Linking Conflict Analysis to Mediation and Conflict Resolution Efforts

A HANDBOOK FOR WEST AFRICAN PRACTITIONERS

Camilla Petra

Editing by Mariama Conteh, Philippe Taflinski

MAY 2014

CMI
Martti Ahtisaari Centre

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Crisis Management Initiative

Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) is one of the world's leading independent conflict resolution organisations. We actively work to ensure sustainable peace across the globe based on our strong belief that all conflicts can be resolved if there is sufficient political will and skill.

We have over 20 long-term projects in the most challenging areas of the world such as Yemen, Afghanistan, South Sudan, West Africa and Caucasus. Founded in 2000 by President and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Martti Ahtisaari, we now have a team of around 80 dedicated conflict prevention and resolution professionals, and offices in Helsinki, Brussels and our project locations.

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Improving West-African Capacities in Mediation and Peace Processes

The region of West Africa is an important geographical focus for CMI, notably in terms of capacity building in mediation and conflict analysis for West African professionals. The CMI project on 'Improving West-African Capacities in Mediation and Peace Processes' seeks to enhance mediation skills of key regional actors so that they are better equipped to prevent and resolve conflicts in the sub-region. The project is conducted in partnership with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping training Centre (KAIPTC) and in collaboration with ECOWAS. To strengthen the skills of high-level West African decision-makers and practitioners, CMI together with KAIPTC, has developed a comprehensive ten-day training package in Conflict Analysis and Multi-track Mediation. The training is based on the regional context and specificities and encourages the sharing of experiences amongst the participants. The training course was piloted in June 2013.

In addition, CMI has also developed a training course on Conflict Analysis for Mediation Strategy Design. The 7 day scenario-based course aims to complement the conflict analysis and mediation trainings by focusing on providing participants tools to transfer the conflict analysis information into effective design of mediation strategy through a concrete West African case. CMI piloted this course in April 2013. This handbook, focusing on the linkages between conflict analysis and mediation in the context of West Africa, serves to complement the content of the course. The purpose is to produce information that would be useful for practitioners working in the field of peace and security in West Africa.

Foreword

Heidi Huuhtanen
Programme Director, CMI

Accompanying the exponential growth in mediation interventions, it is now commonly accepted in the field of conflict resolution that one of the critical aspects of successful mediation processes remains the quality of conflict analysis. It seems logical that assumptions are made that it is not possible to design an effective mediation process without adequate conflict analysis. However, experience has shown that several gaps remain within academia and in practice, in ensuring that conflict analysis makes its necessary contribution to the design of mediation processes. Studies in this report do not question that adequate conflict analysis for mediation is the ideal scenario; rather they share the more complex realities in selected West African countries.

This report is a response to a need to better understand the way conflict analysis is undertaken in a region that has in the past, and unfortunately continues in the present, to experience a plethora of conflicts of different intensities. Working on conflict resolution in what is often termed as one of the most conflict prone regions in the world, it seemed crucial that preliminary steps were taken to examine how conflict analysis feeds into conflict resolution activities, and particularly mediation. Not only would this deeper understanding help better design intervention in partnership with local actors, it would create a better understanding of capacities that need strengthening.

The journey through the combination of field and desk research has been enlightening. Being introduced to the many actors in the region involved in mediation and conflict analysis illustrated a certain dynamism in West Africa regarding conflict resolution. Government, civil society, regional, international, as well as religious and traditional actors come together with varying interrelationships to analyse the conflicts and design mediation interventions. Yet the linkages between those doing the analysis and those designing mediation processes do not always exist, highlighting clear challenges in effective mediation. At the other end of the spectrum, analysis not conducted in the formal manner, but based on actors' deep understanding of the context has also led to effective mediation. It is these complexities and dynamics that are highlighted in this report.

Through engaging with this subject there is a better sense of some of the practical realities of conflict analysis in West Africa. The report shares elements of how various actors in the six countries studied operate in terms of conflict analysis and mediation, and most importantly how these are linked. The challenges and successes are also highlighted. It is clear that West Africa has made enormous strides in resolving its conflicts, but gaps also remain that need addressing in order to ensure the region continues to move in the right direction.

Contents

List of Acronyms

APC	All People's Congress (Sierra Leone)
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
CAPES	Centre for Analysis of Economic and Social Policy (Burkina Faso)
CDF	Civil Defence Force (Sierra Leone)
CEWS	Continental Early Warning System
CISU	Central Intelligence Security Unit (Sierra Leone)
CDVR	Commission on Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation (Côte d'Ivoire)
CLHRE	Centre for Law and Human Rights Education (Liberia)
CNDHCI	National Commission on Human Rights (Côte d'Ivoire)
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
CoW	Council of the Wise
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Liberia)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DISEC	District Security Committee (Sierra Leone)
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group
ECOWARN	ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECPF	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
ESF	ECOWAS Standby Force
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
ICG	International Crisis Group
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
INEP	National Institute for Research and Studies
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
INEP	National Institute of Research and Studies
IRCSL	The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
LWI	Liberia Women Initiative
MARWOPNET	Mano River Union Women's Peace Network
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MRU	Manor River Union
MSC	Mediation and Security Council (ECOWAS)
MSC	Military Staff Committee (AU)
MSU	Mediation Support Unit (UN)
NCCP	National Coordinating Committee for Peace (Sierra Leone)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPP	National Patriotic Party (Liberia)
NSC	National Security Council (Sierra Leone)
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMC	Observation and Monitoring Centre (ECOWAS)
ONS	Office of National Security (Sierra Leone)

OMZ	Observation and Monitoring Zone (ECOWAS)
PAIGC	African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde
PBO	Peace-Building Office (Liberia)
PDAs	Peace and Development Advisors (UN)
POW	Panel of the Wise
PROSEC	Provincial Security Committee (Sierra Leone)
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy (Liberia)
PSC	Peace and Security Council (AU)
P4DP	Interpeace Platform 4 Dialogue and Peace
REC	Regional Economic Community
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SMC	Security and Mediation Council (ECOWAS)
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	Unite Nations
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDPA	United Nations Department for Political Affairs
UNIOSIL	United Nations Integrated Office for Sierra Leone
UNIPSIL	United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone
UK	United Kingdom
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
UNOL	United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Liberia
UNOMIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia
UNOWA	United Nations Office for West Africa
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
UNSRSG	United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General
VdP	Voz di Paz
WACSOF	West African Civil Society Forum
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WARN	West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network
WIPNET	Women in Peacebuilding Network of WANEP

Executive Summary

Recent years have witnessed concerning developments in the region of West Africa. Early 2012 saw coup d'états in Mali and Guinea Bissau, creating fears for fragile countries in the region that had already experienced war, and apprehensions regarding the implications for neighbouring countries, as well as the security of the region as a whole. In 2013 worrying trends emerged in countries that had been calm in previous years, such as Benin and Togo. In addition, the conduct of legislative elections in Guinea at the end of September 2013 were contested, and the current situation is still unsettled. These developments are troubling and represent a snapshot of the spectrum of conflicts and civil wars that have plagued the region of West Africa over the previous decades.

Such violent conflicts have led to the emergence and growth of national, local, regional and international tools and response mechanisms to address these complex challenges. Conflict analysis constitutes a corner stone in creating an enhanced understanding of the causes, trends and dynamics of conflict and mediation, as well as possible solutions. This publication examines the manner and extent to which conflict analysis is conducted and applied for mediation and conflict resolution purposes in the context of West Africa. Although the overall regional context will be highlighted, the scope of the handbook will be primarily limited to field and desk research conducted on six different countries: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire.

There are a variety of actors in both conflict analysis and mediation in the region of West Africa. Government ministries and agencies often engage in both processes, though some of the countries studied still lack institutions involved in conflict analysis. With regards to regional actors, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is the most prominent and visible player, though other regional actors, such as the Mano River Union (MRU), are progressively enhancing their engagement in the field of regional peace and security. Prominent regional leaders also play important mediation roles, either through an official mandate or by taking initiative on their own. On the international arena, the United Nations (UN) is at the forefront of efforts for peace and security, though an increasing number of other actors such as international civil society organizations are contributing through pursuing both analysis and mediation at different tracks. Representing institutions that possesses a strong moral and social authority in West Africa, religious and traditional actors have also made significant contributions in resolving conflict through mediation and dialogue processes. Furthermore, the role of local, national and regional civil society organizations, in both conflict analysis and resolution in West Africa, has been increasing, and their role in producing analysis is particularly important.

The range of methods applied for conflict analysis and mediation in West Africa depends on the context as well as the capacities and characteristics of the actors that utilize them. The government actors rarely possess a comprehensive toolbox for the analysis of conflict and tend to pursue less strategic approaches that often constitute a combination of both analysis and mediation. Overall it seems to be fairly common that the same government institutions are involved in both conflict analyses and mediation, implying that conflict analysis has fairly strong prospects for feeding into the mediation process given that it is conducted within the same institutions that carry out mediation.

Despite this fact, the formal link nevertheless still remains relatively weak, and several opportunities for conflict analysis to feed into the mediation process are left underutilized.

In the regional arena, the institutional structure of ECOWAS provides a strong framework for conflict analysis to feed into their conflict resolution and mediation efforts. The ECOWAS early warning system, ECOWARN, relies on four observation and monitoring zones and a civil society network, through which ECOWAS practitioners gain early warning data from the field. Channels also exist for communicating this information forward to those ECOWAS structures involved in mediation. The limited number of personnel may however pose a challenge for conducting analysis and incorporating it into mediation efforts. Furthermore, regardless of the potential strength of the links between analysis and mediation in general, they risk become undermined if there is a lack of political will amongst the ECOWAS Member States to take action.

The UN, representing internationally the most prominent actor, possesses a system in which conflict analysis is conducted by different agencies and country-based programmes in West Africa. They transfer information to different UN entities involved in mediation and conflict resolution processes. The Department for Political Affairs (DPA) represents the key institution that ensures that a channel exists for linking conflict analysis to the mediation tools of the organization. Whether conflict analysis in practice precedes mediation, however, also depend on whether circumstances on the ground allow for sufficient time to conduct analysis. Moreover, when there is a lack of political will amongst the member states, the UN's ability to intervene in conflict becomes largely undermined.

With regards to approaches, those employed by religious and traditional actors include religious values and narratives, traditional dispute settlements processes, as well as mediation approaches similar to those pursued by other actors. Conflict analysis feed into the mediation process through the deep knowledge of the context, actors and conflict dynamics that the religious and traditional mediators in the West African societies often already possess by virtue of their positions and access to society.

Civil society engages in a variety of activities, including facilitating dialogue between fighting factions and producing early warning data and analysis of social and political developments in the region. Civil society is often involved in both conflict analysis and mediation. With regards to mediation their role is often at track II or III levels, though they have made critical inputs and contributions to track I levels in the majority of the peace processes in the region.

The individuals involved in mediation and conflict resolution also often referred to their own experience and know-how as a key approach. Whether conflict analysis is then linked to the mediation process or not, depends on the extent to which the practitioners either conduct analysis themselves or consult external sources of conflict analysis when designing their mediation strategy.

This indeed reflects the circumstances in certain countries in West Africa that would benefit from creating mechanisms and structures through which information could be shared between different government entities as well as between those entities and civil society. Sometimes analysis may also be available, for instance, within a civil society organization, but resources to synthesize it into comprehensive and end-user accessible information packages, are absent. In such circumstances it might be extremely difficult for the mediator to integrate the different elements of information into a fully-fledged understanding of a conflict that would then guide the mediation process.

Although the actors and institutions involved in conflict resolution in West Africa still face a number of challenges with regards to both the complex context in which they operate and the capacity and institutional limits, there are several signs of progress. New structures and initiatives by local, national, regional and international actors are constantly deployed to increase prospects for conflict analysis to be linked to mediation processes. The attention should be on building upon this base.

West Africa

Cape Verde

Mauritania

Mali

Niger

Senegal

The Gambia

Guinea-Bissau

Guinea

Burkina Faso

Benin

Sierra Leone

Côte d'Ivoire

Togo

Nigeria

Liberia

Ghana

Introduction

The theories, tools and methodologies that exist on both conflict analysis and mediation are numerous. As wide and diverse as they are, so too are the debates that follow and the continuing development of thinking and positions on these subjects. It is also true that conflict analysis is conducted with tools and methodologies that come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Similarly, mediation has evolved to include a large body of theory, comparative research, skills and techniques. It is also true that there are still major debates reflecting divided opinion about what defines successful mediation, the main contention being the subjective nature of values, labels and judgments attached to those doing the analysis. Despite all this contention, one area where there is rarely disagreement is the belief that a successful mediation process needs to be accompanied by thorough conflict analysis. This is due to the fact that the complex and highly fluid nature of events on the ground necessitates the appropriate and systematic provision of analysis and options to the mediators.

The general consensus is that the more in-depth the conflict analysis before, during and after a mediation process, the more dramatically the chances of success of the mediation are increased. One of the most respected pronunciations on this comes through inputs from mediation experts around the globe who, in consultations hosted by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and organised together with the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), inputted on what became the 2012 United Nations Guidance on Effective Mediation. In its section on preparedness it is clearly stipulated that, amongst other things, conflict analysis is one of the key fundamentals that needs consideration for an effective mediation process.

Practice has illustrated, however, that while thorough conflict analysis may indeed be necessary for a successful mediation process, its availability does not necessarily strengthen the mediation process. The desire to improve both mediation and conflict analysis internationally has seen various discussions, and studies endeavour to define and search for solutions to these challenges. There is still a need to give further attention to the gap that exists between conflict analysis and its use in the design of mediation strategy and interventions. Some key elements are considered as obstacles to the effective linkages between the two.

One of the most crucial relates to a disconnect between the results of conflict analysis processes and the mediators' methods. It is true that in the last ten years conflict analysis has left the realms of academia and think tanks and is a tool utilised in conflict prevention, management and resolution practice. Some of the first-hand Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) frameworks developed for major development agencies such as the UN, DFID and GIZ as well as the World Bank are highly useful tools. There is little question that some of the elaborate early warning systems produce first-class data. Early warning methods within the AU and ECOWAS, for example, are already evidence of hybrid methods attempting to provide ongoing and timely analysis based on a regular data collection process, rather than a one-off activity. The great challenge remains, however, that this analysis is sometimes useful for certain end users such as

policy makers, development practitioners, political analysts or security services, but not necessarily for mediators.

Mediation is primarily a practice field. This implies that the intention and value of the mediator's skills lies in their successful application to specific situations of conflict. This is a process that is practical and places emphasis on the results and change this has on the circumstances of several individuals. While the value of theory and academic knowledge is clear, its limitations for practitioners are well documented. One such example is that limited attention is given in analysis to points in time where specific types of mediation interventions would be ideal. Similarly, the logic and analysis may not be useful in situations where mediators are applying their techniques in a context and to actors for whom the local framing and analysis of the context has more relevance. This is often due to lack of conduct of joint analysis with local actors. In general, the mediator's needs are not included in the development of the conflict analysis methodology and the likelihood that it will not be utilised remains high.

There are other basic limitations to the effective use of conflict analysis for mediation processes. One relates to the fact that in many cases, even where the analysis is relevant or useful, the mediators may not be aware of its existence. There are organisations, networks and services dedicated to providing credible analysis. However, a gap remains in the knowledge transfer to the mediator. Several factors contribute to this. Key are the practical realities of many mediation processes where the rapidly changing conflict dynamics create great time pressures. Support team members may not have the time to access this type of knowledge if they did not already have it as part of their repertoire. This will mean that the mediator also will not have access to the information. Also important is the fact that mediation in general is only recently being professionalised. The functions of the mediation team, their skills, including conflict analysis, may not always be strong. Additionally, those who may be tasked with providing analysis to mediators may also not be the most qualified to do so.

Another challenge, which particularly affects official mediation processes, is related to the limited capacities within many of the organisations with mediation mandates. The difficulty is that there are scenarios where conflict analysis is undertaken in different departments, sections or units than those where mediation is conducted. In theory, if the analysis is relevant then it does not necessarily need to be conducted in the same department or team as those doing mediation. Nonetheless, in practice separating conflict analysis and mediation teams can add to the challenges. This is particularly the case as there is growing consensus that analysts and conflict analysis should be integral to mediation support teams or units.

Finally, a key point is that, despite global agreement that conflict analysis is necessary for a successful mediation process, a major challenge remains the fact that conflict analysis has not necessarily led to corresponding action. Some of the aforementioned gaps and challenges provide explanations for this, but there are also some other challenges that arise. Much of this is related to the wider interests and socio-political contexts within which mediation and wider conflict prevention and resolution activities take place.

In many instances, there may be political limitations to the action that is needed to effectively respond to elements raised from the conflict analysis. In other instances, the mediation may lack the resources, whether time, financial or human, to take relevant action. Furthermore, oftentimes the analysis cannot be used because the mediation may not have the mandate to address aspects highlighted.

What does this mean for the future success of mediation processes? The importance of examining links between available conflict analysis and mediation processes remains clear, and there is need for further research in this field. Efforts at strengthening these linkages will be best conducted with a better functional understanding of the links between conflict analysis and mediation. Critical is that the analysis of conflict analysis practice is conducted from the perspective of those involved in mediation. It is only by taking into account their needs and experiences that existing analyses, tools and actors should be examined, leading the way for understanding what additional efforts are needed for making the mediation process more effective.

About the handbook

There is really no fundamental difference between West Africa and the rest of the world when it comes to conflict analysis and its links to mediation. The same basic rules and terms exist. The region experiences the same basic challenges of linking conflict analysis and mediation to ensure that the analysis is relevant for the mediation process. The global understanding of the importance of conflict analysis to the success of mediation processes applies the same way it does in any other region of the world.

The specificities, however, are in the details. As practitioners trying to improve mediation processes it is in these details that the entry points for contributions to the field are founded. This handbook was developed as a contribution in responding to the need for a more practical understanding of the relationship between conflict analysis and mediation in the region, in order to strengthen mediation capacity in West Africa. It aims to contribute to a functional understanding of the individuals and institutions engaged in mediation, and the types of linkages they have. This would enhance understanding of which areas need addressing or strengthening. To examine these issues, the handbook provides a brief background of the conflicts in the countries presented and examines several elements; actors in conflict analysis and mediation, approaches and methodologies used, and the linkages between conflict analysis and mediation, before providing some concluding remarks.

The aim was to gain an understanding of the difference between rhetoric and reality in specific West African countries; to have a clear idea in specific countries of which institutions are playing conflict analysis roles and which play mediation roles and most importantly the way they link together. In terms of actors in West Africa, the specific role of civil society as well as religious and traditional leaders in the region is given necessary attention. Also important was the manner in which the conflict analysis and mediation was carried out. This would help value what works and identify where the gaps that need addressing exist.

The focus on challenges and capacity strengthening relates to the core element of the project within which this publication was commissioned at CMI, whose aim is to strengthen West African mediation capacities. Having gone through a rigorous process of developing a curriculum for mediation and conflict analysis in West Africa that included training needs analysis and research in the 15 ECOWAS member states, a two-week course on mediation and conflict analysis tailored to the West African experience was developed in partnership with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC). It became evident, however, that more time was needed to address the issue of conflict analysis, and most importantly the manner in which this could be made useable and relevant for mediation practitioners. The key question related to the manner in which the analytical process can be tailored specifically for mediation and associated forms of third party intervention. It seemed prudent to more closely examine the specifics of the West African situation before attempting to address the gaps. This way the contribution to strengthening mediation capacities could be more effective.

It is with this background that short field studies were commissioned in six[1] of the ECOWAS member states to contribute to the development of a training module that would take into account and be relevant to the actual context in West Africa. It is in part the results of the field studies in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, that fed into the development of the final CMI training course on 'Conflict Analysis for Mediation Process Design' that was piloted in April 2013. Understanding the limited availability of documentation on such issues in the region, particularly those that focus less on theory, it seemed important to publish a document that could focus on the on-the-ground realities, and be shared with practitioners new to working in the region as well as those who have already been working in West Africa.

The handbook in no way seeks to provide a comprehensive reflection on conflict analysis and mediation in West Africa. Nor does it seek to represent an exhaustive presentation and analysis of the actors, linkages and methods and tools regarding conflict analysis and mediation in the six West African countries studied. Rather, it aims simply to provide a snapshot of some of the key actors in the region and seeks to briefly highlight some of the key elements regarding the actual relationship between conflict analysis and mediation in the field. Most importantly, the handbook aims to describe some of the challenges and realities that exist, providing a preliminary understanding of the possible impact this has on greater stability in the region if such capacity gaps are not addressed.

West Africa has suffered from decades of armed conflict, governmental repression and violence. While each of the conflicts has its own complexities, there are certain common root causes that can be distinguished, such as the marginalisation and exclusion of large segments of the population, the lack of adequate economic resources and poor governance. Each of the six countries within this study have witnessed the rise and fall of several authoritarian rulers with some regime changes more violent than others. The purpose of this chapter is to provide some information on the background to the conflicts of these six countries. Different periods in time will hence be highlighted depending on the case. The objective is not to provide a comprehensive historical narrative but to point out crucial developments and events.

1.1. The Mano River Union Countries
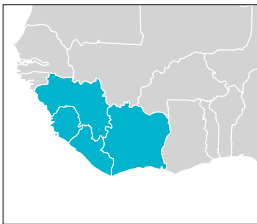
Sierra Leone, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia make up the Mano River Union (MRU). Established in 1973 by Liberia and Sierra Leone, Guinea joined in 1980 and Côte d'Ivoire became a member in 2008. The MRU is a sub-regional grouping formed to promote security, economic liberalisation and infrastructural development. Unfortunately, achieving these goals has suffered serious setbacks within the last 14 years due to violent conflict, including the devastating wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

1.2. Liberia
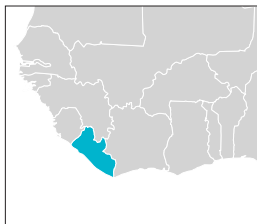
The first civil war in Liberia began in 1989, when an insurgency faction, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor, launched an attack on the government forces. Their grievance was against the repressive military regime of Samuel Doe that lasted for almost a decade. The demands for social change and justice among the population could no longer be disregarded[2]. Originally a poorly armed and unorganised faction, NPFL soon grew in capacity. In 1990, the rebel groups launched independent attacks in Monrovia, resulting in the execution of President Doe and ultimately the split of the NPFL. Following the overthrow of the government, Liberia experienced seven years of civil war in which different factions, mostly organised along ethnic divisions, fought each other. In the period between 1990 and 1996 a total of thirteen peace agreements were signed.

With the support of the ECOWAS peacekeeping forces, weapons were finally laid down and a peace agreement signed in 1996. Elections were organised in 1997, in which Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Party (NPP) gained power. Unfortunately, the change of power did not result in a change of governing practices and Charles Taylor continued along the same path as his predecessor. The subsequent years were characterised by continued corruption, repression and exploitation of ethnic divisions, paving the way for renewed conflict and ultimately the second phase of the civil war in 1999.[3]

The fighting took place between the government forces of Charles Taylor and two rebel factions, namely the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), launching attacks from Guinea, and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), launching attacks from Côte d'Ivoire. The rebel factions had by 2003 gained control of a large part of the territory in the west and northwest of Liberia.

As a consequence of increasing military defeat and strong pressure from the international community with ECOWAS at the forefront, Taylor finally agreed to resign in August 2003 and went into voluntarily exile in Nigeria. The civil war in Liberia ended in August 2003 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra, Ghana. The agreement allowed for the organising of free and fair elections in 2005, in which Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected as the first female president in the history of Liberia and of the African continent.

1.3. Sierra Leone
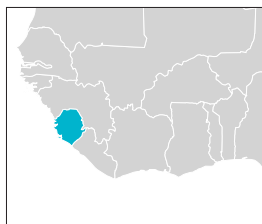
Sierra Leone was transformed into a one-party state in 1978, under the rule of Siaka Stevens and his 'All People's Congress' (APC) party, which had been in power since 1967. Stevens ruled a patrimonial state for the following seventeen years. In 1985, he chose to hand over power to the military head of Sierra Leone, General Joseph Momoh. Instead of contributing to socio-economic development as promised, General Momoh seemed unable to change the downward spiral of the country. The government policies created a socio-economic gap between the capital and the rural areas, excluding the rural-dwelling majority of the population from wealth and economic development.

In early 1991, a rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), launched attacks from the east of Sierra Leone, close to the border with Liberia, with the purpose of overthrowing the government[4]. It did not take long for the RUF to occupy the southern and eastern parts of Sierra Leone, since the national army was very weak. Between 1999 and 2002, Sierra Leone experienced devastating violence and atrocities at the hands of the rebels who were later joined by a large contingent from the army. Other armed groups emerged, including the civil defence force (CDF) who set themselves up to defend the population from the rebels. During this time there continued to be much political instability including two military coups d'état.

Half of Sierra Leone's population of 5 million people was internally displaced, some 50,000 people became refugees in neighbouring countries and there was an estimated death toll of at least 50,000. What started as a revolutionary movement quickly turned into one of greed and violence for which the civilian population paid the heaviest price.

By 1995, the international community had become increasingly involved with the AU, ECOWAS and the UN, trying to push for a negotiated settlement and to put an end to the fighting. ECOWAS ground troops eventually played a critical role in curbing the violence[5]. A peace agreement signed in Abidjan in 1997 failed and was later followed by the signing of the Lome Peace Agreement in 2001. UN peacekeeping forces were deployed on the ground to ensure the implementation of this agreement. In 2002, the civil war was officially declared over.

1.4. Côte d'Ivoire
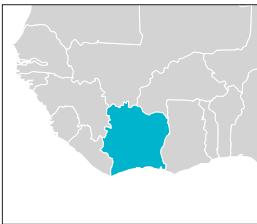
Côte d'Ivoire has also experienced a violent recent history. The politico-military conflict that broke out on 19th September 2002 was the result of several socio-political crises that Côte d'Ivoire had witnessed since the death of the first post-independence president, Felix Houphouët Boigny. The societal instability triggered a coup d'état followed by post-electoral conflict linked to the presidential elections of November 2010. The sharp social tensions originated from diverse internal causes such as poor governance and poverty, but ultimately crystallised around the concept of 'Ivority', where ethnic identity was mobilised and finally triggered violent conflict. During these periods of violence, thousands of people were killed, many disappeared, and thousands of families were displaced either internally or externally.[6]

In 2002, an attempt to overthrow the government of President Laurent Gbagbo provoked the division of the country. The north came under the control of an armed opposition movement, while the south still remained within the power of the government. A buffer zone monitored by French armed forces was established between the two parts of the country. In 2004, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorised the deployment of forces with the purpose of maintaining peace.

A Peace Agreement mediated by the President of Burkina Faso through the process of Direct Talks was finally signed in 2007, marking the end of the separation of the territory. While this brought an end to the open hostilities, it certainly did not provide the way for peace and the ceasing of the conflict[7]. The second round of elections in November 2010 resulted in another political crisis with massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The presidential candidate Gbagbo refused to recognise the electoral victory of his opponent, Alassane Ouattara. This time the violent crisis lasted for four months and was mostly concentrated in the west of Côte d'Ivoire and in the capital, Abidjan.

During this period, more than one million people were internally displaced and 200,000 became refugees fleeing outside the borders of Côte d'Ivoire.[8]

Intervention from France and the international community finally paved the way for settlement as Laurent Gbagbo was apprehended and imprisoned. Ouattara was declared the official winner of the elections. Since then, Côte d'Ivoire has been attempting to reconstruct itself after years of civil war that divided the country in two.

1.5. Guinea-Bissau
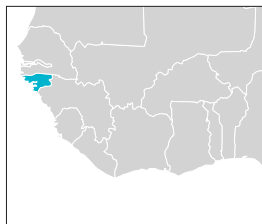
Guinea-Bissau is unfortunately known for its politico-military instability. Since 1998, the country has suffered from one civil war, four military coups and the murder of one president and four military chiefs of staff, as well as extrajudicial detentions. No president has ever completed a full term in office.

Guinea-Bissau gained independence from Portugal in 1974 when the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) obtained control of the country. The ruling government pursued a very repressive policy against those who were perceived as having been favoured by the colonial power. The following years were characterised by several attempts to challenge the regime, answered by increasingly repressive government responses. The conflict gained an ethnic dimension with the president Joao Bernardo Vieira conducting a very repressive policy towards an ethnic group that he perceived was trying to dominate politics — the Balantas. This group had previously obtained good social and military positions and was now paying a high price for its previously somewhat favoured social status.[9]

Tensions within the society and between the different ethnic groups continued to boil beneath the surface for decades, until they finally resulted in the '7th June War' in 1998, lasting for eleven months. Since the independence of Guinea-Bissau, this was by far the most violent confrontation and left the society deeply fragmented and bitter. The war started as a small-scale rebellion, which quickly grew in size. Soldiers from Senegal and Guinea intervened to support the sitting government and, soon after, ECOWAS peacekeeping troops were stationed on the ground as well. With the end of the war, Guinea-Bissau was left in a fragile state with the heavy burden of thousands of deaths, destroyed infrastructure and widespread poverty.

This, unfortunately, did not mark the end of political and social instability, and a divided military and security apparatus continues to suffer from violent confrontations with each other and the civilian leadership. Numerous assassinations and problems of control over a large drug trafficking market have left Guinea-Bissau with continued political and security crises over the years.

The latest coup d'état in Guinea-Bissau followed the first round of presidential elections in March 2012, which were a result of the death of sitting president Malam Bacai Sanha. A run-off between two of the presidential candidates was to be held on 29 April, but soldiers in the country seized power on 12 April. A mediation process was launched by ECOWAS, who rejected initial suggestions of a junta-led transitional council. ECOWAS brokered an agreement between the political parties and the military for a one-year civilian transitional government. In spite of the internal divisions, a transitional government was successfully formed on the 22 May 2012. Elections are scheduled to be held on the 16 March 2014.

1.6. Guinea
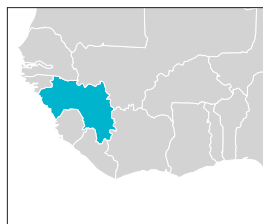
Internal struggles within Guinea have for decades been fought along ethnic divisions, mostly between the Malinké and the Fulani, the two main ethnic groups within the country[10]. The pattern of the politico-military context of Guinea has seen ruling presidents who have managed to stay in power until their deaths, bringing a certain political stability, despite the occurrence of insurgency attacks that have tried to undermine the regimes. Soon after the independence of Guinea in 1958, the country became an authoritarian one-party state with the government gaining almost all control of the public and economic activities of the citizens. Ahmed Sékou Touré served as the president of Guinea from 1958 until his death in 1984, ensuring top government positions for the Malinké population and therefore further enforcing the already existing ethnic divisions among the population[11]. A non-violent coup d'état followed, with Lansana Conté taking over power, surviving several coup attempts until his death in 2008.

In Guinea, large segments of the population were dissatisfied with Conté's regime. It also perpetrated large-scale human rights abuses towards opponents of the government, including the condemning of the opposition leader, Alpha Condé, to a prison sentence in 2000. In September of the same year, insurgency attacks were launched at the Guinean border with Liberia and Sierra Leone, resulting in the death of more than a thousand people and a massive amount of displaced persons.

The military junta quickly filled the power vacuum that was created by the death of Lansana Conté, when leader Captain Dadis Camara declared himself president. The following year, the opposition launched an attack in order to urge the president to abstain from power. Later the same year, Captain Camara survived an assassination attempt and was later exiled to Burkina Faso, paving the way for the appointment of the opposition leader as interim prime minister. Presidential elections were finally held in June 2010 and former opposition leader Alpha Condé was declared winner. Instability has however persisted with continued violent clashes between security forces of the government and the opposition.[12]

Legislative elections were delayed five times in total but were finally held in September 2013. Early on, a dialogue was launched between the government and the opposition on the conduct of elections but was interrupted in March 2012. Talks were revived through the facilitation of Ambassador Said Djinnit, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the UN (SRSG) for the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA). The president's party is mostly supported by the Malinké while the opposition holds the support of the Fulani. Condé has not been able to unite the population in terms of ethnic divisions and riots between different ethnic groups increased in the course of 2012. Electoral demonstrations have in the past involved use of force by national security organs against the Fulani population and have at times led to violent confrontations between the Malinké and the Fulani[13]. These tensions continued to shape the dynamics of the society and the legislative elections of 28 September were accompanied by accusations of fraud and the opposition refused to recognise the results. Mediation and dialogue continued and prospects for political stability are now higher.

1.7. Burkina Faso
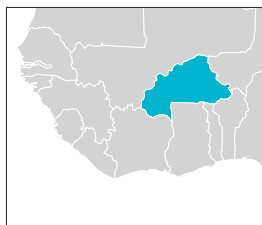
Since its independence in 1960, Burkina Faso has suffered from a number of violent political crises, illustrated by five military coups d'état of which the most recent took place in 1987, when president Blaise Compaoré came to power. His regime has been regularly accused of human rights violations, including the suppression of an independent press. In the past excessive force has also been used against demonstrations and other popular movements against the government[14]. The current rule is characterised by relative stability, with the regular conduct of elections and a quite regulated functioning of institutions.

The relatively positive development that Burkina Faso had witnessed took a turn for the worse in 1998 when a serious socio-political crisis broke out, following the announcement of the assassination of the investigative journalist Norbert Zongo. In March 1999, thousands of protesters took to the streets to peacefully show their sorrow for the death of the journalist. This marked the beginning of a protest movement that mobilised students, NGOs, human rights group representatives and the civil society as a whole. The protests demanded reforms within the judiciary system to better take into account human rights as well as a democratic revision of the constitution[15]. Such a collectively organised movement had rarely been witnessed in Burkina Faso and illustrated the indignation of the population with the impunity of the government. The previously reigning relative stability was suddenly shaken.

As a response to the seriously questioned legitimacy of the government, Compaoré began implementing democratic reforms of the political system. This process ultimately resulted in the maintenance of the power within the hands of the current president and government by enhancing the support of the population, without bringing political change or change of leadership. The government that was formed in 2000 included a part of the opposition, providing a wider political space to express opinions.

This, however, substantially weakened the opposition, which was split between those who wished to participate in the government and those who were opposed to it. In addition, Compaoré also allegedly began funding the opposition parties and therefore to a large extent managed to obtain their support. An additional indicator of the introduced democracy was to limit the number of presidential terms to two by a constitutional amendment in 2000, which nonetheless was declared non-retroactive in 2005.[16]

The dialogue that was established between the different parties of society as a response to the socio-political crisis at the end of the 90s therefore only managed to bring limited social cohesion and merely superficial political reform. The underlying aspirations for more social justice and democracy were left unaddressed. This being said, Burkina Faso is still part of the more stable countries in the region of West Africa. In 2005, Blaise Compaoré was elected for a third presidential term and again re-elected in 2010. Recent tensions in the country relate to the question of whether he will attempt to amend the constitution to allow him to stand for a third term in the upcoming 2015 presidential elections.

There are a variety of actors in both conflict analysis and mediation in the region of West Africa, ranging from government actors to religious ones as well as different peacebuilding NGOs. Common for the region as a whole is that the same actors are often involved in both conflict analysis and mediation. This is particularly the case for the government actors in the six countries studied. While some countries do possess specific institutions for conflict analysis others lack them. This chapter aims to introduce the main type of actors in the region and provide an overview of their respective roles.

2.1. Government Actors

In the region of West Africa, relatively few governmental actors are specifically responsible for conflict analysis, and most of the time they are also involved in mediation processes. Governmental responsibility for conflict analysis includes officers in charge of peacebuilding in the different ministries, departments and special agencies.

In the case of **Liberia**, an attempt to enhance the governmental capabilities to conduct conflict analysis was introduced with the establishment of an 'early warning signal and response committee' by the Peace-Building Office (PBO) of Liberia. The PBO is an office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This is the first specifically state-related institution charged with conflict analysis, though as a newly set up committee still in the process of developing its capacities. Furthermore, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia is another institution that is engaged in conflict analysis through its mandate to investigate violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that occurred from 1979 until the end of the civil war in 2003. Such investigations particularly put emphasis on crimes of gender-based and sexual violence. The TRC was also charged with conducting a critical review of the history of Liberia in order to be able to transform stereotypical misconceptions of the past that stand in the way of a peaceful future.[17]

Among the ministries that are specifically involved in the mediation process are the Land Commission and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The PBO of Liberia is the primary institution responsible for mediation, though to a certain extent it is also involved in conflict analysis. The PBO provides the government with support in building a foundation for sustainable peace and development in Liberia. It is also involved in implementing the national 'Poverty Reduction Strategy' and addressing other social issues as a means to achieving sustainable development. Though such efforts do not constitute direct mediation, they certainly aim at building the foundation of a more prosperous society and hence indirectly contribute to preventing conflict and sustaining peace.

Sierra Leone, on the other hand, has a relatively advanced governmental structure regarding conflict analysis. The primary state actors involved in conflict analysis are the Heads of the National Police, the Central Intelligence Security Unit (CISU), the Office of National Security (ONS) and the Sierra Leone Army (SLA). The ONS is responsible for coordinating security sector activities and conducting periodic security sector assessments as well as regional conflict analysis for diplomatic purposes[18]. The ONS is the primary institution officially responsible for analysing threats to security and for making these results available to the National Security Council (NSC). The NSC was set up in 2002 to serve as the highest national forum to consider matters of security in Sierra Leone[19]. The NSC, however, rarely engages in these issues and eventually the results of such conflict analysis end up on the desk of the President of Sierra Leone. Together with ad hoc committees set up by the President, the ONS plays the role of a mediator as well, therefore constituting an institution that both analyses conflicts as well as mediates them. Their role as mediator, however, is more limited.

With regard to **Guinea-Bissau** and **Guinea**, there are not yet any government institutions officially responsible for conflict analysis and/or mediation. In Guinea-Bissau, however, the National Institute of Research and Studies (INEP) has contributed to enhancing the knowledge in conflict analysis. INEP has conducted several studies on the political, economic and social situation of Guinea-Bissau. Though it is not an institution specialising in conflict analysis, through conflict research programmes it is enhancing the knowledge in this field. In both Guinea-Bissau and Guinea, governmental institutions seem to be evolving in the field of mediation as well, with institutions such as the National Transitional Council and the Economic and Social Council in Guinea engaging in the area.

In the case of **Burkina Faso**, different Ministries have a certain responsibility in the field of conflict analysis, such as the Ministry of Territorial Administration for Decentralised Security and the Ministry for the Empowerment of Women. Another government institution is the Centre for Analysis of Economic and Social Policy (CAPES), which is under the Presidency of Burkina Faso. This institution is undoubtedly an essential tool in the field of conflict analysis and in proposing alternative mechanisms for crisis management.

As a response to the socio-political crisis at the end of the 1990s, transitional structures were also established by the President of the Republic in order to facilitate the reconciliation with the people of Burkina Faso. These structures included a 'Council of the Wise', with the stated mandate to execute a thorough study of the situation as the first step to reconciliation. The 'Council of the Wise' also played the role of a mediator in the past.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, few state actors are yet to be involved in conflict analysis. The Commission on Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation (CDVR), and the Ombudsman (Médiateur de la République) represent institutions with a primary mandate relating to mediation and conflict resolution, but with some role in conflict analysis as well. Though conflict analysis is part of their task, they are not mandated to conduct any research on the Ivorian conflict.

This is especially the case of the CDVR, created on 13 July 2011 — a fairly new institution. The Ombudsman was created in 1995 and became an official institution of the state in 2000.

Other government institutions such as the Ministry of Human Rights and Civil Liberties and National Commission on Human Rights (CNDHCI), were created in 2005 to promote, monitor, investigate and document human rights abuses in Côte d'Ivoire, while work remains to be done to increase knowledge of methodology and tools for conflict analysis.

Formal structures in charge of national reconciliation and daily mediation are the Commission on Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation, and the Ombudsman. The official objective of the latter is to further prospects for reconciliation in the interest of the entire nation and to create the conditions for sustainable peace by providing tools for monitoring and prevention of conflicts. Until today, this institution has primarily been deployed for administrative disputes though it could be used for the resolution of social conflicts as well. The CDVR, on the other hand, has a commission charged with conducting investigations based on complaints from citizens and through these means indirectly contributes to a certain degree of conflict management. The CDVR has not been able to launch much in terms of concrete activities and has faced criticism for lacking credibility and impartiality. Other governmental structures include the former Ministry of National Reconciliation (2000–2011) that has clearly been unable to successfully address the series of crises that have faced the Ivorian society in the past decade.

2.2. Regional Actors

Amongst the prominent regional international actors, the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** plays a key role in conflict analysis and mediation in the region. ECOWAS, a regional organisation of fifteen member states, was established in 1975. The overall objective of the organisation is to promote economic integration amongst the member states, which, as a goal in and of itself, could be argued contributes to peace due to increased interdependence and collective benefits of trade. Based on the regional context, however, ECOWAS has had to develop a clear role regarding conflict prevention, management and resolution. One of the basic principles of the organisation is also the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

The evolution of the ECOWAS peace and security architecture culminated in the signing of the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Peacekeeping and Security in 1999. This protocol provided the framework for establishing mechanisms and institutions for conflict resolution. In 2001, the adoption of the Supplementary Protocol led to the establishment of a Security and Mediation Council (SMC) and the Council of the Wise (CoW). These institutions acquired the mandate to address conflict related matters within the ECOWAS member states. Since the signing of the Supplementary Protocol, several attempts at resolving conflicts in the region were conducted through the mechanisms for conflict resolution, including attempts to resolve the conflicts in Togo, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, as well as Côte d'Ivoire.

The establishment of the Standing Mediation Committee as a consultative group on the Liberian conflict on 9 May 1990 is considered a major landmark. Having gone into consultative meetings with the warring factions from the beginning of July 1990, but with no clear headway, the formation and deployment of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia was necessitated and the ECOWAS troops finally also contributed to the end of the fighting. This has evolved and currently exists as the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). A special representative, appointed by the SMC, serves as the chief of the peacekeeping missions and is in charge of all peacekeeping activities undertaken by ECOWAS. The special representative also undertakes diplomatic and political negotiations with the conflict parties within the framework of an operation and produces reports on findings on the ground.

The **Mano River Union (MRU)** also represents a relevant actor with regard to conflict analysis and mediation. The MRU has tried to enhance cooperation in the field of regional security and defence for the last 10 years. In 2000, the MRU agreed to adopt a protocol for joint cooperation on defence and security as well as internal and foreign affairs. The protocol provided a mandate for the establishment of a secretariat and a mechanism to monitor border security and other security-related matters. As a consequence of the civil war in Liberia, these plans were however put on hold and the MRU focused their strength on attaining a ceasefire in Liberia. The secretariat, mandated to have a strong role in sub-regional conflict resolution, remained relatively passive and was not able to respond to the situation. Sub-regional networks, such as the Mano River Union Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) and the MRU Inter-Religious Coordination Committee, played an active role in pressuring the national leaders within the MRU to start a dialogue on peace and stability with regard to both the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone.[20]

Created in 2002, the **African Union (AU)** also plays an important role in the context of West Africa. With the aspiration to pursue from the outset a stronger role in conflict resolution and prevention in comparison to its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the AU adopted an interventionist approach to peace and security on the African continent. This approach implied that human security was put at the forefront, allowing for the intervention in national affairs for the prevention of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other grave breaches undermining peace and stability.

Relevant AU institutions within its African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) include the Peace and Security Council (PSC), representing the primary decision-making body with regard to conflict management and mediation activities. Furthermore, the AU Commission is responsible for the design and implementation of such activities. Other relevant institutions include the African Standby Force (ASF), comprising both military and civilian personnel that may be deployed in areas of armed conflict. The ECOWAS standby force represents one of the five regional standby forces that constitute the ASF. Furthermore, the Panel of the Wise (POW) serves as an assisting and advising body of experts that are mandated to support formal mediation processes.

With regard to West Africa, the AU collaborates closely with ECOWAS under the principle of subsidiarity, as it strives to enhance cooperation with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) for the strengthening of regional conflict prevention and mediation structures and the enhancing of national infrastructures for peace. This allows RECs to play the primary role based on their proximity to the conflicts, while collaborating with the AU. The AU is present on the ground in some countries through field offices that allow for the organisation to better engage in peace processes in the region. The AU has field offices in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia, through which the AU supports the implementation of peace agreements and monitors conditions on the ground.

Finally, **regional leaders** have played and play important roles in mediation and conflict resolution in West Africa, either in their mandated functions as Chairmen of ECOWAS or the AU (e.g. President Mohamed Abdel Aziz of Mauritania on the Mali crisis) or by taking initiative on their own. For example, the 2007 Ouagadougou Peace Accord signed for Côte d'Ivoire was negotiated under the auspices of Blaise Compaoré, President of Burkina Faso and also Chairman of ECOWAS at the time. His team, then led by Djibril Bassolé, set up and run the Direct Talks before and after the agreement. President Compaoré also played a supportive role in Guinea by granting exile to Captain Dadis Camara in Burkina Faso after his assassination attempt, taking a contested leader out of the Guinean power game and allowing for the political developments in the country to take new directions.

Through their status and personality, senior regional mediators can apply a certain level of leverage to conflict resolution and mediation efforts which is often needed to unlock deadlock situations, and by originating from the neighbourhood they do bring to situations a sound understanding of the causes of conflicts and awareness of regional dynamics and implications.

2.3. International Actors

The **United Nations (UN)** and its specialised agencies also play important roles in the conflicts of West Africa. The support of the African Union and especially the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) was crucial to the management of the Ivorian crisis. The UN was also strongly present in both the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) was created in 1993, with the purpose of providing support to the ECOWAS mission to end the civil war.

The mission ended in 1997, after having provided support to the conduct of elections in 1997. The mission was immediately replaced by the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Liberia (UNOL) and finally with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2003, with the purpose to support the implementation of the peace agreement. In Sierra Leone, the UN was present throughout the whole course of the civil war as well as in the reconstruction of the country in the post-conflict phase. The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was established in 1999. This mission was followed by the setting up of the United Nations Integrated Office for Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) with the mandate to promote the consolidation of peace by assisting the government in strengthening the compliance with human rights and the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals. Finally, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) was established in 2008, further contributing to the reconstruction of the country by offering political advice and support to the training of national security forces.[21]

The United Nations Department of Political Affairs (DPA) is in charge of political missions and peacebuilding support offices related to conflict resolution and mediation in West Africa. The DPA monitors regional and national political developments and gathers data on the potential escalation of violent conflict with the purpose of enabling efficient policy responses to address such threats to peace and security. The DPA also offers support to the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG), his envoys, the political missions and other attempts of the UN to solve conflict and prevent crisis.

The United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) is a UN regional office for conflict prevention and peacebuilding and reports to DPA. UNOWA works in several fields of peace and security in West Africa, including governance, security sector reform, human rights and gender issues. A small mediation unit at the office supports the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the UN who, in collaboration with ECOWAS, plays a key diplomacy and mediation role. UNOWA maintains close collaboration with ECOWAS and the African Union on matters of peace and security for the region and has also developed common strategies on how to address crises and unconstitutional changes of governments in some of the countries in the region. UNOWA and the ECOWAS Commission also cooperate closely on a joint programme for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in which UNOWA provides support for the implementation of ECOWAS protocols and frameworks related to conflict prevention and resolution.

The role of **individual countries** as actors within conflict resolution in West Africa should be emphasised as well. Nigeria represents one of the most powerful regional players. As a consequence of strong historical ties, the United Kingdom has influence on Anglophone countries. The other European country exerting influence in West Africa is undoubtedly France, illustrated best by its interventions in successive crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and more recently in Mali. Finally, the US played a key role in Liberia by contributing to the reconstruction in the aftermath of the civil war and by deploying 4000 military personnel in 2003 to support the UN mission.

2.4. Religious and Traditional Actors

On the side-lines of formal mediation conducted by state structures and the international community, traditional and religious actors also play a prominent role in West Africa. In the sub-region, religion represents a cornerstone in the social construction of identity and culture and therefore also has the potential to provide for a social and cultural foundation in the search for peace. Religious actors play an important role through dimensions of forgiveness, confession and mercy and in the religious understanding of these conceptsi. The legitimacy often linked with religious actors as mediators also derives from their perceived moral and spiritual authority. [23]

In **Liberia** and **Sierra Leone**, the main religious actors involved in both conflict analysis and mediation are the heads of religious organisations, including the inter-religious council and the council of churches and that of Imams/Sheiks. The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL), founded in 1997, pursued a very active role in mediating in the conflict in Sierra Leone by conducting dialogue with the fighting factions, listening to their complaints and condemning human rights violations. The Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL) played a major role in mediating the Liberian crisis, including the drafting of the peace accord. The inter-religious council was considered a credible and legitimate actor in the eyes of the population, including the government and the rebels. This was partially due to the fact that the council was perceived as a neutral mediator with no ulterior motives than those of religion.[24]

In **Guinea-Bissau** and **Guinea**, the primary roles of traditional and religious actors are within the field of mediation. The key actors of Guinea-Bissau that were involved in the recent mediation process are members of an association called 'Cidadãos de Boa Vontade' (Citizens of good will). Composed primarily of religious influential people of the civil society, this association has always been present in mediation processes of the violent crisis in Guinea-Bissau since the politico-military conflict of June 1998. Within Guinea, religious actors such as the Imam of the Great Mosque of Conakry and the Bishop of Conakry play key roles in mediation processes.

In the case of **Côte d'Ivoire**, it is primarily the Supreme Council of Traditional Chiefs and Kings of Côte d'Ivoire and the Forum of Religious Confessions, which, since the coup d'état in 2000 to the present day, mediates and proposes peaceful resolutions to conflicts. With regard to **Burkina Faso**, the Supreme Council of the customary and traditional leadership of the country pursued the role of advising holders of customary authority with regard to the organising of elections, with the purpose of contributing to the resolution of the conflict.

2.5. Civil Society Actors

While the contributions of religious and traditional actors have been more concentrated within the field of mediation, civil society provides a strong contribution in the area of conflict analysis, where a variety of different peacebuilding NGOs are engaged. Civil society in West Africa has made a significant contribution in documenting experiences, early warning and response, advocating against the proliferation of small arms, contributing towards inclusive peace agreements and post-conflict reconstruction, as well promoting the inclusion of women in peace processes. Civil society organisations (CSOs) within the West African societies consist of fairly different actors, ranging from community-based organisations to trade associations, research institutions and service providers. There is, however, a large number of CSOs in West Africa that work in the fields of both conflict analysis and peacebuilding.

The contribution of civil society to conflict analyses is particularly important within the West African context, where the different governments have varying levels of capacity to conduct analysis themselves. In some cases contributions from civil society organisations regarding early warning signals for internal conflicts are critical to the overall national security analysis. It is important to note that the ECOWAS Early Warning System, ECOWARN, relies in part on a network of civil society organisations (especially WANEP) for furnishing information to their system.

In both **Sierra Leone** and **Liberia**, civil society actors were key players in the mediation of the major conflicts. It is the many actions of civil society that can be noted as critical catalysts in bringing all parties to the negotiating table. At the peace talks of the final peace agreements for both countries, in Accra and Lome, civil society was present giving input, unblocking stalled proceedings and generally supporting negotiations. They also played important roles in raising awareness of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) by documenting experiences and sharing these with the public.[25]

Operating regionally, the NGO **West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)** has been active in conflict resolution and mediation in all the countries discussed above. This organisation focuses specifically on collaborative models for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and possesses country offices in all 15 ECOWAS member states with the Head Office in Ghana and a Liaison office at ECOWAS. Women in peacebuilding (WIPNET) represents a specific programme within WANEP that was launched in 2001 with the aim of enhancing the capacity of women to participate effectively in peacebuilding efforts within West Africa and incorporate gender perspectives into all peace processes[26].

Since 2000, WANEP and other organisations have contributed to enhanced early warning mechanisms through the establishment of focal points in different regions.

The NGO **Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET)** engages regionally for the empowerment of women for their full and equal participation in all levels and aspects of peace processes in West Africa. Through well-established regional networks, MARWOPNET engages in different tracks of diplomacy in each country within the Mano River Union.[27]

The Abuja-based **West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF)** is a platform for different civil society organisations in West Africa. Its primary aim is to allow for civil society contribution to ECOWAS work for regional integration and stability. This platform brings together West African CSOs to share ideas and collaborate, serving as a networking umbrella to enhance relationships between CSOs in West Africa on the one hand, and between CSOs and ECOWAS on the other. Information also flows in the other direction with WACSOF ensuring CSOs in the region are better acquainted with ECOWAS' work. WACSOF's work relies on focal points in the ECOWAS member states to share and feed information into the policy and advocacy work targeted at ECOWAS.

The numerous conflict analysis and mediation actors presented in the previous chapter apply a variety of approaches and tools that are actor and context specific. Furthermore, there is no common interpretation of the concept of a 'method' amongst the different types of actors within the region of West Africa. For the purpose of this handbook, the concepts of a method or a tool will not be defined in exclusive terms nor will they be further elaborated. Rather, the aim of this chapter is to highlight the main approaches of regional actors in conflict analysis and mediation in those terms that these actors themselves define them, thus giving a practical understanding of the context. Similarities in the methods and approaches used can be noted amongst the different actors. The application of interviews, group discussion, seminars and workshops are presented as tools within all the categories of actors studied. Furthermore, the regional actors seem to generally agree on certain qualities of a mediator that are crucial for the success of a mediation process. Such qualities include compassion, the ability to attain the trust of the conflict parties in question, the capacity to listen, a profound knowledge of the conflict and the ability to take into account the cultural, historical, ethnic and social dimension of each context in which a conflict occurs.

3.1. Government Actors

The methodologies used in the different countries were often a combination of both conflict analysis and mediation, which does not seem surprising considering the fact that the same government actors often serve the role of both analysts and mediators. However, these methods are developed more on an ad hoc basis dependent on the respective situation.

In **Sierra Leone**, the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) conducts conflict analysis through the gathering of information from community members or relevant persons in institutions. Provincial and District Security Committees (PROSECs and DISECs) were also established as part of the Office of National Security (ONS) in order to ensure information processing networks. These served as localised security coordinating bodies and early warning mechanisms by providing the ONS access to information and early warning signals on local levels[28]. The strengthening of civil decision-making bodies as part of the security sector reform (SSR) of Sierra Leone has also served as an approach to constrain the power of armed forces as a means to strengthen aspects of peace and security[29]. This has, however, had certain limitations when being translated into reality and civilian oversight systems remain weak.

In the case of **Liberia**, the 'Poverty Reduction Strategy' (PRS) has raised concerns among the people as to whether the document sufficiently addresses aspects of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

It has, however, been considered as a tool for a more inclusive approach in the sense that it allowed for the input from several civil society actors with regard to its peacebuilding element. A further attempt at building peace is the proposition by the government of Liberia to create a 'Reparations Trust Fund' to compensate for the losses of victims of the civil war.[30]

Moreover, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia investigates human rights abuses and paves the way for reconciliation. The primary method of the TRC is the collection of testimonies from private individuals in the form of narrative statements of past abuses. While creating an understanding of the experiences of the Liberian people, this approach also serves as an opportunity for both victims of violence and perpetrators to tell their story and the truth about the past, which is intended to increase prospects for forgiveness and reconciliation. Until today, the TRC has collected approximately 16,800 testimonies and statements within Liberia and has through statistical analysis mapped out these different experiences and patterns of violence.

While mediation capacities in **Guinea-Bissau** are rather weak, the conflict analysis structures are fairly advanced. The National Institute of Research and Studies (INEP), applies a variety of methods with certain having a more direct relation to conflict analysis than others. INEP has been engaged in analysing local strategies for conflict management in Guinea-Bissau, in which its methodological framework combines theoretical debate with fieldwork-based research about cases of conflicts and comparative analysis of strategies for conflict management within Guinea-Bissau and other countries in West Africa.i

With regard to **Guinea**, the government structure is still in the process of strengthening capacities in both conflict analysis and mediation. With the lack of an established framework for these processes, practitioners of the government make use of certain guiding principles to the process of mediation and conflict resolution, including impartiality of the mediator, profound knowledge of the conflict context, capacity to listen, and capacity to find compromise.

In **Burkina Faso**, practitioners involved in mediation processes state that with the lack of a proper institution responsible for conflict analysis, the best asset is to make use of their own experience and know-how. As a response to the socio-political crisis that broke out in the end of the 1990s, the approach pursued by the 'Council of the Wise' was to put forward recommendations to establish the rule of law, institutional reform and promote the fight against corruption. Some of these recommendations, including the revision of the electoral law, were implemented by the government. However, as previously described, the actual impact was limited.

The 'Council of the Wise' also proposed the launch of a set of measures to promote truth and justice, inter alia through introducing a 'day of forgiveness'. This proposal was however not perceived so positively by the people, since it was considered that the two first phases had been left unimplemented and people were just expected to forgive each other without truth and justice.

As a response to this resentment of the proposal, the government called upon traditional and religious leaders to campaign for the 'day of forgiveness'. During this transitional process, the government also established state committees and commissions to which traditional and religious leaders that hold credibility in the eyes of the population were invited to participate. This was a means of increasing the support of the people and therefore promoting peace.[32]

Government actors in **Côte d'Ivoire** in the field of conflict analysis usually make use of methodologies that have already been applied to other existing conflicts. In addition to this, universities and research centres also organise seminars and workshops with experts where reflections are made on conflict analysis related issues.

That said, the Commission on Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation (CDVR) has developed a process consisting of a number of components that are aimed at promoting reconciliation and preventing future conflicts. This includes a thorough and honest examination of the social problems and challenges that the Ivorian society is facing. Furthermore, the Commission is charged with conducting public surveys with the purpose of identifying the triggers of the events during the war and their impact on the lives of people. These surveys are organised as public hearings that allow both victims and perpetrators of the conflict to talk to each other. By these means the purpose is to ultimately sow the seeds for forgiveness among the population. Another means of the CDVR is the call for reparations, which it states will consist of material, moral and psychological support to compensate for the loss incurred by the victims of the war. This reparation process aims to ensure that the perpetrators of violence will be reintegrated into society after serving their sentences, which aims to prevent future conflict[33]. The 'roadmap to peace' has not yet been fully implemented and the CDVR struggles to implement the different elements of its mandate. Challenges also remain due to the fact that the mandate of the CDVR is limited to 2 years and should be completed by the end of 2013. Taking into consideration that the preparation phase took one year, there are serious concerns that the impact of the Commission will be limited, despite clear approaches.

3.2. Regional Actors

The **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** has a large toolbox in both conflict analysis and resolution. With regard to conflict resolution, the methodologies can be divided into three different categories. The first is political declarations, which consists of, amongst others, the protocol of non-aggression, which was adopted in 1978. In addition, the protocol on democracy and good governance lays out conditions for the conduct of free, transparent and peaceful elections as a means to prevent the occurrence of electoral violence as well as setting out governance guidelines in accordance with democratic principles. Moreover, the protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security identifies guidelines to promote the consolidation of peace, security and stability within the Community. This protocol represents a political commitment by the member states.

These protocols could be described as diplomatic tools by which ECOWAS aims to influence the behaviour of member states and strengthen conditions for building peace. Furthermore, ECOWAS applies several economic and trade measures that may serve as an incentive for peace.[34]

The final means in the category for conflict resolution lies in the spectrum of 'hard security', which aims at directly contributing to building peace through military and civilian interventions. The primary tool within this category is the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). The ESF is composed of a Main Force and a Task Force. The Task Force comprises 2773 personnel and can, in theory, be deployed within 30 days and sustained for 90 days. The Main Force, composed of approximately 1000 more troops is aimed at complementing the Task Force and can be deployed within 90 days. The challenge within the methodological framework of ECOWAS is the fact that the actual implementation relies fully on the willingness of the member states, both in terms of the implementation of diplomatic protocols and trade measures as well as contributions of personnel for military and civilian interventions.[35]

Concerning methods for conflict analysis, ECOWAS has developed an Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), which is an observation and monitoring tool for conflict prevention. It enables media institutions, other stakeholders and different national actors to channel information into the ECOWAS system and more specifically to the Early Warning Directorate. ECOWARN is implemented in partnership with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), and it consists of approximately 45 field reporters as well as a database that gives indicators for monitoring conflict and peace. Early warning reports and briefings as well as mission assessments are produced periodically.[36] With regard to the institutional structure of ECOWARN, the core of the system is the Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC) that receives information from the field through four different observation and monitoring zones (OMZ). These zones are covered by regional bureaus and have the responsibility of monitoring and gathering information on a certain number of countries in the region and feeding this information into the ECOWARN system. These zonal bureaus are located in Gambia, Burkina Faso, Liberia and Benin and they produce regular reporting. ECOWAS practitioners have also stated phone calls and other informal means of communicating with their individual, professional and personal networks as important means for obtaining information on a certain conflict.

Moreover, the 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) contains an early warning component that calls for the production of reports and formulation of preventive response options for ECOWAS policy makers as a means to facilitate interventions that prevent conflict. Furthermore, the Framework contains a preventive diplomacy section that calls for strengthened capacities in this field through good offices, mediation and facilitation based on dialogue. ECOWAS may deploy a special envoy, a mediator or Council of the Wise members to conduct a fact-finding mission on a potentially alarming crisis and advise the President of ECOWAS on suitable means to prevent the crisis from escalating. The zonal bureaus and the Council of the Wise also update the President of ECOWAS on rising tensions in the member states that may pose a threat to peace and security.

Though the progress of the **Mano River Union (MRU)** in the realm of peace and security has been hampered by the violence and armed conflicts that have afflicted West Africa in the past decades, initiatives have been taken to establish and enhance structures and tools for conflict resolution and prevention. Recent years have witnessed attempts at enhancing border security, but the coming years will ultimately demonstrate the nature and quality of the application of capacities and approaches at conflict resolution that the MRU is currently in the process of acquiring.

The **African Union (AU)** provides a continental framework for responses in terms of conflict prevention, resolution and management. On an institutional level, the AU's primary means for mediation and conflict resolution is the African Standby Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise (POW) and the AU Peace Fund. The Peace Fund provides financial resources for efforts of conflict resolution and especially the peace support missions. The ASF is a peacekeeping force with civilian and military components that can serve as a rapid reaction force for violent conflicts on the continent. The force is based in five different regions. It does, however, face many challenges and is still being strengthened. The Panel of the Wise (POW) is made up of five 'highly respected' individuals with diverse backgrounds. The Panel may either act on the request of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) or the Chairperson of the Commission to support their respective conflict resolution efforts.

Additional institutional structures for promoting peace and security include the AU Military Staff Committee (MSC), consisting of senior military officers and offering advice to the PSC on matters of military security, as well as the AU field offices, which are producing reports on socio-political developments and which support peacebuilding activities in the region.

The AU approach for obtaining conflict analysis and early warning data relies on a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) that is structured around an observation and monitoring centre, the 'Situation Room' based at AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Within the framework of the CEWS, information is gathered and compiled into reports that focus on potential, actual and post-conflict situations on the continent. These reports are then communicated to early warning analysts that further evaluate the situation and identify potential scenarios of how the situation is likely to develop. The CEWS also includes continuous monitoring in the form of Africa News Briefs and Daily News Highlights. ECOWAS is mandated to provide the Situation Room with conflict analysis information produced within the framework of ECOWARN. ECOWAS has also posted liaison officers at AU headquarters with the purpose of enhancing coordination between the two organisations.

3.3. International Actors

The **United Nations (UN)** has a variety of means for supporting conflict resolution of which only a few elements will be mentioned in this chapter. The primary and probably the most widely known mechanism of the UN are the UN peacekeeping missions. Though serving under the name of peacekeeping missions, this category of interventions includes several aspects from operations that aim at monitoring a ceasefire agreement to missions that support security sector reform in the post-conflict phase. As in the case of ECOWAS, the UN operations consist of civilian, military and police personnel, depending on the nature of the intervention.

Additionally, the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) of the Department for Political Affairs (DPA) was established in 2006 and is mandated to provide advisory, financial and logistical support to peace processes. This unit also promotes capacity building in terms of mediation of regional and sub-regional organisations. The UN mediation support structure also comprises the UN Standby Team of Mediation Experts, a group that can be deployed to provide assistance and advice to mediators in a certain conflict, including in West Africa if needed.i Another set of experts that also works in close collaboration with the MSU are the Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs). The PDAs collaborate with the UN Country teams and engage in conflict analysis, mediation, dialogue and advisory roles on behalf of the UN.

Further relevant conflict resolution mechanisms of the DPA are the envoys of the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG), the political missions and good offices. The UNSG may deploy envoys or senior representatives to field operations with the purpose of offering support for conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes in a fragile situation. Furthermore the DPA may deploy political missions in order to provide support and advice in peace negotiations, or in order to monitor peacebuilding activities. Finally, the good offices can be used to support mediation processes and offer aid to those UNSG special advisors engaged in such processes.

With regard to conflict analysis, there is in fact no UN-wide early warning system to collect, assess and feed conflict analysis information into the system. Although the early warning data exist within the UN as a whole, there is a lack of capability to analyse and incorporate this information into a central early warning system. Instead, several UN early warning mechanisms are managed separately by the different country-based programmes, including by UN bodies and agencies as well as ad hoc initiatives that conduct their own conflict monitoring and assessments. An example of this is the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) early warning system on food and agriculture, or the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, which is charged with collecting information on massive violations of human rights in order to alert the Secretary-General on conflict situations that may escalate into genocide. Furthermore, the DPA supports UN investigative mandates and fact-finding missions, through which a UN-independent mission can be deployed to investigate and provide data on a crisis situation or other alarming circumstances for international peace and security.

There are also several relevant **international organisations** that conduct analysis on West African conflicts applying methods of their own. For instance, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and the International Crisis Group (ICG publish each year a variety of reports, policy briefings and other relevant documents that constitute conflict analysis. The Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), based in South Africa but which also has an office in Dakar, also produce regular analysis on conflicts.

3.4. Religious and Traditional Actors

One of the assets that religious leaders can use in conflict resolution is their established regional and global networks, from which they can attain support. This support finds expression through mosques, churches, temples, community centres and educational institutions, allowing these actors to reach out to people by virtue of their status[38]. In societies characterised by poor governance and a lack of capability of the state to address societal problems, the traditional and religious actors may serve as the only accessible institution that is capable of responding to the needs of the citizens and therefore often represent an important leadership in the eyes of people.

Methods that are considered specifically traditional in West Africa include the 'palaver hut' and the 'kinship of pleasantry'. The 'palaver hut' or the 'palaver tree' as it is called in some countries in West Africa, is a traditional community method for conflict resolution. The name derives from the fact that citizens have traditionally been gathering under a palaver tree or in a palaver hut to discuss social affairs and matters relating to the welfare of the citizens, and to resolve conflicts. These served as respected spaces for discussion where community disputes were settled[39]. In Liberia, they also served as a forum where perpetrators could confess their war crimes and be forgiven by the victims and survivors or be subject to some form of community sanction[40].

The 'kinship of pleasantry' serves more as a means for conflict prevention than the settlement of disputes. It is based on ethnic and cultural pluralism within and between communities. It is difficult to explain it in exclusive terms but it makes advantage of the cultural realities of kinship for the establishment of friendly relations on the basis of humour and mockery. It creates a friendly social space in which mockery is allowed between certain categories of people as well as between tribes. The 'kinship of pleasantry' can, however, take on various expressions. It can be the bringing together of different ethnic groups to remind them about cultural legends of the people of a certain country or about traditional ancestral pacts between different communities. It can be a conversation on the street where, for instance, people from different communities create a relaxed atmosphere by mocking each other in various ways, often using expressions that build on traditional stereotypes of a certain tribe or ethnicity. This kind of pleasantry between tribes can often contribute to the dissolving of negative tensions and therefore the prevention of conflict.[41]

While religious and traditional actors are to a certain extent overlapping categories, some methods can nevertheless be described as specifically religious. In recent decades, the impact of religion as a driver of conflict has often been highlighted, but it is more rare that religion as a notion for mediation and peacebuilding has been subject to attention. Religious actors have, however, made substantial contributions to efforts for peace. Such actors may mobilise religious narratives to motivate conflict parties in trying to transform their relationship by emphasising values that may create empathy and understanding between the conflict parties. Ultimately it can contribute to dissolving misperceptions about each other. While values such as forgiveness, love and compassion are not exclusively religious, they can nevertheless be mobilised in a religious context for the purpose of reconciliation.[42]

Many prominent religious actors within West Africa have made substantial contributions to conflict resolution. During the civil war in Sierra Leone, the Inter Religious Council pursued dialogue with all the conflict parties and contributed to efforts for reconciliation. In Liberia, the Council also played a central role in the peace negotiations and drafted the Liberian Peace Accord that finally was approved by the conflict parties. The religious actors further contributed to making the peace process legitimate in the eyes of the local people.

3.5. Civil Society Actors

In West Africa, civil society actors are to a large extent involved in both conflict analysis and mediation. The role they play, especially in conflict analysis, deserves to be highlighted bearing in mind that other types of actors in the region are less strongly involved in this particular field. The role of civil society in peace processes in West Africa has also increased during the previous decades. The numerous violent conflicts that the region has faced, and the continuous inability of the fighting factions to bring about peace, have demonstrated the necessity of including civil society actors in peace processes in order to find sustainable outcomes.[43]

Civil society organisations (CSOs) in West Africa pursue various different activities that aim at promoting prospects for sustainable peace. During periods of violent conflict, civil society often serves as the primary provider of basic services and humanitarian assistance, which is not necessarily conducted by peacebuilding CSOs per se, but nevertheless constitutes a crucial component in sustaining the basic functioning of a society. On the negative side, civil society has often been accused of aligning with political parties and fighting factions in West Africa and to a large extent also suffers from a lack of funding that prevents it from taking effective action.

CSOs in West Africa often work in the perspective of multi-track mediation when carrying out peacebuilding and mediation activities, including informal shuttle diplomacy and advocacy between the different tracks. Shuttle diplomacy has especially been applied by women's groups in the civil wars of Liberia and Sierra Leone. Examples of such groups are the Mano River Women's Peace Network (see below), the Liberian Women's Initiative, Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace, and the Campaign for Good Governance. With regard to the civil war in Sierra Leone, women's groups were one of the first in the society to support the engagement in dialogue with the RUF at a time when the conflict parties themselves preferred to pursue the use of weapons rather than sit down and talk to the 'enemy'. Through advocacy, pressure could be exerted on Track I actors to take action, and the media have been used to involve the population in the peace process.

In **Liberia**, CSOs were not that common before the war broke out, but during the first phase of the civil war a marked increase could be witnessed in the number of CSOs specifically involved in conflict resolution. A large number of human rights organisations and women's groups are engaged in peacebuilding, for instance organisations such as the Liberia Women Initiative (LWI) and the Center for Law and Human Rights Education (CLHRE). Furthermore, civil society actors participate in different forms of capacity building by organising training, as illustrated by the training organised by the Liberian NGO Ushahidi on the use of mobile phones for the sharing of early warning signals in Liberia.

In **Sierra Leone** in 1995, approximately 60 CSOs, including the women's movement for peace and the Sierra Leone Labour's Congress built a broad national constituency with the purpose of exerting pressure on the government and the RUF to come together and negotiate. This group of local civil society organisations named themselves the National Coordinating Committee for Peace (NCCP) and engaged in organising conferences and workshops on the subject. This group also advocated for the media with the objective of transforming certain conceptual perceptions about the conflict and pressured the media to not label the RUF as rebels, but a fighting faction, as a means of paving the way for a more favourable atmosphere for dialogue between the conflict parties.

In **Guinea**, CSOs have to a large extent been the primary service providers for the population in areas neglected by the government. Civil society in Guinea has also conducted training programmes on human rights for the police and the military with the aim of reducing violence and human rights abuses by these forces. Through media-focused advocacy, civil society tries to improve the accountability of authorities with regard to human rights by raising awareness among the population on these issues. Though not conflict resolution in the strict sense, these activities contribute to enhancing prospects for peace and may therefore serve as a means for preventive diplomacy.

More than a hundred CSOs can be found in **Guinea-Bissau** engaging in peacebuilding through community radio advocacy and human rights sensitisation. Through contributing to the construction of schools, literacy training and other development activities, the civil society organisations also promote peacebuilding efforts more indirectly by creating a more prosperous society.

The structure and capacity of civil society in **Burkina Faso** operates under several pieces of legislation concerning the status of civil society, giving an impression of an improved social space for these organisations to function.

Civil society organisations in **Côte d'Ivoire** have increased in number since the 1990s but many are considered to be aligned with political parties and therefore do not always enjoy the trust of the citizens. During the civil war itself, CSOs defending human rights and offering humanitarian assistance were often subject to violence, therefore constraining the room for manoeuver of these organisations. Civil society in Côte d'Ivoire, however, often plays the role of mediating in community-based conflicts in cases where other efforts have been unsuccessful. In these cases, civil society strives to represent an impartial actor and therefore gain the trust of the conflict parties.

During the war and the electoral crisis, CSOs in Côte d'Ivoire also used local radio stations to inform the citizens about incidents of the crisis, trying to contribute to the deconstruction of misperceptions about the war that allowed for continued violence.

Certain individual CSOs in the region of West Africa have been particularly influential with regard to conflict analysis and resolution. The **West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)**, being an implementing partner of ECOWARN, uses its networks on the grassroots level to develop early warning reports and assessments that are fed into the ECOWAS mechanism.[44] West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network (WARN) of WANEP is a tool for conflict prevention where socio-political situations are analysed, relevant policy-makers informed of the analysis, and possible options for addressing alarming situations proposed[45]. In addition to engaging in conflict analysis, WANEP is also active in regional peacebuilding efforts, with a special emphasis on the role of women.

The **Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET)**, is a regional actor that pursues several different approaches in promoting peace both through conflict analysis and dialogue. MARWOPNET has assisted local authorities within the Mano River Union in conflict analysis and the network primarily acquires early warning data from communicating with local and traditional women groups within the sub-region. Concerning peacebuilding, MARWOPNET has taken advantage of its extensive regional networks to try to form a broad constituency within the region in order to exert pressure on national leaders to take more action for peace. Through its strong networks with UN agencies, ECOWAS and the African Union, MARWOPNET has been able to bring to their attention the suffering of women and children during conflicts, such as the poor conditions, particularly of women and children, in refugee camps in the sub-region.

A common feature for the different types of actors in the realm of peace and security in West Africa is that the same actors often simultaneously engage in both conflict analysis and mediation. Practitioners in the field often feel they are one and the same or can be inter-changed, i.e. one can come before the other. On the other hand, there are several institutions and actors that are engaged in either conflict analysis or mediation. In order for analysis to be incorporated to mediation efforts, it is therefore required that linkages and information flows be created between those actors charged with conflict analysis and those processes in which mediation strategies are designed.

4.1. Government Actors

The governmental actors within the context of West Africa do not possess a comprehensive toolbox for the analysis of conflict and, to the extent that state-related institutions are engaged in the field, the link to those institutions and actors that are involved in the mediation process is fairly weak in general, though there are also cases that demonstrate otherwise. Analysis does not always precede mediation, which suggests that conflict analysis does not feed into mediation strategy design. At the same time, governmental actors are often some of the key actors with mediation roles and have at times successfully mediated conflicts.

Despite the fact that **Liberia** in recent years clearly has invested in an enhanced structure for the analysis of conflict, the link between analysis and mediation nevertheless remains fairly weak. Conflict analysis is mostly conducted on an ad hoc basis without a clearly defined methodology. With the establishment of an 'early warning signal and response committee' by the Peace-Building Office (PBO) in Liberia, the prospects for enhancing the link between analysis and mediation have certainly increased. Obstacles to the inclusion of well-founded analysis to contribute to mediation and peacebuilding processes still need to be overcome, as actual events of mediation and conflict resolution have not always been preceded by analysis.

In the governmental structure of **Sierra Leone**, certain mechanisms have been put in place to enhance the links between conflict analysis and mediation. The Office of National Security (ONS), the institution officially responsible for conflict analysis, brings its data to the attention of the National Security Council (NSC) and therefore creates a potential link to mediation and conflict resolution. The NSC nevertheless rarely takes action on the basis of the analyses provided by the ONS and the practitioners involved in mediation do not take advantage of the conflict analysis conducted for the designing of a mediation strategy. This implies that there is in fact a degree of disconnect between the official conflict analysis institutions and the mediation processes.

Neither does the ONS share their conflict analysis with CSOs or chiefs in local communities and thus — to the extent to which these actors conduct mediation efforts — the conflict analysis of the ONS is not strongly taken into consideration. The conflict analysis of the ONS has, however, been taken into account in the conflict resolution efforts of the UN through certain ad hoc committees that provided the UN peacekeeping operations with information that they could apply when planning conflict resolution and prevention actions.

As the previous chapters indicate with regard to **Guinea** and **Guinea-Bissau**, there is a lack of an explicit link between those institutions and people that conduct conflict analysis and those state actors that are involved in the mediation process. In fact, the practitioners in mediation and conflict resolution state the utilisation of their own experience and knowledge of the context for designing and conducting mediation efforts. Conflict analysis is therefore linked to mediation only to the extent of the capacity of the mediator and her/his ability to consult sources of conflict analysis and to undertake this effectively. **Burkina Faso** shows a similar pattern as the other countries studied. Regardless of the fact that there exist government structures for conflict analysis, such as certain ministries and the Centre for Analysis of Economic and Social Policy (CAPES), there is no deliberate connection between the analysis conducted by these actors and the mediation process. The 'Council of the Wise', on the other hand, does represent an institution that engages in both conflict analysis and mediation and therefore offers a potential for conflict analysis to feed into the mediation process within the institution. The extent to which this occurs is, however, disputable.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the pattern of disconnect is also present between the actors conducting conflict analysis and those institutions and actors that are involved in the mediation process. The analysis of conflict is only one activity of those state entities engaged in research and the results of this analysis are little known within the government structure and not subject to much circulation. This circumstance evidently prevents the creation of a link between conflict analysis and mediation with regard to these actors. The Ombudsman and the Commission on Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation (CDTR) in Côte d'Ivoire represent an exception in the sense that conflict analysis and resolution is conducted within the same institution. The CDTR provides an interesting case of how analysis of conflict can actually link to the mediation process.

Overall it can be concluded that within the context of **West Africa** it seems to be fairly common that the same government institutions are involved in both conflict analysis and mediation. This circumstance leads to the assumption that, with regard to the governmental institutions, conflict analysis has fairly strong prospects for feeding into the mediation process given that analysis is conducted within the same institutions that carry out mediation. Despite this fact, the formal link nevertheless still remains relatively weak and several opportunities for conflict analysis to inform processes have not been seized.

The individuals involved in mediation and conflict resolution often refer to their own experience and know-how for successfully contributing to the mediation processes in which they are involved. While this certainly has yielded positive results, it means that if such experience is limited or biased then the mediation process is compromised. Several practitioners in the region state that they request opinions from colleagues and friends, listen to news, interact with the conflict parties, read reports of other actors involved in the mediation process including CSOs and consult research and reports of credible agencies and well-recognised think tanks in the field of conflict resolution. This serves as a means to increase their ability to understand the conflict and feed this information into the mediation process. On the other hand, some practitioners state that there are several cases in which the mediation efforts are needed urgently and hence there might simply be a lack of time to engage in analysis.

4.2. Regional Actors

The **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** has the most comprehensive and advanced structure on the African continent with regard to conflict prevention and management with the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN). The OMC represents the entity that provides the link for the conflict analysis to feed into the wider ECOWAS system where conflict resolution and mediation activities are planned and undertaken. The ECOWAS reports are sent to the relevant ECOWAS Commissioners and Directorate of Peacekeeping and Political Affairs. The link to conflict analysis is furthermore enhanced as the Directorates may also circulate information between the officials of the Early Warning and Peacekeeping Directorates as they meet and exchange information on a regularly basis. The standby forces also have access to the early warning data and can apply in the field within the framework of their mandate but do not have the possibility to make decisions for necessary action extending their mandate.

The ECOWAS Commission in turn reports to the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council (MSC) and is made up of three different configurations: the Heads of State and Government, the Ministerial and the Ambassadorial levels. The MSC is the institution that is mandated by the member states to take relevant decisions for the establishment of peace and security and which makes it the primary actor responsible for decisions on mediation and conflict resolution. The channel therefore exists for conflict analysis data to reach those relevant decision-making bodies for peace and security of ECOWAS. The Special Representatives of the President as chiefs of the peacekeeping missions have a direct link to the ECOWAS Commission and the Peacekeeping Directorate, which allows for information flow. The ECOWAS Commission furthermore reports to the Council of the Wise and may provide them with relevant conflict analysis data for the conduct of mediation and facilitation during times of crisis[46]. It can therefore be stated that the institutional structure of ECOWAS indeed provides a strong framework for conflict analysis to feed into ECOWAS conflict resolution and mediation efforts.

Furthermore, there is a link between the zonal bureaus and the President of ECOWAS on the one hand and the Council of the Wise and the President of ECOWAS on the other. This link also emphasises the role of the Council of the Wise as not just a mediating and facilitating body but also as an important entity for informing the ECOWAS decision-makers on rising tensions within the community, and thus playing a key role in prevention. At the same time, the Council of the Wise are able to link this data to mediation activities of their own. However the challenge is rather whether the Council of the Wise members in practice will apply the conflict analysis information available in designing a mediation process as they could be prevented to do so by the national authorities of a member state.

Whether in practice conflict analysis is actually linked to the mediation process is less clear and the fact that crises may escalate extremely fast may pose a challenge. In such circumstances the actual mediation process may happen in a rush with no time for either conducting new and thorough analysis or taking account of existing analysis when considering mediation options. A further structural constrain in this regard is the limited number of staff within the ECOWAS system, which indicates that the capability to process the large amount of data may be relatively low, hence posing a challenge to integrating the conflict analysis insights. In practice there is thus the risk that conflict analysis, though present in the ECOWAS system as a whole, does not always feed into the strategy design of mediation processes. [47]

Finally, perhaps the ultimate challenge that ECOWAS faces as a regional actor like most other regional and international organisations is the fact that the peace and security architecture of ECOWAS is only as strong and capable as the sum of its parts. Regardless of the potential strength and effectiveness of the links between early warning and rapid response or conflict analysis and mediation in general, the links risk becoming largely undermined when there is a lack of political will amongst the member states.

If the national authorities and decision-makers are opposed to mediation and conflict resolution activities towards a certain conflict, or if member states are reluctant or not capable of providing necessary resources to peace operations and mediation that could prevent violent conflict, ECOWAS will stand fairly impotent in front of the threats to regional peace and security. For conflict analysis to actually feed into efforts for mediation and conflict resolution, the political will of the member states is a prerequisite without which the organisation in its current structure cannot play the role that it aspires to.

The institutional structure of the **African Union (AU)** offers several channels for conflict analysis data to feed into mediation and conflict resolution processes. The early warning data of the CEWS is communicated to the PSC through the Chairperson of the Commission that is mandated to advise the PSC on threats to peace and security. The Political and Security Council (PSC) sits at the centre of the peace and security architecture of the AU, with a coordinating function with regard to all other institutional elements. As the PSC receives information and advice from the Panel of the Wise (POW), the Military Staff Committee (MSC), the African Standby Force (ASF) as well as the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), it is upon this institution to ultimately ensure the effective communication of information between the different entities engaged in both conflict analysis and resolution. Once again the presence of information sharing channels does however not always translate in practice into effective communication and as the AU suffers from constraints in both personnel and financial capacity, early warning data does not always feed into the design of peace processes.

4.3. International Actors

The United Nations (UN) does not possess a comprehensive early warning system, and therefore no system-wide mechanism for feeding early warning data into mediation efforts. The UN Department for Political Affairs (DPA) is key in monitoring and analysing global political developments and communicating this information forward to the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) and the UN Security Council (UNSC). The DPA delivers analytical reports and briefing notes to the UNSG and offers support and advice to mediation efforts, including those of good offices, UNSG envoys, as well as the UN political missions (see previous chapter). The DPA therefore represents the institution that in practice ensures that a channel exists for linking conflict analysis to the mediation tools of the organisation and the UNSG in particular. [48]

Furthermore, the DPA delivers 'horizon scanning' briefings on emerging conflicts to the UNSC on a monthly basis. Senior officials within the DPA also regularly brief the UNSC on political developments in general and those of the UN political missions in particular. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as well as the UNSG special advisors on the prevention of genocide, the responsibility to protect and other themes of expertise, offer further prospects for conflict analysis. In the region, the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) monitors and gathers information on the situation and developments in the countries.

Through regular meetings with other UN agencies and non-UN actors in West Africa, the data is shared and prospects for this information to be utilised when engaging in mediation increased. In relation to the UN peacekeeping missions in the region, conflict analysis feeds into conflict resolution at least to the extent that the mission staff is engaged in both. Whether conflict analysis in practice precedes mediation is undoubtedly more disputable. The challenge is whether the extensive flow of information can be integrated into comprehensive analysis to be used when designing peace processes, regardless of the time constraints and complex dynamic nature of circumstances on the ground. Moreover, the UN peace efforts, or absence thereof, reflect the will of the member states, especially those of the UNSC who can veto any proposed interventions.

4.4. Religious and Traditional Actors

As illustrated in the previous chapters, religious and traditional actors in West Africa have made substantial contributions to peace and mediation. These actors are, however, appointed by virtue of their moral and cultural status in society rather than on the basis of their capacities in conflict analysis. Religious and traditional mediators, such as the Interreligious Councils in Sierra Leone and Liberia do not possess an early warning unit and analysis does not always precede mediation. This by no means implies, however, that links are non-existent between conflict analysis and mediation or that the results of their analysis are flawed, though perhaps less formal.

Members of religious and traditional institutions that engage in mediation and conflict resolution systematically apply conflict analysis either to the extent that they conduct it themselves or consult other sources (for example NGO reports). However, conflict analysis may simply feed into the mediation process through the deep knowledge of the context, actors and conflict dynamics that the religious and traditional mediators in the West African societies already possess by virtue of their positions and access to society. Religious leaders may also apply religious narratives and doctrines as a means to provide further essence to the understanding of a conflict. Religion can serve as a framework within which alternative perspectives to a certain conflict can be highlighted through the use of religious language and symbols. Such approaches may offer a more profound understanding of a conflict that can be integrated when considering mediation approaches.[49]

Furthermore, the religious and traditional mediators in West Africa are rarely external to the communities they serve and thus operate in that particular context. Most often brought up within these societies, they possess a profound understanding of the conflict dynamics and the cultural, religious and societal context in which the conflict occurs. Approaches to mediation presented in the previous chapter, such as the 'kinship of pleasantry' and the 'palaver hut', are relevant in those contexts. When applying these, the knowledge of culturally-shaped values, identities, emotions and behavioural patterns inform the process of conflict resolution.

The importance of these actors extends beyond the traditional mediation processes as these actors have pursued key roles in mediation and conflict resolution at the official Track I level as well. Traditional methods of conflict resolution do not necessarily come into play in these contexts but the religious and traditional actors rather apply internationally recognised guidelines to mediation and more or less similar approaches as other mediators at that level. There have also been known instances in the resolution of conflicts in West Africa where traditional methods and beliefs were introduced into the official Track I process.

An advantage that both religious and traditional mediators possess compared to actors coming from outside the country in question is precisely their understanding of the conflict and the interests of the conflict parties that are often not publicly expressed and may therefore be little known. The advantage that derives from this broad understanding and awareness may, however, also turn into a pitfall. As the lenses through which reality is seen and interpreted have been shaped by cultural, societal and psychological dimensions, they most certainly will reflect on the mediator's understanding of a conflict and choice of approaches. As these actors are an integral part of the context in which the conflict is occurring, they may be more likely to possess personal ties and emotions to the matters at stake that may be difficult to suppress from the mediation setting. In the absence of a proper conflict analysis, the mediation process then risks becoming a reflection of the mediator's own perceptions, emotions, norms and values that are imposed on the process. Though total impartiality is often an illusion, well-founded analysis may serve to attain a more detached perspective and understanding for mediating a conflict.

4.5. Civil Society Actors

With regard to mediation, the role of peacebuilding organisations in West Africa is often at Track II level, though critical inputs to Track I levels have been made in the majority of the peace processes in the region, corresponding to the Track 1.5 approach. It is, however, the realities on the ground that determine whether there in fact is time to conduct analysis and sometimes civil society practitioners do rush into mediation and conflict resolution without proper analysis. Although conflict analysis information might exist as such within an organisation, there are not necessarily resources in terms of time and personnel to synthesise it into comprehensive reports that could be applied to mediation. As analysis does not always precede mediation, the link between the two may sometimes be undermined by such circumstances.

On the other hand, certain civil society organisations (CSOs) are specifically involved in conflict analysis and, although these organisations rarely link directly to official mediation efforts, they are irreplaceable resources for providing data. The fact that ECOWAS relies on a network of CSOs for much of the conflict analysis data that is circulated within the organisation indicates the important role of civil society in enhancing the link between conflict analysis and mediation in the context of peace and security in West Africa.

Despite the important role that West African CSOs are playing with regard to producing conflict analysis, they rarely, however, link directly to those national institutions charged with analysis, mediation or conflict resolution.

Nonetheless, CSOs in West Africa represent important actors in both conflict analysis and mediation. In addition to associating with each other's efforts, civil society actors can be key channels for feeding information to national or regional mediation processes. Furthermore, civil society can play a central role in attaining results in mediation processes at community and national levels when the official peace process has stalled.

As this handbook illustrates, there are a variety of actors and both ad hoc and permanent structures for responding to threats of peace and security that are arising in West Africa. Despite this, the actors and institutions involved in conflict resolution in the sub-region still face a number of challenges with regard to the complex context in which they operate and the somewhat limited capabilities and institutional structures put in place for enabling efficient responses. This publication has sought to contribute to a better understanding of the actors involved in conflict analysis and mediation in the region, the tools and mechanisms applied for conducting conflict analysis on the one hand, and those used for undertaking mediation and conflict resolution on the other. Light was also shed on the presence and scope of links between analysis and the design and implementation of mediation processes and conflict resolution at large.

Conducting conflict analysis for the design and conduct of mediation is fundamental. Though far from offering a comprehensive account of the origins of conflicts in West Africa, the historical chapter on the six countries studied illustrates the complex nature of some of these conflicts. Underlying causes of conflicts are often present long before violence breaks out, and interventions that neglect long-standing grievances and interests of the actors will stand little chance of achieving sustained success.

A primary challenge with regard to enabling conflict analysis to be successfully applied in mediation processes in West Africa is the fact that it is often conducted on an ad hoc basis and only once violent conflict emerges. In the absence of a clear methodology guiding the analytical process there is the risk that the information produced only sheds light on a few aspects of the conflict and distorts the overall evaluation of the situation. In addition, as effective conflict analysis is often a time-consuming process, it requires capabilities in terms of personnel that can commit themselves to the task on a more permanent basis. Finally, if analysis is conducted only once violent conflict breaks out and at a time when mediation efforts in fact should already have been deployed, the information produced with such a time constraint will most likely be limited and prospects for incorporating it into the mediation strategy design narrow. Where there are strong on going analytical systems such as the AU's CEWS and ECOWAS's ECOWARS there are still a variety of challenges related to synthesising the analysis so that it is usable by the mediation team.

The picture that has been drawn throughout the previous chapters illustrates that the situation varies quite substantially with regard to regional and national structures for the conduct of conflict analysis and mediation. In some contexts the same actors and institutions are simultaneously involved in analysis and mediation while in other circumstances those institutions conducting conflict analysis are different from those active in mediation. This is not in itself an obstacle to effective conflict resolution, but may, however, become one when links between institutions engaged in analysis on the one hand, and mediation on the other, are absent.

This indeed reflects the circumstances in certain countries in West Africa that would benefit from creating mechanisms and structures through which information could be shared between different government entities as well as between those entities and civil society.

In most countries, much stands to be gained from improving channels for information sharing between different types of actors. Stronger roles and capacities of civil society actors to be involved in mediation processes themselves could increase the chances of conflict analysis produced by these actors to be applied in mediation. With countries such as Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire possessing few or no government institutions charged with conflict analysis in the first place, there is also a strong need to enhance the conflict analysis capacities of those governmental entities active or closely associated with mediation in these countries.

That said, a number of positive experiences can be drawn from the region as well. With a decade-long civil war on its shoulders, Sierra Leone has developed institutions and mechanisms that at least are attempting to allow early warning data and analysis to feed into mediation efforts conducted in the country. The Office of National Security (ONS) provides a link for information sharing between government entities as well as between government and civil society. In recent years, Liberia has also started the process of enhancing governmental structures in conflict analysis that could be used in mediation processes. These two countries, have moved forward in trying to decrease the gap between analysis and mediation. As civil society organisations in other countries engage in peacebuilding and increase the sharing of information with government actors, another step is taken in the right direction.

Important insights can also be drawn from ECOWAS. In order to complement national and local structures for mediation and conflict resolution, it has developed a comprehensive system for producing conflict analysis that is shared with its various entities. Acknowledging the important role that civil society plays in contributing to efforts of peace in West Africa, ECOWAS has opened a channel with civil society, through which ECOWAS practitioners gain early warning data from the field to complement that of their zonal bureaus. Channels have also been created for communicating this information forward to those ECOWAS departments and structures involved in mediation. Despite the challenges of ensuring that the conflict analysis available will, in fact, be applied in ECOWAS-led mediation processes, the institutional framework can be considered as successful and innovative. Communication channels exist between ECOWAS and the early warning structures of the AU that may apply the information when designing conflict resolution processes in West Africa.

Although the UN lacks a system-wide mechanism comparable to that of ECOWAS, it does, however, possess its own institutional architecture through which conflict analysis can be accessed by the relevant institutions involved in peace processes. Both ECOWAS and the UN, however, face challenges that go beyond their institutional framework of conflict analysis and mediation. That said, the fact remains that individual member states can to a large extent prevent these organisations from taking appropriate action, even though it would be recommended on the basis of the conflict analysis data available.

Furthermore, it was demonstrated that actors involved in mediation and conflict resolution often already possess a firm knowledge and analysis of a certain conflict. As a result of either conducting systematic analysis themselves or by virtue of their social positions and long-standing experience from a particular society, certain actors successfully apply conflict analysis in their respective conflict resolution and mediation efforts. This type of knowledge and analysis, while not formal, can be extremely valuable for effective peace processes. Needless to say, local civil society organisations, government practitioners and religious and traditional leaders demonstrate this case very well. When pursuing the role of a mediator, these actors may however become subject to certain pitfalls, such as asserting their own expectations and prejudices on the mediation process. Awareness of this and a critical reflection of the potential risks that it implies for the outcome of the process are the best ways to strive towards maintaining at least a minimum degree of impartiality when pursuing analysis and mediation.

While armed conflicts and violence keep on occurring in West Africa, there are signs of increased efforts to address their resurgence. Though the success of some of those efforts can be questioned, it is evident that in the previous decade several structures and mechanisms for more efficient peacebuilding and conflict resolution have been established and enhanced by local, national, regional and international actors in the context of West Africa.

Enhanced capacity to link conflict analysis to mediation processes is certainly not a guarantee for successful mediation and conflict resolution efforts. Even a mediation process that is designed in accordance with what the most extensive conflict analysis data suggests may fail to establish peace. Reality has shown that peace processes are dependent on a variety of other factors that come into play in the context of conflict. External circumstances, such as the sudden death of a political leader or the unwillingness of the conflict parties to engage in efforts for peace, may undermine the process. Nevertheless, it is evident that each course of action taken for resolving conflicts that lacks a deeper understanding of the conflict and consequences of potential actions may, in the worst-case scenario, result in increased levels of violence. With the future of West Africa lying in the hands of all these local, national, regional and international actors that exert power or play a role in peace processes in the region, it is fundamental to take into consideration how to best frame peace processes and how sound conflict analysis can be applied effectively to serve this purpose.

Notes

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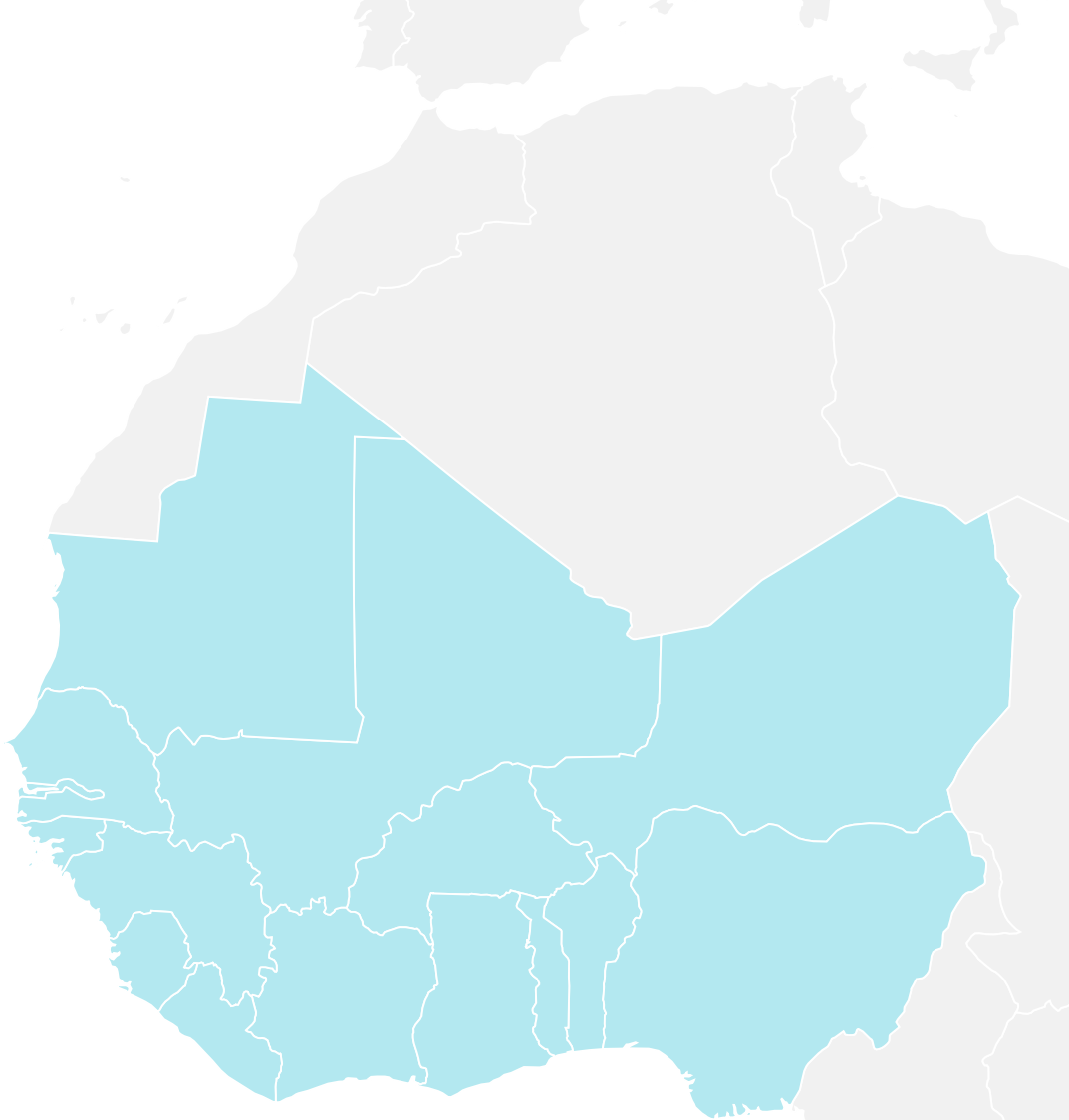
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