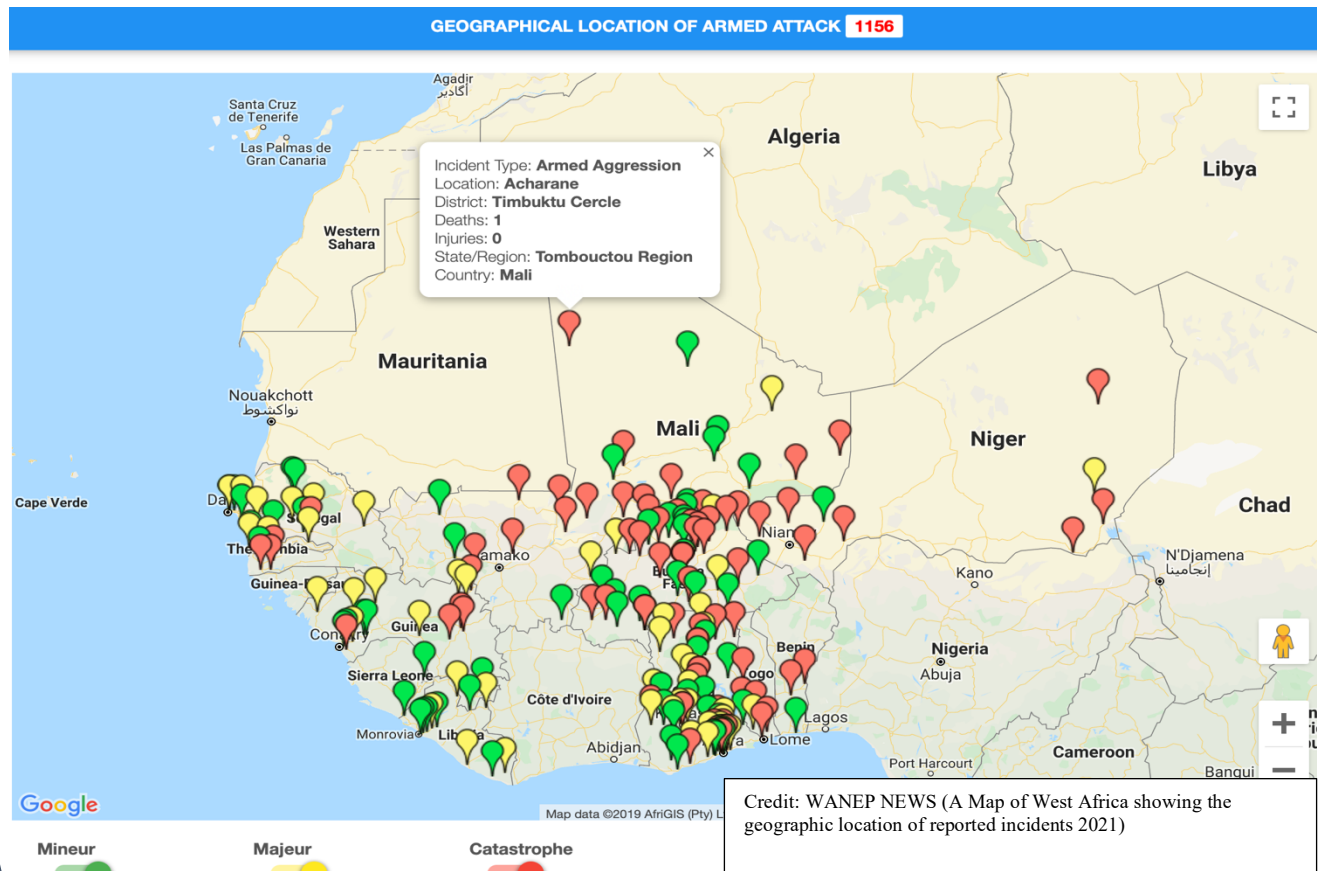
WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING (WANEP)

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

JANUARY 2022

1.0 Introduction

In 2021, the peace and security environment of West Africa recorded mixed fortunes of political, economic and security gains as well as challenges. In the political space, Niger, Benin and The Gambia successfully organised presidential elections amid the increased spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The run-off presidential elections in Niger, conducted on February 21, 2021, marked the first democratic transition in the political history of the country. This represents an important stride in the effort to consolidate democratic governance, peace and stability in Niger. Equally significant was The Gambia presidential elections of December 4, 2021, which was critical to the stability of the country as it marked the first political transition in the post-President Jammeh era. The presidential elections of Benin held on April 11, 2021, was fraught with reports of intimidation of opposition party candidates and supporters as well as the media which has impacted negatively on the political space and inclusive participation of key stakeholders.

Despite these efforts, the resurgence of military coups in the political landscape of West Africa indicates a decline of democracy and an increasing trend of authoritarianism in the region, as evident in three military coups in Mali and Guinea witnessed in the region between August 2020 and September 2021. Mali has been under a military-led 18 months Transitional Government following the coup d'etat of August 18, 2020, that deposed President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita after months of anti-government protests. Similarly, on 5 September 2021, President Alpha Conde of Guinea was overthrown in a military coup led by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya. These coups have not only stymied democratic governance but also created political uncertainties in the region. Despite the mediation efforts and sanctions by the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to pressurise the military regimes to return to democratic governance, they appear to be intransigent to such commitments.

The security complexities of the region are further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the socio-economic livelihoods of its population. With over 742,000 confirmed cases and 10,249 fatalities as of 31 December 2021,[1] Governments in the region continue to be challenged on best strategies to reduce the spread of infections within the socio-economic contexts of West Africa. The informal economy which engages more than 85 per cent[2] of populations, mostly women and young people have been devastated. The ripple effect manifests in the growing number of labour strikes, civil protests and agitations, leading to strained relationship between the state and its citizens.

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[1]ECOWAS COVID-19 Dashboard. Available at: https://data.wahooas.org/outbreaks/#/ (Accessed 16/12/2021).

[2] ILO Report (2016). "Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_626831.pdf (Accessed 16/12/2021).

Moreover, vaccine rollout and implementation of economic stimulus plans by ECOWAS Member States are designed as a counter-measure to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the populations. However, this is compounded by other emerging health security threats such as Ebola, Yellow and Lassa Fever, Meningitis and Measles in Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Niger and Mali. These diseases affect the resources of the State and compromise its effort to mitigate the dwindling economies of the region.

Also, zones of instability continue to expand in the region with the increasing operations–of terrorist and armed groups, kidnapping, banditry, and communal violence, especially in Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Recorded cases of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea that threaten the territorial waters of West Africa are further exacerbated by concerns of potential terrorist groups expansion to littoral States of Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Ghana and Benin.

Furthermore, the women, peace and security ecosystem recorded cases of gender-based violence, especially ritual murder of women and girls in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ghana in 2021. Cases of rape and physical assaults were also prominent in the reporting period. Additionally, the complex humanitarian emergencies in the Sahel continue to have adverse effects on the security of women and children. In particular, internal displacement, refugee flow, irregular migration and organised crimes occasioned by increasing violent conflicts have limited women and girls' access to healthcare and psychosocial support, education as well as economic livelihoods. Again, despite the policies to create spaces for women participation and representation in governance, challenges in the implementation of such policies continue to impede the effectiveness of such efforts.

The *West Africa Peace and Security Outlook* sheds light on the governance and human security challenges of ECOWAS Member-States in 2021 and projects the risks of vulnerabilities and threats that could inform specific intervention strategies in 2022.

2.0 Governance and Democracy

Despite COVID-19 concerns, Niger, Benin and The Gambia successfully organised presidential elections in 2021. Amid security concerns, Niger conducted elections that led to a political transition from one democratically elected president to another for the first time since their independence. The first and run-off elections of 27 December 2020 and 21 February 2021 respectively, led to the election of Mohamed Bazoum of the ruling Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS-Tarayya).[3] In spite of opposition parties' reports of political intimidations, lack of inclusivity in the electoral process, the democratic transition in Niger is widely seen as key to its political stability as well as ongoing effort to address insecurity in the country.

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[3] See https://www.africanews.com/2021/02/23/niger-s-mohamed-bazoum-wins-presidential-election-round-2-ec// (Accessed on 24/12/2021).

The presidential elections of Benin and The Gambia on 11 April and 4 December 2021, respectively, led to the re-elections of incumbent Presidents Patrice Talon and Adama Barrow. In Benin, opposition parties accused the ruling party of lack of inclusive participation through the use of special economic crimes, terrorism court and electoral reforms to disqualify political opponents, which led to tensions and violence.[4] Most of the key political opponents were exiled or barred from contesting the election. It contributed to a shrinking political space for dissenting views in the country and discredited the widely recognized vibrant multi-party democracy practice. The lingering disagreements among political stakeholders largely due to the *Certificat de Comformité* in the electoral law[5] limited the space for inclusive political participation of opposition parties in the parliamentary election held in 2019, the local election of 2020 and the presidential election of 2021. It has also fractured the political stability and social cohesion in the country.

In The Gambia, the presidential election of December 2021 was relatively peaceful despite inter and intra-political party disagreements that generated protests. It marked the first independently organised political transition after the exit of President Yahya Jammeh in 2017 after 22 years of authoritarian government.[6] Leading opposition candidates such as Ousainou Darboe rejected the presidential election results, accusing the Electoral Commission of inordinate delay in transmission of results. Given the chequered political history of The Gambia, political stability is a prerequisite for the socio-economic development of the country. Therefore, continued political disagreements pose a significant threat to its achievement of social cohesion and advancement.

The process towards local and legislative elections in The Gambia, Senegal and Sierra Leone in 2022 is another cause for concern. As indicated earlier, lingering political dispute over the

Timeline of Elections 2022 in West Africa		
Country	**Election**	**Timeline**
The Gambia	Parliamentary	April 9, 2022
Senegal	Local	January 2022
	Parliamentary	July 2022
Sierra Leone	Local	2022
		@WANEP NEWS

process and outcome of the presidential election by the opposition party in The Gambia is likely to impact the processes leading to the parliamentary elections in April 2022. Also, Senegal is set to organise local and legislative elections in January and July 2022, respectively. The upcoming elections are against the backdrop of tensions and disagreements between the ruling and opposition parties over the arrest of key opposition leaders and protesters on allegations of

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[4]Ibid.
[5]Ibid.
[6]See https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20211205-incumbent-barrow-declared-winner-of-gambia-s-presidential-election
(Accessed 25/11/2021)

economic crimes, corruption and unlawful protests. This has limited the political space for the inclusive participation of key political stakeholders in governance. More importantly, the outcome of the elections will confirm the legitimacy of the electoral process and act as a referendum on the popularity of President Macky Sall and his Benno Bokk Yakaar party coalition amid allegations of possible amendment of the presidential term limit by the incumbent President to vie for a third term in office.[7] These dynamics are likely to heighten the stakes ahead of the elections in 2022. Similarly, Sierra Leone is expected to hold local elections in 2022 amid continued political tensions and disagreement. Key opposition party leaders including former President Ernest Bai Koroma is being investigated by the Anti-Corruption Commission on corruption allegations, while the former flagbearer of the All Peoples Congress Party (APC), Samura Kamara, is on trial for alleged corruption charges. The instances highlighted are signs of potential tension that could undermine the peaceful conduct of the impending local elections.

The resurgence of military coups in West Africa constituted the most significant threat to democratic governance among ECOWAS Member States in 2021. The democratic Government of President Alpha Conde of Guinea was toppled on 5 September 2021, while in Mali the Government of President Boubacar Keita was overthrown on 18 August 2020 in a military led coup by Colonel Asimi Goïta. Eight months after the coup, the leadership of the Transitional Government headed by interim President Bah N'Daw was also replaced by the military leadership of Colonel Assimi Goïta in another military coup on 24 May 2021.

While in Mali the ECOWAS and AU mediation initial efforts led to the development of a political transition towards a return to democratic governance in February 2022, a similar effort to engage the military coup leaders in Guinea has been unsuccessful. A twist to the Malian transition is the recent declaration by the Transitional Government that it will no longer honour the agreed timeline for the proposed presidential and legislative elections scheduled for February 2022 largely due to rising insecurity.[8] While this development and the non-engagement posture of the Guinean coup leaders are seen as attempts by the military to entrench themselves in power, it has also elevated political uncertainties in the region as well as challenged the role of ECOWAS in fostering political stability across the Member States.

Niger and Burkina Faso also experienced coup attempts and mutiny in 2021. Prior to the inauguration of President Bazoum, the Nigerien army foiled a coup attempt on 30 and 31 March 2021.[9] This suggests growing discontent and divisions within the army over the weak capacity to respond effectively to rising insecurity and the general welfare of security personnel, which could

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[7] See https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/01/what-2022-has-store-africa?utm_source=Chatham%20House&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=1292097 (Accessed 25/11/2021).

[8] Christian Akorlie (2021). "West African bloc imposed sanctions on Mali over stalled votes". Reuters. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-westafrica-security-mali-guinea-idUSKBN2HS0BQ (Accessed on 25/11/2021).

[9] See https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/31/heavy-gunfire-heard-near-nigers-presidency (Accessed on 25/11/2021).

undermine the democratic governance and counter-terrorism efforts in the country. In November 2021, Burkina Faso also recorded a military mutiny and civil protests against the perceived inability of the Government of President Kabore to respond to the security challenges and socio-economic difficulties faced by the population. The military mutiny is a visible signpost of political divisions, disunity and discontent within the army following the trial and sentencing of senior military officers including General Gilbert Diendere and General Djibrill Bassole, close allies of the deposed former President Blaise Campaore. The discontent within the army is also seemingly exacerbated by the commencement of the trial of 14 soldiers including former President Campaore and General Diendere accused of their role in the assassination of Thomas Sankara at a military court on 11 October 2021.[10] The trial is seen by some segments within the army and the country as an attempt to persecute and purge the army of officers suspected to be allies of Blaise Campaore. Moreover, the discontent within the army is partly attributable to the growing resentment in the army over the lack of equipment and resources to effectively counter armed groups insurgencies in the country.

In response to the declining democracy evident in constitutional changes of presidential term limits, resurgence of military coups and growing citizens demand for accountable and responsive governance, various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) initiated advocacy and other measures to engage critical stakeholders, to explore avenues to address this challenge. A nodal instance of this is the regional CSOs consultative meeting organised by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) between 15-16 November 2021 in Accra, Ghana, to review the state of democracy and governance in the ECOWAS region. A key outcome of the meeting was the need to institutionalise two-term presidential limits across Member-States through a review of the *2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.*[11] Although the recommendations from the civil society led by WANEP have been submitted to the leadership of ECOWAS for consideration, formal modification of the protocol is yet to be undertaken. The delay in reviewing the Protocol could further mar the credibility of ECOWAS and negatively impact its ability to forestall challenges facing democratic governance in 2022 and beyond.
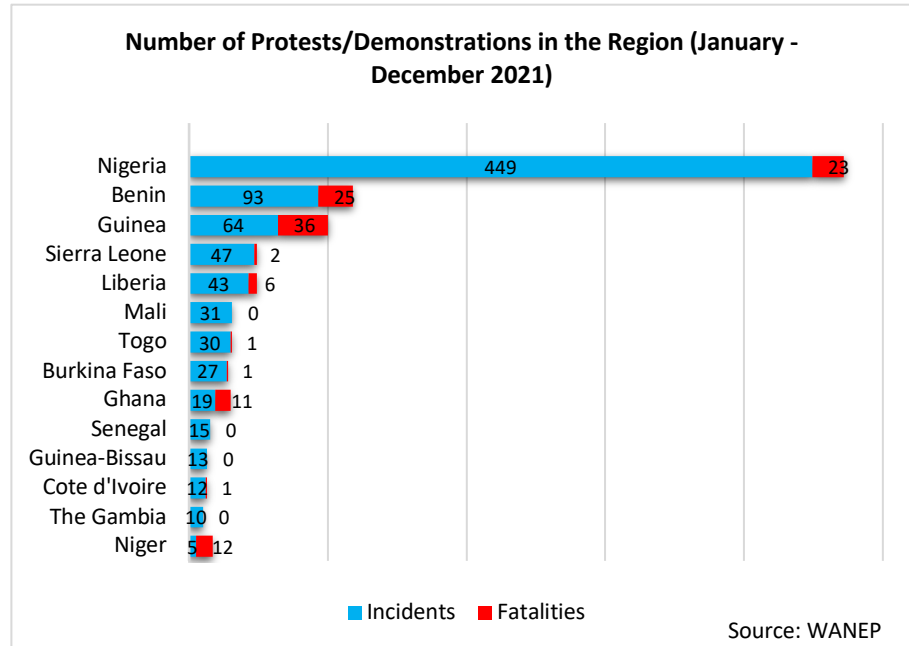
Youth protests, labour agitations and citizens demonstrations against governance faultlines also featured prominently across the countries in the region in the past year. A total of 857 cases of demonstrations were recorded across the region, resulting in 118 deaths and 914 injuries.[12] Structural and systemic drivers of the demonstrations included ineffective social service delivery, working conditions, youth unemployment, high cost of living and inadequate social infrastructure

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[10]WANEP NEWS. Data collected and *compiled by WANEP NEWS through monthly incident and situation reports last updated on 5 January 2022.* Available at www.wanep.org (Accessed 05/12/2021).

[11]ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance was developed in 2001 as an expression of collective political resolve of ECOWAS member States to take the process of preventing and resolving crises and violent conflicts forward, and to achieve peace and security through the development of democracy and good governance.

[12]WANEP Monthly Bulletins. Jamuary – December 2021. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 05/12/2021).

in communities. A notable trend in protests and demonstrations is the use of social and digital media spaces as veritable grounds by youths to express their concerns and dissatisfaction with the State. A typical instance was the #EndSARS in Nigeria, #FixTheCountry in Ghana, #ThreeYearsJotna in The Gambia and

Number of Protests/Demonstrations in the Region (January - December 2021)

Country	Incidents	Fatalities
Nigeria	449	23
Benin	93	25
Guinea	64	36
Sierra Leone	47	2
Liberia	43	6
Mali	31	0
Togo	30	1
Burkina Faso	27	1
Ghana	19	11
Senegal	15	0
Guinea-Bissau	13	0
Cote d'Ivoire	12	1
The Gambia	10	0
Niger	5	12

Source: WANEP

#FreeSenegal in Senegal. While these contribute to the promotion of civil activism, freedom of expression and amplification of dissenting voices, the new media space has also generated violent communications through its attacks against political opponents, as well as religious and ethnic bigotry that induced tensions and violence in the affected countries. Social media bloggers and critics of regimes have also come under attack with expressed threats to their lives. Given the political and social challenges bedevilling countries, social media is likely to remain a conduit for citizens protests and also a counter-productive platform for fake news and exacerbation of violence.

Additional challenges arise from COVID-19 economic recovery policies and their related volatilities that impact the governance landscape of the region. The protracted impact of the pandemic and the wide public non-compliance with protocols and vaccine hesitancy in ECOWAS Member States continue to have an impact on bilateral and multilateral relationships, especially in the global North concerned about the global resurgence of the virus through a new variant, Omicron, linked to countries on the continent including in West Africa. The travel restrictions, lockdown, limitations on social gatherings and closure of commercial activities and schools, harmed the economies and livelihoods of citizens. West African economies have been affected by depleted revenue which reinforced poor socio-economic responses by the State with citizen backlash and protests.[13]

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[13] Op. cit. ECOWAS Commission (2021).

It is estimated that COVID-19 has increased the proportion of people living on less than USD 1.90 a day by 2.3 per cent in 2020 and by 2.9 per cent in 2021, leading to extreme poverty rates of 34.5 per cent in 2020 and 34.4 per cent in 2021.[14] The recovery of the regional economy continues to show signs of fragility and remains insufficient to enable households to return to their pre-crisis level of nutrition and economic wellbeing.[15] According to the ECOWAS Commission monitoring report on COVID-19 impact in West Africa, 62 per cent of respondents from various households interviewed across the region indicates that their level of income is low.[16] The report also shows that the most affected socio-economic categories are households that depend on unstable sources of income, such as small-scale traders, street vendors and casual workers.[17]

Within the agricultural sector, reported shortage of labour was common, largely due to the restrictions or closure of land borders that limit trade across the region. Its effects continue to disrupt supply chains for local agricultural products.[18] In conflict-affected areas such as the Lake Chad Basin, the Liptako-Gourma region and the Sahel, households have resorted to selling productive assets to sustain their livelihoods.[19] The loss of households' livelihoods has limited their access to food. Nearly 25 million people were unable to meet their food needs in 2021, which is 34 per cent higher than in 2020.[20] This is due to the low availability of food products coupled with higher prices due to the persistent impact of restrictive measures and conflicts. In response, governments across the region through partnership with international financial institutions and other development partners have initiated various stimulus packages to alleviate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on the livelihoods of households. These interventions have yielded minimum gains in supporting the livelihoods of some populations. Therefore, a lot more needs to be done to assuage the debilitating impact of the pandemic on agriculture and livelihoods.

Key Outlook for 2022

Military coups and governance instability
- Given the history of military coups that characterize the politics of Niger, the relative peaceful democratic transition witnessed in 2021 provides an opportunity to strengthen the capacity of the State to consolidate democratic gains and respond effectively to the multidimensional security threats to the country's stability in 2022 and beyond. However,

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

the seeming discontent in the Nigerien army evident in the attempted coup that occurred before the inauguration of President Bazoum, and the rising trend of coup attempts and military takeovers in the region could potentially sully the democratic gains and stability of the country in the years ahead if robust measures are not taken to respond to this threat as well as insecurity induced by terrorist and armed groups insurgencies.

- The protracted political disagreements, tensions and violence in Benin are likely to linger in the years ahead given the continued crackdowns of political opponents that have contributed to a shrinking political space for consensus building, and inclusive participation of opposition parties and civil society in the democratic process of the country. Given this threat, the risk of protests, demonstrations and agitations is likely to continue in 2022 and beyond, with consequences on the social cohesion and political stability of the country.

- The political standoffs between ECOWAS and the Transitional Governments headed by the military in Mali and Guinea are likely to further deteriorate in 2022. The renege of the military junta to the transition roadmap and expressed tough political posture in Mali not only undermines the possibility for a return to democracy as agreed but also undermine the regional strength of ECOWAS in West Africa. Similarly, the intransigence of the Guinea Transitional Government headed by Colonel Doumbouya could potentially elicit further sanctions from ECOWAS that will entrench military rule in Mali and Guinea and motivate their support for similar military incursions in governance in other ECOWAS member states.

- The discontent and division within Burkina Faso's national army and civil society over the inability of the State to curtail the rising terrorist and armed groups spread of violence against populations and the trial of Senior Army Officers evident in civil protests and mutiny by soldiers are precursors of instability. Notably, political division and disunity within the army are not only inimical to the fight against the rising insecurity but also threaten the political stability of the country. It would also threaten the already fragile governance stability in the country in 2022 if conditions remain the same.

COVID-19 impact on human security
- The evolving nature of the COVID-19 dynamics coupled with sluggish economic recovery is likely to affect economic growth expectations for 2022. This points to continued economic volatility and the likelihood of civil unrest, labour strikes and demonstrations across ECOWAS Members States in 2022.
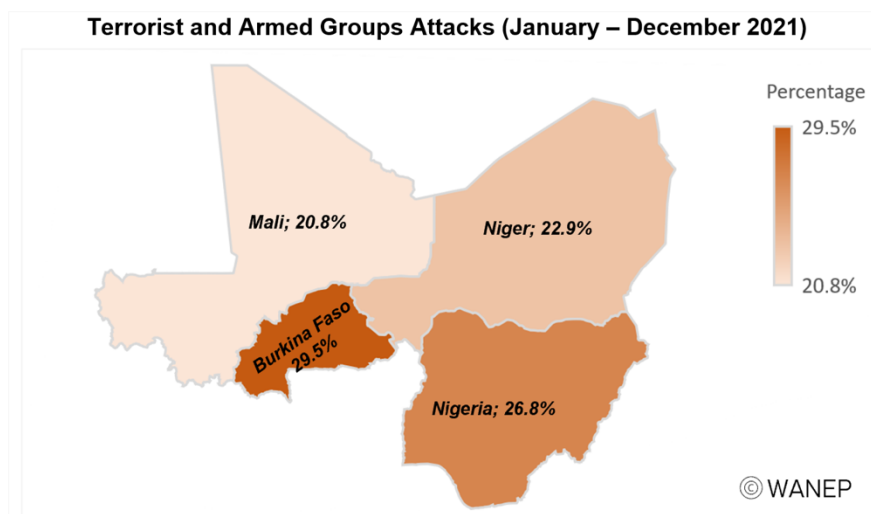
Key Resilient Factors

- Various CSOs in West Africa have commenced advocacy and consultations to engage ECOWAS and West Africa Governments to review the *2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance* with a recommendation to adopt a two-term presidential limit across the 15 countries in the region. In addition, there are ongoing CSO coalitions across the region geared towards the development of a collective action that supports democracy and good governance as a panacea to the growing citizen resentment and support for undemocratic regime changes by the military.
- ECOWAS and the AU mediation teams continue to engage the Transitional Governments (TGs) in Mali and Guinea. This provides a diplomatic channel to strengthen dialogue with the TGs aimed at developing roadmaps for transition to democratic governance.

Recommendations

- ECOWAS should consider the key recommendations submitted by CSOs in reviewing the 2001 Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy for adoption by the Authority of Heads of State and Government.
- ECOWAS, AU, UNOWAS and international partners should increase collaboration and intensify engagement with the Transitional Governments and key stakeholders in Mali and Guinea through sustained dialogue, negotiation and consensus on the pathways towards the restoration of democratic governance in the countries.
- CSOs should intensify collaboration with ECOWAS to popularise the Protocol and other governance frameworks as part of awareness raising and also to increase public appreciation of the role of ECOWAS in strengthening the political stability of West Africa to shore up a sense of interest and contribution of citizens to democracy and governance in the region.

3.0 Organised Crime and Violent Extremism

Organised crime and terrorism are critical concerns in West Africa. The persistent attacks on security operatives and civilians, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria undermine international, continental and regional responses. The security situation in the Sahel region and

Terrorist and Armed Groups Attacks (January – December 2021)

Mali; 20.8%
Niger; 22.9%
Burkina Faso 29.5%
Nigeria; 26.8%

Percentage
29.5%
20.8%

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Nigeria continues to deteriorate. The number of incidents has risen from 709 attacks reported in 2020, to 932 by December 2021, according to data from WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).[21] Among the four affected countries, Burkina Faso recorded the highest cases with 275 attacks accounting for 29.5 per cent. Nigeria recorded 250 attacks accounting for 26.8 per cent, while Niger and Mali recorded 214 and 194 scoring 22.9 and 20.8 per cent of terrorist and armed group attacks, respectively. It resulted in 4,793 deaths which include 1,000 security personnel as reported in 2021,[22] constituting a significant increase in fatalities when compared to figures of 2020.[23]

Prominent among these incidents include attacks (Tchoma Bangou and Zaroumadareye villages) in the Tillabéri region of Niger that led to 100 deaths on January 2, 2021.[24] Additional attacks in March 2021 in the Tillabéri region and Tahoua region in Niger led to a total of 195 fatalities.[25] Extremist attacks in the Gao region of Mali led to the deaths of 33 soldiers, while in Nigeria, a military base in Minok community of Borno State was attacked, leading to the deaths of six soldiers in March 2021.[26] In Solhan town of Burkina Faso, an extremist attack on June 2021 led to the deaths of 160 people, while 53 deaths were reported on November 2021 when a military police post in the North of Burkina Faso was attacked.[27]

There is also a domestic expansion of terrorist groups from their initial areas of operation to new frontiers for geostrategic interest, including recruitment and financial gains from ransom payments as well as cattle rustling and illegal gold mining. Boko Haram and ISWAP have expanded their operations beyond the North-East to the North-West and North-Central geopolitical regions of Nigeria, due to deteriorating security and alliances among armed groups.[28] Across the Sahel region, *Jama'at nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin* (JNIM) continued to strengthen their territorial control at border communities, particularly the Liptako-Gourma area that intersect border communities of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. This is due to the weak State security presence in the area which is exploited by extremist groups to access natural resources that finance their operations. In Mali, attacks by terrorist groups have expanded beyond the North and Central regions to the West of Senegal. Also, incursion of attacks southwards from Burkina Faso suggests threats by extremist groups to gain a foothold in the coastal States of the region. For instance, in June 2021, armed groups attacked Tougbo in Cote d'Ivoire along its northern border with Burkina

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[21] Op Cit. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] See: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/niger/terrorism (Accessed 05/12/2021).
[25] Ibid.
[26] See: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/boko-haram-seizes-nigerias-northern-region/2222028 (Accessed 12/12/2021).
[27] Op Cit. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).
[28] ISS Report (2021). "Boko Haram Teams up with Bandits in Nigeria". Available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/boko-haram-teams-up-with-bandits-in-nigeria (Accessed 07/12/2021).

Faso.[29] In April 2021, a vehicle struck an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), and a national gendarmerie vehicle was also attacked on the highway between Nassian and Kafolo in Cote d'Ivoire.[30] On March 28, 2021, an armed attack in Kolobougou led to the death of three Ivorian soldiers and two civilians.[31] In Togo, a security post in *Kpendjal*, near the border with Burkina Faso was attacked on November 9, 2021.[32] Between October to December 2021, Benin recorded more than three attacks by unknown armed groups on security posts along its north-western border with Burkina Faso.

A consequence of the armed attacks in the region is the growing number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees. For instance, more than 5.3 million people, particularly women and children have been displaced in the region with 65 per cent of the IDPs located in Burkina Faso and Nigeria.[33] The humanitarian crisis in North-East Nigeria remains one of the most severe in the region with 1.9 million IDPs recorded between January and December 2021.[34] According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 8.7 million people from Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States need humanitarian assistance, while 1.6 million children are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition.[35] In Burkina Faso, the number of IDPs has increased from 1.1 million in March 2021 to more than 1.4 million people as of December 31, 2021, representing an increase of 32 per cent.[36] The Northern regions along the Sahel remain the most affected. A total of 38,000 cases of asylum seekers from Burkina Faso to neighbouring countries were recorded in 2021.[37] In Niger, repeated terrorist attacks against the security forces and civilians have led to 216,818 displaced persons in communities in Diffa and Maradi including 61,320 refugees, mostly from Nigeria and Chad.[38] In Mali, over 414,900 people have been displaced in the North and Central regions.[39]

Kidnapping for ransom has also become a conflict economy exploited by terrorists, bandits and other criminal networks to sustain their operations and livelihoods in the region. Recent trends in Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have shown an expansion of kidnapping locations and targets across social classes or economic divides.[40] A total of 1,631 incidents of kidnapping were

[29] Op. cit. WANEP NEWS.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid.
[32]Ibid.
[33]ACLED, via OECD Analyst, Jose Luengo-Cabrera. Available at https://www.linkedin.com/in/jos%C3%A9-luengo-cabrera/detail/recent-activity/ (Accessed 07/12/2021).
[34] See: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Nigeria%20-%2031%20Dec%202021.pdf (Accessed 07/10/21).
[35] Ibid.
[36] Global Humanitarian Overview 2022. Available at: https://gho.unocha.org/burkina-faso (Accessed 20/12/2021).
[37] Ibid.
[38] See: https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/matrice-de-suivi-des-d-placements-dtm-sahel-central-liptako-gourma-tableau-de-bord-n-22 (Accessed 13/12/2021).
[39]See: Ibid.
[40]See: https://www.cfr.org/blog/kidnapping-nigeria-growth-industry (Accessed 05/11/2021).

recorded in the region between January and December 2021[41]. 840 cases were reported in Nigeria, affecting 5,878 victims including 641 women and 1,046 children[42]. In Mali, a total of 318 incidents of kidnapping was recorded in 2021 as compared to 141 reported cases in 2020[43]. Burkina Faso recorded 299 cases, while Niger reported 168 kidnap incidents in 2021[44].

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, especially along the coast of Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia, accounted for 34 attacks on vessels and 57 crew members kidnapped in 2021, which represents a 55 per cent decrease compared to 130 crew members kidnapped in 2020.[45] The decrease in piracy incidents could be attributable to the level of multilateral cooperation between navies of coastal States including sharing of timely information, joint training and operations in the region. However, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) Piracy Reporting Centre warns that the piracy threat persists and the risk to crew and vessels plying the Gulf of Guinea remains high.[46]

Trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs remained a critical challenge to the region as reported cases of illicit drug trafficking and seizures increased from 280 in 2020 to 339 in 2021.[47] These drugs comprised marijuana, cocaine, codeine and tramadol predominantly in Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, The Gambia, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Senegal. In Nigeria, 3.3million kilograms (kg) of illicit drugs was seized by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in 2021, while more than 100 kg of marijuana were seized by the authorities in Conakry in March 2021.[48] At the port of Banjul in The Gambia, two tons of cocaine from Ecuador were intercepted by the Drug Law Enforcement Agency in January 2021.[49] These seizures indicate an improved response capability of governments to combat drug trafficking in the region. Harmful drugs, remains a key influence on mental ill-health, crime and violence especially among young people in the region.

Major cases of homicides were recorded in 2021, namely in Nigeria with 145 incidents, 155 deaths and 34 injuries; Mali with 30 incidents and 30 deaths; Togo recorded 25 incidents with 25 deaths and two injuries, while The Gambia recorded 17 incidents with 17 deaths. Burkina Faso reported four incidents and four deaths.[50] A few of the homicides occurred as a result of mob

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[41]Op Cit. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).
[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Ibid.
[45]ICC-IMB Annual report: 2021 World-Wide incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships. Available at: https://maritimecyprus.com/2022/01/13/icc-imb-annual-report-2021-world-wide-incidents-of-piracy-and-armed-robbery-against-ships/ (Accessed 16/11/2021).
[46]Ibid.
[47]Op Cit. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).
[48]Ibid.
[49]Ibid.
[50]Ibid

justice as reprisals for robbery or physical assault while most of the incidents were linked to fights, accidents or domestic violence. The lingering conflict between herders and farmers stemming from competition over increasingly scarce resources, particularly grazing lands, pasture and encroachment also continue to fuel violence in the region. WANEP NEWS recorded a total of 190 incidents in the region, especially in Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso resulting in 1,105 fatalities in 2021.[51]

Key Outlook in 2022

Terrorist and Armed Groups shifting frontlines
- In Burkina Faso, the spread of insecurity and violence have affected almost half of its territory.[52] Despite the increased deployment of security forces, terrorist and armed groups have expanded their operations from the North to the Centre-North, Centre-East, South-West, Cascades, Boucle du Mouhoun, Haults-Bassins and Sahel regions. The recurrence of armed violence and the systemic challenges of states responses to these threats indicates a potential escalation of attacks and fatalities in 2022. It will further impact on existing humanitarian crisis especially increased internal displacement, food insecurity and closure of schools in 2022.

- In 2021, Mali recorded terrorist and armed group attacks in new locations including Mopti, Segou, Kidal, Kayes, Timbuktu, Gao, Hombori, Bamako and the wider Sahel region. The terrorist expansion and persistent attacks could be attributed to the ineffectiveness of existing counter-terrorism strategies and operations especially at hard-to-reach border communities. Considering this trend, Mali's Liptako-Gourma border area with Burkina Faso and Niger will remain a hotspot for terrorist attacks in 2022.

- Climate change variabilities constitute a driver of agro-pastoralist conflicts and inter/ intra-communal violence in West African countries within the Sahel corridor such as Niger. This is further compounded by violence extremism predominant in Diffa, Maradi and Tillaberi regions, with low to medium level risks in Agadez, Tahoua and Niamey. Despite the recent progress made in the governance landscape of Niger, the weak state capacity suggests that the new government will grapple with the challenge of responding to the continued insecurity and humanitarian crisis induced by terrorist and armed attacks, and climate change variabilities in the country.

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[51]Ibid.
[52]Op. cit. Global Humanitarian Overview 2022.

- While Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to expand their operations in the North-east, North-central and West regions,[53] incidents alliances with of escalating armed bandits attacks in these locations, reveals a potential link between terrorists and armed bandits to strengthen and expand their operations in other parts of the country in 2022. Despite the State's effort to respond to this threat, the geographical spread, rapidity and multiplicity of incidents of insecurity challenge the capacity of state security to mitigate insurgency and armed conflict in 2022. Its disruptions of agriculture predominantly derived from the north is likely to lead to food insecurity and decline in livelihood in 2022.

The Littoral States to watch (Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana Senegal and Togo)

- The southward expansion of armed insurgency in Mali and Burkina Faso indicates an increasing vulnerability and threats to bordering littoral States such as Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin. It portends a significant threat to maritime security and the potential alliance with pirates into organised crime syndicates channeling arms, illicit drugs and oil bunkering along the Gulf of Guinea.

Growing anti-French and anti-government sentiments

- Anti-French and anti-government protests have increased across the Sahel countries following persistent terrorist and armed group attacks on civilians and security forces. There is widespread public disenchantment over governments' and their French partners' handling of the insecurity challenges in Mali and Burkina Faso. It motivated the military coups of August 2020 and March 2021 in Mali and also escalated the frequency of demonstrations against French Forces in the country.[54] In November 2021, a convoy of French military personnel en route to Niger from Cote d'Ivoire was blocked by protesters opposed to France's intervention at Kaya in Burkina Faso.[55] This indicates growing resentment and trust deficit between the State and citizens which is counterproductive to security stabilisation efforts, especially the joint multinational miliitary campaigns in the Sahel.

Geo-strategic and political interests in the region

- The strategic importance of West African countries to multinational and global trade, existing Foreign Direct Investments, natural and human resources, increase international stakeholder interest in its political, economic and security stability. With nearly two-thirds of its population under the age of 25, the region's human capital is key to its capital

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[53]See: https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/438008-boko-haram-carrying-out-attacks-in-nasarawa-governor-tells-buhari.html (Accessed 05/01/2021).
[54]Op Cit. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).
[55]Ibid.

development and an important characteristic of its global profile.[56] Its natural resources for renewable energy continues to trigger external political influences from Western global powers as well as China, Russia, Turkey and the Gulf States such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. Public opinions suggest an overbearing influence and interference of external interests on West African States which undermines the responsibility of the Governments to their citizens for social security, economic and environmental wellbeing. The political elites and officials are accused of being out of touch with the needs and interests of their citizens as exemplified in the various mass protests across the major cities of the region. The competing interests by external powers in the region jeopardise collective commitment to the fight against terrorism and violent extremism and limit the effectiveness of interventions, especially in the Sahel. The political uncertainties created by this situation has been linked to the accusations levelled against political elites by various indigenous groups and oppositions who accuse governments of acts of impunity, constitutional changes to extend their term limits indirectly backed by external powers as well as the recent justifications presented by the military for the trends of coups and takeovers being experienced in the region in 2021 and likely to continue in 2022.

Key Resilient Factors
- The third Extraordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of States and Governments held in Accra, Ghana on November 7, 2021, on the situation in Mali and Guinea raised concerns about the deterioration of the security situation in Mali and called on the neighbouring countries to step up security presence along their borders with Mali. They also instructed the ECOWAS Commission to intensify discussions with the African Union Commission to enhance the security situation in the Sahel. Also, the Authority called for a more robust and offensive mandate to enhance the operational capacity of MINUSMA to deal with terrorism challenges in Mali.

- There is continued and sustained bilateral and multilateral cooperation among States and non-State actors to increase efforts in tackling transnational organised crimes, violent extremism and terrorism in West Africa. An instance of such effort is the Accra Initiative, which was formed by some countries, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire and Togo with Mali and Mali as observer members. The broader objective of the Accra Initiative is to strengthen cooperation and collaboration among Member States to prevent spillover of terrorism from the Sahel and address transnational organised crimes as well as violent extremism in member countries' border areas. As part of the efforts to achieve this, a coordination meeting among Member States on the Initiative is scheduled to be held in

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[56]Gain, M.A. "Conflicting Agenda and Strategic Rivalry in the Sahel" (November 2021). Available at: http://www.mei.edu/publications/conflict-agenda-and-strategic-rivalry-sahel (Accessed 15/11/2021).

Accra, Ghana, in January 2022 to strengthen security cooperation and collaboration to counter incursions of terrorist and armed groups in border communities.

Recommendations
- ECOWAS and development partners should reinforce bilateral cooperation with G5 Sahel, MNJTF, especially Chad and Nigeria military to strengthen their capacities and increase collaboration with local communities to stem attacks from Boko Haram and ISWAP.
- ECOWAS should strengthen collaboration with Member States and CSOs with technical expertise in the area of Conflict Early Warning and Response to provide requisite support to the National Coordination Centre for Early Warning and Response Mechanisms (NCCERM) and enhance their capacity to respond to security threats in countries and the region. This should also lead to enhancing the coordination and information sharing as well as the implementation of the ECOWAS counter-terrorism strategy to prevent or mitigate violent conflicts.
- There is also the need for Governments and ECOWAS to strengthen platforms for robust engagement with CSOs to ensure effective implementation of the 2020-2024 medium-term Action Plan on countering violent extremism developed and approved by the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, especially in enhancing community resilience.

4.0 Women, Peace and Security

Challenges of weak implementation of national policies and laws that promote gender parity, the inadequate political will to support women participation in politics and governance, growing violence and intimidation in politics, as well as limited access to economic support were key features in the women peace and security agenda for 2021. In the presidential elections conducted in Niger, Benin and The Gambia, no female candidate represented the contesting political parties. For instance, the female candidate who applied to contest for The Gambia presidential election of December 4, 2021, was disqualified as she could not meet the criteria and other legal requirements to endorse her candidacy.[57] In Benin, the implementation of *Certificat de Comformité*[58] and party system reform approved by the National Assembly in 2018, has also contributed to reducing women's participation and interest to contest the 2021 presidential election. The low representation of women in governance and decision-making processes is attributable to entrenched gender inequality fostered by sociocultural and economic conditions in the country. This could suggest the inadequate gender consideration by the State to ensure the participation of women. Also, the growing culture of violence in elections and

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[57]WANEP-EMAM Opening Statement on Gambia Presidential Election 2021. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed 14/12/2021).
[58]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.

politics is contributing to low participation and representation of women in governance in countries across the region. While some political parties have deliberately developed gender policies to support and increase women participation and representation through elections, candidature fees for national elections and the cost of campaign financing continue to hinder such efforts.

The socio-economic livelihoods of women in countries have also been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The negative impact of the pandemic on the informal sector of the economies of countries, which engage about 85 per cent of women, has contributed to limiting access to credits, jobs and income losses[59]. This has also put enormous pressure on health systems that has disrupted essential services, including maternal health and contraception in many African countries.[60] As of 14 November 2021, an aggregate of 6,109,722 cases had been recorded with 151,173 deaths and a 2.5 per cent case fatality rate[61]. Studies reveal that substantial morbidity and socio-economic challenges have adverse impact on populations' access to quality healthcare in countries.

Cases of gender-based violence, especially ritual murder of women and girls were recorded in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia in 2021. The WANEP NEWS recorded 185 ritual-related deaths including 43 females and 30 children from January to December 2021.[62] Cote d'Ivoire recorded 50 cases of rape and physical violence against women and children. Liberia also recorded 20 cases of ritual murder of women and girls in 2021. Furthermore, violence against women and children, especially rape and physical assault, were recurrent in 2021. In Nigeria, 4000 cases of sexual and gender-based violence were recorded[63], while Sierra Leone recorded 3,292 cases between January and December 2021.[64] WANEP NEWS recorded over 291 sexual and physical assault cases in Liberia, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.[65]

Insecurity and COVID-19 have contributed to reported cases of sexual abuse against children in communities. In Sierra Leone, 537 teenage cases of sexual abuse were reported between January and December 2021.[66] In Ghana, at least 51 cases of teenage pregnancy were recorded during

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[59]Op Cit. ILO Report (2016).

[60]UN-Women, Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals the Gender Snapshot 2021, Available at: Progress-on-the-Sustainable-Development-Goals-The-gender-snapshot-2021-en.pdf (unwomen.org)

[61] Impact of COVID-19 on Maternal Healthcare in Africa and the way forward (December 2021). Available at: https://archpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13690-021-00746-6 (Accessed 27/12/2021).

[62]WANEP NEWS. Situation Tracking – Nigeria Vol. 15. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 12/12/2021).

[63]Op Cit. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).

[64]Sierra Leone Rainbow Centre SGBV Data (2021).

[65]Ibid

[66] Op Cit. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).

the lockdown period and school closures between March 2020 to January 2021.[67] This trend threatens the attainment of Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.[68]

Despite women and girls constituting a significant number of victims of sexual and gender-based violence, reports indicate they are also perpetrators of violence. From WANEP NEWS data, over 38 violent incidents with eight fatalities and 26 injuries were perpetrated by women and girls across West Africa in 2021[69]. Key instances include an incident of a female teenager who killed her father at Hafia district in Télimélé prefecture of Guinea on 2 May 2021. In Dakar, a young woman was arrested for killing her newborn baby on November 10, 2021. Also, a middle-aged woman assaulted her six-year-old nephew, leading to his death at Amanfrom Official Town in Ghana on 1 December 2021. On 11 January 2021, an 18-year-old girl reportedly set her boyfriend ablaze at Zaki Biam in the Wadata area of Makurdi Local Government Area in Benue State, Nigeria.

Key outlooks for 2022

COVID-19 impact on women livelihoods and SGBV
- The impact of COVID-19 continues to weigh in heavily on women and youth-led small and medium-scale businesses that constitutes 58 per cent of Africa's self-employed population.[70] There are also challenges of various mutations of COVID-19, limited rate of vaccine uptake in countries and the slow impact of contingency plans for economic and social recovery. Considering this, the informal sector is likely to continue to endure the impact of the pandemic. Should this persists, the socio-economic livelihoods of women and girls are likely to be worsened in 2022.

- Weak implementation of National Action Plans (NAP) of UNSC Resolution 1325 and related policies in most ECOWAS Member States continues to undermine effective protection and promotion of women's safety and security. Critical challenges facing the implementation include inadequate budgetary allocation and weak capacity of state institutions as evident in countries across West Africa. Given the weaknesses in the implementation of existing laws and institutions that protect and promote women and children security, the prevalence of SGBV are likely to linger in the coming years.

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[67]Ibid.

[68]SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality#:~:text=SDG%205%3A%20Achieve%20gender%20equality%20and%20empower%20all%20women%20and%20girls (Accessed 14/12/2021).

[69]Op Cit. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).

[70]Female Entrepreneurship, key ingredient for Africa's Growth (June 2021). Available at: https://ideas4development.org/en/ffemale-entrepreneurship-key-ingredient-africa-growth/ (Accessed 12/12/2021).

Key Resilient Factors

- The increased awareness created by CSOs, Media and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) around the UNSCR 1325 and other related Resolutions and frameworks both at the continental and regional levels to promote women inclusion, participation and empowerment in various sectors continue to enlighten many people including advocates of the women, peace and security agenda.

- There has been considerable public awareness through social media advocacy and activism by women groups and other social networks in promoting prevention and protection of women and children's rights in countries. There are various social media campaign platforms including, the #HeForShe global campaign, #Kasa!endsexualviolence in West Africa and #Handsoffourgirls in Sierra Leone specifically created to promote and protect women and children.

- Continued capacity enhancement of women and girls through advocacy by women groups, individuals as well as CSOs to promote inclusive participation and empowerment of women in governance and decision-making processes. For instance, WANEP's Women, Peace and Security programme has established National Women Coalitions (NWC) geared towards strengthening systems and structures that empower women at local and national levels to contribute to governance and political transitions in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Cote d'Ivoire.

Recommendations

- There is the need for CSOs, the media and other relevant actors to strengthen engagements with the ECOWAS Member States for the full implementation of NAPs on UNSCR 1325 and related Resolutions, Laws and Bills on the empowerment of women and girls as well as protection against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in countries in the region.
- Governments, political parties and other stakeholders should widen the space for women's engagement in governance, peace and security processes.

5.0 Environmental Security

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to reinforce the humanitarian complexities associated with climate change risk factors within the region in 2021. As of 31 December 2021, the total confirmed cases have spiked to 745,006, with 10,251 fatalities.[71] Despite the efforts by Governments through a partnership with the Africa Centre for Disease Control (CDC), West Africa Health Organization (WAHO) and other development partners to ensure adequate supply of

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[71]See West Africa Health Organisation (WAHO). ECOWAS COVID-19 Dashboard. Available at: https://data.wahooas.org/outbreaks/#/ (Accessed on 27/12/2021).

vaccines to facilitate vaccinations campaigns in countries, the prevalence of vaccine hesitancy and limited availability of vaccines continue to hinder efforts to achieve optimum uptake in the region. As of July 2021, the proportion of the population vaccinated in Africa was 3.2 per cent compared to 48.12 per cent in Europe.[72] Apart from Cape Verde, which has a vaccination rate of 25.41 per cent, the

Geographic Distribution Map of COVID-19 in West Africa (As of 31 December 2021)
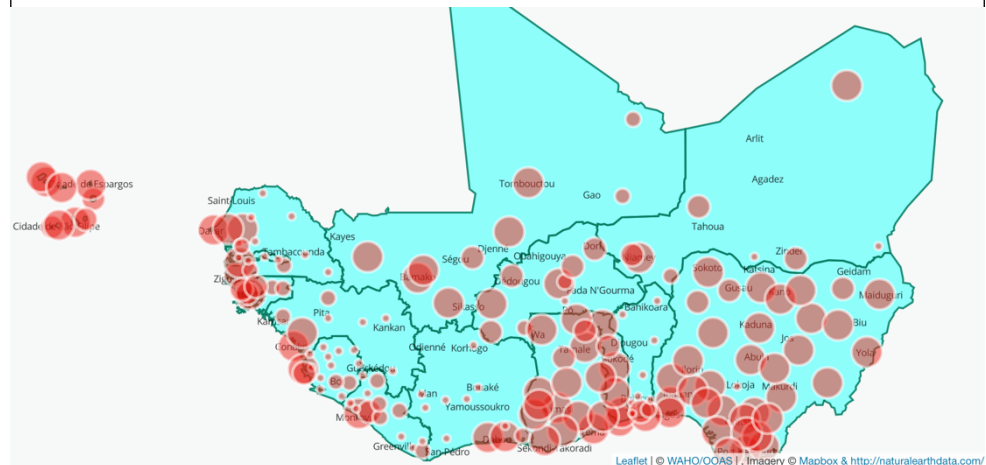
vaccination rate in most ECOWAS countries is below four per cent.[73] This suggests that West African States are likely to fall short of the targeted 40 per cent full vaccination of their citizens envisaged by the World Health Organization (WHO) in developing countries by December 2022. However, in the last quarter of 2021, there has been encouraging efforts by developed countries and other international partners to supply vaccines to West African States to support various vaccination campaigns.

The health risk is further compounded by the multi-layered effects of climate change. Of particular concern is the adverse impact of climate change on resources including water, land, food, fisheries and biodiversity that support livelihoods of populations, but particularly in the Sahel. Inter and intra-communal conflicts driven by competition over limited resources are prevalent in communities in the Lake Chad Basin Countries and the Sahel. Humanitarian needs in the Sahel and Lake Chad region (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria) are rising due to increasingly violent conflicts, deep poverty, climate change, and unprecedented food insecurity and malnutrition.[74] In addition to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, weak health systems are increasingly strained, and humanitarian needs are growing. According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, a record of more than 30 million people required humanitarian assistance in the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin in 2021

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[72]Ibid.
[73]Ibid.
[74]See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_7048 (Accessed on 30/12/2021).

due to a deepening crisis.[75] This is more than 5 million more than recorded in 2020.[76] This trend points to further deterioration of support to stem the humanitarian crisis.

The threat of epidemics including Ebola, Cholera, Yellow and Lassa Fever, Meningitis and Measles impacted the health security of populations in communities of Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Niger, Mali and Sierra Leone. Ebola resurged in N'Zérékoré and Siguiri regions of Guinea in March 2021 with 22 confirmed cases and a total of 11 fatalities. Nigeria lost about 3,604 persons to Cholera with additional 111,662 suspected cases of Cholera across 33 states and the Federal Capital Territory in 2021[77]. The outbreak of existing epidemics is partly attributable to the securitisation of the COVID-19 pandemic that has diverted a greater portion of national resources into the containment of the pandemic, while attention to such epidemics has been lopsided.

Key Outlook for 2022
- Given the gaps in the region's responses to insecurity and climate change, as well as the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, complex humanitarian crises in West Africa are likely to deteriorate in 2022 if response strategies are not strengthened to enhance mitigation.

Key Resilient Factors
- ECOWAS, African Union, UNOWAS and Member States have developed and activated various policies and humanitarian responses including conflict prevention and humanitarian support strategies to engage development partners and CSOs to respond to the complex humanitarian emergencies facing West Africa. For instance, the AU Regional Stabilization Strategy for Recovery of Boko Haram affected Countries in the Lake Chad Basin is contributing to mitigating the impact of climate change and humanitarian emergencies in communities in the Lake Chad Basin. Also, relevant UN Agencies are responding to the complex humanitarian challenges particularly in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin.

- WAHO and CDC continue to strengthen partnerships with States and the World Health Organizations (WHO) to provide the necessary support to countries in the region to mitigate the spread of the pandemic among populations. In addition to this, countries have developed and implemented various measures including vaccination campaigns to respond to the spread of the pandemic. Specifically, the CDC and WAHO's COVID-19 Trackers serve as veritable sources of data and information on the pandemic in countries.

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[75]See   https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/sahel-crisis-humanitarian-needs-and-requirements-overview-april-2021 (Accessed on 30/11/2021).
[76]Ibid.
[77]See: https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/506359-in-2021-nigeria-lost-3604-lives-to-cholera-official.html (Accessed 30/12/2021).

The institutions have also been providing regular updates and reports to support efforts by countries to mitigate the spread of the pandemic and its impact.

- There are ongoing clinical efforts by CDC, WAHO and countries such as Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana to scale the development and production of life-saving vaccines to mitigate the spread of the pandemic in countries.

- Issues concerning climate change-related security risks have gained traction in the global security conversation. In light of this, ECOWAS and AU continue to engage global partners in the development and activation of policies and frameworks to respond to climate-induced threats to human security in West Africa. For instance, the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 27) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will take place in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt in 2022. This offers a further platform for African countries to increase their voices and hold global leaders accountable for their commitment to the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement in delivering $100 Billion per year to support developing countries' adaptation and transition costs to mitigate climate change impact.

- Concerted and sustained campaigns against environmental threats at the local, national and international levels by Government institutions, CSOs, NGOs, the media, IGOs and other relevant advocacy groups continue to support environmental protection and awareness.

Recommendations
- WAHO, CDC and Governments should continue to strengthen partnerships with the WHO and development partners to enhance healthcare systems, medical research and pharmaceutical institutions to ensure adequate production of vaccines and other medicines to bolster health security resilience and respond effectively to epidemics and pandemics in the region.
- ECOWAS, AU and Member- States should strengthen collaboration with development partners to enhance the capacity of security agencies and humanitarian responses to mitigate the rising insecurity and humanitarian emergencies in the region.

6.0 Conclusion
Indeed, the peace and security of West Africa witnessed a mixed bag of progress and challenges in 2021. Countries such as Benin, Niger and The Gambia organised relatively peaceful presidential elections, signaling efforts to consolidate democratic governance in the region. Remarkably, Niger's presidential election is the first democratic transition in the history of politics and governance of the country. The Gambia's election is also critical to the stability of the country,

being the first to be organised in the post-President Jammeh era. However, the military coups that overthrew the elected Presidents of Mali and Guinea have implications for governance stability in the region. While this has stymied democratic governance in the affected countries, it has also led to political uncertainties, with potential contagion effect given the similar vulnerabilities prevailing in other ECOWAS countries. Political exclusion coupled with rising civil unrest and agitations in demand for accountable and responsive governance in West African countries are also precursors of potential tensions and violence in the years ahead if conditions remain the same.

The cumulative effects of the varied threats to security manifest in a cocktail of humanitarian emergencies reflected in increased cases of fatalities, injuries, IDPs, influx of refugees and irregular migration, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence against women and children in vulnerable communities across the region. Beyond the consequences of internal instability, the geostrategic importance of the region continues to attract international interest and priorities to establish greater political, military, and economic influence in the region's geostrategic resources. The growing nature of external influences challenges the capacity of the region to retain security stability. Despite these, national, regional and international partners must increase collaboration to conflict prevention and mitigation, in the region that assuages the existing peace and security challenges facing the region.