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Preparedness for Effective Humanitarian Response: Assessing the Operational Capacity of the ECOWAS Standby Force

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**ALC WORKING PAPER,
MAY 2013:**

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**PREPAREDNESS FOR EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN
RESPONSE:
ASSESSING THE OPERATIONAL CAPACITY OF
THE ECOWAS STANDBY FORCE**

This paper is the product of research conducted during attachment to ECOWAS as part FOREWARN Programme. Any errors contained therein are the fault of the author



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Abstract

The success and effectiveness of a response system during a humanitarian crisis depends significantly on its level of preparation. This study examines the various components of preparedness in humanitarian assistance and how the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) in collaboration with other relevant units including the Early Warning Directorate (EWD) and the ECOWAS Emergency and Response Team (EERT) can better prepare to provide support in crisis zones in West Africa. It identifies potential operational challenges of the ESF in terms of readiness for rapid deployment and response to humanitarian crises in the region.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AFISMA	African-Led International Support Mission to Mali
AU	The African Union
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECPF	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
EERT	ECOWAS Emergency and Response Team
ESF	ECOWAS Standby Force
EU	European Union
EWD	Early Warning Directorate
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Action
PSOs	Peace Support Operations
UN	United Nations
UNHRC	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution



1.0 Introduction:

In response to humanitarian crisis, preparedness is fundamental to saving lives and livelihoods. In hazard and conflict-prone areas, preparing and equipping authorities, individuals, and communities with the knowledge and capacities for effective response can substantially reduce the impacts of crises.¹ Preparedness can be defined as state of full readiness for an emergency.² In humanitarian assistance, the concept of preparedness covers a whole range of issues including contingency planning, stockpiling of equipment and supplies, emergency services and standby arrangements, communication, information management and coordination arrangements, personnel training, community drills and field exercises, and public education.³ The military has emerged as a vital asset that can be utilized in humanitarian response. Though humanitarian response is not a primary role of the military in much of West Africa, the utilization of military assets in enhancing preparedness can provide guidance and inform all actors in humanitarian assistance of expectation, opportunities and capabilities for effective response in the region.

In West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has developed policies and structures to promote and facilitate humanitarian assistance. Among such mechanisms is the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). Though still in its formative stage and not fully operational⁴, the ESF has a clear mandate to support humanitarian response through the provision of emergency services and standby arrangements, communication, transportation, contingency planning and coordination arrangements. ECOWAS is making efforts to ensure that, in collaboration with other units,

¹ Overseas Development Institute. (2003). *Humanitarian exchange*. London, Humanitarian Practice Network. Available at : <http://www.odihpn.org/documents/humanitarianexchange038.pdf>

² Emergency Management Institute (U.S.). (2000). *Emergency preparedness U.S.A.* [Emmitsburg, MD], Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute. Available at: <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/downloads/casestudyChapter2020405.doc>.

³ United Nations, (2007). ISDR, Words into Action: A Guide For Implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action. Available at : <http://unocha.romenaca.org/Portals/0/Docs/Disaster-Preparedness-for-Effective-Response%5B1%5D.pdf>

⁴ The target date for the full establishment and functioning of the ESF was initially set for 2010; this was however reviewed in 2009 with a new target of 2015.

the ESF is able to fulfill its humanitarian mandate in support of the broader regional objectives of the organization. However, the political crisis in Mali with its attendant humanitarian impacts has revealed that the ESF is still far from prepared to fulfill its mandate. Much needs to be done to properly build capacities in areas such as hazard monitoring, early response, and emergency services in the region. Notwithstanding the three major exercises, JIGUI 1, 2 and 3, conducted in Mali, Burkina Faso and Accra, respectively, to assess the levels of interoperability and deployment within 48 hours, the state of preparedness of the ESF in responding to humanitarian crises has not been tested adequately despite the humanitarian challenges facing the region.

This paper examines the various components of preparedness in humanitarian assistance and how the ESF in collaboration with other relevant units including the Early Warning Directorate (EWD) and the ECOWAS Emergency and Response Team (EERT) can better prepare to provide support in crisis zones in West Africa. It identifies potential operational challenges for the ESF in terms of its readiness for rapid deployment and response during humanitarian crises in the region.

1.1 Humanitarian Mandate of the ESF

Originally formed with the twin objectives of promoting regional cooperation and economic integration, ECOWAS had to shift its focus to peace and security amid the growing conflicts and instability experienced in the early 1990's in West Africa. The need to prioritize peace and security arose due to the threats and challenges conflict and insecurity posed to the organization's founding objectives. ECOWAS has consequently evolved mechanisms for responding to humanitarian crises caused, in part, by the interminable conflicts and insecurity experienced in the region.

The lessons learnt from ECOWAS interventions in conflicts led the organization to rethink its humanitarian approach, response and programmes. The formation of the Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs, the ECOWAS Emergency and Response Team, the ECOWAS Standby Force that comprises of civilian, military and police components, are all indications of the structural and functional adjustments that have occurred within the organization. ECOWAS has in addition developed several policy documents and protocols including a humanitarian policy⁵, and provisions for humanitarian response within the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution Peace-keeping and Regional

⁵ The ECOWAS Humanitarian Policy developed in March 2012 aims to articulate the vision, mission, strategic objectives and core humanitarian principles on humanitarian challenges in the region.

Security that define the organization's targets, responsibilities and strategies in emergency and humanitarian situations.

In this evolving context, the ESF has, in addition, expanded its mandate to include humanitarian assistance and crises response. The conception of the ESF alone is noteworthy for its incorporation of lessons learnt from experiences in armed conflicts, growing emergency situations including natural and human-induced risks, and most significantly making preparedness relevant for response in any humanitarian situation.

1.1.1 Protocol Relating To the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Regional Security (The Mechanism)

In addition to observation and monitoring, peacekeeping and restoration of peace, preventive deployment, enforcement of sanctions and embargo, the ESF has as an integral role of 'humanitarian intervention in support of humanitarian disaster'.⁶ Article 41 of the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Regional Security in particular stipulates that:

'...the ECOMOG unit⁷ shall be adequately equipped to undertake humanitarian activities in their mission area under the control of the Special Representative of the Executive Secretary⁸ '... and "when necessary, ECOMOG shall coordinate the activities of humanitarian agencies in the field".

This expanding role of the ESF from a more traditional role of the military and ad hoc arrangement can be enhanced further to promote the provisions under chapter 8 of the Mechanism which allow for humanitarian assistance. Article 40 of the same chapter further mandates ECOWAS to intervene in a member state in order to alleviate the suffering of populations and restore life to normalcy in the event of a crisis, conflict and disaster. It specifically authorizes ECOWAS to take appropriate action to rehabilitate a devastated member state and to develop its own capacity to efficiently undertake humanitarian actions for the purposes of conflict prevention and management.

⁶ Article 22 of the Mechanism, 1999

⁷ now the ECOWAS Standby Force

⁸ now President of the ECOWAS Commission

1.1.2 The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF)

The ECPF, as a tool for conflict prevention, provides for the analysis of the threats to peace and security and an examination of how various thematic areas of intervention work to forestall these threats. The ECPF also has a humanitarian component that seeks to:

“Mitigate the impact of humanitarian disasters and emergencies that would result in social and political upheaval; serve as a bridge between relief, emergency assistance and medium term rehabilitation; protect sustainable development through crises prevention and preparedness; and foster inter-regional harmony and security through cooperative arrangement to ensure effective humanitarian crises prevention and preparedness programmes.”⁹

The framework also recognizes the mandate of the ESF in the achievement of the above objectives. It stipulates that ECOWAS “shall facilitate the training and equipping of ESF standby units, particularly the civilian component, in Member States in humanitarian relief and sanitation, as well as the design and implementation of quick-impact and reconstruction projects, for their incorporation into missions wherever and whenever required”.¹⁰ This provision not only reemphasizes the humanitarian mandate of the ESF, it looks at programmatic concepts that could be developed and taken on board as humanitarian efforts by the military.

1.1.3 Supplementary Act Relating to the Code of Conduct for the Armed Forces and Security Services of ECOWAS (Code of Conduct)

The Code of Conduct supports the extensive humanitarian mandate spelt out in relevant ECOWAS treaties and frameworks. Article 7 of the Code of Conduct on Humanitarian Assistance gives responsibility to the armed forces and security services in the exercise of their duties to provide to all persons in need adequate protection, assistance and refuge. In rendering humanitarian assistance, they are also mandated to ensure that internally displaced persons, refugees, foreigners, stateless persons, minorities, women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities are not victims of any forms of discrimination including race, sex, age, identity, religion or political views.

⁹ ECOWAS, 2008. The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework. Regulation/MSC/Reg. 01/01/08. Article 93.

¹⁰ Ibid. Article 94.e

Article 17 provides for the regulation of the conduct and operations of the military, with mandate and oversight from civilian political and administrative authority. This means that they can be checked and held accountable to relevant provisions under international humanitarian law, national laws, the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and the Code of Conduct. The armed forces and security services are also mandated to cooperate as appropriate with humanitarian organizations.¹¹ This emphasizes the importance of having the military operate in coordinated approaches, and in visible and realistic collaboration to ensure effective preparedness for humanitarian crises response.

1.2 ESF Scorecard: Linking the Elements of Preparedness in Humanitarian Crises Response

The success of humanitarian crisis response hinges greatly on the level of preparedness. According to the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), ‘preparedness is the capacities and knowledge developed by governments, professional response organization, communities and individuals to anticipate and respond effectively to the impact of likely, imminent or current hazard events or conditions’.¹² A comprehensive level of preparedness in humanitarian crises leads to effective anticipation and timely response, which eventually lessens the impact of the crisis. It is therefore a continuous cycle of planning, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective measures in an effort to ensure effective coordination and execution during or around an emergency¹³.

The Hyogo Framework for Action¹⁴ identifies four core areas of disaster preparedness. These include contingency planning; early warning and monitoring; emergency services and standby arrangements; and information management, communication and coordination. In order for the ESF to fulfill its humanitarian role, there is need for the establishing of a structured response system that takes into account these elements.

¹¹ Article 25, Code of Conduct

¹² Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response, Guidance and Indicator Package for Implementing Priority Five of the Hyogo Framework, 2008

¹³ The National Incident Management System (NIMS)

¹⁴ The Hyogo Framework for Action is a 10 year plan developed in 2005 focusing on reducing disasters by 2015 through its five priority areas including preparedness.

1.1.4 Contingency Planning

Contingency planning is one of the core elements of preparedness prioritized by most organizations that respond to humanitarian crises. Developing a contingency plan involves making decisions in advance about the management of human and financial resources, coordination and communications procedures, and being aware of a range of technical and logistical responses.¹⁵ Contingency planning therefore is a systematic approach of identifying effective measures to counter an existing threat that might evolve into an actual situation with devastating consequences. The importance of a contingency plan as a management tool is to develop relationships and common understandings around a particular issue, reinforce coordination mechanisms thus improving the quality of humanitarian response while identifying constraints. It also subjects the system to constant review and modifications so as to tailor responses to evolving challenges.

The development of rules of engagement for the military in a humanitarian crisis is a first step in ensuring that planning is in place. However, the political process of decision-making at the level of the Heads of States or Council of Ministers slows down the ECOWAS response structure. The logistical and political complexities in certain humanitarian situations further complicate and weaken efforts in early planning and contingency arrangements. The delay in convening high-level political meetings contravenes the very idea of preparedness and rapid deployment for effective early response. Mali, for instance, spent almost a year between March 2012 and February 2013 without any visible and constructive response even after ECOWAS realized that intervention was unavoidable in a bid to end the continuing political and security crisis.

In addition, a contingency plan should have a high probability of meeting goals and targets on a potential threat built into a scenario. It is unrealistic to have a plan that addresses all humanitarian challenges in the region. Depending on the mandate of the mission, ECOWAS has a timeframe for response that covers specific responsibilities and targets. These timeframes include thirty days for a stand-alone ECOWAS observer mission; thirty days for preventive deployment missions (Task Force); ninety days for complex multidimensional peacekeeping mission; and fourteen days for rapid intervention, such as in genocide situations. However, there is need to review these timelines against capacity, bureaucratic processes and operationability of military responses in the development of a revised plan. Although producing a comprehensive plan for a regional organization like ECOWAS might be unrealistic and over-ambitious, a simulation exercise to test the response system of the organization would reveal possible gaps and challenges in the

¹⁵ Contingency Planning Guide 2012,(Page7)

preparation, analysis, development and implementation of a contingency plan. Such an exercise would improve the level of preparedness and response of the military in specific scenarios. It would also address the further engagement of the military not only in humanitarian response in general but also in crises emanating from disasters.

1.1.5 Early Warning and Monitoring

Early warning refers to the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of anticipating and identifying emerging, deteriorating, or recurring humanitarian crises.¹⁶ It looks at forecasting, detecting and analyzing imminent crisis as a means of prevention. For instance, it analyzes the structural causes of conflict, infusing them into programmatic responses for conflict prevention. Early warning as an element of preparedness is a combination of pre-emptive action, information gathering and analyses that can guide response. Its importance as a prerequisite for preventive action should be seen from the point of view that suffering and death could be avoided or minimized.¹⁷ Therefore, steps must be taken to identify signs of events that would lead to crises. Lessons learnt from the use of early warning can subsequently inform the design of programmatic actions for future preventive actions and crises response.

The EWD has four zonal bureaus in Banjul, Ouagadougou, Monrovia and Cotonou and an observatory and monitoring center or Situation Room based at the ECOWAS Commission. It was established to provide information that can help in forestalling imminent crises. The Directorate leads on the collection and analysis of data and preparation of situation reports for use by the ECOWAS Commission. Such collection and analysis of information covers various thematic areas including humanitarian and disaster indicators, and involves the use of the military as one of the mechanisms for response. The situation reports are then sent to the office of the president through the commissioner and the resultant action points filter down to the respective response units of the organization depending on the most suitable recommendation and approach.

A number of challenges however, hinder the efficiency of the Early Warning System at ECOWAS. First, the visibly low levels of coordination among various departments within the ECOWAS Commission also extend to how outcomes and results of early warning feed into response. Second, the long process involved in converting early warning information into timely action further complicates the process. As such ECOWAS through its various

¹⁶ Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response, Guidance and Indicator Package for Implementing Priority Five of the Hyogo Framework, 2008

¹⁷ Dorn, R. 1997. An overview of disaster preparedness for veterinarians. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 210(3):

response structures namely the ESF, EERT needs to move from a slow responsive *fire brigade* approach to a more timely responsive system. The military, in particular, can support efforts to overcome some of these challenges. The ESF can be adequately prepared to respond to humanitarian crisis through increased collaboration of the various ECOWAS response units, incorporation of the military's system of information gathering and management, and the provision of timely information on a crisis.

1.1.6 Emergency services and Stand by arrangements

Emergency services and Stand-by arrangements are supposed to be the strength of any military unit. The military should ideally be ready and well equipped to address emergency security and humanitarian situations. This element emphasizes operational readiness and comprises of stockpiling equipment and supplies, regular simulation exercises and ensuring readily available personnel. Unlike Southern Africa that has in place a rotational arrangement for its stand by force, West Africa is yet to develop clear terms of agreement for a military standby arrangement.

ECOWAS has been planning for the establishment of a humanitarian depot since 2004. The depot is meant to increase the organization's preparedness for emergency situations. Despite the location of the humanitarian logistics base in Mali due to Bamako's central location, the base is not equipped and therefore remains non-functional. The setting up of the base however remains a high priority for the Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs.

2.0 Readiness for Humanitarian Response

2.1 Past experiences: Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire

ECOWAS through its multilateral military unit has been involved in interventions in countries undergoing crises since 1990. Due to the nature and extent of gross human suffering these arrangements began on an ad hoc basis. The spirit of intervention in member state countries undergoing conflict was retained, but slightly altered to gain international recognition and acceptance. ECOMOG as it was then called has been involved in conflicts in 8 member states to date including interventions in Liberia (1990), Sierra Leone (1997), Guinea Bissau (1999) Côte d'Ivoire (2001 and 2010); Niger (2009); Guinea Bissau, Guinea (2003, 2009 and 2012), Cote d'Ivoire (2010) and in Mali presently.

The Sierra Leone crises in particular marked a hallmark event, as it was the first time in West Africa a military junta was kicked out of power by a regional force to restore a democratically elected government. The ousted president formally sought the assistance of the regional body to restore order in the country after he was overthrown in 1997. The further breakdown in law and order continued when the military collaborated with rebels to wreck the country causing untold human suffering on the population in the process. ECOMOG's intervention to restore peace and stability in the country, however, highlighted the challenge of respect for human rights and international humanitarian laws clearly absent even within the ECOMOG forces themselves. The ad hoc nature of its intervention coupled with the claims of human rights abuses in Liberia and Guinea as well as the wave of democracy sweeping the region, forced ECOWAS to gradually transform this make-shift arrangement to a more structured and formalized military unit.

The electoral crisis in Cote d'Ivoire and the subsequent ECOWAS involvement was entirely different from the crisis in Sierra Leone. The civil war triggered by the 2002 presidential elections dispute between the incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo and declared winner of the elections Allasane Ouatara. The ECOWAS peace plan for Ivory Coast facilitated the deployment of ECOMOG and formation of a power sharing government towards the resolution of the Ivorian crisis. Despite the presence of ECOMOG in the country, the escalation of the conflict generated questions on how formidable and responsive the ECOWAS engagement was. Disagreements at the highest decision making level of the organization, clearly demonstrated ECOWAS unpreparedness for intervention. Ghana, a traditionally neutral country for instance declined to send troops to Ivory Coast; while the Gambia opposed the idea of military action. Unlike the case of Sierra Leone, the political and security situation in Ivory Coast continued to deteriorate, demonstrating ECOWAS unpreparedness in the face of a political and humanitarian crisis.

2.2 Present Gaps: The Political Crisis in Mali

Since March 22, 2012, when the current political crisis in Mali started, ECOWAS has been working assiduously with the AU and UN to resolve the situation. Both AU and ECOWAS initially instituted sanctions against the military regime and appointed a mediator to oversee the dialogue process. However, even though both organizations realized that mediation efforts were not yielding much success, they could not convince the United Nations to support a military intervention. The UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2085 mandated the AU and ECOWAS to work with the European Union (EU) and other partners to provide coordinated and coherent support for the resolution of the crisis. France through its military intervention in the North steered the process and provided a temporary semblance of normalcy.

The subsequent constitution and deployment of the African-led Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) revealed several challenges with ECOWAS roles in the Mission and in the resolution of the conflict. Since, the relationship between funding countries and AFISMA troop contributing countries¹⁸ is purely bilateral, there is therefore little or no oversight role for ECOWAS. This highlights the challenges of having a partially completed Stand by Force. The gaps in responses between the political, security and humanitarian units within ECOWAS further underscore the challenges the organization currently faces in responding to the situation. The Integrated Planning Process provides the guiding principle for the

¹⁸ Using a system of pledged troops, the troop contributing countries to AFISMA include Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal.

planning, design and implementation of complex ECOWAS Peace Support Operations (PSOs) in conflict and post-conflict situations. It is also the basis for linking the different dimensions of peace support operations namely political, development, humanitarian, human rights, rule of law, social and security. Thereby it integrates the imperatives of each dimension into its strategic thinking and design. The lack of a much-needed synergy between these units has seriously affected a comprehensive response from ECOWAS in Mali.

The complexity of the political crisis in Mali has resulted in massive humanitarian suffering. As of October 2012, the crisis had resulted in the displacement of over 400, 000 people both internally and into neighbouring countries. Towards the end of 2012, 4.6 million people were at a risk of food insecurity;¹⁹ a situation complicated further by the current drought in the Sahel Region. The UNSCR 2085 authorized AFISMA to “support the Malian authorities to create a secure environment for the civilian-led delivery of humanitarian assistance and the voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPS) and refugees, in close coordination with humanitarian actors”.²⁰ The UNHCR, OCHA and other UN agencies have however dominated this role of facilitation and coordination of humanitarian relief with limited presence from ECOWAS. Though the resolution clearly states that AFISMA should not directly be involved in the delivery of aid, ECOWAS has an all-important mandate of coordinating humanitarian efforts within the region and monitoring crises that should consequently inform its response. A full deployment of the EERT is yet to be realized and as a result, the monitoring role and mandate of the organization has greatly suffered. Reports of the humanitarian situation in Mali for instance have mainly been prepared by UN agencies.

2.3 Potential Operational Challenges

The establishment of the ESF provided under the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, is in line with the Constitutive Act of the AU that provides the primary legal authority of the AU, specifically the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State. The intervention should be pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances including war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity”. The act also guarantees “the right of Member States to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security.”

¹⁹ Complex emergency Situation Report No. 18, United Nation’s Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 24th October 2012

²⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2085

The AU Stand By forces comprises of 5 brigades including the ECOWAS brigade focusing on a comprehensive peace support operations with ECOWAS as one of those brigades. The ESF should comprise of pre-determined regional standby units that are highly trained, equipped, and prepared to deploy as directed in response to a crisis or threat to peace and security. The ESF Task Force should be comprised of 2773 soldiers within pre-determined units and upon order be prepared to deploy within 30 days and be fully self-sustaining for 90 days. The ESF Main Brigade in addition will be comprised of 3727 soldiers (totaling 6500) within pre-determined units and upon order be prepared to deploy within 90-days and to be fully self-sustaining for 90-days.

In readiness for 2015, when it is estimated that the ECOWAS stand by Force will be operational, maximum attention should be given to a few operational challenges that underscored by the current Malian crises and encountered in the process of constituting the ESF. First, bureaucratic processes have greatly slowed the responsiveness of ECOWAS as an organization. During the early days of the organization involvement in conflicts (in Liberia and Sierra Leone), ECOWAS was relatively efficient in terms of its response. This was mainly due to the nature of most of the governments existing then; accountability was not a priority for military and authoritarian regimes. The new wave of democratization has clearly changed that. Countries need legislative approval for decisions surrounding contribution of troops to a regional force. Within ECOWAS itself, the decision to intervene is also quite slow²¹.

Second, peacekeeping has now become a business for countries contributing troops as it comes with huge individual and national benefits. The arrangement within ECOWAS is for countries to contribute troops, equipments and weapons at the same time. The disparity in the per diem and support given by UN to that of ECOWAS can de-motivate or hinder cooperation among troop contributing countries. In addition, there is presently no standing terms of agreement for standby arrangement between ECOWAS and member states. As a result, a country that is supposed to be contributing a battalion might choose to send that same battalion for a UN peace operations mission elsewhere.

Importantly, political bottlenecks and external influence pose serious challenges to ECOWAS peace operations in the region. Member states in crises might choose not to be cooperative with the regional body, as was the case in the current Mali crises when Mali initially opposed the idea of an ECOWAS intervention and later restricted the ECOWAS

²¹The decision to intervene should come from either one of the following quarters: upon the decision of the Authority; upon the decision of the Mediation and Security Council; at the request of a Member State; on the initiative of the President of ECOWAS Commission; and at request of the African Union or the United Nations. This is followed by a series of planning, analysis and preparations

deployment to certain areas in the country. Additionally, the influence of self-interested western powers has been visible in every crisis in the region. It is important that external engagement is focused on improving the conditions on the ground, in line with the principle of 'do no harm'. External influence should not complicate political and security challenges and compromise the role and response of ECOWAS.

3.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Key Findings

Humanitarian response can only be effective when all aspects of preparedness are comprehensively examined and effectively carried out. This was highlighted as one of the main pillars in the Hyogo framework for action. Two years to the target date for a fully functional ESF, there is need to check the scorecard on the operational capacity of the force.

There are existing structures for the full functionality of some of the important components of preparedness, vis-a-vis contingency planning, early warning and monitoring and emergency services and standby arrangements. However, their existence may seem irrelevant if their functional capability cannot promote preparedness for early response and the mitigation of humanitarian crises. Early warning and monitoring though functional lacks the technical analysis in certain thematic areas such as humanitarian and environmental issues. There is therefore need for the full development of the above areas of contingency planning, emergency services and standby arrangement.

Furthermore, the relationship between various response units, particularly the link between the military and the EERT and disaster response units, is almost non-existent. The military possesses several strengths and capabilities that can be valuable during humanitarian emergencies. These include a culture based on hierarchy that can facilitate management, discipline and organization; expertise in the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure such as bridges and roads; protection of civilians in conflicts zone through the creation of safe conditions for humanitarian operations; valuable expertise in logistic, engineering and

useful standby supplies²². However, ECOWAS is yet to explore such capacities in order to improve on its already existing structures. This can only be done through coordination, capacity analysis, and joint simulations between the relevant response units.

Overall, this study identified potential operational challenges that can provide insight on areas that need to be critically examined, and possibly reviewed to ensure that the role of the ESF for preparedness in emergency or humanitarian situations is visible and explored fully. These areas include the bureaucratic processes at ECOWAS; monetization of peacekeeping; the relationship with member states; the external influence on humanitarian challenges in the region; and the lack of technical analyses and research that can inform the role of the ESF and its relationship with other units in the area of preparedness in an event of humanitarian crises.

3.2 Recommendations for ESF

ECOWAS has two major issues to consider in order to fully operationalize the ESF. First, the comprehensiveness of the definition of peace support operations as stipulated in Article 22 of the mechanism²³ should guide the preparation vis a vis planning, training and simulation of ESF with a particular attention to humanitarian intervention.

Second, the increased need for collaboration in planning as specified in the integrated planning process should be prioritized. This should involve all response units particularly the humanitarian response unit of the organization, which is conspicuously lacking.

In view of the above, the following recommendations are fundamental in order to address the operational challenges facing the ESF:

- ECOWAS should coordinate disaster management efforts of the ECOWAS standby force, and that of national armies in view of the working relationships and synergies that should exist between the two. This can be fostered through joint planning, training and simulations.
- ECOWAS should set up joint operation centres and crises management teams, as well as organize joint analysis mission centres in the event of a

²² Refugees Studies Program, 1995. The Role of The Military in Humanitarian Emergencies Conference Report. Oxford, 29-32 October. Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford. Available at: <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/pdfs/workshop-conference-research-reports/Role%20of%20the%20Military%20in%20Humanitarian%20Emergencies.pdf>

²³ The definition covers the following tasks: observation and monitoring peacekeeping and restoration of peace; humanitarian intervention in support of humanitarian disaster; enforcement of sanctions, including embargo; policing activities, including the control of fraud and organized crime peace building; disarmament and demobilization and preventive deployment; and any other operations mandated by the Mediation and Security Council.

humanitarian crisis in order to increase the collaboration between their response units; and thus boost preparations planning.

- ECOWAS should carry out an audit of its various response units in order to enhance clarity in definition of roles, capabilities and opportunities that should inform the role of the military in preparedness both at national and regional level.
- Though the ESF has organized 3 simulation exercises, these efforts should be increased giving particular emphasis to the ESF humanitarian mandate. This can increase collaboration between the ESF and other humanitarian actors. Adequate training to meet the ESF capacity needs should also be prioritized.
- The Humanitarian and Social Affairs directorate should enhance its monitoring and coordination role in the face of humanitarian crises in the region. This should consider especially the link between early warning and the role of the ESF. Such improvements could potentially underscore for the military's preparation and involvement.

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