



Crossing Boundaries Sub-Regional Conference on Civil Society and Security Sector Cooperation

Mamba Point Conference Hall, Wilberforce, Freetown, Sierra Leone
30 April – 1 May 2008

Summary Report with Statement of Recommendations

Organized by
Conciliation Resources in partnership with
Mano River Women's Peace Network
Search for Common Ground/Talking Drums Studio
Centre for Development and Security Analysis

Funded by the UK Department for International Development

A two-day Sub-regional Conference on civil society and security sector cooperation was organized by Conciliation Resources (CR) in partnership with Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), Search for Common Ground/Talking Drums Studios (SFCG/TDS) and Centre for Development and Security Analysis (CEDSA) from 30 April to 1 May 2008 in Freetown, Sierra Leone.¹ The conference was attended by over 30 participants representing civil society and the security sector in the Mano River Union (MRU) - Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. High-level security sector policymakers and managers came face-to-face with community representatives to discuss policies and how these function at local levels.

The aim of the conference was to facilitate networking and experience sharing between civil society and security sector institutions across the Mano River Union countries to address key challenges in sub-regional security policies and implementation. Participants developed and agreed the following Statement with recommendations for policy action by the MRU, its member states and civil society organizations:

A Mano River statement for sustained and enhanced civil society – security sector cooperation

The Mano River Union and member states should:

- Strengthen the Mano River Union Secretariat so it can improve the performance of its coordinating functions.

For example to effectively implement joint border patrols, review protocols, exchange learning and convene periodic joint meetings to address security challenges such as: the border area of Yenga between Sierra Leone and Guinea, human, drug and arms trafficking and the downsizing of military forces in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

- Expedite the issuing of the ECOWAS passports in their respective countries.
- Widely disseminate protocols among the populace in more accessible formats such as printed materials and radio broadcasts.
- Harmonize and publicly display cross border tariffs to ensure free movement for MRU citizens.
- Publicly commit to expose and eradicate corruption and other abuses by security personnel and ensure best practice.

The Governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone should:

- Remain committed to mobilize resources for the security sector to function effectively. *For example improve conditions of service, provide adequate human resources and equipment and build the capacity of security sector personnel.*
- Renew commitment to the Mano River Union and its protocols.
- Promote awareness raising activities about security sector structures among the populace and create more opportunities to dialogue with and engage civil society.
- Encourage Parliament/ Legislature to take their rightful role in providing oversight of the security sector.
- Pay special attention to the challenges faced by women in the security sector and to violations perpetrated against them.
- Provide national ID cards to their citizens that are recognized within the Mano River Union.

¹ These organizations have partnered each other and security sector actors in two key border districts (Kenema and Kailahun) and Freetown over the past year in a Pilot Project: Strengthening Citizens' Security, funded by the UK Department for International Development. The conference was an opportunity to share lessons with Liberia and Guinea as well as with other Sierra Leone decision-makers.

The Government of Liberia should:

- Ensure the sustainability and national ownership of the Security Sector Reform process.

Civil society representatives should:

- Create a *Sub-Regional Working Group on Security* to support the Mano River Union Secretariat and monitor its performance.
- Encourage a broader interest and participation in security matters and exercise their rights.
- Strengthen their capacity to engage with the security sector. *For example facilitate meetings between communities and security sector officials.*
- Encourage women's inclusion and participation in civil society organizations' involvement in the security sector.

Statement from the participants of the *Sub-Regional Conference on Civil Society and Security Sector Cooperation* organized by Conciliation Resources, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1 May 2008.

The first session of the conference brought out the differences in the National Security Architectures of the three countries. While Sierra Leone and Liberia show similarities in the structure of the security sector, it was pointed out that Guinea has a more state-centred approach to security. In contrast to Guinea, both Sierra Leone and Liberia have recently gone through a reform process. In Sierra Leone this process is mainly led by the British military. In Liberia it is led by the USA who have mandated a private security company to train the Liberian military.

In working group sessions the following issues were discussed:

1. Security challenges related to cross-border border trading

Participants identified the following key challenges in cross border trading: widespread corruption, failure to apply the MRU and ECOWAS protocols, inadequate man power and equipment to secure and control porous borders, lack of gender awareness by officials and no mechanisms to report and redress abuses. These problems not only violate the MRU protocols and pose an economic challenge to cross border traders: They also affect the trader's personal security. In their suggestions on how to tackle these problems, participants called for action at local, regional and institutional level.

2. Information exchange between civil society and the security sector

By comparing the strengths and weaknesses in information exchange in the three countries it was shown that in all three some sort of structure exists for communication between civil society and the security institutions. These structures can be found at different levels. However, it became clear that these structures lack financial capacity and have a low degree of institutionalisation which affects their functionality. Participants stressed that in order to address these challenges, existing information exchange structures need to be strengthened. At the same time all stakeholders need to develop a clear understanding of their role within these structures.

3. Initiatives for building trust between the civil society and the security sector

As is the case with structures of information exchange, it was made clear that there are initiatives and structures for increasing trust between civil society and security sector personnel but that these initiatives lack sustainability and are limited in scope and effectiveness.

The following group works and plenary discussions were geared towards developing recommendations for policy action, which were agreed in the conference statement. Besides the common issues of corruption, lack of capacity for border operations, dissemination of MRU protocols, lack of adequate dialogue between civil society and the security sector, it was also pointed out by the Sierra Leone group that the Yenga border dispute is a great concern for Sierra Leoneans and requires more attention from the authorities. The Guinean delegation emphasized that, among other things, uniform travel documents and customs tariffs in the MRU countries are needed. The Liberian delegates called for more ownership by policymakers and citizens in the security sector reform processes.

A Drafting Group comprising two delegates from each country (one civil society and one security sector) was set up to compile the recommendations and draft a Mano River Statement for Sustained and Enhanced Civil Society – Security Sector Cooperation.

Participants also discussed follow-up activities. They identified the need to link up with ECOWAS and other cross border initiatives. Wide dissemination of the outcomes of the conference was seen as a vital step in strengthening the citizen – security sector link. Participants proposed to set up a ‘virtual’ working committee – using internet communication – to take the process forward. Strategic actions to be taken include visitation to all border areas by competent Mano River country officials and civil society to ascertain the security loopholes identified, sensitization of various constituencies about negative practices at the borders, production of newsletters on security issues in the MRU, briefing sessions to be held with various security sector bodies and training sessions to be held for civil society on their rights and obligations. Recommendations were also made for additional topics to be addressed such as human trafficking, drug and small arms abuse, sea boundaries, and sea piracy, training for the security sector and more exchange visits among MRU countries.

Participants highly valued the conference and stated that it has given them a profound insight into the potential security threats in the MRU sub-region and it has provided them with indications of how to tackle them. The delegations returned to their countries and occupations with the aim of informing colleagues and superiors about the outcomes of the conference, disseminating the outcomes and keeping in touch with conference participants for further collaboration.

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