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Towards the Operationalisation of the Civilian Component of the ECOWAS Standby Force

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This policy paper takes a look at the progress made by ECOWAS in developing the civilian component of its future stand-by force. It also makes policy recommendations on the kind of civilian expertise that is likely to be required and what the implications for training of such civilian experts would be for regional Peacekeeping Training Centres.

Introduction

Whereas the search for strategic responses to violent conflict has gained momentum with the emergence of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), peacekeeping is increasingly seen as a peacebuilding tool with important political and socio-economic implications.¹ It is therefore generally agreed that overcoming violent conflict requires an integrated approach, stretching from peacekeeping to post-conflict reconstruction and involving civilian components that are fully interoperable with a common mandate and objectives.² At the global level, peace support operations (PSOs) have therefore evolved to become more complex in their mandates and multidimensional in nature. This development is partly a result of the growing relevance of international paradigms associated with *Human Security* and the *Responsibility to Protect*, which have led to the realization that effective peacekeeping requires an expanded notion of security, if it is to pave the way for longer-term peacebuilding and development.³ To respond to the challenges of modern PSOs and the changing nature of inter-state conflicts, the mandates of peacekeeping operations have thus taken on board not only military tasks, but also policing and civilian issues such as political affairs, legal advice, human rights protection, gender mainstreaming, HIV/Aids awareness, public information and civil affairs.

In addition, modern peacekeeping mission structures from both the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) operate under the civilian leadership of a Special Representative, supported by the military Force Commander and a Police Commissioner. These are usually backed by several civilian heads of specialized technical sections. As such, multidimensional PSOs require staff that has expertise in the realm of peacebuilding, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), rule of law, humanitarian affairs, security sector governance or transitional justice. In some instances, such as with the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), former missions have now become entirely civilian

structures with complex political tasks in support of peace consolidations.

Notwithstanding these well established needs, recent assessments of global peacekeeping operations have identified “a renewed concern at the UN, and also within the European Union (EU), about the ability of peacekeeping provider to deploy suitable civilians rapidly to oversee the political aspects of missions or contribute to key state building functions.”⁴ Earlier reviews have equally underscored the importance for peacekeeping operations to pay sufficient attention to civilian issues related to the rule of law and security sector reform (SSR).⁵

In line with these conceptual changes and operational challenges, there is a growing need for West Africa to clarify the implications of the multidimensional requirements of PSOs. This is especially true for the roles and functions of civilians, their recruitment procedures and training requirements that have rarely been subject of policy research in the region. Thus, it seems useful to develop the understanding of the civilian dimension of modern multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations and how these requirements tie in with the tasks of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). This is to ensure that the future development of the ESF provides effective linkages with the complex political, humanitarian, social and security requirements of modern PSO in West Africa. A well developed concept for the civilian component of the ESF will also need to correspond with the *AU Policy Framework for the Civilian Dimension of the African Standby Force*, which in turn should help to make a case for stronger civilian mission leadership within ECOWAS peacekeeping operations in future.

This policy paper takes a look at the progress made by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in developing the civilian component of its future stand-by force. It also makes policy recommendations on the kind of civilian expertise that is likely to be required and what the implications for training of such civilian experts would be for regional Peacekeeping Training Centres.

¹ African Development Bank: African Development Report 2008/2009 – Conflict Resolution, Peace and Reconstruction in Africa, Oxford 2008.

² G8 Report on Peacekeeping/Peacebuilding, Summit 2009.

³ Richard Gowan & Ian Johnston: New Challenges for Peacekeeping – Protection, Peacebuilding and the ‘War on Terror’, International Peace Academy Working Paper, March 2007.

⁴ Center on International Cooperation: Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2009, Briefing Note, p.3.

⁵ A Review of Peace Operations – A Case for Change, Synthesis Report, Conflict Security and Development Group, King’s College London, 13 March 2003.

Historical Context

Peacekeeping operations by ECOWAS began as an ad hoc measure in 1990 when the sub-regional body established the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) as an intervention force to bring stability to Liberia, which was then involved in a violent conflict that threatened the stability of the whole region. Since the first intervention in Liberia, ECOWAS has undertaken peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire. While these early interventions were largely successful in ensuring cease-fires as a basis for peace agreements, ECOMOG operations did not include significant civilian structures and therefore could only make limited contributions to regional peacebuilding or post-conflict reconstruction efforts.⁶

It was part of the measures to find a more permanent solution to the security and peacekeeping needs of West Africa that ECOWAS, in December 1999, adopted the *Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security* (hereafter the Mechanism). Under the Mechanism ECOMOG became one of the supporting organs of the institutions of the Mechanism and subsequently a basis for the development of the regional Standby Force, as an important regional element of the emerging African Peace and Security Architecture.⁷

At the continental level, the Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000) provides the legal basis for the right of the AU to intervene in Member States with a view to preventing war crimes, genocide or crimes against humanity and to restore peace and security. In article 13, the AU Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council establishes the ASF “to enable the Peace and Security Council to perform its responsibilities with respect to the deployment of peace support missions (...) and be composed of standby multidisciplinary contingents with civilian and military components in their countries of origin and ready for rapid deployment at appropriate notice.” For a long time, the implications of this decision for the civilian component were rarely discussed amongst policy-makers and academics.⁸

The ESF will become one of the five regional standby forces conceived under APSA. It is being developed in line with the time-table for the ASF and its “roadmap” for coordination with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). It is also envisaged to provide a basis for greater coherence between AU and UN peace operations in future. As such, the arrangements around the ASF and their regional Brigades will also form an important element in the continental response to the R2P.⁹ Based on different scenarios, the ESF is likely to take on rather diverse

functions, including those for multidimensional peace support operations, robust interventions, preventive deployments, but also for humanitarian responses and peacebuilding tasks with varying deployment targets ranging from 14 to 90 days. As such, the role of the ESF might well extend to providing protection for civilians, assist with humanitarian relief or post-conflict reconstruction as well as preparing for a subsequent UN-led peacekeeping mission to take over. The process of establishing the ESF should therefore correspond to the existing *AU Policy Framework for the Civilian Dimension of the African Standby Force* and take into account the recommendations from various technical expert workshops convened by the AU and African Peace Support Trainers Association (APSTA) members.¹⁰

Current progress with the civilian component of ECOWAS peacekeeping mission

Globally, civilian capacity for peace operations is characterized by a ‘strategic gap’ in terms of providing the required link between political, security, developmental and humanitarian strategies and building the required capacity. Recent analyses deplore the fact that “existing efforts have been undertaken with little attention to one another; with inadequate linkages to multilateral systems, through which the vast bulk of post-conflict response is undertaken; with insufficient attention to the question of building capacity in the global South; and with a minimum of coordination.”¹¹ The AU also lamented the “need to further develop the police and civilian components of the ASF to reflect the multidimensional nature of Peace Support Operations.”¹² In turn, a number of technical workshops have been held to develop the Police and Civilian Staffing, Rostering and Training needs.

Nonetheless, in West Africa, progress to date has largely focused on the military dimension of the ESF, its force structure and field exercises and the setting-up of the military Planning Element, comprising of the Mission Planning and Management Cell and the Task Force Headquarters in Abuja.¹³ It remains to be seen whether it will be able to meet its overall objectives to become operational by 2010.

More specifically, with regard to civilian component of the ESF, progress has been slow. Initial steps towards the operationalisation of the involvement of civilians in the ESF began in 2005 with a workshop at KAIPTC that deliberated on the structure, mandate, and recruitment and selection procedures for civilian experts to be involved in ESF. This

⁶ Funmi Olanisakin: *Lessons from Peace Support Operations in West Africa*, KAIPTC/GTZ: Accra, 2007.

⁷ Together with the Peace & Security Council, the Continental Early Warning System CEWARN, the Panel of the Wise and the Peace Fund, the ASF constitutes one of the elements of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

⁸ For an early exception see: Cedric de Coning: *The Civilian Dimensions of the African Stand-by Force System* in: *Conflict Trends* Vol.41 (2005), pp. 10-16; Mark Malan: *Developing the ECOWAS Civilian Peace Support Operations Structure*, Report of an Expert Workshop, Accra/KAIPTC, 9-10 February 2006.

⁹ Kwesi Aning & Samuel Atuobi: “Responsibility to Protect in Africa – An analysis of the African Union’s Peace and Security architecture” in: *Global Responsibility to Protect* Vol.1 (2009) pp.90-113.

¹⁰ See Report on the APSTA – EGT Consultative Workshop, 18-20 May 2009 as well as the Report on African Standby Force Civilian Staffing, Training and Rostering Workshop, 10-12 July 2008, Kampala and AU: *Policy Framework for the Civilian Dimension of the African Standby Force*, KAIPTC: Accra, 29 August – 1 September 2006.

¹¹ Rahul Chandran et al: *Rapid Deployment of Civilians for Peace Operations – Status, Gaps and Options*, Center on International Cooperation/New York University, April 2009, p.2.

¹² Conclusions of the Meeting of the African Chief of Defense Staff and Heads of Security on the Operationalisation of the ASF, 24-28 March 2008.

¹³ See ASF Progress Report, 9 June 2008; see also Jakkie Gilliers: *The African Standby Force – An update on progress*, ISS Paper 160, March 2008.

workshop was followed by another one in 2006 that produced a roadmap for the operationalisation of the civilian dimension of the ESF by 2010. In spite of these initial steps, since 2006 not much has been done to implement the recommendations of the two workshops.¹⁴ Instead, the ECOWAS Emergency Response Team (EERT) seems to have been established with a dual purpose: as an instrument for humanitarian intervention in the sub-region as well as for ensuring the civilian participation in ESF activities.¹⁵ For the purposes of capacity building and rostering for the EERT, course modules for the training of civilian experts have been developed and actual trainings began.¹⁶ While the rationale behind the EERT is laudable, its dual objective of supporting humanitarian emergencies and at the same time the ESF will pose certain challenges and therefore needs rethinking. We are of the view that the exigencies of peacekeeping operations are different from

other forms of humanitarian emergency such as natural disasters. Therefore, it will be helpful to conceptualise the civilian component of the ESF as distinct from the broader issues of humanitarian emergency. Separating the two issues will also ensure that ECOWAS's approach to the civilian component of the ESF conforms to that of the AU, thereby making it easier to integrate the two issues in future joint missions.

From the work being done by the EERT, it seems that ECOWAS policies are generally in support of a stronger civilian involvement in future ECOWAS peacekeeping missions. What needs to be done now is to develop a clear focus on civilian capacity building that will produce civilian experts also for participation in future ECOWAS peacekeeping operations, in line with the civilian component of the ASF.

There will also be the need for ECOWAS to further develop the police components of its future ESF missions to support law and order during the stabilization phases of its interventions, and to possibly train newly recruited police forces. What this policy brief therefore calls for is the systematic development of civilian and police capacity for the ESF, taking into consideration the peculiar demands of PSOs as opposed to other forms of humanitarian emergency. This will ensure that capacities are developed to suit particular situations.¹⁷ For instance, it is especially the critical role of civilian governance expertise for institutional capacity development and peacebuilding that should be emphasized when conceptualizing multi-dimensional tasks for future ESF interventions. This should be done by having in mind post-conflict political, social and economic situations. Such an approach might equally provide an opportunity to also take on board experiences with non-violent

third party interventions that have been tested elsewhere to prevent or deter violence.¹⁸

Potential roles of civilians in future ECOWAS peacekeeping missions

It is envisaged that future ECOWAS-led peacekeeping missions, including those of the ESF, need to be fully multidimensional with the required civilian expertise to perform some or all of the following tasks to:

- ❖ provide advisory services for the implementation of peace agreements;
- ❖ support for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies;
- ❖ assist in the planning and implementation of DDR programmes;
- ❖ support the organization and monitoring of elections;
- ❖ assist in judicial reform, transitional justice and the strengthening of the rule of law;
- ❖ strengthen child protection and the promotion of human rights;
- ❖ take on board the protection of civilians and gender mainstreaming;
- ❖ support security sector reform and other governance issues;
- ❖ assist with post-conflict recovery and rehabilitation; and
- ❖ provide administrative, financial and logistical mission support.

The civilian tasks identified above are similar to those currently performed under complex UN PSOs. In addition, it is not inconceivable that in the near future "other sources of human insecurity will factor into the mandate and conduct of peace operations, such as migration flows, environmental stress, and even public health crises"¹⁹ that would require additional civilian expertise to ensure an effective transition from stabilization to post-conflict reconstruction.

Implications for training and the role of Regional Peacekeeping Training Centre

Identifying and training of civilian experts to be part of future ECOWAS peacekeeping operations has important implication for regional peacekeeping training centres, as they will need to develop or expand both generic, specialized and mission-specific trainings for such personnel.

The Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Training Centre (KA IPTC) as one of the three peacekeeping training centres in West Africa already trains a number of West African civilians in related areas, such as Civil-Military Coordination (CIMIC), Peacebuilding, DDR, Election Monitoring, Negotiations, Gender and Conflict Prevention. It is anticipated that in the months to come, KA IPTC would further liaise with ECOWAS and the AU to expand its curriculum to provide specialized training for civilians in support of the operationalisation of the civilian components of

¹⁴ Another workshop is planned to take place at KA IPTC to review the civilian dimension agenda of the ESF.

¹⁵ ECOWAS Emergency Response Team, Concept Paper (April 2006).

¹⁶ One of such trainings was organised in Cotonou, Benin, from 3 – 7 August 2009.

¹⁷ For a recent assessment see Comfort Lamptey: Engaging Civil Society in Peacekeeping – Strengthening Strategic Partnerships between United Nations Peacekeeping Missions and Local Civil Society Organisations during Post-conflict Transitions, UNDPKO Best Practice Unit, August 2007.

¹⁸ See for instance: Lisa Schirch: Civilian Peacekeeping – Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy, Life & Peace Institute, Uppsala 2006.

¹⁹ Govan & Johnston, op cit, p.6.

the ESF. This should be done in coordination with the other regional Peacekeeping Training Centres and backed by research and joint training needs assessments. Likewise, it might be possible to further develop KAIPTC's existing trainee database to support a future civilian roster for ECOWAS, taking into consideration other regional and international experiences with roster systems.

Recommendations

Based on the fact that not much progress has been made with regard to the development and operationalisation of the civilian component of future ECOWAS peacekeeping missions and the ESF, we make the following recommendations:

- ❖ There is the need for a better understanding of civilian roles within ECOWAS peacekeeping operations and the ESF in particular;
- ❖ Civilian involvement should be seen as an integral part exercise, where the ASF will be tested, have the necessary civilian capabilities; and
- ❖ There is the need for discussions between ECOWAS

member States, regional experts, policy-makers and major stakeholders (including its peace support training centres and regional civil society) on the best approach to the development and operationalisation of the civilian component of ECOWAS peacekeeping missions;

- ❖ Targeted training programmes for civilian personnel should be developed in conjunction with the UN, the AU, RECs and regional training providers as soon as possible to ensure that future ECOWAS peacekeeping missions as well as the upcoming AMANI Africa exercise, where the ASF will be tested, have the necessary civilian capabilities; and
- ❖ Training of civilians should be tied to the creation of a civilian roster of experts as well as the operationalisation of both the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework and the AU Post Conflict and Reconstruction Framework. It should go hand in hand with a clear commitment for (only) trained personnel to be considered for future deployment.

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