



## Conflict Systems and Risk Assessment in West Africa

Joint ECOWAS/CSAO Program Experts Meeting  
Azalaï Grand Hôtel, Bamako (Mali), 2-5 June 2009

### Presentation Note

#### 1. Context

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##### ***ECOWAS role and mandate***

In accordance with Article 58 of the Revised Treaty and in compliance with Article 23 paragraphs (1) and (2) of the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security, the Early Warning Department is responsible for data collection, analyses and preparation of reports to be used by the President of the Commission, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas. This would involve developing tools to facilitate decision-making with a view towards conflict prevention.

To effectively carry out this mandate, the Early Warning Department works closely with the United Nations organisations, the African Union, research centers, civil society organisations and other relevant International and regional organisations.

##### ***Partnership in support of Early Warning and Rapid Response***

Within the framework of a strategic partnership on governance and conflict prevention, the Early Warning Department has drafted, with the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC/OECD), a three year joint programme based on:

- ✓ establishment of a framework in which to improve knowledge and analysis related to conflict dynamics and systems;
- ✓ Risk assessment in the 15 member States;
- ✓ Involvement of civil society and regional expertise in the implementation of early warning and prevention strategies.

The meeting held in Bamako is a follow-up to the program launched in Conakry from 16 to 18 December 2008. It will validate a work programme based on priority actions for 2009 and define modalities for its implementation.

## **2. The ECOWAS Early Warning System Approach, related issues**

**The concept of conflict systems** is the result of analysing conflicts and monitoring their dynamics and evolutions. In West Africa, examining conflict situations in the geo-political area of the Mano River countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) as well as in the Senegambian zones (the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal) indicates that conflict systems exist. The meeting in Bamako should examine the usefulness and functionality of a regional and systemic approach.

**Risk assessment** is a governance tool for prevention and a key element in all development strategies. Most international and regional agencies use it. The risk assessment of countries should take into account the context as well as regional and sub-regional dynamics having a strong national impact on peace, security and development. The meeting should address how risk assessment can and should support the early warning and response policy and mechanism.

The ability of analysts to understand the causes of conflict and conflict dynamics in the sub-region is key to the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response System (ECOWARN). This strategic thinking process is essential in order to develop decision and prevention tools. A relevant approach of these conflict systems (intra-state and transnational) and their dynamics should contribute to improving risk assessment capacities in each country and/or groups of countries. Studying conflict systems in the region should provide analysts with a broader and better understanding of conflict. The seminars which will be held regularly throughout the region shall cover socio-political, economic, historic as well as international dimensions of conflict.

It is also crucial to understand the spillover effects of crises which shape conflict systems in West Africa. Conflicts are never isolated incidents. They have a domino effect. A conflict in one country will impact its neighbors and beyond. Two examples best illustrate the impact of conflict in the sub-region: i) the Liberian civil war which began in 1989 with the role played by diamond trafficking and its impact on other Mano River countries (Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire); and ii) the Casamance conflict in Senegambia with the MFDC<sup>1</sup> separatists which affected Senegal, the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. A strategic analysis such as that foreseen in the Early Warning System should consider this dimension.

The involvement of civil society, regional and international expertise, research institutes and other actors is essential in the programme's implementation.

Over the long-term, the country risk assessment and conflict systems study will cover the entire region. Each year, the action plan will give priority to selected countries. In 2009, the study will focus on Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire.

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<sup>1</sup> Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance.

### 3. Objectives

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- ✓ **Involve sub-regional networks and expertise** in the implementation of the programme on conflict systems and risk assessment;
- ✓ **Follow-up the Conakry workshop conclusions and recommendations on conflict systems;**
- ✓ **Finalise, validate and define modalities and conditions for the implementation of the action plan** on risk assessment and the analyses on dynamics and deep-seated causes of conflict in West Africa;
- ✓ **Define specific approaches, the methodology, orientations and modalities** of risk assessment in three selected priority countries.

### 4. Schedule of Sessions

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The meeting will be divided into two complementary parts:

- **The first two days (from 2 to 3 June)** will focus on the regional approach in the analysis and political aspects of conflicts. Within this framework, conflict systems and underlying deep-seated causes to recurring crises threatening West Africa's stability will be addressed.
- **The last two days (from 4 and 5 June)** will focus on methodology, specific objectives and modalities of risk assessment in the selected countries for 2009 (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau).

### 5. Key questions

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- What do we mean by conflict systems?
- To what extent do they exist in West Africa? What are they? How can understanding them contribute to the early warning and crisis prevention responses?
- What are the links between national dynamics and sub-regional conflicts?
- In ECOWAS countries, what are the risks of crises, conflicts, instability and/or violent outbreaks?
- How to organise risk assessment in order to contribute to the operationalisation and improvement of the ECOWARN system?
- What methodology(ies) to adopt?
- What are the practical modalities of implementing a risk evaluation in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau?

The meeting will be structured around the answers to these questions. The debate on conflict systems began at the meeting in Conakry. This meeting will develop and deepen the discussions to examine whether the concept can be used in the analysis of the challenges and the strategies to meet these challenges.

## 6. Participants

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- ECOWAS (Early Warning Department);
- The Sahel and West Africa Club (Governance, Peace and Security Unit)/OECD;
- Independent experts or members of research institutions and civil society networks from 12 countries of the region;
- Sub-regional and regional organisations, networks, think-tanks, research institutes (CODESRIA, GRTP, MOST, PASPA, WACSO, WANEP, WANSO);
- United Nations organisations (UNDOC, UNOCHA, UNOWA).

## 7. Contacts

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