

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**UNDERDEVELOPMENT: MAJOR CAUSE
OF INSECURITY IN WEST AFRICA**

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ABSTRACT

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The stability of a country in terms of physical security is necessary for economic development when considered within the context of inter-state rivalry and competition. However the relationship between security and development reverses when the sources of insecurity emanate from within the borders of a country. Since the demise of communism and the collapse of the Soviet Union as a super power, there has been an increase in the spread of democracy as the preferred form of governance in most parts of the world. With the absence of super power rivalry, African Governments that relied on Cold War politics to exploit their people no longer had the protection and wherewithal to perpetrate their continued stay in power amidst popular movement for democratic reform. In the past these governments labeled genuine internal demands for change as either communist or capitalist inspired within the context of cold war politics and sometimes received open support from either the Eastern or Western bloc countries to reinforce their hold on power. For example France, during the cold war period had a very high-profile military role in its former colonies in Africa which in no small way helped in propping up leaders of those countries. It must however be mentioned that until the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire, France has systematically reduced its military presence in Africa since the end of the cold war, and instead has aimed at diversifying its commercial relations in Africa beyond its colonies.

While the end of the cold war saw a dramatic decline in inter-state conflicts, the number of civil wars increased. This is especially true in the poor regions of the world; particularly Africa as attention of ordinary people shifted more towards seeking economic, social, political and environmental conditions that will lead to improvement in their lives. Where such aspirations could not be met through normal political process violent means were used, resulting in instability in the region. This is particularly true in the West African sub-region.

The object therefore of this research paper is to show how underdevelopment has played and continues to play a significant role in intra-state conflicts in West Africa with the view to suggesting what could be done to reduce such conflicts in the sub-region. To do this, the paper will define which countries constitute West Africa, and examine the characteristics of

underdeveloped nations vis a vis those of developed countries. The paper will also examine political, economic, social and environmental insecurity in West Africa and how they relate to underdevelopment. The role of key regional and external actors (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union, the United States, Britain, France and the United Nations) in conflict prevention and resolution in West Africa and finally propose some solutions to intra-state conflicts in West Africa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	III
UNDERDEVELOPMENT: MAJOR CAUSE OF INSECURITY IN WEST AFRICA.....	1
DEFINITION OF WEST AFRICA	2
CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES	2
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSECURITY IN WEST AFRICA AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT	3
POLITICAL INSECURITY	4
ECONOMIC INSECURITY	5
PRIMARY EXPORT ORIENTED ECONOMY	6
POOR SUB-REGIONAL TRADE.....	7
POLITICAL WILL	8
EXTERNAL PRESSURE.....	8
UNDER-DEVELOPED INDUSTRIAL SECTOR	9
UNDERDEVELOPED REVENUE GENERATION AND COLLECTION	10
SOCIAL INSECURITY	10
TRIBALISM.....	10
RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE.....	11
CORRUPTION	12
ENVIRONMENTAL INSECURITY	12
UNDEVELOPED AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES	12
OVERPOPULATION	13
ROLE OF KEY REGIONAL AND EXTERNAL ACTORS IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION IN WEST AFRICA	13
ECOWAS AND AFRICAN UNION	13
EXTERNAL ACTORS AND THE UN.....	14
External Actors	14
The UN	14
SOLUTIONS TO INSECURITY IN WEST AFRICA	15
CONCLUSION	16
ENDNOTES	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY	23

UNDERDEVELOPMENT: MAJOR CAUSE OF INSECURITY IN WEST AFRICA

The stability of a country in terms of physical security is necessary for economic development when considered within the context of inter-state rivalry and competition. However the relationship between security and development reverses when the sources of insecurity emanate from within the borders of a country.

Since the demise of communism and the collapse of the Soviet Union as a super power, there has been an increase in the spread of democracy as the preferred form of governance in most parts of the world. With the absence of super power rivalry, African governments that relied on cold war politics to exploit their people no longer had the protection and wherewithal to perpetrate their continued stay in power amidst popular movement for democratic reform. In the past these governments labeled genuine internal demands for change as either communist or capitalist inspired within the context of cold war politics and sometimes received open support from either the Eastern or Western bloc countries to reinforce their hold on power. For example France, during the cold war period had a very high-profile military role in its former colonies in Africa which in no small way helped in propping up leaders of those countries. It must however be mentioned that until the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire, France has systematically reduced its military presence in Africa since the end of the cold war, and instead has aimed at diversifying its commercial relations in Africa beyond its colonies.¹

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The object therefore of this research paper is to show how underdevelopment has played and continues to play a significant role in intra-state conflicts in West Africa with the view to suggesting what could be done to reduce such conflicts in the sub-region. To do this, the paper will define which countries constitute West Africa, and examine the characteristics of underdeveloped nations vis a vis those of developed countries. The paper will also examine political, economic, social and environmental insecurity in West Africa and how they relate to underdevelopment. The role of key regional and external actors (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union, the United States, Britain, France and the United

Nations) in conflict prevention and resolution in West Africa and finally propose some solutions to intra-state conflicts in West Africa.

DEFINITION OF WEST AFRICA

For the purpose of this paper West Africa refers to the aggregate of the people and geographical landmass of the 15 sovereign countries that constitute the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The countries are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. These countries except, Liberia, were colonies of three European powers namely Britain, France and Portugal for hundreds of years.

West African countries are categorized into either as Anglophone (Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone), Francophone (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo), or 'Lusophone' (Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau), in view of their colonial past and official languages. Except Nigeria which has a population slightly over 100million most West African countries are either small in size or sparsely populated to be really viable as economic and political entities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Nations categorized as underdeveloped, are also referred to as the Third World. All 15 countries that constitute ECOWAS are categorized by the UN as underdeveloped and consequently fall under countries referred to as the Third World. Most underdeveloped countries are marked or characterized by a number of common traits. They have distorted and highly dependent economies devoted to the production of primary products for export to the developed world and provide markets for finished goods. They have strong traditional, rural social structures, high population growth and widespread poverty. They are characterized by poor and undemocratic governance, high illiteracy rate, disease, abuse of individual freedom and liberty and high national debt. Public officials and people placed in authority are generally not accountable to their citizens. In spite of these negatives, the Third World is sharply differentiated. It includes countries on various levels of 'economic development' and despite the poverty of the countryside and the urban shantytowns, the ruling elites of most underdeveloped countries are wealthy.²

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSECURITY IN WEST AFRICA AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

In the past national security in West Africa focused almost exclusively on military concerns. A disproportionately high percentage of national resources went into the procurement of military hardware and maintenance of large military forces in the hope of promoting physical security. These were achieved at the expense of quality standard of living for the peoples of West Africa.³ National security was synonymous with military might or power. In spite of the armaments and security apparatus of post-independence West Africa, intra-state or internal conflicts have continued to pose problems to many governments in the sub-region. National security therefore appears no longer a military matter alone, as the security of the individual now seems more important than the security of the state in most developing countries particularly so in our post cold war world.⁴ True security only occurs when people really feel secure. The need for the state to provide common security for all its citizens in the spheres of trade, food, health, monetary matters and peoples' fears on disease, unemployment, poverty, crime and terrorism has become increasingly important to be ignored.⁵

West Africa which has only 15 of the 53 states in Africa has had a very disproportionate share of conflicts in Africa. In the last decade, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal have been embroiled either in civil wars or in interconnected web of conflicts that have seen refugees, rebels, and arms spill across porous borders. Nigeria, Mali, and Niger have been plagued by internal conflicts that have weakened their capacity to provide security to their citizens. Democratization efforts have suffered setbacks in Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea and Togo. The fifteen states that make ECOWAS today are among the poorest countries in the World. West Africa is also the most coup-prone sub-region in Africa. More than half of successful coups d'etat in Africa since independence (forty one out of seventy-five) have occurred in West Africa.⁶ In fact all countries in West Africa except Cape Verde have suffered at least one or more successful coups d'etat.⁷ Why is West Africa so unstable? Is there any relationship between the insecurity in West Africa and the political, economic, social and environmental conditions that prevail within the various countries that constitute ECOWAS? Is there a relationship between underdevelopment and insecurity/instability? To answer the above questions this paper will examine the causes of political, economic, social/cultural and environmental insecurity in West Africa and how they pose the greatest threats to internal security in many developing nations, especially in the West African sub-region.

POLITICAL INSECURITY

Governments of politically developed nations exercise legitimate authority within their territorial borders and in interactions with other states. Their authority emanates from the mandate of their people and is exercised with regard to the preferences of their citizens.⁸ This is because the appropriate institutions of governance i.e. the legislature, the judiciary, auditor generals, central bank, the press etc, in the most advanced countries, are well established, developed and independent. They are therefore effective in keeping governments within legal bounds in the exercise of their political authority. On the contrary, many West African countries at independence either lacked these structures or were poorly developed. Without the necessary institutional and legal checks and balances, many West African governments in the 1960s and 70s turned autocratic to facilitate the indefinite rule of the so called founding fathers of the most dominant political parties at independence. These African leaders, like their colonial predecessors, were intolerant of opposition and dissent. Political opponents were either incarcerated or eliminated through extra-judicial killings. Some countries even turned one party states and political activity was outlawed. Citizens of these countries lived in fear. A survey conducted in the 1960s regarding political situation in newly independent African countries revealed startling results. Quite a large number of countries within 10 years of independence had encountered attempts at the overthrow of the ruling government by a coup plot. Some of the affected West African countries were: Dahomey, now Benin-5 attempted coup plots, Ghana-1, Mali -1, Nigeria-4, Sierra Leone-2, Togo-2, Upper Volta now known as Burkina Faso-1.

For example, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana sowed the seeds of his own downfall soon after independence. In 1958, one year after independence, he passed the Preventive Detention Act which gave him sweeping powers to detain his opponents, for up to five years without trial for reasons of 'national security'. By 1961, Nkrumah had detained an estimated 400-2000 of his opponents.⁹ Governance structures such as the legislature and the judiciary which were established to moderate the authority and power of the executive were controlled by the president. With no effective legal, political, or institutional structures to control the excesses of the president, the military in collaboration with other external actors for the first time usurped the authority of the people of Ghana and overthrew the government of Dr Kwame Nkrumah in a coup d'etat in 1966, barely nine years after independence, setting back the clock of democratic governance in Ghana for another 20 years.

Nations with the most developed political structures are also the most stable and advanced. Their governments are largely democratic, representative and accountable to the electorate. On the contrary, politically underdeveloped states usually have governments that are

too independent of their citizens . According to Moore, this independence emanates from: strong external financial and/or military support for elites of underdeveloped states, even when they are in conflict with many of their own citizens; the heavy dependence of these states on 'unearned income'; and the capacity of these elites to control valuable commodity exports to purchase overwhelming armed forces which invariably are used to exercise and perpetuate power and authority, and to suppress individual freedoms and liberties of their citizens.¹⁰ When citizens are alienated from the affairs of their governments they are less likely to be committed to the service of their state. Pre-independence struggles in West Africa for self determination were the result of such alienation. The logic still holds true irrespective of the reasons for such alienation. In all four of West Africa's major conflicts in the last decade, in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire, personalized autocracy was a significant trigger. Samuel Doe and Charles Taylor in Liberia, Siaka Stevens and Joseph Momoh in Sierra Leone, Joao Vierra and Kumba Yala in Guinea-Bissau and the heirs who inherited Felix Houphet-Boigny's crown in Cote d'Ivoire – Henri Conan Bedie, Robert Guei, and Laurent Gbagbo have displayed antidemocratic tendencies and often ethnic favouritism that alienated and threatened certain groups in the process.¹¹ Underdeveloped political structures in many West African countries have alienated citizens or sections of the populations in the respective countries from the political process. The political insecurity of individuals or groups within these states as a result of such alienation has resulted in instability and in some cases conflict in some countries.

ECONOMIC INSECURITY

Economic underdevelopment is another major cause of insecurity in West Africa. In the mist of abundant natural resources most West African countries fall under the category of countries with the lowest annual GDP per capita in the world. Per capita GDP refers to the total output of goods and services for final use produced by an economy, by both residents and non-residents divided by the total population of the country. ¹² UNDP Human Development Indicator Report released in 2001 quotes the GDP per capita of the three highest ranking countries in West Africa in 1999 as follows: Cape Verde Island - \$4,490, Guinea - \$1,934 and Ghana - \$1,881, and the three lowest being: Mali - \$753, Guinea Bissau - \$678 and Sierra Leone- \$448.¹³ There were no figures for Liberia because it was embroiled in a civil war. Incidentally, Sierra Leone was also the country with the lowest GDP per capita in the world that year. To give an idea of the extent of poverty in the West African sub-region, the annual GDP per capita of the top three Western countries in 1999 were: Luxembourg - \$42,769, USA - \$31,872 and Norway - 28,433.¹⁴ A gloomier picture is painted when one looks at the gaping disparity between the

GDP per capita between the two top West African countries; Cape Verde - \$4,490 and Guinea - \$1,934. The disparity depicts the very low human development in the entire West African sub-region in comparison with those of the advanced world, exemplified by countries in Western Europe and the US. While West African countries are characterized by poverty and internal conflicts, the advanced countries are rich and stable. There seems to be a correlation between GDP and stability. Where incomes are low and sections of a population monopolize control of national resources at the expense of others, there is discontent which may lead to conflict when no avenues for fair distribution of the national income and resources exist. It is therefore not surprising that out of the 15 countries in West Africa, only Cape Verde has escaped civil war or coup d'etat since its independence in 1975. Low per capita GDP, unemployment, poverty, disease and hunger which characterize many West African countries are consequences of under-development. Many reasons have attributed to this poor state of affairs.

PRIMARY EXPORT ORIENTED ECONOMY

Economic activity in West Africa does not lend itself to growth in national income. West African countries still rely primarily on agricultural and raw material export as their main sources of wealth. With the exception of crude oil, where exporting countries since 1973 have had a say in the pricing of their exports, prices of all other exports from West Africa are controlled by forces outside the sub-region. From the colonial period the economies of West African states, were designed by the colonial powers to supply raw materials to industries in the developed world while serving as markets for finished goods. A look at the exports and imports of the three countries in West Africa with the highest per capita GDP in 1999 will make the situation clearer: Cape Verde exports fuel, shoes, garments, fish, hides, and imports; foodstuffs, industrial products and transport equipment.¹⁵ Guinea exports: bauxite, aluminum, gold, diamonds, coffee, fish, agricultural products and imports; petroleum products, metals, machinery, transport equipment, textiles, grain and other foodstuffs.¹⁶ Ghana exports: gold, cocoa, timber, tuna, bauxite, aluminum, manganese ore, diamonds and imports; capital equipment, petroleum and foodstuffs.¹⁷ The picture is the same for the rest of West Africa. For over a century this has been the arrangement. The major plantations in the sub-region were mostly for the production of cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, tea etc which were for export and the few industries established were mainly in the mining sector. Manufacturing within colonies were virtually non-existent and all the major roads, rail and other means of communication were developed to link the sources of raw material to the ports for export. Economic development therefore of the

colonies was purely for the purpose of serving the economic interests of the metropolitan cities of the 'North'. Post independence West Africa still exports the same raw materials to the developed nations without adding value and in most cases receiving prices much lower than they were decades ago.

POOR SUB-REGIONAL TRADE

Except crude oil and few others, most of the primary exports of West Africa i.e. coffee, tea, cocoa, bauxite, manganese ore, diamond, gold etc have no big markets within the sub-region. The cash crops are not indigenous staple foods and therefore are hardly consumed by the farmers who cultivate them. The absence of the appropriate technology requires that raw materials such as bauxite, iron ore, manganese ore etc are exported in their primary form for processing in the industrialized countries. There is therefore hardly any trade among West African countries. The desire for foreign exchange for capital and manufactured goods against low commodity prices compel governments of the sub-region to encourage farmers to produce more cash crops thus creating a vicious cycle of overproduction and low world prices. In the early part of the 1960s Ghana tried but failed to break this cycle by withholding its supply of cocoa to the world market. The next leading producer of cocoa at the time, Cote d'Ivoire, refused to cooperate and prices tumbled. The fallout for Ghana was the overthrow of Dr Kwame Nkrumah for reasons including poor performance of the Ghanaian economy by the military in 1966. It is however interesting that despite the low prices of cash crops, farmers in the sub-region are still advised by 'economics experts' in West Africa to invest more in cash crop production at the expense of staple or food crops. It is even more interesting that a large proportion of the foreign exchange earned through export of these cash crops go into the importation of food which could have been grown locally in the first place. JW Smith says:

this pattern of land use characterizes most Third World countries today. External control producing crops for the wealthy world, instead of internal control producing crops for indigenous use, is what causes hunger in this world. These conquered people are kept in a state of relative impoverishment. Permitting them any meaningful share of social wealth would negate the historical reason for conquest, which is ownership of that wealth. The ongoing role of Third World countries is to be the supplier of cheap and plentiful raw materials and agricultural products to the developed world. Nature's wealth was, and is, being controlled to fulfill the needs of the world's affluent people.¹⁸

West African countries do have a choice in the matter, either to continue with the status quo or to change course by adopting policies that will eradicate hunger leading to the improvement in the quality of life within the sub-region. Countries such as India, China and

Malaysia etc, were once poor nations. They are wealthier today because they have successfully set their priorities right. So can West Africa if only there is political will within the sub-region.

POLITICAL WILL

The question that begs to be asked is: why is West Africa not taking its indigenous food production seriously so as to ensure food security of its people? There are several possible reasons: (a) The importation of food and manufactured goods yield very lucrative 'dividends' to public officials involved in procurement especially where imports are controlled by the state and not the private sector. Self sufficiency in food production will remove this source of private 'income'. It is common knowledge in many West African countries that some state departments and agencies prefer foreign imports to their local equivalents either due to their superior quality or the financial benefits they get from foreign suppliers for doing business with them. (b) Planned and prudently coordinated local food production will eradicate hunger and this may remove one of the many reasons/excuses that some governments of developing nations use for acquiring loans, aid and grants from the developed nations, some of which are misapplied due to lack of accountability. In 2002, the US government alone provided \$81.88 million to 12 ECOWAS countries in West Africa as food/development aid.¹⁹ (c) A third possible reason is that unlike cash crops, farmers do not need state institutions to market their produce because the markets exist locally and within the sub-region. The only requirements of farmers are good connecting roads from farm gates to the urban centres. These are not as well developed as those to the areas where cash crops are cultivated. (d) A fourth and probably the most important reason is that most of the main cash crops in West Africa are perennial crops. Once cultivated, they produce for years and farmers prefer cultivation of such crops because they are easier to manage than food crops. However when weighed against social consequences of such land use, some priorities need to be set by governments of respective West African countries if hunger and poverty are to be eradicated from the sub-region. A healthy balance between national and private interest should be sought.

EXTERNAL PRESSURE

A fourth possible reason for poor economic development in West Africa is external pressure. Efforts by some few countries in West Africa to improve local food production have been partially successful due to pressure from some developed nations who need markets for their own farmers. Available statistics suggest that domestic rice production in Nigeria has expanded at a phenomenal rate over the past two decades making Nigeria by far the largest rice producer in sub-Saharan Africa. The increase in rice production is attributed entirely to the

government's ban on rice imports since 1986. The ban has effectively held in check further growth of rice imports, and has ensured high domestic prices for rice relative to other food crops. Although the ban was officially lifted in early 1995, imports have not resumed and Nigeria now appears self sufficient in the production of this important staple food in the West African sub-region.²⁰ Other countries have not been that successful. Ghana for example in 2002 tried to protect its fledgling poultry industry from cheap imports of the same commodity from outside by imposing tariffs on imported chicken. Within 30 days, the Government of Ghana had to reverse its decision because it was admonished by some donor nations and the IMF/World Bank for not liberalizing its markets enough. The development of West Africa is dependent on such positive agricultural policies which aim at eradicating hunger and food insecurity, the presence of which may cause instability within countries in the sub-region.

UNDER-DEVELOPED INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

Two main reasons may explain the poor state of manufacturing in the sub-region. Firstly, West Africa is not attractive to both foreign and local investors in the manufacturing sector, for following reasons: (a) Africa is no match to other global competitors such as China, Vietnam, Latin America etc for foreign investment in terms of labour, which must not only be cheap but educated and healthy, and infrastructure, such as good telecommunications, banking, transportation etc which are imperative for industrial growth and commerce. In addition, foreign investors in Africa cite over-bearing bureaucracy, corruption and hostile tax regimes as some of the reasons hampering industrialization of Africa. (b) Local investors seem more inclined towards retailing than manufacturing because retail business yields quick returns with low capital while manufacturing is capital intensive. West African countries are therefore net consumers and among the highly indebted nations of the world.

Government involvement in business in many West African countries could be another reason for the sub-region's undeveloped industrial sector. Governments' responsibility in business is to create the enabling environment for the growth of the private sector. Some West African countries still run state owned enterprises which generally are mismanaged and require annual injection of state funds to remain in business. In 1988 Ghana commenced its divestiture programme of state owned enterprises. The object was to relieve the Ghanaian tax payer of the burden of having to subsidize inefficient and non-performing state owned businesses. The initiative is paying off especially in the communication sector. Similar efforts have been initiated in other West African countries. As at 2000 Nigeria had sold off 34 of Nigeria's 99 State Owned Enterprises listed for divestiture in 1988.²¹

UNDERDEVELOPED REVENUE GENERATION AND COLLECTION

Many West African countries rely on unearned incomes or donor support to balance their budgets or undertake projects in their respective countries. There are three disadvantages to this: firstly, it retards the development of 'home grown' structures and initiatives for revenue generation in the sub-region. Secondly, local businesses and industries shirk their tax obligations to the state, as state institutions assigned the responsibility for revenue collection pay lip services to their duties and get away with it because quite a large proportion of countries in the sub-region rely heavily on grants, aid, or loans from foreign governments or financial institutions to finance government expenditure. Thirdly, underdeveloped or lack of effective monitoring institutions such as auditor generals give free range for the misuse or diversion of such funds without public officials being held accountable. The interplay of the above perpetuates the dependency syndrome in the sub-region and therefore poverty.

SOCIAL INSECURITY

Nigeria is the 10th largest oil producer in the world, and the most prolific oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa. It currently produces 2 million barrels per day most of which it sells to international traders. Oil is the single most important sector in the country's economy, providing over 90 percent of its total exports. In 1999 the youth of Niger Delta, a region in Nigeria with vast reserves of oil and natural gas, decided to create unrest by persistently attacking oil installations in the region. This resulted in several clashes with security forces. The grievance of the youth was that the region had been neglected, in spite of the large incomes and profits being made from drilling oil from the region by the government of Nigeria and the oil companies operating in the area. The youth were demanding improvements in social amenities such as schools, good drinking water, roads and political representation as condition to stop the attacks.²² From the above example it appears when the social contract between the state and its citizenry fails, conflict becomes inevitable. People accept state authority so long as the state delivers services and provides reasonable economic conditions, such as employment and income. When this social contract is broken, violence and social disorder are the outcomes and sometimes these could lead to civil war.²³ Other social factors, linked to underdevelopment, that cause instability or conflict are tribalism, religious intolerance and corruption.

TRIBALISM

Governments and the citizenry of most developed countries are generally aware of their civic responsibilities and the role patriotism plays in national development. This awareness has been the result of years of democratic governance, the very high literacy rates and the rule of

law in these countries. On the contrary, in developing countries especially those in Africa, colonialism left not so good an image of government. The colonial masters exploited ethnic differences to their advantage.²⁴ The colonial governments were generally 'sabotaged' by the indigenous civil servants and the mass of the population because they were perceived as undemocratic and exploitative. Post independence African governments were no different. Many governments soon after independence were also exploitative and autocratic. In autocratic and ethnically diverse environments, the idea of patriotism and national development do not mean much to people whose main concerns revolve around the basic necessities of life.²⁵ Loyalty therefore is generally based on interest and is first to the family or clan, then to the tribe or ethnic group and lastly to the state. While in the developed world citizens conscientiously work for the state, and expect to be appropriately rewarded, in underdeveloped countries wages are low and workers across board use unpatriotic means to get by in life. Citizens therefore, look out for their tribesmen and women in positions of authority for privileges or openings for success in life. This mentality permeates all aspects of life in the West African sub-region. The difference is only in the degree in which it manifests in everyday life in the various countries. Where such interest based tribalism is strongest conflicts have resulted because some sections of the population get sidelined in the allocation of government positions, employment, development projects, social amenities or distribution of the 'national cake'.²⁶ Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire are examples of countries in which bloody civil wars have been fought on ethnic grounds in West Africa. Other countries with festering ethnic rivalries are Mali, Ghana to a lesser extent, Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal and Guinea.²⁷ To avoid future conflict in these countries will require establishment of political and social structures that recognize the needs of all citizens including minorities.

RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Societies that are generally developed are also socially tolerant of religious persuasions of others. Some West African countries have had internal unrests due to clashes between religions. In Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire there have been religious clashes between Moslems and Christians and in Ghana between Christians and Moslems, Christians and traditionalists and Moslem and Moslem. Religion is a big issue in many West African countries and Nigeria for example has experienced several religious conflicts resulting in hundreds of deaths. Apart from strong ethnic bonds, Nigeria is also torn between the two major religions, Christianity and Islam.

CORRUPTION

One of the main causes of social insecurity is corruption. All societies be they developed or underdeveloped suffer some degree of corruption by government officials for personal gain. The difference however is that developed nations have well developed and effective structures and means for dealing with this antisocial practice when it is encountered. In the developing world however and especially in West Africa, corruption is perceived as a 'necessary' evil. With low wages many employees of government including some politicians find other ways of making ends meet.²⁸ Corruption therefore seems acceptable as the norm. Of 99 countries considered in a survey conducted by Transparency International in 1999 which included four West African countries, Senegal, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria were ranked: 62nd, 65th, 75th and 98th least corrupt countries respectively.²⁹ Africa cannot develop by its effort alone in a globalized world. It requires foreign assistance, not in the form of hand outs but investment to enhance its growth. To achieve this, corruption needs to be tackled at all levels of the African society.³⁰ Societies that are open and democratic and whose citizens are free are less inclined to corruption than those that are closed and undemocratic. Democratic governance and accountability are the means for minimizing corruption in the sub-region.

ENVIRONMENTAL INSECURITY

UNDEVELOPED AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Demographic pressures and underdeveloped agricultural practices degrade the environment which could result in food insecurity and thus conflict. As already mentioned, countries in West Africa mainly export primary products which generally earn low financial returns compared to the degradation the environment is subjected to. For example the cultivation of cocoa, coffee, tea and export of timber require the destruction of virgin forests. The declining value of primary commodities, in the world market and the crippling international debts of West African countries result in national demands for more exports of these commodities for more foreign exchange.³¹ Without adopting suitable scientific methods for increasing productivity, further destruction of virgin forests for the expansion of farms only degrades the West African environment. It is estimated that the annual rate of deforestation in sub-tropical Africa is 4.04million hectares per year or 0.6% of its virgin forests. Deforestation affects top-soil retention which causes drought and desertification, all with profound consequences for the quality of life of populations. The Sahara desert is creeping southward and West African countries in the Sahel region have already started experiencing the devastating effects of deforestation. Deforestation also makes agricultural production unsustainable which affects both

food and cash crop production. Food insecurity brings about deterioration in health and social cohesion, often resulting in political turmoil and forced displacements of population.³²

OVERPOPULATION

Increased demand for food due to rapid population growth in West Africa has increasingly put undue pressure on the West African environment. Where populations cannot be sustained by the environment, forced migrations from rural to urban areas have resulted particularly among the youth for non-existent jobs in the cities. Urban people have much higher levels of consumption than rural dwellers, consuming large amounts of fossil fuels, timber, meat, and manufactured products.³³ The net effect of such drifts has been yet more pressure on the environment. The limitations on the environment to meet increased demands for employment, accommodation, sanitation, and utilities in the urban centres, have led to increased crime, internal political turmoil or conflict.

ROLE OF KEY REGIONAL AND EXTERNAL ACTORS IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION IN WEST AFRICA

ECOWAS AND AFRICAN UNION

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union (AU) in the past have not been very successful in preventing conflicts in the West African sub-region but have played very important and remarkable roles, in cooperation with the UN and other external actors, in conflict resolution and peacekeeping. For example both The AU's Peace and Security Council and ECOWAS' Mediation and Security Council and Defence and Security Commission have been effective in reacting to conflicts in the sub-region, particularly in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire with the assistance of the UN, US, Britain and France. The AU and ECOWAS are making progress with regard to the establishment of both regional and sub-regional standby forces to enhance the AU and ECOWAS capacity to undertake peace support operations at short notice. The Group of Eight nations has committed to support the AU in this direction. The ECOWAS standby force is anticipated to be 6,500-man strong comprising highly trained and well equipped soldiers which could be deployed immediately in response to any crises or threat to peace.³⁴ There has also been a positive trend on the continent with regard to conflict prevention and management. The AU and ECOWAS are increasingly taking the lead in conflict prevention and management and in some cases taking the lead in actual peacekeeping operations.

ECOWAS has however not been very successful in dealing with issues of underdevelopment, the main cause of intra-state conflicts in the sub-region. Many of the states in West Africa are economically not viable because of their size and GDP. Apart from Nigeria, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire that have over 15million people as population, the rest of West African states are tiny in terms of population and need to be part of an integrated market to be viable. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was therefore established in 1975 to address this anomaly. The object was to create a common market in which goods, services and people would move freely across West Africa and in which members will derive benefits from increased trade and common external tariff. But lack of political will in the sub-region has rendered ECOWAS still far from its goals.³⁵ Inter-state trade among countries in the sub-region is currently less than 5% of the total West African trade in the formal sector. Countries in the sub-region are therefore individually vulnerable to a hostile global environment. West African governments need to overcome their rivalries and competition to ensure that ECOWAS works. An effective ECOWAS will enhance inter-state trade and also strengthen the bargaining power of its members in international trade negotiations and debt relief efforts.³⁶

EXTERNAL ACTORS AND THE UN

External Actors

The US and France, through their respective training assistance programmes i.e. African Crises Response Initiative (ACRI) now re-designated African Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA) and the Re-enforcement of African Peacekeeping Capabilities (RECAMP) in West Africa have helped and continue to help enhance capacity of West African peacekeepers through training and logistics support. For example the US under ACOTA and African Regional Peacekeeping programmes (ARP) has trained and equipped West African peacekeepers from Senegal, Ghana, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Nigeria.³⁷ The US, Britain and France have also played lead roles, militarily and have supported ECOWAS operations financially and logistically, in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire respectively.

The UN

In addition to the activities of UN agencies in West Africa, the UN has been very alive to its responsibility of maintaining international peace and security in the World and the West African sub-region in particular. The main activities of the UN in peace support operations in West Africa have included peacemaking and peacekeeping initiatives, mobilization of international support for peacekeeping in time of conflict in the sub-region, support for AU and

ECOWAS peace initiatives, protection of civilians and addressing refugee security issues during conflict. The UN in collaboration with the AU and ECOWAS has also initiated a programme of action to prevent, combat and eradicate illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects since 2001. The UN has undertaken and is currently involved in multidisciplinary peacekeeping and other post conflict activities in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire. The UN has learned through experience that building durable peace after a civil war requires addressing the root causes of the conflict and promoting sustainable development, which includes fostering democratic pluralism, transparency and governance that is accountable, the rule of law and economic recovery.³⁸

SOLUTIONS TO INSECURITY IN WEST AFRICA

Conflicts in West Africa, since the end of the cold war, have predominantly been intrastate. Addressing these conflicts appropriately, requires countries in West Africa, ECOWAS, the AU, the UN and the international community as a whole to understand the underlying causes of these conflicts. It has been argued above that political, economic, social/cultural and environmental insecurity emanating from underdevelopment is the main cause of conflict or instability in the ECOWAS sub-region. To reduce or eliminate insecurity in the sub-region the causes of underdevelopment and thus conflict in West Africa must be given due attention at national, sub-regional and at the international levels.

The colonial system of governance, which was adopted by many West African governments soon after independence, where authority revolved around an individual, ought to give way to true democratic governance where authority of government emanates from the electorate. Democracy is about choice, representation, transparency, accountability and the rule of law. It is the duty of the electorates in West Africa to ensure that true democratic governance is established and consolidated in their respective countries by the establishment of strong and independent political institutions i.e. the legislature, the judiciary, the electoral commission, political parties, private press, with appropriate laws to back them to ensure accountability of public office holders including the executive arm of government.

Secondly, functions of government should be decentralized to ensure that national development affects all regions and ethnic groups in the respective countries of the sub-region. The most devastating civil wars in the sub-region and on the continent of Africa have been ethnically based. Minority interests should be protected by law and catered for through proportional representation in government. All ethnic groups must have equal opportunity for development and improvement. This means the state must invest in the education of all its

citizens. Education reinforces democracy and ignorance destroys it. The most democratic countries are usually the most educated also.

Thirdly, West African governments should shift current emphasis on export of cash crop to staple food crop production to eradicate hunger in the sub-region. Food security ensures political, economic, and social stability and should therefore be first on the agendas of all West African governments if they intend to make a difference in the lives of their people. Like Nigeria, local food industries should be protected against outside competition until they are competitive. In addition to peasant farming, governments should encourage investment of both local and foreign capital through tax relief for commercial food crop farmers who shift from rain fed agriculture to the use of rivers and water bodies in the sub-region to irrigate their farms. De-emphasis on cash crops production in West Africa will not result in loss of foreign exchange. On the contrary, control and establishment of quotas for cash crop production will improve prices. In any case, it is in the short and long term interest of the West African sub-region to increase food production than cash crop production. This should be complemented by good road networks to farming centres to facilitate marketing of food stuffs from 'farm gates' to the urban centres, if farmers are to reap the benefits of increased food production.

With regard to the industrial sector foreign investment is necessary. Foreign investors prefer politically stable environments, with good governance, accountability and rule of law, for capital investment. It is the responsibility of the respective governments within the ECOWAS sub-region to create the enabling environment that will entice foreigners to invest in West Africa.

CONCLUSION

Until the causes of underdevelopment in West Africa is tackled in its entirety, through democratic governance, sound economic, social and environmental policies, internal conflicts in West Africa will continue to present a major threat to security in the sub-region.

Insecurity in West Africa emanates from poverty which is a product of underdevelopment. The current cycle of poverty, hunger and privation in West Africa is the direct consequence of political, social, economic and environmental underdevelopment. The arrangement where West Africa continues to produce cash crops and raw material for export while serving as market for manufactured goods cannot continue indefinitely. The increasing growth of population, falling commodity prices and subsequent pressure on the environment, if not reversed, will result in further deterioration in the quality of life within the sub-region which may lead to more social unrest and conflict. ECOWAS countries therefore need to adopt policies that will replace this unfair trade arrangement with a more equitable economic order that will be beneficial to both

West Africa and the developed world. The initiative for this change rests with ECOWAS and not the developed world. West African governments therefore need to overcome the rivalries of the past for influence in the sub-region and to pursue policies that will facilitate the achievement of the goals that led to the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975. An economically integrated West Africa will improve the economic fortunes of its member states in terms of commerce and bargaining power, both regionally and globally.

WORD COUNT=6,957

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