WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING OUTLOOK 2023

Potential Flashpoints and Simmering Conflicts in the Region

Credit: WANEP NEWS (A Map of West Africa showing the geographic location of reported incidents 2022)
1.0 Introduction

The West Africa region recorded some gains in the governance, peace and security landscape in 2022, despite being characterised by political and socio-economic challenges. The Gambia and Senegal successfully organised legislative and local elections between March and April, and January - July 2022, respectively despite the recorded incidents of isolated violence. Equally significant were preparations made by Benin, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia towards legislative and presidential elections in 2023. The electoral laws have been revised and voter registrations concluded in Benin, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, while Liberia has scheduled voter registration between March-May 2023. These are significant developments for the successful conduct of free, fair and transparent elections in these four countries. However, these gains were laced with protracted inter and intra-party tensions and violence. This poses a high risk to the inclusive citizens’ participation in the electoral processes and peaceful political transitions in the respective countries.

The challenges of the Unconstitutional Change of Government (UCG) through military coups continue to undermine democratic governance and political stability in the region. The two coups experienced in Burkina Faso in 2022, heightened the existing political instability and uncertainty from escalating armed groups’ insurgency. The complex mix of security and political threats has impacted the mediation effort of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to restore democratic governance and regional stability. Nevertheless, ECOWAS was able to negotiate a two-year transition to democratic governance by March 2024 with the Military regime in Mali.¹ This resulted in the lifting of sanctions imposed on the country following the Unconstitutional Change of Government in 2020 and 2021, respectively. These actions were regarded as steps towards rebuilding the political landscape of the country.

The ripple of rising geopolitical tension between the West and Russia through the war in Ukraine is also affecting the regional security of West Africa. In recent times, the power dynamics of France in her former colonies of Mali and Burkina Faso have come under heavy criticism from the citizens of these countries. This has led to strained diplomatic relations and the subsequent withdrawal of the French military and other Western development organisations from Mali. This withdrawal has resulted in the subscription and deployment of the Russian private security company, Wagner Group by Mali and Burkina Faso to bolster their military operations against surging terrorist and armed groups’ insurgencies. Russia’s increasing military influence in the former French colonies in the context of shifting global political trends has the potential to trigger geopolitical contestations, which will further increase instability in the region.

The ripple of the Russia and Ukraine war has further negated regional socio-economic policies and development, especially as West Africa struggles to recover from the economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic with rising rates of inflation and external debts. The consequence is reflected in the broader public sector debt-to-Gross Domestic Product ratio in Africa which stands at above

60 per cent in 2022. This is primarily caused by a dependence on imports of consumer goods and fuel. The adverse impact continues to generate citizens’ discontent as experienced through rising agitations, protests, and labour strikes, which have further fragmented social cohesion in countries across West Africa.

Zones of instability continue to expand in the region with an increase in violent extremism, organised crime and communal violence, especially in Nigeria, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. The expanded threats of extremism to the littoral states of Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Togo and Ghana compounds the peace and security stability of the region. Recent terrorist and extremist attacks in communities close to Burkina Faso’s borders with Ghana, for example, are manifesting in the influx of regular and irregular migration to neighbouring countries. In December 2022 alone, WANEP-Ghana NEWS recorded over 1,000 migrants fleeing from nearby villages in Burkina Faso to Hapa village near Hamille in the Upper West region due to terrorist attacks in Kolinka, a village near the Burkina Faso-Ghana border.

Cases of rape and physical assaults especially on women and girls were also prominent in the reporting period of 2022, in Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The complex humanitarian emergencies of the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) continue to impact the security of women and children with an adverse effect on their healthcare, psychosocial support, education, and economic livelihoods.

Climate change impact and slow-onset disasters continue to deplete natural resources including water, land, food, fisheries and biodiversity, particularly in the Sahel and LCB regions. Other health security threats such as Yellow and Lassa Fever, Cholera, Meningitis and Measles were prominent in Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Niger and Mali in 2022.

The Annual Peace and Security Outlook sheds light on the governance and human security challenges of the region in 2022 and projects the risks of vulnerabilities and threats that could inform specific intervention strategies in 2023.

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2.0 Governance and Democracy

In 2022, two military coups were recorded in Burkina Faso with implications to the efficacy of the ECOWAS 2001 Supplementary Protocols on Democracy and Good Governance in the region. The first coup of 24 January 2022, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba ousted the elected government of President Kaboré while the second coup of 30 September 2022 led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, deposed Lt.Col Damiba. These unconstitutional changes in Government have undermined regional and international efforts towards mitigating the security crises in the country. The implication of this political instability is the strategic geo-location of Burkina Faso for terrorist and armed groups to expand their operations to bordering countries of Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Togo and Ghana. The spread of UCG remains a threat to democracy in the region with likely spread to other ECOWAS member States. In 2022, coup attempts were also recorded in Guinea Bissau in February 2022, which led to 11 fatalities and injuries.\(^5\) Burkina Faso military leaders announced a foiled coup in November 2022,\(^6\) while in The Gambia eight soldiers were arrested over allegations of attempted coups in December 2022.\(^7\)

Despite these challenges, the region recorded positive strides in the governance landscape. The conduct of the Gambia legislative elections and steps being made to implement the recommendations of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) were important milestones in the consolidation of democracy in the country. The National People's Party (NPP) of President Adama Barrow failed to replicate the victory of the Presidential elections of December 2021 at the National National Assembly elections as they could not secure the majority with a final tally of 24 out of 58.\(^8\) The United Democratic Party (UDP), the main opposition party, led by Ousainou Darboe secured 15 seats.\(^9\) The current political dynamic signals

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\(^9\)Ibid.
the growth of multiparty democracy in the country and motivation for continued dialogue and consensus building among political parties. This enhances political stability and dissuades inter-party tensions and polarisation that pose a significant risk to democratic stability in the post-President Yaya Jammeh era.

Benin, Nigeria, The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia also commenced preparation for various level elections within the reporting period. Nigeria's general elections scheduled for February and March 2023, will be the seventh since the country returned to democratic governance in 1999. The current political landscape referred to as the fourth Republic has been the longest and most consistent period of democratic stability since its independence. The 2023 elections will complete President Muhammadu Buhari’s second term in office since he was elected in 2015. However, the political climate is fraught with multidimensional security threats, and economic and social challenges to the country's election security. Beyond the proliferation and operations of violent extremism and banditry in the North-East and North-West zones, commercialised kidnapping, armed robbery, armed insurgence by separatist groups, intra-communal violence, transhumance conflicts, human and drug trafficking remain pervasive across all geopolitical zones in the country. Conducting elections amidst these existing security threats could be exploited by criminal groups to escalate insecurity ahead of the elections.

Already, the deteriorating security has led to the increase of Internally Displaced Persons, especially in the North-East, North-West and North-Central zones of the country. In some of these regions, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) would face challenges in conducting elections due to the prevailing insecurity. Documented reports by WANEP NEWS indicate that 14 out of 24 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Niger State have been overrun and
controlled by bandits.\textsuperscript{10} Given this threat, INEC has indicated that elections may not hold in 270 polling units of Niger State.\textsuperscript{11} In addition, 156 polling units across six LGAs in the eastern area of Sokoto State are under constant attack by bandits, who have declared these areas as no-voting zones in the State.\textsuperscript{12} In Zamfara State, 356 polling unit areas are either under bandit control or bordering areas of bandits’ influence in the State.\textsuperscript{13} More worrisome are reports that bandits are collecting the Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) of some community residents in Zamfara and Sokoto States.\textsuperscript{14} In Birnin Gwari and Dandume Axis of Kaduna State, the Ansaru terrorist groups have issued a ban on political campaigns.\textsuperscript{15} In some communities of Katsina, Zamfara and Niger States, armed bandits have also issued a similar ban on political activities.\textsuperscript{16} There were four separate attacks on INEC facilities in the Imo State of South Eastern zone of Nigeria in December 2022.\textsuperscript{17} The climate of fear emanating from recurrent insecurity has the potential to inhibit the inclusive participation of vulnerable populations in the elections. It also implies that INEC will be unable to successfully conduct credible polls in hotspot areas during the February and March 2023 federal and state elections. At different times in April and June 2022, INEC suspended the Continuous Voters Registration (CVR) in some Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Imo, Anambra, and Kaduna States following the spate of insecurity and incessant attacks on its field officers.\textsuperscript{18} Furthermore, weak voter education threatens citizens’ preparedness and participation in the elections. INEC has also expressed the agency’s limitations in monitoring cases of vote-buying, voter intimidation, and staff collaboration with political parties, which could undermine the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. While INEC’s mandate is focused on conducting elections, the involvement of anti-corruption agencies and security services in monitoring criminal and corrupt activities throughout the electioneering process is paramount. It will mitigate political party campaign financing, bribery, vote buying and the abuse of incumbency that suppresses citizens’ rights to freely participate in the electoral process.

The late delivery of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) machines to INEC has raised red flags especially as these machines are integral to accrediting voters and transmitting results to the INEC portal. Its late arrival restricts the Commission’s ability to timely provide adequate capacity for its officials who will be deployed to manage its operations at the polling units. Public trust in the BVAS has a huge implication on the credibility of the electoral process. Therefore, the INEC must prioritise its focus on the in-depth capacity building of its personnel on the proper operation and functioning of the BVAS machines to avoid the potential threat to the credibility of the votes and results.

\textsuperscript{11}See https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/03/insecurity-elections-may-not-hold-in-270-polling-units-in-niger-inec/
\textsuperscript{12}Interview with Dr Murtala Rufia, Department of History Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto State; 6/8/2022
\textsuperscript{13}Interview with Dr Murtala Rufia, Department of History Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto State; 6/8/2022
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
The Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL) has also scheduled June 2023 for the country’s multi-tier elections comprising presidential, parliamentary and local elections with the incumbent, President Julius Maada Bio seeking re-election. As a result, a revised Public Election Act (2022) has been passed into law to provide new regulations for voter registration, an enhanced framework for political transition as well as reserved parliamentary and local council seats for women. This has been viewed as a milestone to ensure the inclusive participation of women in governance. However, the contentious point is President Bio’s proposal to the ECSL for the application of a Proportional Representation (PR) voting system in the elections. This has generated disagreements among critical stakeholders. The main opposition party, All People’s Congress (APC) filed a petition at the Supreme Court to interpret the use of the PR system. In its judgement, the Supreme Court decision affirmed the proposal to conduct the 2023 parliamentary and local council elections using the PR System which has further exacerbated political tension characterised by violent protests, especially between the two main political parties – the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) and the APC. Also, continued intra-party leadership struggles in the APC and the National Grand Coalition (NGC) have contributed to the fragmentation of political tolerance ahead of the 2023 elections.

In Liberia President George Weah is seeking re-election in the presidential polls of October 2023. Although the National Electoral Commission (NEC) has commenced preparations towards voter registration scheduled for March-May 2023, heightened economic challenges and political wrangling pose significant risks to election security. The perceptions of corruption among public officials have given rise to mistrust between the state and its citizens. An often overlooked legacy of the civil war is a large number of disadvantaged youth, some of whom are former child soldiers, who have organised into urban street gangs, referred to as "zogos" and susceptible to drug abuse and violence. Therefore they present a threat to the peaceful conduct of the election.19

Benin also conducted legislative elections on 8 January 2023. A total of seven political parties, including three from the opposition, were registered to participate in the January polls. These comprise the Democrats, the Cowry Forces for an Emerging Benin, and the Popular Liberation Movement. The willingness of the opposition party to contest the election enhanced the inclusivity of the process, ensuring that diverse political interests were represented which is a departure from the opposition’s four years of absence from active politics in the country. Despite Benin’s progress towards consolidating democratic governance, controversial electoral and institutional reforms adopted in 2018, are viewed as a negation of multiparty democracy. It deepened mistrust and a lack of confidence in the electoral process among political actors in the country.

All scheduled elections in the region will be held against the backdrop of widespread dwindling democratic governance due to the rising threats of UCG in West Africa. Therefore, the upcoming elections present opportunities to renew confidence in liberal democratic practice as well as ECOWAS’ effort to enhance good across the region.

Rising geopolitical tension between the West and Russia occasioned by the war in Ukraine has rippling political and security implications for the overall peace and security in West Africa. Like the rest of the world, the region faces a rapidly growing impact from the Ukraine war, including spiking food prices and disruptions in the importation of cereals and other commodities, including fertilizers and fuels. The effects of this conflict manifest in rising inflation with a snowball effect on food insecurity, energy shortages, and poverty in the region. It has led to a backlash of citizen discontent expressed in recurrent agitations, protests, and labour strikes. Between February and December 2022, the region recorded 706 protests against economic hardships, resulting in 387 fatalities and 756 injuries.\textsuperscript{20} While protests and demonstrations are fundamental elements of democracy, they could threaten social cohesion, peace and security when it breaks down into violence. Most countries in the region devastated by the economic downturn have resorted to borrowing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with stringent obligations to Structural Adjustment Programmes as conditions for assistance. These austerity measures are generating social unrest and citizen support for the unconstitutional change of governments.\textsuperscript{21}

The tensions between the West, Russia and China have renewed political realignments, especially in countries of sub-Saharan Africa that reflect strained international relations between some western countries and their former colonies as exemplified in the weakening diplomatic relations between francophone countries of Burkina Faso and Mali with France. The demand for the withdrawal of French military troops from Mali and the subsequent approval for the deployment of the Russian Wagner Group in the country accentuates these growing divisions. A similar challenge is faced in Burkina Faso where the military-led transitional government has deployed the Wagner Group to counter-insurgency on their territory. Regionally, the tense relationship between Mali and Cote d’Ivoire following the arrest and trial of 46 Ivorian military personnel on suspicion of a military putsch in Mali, further compounds the insecurity of the region. Despite the negotiated release of the soldiers by ECOWAS, the Commission faces the difficult task of enforcing its democracy and governance protocol given the UCGs in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea which has impacted its credibility and authority in the region. The frosty political relationship between Mali and Niger in view of the existing military cooperation between Niger and France resulted in the suspension of transit access of petroleum products destined for Mali through Niger in the face of the threat of terrorist attacks from Mali. There is also simmering tension between Ghana and Burkina Faso over allegations of Wagner Groups’ activities close to the border between the two countries which has become a source of concern for ECOWAS.

**Key Outlook in 2023**

**Military coups and governance instability**

- The recurrent coups in Burkina Faso reveal divisions and discontent within the military that weakens the capacity of the military-led government to effectively negotiate with ECOWAS on the appropriate and sustainable transition to democracy as well as response

\textsuperscript{20} WANEP NEWS. www.wanep.org (Accessed 10/01/2022).

to complex multilayered security crises facing the country. Given these challenges, there are potential risks of counter-coups that would undermine the transition to democracy and political stability in 2023 and beyond. Terrorist and armed groups are likely to exploit these instabilities to exacerbate insecurity in a bid to expand their geographical areas of operations, especially in neighbouring littoral states of West Africa.

- Attempted coups in Guinea Bissau and The Gambia indicate a growing wave of discontent and political interference in the military across ECOWAS member States. It also highlights the widespread disenchantment with the existing weak democratic structures in most countries in the region. This manifests in poor governance and corruption by political elites with subsequent citizen bias for UCGs as a recourse to the perceived impunity by the politicians. There is a need to integrate appropriate capacity building and enlightenment of democratic practice and ethos as part of the security sector reforms across countries in the region and coordinated multistakeholder efforts for accountability and justice as deterrence to corruption and political practices. This will stabilise democratic governance and reduce the likelihood of more coup attempts in the ECOWAS Member States in 2023 and beyond.

- Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea have reached an agreement with the ECOWAS mediation teams on a transition timetable. The Mali agreement proposes a two-year transitional period from 2022-2024 that includes the review of constitutional and electoral laws. Burkina Faso conceded to a two-year transitional plan of July 2022-July 2024, while Guinea has acceded to a two-year transitional period from January 2023 to January 2025. As part of actualising these transitions, ECOWAS established monitoring teams to provide technical support and guidance for the three countries. While this demonstrates commitments by all stakeholders towards the success of the transition plans the rise in activities of violent extremists, terrorists and organised crime groups could potentially constrain its actualisation.

Upcoming Elections in 2023

- Nigeria’s 2023 general elections offer an opportunity for another democratic transition and stability of the country’s political landscape. However, ethnic cleavages, a weak judiciary, abuse of incumbency and issues of exclusion, among others, are recurrent fault lines that continue to resurface and generate conflicts in every election. Notably, rising insecurity and socio-economic challenges constitute high stake risks to the upcoming elections with the potential to negatively impact the peaceful conduct of the elections and political transition in the country.

- Despite democratic dividends achieved by Sierra Leone and Liberia in the post-civil war era, the success of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections is challenged by disputes over legal frameworks for the conduct of the elections, intra and inter-party wranglings, violent communication arising from the abuse of the social media, citizens’ protests and politically motivated violence. These conflicts could undermine the electoral
process and transitional process in these countries if appropriate preventive actions are not implemented.

Key Resilient factors

- There is a growing citizens and civil society demand for good governance in targeted countries with increasing resistance against the suppression of inclusive participation in the democratic processes. In the past year, the frequency of citizens’ use of various social media spaces and demonstrations to pressure governments for accountable and responsive governance has increased in the region as exemplified by the statistics from WANEP NEWS. It has created political awareness and resilience among citizens.

- Various CSOs in West Africa have commenced advocacy and consultations to engage ECOWAS Authorities of Heads of State and Government to review the *2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance* that will strengthen the Protocol especially the adoption of a two-term presidential limit across the 15 countries in the region. CSOs are also 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 UCGs by the military.

- AU, ECOWAS and other international partners have been committed to the mediation and negotiation effort to actualize political transition to democratic governance – Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea. These efforts have been complemented by sanctions with coercive capacities to deter future attempts to renge on the transition plans by the military-led governments in these countries.

Recommendations

- ECOWAS should consider the set up of a regional lobby committee comprising appropriate middle-level decision makers in the Commission and leadership of reputable CSOs to embark on shuttle diplomacy with member states at Track 1 level to build acceptance for the adoption of the 2001 Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy by the Authority of Heads of State and Government.

- ECOWAS, AU, UNOWAS and international partners should increase collaboration and intensify engagement for monitoring and providing technical support to the Transitional Governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea through sustained dialogue. This will ensure sustained commitments to the agreed transition plan or roadmaps for the return to democratic governance.

- CSOs should intensify collaboration with ECOWAS to popularise the Protocol and other governance frameworks in major regional and indigenous languages as part of the awareness raising that increases public appreciation of the role of ECOWAS in strengthening regional political stability. It will also strengthen citizens’ interest and contribution to democracy and good governance in the region.
• The ECOWAS, AU, UN, and other international partners should intensify their engagements with the Governments and other political leaders in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia to ensure political parties are committed to promoting peaceful and credible elections through preventive diplomacy and dialogue.

• In Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia, political parties and other stakeholders discourage the perpetration of electoral violence or fraud by its members and supporters and instead explore the viability of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms or legal channels when faced with election-related disputes. This enhances public confidence in the democratic process and the rule of law, as well as positions the region to actualize its regional development and human security goals.

3.0 Organised Crime and Violent Extremism

The coastal states in West Africa face significant security challenges to peace and security, as spillover terrorist attacks from the neighbouring countries of the Sahel have increased. The northern regions of Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, and Togo recorded attacks on civilians and security operatives in 2022. While Ghana has not experienced direct attacks, violent incidents involving extremist groups were recorded at its border with Burkina Faso. It emphasises the threat to the security of the littoral states as well as to regional stability especially when weighed against the 2022 statistics of violent extremist-related attacks from the West Africa Sahel. The WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS),\(^{22}\) recorded an exponential increase of 1,601 terrorism-related or armed attack incidents in 2022, compared to 932 attacks reported in 2021, and 709 recorded in December 2020.\(^ {23}\) Nigeria recorded the highest number of cases with 990 attacks accounting for 63 per cent of the region’s terrorist and armed group attacks.\(^ {24}\) Burkina Faso recorded 337 attacks, Mali reported 171 attacks, Niger recorded 61 attacks, while Togo,

\(^{22}\) WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS). (Accessed 10/01/2023)

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.
Benin and Cote d’Ivoire recorded 28, 10 and 4 incidents, respectively.\textsuperscript{25} The attacks resulted in 7,217 deaths which included the loss of 948 security personnel as reported in 2022.\textsuperscript{26} It constitutes a 51 per cent increase in fatalities when compared to 4,793 recorded in 2021.\textsuperscript{27}

Prominent among these incidents include the first attack in Benin’s W National Park between 8 and 10 February 2022, which led to the death of a soldier and eight park officers, including a French instructor. In the Kpinkingandi border area of Togo and Burkina Faso, a terrorist attack was reported on a military post on 11 May 2022, which led to the death of eight Togolese soldiers and injury to 13 others. In Ondo State of Nigeria gunmen attacked a Catholic Church on June 5 2022 during worship service which led to the death of at least 50 people including women and children. Armed men on motorcycles attacked several villages and killed over 132 civilians in Diallassagou, Mopti region of Mali on 18 June 2022. At Seytenga in the province of Seno, Burkina Faso, more than 100 people were killed on 11 June 2022, while an attack on a supply convoy heading for Djibo on 26 September 2022, led to the death of 37 people including 27 soldiers.

These trends suggest that governments across the region are grappling with insecurity from violent extremism and armed attacks, especially at border communities that have escalated as terror hotspots. The perceived inability of the states to respond to the security challenges and socio-economic difficulties faced by the population has encouraged terrorist groups to expand their operations to new frontiers for geostrategic interest, including recruitments and financial gains from ransom payments as well as cattle rustling and illegal gold mining.\textsuperscript{28} In the Sahel, new groups have emerged, while others formed alliances to strengthen their territorial control at border communities, particularly in the northern region of Nigeria and the Liptako-Gourma area that intersect border communities of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. The weak state security presence in these areas is exploited by violent extremist groups to control natural resources that finance their operations.\textsuperscript{29} The expansion of attacks southward from Burkina Faso to the coastal States of Benin, Togo, and Cote d’Ivoire, suggests the increasing threats extremist groups pose to the security of the region. In Nigeria, the merger of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Ansaru and Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad (JAS) and other organised crime groups facilitated attacks on the Kaduna-Abuja rail track and the Kuje Correctional Centre in Abuja (FCT) in March and July 2022, respectively.\textsuperscript{30} Niger faces terrorist threats across its seven borders with the highest impact on Tillabéry, Diffa and Tahoua regions. Reports indicate the persistent killing of farmers, worshippers at mosques, and community leaders for refusal to cooperate with extremist or terrorist groups.\textsuperscript{31} In Mali, attacks by terrorist groups have also expanded beyond the North and Central regions to the West of Senegal. Terrorist expansion to the Southern regions is likely to disrupt economies of industrial gold mining and cotton
production concentrated in this region. The new expansion of terrorist activities to the south trailed the withdrawal of the French and European states’ military forces from the country. The West has also raised concern over Mali Transitional Government’s alliance with the Russian Wagner Group, accused of complicity in human rights violations and killings of at least six persons in the country since the commencement of their joint operations with the Malian army at conflict hotspots from March 2022. It has increased public concerns over the counter-terrorism operations and strategy in Mali. Given the existing gaps in personnel and resources following the withdrawal of international peace enforcement operations, the deployment of the 1000 mercenaries from Wagner is considered insufficient to contain the escalating terrorist threat in the country.

The limitations of state security have evolved the formation of community-led defence groups in the Sahel such as the Koglwéogo in Burkina Faso. However, these communal self-defence groups have been accused of rights abuses and are often set up by disputing communities or ethnic groups that fuel inter-ethnic conflicts and further complicate existing insecurity in these countries. For instance, in Niger, self-defence militias among ethnic Arab, Djerma and Tuareg communities in Tillabéri and Tahoua perpetrated attacks on civilians in 2022. These incidents continue to serve as a veritable breeding ground for terrorist and armed groups to weaken social cohesion and expand their operations beyond the affected communities.

A backlash of these armed attacks is the increase of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees. At least 2.5 million people, particularly women and children are internally displaced in the Central Sahel axis of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Burkina Faso accounts for over 76 per cent of the figures with 1.9 million IDPs and refugees. The humanitarian crisis in the North-East of Nigeria remains one of the most severe in the region with 2.1 million IDPs recorded between January to December 2022. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that about 8.3 million people need humanitarian assistance, while 1.8 million children are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition in Nigeria in 2023. A comparative analysis of food insecurity across the 13 regions of Burkina Faso has doubled from 300,000 people in 2021 to over 600,000 in 2022. Also, attacks have been targeted against places of worship, health centres, and secular state education across the region, as well as abducting and killing of teachers. The number of schools affected by violence has tripled in the last three years, from 1,784 in 2020 to more than 6,500 schools closed or non-operational in 2022. These groups have also perpetrated attacks targeting humanitarian workers including the UN

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36 Ibid.
38 See: [https://humanitarianaction.info/](https://humanitarianaction.info/) (Accessed 15/01/23).
Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA). Since July 2013 the UN has documented 171 peacekeepers killed in hostile acts.42

Kidnapping for ransom has evolved into a conflict economy exploited by terrorists, bandits and criminal networks to sustain their operations in the region. Recent trends in Nigeria and the Central Sahel zones of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have shown an expansion of kidnapping across social classes and economic divides.43 A total of 1,387 kidnap incidents were recorded in the region between January and December 2022.44 Nigeria accounted for the highest number of kidnap incidents with 925 affecting 6,476 persons, including 26 security officials.45 In Mali, a total of kidnap 218 incidents were recorded in 2022 as compared to 141 reported cases in 2021.46 Burkina Faso recorded 199 cases, Niger reported 16 cases, Liberia reported 12 cases, while Ghana and Benin each reported 11 incidents in 2022.47

Piracy and armed robbery along the coast of Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Liberia recorded a 46 per cent decrease from 35 incidents in 2021 to 19 in 2022.48 The decrease could be attributed to the level of multilateral cooperation between navies of coastal states fostered by timely information, joint training, and operations. Despite this decrease, the Gulf of Guinea remains dangerous as evidenced by the pirate attack on the Ro-Ro vessel in November 2022, around 28nm South-west of Turtle Islands in Sierra Leone and an additional incident in the last quarter of 2022. Consistent effort is needed to ensure the sustained safety of seafarers in the region.49

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44 WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
Trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs remained a critical challenge to the region. In the Mano River Union (MRU) Basin, the trade and abuse of a new illegal synthetic drug known as ‘kush or K2’ have become widespread among the youth. Rising cases of health hazards and death from the abuse of the drug in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia highlights its threat in the sub-region\(^{50}\). Other reported cases of illicit drug trafficking and seizures indicate an increase from 339 in 2021 to 515 in 2022.\(^{51}\) 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. These seizures suggest improved response capability of governments to combat drug trafficking in the region. Harmful drugs remain a key contributor to mental ill-health, crime, and violence among young people in West Africa.

Herder-Farmer conflict reports highlighting a reduction in incidents and fatalities as documented in the WANEP NEWS. A total of 157 incidents with 153 fatalities was recorded in 2022, compared to 198 incidents with 1,105 fatalities in 2021.\(^{52}\) Countries mostly affected include Nigeria, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.\(^{53}\) The reduction could be attributed to the implementation of the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlement introduced in 2019, as well as joint military operations to counter armed herder and farmer reprisal attacks in the northern region and middle belt of Nigeria. In Ghana, Mali and Burkina Faso, there are existing bye-laws dispute management mechanisms to manage grievances between herders and farmers in the local communities.

**Key Outlook in 2023**

**Expansion of Terrorism to Littoral States of West Africa**

- The threat of the expansion of violent extremism beyond the Sahel to the coastal states remains palpable. Between November 2021 and December 2022, a total of 38 attacks were reported in Benin and Togo. Terrorist groups have also spread their operations westwards towards Senegal and to northern Cote d’Ivoire which borders Burkina Faso.


\(^{51}\)Op Cit. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS).

\(^{52}\)Ibid.

\(^{53}\)Ibid.
• The seaports of Benin, Ghana and Togo are key economic strategic hubs and supply lines for goods transportation to landlocked countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Considering the geographic and strategic importance of the coastal states to regional and international trade, violent extremism has the potential to cripple the micro and macro economies of these countries and impact the free movement of goods and services across the region. It will likely lead to recurrent economic and political crises across the region, especially against the backdrop of adverse repercussions to already staggering economies and political crises of coastal states.

• The influx of migrants into border communities is escalating tension between residents and migrants over competition for limited resources including farmlands, water, and food. Despite the ongoing efforts by the Immigration and security agencies of Ghana to record the movement of migrants, many do not have proper legal documents to support their immigration status in the country. The danger of undocumented migrants is their potential exploitation by extremist groups to organise crime and terrorism in host countries.

Terrorist mergers and alliances of convenience
• The relationship between violent extremist and organised crime groups continues to increase as they explore alliances to achieve mutual interests. Such cooperation reinforces a vicious cycle of instability that enables them to remain relevant and continue to exploit economic means to sustain their operations. The overlapping impact of this interdependency undermines the effort of the states and region to reinstate public security, governance and development in the region. The pledged allegiance of Ansar Beit Al Maqdis organisation to the Islamic State (IS) organisation, also known as Daech strengthens the international criminal network in Nigeria. This suggests more coordinated attacks in the country and the region in 2023 and beyond. Concerns continue to emerge over the suggested mergers between violent extremist groups in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, comprising ISWAP, Ansaru and Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad (JAS). Similarly, there is evidence of collaboration between JAS, Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) affiliates, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and IS, especially in organised kidnapping operations. The IS’ June 16, 2022, edition of the Al-Naba publication, declared Africa the land of Hijra and Jihad, requesting its members to relocate to African countries. The continent is targeted and considered the future safe place for terrorist operations.

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54 Ibid.
55 GCTF. Available at www.theGCTF.org (Accessed 10/12/2022).
haven for international terrorist groups such as IS. It also motivates smaller terror groups to seek alliances in building a stronger front for ISIS’ future operations on the continent.

**A Surge in ethnic and inter-communal violence in conflict-affected communities**

- The linkages of violent extremism, organised crime and communal conflicts in the region have led to the emergence and proliferation of self-defence groups and community-based armed groups such as Civil Joint Taskforce (CJTF) in Nigeria, Koglweogo, Dan Nan Ambassagou and Dozo in Burkina Faso and Mali, respectively, as community-driven self-help security structures. However, there have been public concerns over human rights abuses perpetrated by these groups. The acts of impunity and extra judicial excesses of these self-defence groups would escalate complex conflicts difficult for the state and the Regional Economic Community of ECOWAS to address.

Protracted chieftaincy disputes and ethnic clashes remain prevalent in the north of Ghana. A renewed chieftaincy clash in Bawku, Upper East region has resulted in deaths, injuries and the destruction of properties. The chieftaincy dispute of November 2022 at Enchi in the Western North region resulted in the death of four people. The proximity of Bawku, Upper West region to Burkina Faso’s border with Ghana increases the security challenges in the face of heightened violent extremist extremism in Burkina Faso as well as the influx of arms used in these conflicts. Violent extremist and terrorist groups could also exploit such local conflicts to reinforce their presence and mobilise conflicting communities for proxy attacks in Ghana.

**Continued anti-French sentiments and strained diplomatic relationships**

- Anti-French and anti-government protests continue to pose security threats across the region, especially in the Sahel countries. There is widespread public disenchantment in Mali and Burkina Faso over how France and past democratic governments handled the insecurity challenges. The military coups of August 2020 and March 2021 in Mali and September 2022 in Burkina Faso partly justified their coup on the level of insecurity that pervaded their countries. In October 2022, pro-military government supporters in Burkina Faso protested and attacked French institutions and diplomatic outposts in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso to express their rejection of French military operations in the country. The growing citizens’ resentment over French policies and roles especially in former French colonized countries of West Africa is perceived by the West as counterproductive in the face of the spread of international terrorism networks in the region. It has destabilised joint multinational military efforts in the Sahel, leading to the redeployment of France 3,000 troops in Niger and Chad to continue their joint action against terrorism in the Sahel and the coastal states. Despite this new strategy, the
growing anti-French policy sentiments in the region and the incursions of the Wagner Group can complicate or negatively impact international coordinated counter-terrorism efforts in West Africa. Already, Mali’s frosty relationship with some regional and western states weakens counter-terrorism responses in the country. Countries such as France Canada and other European States completed the withdrawal of their peacekeeping troops in November 2022.65 There is also a strained relationship between Mali and the MINUSMA following the expulsion of their spokesperson from the country in July 2022.66 Given this development, the 15 troop-contributing countries, especially the Western allies to the joint military operations have expressed their pessimism about the continuity of counter-terrorism intervention in the country. Benin and Sweden have announced their intent to withdraw 450 and 200 of the military personnel, respectively from the peace support operations before the end of 2023.67 Egypt, responsible for the third-largest military contribution as well as Cote d'Ivoire and Germany has also threatened to pull out.68 These withdrawals will impact the strength of the UN mission and be detrimental to Mali’s security outlook in 2023.

Key Resilient Factors

- There is continued and sustained bilateral and multilateral cooperation among states and non-state actors to increase efforts to tackle transnational organised crimes, violent extremism, and terrorism in West Africa. For instance, the Accra Initiative, comprising Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Niger, have agreed to strengthen cooperation and collaboration to contain the spillover of terrorism from the Sahel into their borders. This is exemplified by the ministerial conference and summit held in Accra, Ghana, on November 2022, which committed to mobilising resources to support a Multinational Joint Task Force of the Accra Initiative (MNJTF/AI) operations by the end of December 2022.

- At the international level, the European Union (EU) sanctioned three al-Qaeda-affiliated commanders in July 2022 due to attacks against civilians, MINUSMA, and defence and security forces in Burkina Faso. On 29 June 2022, the UN Security Council renewed MINUSMA’s mandate for an additional year and in September 2022 the European Council renewed the mandate of the EU civilian mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger), till September 30, 2024, with emphasis on integrated rights-based approach in the fight against terrorism.

Recommendations

- ECOWAS/AU, international partners and the Troop Contributing Countries should intensify synergy and action to meet the various commitments to strengthen the Accra Initiative, G5 Sahel and MNJTF in the fight against terrorism and organised crime in the Sahel, and the coastal states.

67Ibid.
68Ibid.
• Religious leaders, faith-based and interfaith organisations including places of worship should strengthen interfaith platforms, constructive dialogue and collective response to violent extremism and terrorism at national as well as regional levels.

• Local women and youth groups should utilize existing women and youth social network platforms to intensify training and mentorship on radicalization as well as women’s participation in security and early warning initiatives at all levels.

4.0 Women, Peace and Security

The women, peace and security landscape in the region recorded mixed fortunes of governance and human security challenges in the period under review. States have advanced progressive governance policies and laws to create spaces for women and youth participation in political leaderships that aligns with the global women and youth peace and security agenda. These laws and policies include key issues such as gender equality, women’s empowerment, sexual offences, domestic violence, and gender-sensitive security sectors reforms, as well as the development of a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (WPS) and other related instruments, geared towards the protection of the rights of women in the region. A good example is women’s representation in the National Assembly of Senegal has increased from 41.8 per cent in 2017 to 44 per cent in 2022, representing 14 per cent above the adopted Inter-Parliamentary Union’s (IPU) global framework for a minimum of 30 per cent quota representation for women in governance.69

Despite this achievement, women, and girls in most countries of the region face political marginalisation, and gender-based violence, especially ritual killings as well as rape and physical assaults as reported in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ghana. Between January to December 2022, the WANEP NEWS recorded over 591 cases of violence against women and girls, which led to more than 649 fatalities and 109 injuries in the region. Majority of the victims were between 3 months to 14 years old.70

In addition, a total of 988 women, and 402 children, were kidnapped for ransom by organised criminal networks operating in West

Africa. The majority of the kidnap incidents occurred in Nigeria, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. For instance, on 17 October 2022, a total of 10 women, including a one-year-old child were kidnapped by armed bandits at Manye, a village in Anka Local Government Area of Zamfara State in Nigeria.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) remains a persistent practice in West Africa despite counter actions by various stakeholders. A total of 991 survivors of FGM were reported in Liberia, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone in 2022.

Key Outlook in 2023

Weak Implementation of the WPS and YPS agenda
- Weak implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) of UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 2250 as well as related laws 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, weak capacity of state institutions and fragmented CSOs collaboration as evident in countries across West Africa. Given the weaknesses of implementing existing laws and frameworks that protect and promote women and children’s security, the prevalence of SGBV and FGM is likely to challenge ongoing efforts to address the health and well-being of women and girls in the region.

Continued demand for gender equality and empowerment in the region
- Women groups and social networks continue to demand the state’s responses to the implementation of laws or policies on the minimum 30 per cent quota to ensure gender equality and women's participation in governance, peace, and security processes.

Key Resilient Factors
- The increased awareness created by CSOs, media and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on the UNSCR 1325, and 2250 as well as other related Resolutions and frameworks both at the continental and regional levels has supported the enlightenment of citizens on the YPS and WPS agenda.

- Continued capacity enhancement of women and youth through advocacy by women and youth groups, individuals as well as CSOs promotion of inclusive participation and empowerment of women and youth in governance and decision-making processes. For instance, WANEP designed the Youth Transformational Empowerment and Mentorship (Y-TEaM) Programme to develop a generation of youth peacebuilders capable of taking on leadership roles in their communities and countries in peace and security for conflict prevention and transformation. Also, the Women, Peace and Security programme has strengthened advocacy on WPS through the GenderTalk Series as well as the

Ibid.

Ibid.
operationalisation of the Continental Result Framework and the establishment of the coalition of women advocates and leaders in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Cote d’Ivoire.

- The establishment of the ECOWAS Working Group against Gender-Based Violence and Violence against Children (GBV/VAC) to mobilise support and action across the region towards eradicating SGBV and ensuring the protection of women and children. The working group also aims at providing capacity building support to member states, CSOs and other stakeholders to respond to GBV/VAC. Similarly, FemWise-West Africa – a Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation has been set up by the ECOWAS Commission in conformity with the Africa Union (AU) continental arrangement for FemWise Africa, as a subsidiary mechanism of the Panel of the Wise. It aims to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation within the ECOWAS mediation and security framework and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The Network provides a platform for strategic advocacy, capacity building and networking aimed at enhancing the implementation of the commitments for women’s inclusion in peace and security processes.

**Recommendations**

- There is a need for CSOs, the media and other relevant actors to intensify engagements with the ECOWAS Member States for the full implementation of NAPs on UNSCR 1325 and related Resolutions, laws and policies 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 youth and women’s engagement in governance, peace and security processes.

- Governments and regional actors should be intentional in providing adequate resources, political commitment, supporting regular data collection, monitoring and reporting on the compliance of laws and policies supporting women’s participation, leadership, and decision-making.

- There is a need for a strong coordination mechanism that can strengthen advocacy efforts, capacity building and networking to ensure the implementation of the WPS and YPS agenda across the board in the region.

5.0 Environmental Security

Climate change and its multi-layered impacts on regional security were key concerns for stakeholders in the period. The adverse effect on resources including water, land, food, fisheries, and biodiversity challenges the livelihoods and human security of the populations, especially in the Sahel. Inter and intra-communal conflicts driven by competition over limited resources are prevalent in communities of the Lake Chad Basin Countries and the Sahel. Humanitarian needs in the Sahel and Lake Chad region overlap across west and central Africa countries especially in
Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria as a result of increasing violent conflicts, deep poverty, climate change, and unprecedented food insecurity and malnutrition.\textsuperscript{73}

Climate shocks and conflicts have further been complicated by the global pandemic and conflict especially COVID-19 and the recent war in Ukraine. Over 30 million populations in the Sahel, mostly women and children, require lifesaving assistance and protection in 2023, an increase of almost two million from 2022.\textsuperscript{74} This has prompted Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria to develop Response Plans, requiring a total of US $3.8 billion to scale up aid operations, coordination and adequate resources to mitigate the humanitarian challenges.\textsuperscript{75} The countries of the Sahel and West Africa face food and nutrition crises of exceptional proportions.\textsuperscript{76} Acute food insecurity almost quadrupled between 2019 and 2022, from 10.8 million to 40.7 million people respectively, with millions at risk of slipping into a crises.\textsuperscript{77} The dire humanitarian trends portend significant risks for state stability and the already fragile human security in the region.

Incidences of severe flooding, drought, and increased weather temperatures as manifestations of climate change increase were recorded in the region. Between May and November 2022, the region reported 217 incidents of severe floods, with 963 fatalities and displacement of about 1.6 million people, especially in Nigeria, Ghana, Niger, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. The 2022 flooding in Nigeria was attributed to a combination of factors including heavy local rainfall and the release of excess water from the Lagdo Dam in neighbouring Cameroon.\textsuperscript{78} Flooding and landslide remain a recurring phenomenon in most parts of the region, especially coastal communities. Additional threats to environmental security include illegal fishing, logging, illegal mining, and pollution of water bodies in the region.

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77}Ibid.
To assuage the existential threat of climate change on human security, the 27th Conference of Parties (COP27) hosted in Egypt in November 2022, provided Africa with the opportunity to shape climate discourse by pushing priority areas such as loss and damage, stranded assets, access to climate finance and adaptation. The key outcomes of COP27 supported additional incentives for stakeholders to increase national, regional and international cooperation to augment adaptation responses to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The notable agreement such as funding for ‘loss and damage’ to developing countries devastated by climate change, and the Global Goal on Adaptation, is an avenue to strengthen international cooperation to generate resources to strengthen community resilience in West Africa.

The threat of epidemics including Cholera, Yellow and Lassa Fever, Meningitis and Measles also impacted the health security of populations in communities of Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, and Sierra Leone. For instance, in Nigeria, 13 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Bono State, recorded a cholera outbreak with more than 6,000 suspected cases and a 4-5 per cent case fatality ratio. The outbreak of existing epidemics is partly attributable to the resource prioritisation to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic at the detriment of containment measures to other health epidemics.

Key Outlook for 2023

Gaps in responses to climate change impacts in the region

- Given the gaps in the region’s responses and adaptation strategies to insecurity and climate change, complex humanitarian crises in West Africa are likely to continue in 2023 if response strategies are not strengthened to enhance mitigation. Food insecurity, for instance, occasioned by multiple factors including severe drought, insecurity and soaring prices was unprecedented in 2022. As a result of this, several countries recorded low cereals production. Between 9 per cent and 47 per cent of the total cereal production was lost in Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, and Cote d'Ivoire. This portends a severe food crisis in the region in the years ahead if the worrying trend persists.

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, ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy adopted in 2022 and first Plan of Action (2022-2030) in line with ECOWAS Vision 2025. The AU Regional Stabilisation Strategy for Recovery of Boko Haram affected Countries in the Lake Chad Basin is also contributing to mitigating the impact of climate change and humanitarian emergencies in communities in the Lake Chad Basin.

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Also, relevant UN Agencies are responding to the complex humanitarian challenges, particularly in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. For instance, United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSP) covers the period 2018-2030, with a focus on six priority areas: cross-border cooperation, climate action, crisis prevention, women and youth empowerment, economic revitalisation, and renewable energy. The overarching goal is to scale up efforts to accelerate shared prosperity and lasting peace in the region to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063.

- The agreements reached at COP27 including the provision of funding for ‘loss and damage’ to developing countries devastated by climate change, and the Global Goal on Adaptation, provide an avenue for multilateral cooperation to strengthen states, regional and continental responses to enhance resilience across countries in Africa.

**Recommendation**

- ECOWAS should intensify collaboration and cooperation with its Member States, AU, international partners and regional institutions on climate change including West Africa and Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and West African Science Service Center on Climate Change, and Adapted Land (WASCAL) among others, to fast track the implementation of ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy adopted in 2022 and first Plan of Action (2022-2030) in line with ECOWAS Vision 2025 and actualization of the resolutions of COP27.

6.0 Conclusion

The report has shed light on the political, economic and security gains as well as challenges of West Africa in 2022. The governance landscape recorded strides in efforts towards democratic consolidation reflected in The Gambia’s peaceful political transition, while Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Benin prepare towards presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023. The successful elections in these countries will not only enhance the quest for entrenched democratic governance in the region in the face of the threat of Unconstitutional Changes of Governments, but also the strength of ECOWAS to continue its efforts to drive enforcement of democratic ethos and stability in West Africa. Despite this progress, two military coups in less than a year in Burkina Faso, as well as the unsuccessful coups in The Gambia and Guinea Bissau, is an indication of retrogression of democratic practice and weakening of the ECOWAS protocols and mandate to ensure security and development of its citizens.

Moreover, the security landscape of the region faces complex and multi-layered challenges, with the geographical expansion of terrorist and violent extremist groups, particularly to coastal states. Climate change and its multi-layered challenges heighten insecurity in vulnerable communities. The cumulative effects of the security threats manifest in a cocktail of complex humanitarian emergencies including forced migration, food insecurity, and perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence against women and children, among others, in vulnerable

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communities across the region. This has prompted the development and activation of varied national, regional, and international responses to mitigate the impacts on human security and states stability, with varied degree of success and pitfalls that limit the efficacy of interventions. Finding lasting solutions to the evolving challenges facing the region’s security, therefore, requires multidimensional approaches and strong political commitment from national and external actors. More significantly, it would require addressing the identified gaps in the existing responses and fault lines in governance that continue to generate citizens’ discontent, tensions and violence that have fragmented social cohesion in countries across West Africa.