

# People's perspectives on instability in West Africa

Case study report:

## **Mano River Union**

Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire

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## **Nigeria**

Plateau and Niger Delta States

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## **Casamance**

Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia



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## The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project

The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project is a joint initiative implemented by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld and financed under the European Commission's Instrument for Stability. The project provides European Union institutions with analysis and recommendations based on the opinions and experiences of local people in a range of countries and regions affected by fragility and violent conflict.

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**Conciliation Resources** is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. Over the past 15 years we have supported local initiatives to build peace and secure meaningful justice in war-affected communities, particularly in the Mano River Union countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. For further details about our work in West Africa please contact: Janet Adama Mohammed, West Africa Programme Director, [jmohammed@c-r.org](mailto:jmohammed@c-r.org)

## Three West Africa Conflict systems



## Glossary

<b>CPF</b>	Conflict Prevention Framework (ECOWAS)	<b>MRU</b>	Mano River Union
<b>CPLP</b>	Community of Portuguese Speaking States	<b>PAIGC</b>	African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration	<b>RUF</b>	Revolutionary United Front
<b>ECOMOG</b>	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group	<b>SSR</b>	Security Sector Reform
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States	<b>TRC</b>	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>ICG</b>	International Crisis Group	<b>UNIOGBIS</b>	United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross	<b>UNMIL</b>	United Nations Mission in Liberia
<b>JSR</b>	Justice Sector Reform	<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>MFDC</b>	Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance	<b>WACSOFF</b>	West Africa Civil Society Forum
		<b>WANEP</b>	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

# Executive summary

The aims of this study were: a) to fill a gap in analysis and understanding of conflicts in the region by involving local people and their representatives in reflection on the underlying drivers and impact of the conflicts or instability affecting them, and; b) to identify some common themes and responses for national, regional and international decision makers. Consultations combined workshops and interviews with people from the Mano River region (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea), the countries affected by the Casamance conflict (Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia) and from Jos and the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

The study produced four overarching findings:

- Firstly, participants share many common views on the conflict drivers in their respective countries or the region. Their ideas converge around the issues of: youth disenfranchisement and unemployment; poverty and social exclusion; poor governance, including natural resource management, election violence and corruption; cross-border instability; and the presence of relatively “new” threats, such as drug trafficking and organised crime.
- Secondly, West Africans have suggestions for a variety of practical responses to some of these challenges, which stem from their daily experience of living in West Africa.
- Thirdly, participants believe that a more coordinated and strategic approach to common issues affecting a number of states within the region is needed and there is a desire to see civil society more involved in this.
- Fourthly, many participants in the research see ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and its peace and security mandate, as an effective way of addressing conflict and instability in the region. However, they feel that ECOWAS could go further to pool and coordinate civil society views and actions as part of its role in conflict prevention.

Analysis that informs programming and policy decisions should tap into this local expertise. Actions and decisions based on local views and suggestions, or made in consultation with local actors, in turn can have greater local legitimacy. Furthermore, initiatives in which local communities and actors have some investment and input are likely to be more sustainable. For donors, support to locally owned initiatives would therefore represent an investment in the consolidation of their own peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction efforts to date.

The European Union's (EU) role in further strengthening this link between local voices, civil society and policy makers could be a significant part of its current Regional Integration Programme. In so doing, it would contribute to programming and policy making that is validated by those most affected by violent conflict and instability.

The Policy Brief that accompanies this report identifies areas and provides practical recommendations for the EU to consider, which came out of this consultative process. These range from recommendations on narrowing the gap between centres and peripheries; preventing youth from being co-opted into war economies, drug trafficking and organised crime; lessons learning on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programmes, and; strengthening the role of ECOWAS in addressing the root causes of conflict in the region.

# Background to the studies

Between February and May 2011 Conciliation Resources carried out a series of consultations in three areas of West Africa among local people closely affected by conflict or instability. The aim was to fill a gap in analysis and understanding of conflicts in the region by involving local people and their representatives in reflection on the underlying drivers and impact of the conflicts or instability affecting them - perspectives which can be overlooked in studies based on the views of the political and social elite. A regional approach was adopted in order to investigate the issues and perspectives in different conflict systems<sup>1</sup> in West Africa in order to 'sample' some of the dynamics for the region as a whole. From the findings we hoped to draw out some of the common themes which emerged from these discussions, as well as suggested responses for national, regional and international decision makers.

The research was part of a broader initiative called the People's Peacebuilding Perspectives project: an 18-month joint project undertaken by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld, which provides European Union (EU) institutions with analysis and practical programming recommendations based on the opinions and experiences of local people in a range of countries and regions affected by fragility and violent conflict.

The three areas covered in the consultations were:

- The countries of the Mano River Union (MRU):  
Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea
- The countries affected by the Casamance conflict:  
Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia
- Plateau State (Jos) and the Niger Delta in Nigeria

## Methodology

The consultations took the form of analytical workshops and in-depth interviews. These took place in Freetown (Sierra Leone) between 22 - 25 February 2011, in Dakar (Senegal) between 15 - 19 May 2011 and in Abuja and Jos (Nigeria) between 20 - 30 May 2011.

The four-day workshop in Freetown in February 2011 focused initially on common experiences of post-conflict reconstruction in Liberia and Sierra

Leone and the differences between the two contexts. Participants were then joined by colleagues from Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire to discuss the risks faced by the whole Mano River region. Workshops involved civil society peacebuilding actors, representatives of the security forces, a representative of the Chieftaincy Commission in Sierra Leone, former combatants, youth and political party representatives from the MRU countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Discussions were built around presentations made by peacebuilding actors on the drivers of conflicts, current tensions and responses. In addition, individual interviews were held with a State Minister, an ex-combatant, a traditional leader in Freetown, and with civil society actors from the respective countries.

In May 2011 consultations were held in Senegal with community groups from Casamance and civil society actors and researchers working on Casamance, Guinea-Bissau and Gambia. Participants included community peace activists and civil society representatives working on the conflict. Discussions focused on drivers of conflicts, the inter-connections between them and responses. Research also included discussions with the EU Delegation in Dakar, International Crisis Group (ICG), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Gorée Institute to gather their views on on-going responses to the conflict.

The consultations in Abuja, Nigeria, were held with groups from the Niger Delta and Jos in Plateau State: participants included civil society actors working in the peacebuilding field, representatives of religious bodies, and representatives from security sector (military and police) and the Presidential administration. In addition, a field trip was organised to the conflict areas of Jos, where separate meetings were held with Christian and Muslim groups. A separate consultation meeting was also held with civil society actors and experts working on peace and security in the region to discuss the role of the ECOWAS in responding to conflicts in the region. These perspectives were complemented by a meeting with the ECOWAS Early Warning Programme Director and her team to discuss ECOWAS' response mechanism. Meetings were also held with the Regional Integration Programme Officer of the EU Delegation in Abuja, the Nigeria Peace and Conflict Institute and the National Orientation Commission.

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1 A 'conflict system' can be defined as a series of interactions between states that support and sustain the conflicts within those states in a systemic way.

An initial meeting with West Africa regional experts in London on 26 January 2011 to discuss the critical drivers and analyse responses to the conflicts, helped to frame the questions of enquiry, gather perspectives and test the methodology. The field-work and initial reporting were conducted by a consultant, Carolyn Norris, working closely with Conciliation Resources staff. The research drew on the contacts and experience built up through Conciliation Resources' work in the region since 1996.

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The need for a limited focus precluded analysis of some local issues, such as chieftaincy disputes in northern Ghana, as well as broader issues, such as the development of the radical Boko Haram sect in northern Nigeria, tensions across the Gulf of Guinea, including the Bakassi peninsula and instability caused by Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb in northern Mali and beyond.

# Context

## Overview

Although many countries remain volatile, West Africa appears calmer in 2012 than in recent years. Several countries are experiencing democratic transitions or in a period of peace consolidation and peacebuilding. Ghana and Nigeria have moved from military rule to civilian rule. General elections in Nigeria in April 2011 were seen as evidence of progress in this transition, although post-electoral violence in 12 northern states left more than 800 people dead<sup>2</sup> and points to serious flaws in new democratic institutions.

Guinea has a new government which is re-engaging with its neighbours and the broader international community to bring about domestic change. Guinea-Bissau held presidential elections in July 2009 which ended peacefully, despite the assassination earlier that year of the President and Chief of Staff, and improvements in the political and security environment have been noted by the United Nations (UN).<sup>3</sup>

However, underlying elements responsible for the region's turbulence remain a threat to peace and these and low intensity conflicts prevent development taking hold. In addition, newer threats, such as organised crime and the narcotics trade, present a further challenge to new democracies and fragile states.

## Cross-border inter-connections

West Africa is a region in which ethnic, cultural and social relationships extend across national boundaries: *Mandingo* and *Kissi* people reside in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone; *Fulla* people are present in most countries across West Africa including Guinea, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali. Strong historical and cultural ties exist between these peoples.

Similarly, the sources and effects of conflicts in West Africa are not bound by state borders and are often highly interlinked. Violent conflict in one country can be fed by or exported to another, and their effects, such as displacement and disruption of trade can be

felt both by immediate neighbours and more widely across the region.

The four countries of the MRU, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, share common boundaries and have been linked by instability and affected by conflict of different intensity over the past two decades. They thus represent a typical conflict system, in which the actors and factors for conflict may be local or national, but their ramifications are regional in character.

Charles Taylor's incursion into Liberia launched from Côte d'Ivoire in 1989 set off a chain of civil wars across the region. Taylor supported the war in Sierra Leone in 1991, with rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) operating out of Liberia, and the conflict spread briefly into Guinea in 2000, resulting in a Guinean military response to contain the issue. Civil conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as the recent political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, have resulted in huge numbers of refugees in neighbouring countries, and also cross-border movement of small arms, 'dissident' groups and mercenaries.

The conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal forms part of a less well-defined, yet clearly interconnected conflict system, linking Senegal, Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. Despite the Senegalese Government's insistence on the internal nature of the conflict, the unrest in the Casamance region, which began in 1982 with the political aim of independence from the rest of Senegal, has wider implications for stability in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Gambia.

There are close historical links and allegiances between the people of Casamance and ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau and Gambia; an affinity which contrasts with the sense of alienation which people in Casamance feel towards the Senegalese capital, Dakar. Casamance was part of Guinea-Bissau until the French took over in the mid-1800s and many Casamançais have close cultural and historical ties to northern Guinea-Bissau. The Diola ethnic group are dominant in both Gambia and Senegal, particularly in the Casamance region, and also present in Guinea-Bissau. The Gambian President, Yahya Jammeh is also from the Diola ethnic group. Allegations of Gambian support to the rebel group, the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) have strained bilateral relations between Gambia and Senegal. Guinea-Bissau's relations with Senegal have similarly been strained by MFDC's guerrilla activities in the

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2 'Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: Post-election violence killed 800', press statement, May 16 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/05/16/nigeria-post-election-violence-killed-800> (accessed 15 June 2011).

3 UNSC S/2011/73: Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in that country, 15 February 2011.

border region of Guinea-Bissau. The conflict continues to cause a refugee problem in both countries.

### **Situation in the countries of the Mano River Union**

In 1989 Charles Taylor brought war to Liberia when he launched his incursion from Côte d'Ivoire. That war spilled over into Sierra Leone in 1991 and fighting also spread into Guinea briefly during 2000. Sierra Leone started its transformation from conflict to peace in 2002 and elected a new president in 2007. Liberia's transition began in 2003 and was consolidated with the 2005 election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who was re-elected for a second term in 2011. The 2006 arrest of Charles Taylor to face war crime charges for his actions in Sierra Leone's civil war marked another turning point in the region's stability.

Conflict broke out in the once stable and economically successful Côte d'Ivoire in 2002 and rumbled on until 2010 when presidential elections heightened tensions, provoking more fighting. A tense political resolution evolved in early 2011 after French intervention, with the former President, Laurent Gbagbo, under house arrest.

Guinea has avoided implosion but has endured fundamental political instability for many years. Elections in 2010 marked an end to military rule and conflict was again avoided when the results of a hotly-contested presidential race were respected. The July 2011 armed attack on the presidency is a sign of tense relations with the army.

### **Situation in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Gambia**

Senegal has known no major political upheaval since it gained independence from France in 1960, but resists using its political stability to resolve a persistent conflict lasting more than two decades in its southern region of Casamance. Relations between Gambia's President Jammeh and Senegal's President Wade have been generally poor. The level of tension fluctuates but was high during 2010 when Jammeh stood out among West African leaders in his support for the Ivorian leader, Laurent Gbagbo. The interception in Nigeria in November 2010 of weapons on route for Gambia, allegedly for transfer to Casamance rebels, fuelled bilateral tension.

Guinea-Bissau has been politically unstable since it won its war of independence against Portugal in 1974 and is currently seen as a regional hub for illegal trade, such as cocaine on route for markets outside Africa. Guinea-Bissau has maintained largely good

official relations with Senegal, which has mediated on occasions and militarily intervened in Guinea-Bissau's 1998/99 political crisis. Guinea-Bissau is home to some 7000 refugees from Casamance.

### **Situation in Nigeria**

Nigeria is both Africa's most populous nation and the most powerful player within West Africa. Despite its apparent strength, it faces several fundamental challenges, including the management of wealth from oil production, a population comprising more than 250 ethno-linguistic groups and numerous religious communities, as well as a turbulent history of military rule and civil war since independence in 1960. Progress in the last elections, in terms of a strengthened Independent National Electoral Commission, was marred by contested election results, pre-electoral and post-electoral violence. Nonetheless, the result of the election, in which a 'southern minority' politician was elected president for the first time, is seen by some as a new beginning.<sup>4</sup>

Tensions in the Niger Delta centre on control of Nigeria's oil revenues; in Plateau State they emanate from communal rivalries inflamed by a quota system, which aims to redress regional and ethnic disparities by granting privileges according to one's state of origin. This defines people as either 'indigenes' or 'settlers' within a given state. Both zones of tension result from Nigeria's federal experiment<sup>5</sup> which attempts to provide a federal framework to accommodate the country's ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. In both areas people struggle to safeguard their livelihoods in a system where politics is a means to gain access to and control of resources and wealth.

### **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**

The primary aim of the regional intergovernmental body, ECOWAS, is regional integration. Peace and security are one of five priority areas within its strategy for the region, 'Vision 2020'.<sup>6</sup> With the support of the United Nations (UN), the EU and

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4 'International Crisis Group, Grappling with the aftermath of April polls', Kunle Amuwo, senior analyst on Nigeria, *The Nation*, 23 May 2011.

5 See International Crisis Group (ICG) report which explores the origins of flawed federalism and its impact in the Niger Delta and Plateau State: 'Nigeria's Faltering Federal Experiment', ICG Africa Report, No 119, 25 October 2006.

6 '...in the new ECOWAS, instability and security at any level or in any part of the region must be seen and treated as a potential threat to the entire region and the new vision' Towards a Democratic and Prosperous Community, ECOWAS Vision 2020

the African Union (AU), ECOWAS has taken an increasingly proactive role in the field of conflict prevention and management. Ramtane Lamamra, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security has credited ECOWAS with 'making the boldest move in the African continent to manage conflicts in the face of global indifference in the 1990s'.<sup>7</sup>

Over the last few years, ECOWAS has launched a number of peacekeeping missions, in which Nigeria has played a lead role: Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia (1990-1998 and 2003 – 2006) and missions in Sierra Leone (1997-2003), Guinea-Bissau (1999) and Côte d'Ivoire (2003). Beyond its peacekeeping role, ECOWAS has an impressive framework for peace and security, including the Protocol on the Mechanism

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7 ECOWAS Commission conference report, 'Two Decades of Peace Processes in West Africa: Achievements – Failures – Lessons, Monrovia, Liberia', 22-26 March 2010, p 10.

for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. More recently, in 2008 a comprehensive Conflict Prevention Framework (CPF) was adopted, which includes operational prevention such as deployment of the ECOWAS Standby Force. Mediation functions are provided through the Council of the Wise and the Mediation Facilitation Division.

The early warning system (Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN)) also set up under the Protocol, began operation in 2003 and is reasonably well established, even if scope for action on information and advice it generates can be limited by decisions taken in Department of Political Affairs and Department of Peacekeeping where political considerations can take precedence.<sup>8</sup>

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8 Meeting with ECOWAS official, Abuja, 24 May 2011.

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**The following sections document the views on issues of concern and existing responses, as well as the ideas and recommendations of workshop participants and interviewees in each context. Reflecting Conciliation Resources' long-term engagement and partnerships in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, the findings from research on the MRU are more substantial than for the other contexts, where time and resources limited the extent of research. However, many participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss the situation and responses in such fora. Indeed, in Casamance participants said that the meeting was the first time state and non-state actors had sat down together to discuss the conflict and hoped for more such opportunities.**

# Mano River Union consultations

## Key issues

The following issues were identified as drivers of tension and violence in the MRU countries, although their impact and scale varied:

- Youth disenfranchisement
- Extreme poverty
- Poor governance – a broad topic perceived to include corruption, organised crime, patronage systems, and limited access to equitable justice
- Exploitation of natural resources
- Disputed access to land
- Elections
- Regional insecurity

## Youth disenfranchisement

Unemployment, particularly amongst young people, emerged in discussions as a potential trigger for tension and violence. Fear and mistrust towards youth are pervasive: young people were commonly perceived by participants as a 'bad asset', holding back progress in their respective countries and perpetuating conflict and crime. Some of the participants indicated that, due to the short time-frame allowed for their implementation, processes of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of former combatants in both Liberia and Sierra Leone had not been effective in reintegrating youth back into post-conflict societies and reorienting them away violence.

*‘After the war the UN offered the youth tools for work and the Government of Sierra Leone was to follow up with continuous support to adequately reintegrate the youth. This never happened and now most of the youth are back on the streets or in the bushes committing crimes’*

Ex-combatant, Sierra Leone

Given that many young people have spent their early years engaged in violence rather than education, participants were fearful of what this would mean for the country's future leadership. They felt that there were few development processes such as those of civil society organisations, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Youth

Programmes, the German International Cooperation and CARE's Youth and Enterprise Development Programmes, which were enabling some youth to reintegrate into society.

In one of the workshop sessions, participants cited the case of bike riders to illustrate the residual fear and mistrust felt towards youth within society. Many bike riders are former combatants who used the money received as part of the DDR process to buy a motorbike to earn a living by providing a taxi service. In Sierra Leone and Liberia they have organised themselves into an association. Similar associations have developed in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. Even though the bike riders provide an essential service to communities, they are still treated with mistrust by the population. Many people see them as those who killed during the war years and associate them with violence and criminal acts, such as smuggling and robbery.

*‘People think we bike riders are bad. They still link us to the war, but we did not go to the war of our own accord. Now we provide the much needed transport services especially in remote communities and they still don't trust us. The police are not helping the situation. They are always fighting us and charging us arbitrary fees and they like to link us with crimes which we are not part of.’*

Bike rider, Sierra Leone

By February 2011, the Liberia Bike Riders Association announced that, since political parties did not provide effective programmes to manage the youth situation, it was considering forming a youth-focused political party. This announcement generated lively debate in the MRU consultations. Some felt the riders were not 'ready for leadership', while others welcomed the fact that young people were 'using their energies to support political progress' in their respective countries.

Widespread mistrust of youth increases with a rise in regional insecurity, as youth are perceived to be deployed among countries of the region to commit violence, back political campaigns, and to fight civil wars in neighbouring countries. Participants cited cases of former combatants in Sierra Leone who had been approached to support an uprising in Guinea in late 2010 during the political crisis there and of others who had gone from Liberia to join forces with groups

fighting in Côte d'Ivoire after the November 2010 elections.

Participants also indicated that DDR processes were time-bound in short-term projects, which did not offer the space to effectively implement the reintegration aspect of the process. As a result and also due to poor quality education, a large section of the youth population is marginalised and unemployable, from the ex-combatant group in Liberia and Sierra Leone to school drop-outs. These youths are easily mobilised to commit election violence or for mercenary activities.

### **Responses:**

Participants recommended that one means to tackle the issue would be to ensure that projects, including large infrastructure ones, employ local people, especially young people whenever they have the requisite skills. Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) actively support government youth commissions, working on community reconciliation to integrate disaffected youth, teaching young people leadership skills or simply involving youth in their own decision-making. Participants in the workshops also recommended that governments in the region should introduce a year's compulsory national non-military service for all young people, which could provide some vital skills not provided by the formal education system, and additional vocational skills for others.

At the time of the workshop, in February 2011, the Government of Sierra Leone was considering a programme, which would fund re-deployment of youth to rural areas to be involved in agriculture and other service delivery areas. The government had for example supported the Chiefdom Youth Volunteer Scheme to support the collection of revenues along the borders of the country under the National Revenue Commission. Participants said that youth unemployment was most critical in rural areas, especially along border areas, and that this was behind the continuing flow of young people to urban areas, increasing pressure on urban resources and reducing the rural-based enterprise development, such as farming and fishing.

### **Extreme poverty**

The workshop coincided with local media headlines that food price increases had contributed to popular unrest in Tunisia in December 2010 and the threat of increased oil prices as a result of political unrest within Libya. These issues were being discussed on the local media.

This background sparked discussion on food insecurity in the workshop. In the same period the price of rice in Sierra Leone had increased as a result of a substantial increase in fuel costs. In addition, the introduction of a 15 percent VAT charge was leading to increased costs of goods and services, such as basic commodities. Participants highlighted the huge wealth disparity between urban and rural populations in the region, coupled with widespread corruption, especially in the rural areas, where there were weak governance systems and a lack of supervision from the national level. They pointed to continued low food production levels and the need for all the MRU countries to import products such as rice, sugar and cooking oil. Participants felt governments were not managing the economies well enough and resources were unfairly distributed, causing tension especially among the excluded rural populace and the youth.

### **Responses:**

Participants acknowledged that reducing extreme poverty was a long-term issue involving many actors in many sectors. However, they felt it was important to take action to reduce vulnerability to external shocks, for example, price increases, natural disasters, such as floods and drought and to address lack of participation and corruption.

It was proposed that NGOs in the peacebuilding and governance sector continue to monitor the extent to which poverty reduction strategies are sensitive to their potential impact on instability or conflict and are tailored to mitigate these risks. Participants highlighted, for example, that a focus in development support on a particular region can fuel ethnic tensions in other regions, which feel excluded from national resources. This was an effective way to achieve reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

Some NGOs in Liberia reported that they had participated in discussions on the finalisation of the country's poverty reduction strategy, but had felt unable to comment on its conflict sensitivity. Participants proposed that civil society actors could identify specific poverty reduction projects which had been effective in supporting consolidation of peace and provide feedback on these to political decision makers (parliamentarians, government, donors and other stakeholders).

### **Poor governance**

In discussions around poor governance in their respective contexts, all participants mentioned the related issues of ineffective or lack of decentralised governance, corruption and unfair distribution of resources. They felt that poor governance was

one of the critical drivers of conflict in both Sierra Leone and Liberia. The Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) of Sierra Leone and Liberia both dealt with issues of governance; weaknesses in this area were seen as a fundamental cause of each country's conflict.<sup>9</sup>

With wealth and decision-making powers in the hands of a few located in urban areas, the vast majority of people in rural areas across the MRU still feel excluded from decision-making in their own countries. Participants identified a worrying gap between citizens and those who govern them which was prominently highlighted in Sierra Leone TRC's description of the causes of the conflict: the fact that successive regimes had become increasingly impervious to the wishes and needs of the majority of people in the rural areas. Participants also indicated that justice sector reforms in Sierra Leone were only felt in Freetown. In many cases citizens from rural areas have to travel long distances to courts, where they encounter delays in hearings and rulings. This leaves them with little choice but to turn to the traditional justice systems, even though they do not trust them.

Illegal exploitation of natural resources funded the conflict in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. Participants indicated that while this kind of activity is coming under greater control, lack of effective governance has made the MRU countries vulnerable to organised crime. Money made from trafficking of drugs, weapons and people could still fuel further conflict, if other triggers were in place.

Of particular concern to participants were the following aspects:

1. The need to strengthen the capacity of communities to demand accountability from service providers. Participants saw a clear role for civil society in this area and thought this strategy would be effective in tackling governance issues such as corruption, unequal access to justice or unfair judicial processes and patronage systems, which often exclude others on ethnic and/or political criteria.

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<sup>9</sup> Sierra Leone's TRC defined governance as: 'a system of laws, institutions, processes and practices that promotes and protects the fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as facilitating the development and advancement, of people living in any given territory. Accordingly, the instruments of good governance include equitable laws, efficient institutions, due processes and humane practices that lead to such desired ends as security, justice, enhanced livelihoods and democratic participation.'

2. The need for increased donor commitment to civil society's role in monitoring governance. This might include:
  - Donors offering financial support for civil society organisation activities in this field;
  - Increased transparency surrounding donors' relations with government;
  - Increased donor pressure on governments to be transparent.
3. The need for anti-corruption bodies to be stronger and more independent.
4. The need to strengthen inter-governmental mechanisms, such as the Africa Peer Review Mechanism, in order to enhance their credibility and capacity to influence behaviour.

Participants felt the role of donors can, however, also skew questions of accountability for governance. While donors may insist upon progress on human rights standards and democratic and accountable institutions, ultimately sovereign government which should be accountable to its electorate rather than donors.

### **Responses:**

Moves towards re-establishing legitimate power, including moves to transfer this power beyond capitals, are underway with varying levels of political will and success. In Sierra Leone the 2004 Local Government Act provides for decentralisation and structures are already in place. In Liberia, the National Decentralisation and Local Governance Policy was officially launched in January 2012. Legislative elections in Guinea are set for July 2012. Cote d'Ivoire remains vulnerable, as its new president seeks to exert his authority throughout the whole country.

The introduction in each country of anti-corruption measures has met with mixed success. In discussions there was criticism about selective justice handed down by Sierra Leone's Anti-Corruption Commission and about other cases being settled out of court. But initiatives, such as the oversight by the General Auditing Commission of Liberia of the performance of government agencies, were welcomed as a step in the right direction. There was hope that national human rights and media commissions would also contribute to improved governance.

### **Unfair exploitation of resources**

Representatives from all four MRU countries saw transparent and fair utilisation of the region's substantial resources as vital to stop residual conflict and prevent these resources funding future

conflict. Control of these resources was also seen as important to ensuring that the wealth generated contributes to much needed development and to increase government legitimacy in the eyes of the population. The experience in each country in this regard was quite different.

### Responses:

The Guinean Government launched a thorough audit of mining companies operating in the country and a new mining code in 2011, which will be followed by a comprehensive review of all mining contracts. The Liberian government, largely with United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) support, has regained control of rubber plantations from rebel groups and renegotiated key contracts. Civil society is actively involved in networks such as 'Publish What you Pay', which together with the Liberia National Bar Association and the National Council of Chiefs and Traditional leaders, represents civil society on the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative multi-stakeholder Steering Group.

In 2010 civil society in Sierra Leone challenged the award of mining contracts on iron ore deposits in Tonkolili and Marampa, which include a 99-year lease on key port and railway infrastructure for foreign companies (African Minerals and London Mining), on the basis that the contracts violate Sierra Leone's mining code and tax laws. In November 2010 local people in Tonkolili protested against contractors' plans to build a dam on land considered sacred. Neither issue has been tested in court.

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire is more fluid and the question of reforming the cocoa sector is essential, though tricky, as it involves many vested interests and outside investors are concerned about security.<sup>10</sup>

### Disputed access to land

Participants raised this as a major issue in Liberia and an emerging issue in Sierra Leone and Guinea. Sierra Leone's TRC report listed land as a source of dispute between 'settlers and natives' since the former arrived in 1822. Liberia's recent wars have added a new layer of complexity to the issue, as during large-scale displacement people left land they had been occupying and others took their place. With ethnic tensions heightened by the conflict, and given the importance of land for security and livelihoods,

the issue of access to land is a potential trigger point for renewed conflict in Liberia.

Some of the participants reported that communities in Sierra Leone and Guinea have seen large portions of communal land parcelled out to international companies, either for the development of plantations or for mining, without accompanying documentation on land transactions and corporate social responsibility agreements. This has often led to tensions between chiefs and local authorities and the youth.

### Responses:

In 2008 the risk of disputes over land in Liberia led to increased ethnic tensions. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf set up a Special Presidential Land Commission to consult with the factions and to resolve the tensions and violence in Nimba County between the Gio and Mano ethnic groups. Workshop participants indicated that tensions persist, as the communities continue to claim that, on their return from war, they found Mandingo people living on their land. The President, conscious that widespread land disputes are a war legacy, set up a Land Reform Commission in 2009, which includes civil society representatives and receives financial support from the UN Peacebuilding Commission. It aims to redistribute land and also to simplify the cumbersome regulations governing access to land.

Some participants in the workshops were actors involved in numerous initiatives to resolve potential conflict over land, through participation in the Land Reform Commission to reform legislation, direct mediation in a given dispute, or through the establishment of broader dialogue between ethnic groups which have tense relations which could lead to land disputes.

### Elections

*'In our countries, 'the winner takes all' [culture] makes our politics dirty and violent. The opposition will do all it can to come to power and the incumbent political party will do all it can to stay. This is all because whoever is in power has access to the resources and power.'*

Civil society actor, Guinea

The international community see elections as an important step towards a democratic state, a major contribution to peace and development and an important step in marking a transition from a conflict-affected to a post-conflict society. However, election processes in many countries in the region

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<sup>10</sup> Africa Confidential, 'Cocoa Holds the Key', 27 May 2011.

have been marked by violence and destruction of lives and property.

Participants indicated that, although the 2007 elections in Sierra Leone were peaceful, the aftermath was marked by violence and the destruction of property belonging to opposing political parties, especially in Freetown. Tensions often arise over interpretations of election results. In most of the countries, by-elections, identification of political party candidates through 'Primaries' and campaigns for up-coming elections are all often marked by violence. At the time of meeting, Côte d'Ivoire was in its third month of political stalemate after their November elections, which finally reached a political resolution in April 2011 when Alassane Ouattara became president. Guinea had just completed a successful transfer of power, despite going to a second round with close results, in December 2010.

Of particular concern to participants from Liberia and Sierra Leone were the following aspects:

- Unlike previous elections, the incumbent was standing for re-election in the forthcoming presidential elections. Participants feared that this increased the possibility of inappropriate use of government funds to the advantage of the incumbent.
- A risk of heightened tensions and electoral violence instigated by the incumbent. Participants recalled that in previous elections political parties had hired groups of young men to protect themselves and often to intimidate their opponents' supporters.
- The likelihood that weak infrastructure and monitoring would lead to irregularities in voter registration and on polling day. To forestall any illegal challenge to the results, including violence, participants felt it was vital that the election monitoring body is truly independent and seen to act accordingly and that the judiciary must be ready to make timely and independent decisions on outstanding disputes.
- Partisan, or otherwise inadequate, security provisions could provoke an escalation of any violent incident.

A critical concern for the participants in the consultations was the tendency by political parties to 'buy off' groups of young people, whose role it then is to fuel tension and violence during election campaigns and voting. These young people, they alleged, were recruited from neighbouring countries, provided they spoke the language of the ethnic groups in the country where they are recruited for

action. Some of the young persons have identity cards from both Liberia and Sierra Leone.

*“To reduce risk of violence, citizens have to trust their electoral processes and the autonomy of the National Electoral Commission. It is not so much about international observers. It is the perceptions of the citizens of the electoral processes and the conduct of elections. Do people understand their civic rights [and] the electoral processes? Are electoral processes transparent and fair?”*

Sierra Leonean participant, Mano River Union group discussion

### Regional insecurity

Participants raised fears about the porosity of borders, which allow for easy transport of light weapons, illegal substances, such as drugs, and threaten security and bona fide regular trade transactions in border areas. They referred to the spread of civil war from Liberia to Sierra Leone and the consequent attacks in Guinea too. Conflict in Côte d'Ivoire destabilised trade throughout the region and the influx of refugees is acutely felt in neighbouring Liberia.

### Responses:

In this context, the continuing deployment of UN peacekeepers in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire was felt to be vital to reducing the risk of unrest in Côte d'Ivoire spilling over into other countries. Together, the UN presence, national security services and the government institutions in Liberia and Sierra Leone provide some protection. However, the regional tension resulting from the crisis increased the need to prevent disaffected youth from joining fighting forces beyond their borders, as happened during the post-electoral violence in Côte d'Ivoire.

Participants recommended that the new government in Guinea should be seen and seized as an opportunity to resolve the Yenga dispute between Guinea and Sierra Leone. They noted that Guinean military forces had built a base in Yenga and were developing tree plantations, signifying ownership and long-term presence. This had raised the concerns of Sierra Leone citizens within the community.

### Further recommendations

In addition to discussions on the themes noted above, participants made specific recommendations to tackle the potential triggers for conflict they identified.

- All stakeholders should explore alternatives to the formal justice system. There was a strong feeling that confidence in formal justice, where operational, is so low that it lacks the potential to address the conflict triggers identified. Alternatives might include mediation, use of paralegals, Palava Hut discussions and codification of customary law. There was concern, however, that these should be tested for effectiveness and their compatibility with international human rights standards.
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) should exploit national funding potential to enhance their sustainability. They felt that dependence on international funding made their projects vulnerable to short-term perspectives.
- CSOs need support to raise their professional standards in internal procedures, management and governance, in order to be able to be watchdogs of government activities. It would also strengthen their relationship with donors and enhance their credibility in monitoring government performance.
- Legal aid requires state funding. This point was made with particular reference to the Sierra Leone Legal Aid Bill, which was before parliament at the time of meeting.
- The Arms for Development Programme in Sierra Leone needs completing – the promised development grants to chiefdoms, which complied with the scheme, have not materialised.
- MRU states should define their national architecture for peace following the example of Ghana and other West African states.
- Recruitment to the civil service needs to be more transparent with regular performance reviews of staff.
- National governments need to redefine their relationship with donors and take full responsibility for their own programmes.
- The implementation of Liberia and Sierra Leone's TRC recommendations should be a higher priority, including recommendations on memorialisation and reparations.
- An improved DDR-type process is needed at the point when the size of an army is reduced, as well as when a conflict formally ends.



Civil society representatives from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire in discussion at Mano River Union workshop, Freetown, 2011 © Aubrey Wade

# Casamance consultations – Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Gambia

‘Casamance is a landlocked community between two different countries: Guinea-Bissau and Gambia. Boat crossings to Dakar are twice a week and take only 450 people a time. Flights are expensive and ordinary farmers cannot afford [to take their] goods. We in Casamance spend two currencies: the Dalasi [Gambian currency] and the CFA [West African franc].’

Civil society actor, Casamance

Three focus group discussions took place on the Casamance conflict, with people from:

- i) Casamance
- ii) Gambia
- iii) Guinea-Bissau

According to participants, while the conflict in Casamance began with a clear political aim – independence for this southern region of Senegal – the main obstacle to resolving the Casamance conflict today is widely viewed as the Senegal Government’s refusal to acknowledge that it now has wider political implications and to involve other willing parties in finding a settlement. Participants added that the Government’s strategy of negotiating with some, but not all factions of the rebel Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) is perceived as a major contributory factor in prolonging the conflict. The result is simmering instability which continues to attract otherwise unoccupied youth to acts of violence, prevents sustainable development in Casamance and provides illegal profit for some local and international entrepreneurs with the attendant risk of further instability.

## Key issues:

The following issues emerged from the consultations as sources of tensions and potential violence:

- Youth disenfranchisement
- Criminality and vested interests in continued conflict
- Neglect and physical isolation of peripheries
- Political tensions and corruption
- Poor economic opportunities
- Refugee flows

## Casamance group

The Senegalese Government is emphatic that Casamance is an internal issue. Participants noted that in February 2011, President Wade rejected the proposal for a national consultation by the National Conference’s Steering Committee (*comité national de pilotage Assises nationales*), saying it was a matter for the government alone.

In interviews, international officials confirmed that the President had similarly blocked initiatives by the international community to work together to tackle conflict and development issues in Casamance. When violence resumed in 2009 causing 40,000 people to flee and resulting in the deaths of at least 13 soldiers,<sup>11</sup> 11 donors made a joint approach to the Prime Minister’s office about setting up a government focal point on security issues, to ensure donor’s efforts in Casamance were safeguarded. On the back of this, one meeting took place which aimed to establish a roadmap for future meetings, but the terms of reference presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not generate government action. Donors share information among themselves, without direct government cooperation. As a result, the international community feels powerless to influence the conflict dynamic. Workshop participants felt that the government’s appointment of a range of officials to tackle the Casamance issue, the so-called *Messieurs Casamance*, who have no clear mandate, is window-dressing and a means to provide lucrative jobs to friends and allies.

Discussion of the issue within Senegal is blocked by the government. Back in 2005, journalists were detained briefly and their radio station closed for a day, when *Sud FM* broadcast an interview with Salif Sadio, a prominent radical leader of the MFDC. As a result of the political impasse, criminal economic activity is able to flourish. Indeed, the profits from these activities and the vested interests in their continuation, may well serve to prolong the current insecurity. Participants reported that Senegalese military stationed in Casamance receive financial bonuses for postings to the region. This, and the potential financial gains from illegal logging trade and other illicit economic

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<sup>11</sup> US State Department Country Report of Human Rights Practices, Senegal, 8 April 2011.

activities, may undermine any will within the army to seek a resolution to the conflict.

Little hard evidence of criminal activity is available, although a major United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report in 2009<sup>12</sup> highlighted the role of West Africa in the international cocaine trade and illegal migration to Europe; southern Senegal was named as a departure point for illegal migrants and Guinea-Bissau as an entry point for cocaine from South America. In June 2011, a statement by UNODC confirmed the trade was increasingly hidden, though not decreasing.<sup>13</sup> As one participant commented: 'The drugs trade doesn't want stability'.

*'The youth feel the MFDC has given them an identity, recognition and pride which even their parents could not have given. While parents especially women are working hard on vegetable farms to make a living, young people who are the couriers of drugs and arms portray good living. They have big motorbikes, and their rooms are well furnished. Youth cannot be controlled by their parents.'*

Teacher/peacebuilder, Casamance

Although the MFDC has lost much of its political support among the population of Casamance, people are still joining its ranks – mostly young men with few other opportunities. Participants spoke of young university graduates who see no job prospects returning to Casamance to join the 'maquis' (a guerrilla group of the MFDC). Other recruits may be those whose education has been interrupted by the conflict and so see little economic future. Yet others see the maquis as providing an opportunity to avenge their own losses through political, or increasingly, criminal violence. Impunity for human rights abuses committed in the context of the Casamance conflict has been consistent and was well documented by Amnesty International during the intense violence of the 1990s.<sup>14</sup>

### Responses:

The EU provided technical assistance to facilitate negotiations held in Gambia in 1999 between the Governments of Senegal, Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. Since then, President Wade has been clear

that he wants no further international involvement in the peace process. In 2005, a broad range of actors met in Foundiougne, Senegal, to discuss the implementation of the 2004 peace agreement and that meeting ended with a plan to meet again in 2006. However, that meeting never took place.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned above, a commission focused on Casamance emerged from the national conference process (Assises Nationales) and presented its recommendations to President Wade on 1 February 2011, however, these were rejected by President Wade.<sup>16</sup>

### Recommendations identified by participants:

Some of those consulted for the research have been involved in mediation, negotiations and other initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict. They were uniformly pessimistic about further talks being productive for the political reasons mentioned above. Participants presented the following recommendations to enable dialogue for sustainable peace:

- A concerted programme of development action to end Casamance's physical isolation from the rest of Senegal – including transport infrastructure to provide affordable road, air and sea transportation of people and goods.
- Increase the autonomy of Casamance in line with a nationwide regionalisation program.
- The Government of Senegal should acknowledge that the Casamance conflict has implications beyond its borders and nominate an impartial mediator. Participants insisted that resolution efforts must include business representatives, women's groups and representatives of all ethnic and religious groups, alongside others such as youth and traditional leaders, to ensure that inclusive perspectives and concerns inform decisions and actions for peace in the region.
- Part of the peace process must include a long-term comprehensive demobilisation and reintegration programme, which focuses on the reintegration of youth, particularly from the MFDC, into society.
- Implement measures to restore numerous sites of religious significance which have been desecrated by the conflict. This would be an important encouragement to the 7000 refugees in Gambia

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12 UNODC, July 2009. 'Transnational Trafficking in West Africa: a Threat Assessment'.

13 Reuters, 'West Africa drugs trade going the way of Mexico –UN', 20 June 2011

14 Amnesty International (2010), 'Senegal – Land of Impunity, AFR 49/001/2010', 15 September 2010.

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15 Year book of peace processes 2011, escola de cultura de pau, page 51.

16 Article in Le Soleil, accessed on 15 June 2011 <http://senegal.senego.com/paix-en-casamance-les-assises-nationales-preconisant-le-consensus-le-plus-large-possible/>

and a further 7000 currently in Guinea-Bissau to return to Casamance. These groups have remained outside Casamance even during periods of relative calm. Participants indicated that the return of refugees should be carefully planned and take into account their perspectives, political interests and to address their fears. Trauma counselling for refugees and the internally displaced could also help to restore community relations.

- Tackle other sources of conflict, which feed into the Casamance dynamic. For example, cattle theft and land disputes.
- Zero tolerance of illegal transfers of drugs, arms and other substances, with severe penalties for those directly involved and suppliers.

*‘Youth who complete secondary school in Casamance often have to travel to Dakar to work as home helps, with the aim of saving to pay for further studies, but they never get the opportunity because they do not earn much income.’*

Female participant in Casamance

## Gambia group

Participants in the group discussion commented on the fluctuating relations between Senegal and Gambia; the Casamance question is one of the reasons for this and a catalyst for tensions between the two countries. For example, the Gambian President, Yahya Jammeh’s fulsome support for Laurent Gbagbo in the post-election crisis in Côte d’Ivoire at the end of 2010, and President Wade’s clear support for Alassane Ouattara, who eventually took power, led to allegations that Gbagbo helped arm the MFDC via Gambia. In November 2010, Nigeria intercepted a large consignment of arms on route from Iran, which were widely believed to be destined for Gambia and the MFDC.

President Jammeh funds development projects in the Casamance region, for example, the building of a mosque in a Casamance village. Although he has ordered the arrest of some members of the MFDC, participants believed these were members belonging to factions in favour of negotiations with the Senegalese Government. As a result, relations between Gambia and Senegal remain strained.

Gambia is a volatile country with a poor human rights record. Participants related that in September 2009, President Jammeh reportedly stated on national television that he would kill anyone who threatened to destabilise the country and specifically threatened

human rights defenders and those working with them. Many Gambians have sought refuge in Senegal and further afield as a result of such threats and patterns of repression. There were fears that heightened instability in Gambia, for example, around presidential elections in November 2011, would aggravate the situation in Casamance.

Gambia continues to collect tolls and fees from people crossing to and from the Casamance and this is a source of frustration to the travellers, especially women traders, who feel they have the right to travel within every part of Senegal freely to trade for their livelihood.

## Responses and recommendations identified by participants:

- A system of border verification/monitoring needs to be put in place. Joint patrols by Gambian and Senegalese forces along shared borders would enhance border security. This would be contingent on improved relations between Senegal and Gambia, something which could be facilitated by ECOWAS.
- Sanctions on Gambia (or President Jammeh of Gambia, if evidence of personal involvement) to ensure that arm transfers, such as the one intercepted in November 2010, are not repeated.

## Guinea-Bissau group

Guinea-Bissau has great significance for the sub-region in that it is home to places of spiritual significance for the Mandingo, Balante, Manjack and Diola ethnic groups. Some chiefs in Casamance celebrate annual festivals in Guinea-Bissau and seek spiritual affiliations and recognition from superior ethnic leaders in that country.

Within Guinea-Bissau, participants felt that the main driver of conflict is political struggles to gain control over the ruling party, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), and thereby political control of the army and access to resources. The country has a severely dysfunctional and fragile economy and very limited natural resources – a cashew nut export trade and newly discovered oil reserves. The shortage of economic opportunities, the absence of rule of law and rampant corruption, together with an extensive coastline comprising 18 major islands and dozens of smaller ones, have made the country particularly attractive for illegal trades, such as cocaine and arms.

Participants noted that, since the official end of the liberation war against Portugal in 1974, Guinea-Bissau has struggled to develop and more recently

has fallen prey to drug-trafficking networks. Power has shifted between different military factions and the dominant PAIGC, which won the war through its network of cells established throughout the country. During Guinea-Bissau's civil war from 1998-9, President Nino Vieira, a hero of the liberation struggle, received military support from both Senegal and neighbouring Guinea.

Despite the absence of sufficient political and administrative structures, participants felt the March 2007 signature of a 'stability pact' between the three most significant parties had offered a chance to resolve the impasse. However, the assassination of the chief of defence staff and President Vieira on consecutive days in March 2009 put paid to any optimism. Presidential elections later that year brought some stability, though on-going tensions between the President and Prime Minister represent divides within the ruling PAIGC which sustain a fragile political environment. The unstable, largely criminal, economy and the volatile political situation dominated by different army factions, bring profit to a few at the expense of the general population.

Participants indicated that this persistent instability in Guinea-Bissau has created opportunities for illegal trafficking using Casamance as a trade route and the youth as couriers of arms and drugs. The youth generally move unhindered between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. It was alleged that the Casamance youth have links to drug cartels which traffic drugs from South America, through North Africa to Europe.

#### **Responses:**

The main bodies engaged in Guinea-Bissau are: The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS and its predecessor UN Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau since 1999), ECOWAS (since 2004), the Community of Portuguese Speaking States (CPLP) and the EU.

UNIOGBIS is involved in:

- Promoting dialogue between the President and Prime Minister
- Technical support to the organising committee of the national conference which is expected to bring together the findings of regional conferences. The overall aim is to develop a national peacebuilding strategy
- Coordination of security sector reform activities
- In cooperation with UNODC, supporting the Guinea-Bissau Government to address the growing

problem of illicit drug trafficking as part of the West Africa Coast Initiative

The 2011-2013 Peacebuilding Priority Plan for Guinea-Bissau, approved in December 2010, prioritises the rehabilitation of military barracks, renovation of some regional prisons and provides vocational training and youth employment. Thereafter it will work on the national conference.

The CPLP works closely with ECOWAS. On 24 November 2010 the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council adopted a road map paving the way for a partnership between the CPLP and ECOWAS to restructure and modernise the Guinea-Bissau defence and security institutions.

The main focus of EU support between February 2008 and September 2010 was security sector reform. Development cooperation will gradually resume following a July 2011 resolution in discussions under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, in which the EU agreed to resume cooperation on the basis of government undertakings to 'structural reforms in the security sector and a credible fight against impunity and organized crime'.<sup>17</sup>

Participants indicated that civil society within Guinea-Bissau, and together with counterparts across the border in Senegal, has been actively engaged in a variety of initiatives:

- West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) has tried to play a mediation role with stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau.
- An event organised by the Gorée Institute to promote military/civilian dialogue in 2007
- Three sessions of political dialogue between various parties organised by The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)
- A justice and security project organised by Swisspeace

#### **Recommendations by participants:**

Participants focused on internal issues, which would have broader benefits for regional stability, including in Casamance:

- Draft land legislation and agree on procedures to resolve land disputes.

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<sup>17</sup> 'European Union Sets out roadmap for the gradual resumption of development cooperation with Guinea-Bissau', <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/896&type=HTML>, accessed 26 July 2011.

- Coordinate initiatives to promote state authority over military authority. These should include reducing the size of the army and improving conditions for those who remain; demilitarising the state.
  - Urgent efforts to improve standards of education.
  - Priority to the completion of work by the National Conference on conflict causes, prevention and resolution and to the achievement of its stated aim of inclusive dialogue to ensure national reconciliation and ensuring effective state institutions.
  - International initiatives to boost the economy with a view to reassuring the population and providing much needed jobs and development.
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# Nigeria consultations

## Plateau State (Jos)

### Key issues:

Participants highlighted the following key issues as sources or results of tension:

- 'Indigeneity' question and inter-communal tensions
- Impunity and lack of security provision
- Disenfranchised and violent youth
- Urbanisation and pressure on resources
- Violence around elections
- Criminality and drug abuse

### Analysis of the triggers and drivers of conflict:

While simmering unrest, degenerating into violent conflict, has been prevalent in Plateau State for some years, participants felt recent events, in which bombs had been detonated, marked an intensification of violence. Some felt that a rise in drug consumption is making individuals more violent. While the unrest is often portrayed as a religious conflict, the violence is more inter-communal. Religious identity is but one element of these tensions, but symbols of particular religions (such as a church or a mosque) may become targets for sectarian violence.

According to participants, the most significant trigger is that, in line with the 'federal character' of the Constitution, roles within government and its agencies are granted on a quota basis across each state. This often comes with the privileges that accompany such positions such as power and access to state resources. The question of 'indigeneity', which defines one's 'state of origin', becomes increasingly important and linked to access to resources and political power. This leads to tensions between 'indigenes' and 'settlers' and 'legitimises' the polarisation of society, excluding many who have lived in a given state for many years. For example, participants pointed to the conclusions of a study conducted by the Plateau Indigenous Development Association Network, which emphatically recommends that the 'request by the Hausa community in Jos for the creation of districts in Jos should be discarded because their demand does not have any genuine historical basis.'<sup>18</sup> The

recommendation was based on evidence presented as proof that Hausa are not indigenous to Jos.

Yet, the stark divisions, which are apparent today in Plateau State, are relatively new. Many participants referred to the state's capital, Jos, as having historically attracted a diverse population with few tensions.

Participants in the consultations indicated that, given this underlying tension, which frequently erupts over political gain, access to resources, access to land, cattle grazing/migration routes and more general struggles over resources, the response of the security forces becomes critical to maintain peace. One participant said,

*'If all parts of the community had confidence that the security forces would protect them equitably, some conflicts would be pre-empted or resolved.'*

However, it was noted by some participants that, broadly speaking, the military, a majority of whom come from the North, are perceived to be more sympathetic to the Muslim community and the police, a majority of who come from the south, more allied to the Christian community. This makes the role of the security forces more ambiguous. Most communities do not trust the state or national government to provide their security and so resort to self-defence or form their own vigilante-style protection at times of tension or to head off perceived threats, thus deepening the divides and cycle of violence. A climate of impunity has emerged from the lack of action taken in response to allegations of excessive force or bias, and despite various commissions of enquiry, such as the 2009 Plateau State Judicial Commission of Inquiry into sectarian violence in November 2008, this contributes to a cycle of revenge which is unleashed whenever violence is sparked.

Participants remarked on the number of disaffected young people willing to join in violence once triggered. Some of these will have been armed by 'conflict entrepreneurs', which include political parties. In Nigeria, militias frequently hold governments and businesses to ransom by rioting or kidnapping staff of oil companies. In May 2011, youth militias in the Niger Delta demanded US\$90,000 for the resettlement for each of their members in return for agreeing not to harass the population.

<sup>18</sup> The History, Ownership, Establish of Jos and Misconceptions about 'the Recurrent Jos Conflicts', PIDAN, June 2010.

The general trend of urbanisation has created further pressure in cities such as Jos. Participants had observed an increase in the population of Plateau State in response to the adoption by some other northern States of Sharia Law. However, the question of who is 'indigene' and who is not remains the key source of tension and in this divisive context, issues such as disputed elections can easily be exploited by politicians to generate violence.

### **Some ongoing responses to conflict in Plateau State identified by participants:**

#### **Governmental responses:**

- A Plateau State Judicial Commission of Inquiry in mid 2009, under the leadership of former Attorney General, Prince Bola Ajibola, looked into the causes of violence in Jos in November 2008 and the individuals or groups responsible. It submitted its report to the governor in October 2009. It is not clear what follow up has been undertaken. The Hausa-Fulani community boycotted the commission, which it considered biased.<sup>19</sup>
- A federal panel, the Presidential Panel of Investigation, was established at the same time to investigate the November 2008 violence. Hearings began in December 2009 and all sides were represented. The Panel did not reconvene when violence broke out again in January 2010. Its work seems to have been overtaken by another presidential advisory committee, the Lar Committee, which presented its report to President Goodluck Jonathan in August 2010. Recommendations included the setting up of a truth and reconciliation commission to help re-establish trust between communities.
- The security response included deployment of the military Special Task Force and the paramilitary Nigerian Mobile Police (MOPOL).
- The National Human Rights Commission has been involved in mediation efforts and is intending to pursue the issue of access to health care which was denied to some during the December unrest.
- The National Orientation Office regularly reports to government on security issues and highlights the importance of land ownership reform as a means to reduce levels of conflict.
- The Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution conducted joint research with police, youth and other sectors on detecting the early signs of conflict.

#### **Civil society responses:**

- The Centre for Democracy and Development has hosted a conference on indigeneity.
- The Women's Empowerment Program is piloting trauma counselling for those affected by inter-communal violence.
- The Nigerian Red Cross and Red Crescent have implemented its Alternative to Violence Programmes in Plateau State.
- Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN), together with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), with support from the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution held stakeholder workshops just prior to the December 2010 violence and again in June 2011 bringing together representatives of the Berom, Afizere, Hausa, Anaguta, Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba communities. They discussed how to design a dialogue process to redress conflict. They agreed to form a 'Grassroot Peace Advancement Team' to pursue these aims.
- Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) - many thought this body only condemns violence, but does not take action with its members to prevent violence.
- Christian Association of Nigeria held stakeholders meetings during the January 2010 outbreak of violence in Jos. All people in a community - indigene or not - joined ranks and built road-blocks to protect themselves.

#### **Recommendations for Plateau State emerging from the consultations:**

##### **Indigeneity:**

Many of those consulted suggested the concept of indigeneity should be expunged from the Constitution. Perhaps an important step in that direction would be a full and open debate to explore the contradictions and potential for conflict within this concept. The international human rights framework which guarantees equal civil, economic, social, cultural and political rights for all citizens could provide a useful reference.

##### **Livelihood:**

Some dispute triggers could be minimised by defining cattle routes and embarking on land reform, so that differences can be resolved on the basis of a shared and clear understanding.

##### **Security:**

Improved law enforcement to prevent conflict and end impunity. The security forces should build up

<sup>19</sup> Additional information received from Human Rights Watch, in an email exchange June 2011.

relations with all parts of the community during periods of calm and improve their monitoring of warning signs, such as stock-piling of tyres to be used as road blocks, or more weapons in circulation. During conflict, the security forces must act to protect all people equally and investigate serious allegations of illegal actions committed by their own forces.

### **Accountability:**

To reduce the desire for revenge, those responsible for attacks must be held accountable and those affected by acts of violence should be offered counselling. A truth and reconciliation process would contribute to healing and a clarification of what actually happened. These outcomes would contribute to breaking down misinformation which circulates between the different communities.

Political parties also need to review their use of 'supporters' to attack political rivals and address allegations that party officials have handed out weapons to this end. Allegations of such illegal acts must be investigated and those responsible must be held accountable.

### **Continuous dialogue:**

Too often, inter-community dialogue happens only at times of tension and as one-off meetings in hotels. Civil society representatives expressed their need for support to generate such dialogue on a sustained basis. Cooperation from community leaders who are representative of all parts of their community, including women and young people, is vital to this process. Any inter-religious dialogue should equally be fully representative of the communities they represent and on-going. Community leaders could be encouraged to watch for warning signs and trained on appropriate ways to respond. The media should also be involved in the dialogue and encouraged to not misrepresent the different interests.

A facilitated peace process (preferably Track 2 negotiations) should be instituted with external mediation (accepted to both parties) based on agreed plans with various stakeholders and commitment of the Government of Nigeria to transform the conflict.

## **Niger Delta**

### **Key issues:**

Participants highlighted the following key issues as sources or results of tension:

- Distribution of oil wealth
- Political violence
- Impunity

### **Analysis of the triggers and drivers of conflict:**

*'A man from the Niger Delta of Nigeria, seeing the fly-overs in Abuja, got angry and said, 'how could the government build bridges over dry land when communities in the Niger Delta need only culverts [channels under roads for water drainage] to facilitate movement and small businesses.'*

Participant, group discussion on Niger Delta

The Delta Region produces Nigeria's oil, which provides some 30 percent of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product.<sup>20</sup> The distribution of the country's oil wealth is a key political question. The derivation principle determines what percentage of the revenue should be returned to the oil's place of origin. Although the percentage has varied, the population of the Delta Region is angry about the lack of infrastructure and the poverty they experience and there is a perception that the region does not receive an equitable share of the revenue generated by resources. This results in heightened violence around the struggle for political power and violent attacks on representatives of the commercial operatives and the state. Over the past quarter century, unrest in the Niger Delta has slowly escalated into a guerrilla-style conflict that results in hundreds of lives lost each year.<sup>21</sup>

- The population of the Delta region sees the distribution of national resources as unfair and some have organised themselves to react against this;
- Despite the money allocated to the Delta Region States, the population suffers from:
  - Lack of education and lack of accessible education due to lack of roads;
  - Lack of employment opportunities;
  - Poor infrastructure including roads, health services, inadequate road access
  - Lack of electricity

<sup>20</sup> 2009 figures as reported in Fitch's Full ratings report, p 4, 27 October 2010.

<sup>21</sup> International Crisis Group, 'The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria's Delta Unrest', 3 August 2006, p1.

- Because of the money allocated to the Delta Region, battles for political control are violent. As one report stated: 'Spoils of office in Delta State are so extensive that politicians rarely leave voters to decide who gets them.'<sup>22</sup> Politicians and their support networks arm and fund gangs, especially youth without alternative income, to secure their post. These weapons then circulate freely increasing insecurity and the potential for conflict.
- Impunity for violence leads to more violence as people seek revenge outside the law.
- More than just impunity, some of the violence is seen a state-sponsored which includes support for militias.

Some responses highlighted by participants:

- In 2008 the Government set up a Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs with a dual mandate of infrastructure development and youth empowerment. It is not clear how this role sits alongside the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which has existed since 2000. The budget for both bodies in 2009 was lower than the NDDC had received in previous years.
- Steps have been taken to impose corporate social responsibility on the many commercial stakeholders, although a spokesperson from the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs said this was difficult to impose.
- The Petroleum Industry Bill before parliament aims to transform the oil industry into an engine of sustainable development, enhance governance and eliminate toxic social and environmental impact on producing communities. However, its success depends on political will among other factors.<sup>23</sup>
- Nigeria was designated as Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) compliant in March 2011, which is a sign that the Government is prepared for international scrutiny.
- An amnesty was in force between June and October 2009, under which some 20,000 militants were demobilised and underwent training in non-violence<sup>24</sup>. However, the workshop participants were critical that, without follow-up measures, their demobilisation could be short-term.

22 International Crisis Group, 'Nigeria's Elections: Reversing the Degeneration?' p. 11, 24 February 2011.

23 See Revenue Watch Institute, 'The Nigerian Petroleum Industry Bill: Key Upstream Questions for the National Assembly', Patrick Heller, October 2009, accessed 13 June 2011 [www.revenuewatch.org/files/RWI\\_Nigeria\\_PIB\\_Analysis.pdf](http://www.revenuewatch.org/files/RWI_Nigeria_PIB_Analysis.pdf)

24 US State Department Human Rights Report, Nigeria, 2010.

- The Nigerian Red Cross has run Alternative to Violence Projects in the Delta Region which promote non-violent conflict resolution.

### Recommendations from participants for the Delta region:

Given that the above initiatives were not considered sufficient, other recommendations were made with regard to the Delta Region:

- More consultation with communities about development initiatives, so they become community-driven, rather than imposed in line with government priorities.
- Government to support communities to provide adequate, accessible schools.
- Cooperation between civil society and state actors to conduct sensitisation programmes and other initiatives with the aim of rebuilding trust between state, communities and civil society.
- Intervention to encourage both government and citizens to accept their responsibilities with the aim of engendering a political will for change.
- National Orientation Agency in collaboration with civil society, to organise sensitisation programmes to encourage popular electoral participation.
- Government to create enabling environment to tackle corruption and other aspects of better governance.
- Government training of security forces to ensure they intervene with minimum force and with respect for civilians and government action to ensure they are held accountable for any use of force; there is also a need for rigorous political control over the application of force by security forces.

Although elections did not feature in the analysis, the following recommendation emerged from participants:

- Improved cooperation between civil society and government agencies during the whole election process is key to improving performance. These internal mechanisms are seen as more effective in bringing about change than outside observation and criticism.<sup>25</sup>

25 This view accords with International Crisis Group's analysis which states: 'If political violence and electoral malfeasance did not subvert the will of the Nigerian electorate, it is mainly thanks to the contributions of INEC and Chairman Jega and his team; President Jonathan, senior academics who doubled as returning officers; young Nigerians in the National Youth Service Corps who served as ad-hoc officials; and the electorate that was determined and prepared, every step of the way, to defend their votes and protect the integrity of the system' from 'Grappling with the aftermath of April polls, 23 May 2011, published in The Nation.

# Conclusion

As emphasised at the beginning of this report, it is widely acknowledged that conflict and instability in West Africa have affected the majority of the region's 16 countries and that its drivers are interrelated. They cut across weak government structures, endemic corruption, persistent poverty and social exclusion, mismanagement of natural resources and the impact of spill-over of conflict and instability into neighbouring states. Despite a track record of violent conflict, coups and unrest, the countries that experienced conflict, such as Sierra Leone and Liberia, are now consolidating peace, or making significant progress, like Côte d'Ivoire. As such the region is perceived as increasingly stable. A clear indicator of this is the gradual shift in donors' attention away from West Africa to crises elsewhere in the world.

While there are certainly reasons for optimism, there is also convincing evidence that West Africa remains a fragile, volatile region. A special report by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) released in May 2011 suggests just this, while identifying and analysing key emerging threats to peace and security<sup>26</sup>. Significantly, it concludes that some of the new threats are of a criminal, rather than political nature. In addition to recognising that elements of the old challenges to peace and security remain, the report identifies drugs trafficking, terrorism, piracy and challenges to democratic governance as new threats. Importantly, the report also emphasises the inter-linkages between these threats, and linkages between these and the region's security challenges. For example, there are obvious connections between drug trafficking and the challenge of border insecurity, high rates of youth unemployment and disenfranchisement.

This research aimed to fill a gap in the analysis and understanding of the region's conflicts by listening to the voices of local people on the underlying drivers of conflict in West Africa. As we had hoped, the findings have helped to draw out some of the common themes which emerged from the consultations. The common issues that contribute to violence and instability seem to congregate around youth disenfranchisement and unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, poor governance and cross-border instability and the relatively 'new' threats of drug trafficking and organised crime.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this suggests a convergence between local views and the formal analysis on

conflict drivers. However, the consultations also revealed that local people are not only fully aware of the causes of instability in West Africa, but are also articulating a variety of practical responses, which stem from their daily experiences. Furthermore, there is an appetite to contribute to policy making and help consolidate peace in the region. While not all of the suggestions and recommendations are practicable, they can inform analysis that forms the basis of programming and decision making. For donors in particular, it may help consolidate investments made so far on peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. More significantly, responses which emanate from and are owned by local people living with conflict are more likely to be sustainable.

The commonalities identified in the consultations do not necessarily suggest the need for a regional approach to addressing conflict drivers in West Africa. There were many suggestions and recommendations specific to each context. Nevertheless, they do highlight the interconnected nature of conflict and instability in the region, as well as its consequences for populations. Participants felt that there is progress to be made in taking a more coordinated and strategic approach to common issues affecting a number of states within the region and there is a desire among civil society to be more involved in this.

To this effect, ECOWAS' peace and security mandate is an important part of the outlook for a more peaceful West Africa. While opinions on the successes and failures of ECOWAS' efforts in addressing and preventing conflict varied, many participants welcomed the regional organisation's willingness to actively engage on conflicts, seeing its vision as an effective way of addressing conflict and instability in the region. As the ECOWAS Vision 2020 document states,

*“...in the new ECOWAS, instability and security at any level or in any part of the region must be seen and treated as a potential threat to the entire region and the new vision.”<sup>27</sup>*

ECOWAS has played an increasing role in addressing conflict in the region and has an impressive framework for peace and security. To date ECOWAS' role has been one of engagement in times of or in response to crises within its member states. However,

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26 United Nations Security Council Research Report No. 1, 'Emerging Security Threats in West Africa', May 2011

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27 Towards a Democratic and Prosperous Community, ECOWAS Vision 2020

its Conflict Prevention Framework recognises that, beyond ending or containing violence, more needs to be done to address its root causes in order to build more sustainable peace.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, Vision 2020 foresees a central role for civil society in shaping West Africa's future: it refers to a new 'ECOWAS of the Peoples', a shift away from an 'ECOWAS of States'. Progress has been made towards including people's perspectives and ideas through the establishment of a platform for dialogue and consultation between ECOWAS and civil society: the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF). WACSOF has been tasked with coordinating efforts of civil society organisations and channelling their perspectives into ECOWAS' medium and long-term activities in order to achieve Vision 2020. This and other initiatives offer West Africa's local people and civil society an opportunity to formally contribute to policy debates, responses on conflicts in the region, and lessons learning, regardless of whether these are of a regional nature or country-specific. Many participants felt that ECOWAS could go further to pool and coordinate civil society views and actions to respond proactively to specific conflict situations before these escalate.

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28 'ECOWAS member states have a responsibility to ensure sustainable peace goes beyond violence management. In other words, military interventions should constitute only a segment, and ideally a measure of last resort, in the broader peace and security architecture. Emphasis should now be placed on prevention and peacebuilding.'



Traders crossing the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia, November 2009 © Aubrey Wade

*‘A strategic approach with clear roles and responsibilities of member states and civil society, to address the conflict drivers, which affect us regionally, is an important role for ECOWAS. Especially that we now have an ECOWAS of the People.’*

Female peacebuilding activist, Liberia

There is significant scope for the EU to further strengthen this link between local voices, civil society and policy makers as part of its current Regional Integration Programme. In so doing, it would contribute to programming and policy making that is validated by those who are the most affected by violent conflict and instability. Moreover, it would represent an investment in safeguarding the benefits of support to the region to date and to ECOWAS in particular, as its largest donor.

The Policy Brief that accompanies this report identifies areas and provides practical recommendations for the EU to consider, which came out of this consultative process. These range from recommendations on narrowing the gap between centres and peripheries; preventing youth from being co-opted into war economies, drug trafficking and organised crime; lessons learning on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration; and strengthening the role of ECOWAS in addressing the root causes of conflict in the region.