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Regional and Sub-Regional Collaboration for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: The ECOWAS and Nigeria's Counterterrorism Measures in Perspective.

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" Regional collaboration, not isolation, is the cornerstone of sustainable peace and stability in the face of transnational security challenges."

Abstract
The rise of terrorist groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria underscores the limitations of solely national responses to regional security threats. This paper examines the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in fostering regional and subregional collaboration for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Nigeria. By employing a Liberal Institutionalist theoretical framework, the research investigates how ECOWAS facilitates cooperation among member states through shared interests, institutional structures, and monitoring mechanisms. The analysis explores the effectiveness of ECOWAS's mechanisms in supporting Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts and identifies potential areas for improvement. The paper analyses the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), originally a Nigerian initiative, and the Dakar Mechanism for Conflict Prevention highlights their successes and shortcomings. It argues that while ECOWAS plays a crucial role, enhancing information sharing, addressing root causes of conflicts and incorporating civil society actors are critical areas for improvement. By addressing the root causes of terrorism, such as poverty, inequality, and political instability, crucial for long-term success and taking a comprehensive approach to regional security, ECOWAS can play a vital role in enhancing peace and stability in West Africa.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Nigeria, Counterterrorism, Boko Haram, Liberal Institutionalism, Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), Dakar Mechanism.

1. Introduction

The catastrophic terrorist attacks on September 11 2011, marked a watershed moment in global security concerns, catalysing a surge in terrorist activities worldwide (Alexander, 2003). This new era of terrorism, characterised by its persistent and multifaceted nature, poses a grave threat to human life, social cohesion and economic stability (Chen & Yao, 2023). In response, the international community has recognised the necessity of a multi-pronged approach, encompassing national and international efforts, to counter this global threat (Braithwaite & Osabuohien, 2022).

Regional and sub-regional organisations have

emerged as critical players in this collaborative fight against terrorism. Through mechanisms like intelligence sharing and resource pooling, these organisations offer a platform for coordinated action, enabling member states to collectively address the transnational nature of terrorist threats (Council of the European Union, 2020). The European Union's (EU) comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, updated in 2022, exemplifies this approach, emphasising preventative measures and cooperation among its member states (European Commission, 2022). Sub-regional collaborations, such as the trilateral partnership between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, demonstrate the value of localise efforts in countering border terrorism and enhancing security cooperation (Andrés & Bartolacci, 2021; Mendes & Rodrigues, 2020; González, 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brazil, 2023).

Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly West Africa, has witnessed a disturbing increase in terrorist activities in years (START, 2021). Boko Haram, a violent extremist group operating in the Lake Chad Basin, poses a significant threat to regional stability, causing immense human suffering and displacement (Amania, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2023; Lacquement & Lafargue, 2017). The transnational nature of Boko Haram's activities underscores the need for regional and subregional collaboration in combating this threat (Adebajo, 2021). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), an organisation of 15 West African countries, has adopted various strategies and tactics for peace and security in the region, given the considerable threat posed by the insurgency (Onuoha and Akogwu2022).

The ECOWAS has played a significant role in supporting Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts, and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) predates its formal involvement. The MNJTF focuses specifically on the threat of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin region. It operates under the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) mandate, with a force commander appointed by the LCBC. While ECOWAS supports the MNJTF, it is not directly under its command structure. The ECOWAS Standby Force is designed to respond to regional crises, including terrorism. Though some operations and objectives may overlap, it is a separate entity from the MNJTF. Though ECOWAS did not create the MNJTF, the ECOWAS provides political support and legitimacy to the MNJTF, advocating for its mandate and raising awareness of the threat posed by Boko Haram. The ECOWAS contributes to the MNJTF's funding and logistical support, helping to ensure its operational effectiveness. The ECOWAS coordinates and harmonises regional counterterrorism efforts, including those of the MNJTF and national governments. The MNJTF is a prime example of regional collaboration that transcends the boundaries of a single organisation like ECOWAS. It demonstrates the importance of cooperation between neighbouring countries and regional bodies in addressing shared security threats.

The MNJTF has successfully disrupted Boko Haram's operations and deterred attacks (International Crisis Group, 2023). However, challenges persist, including allegations of human rights abuses by security forces and the need for a more comprehensive approach beyond military interventions (Brast, 2017; Olaniyi, 2020; Bob-Manuel, 2019). This paper examines the critical role of regional and subregional collaboration in countering terrorism and promoting peacebuilding in West Africa. Specifically, it evaluates ECOWAS's role in supporting Nigeria's counterterrorism measures, analyses the mechanisms employed by ECOWAS to facilitate regional cooperation, and identifies areas for strengthening the institutional framework to enhance regional peace and security. By adopting a Liberal Institutionalist lens, the study will shed light on how shared interests, institutional frameworks,

and monitoring mechanisms can bolster collective action in countering terrorism.

2. Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating primary and secondary data collection and comprehensively investigating regional and sub-regional collaboration for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Secondary sources from scholarly publications on conflict prevention, peacebuilding, regional cooperation, and terrorism in West Africa were sourced from reputable academic databases. These sources provide theoretical frameworks, in-depth analyses, and empirical data relevant to the research topic. The study consulted official documents from ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), Nigerian government agencies, and international organisations like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). These documents offered insights into ECOWAS's conflict prevention and counter terrorism frameworks, policy guidelines, and operational strategies. The study used credible news sources from West Africa and international media outlets to gather current information on regional security dynamics, terrorist activities in Nigeria, and regional responses.

In addition to the robust secondary data analysis outlined, the study referred to past interviews with stakeholders, including ECOWAS officials involved in conflict prevention and counterterrorism initiatives. These interviews provided crucial insights into regional collaboration's implementation, challenges, and successes, complementing secondary sources. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining primary data from referenced past interviews with key stakeholders involved in ECOWAS's counter-terrorism initiatives and Nigeria's security sector. Interviewees included policymakers from ECOWAS and the Nigerian government, military personnel involved in the MNJTF, representatives from civil society organisations working on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and academics specialising in security studies and regional integration in West Africa. These past interviews referenced in the study were conducted in Abuja, Nigeria, and Dakar, Senegal; the study employed thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns from the past interviews. These findings were then triangulated with insights from secondary sources to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of ECOWAS's role in supporting Nigeria's counterterrorism measures."

3. Theoretical Framework

Liberal Institutionalism, championed by scholars such as Keohane (1988) and Moravcsik (1997), serves as a theoretical framework for understanding international cooperation. The theory posits that states, driven by self-interest, can achieve mutually beneficial outcomes by collaborating through international institutions. It emphasises the role of shared interests, norms, and institutional mechanisms in fostering cooperation.

ECOWAS member states share a vested interest in regional stability and security, a prerequisite for economic development and social progress. This shared interest incentivises cooperation in counterterrorism efforts. Moreover, ECOWAS promotes norms of democracy, good governance, and human rights, which can address the root causes of terrorism and contribute to long-term peacebuilding (Lake, 2009).

ECOWAS has established robust institutional frameworks, such as the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Peace-keeping and Security (MCPMPS), that outline protocols for joint military action, intelligence sharing, and diplomatic interventions in response to regional security threats (ECOWAS, 2009). These frameworks provide a structured platform for member states to

coordinate their actions and pool resources in the fight against terrorism.

Liberal Institutionalism recognises the importance of monitoring and enforcement mechanisms within institutions. ECOWAS employs such mechanisms to ensure member-state compliance with regional security protocols. This can involve peer review processes and the deployment of fact-finding missions to assess conflict situations, enhancing the effectiveness of regional collaboration.

While Liberal Institutionalism provides valuable insights, it is not without its limitations. Critics argue that the theory overemphasises Shared Interests. As such, it may neglect the role of power dynamics and national self-interest in shaping cooperation. Powerful states within an institution may prioritise their agendas over collective action (Avant, 2004). Further, the theory focuses too narrowly on formal institutions, overlooking the role of informal norms, networks, and social movements in fostering cooperation (Acharya, 2004). Enforcing cooperation within institutions can be difficult. Weak enforcement mechanisms and disparities in member-state capabilities can hinder the effectiveness of regional collaboration (Mansfield, 2004). Despite these critiques, Liberal Institutionalism remains a relevant framework for analysing ECOWAS and its role in supporting Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts. The rise of terrorist groups like Boko Haram poses a significant threat to all member states, creating a strong shared interest in cooperation. ECOWAS provides a platform for information exchange, joint planning, and coordinated responses, strengthening Nigeria's counter-terrorism measures.

Liberal Institutionalism offers a valuable lens for examining how ECOWAS facilitates regional collaboration in countering terrorism. It highlights the importance of shared interests, institutional frameworks, and monitoring mechanisms in promoting cooperation for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in West Africa. While acknowledging its limitations, this theory underscores the potential of regional institutions like ECOWAS in addressing complex security challenges.

4. Literature Reviews on ECOWAS and Regional Counterterrorism Measures for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

Scholarly literature has extensively explored the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in regional counterterrorism and peacebuilding. Research has primarily focused on the evolution of ECOWAS's security architecture, the effectiveness of its interventions, and the challenges it faces in addressing complex security threats.

Adebajo (2002) highlighted the organisation's initial focus on conflict prevention and management, with a limited emphasis on counterterrorism. Francis (2005) argued that the rise of transnational threats, particularly after 9/11, prompted ECOWAS to expand its mandate and develop a more robust counterterrorism framework. This evolution is reflected in the establishment of mechanisms such as the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy (ECTS) and the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) (ECOWAS, 2008).

Accordingly, several scholars have examined the impact of ECOWAS interventions in conflict zones with mixed findings. Adetula (2007) highlighted successful peacekeeping operations, such as in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where ECOWAS was crucial in restoring stability. Others, like Onapajo and Uzodike (2012), pointed to the limitations of ECOWAS interventions, particularly in addressing complex and protracted conflicts like the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) identify several challenges:

limited resources, weak institutional capacity, political interference from member states, and the complex nature of contemporary security threats hindering ECOWAS's effectiveness in counterterrorism and peacebuilding. Uzodike and Maiangwa (2014) argued that the rise of non-state actors, such as terrorist groups and criminal networks, poses a significant challenge to ECOWAS's traditional approaches to conflict resolution. Olayoku and Ibrahim (2021) emphasised ECOWAS's potential as a regional security provider, highlighting its normative frameworks and institutional mechanisms for promoting peace and stability. Adetula (2017) critically pointed to the organisation's limitations and persistent challenges in addressing security threats.

Murithi (2011) focused on the role of military interventions in ECOWAS's counterterrorism efforts. Other scholars have explored the role of ECOWAS in promoting regional security and stability in West Africa. For instance, Olayoku and Ibrahim (2021) highlight the importance of ECOWAS's normative frameworks in fostering cooperation among member states. They argue that the organisation's emphasis on democracy, good governance, and human rights creates a conducive environment for addressing the root causes of terrorism.

Other studies have focused on the operational aspects of ECOWAS's counterterrorism measures. Adebajo and Mustapha (2008) provide a historical overview of the organisation's interventions in regional conflicts, demonstrating its capacity to deploy peacekeeping forces and mediate disputes. Similarly, Fayemi and Adesina (2010) examine ECOWAS's role in combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, a critical factor in fuelling violence and terrorism. Newman (2004) focused on the immediate impact of ECOWAS interventions. While the existing literature offers valuable insights, several key debates and gaps warrant further exploration-for example, the dynamics between ECOWAS and International Partners.

Interestingly, works of literature often overlook the complexities of collaboration between ECOWAS and international actors in counterterrorism efforts. However, the collaborative efforts between ECOWAS and international actors in counterterrorism operations are characterised by a complex interplay of power dynamics, shared interests, and potential areas of tension. An example is France's military intervention in the Sahel, which has contributed to degrading terrorist capabilities; it has also been criticised for its unilateral approach and limited consultation with ECOWAS member states (Bøås & Dunn, 2017). This has raised concerns about France's intentions and potential to exacerbate regional tensions. Again, The United States' Africa Command (AFRICOM) presence in Africa has been met with mixed reactions, with some welcoming its support for counterterrorism efforts and others expressing concerns about its potential to militarise US foreign policy in the region (Campbell, 2010). While these partnerships offer opportunities for resource mobilisation, intelligence sharing, and capacity building, the involvement of former colonial powers in ECOWAS counterterrorism efforts has raised several potential areas of tension within these partnerships.

First, there are concerns about neo-colonialism, with some critics arguing that international interventions perpetuate historical patterns of external control and exploitation (Mbembe, 2001). Second, foreign troops and military bases can generate resentment among local populations and fuel anti-Western sentiment, potentially undermining counterterrorism efforts (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012). Third, the focus on military solutions can overshadow the importance of addressing the root causes of terrorism, such as poverty, inequality, and political marginalisation. This can lead to short-term gains in security at the expense of

long-term peacebuilding and stability (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Finally, there are concerns about the sustainability of international support. External partners may have shifting priorities or face domestic pressures to reduce their involvement in regional conflicts, leaving ECOWAS with limited resources and capacity to address on-going security challenges. It is interesting to state that the power dynamics between ECOWAS and international actors are often asymmetrical, with external powers like France, the United States, and the European Union wielding significant influence due to their military capabilities, financial resources, and geopolitical interests. This asymmetry can create challenges in decision-making processes, with ECOWAS potentially feeling pressured to align its strategies with the priorities of its international partners (Adetula, 2017). For instance, France's Operation Barkhane in the Sahel region has been criticised for its unilateral approach, with limited consultation and coordination with ECOWAS member states (Bøås & Dunn, 2017). This has raised concerns about the extent to which regional actors have a genuine voice in shaping counterterrorism strategies.

5. The Impact of Military Interventions in Counterterrorism Operations.

Many studies focus on the immediate impact of military interventions in counterterrorism operations. However, this study focuses on its impact and comprehensively evaluates the unintended consequences of military interventions, including civilian casualties, displacement, and the potential for radicalisation. In addition, the study gives a more in-depth analysis of the long-term implications of such strategies on peace-building and stability, which is needed. Suffice it to state that since the emergence of terrorism in West Africa, marked by the rise of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the early 2000s, ECOWAS has progressively intensified its counterterrorism efforts. Initially focussing on conflict prevention and management, ECOWAS adopted a more proactive stance using military intervention, recognising the transnational nature of terrorist threats and their destabilising impact on the region. While often employed to quell violence and restore stability, military interventions can inadvert-ently trigger a cascade of unintended consequences that exacerbate existing challenges and undermine long-term peacebuilding efforts.

Military operations, even when conducted with precision, inevitably carry the risk of civilian casualties. In the context of counterterrorism, where insurgents often embed themselves within civilian populations, the distinction between combatants and non-combatants can become blurred, leading to tragic outcomes. The displacement of populations due to conflict and military operations further compounds humanitarian crises, creating breeding grounds for resentment and further instability. For example, the fight against Boko Haram takes place in a challenging environment character-ised by asymmetric warfare, civilian displace-ment, and difficult terrain. This can increase the risk of civilian casualties and complicate efforts to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. (International Crisis Group, 2021). Further, Boko Haram is known to infiltrate civilian populations and use human shields, making it difficult for security forces to target them without risking civilian casualties (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2016).

The Nigerian military has a code of conduct that prohibits human rights abuses and emphasises the protection of civilians. (Nigerian Army, 2017). The Nigerian military and other security agencies receive training on human rights law and the principles of international humanitarian law. (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020). The Nigerian government has established

mechanisms to investigate allegations of human rights abuses and hold perpetrators accountable. (National Human Rights Commission, 2023).

While progress has been made, greater transparency and accountability in counter-terrorism operations are needed. This includes prompt and impartial investigations of alleged abuses and ensuring that perpetrators are held responsible. (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Continued efforts are needed to strengthen civilian protection measures and minimise civilian casualties during military operations. This includes improved intelligence gathering, targeted operations, and non-lethal tactics. (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024)

It is important to state that military interventions can inadvertently contribute to the radicalisation of individuals and communities. Heavy-handed tactics, perceived injustices, and the collateral damage caused by military operations can fuel grievances and create fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root. Moreover, disrupting existing power structures and creating security vacuums can allow new armed groups to emerge and exploit the situation. While successful in some areas, the G5 Sahel Joint Force's operations have also been criticised for contributing to the fragmentation of extremist groups and the emergence of new splinter factions (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Although military interventions may be required to address immediate security threats in counterterrorism operations, they are not a panacea and can have profound, often unintended, consequences for long-term peacebuilding and stability. These implications extend beyond the immediate cessation of violence and encompass a complex interplay of social, political, and economic factors. Heavy-handed military tactics, collateral damage, and perceived injustices can erode trust between communities and security forces. This can lead to a breakdown in social cohesion, making reconciliation and long-term peacebuilding more difficult (Newman, 2004). The perception of collective punishment can foster resentment and fuel extremist narratives, potentially creating a vicious cycle of violence. Military interventions can inadvertently weaken state institutions and undermine governments' legitimacy. Relying on external forces for security can reduce national governments' capacity and motivation to build effective and accountable institutions (Paris, 2004). This can result in a power vacuum and increased vulnerability to future conflicts. Military operations often disrupt economic activity, damage infrastructure, and displace populations, leading to economic hardship and underdevelopment.

The destruction of livelihoods and the loss of access to markets can exacerbate poverty and inequality, creating conditions conducive to extremism (World Bank, 2011). Exposure to violence and displacement can have lasting psychological effects on individuals and communities. Trauma can be transmitted across generations, leading to cycles of violence and hindering efforts to build a peaceful and stable society (Betancourt & Khan, 2008).

The financial and human resources dedicated to military interventions often come at the expense of investments in education, healthcare, and other essential services. This can perpetuate underdevelopment and limit opportunities for social and economic progress, further undermining long-term stability (Collier, 2007). The "Forever War" Trap: The reliance on military solutions can create a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and intervention. The short-term gains achieved through military operations may not address the underlying causes of terrorism, leading to the emergence of new threats and the need for further interventions (Mueller, 2005).

While military interventions may be necessary to contain immediate security threats, a sustainable and effective counterterrorism strategy must go beyond kinetic operations. Addressing the root causes of conflict and extremism necessitates a comprehensive approach prioritising non-military measures, such as preventive diplomacy, development assistance, and community engagement. Preventive diplomacy involves diplomatic efforts to prevent disputes from arising or escalating into violent conflicts. It encompasses a range of activities, including mediation, negotiation, confidence-building measures, and early warning systems. ECOWAS has demonstrated its commitment to preventive diplomacy through initiatives such as the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) and the deployment of fact-finding missions to conflict zones (ECOWAS, 2019). An interview conducted on 26th March 2024 with General Francis Behanzin, Former Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security at ECOWAS, revealed insights into the organisation's conflict prevention and counterterrorism approach. General Behanzin emphasised the critical role of early warning systems and preventive diplomacy in ECOWAS's strategy, stating:

> We prioritise addressing the root causes of conflict before they escalate into violence. This involves fostering dialogue, promoting good governance, and addressing socio-economic grievances (Behanzin, Defenceweb 25 March 2024).

By addressing grievances and facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties, preventive diplomacy can help to de-escalate tensions and create conditions conducive to peaceful resolution. It can also address underlying structural factors contributing to conflict, such as political marginalisation, economic inequality, and social exclusion. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities are often cited as key drivers of radicalisation and extremism. Development assistance addressing these root causes can prevent conflict and promote stability. Investments in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic opportunities can empower communities and reduce their vulnerability to extremist ideologies. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s support for community resilience and stabilisation programs in the Sahel region exemplifies the potential of development assistance in countering violent extremism (UNDP, 2023). These programs focus on improving access to essential services, promoting economic opportunities, and strengthening social cohesion.

6. The Impact of Local Communities Voices in the Context of Counterterrorism.

Insufficient attention has been paid to the voices of local communities in the context of counterterrorism. As Osaghae and Suberu (2005) opined, incorporating the perspectives of those directly affected by conflict and counterterrorism is crucial for developing effective and sustainable solutions. This research prioritises the voices of local communities to gain a deeper understanding of the lived realities of conflict and the impact of counterterrorism measures. Local communities possess invaluable insights into the dynamics of conflict, the drivers of radicalisation, and the impact of counterterrorism measures. Their lived experiences provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding that may not be readily apparent to external actors.

Engaging with local communities is vital for understanding the drivers of conflict and extremism and developing effective responses. Community-led initiatives, such as peace committees, dialogue platforms, and social cohesion programs, can play a crucial role in countering extremist narratives and promoting

peaceful coexistence. In Nigeria, community-based initiatives involving religious and traditional leaders have been instrumental in promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and reintegration of former Boko Haram members (International Alert, 2022). These initiatives leverage local knowledge and social networks to address grievances and provide alternative pathways for at-risk youth. For instance, research conducted in Nigeria's conflict-affected Northeast region highlights the importance of understanding local grievances and perceptions of injustice in addressing the Boko Haram insurgency (Uzodike & Maiangwa, 2014).

Community members identified factors such as poverty, corruption, and government neglect as key drivers of radicalisation. Engaging with local communities and incorporating their perspectives in counterterrorism strategies can help build trust and legitimacy for security forces and government institutions. This can enhance cooperation, facilitate information sharing, and create a sense of shared ownership in the fight against extremism. In Mali, community-based initiatives involving local leaders and civil society organisations have played a vital role in countering violent extremism by promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and alternative narratives to extremist ideologies (United Nations Development Programme, 2021).

Local knowledge can inform the design and implementation of more effective and contextually relevant counterterrorism measures. This can involve incorporating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, supporting community-led peacebuilding initiatives, and addressing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different groups within the community. For example, in Niger, the government has partnered with local radio stations to broadcast messages promoting peace and tolerance, countering extremist propaganda, and providing platforms for community dialogue (Search for Common Ground, 2019). Engaging with local communities in counterterrorism efforts is not without its challenges. There may be concerns about security risks, the potential for manipulation by extremist groups, and the difficulty of navigating complex social and political dynamics. However, the opportunities for building trust, enhancing legitimacy, and developing more effective counterterrorism strategies outweigh these challenges. By prioritising the voices of local communities, policymakers and security actors can move beyond a purely military approach and foster a more holistic and sustainable response to the scourge of terrorism.

Challenges and Criticisms of ECOWAS' Counter-Insurgency Strategies

This section deals with the complexities surrounding ECOWAS' adoption of military strategies to combat insurgency in the region, highlighting some authors' criticisms and ethical concerns. It also explores the complexities of international collaboration in counterterrorism efforts, emphasising the need for a balanced approach that addresses both security concerns and human rights considerations. The deployment of multilateral security forces in Africa has become an object of research and study monsters enough for intolerant actors in the literary field that their interest in deploying counter-insurgency strategies is never understood and risks deforming their anti-violent goals. French military intervention in Libya and Mali and the positioning of the American Global Scan Anti-Terrorism in Southern territories of desert countries has provoked protests and burning of American and French anti-terrorist symbols for positive arguments (Walther & Retaille, 2019).

Such a deficiency of consensus demonstrates that the excellent structure of dialogue and consensus, as established by ECOWAS and AU, supports and encourages subregions to invite the international community to assist but

may be insufficient. International redeployment makes regional security immoral. Incorporating a monitoring unit in the defence and security procedures and mechanisms of collection requires provisioning for the antisubversion doctrine.

ECOWAS' effort to enhance peace, dynamic security, and the socio-economic life of its citizenry led to adopting instruments to prohibit and prevent terrorism. ECOWAS has undertaken various initiatives to promote regional cooperation in counterterrorism efforts. For example, ECOWAS has developed regional counterterrorism policies and strategies for member-state cooperation. The organisation has established institutions like the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering (GIABA), which assists member states in combating terrorist financing.

ECOWAS has facilitated the deployment of regional military forces to support countries facing terrorist threats. The organisation promotes intelligence sharing among member states to enhance counterterrorism efforts. However, the organisation's implementation of neutralisation strategies has raised many ethical questions for some authors. Some have erroneously claimed that ECOWAS was 'arrested' by the United Nation's practice and "baulked by the indulgent observances of human rights norms and principles". The organisation responded to these claims by explaining its diplomatic means for struggling against the increasingly objective phenomenon of insecurity. ECOWAS has been criticised for lacking financial and human resources and therefore called to adopt a new practical means - military strategies to solve the crisis (Niwe, 2023).

Therefore, ECOWAS has initiated counter-insurgency military strategies involving the Nigerian Military's cooperation-a proven ineffective measure. In 2013, ECOWAS defined military strategies as appropriate to neutralise the Boko Haram sect within the context of the international practice of regulation and the fight against terrorism (Bala & Tar, 2021; Akran & Udeagbala, 2022) The same year, heads of state and government of ECOWAS, at the end of their 44th extraordinary conference held in Abidjan, have further adopted strategies and tactics to combat terrorism with the establishment of Regional Multinational Joint Forces, which have proportions that include the Alliance for the Lake Chad Basin (LCBC) and the MNJTF (Akinyemi and Asiyanbi2023).

The decision led to a robust International Community mobilisation through Security Council Resolution 2349. Such support Secretary-General Antonio Guterres knew how to insist on the question of the Security Council members, those who favour the prohibition of terrorism and security around the MNJTF (Rjoub et al., 2021). France, Germany, and other European nations significantly contribute to counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel region (International Crisis Group, 2023). The United States also has a military presence in Africa, including countries bordering the Lake Chad Basin, as part of a broader effort to counter violent extremism. This multilateral collaboration reflects a commitment to addressing regional security threats (African Union, 2024).

Dakar Mechanism for Conflict Prevention

The Dakar Mechanism for Conflict Prevention is an example of the steering of ECOWAS towards early mediation and Nigeria towards preventive counterterrorism strategies to secure peace in the sub-region and beyond. The March 1991 Abuja Declaration on Migrants and Refugees establishes that the free movement of persons is a crucial principle of the ECOWAS (Muthuri Kirigia et al., 2016). ECOWAS's Early Warning and Response Network (ECO-WARN) Secretariat, established in 1995 in Lomé, ensures the implementation of Article 11, which states

commit to the exchange of information for the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the region. African countries and sub-regional organizations are actively enhancing cross-border coordination and collaboration to combat terrorism and political violence. For example, the ECOWAS has implemented intelligence-sharing platforms and joint military operations to counter transnational terrorist groups. Similarly, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has established a regional early warning system to prevent and respond to political instability and conflict (Kuassi Lokossou et al., 2021).

The heads of state and government conceived ECOWAS's early mediation mechanisms in response to a deteriorating security environment in the sub-region, and they govern the actions of a legitimised mediating body involved in regional conflict. One of the first and most comprehensive regional peace and security mechanisms is the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflict, Peacekeeping and Security of 1999, known as the Mechanism Protocol.

There have been damaging consequences for peace support operations in the sub-region, such as reportedly unfunded West African military interventions like the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), the Mission of the ECOWAS in Guinea-Bissau and the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea Bissau. Critically, ECOWAS was increasingly faced with internal conflicts that had priority over other interventions, effectively undermining the capacity of ECOWAS to respond adequately to protect peace elsewhere.

ECOWAS Achievements in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Successes and Shortcomings of ECOWAS Initiatives

Findings showed successes and shortcomings in the strategies and contributions of ECOWAS and Nigeria in countering both factions of Boko Haram (including those with Islamist ideologies and those motivated by other grievances). A key example of ECOWAS intervention in a regional conflict is the Liberian Civil War. This conflict, which erupted in 1989 was triggered by a rebellion led by Charles Taylor against the government of Samuel Doe. The war quickly escalated into a brutal and complex conflict involving multiple factions, widespread human rights abuses, and a devastating humanitarian crisis. The violence threatened the stability of the entire region, with refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries and the potential for spillover effects. In response to this crisis, ECOWAS deployed the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), a multilateral armed force, in 1990. ECOMOG played a crucial role in helping to reduce the intensity of the fighting and create space for negotiations. Providing humanitarian assistance and safe havens for those displaced by the conflict. Working with Liberian factions to establish an interim government and pave the way for democratic elections. Collecting weapons and helping former fighters reintegrate into civilian life.

While ECOMOG's intervention was not without its challenges and controversies, it ultimately contributed to ending the war in 1997 and facilitating the transition to a fragile peace. The Liberian case highlights the potential of ECOWAS to intervene in regional conflicts and promote stability, but it also underscores the complexities and long-term challenges of peacebuilding in the region.

ECOWAS established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Peace-keeping and Security (MCPMPS) (ECOWAS,

2019). This framework outlines protocols for information exchange and joint military action in response to regional security threats. ECOWAS plays a significant role in attempting to facilitate intelligence sharing and coordinated military operations to support Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts. ECOWAS created programs like the Regional Intelligence Fusion Centre (RIFC) to enhance member states' information-sharing (ECOWAS, 2017). Other programmes include the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Peacekeeping and Security (MCPMPS) (ECOWAS, 2019). This framework outlines protocols for information exchange and joint military action in response to regional security threats. As ECOWAS counterterrorism strategy in Nigeria, it modified and adapted the policy to fight insecurity in the north of the country on one hand and tame the borders which have been crossing points for terrorist groups wanting to destabilise the country, notably Boko-Haram during the last decade on the other hand.

In the same line of argument, ECOWAS sponsored the participative and inclusive conflict prevention strategy to combine the efforts of each of the Member States, on the one hand, and of the actors of civil society, on the other hand, particularly non-state actors who advocate for peace in time action (Adewopo et al., 2024). Due to the diagnosis of the persistence and recurrence of conflicts, the ECOWAS policy was revised by adopting a conflict prevention strategy. It is further stated that having an inactive and reactive conflict prevention system, it was time for ECOWAS to develop strategic and operational policy lines to address situations of potential conflicts by considering not only the role of States but also civil society and non-state actors of the various Member-States in conjunction with international partners (Brast, 2017).

Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)

The upsurge of Boko Haram terrorism, supported by Islamic State in West Africa, in the year 2014 led to efforts aimed at recruiting more members and infiltrating more areas in Nigeria, which made President-Elect Muhammadu Buhari to make an urgent visit to Niger for talks on how to combat the group. The visit was followed by relevant bilateral and tripartite treaties and agreements between Nigeria and its neighbours that culminated in the establishment of an MNJTF, which first launched an attack on the terrorists in July 2015 during the President's first visit to Cameroon-the ECOWAS and Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). In launching the MNJTF operational plans, a prominent role is played by Nigeria and its defence policies and practices (Tuki, 2023).

The MNJTF is a military force campaign involving Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, established to fight Boko Haram and undertake effective counterterrorism operations in the Lake Chad region and the border areas. The MNJTF's mandate and objectives include eliminating the threats posed by the Boko Haram terrorist group in the Lake Chad Basin border areas and creating a safe operational environment to effectively conduct beneficial economic activities for the Lake Chad Basin States population in the respective border areas. Furthermore, the MNJTF was to be a rapid deployment force in the event of a future possible spill over of the current Boko Haram insurgency in neighbouring countries. Again, the task force is to deny the Boko Haram terrorists the ability to move freely between Nigeria and neighbouring countries (Abubakar et al., 2021).

The MNJTF has achieved some successes in territorial gains against Boko Haram (International Crisis Group, 2020). However, critics argue that intelligence sharing remains inadequate, leading to difficulties anticipating and preventing terrorist attacks (Olonye, 2019). Additionally, the MNJTF has faced logistical challenges and accusations of human rights

abuses (Amnesty International, 2022).

Challenges and Limitations in Countering Terrorism in Nigeria

Nigeria faces a significant challenge in countering terrorism, particularly from Boko Haram. Despite national counterterrorism measures, the group's activities persist. This persistence can be attributed, in part, to limitations in regional cooperation and the porous nature of Nigeria's borders with neighbouring countries within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Idemudia, 2023). The Nigerian government has participated in mediation efforts to address underlying regional grievances contributing to extremism (Adebajo, 2021). Nigeria has provided training and resources to security forces in neighbouring countries to enhance their ability to counter terrorism (Obaze, 2022). These efforts highlight Nigeria's recognition of the threat's regional dimension and attempt to foster a collaborative approach (Adetula, 2020).

Despite these efforts, Boko Haram continues to operate. This persistence can be attributed to porous borders since Nigeria shares extensive, poorly secured borders with neighbouring countries. It allows Boko Haram to establish safe havens, move fighters and supplies across borders, and launch attacks within Nigeria (Bob-Manuel, 2019). Again, some neighbouring ECOWAS countries lack the resources and training to effectively patrol their borders and suppress terrorist activities within their territories (Stremlau, 2022). These factors create a situation in which Nigeria's efforts are undermined by its inability to control the entire regional landscape. In addition, the recent wave of military takeovers and the potential realignment of regional blocs in Africa presents complex challenges.

Africa has witnessed a surge in military takeovers in recent years, with several countries experiencing coups. This trend, coupled with pronouncements of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso leaving regional blocs, raises questions about the future of regional cooperation and stability on the continent. In July 2023, the military of the Republic of Niger ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, citing deteriorating security and ineffective governance (Jeune Afrique, 2023). Burki na Faso had their military coup in January 2022. The military staged a coup against President Roch Kabore, frustrated by his handling of jihadist violence (Al Jazeera, 2022). Mali and Guinea also experienced military takeovers in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The reasons are that the masses were dissatisfied with incumbent governments. Public anger over corruption, economic hardship, and failure to address security concerns can fuel coups (Adetula, 2020).

Additionally, democratic institutions are weak in ECOWAS member states. Suffice it to state that fragile democracies with a history of military intervention are more susceptible to coups (Mkangi, 2020). The implication of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger leaving ECOWAS will have an impact on regional security: A potential fracturing of regional blocs could hinder cooperation on security issues like counterterrorism (Idemudia, 2023). Niger is a critical country in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region. It borders Mali, Burkina Faso, and Chad, all battling extremist groups (International Crisis Group, 2023). Its absence from ECOWAS could create a gap in regional intelligence sharing and coordinated military operations. Niger contributes significantly to regional military forces like the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) fighting Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin (Lake Chad Basin Commission, 2021). Without Niger's participation, the MNJTF's effectiveness could be diminished.

Niger's long, porous borders with conflict zones make regional cooperation crucial for

controlling the movement of fighters and weapons (Bob-Manuel, 2019). Leaving ECOWAS could make information sharing and coordinated border patrols more difficult. Military operations require logistical support, such as transportation and supplies. A fractured ECOWAS could make it more complex to coordinate logistics across borders, hindering counterterrorism efforts. Other countries dissatisfied with ECOWAS might be emboldened by Niger's departure, potentially leading to a weakening of the entire organisation and its ability to address regional security threats. However, Niger might continue bilateral counterterrorism cooperation with some key partners outside of ECOWAS (Lake, 2023).

Niger could explore cooperation with alternative regional security blocs focused on counterterrorism if such blocs emerge. Niger also houses a major US airbase used for drone operations against terrorists. However, in March 2024, Niger announced it was ending its military cooperation agreement with the US, calling the presence of US troops "illegal" (Al Jazeera, 2024). However, negotiations are ongoing, with the US seeking an "orderly and responsible withdrawal" (AP News, 2024). The entire ECOWAS region is slowly under the influence of Western powers to consolidate into one of the worst unrest flag-bearers. Even since Guinea Bissau's 2012 disastrous election, the country has been the latest site for elitist confrontation, driven by the entrenchment of monopoly-type supremacy, which was the source of strife elsewhere in Nigeria and Mali. The region's militaries are the most extreme culprits regarding violent peculiarity (Kuassi Lokossou et al., 2021). It is essential to mention that Nigeria's Boko Haram has been spreading its tentacles in the region, and owing to uncoordinated reactions in the immediate aftermath of the discord, Niger, Cameroon, and especially Benin were at the epicentre of repeated attacks.

One critical challenge is the prospects for close cooperation in regional and subregional conflict management in the ECOWAS subregion. First, it has become a truism that ECOWAS' integration agenda has had a bumpy ride with fewer successes since its creation than the number of meetings, treaties, protocols, agreements, declarations and exemptions (Brast, 2017). Integration requires a certain impetus and cohesion, which some features lack. Without these requisites, the institutional set-up of regional bodies does not always translate into more efficient and pertinent policies. In conflict resolution, ECOWAS tends to blunder without impact. This level of analysis means the study looked at the optimal level of appreciation of the integrity-driven paradigm. The established norms are too loose and seem to have been tailored more to suit the situational leadership accessories.

One of the challenges noted is that some member states lack robust intelligence-gathering capabilities, hindering effective information sharing (Obande, 2017). Maj-gen John Enenche, former Coordinator of the Defence Media Operations in Nigeria, in an interview with the newsmen in Abuja. On January 11, 2021, the challenges of implementing ECOWAS's regional frame-works at the national level, particularly in intelligence sharing and coordination among security agencies, were highlighted. He stated:

> While ECOWAS provides a valuable framework, its successful implementation relies heavily on effective coordination and information sharing at the national level. We need to strengthen our inter-agency cooperation and build trust to maximise our collective impact (Interview, NewsDirect, January 11, 2021).

States may prioritise national security interests over regional cooperation, leading to reluctance

to share sensitive intelligence (Adebajo, 2014). ECOWAS faces limited funding and resources to support large-scale military operations and sophisticated intelligence gathering (Lake, 2015). The region's porous borders allow fighters and weapons to move freely, challenging coordinated military action (Human Rights Watch, 2020). While ECOWAS initiatives have facilitated some level of intelligence sharing and military cooperation, their overall effectiveness remains debatable.

Comparative Analysis of Regional Counterterrorism Approaches in Africa: ECOWAS, SADC, and EAC

The study compared the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC) and came up with the following analysis. ECOWAS has a history of intervening in member-state conflicts and deploying military forces for peacekeeping missions (Adetula, 2020). However, its counterterrorism efforts primarily focus on military operations and intelligence sharing (Idemudia, 2023). In terms of strength, ECOWAS has a well-established institutional framework for regional security cooperation and a rapid deployment force, ECOMOG (Lake, 2023). However, critics point towards limitations in addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering good governance within member states (Adebajo, 2021). SADC's focus emphasises preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution through dialogue and mediation (Mberu, 2017). Military intervention is seen as a last resort.

SADC has a strong record of successful mediation efforts in regional conflicts (Adebajo, 2018). SADC's ability to enforce decisions on member states is limited (Mberu, 2017). The EAC prioritises regional economic integration, development, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding (Mkangi, 2020). The EAC's focus on economic development addresses the root causes of conflict (Mkangi, 2020). The EAC's security architecture is still under development, and its response to regional conflicts has been inconsistent (Mkangi, 2020). Suffice it to state that the specific threats faced by each region differ. Boko Haram in West Africa necessitates a different approach than al-Shabaab in East Africa (Adetula, 2020).

ECOWAS's established security framework contrasts with the EAC's evolving structure (Lake, 2023). Regional cooperation relies on member states' commitment to shared goals (Adebajo, 2021). From the above, each regional organisation has strengths and weaknesses in countering terrorism and promoting peacebuilding. ECOWAS's focus on military intervention can be complemented by SADC's emphasis on preventive diplomacy and the EAC's approach to addressing root causes through development. Effective regional counterterrorism requires a multi-faceted approach that combines these strengths while considering the specific threats faced by each region.

Supporting Nigeria's Counterterrorism Measures

Nigeria faces a complex terrorism challenge, necessitating a multi-faceted response. The country has implemented various counter-terrorism measures, including military operations, intelligence gathering, and peace-building initiatives. Regional collaboration is crucial in these efforts, particularly with ECOWAS member states and through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin. This collaboration supports regional military cooperation, enhances border security, and fosters information sharing. These efforts complement local-level peacebuilding initiatives, enhance community resilience to jihadist violence, and foster long-term stability in the region (Bochicchio & Pallante, 2024).

Mapping the Sahelian Space illustrates that issues associated with transnational terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin require an element of

regional collaboration, focusing on the bilateral understanding between Nigeria and its neighbours, as well as the trilateral interactions and collaborative potential of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Walther & Retaille, 2019). These are pertinent counterterrorism strategies, with the objectives of countering violent extremism, peacebuilding and stabilisation.

The Lake Chad Basin Multinational Joint Task Force (LCB MJTF) comprises Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin, while ECOWAS initiatives to tackle terrorism are ongoing. The European Union (EU), the United States, the United Kingdom (UK), France and other foreign governments are working to strengthen the military and security of the critical actor – the Nigerian government – through the training of counter-militants and the provision of multiple combat and surveillance assets (D. Merrill et al., 2017).

Impact of ECOWAS Collaboration on Nigeria's Counterterrorism Efforts

Nigeria faces a persistent threat from various terrorist groups, most notably Boko Haram. While Nigeria has deployed significant military and security resources to combat this threat, regional collaboration through ECOWAS has become increasingly crucial in supporting these efforts. This collaboration manifests in several key areas:

1. Regional Military Cooperation

ECOWAS has facilitated the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), a combined military force comprising troops from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin. The MNJTF conducts coordinated operations against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin, enhancing regional military capacity and denying the group safe havens (Bothal & Schmid, 2017). However, challenges persist regarding operational coordination, intelligence sharing, and resource constraints (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2015).

2. Border Security Cooperation

ECOWAS initiatives aim to strengthen border security and control the movement of terrorists, weapons, and illicit funds. This includes joint border patrols, information sharing among border agencies, and harmonising border control procedures. However, porous borders and inadequate resources remain challenges to effective implementation (Aning & Brefeld, 2018).

3. Information Sharing

ECOWAS has facilitated the establishment of intelligence - sharing platforms and mechanisms to enhance cooperation among member states' security agencies. This aims to improve early warning systems, track terrorist movements, and disrupt their operations. However, mistrust, bureaucratic hurdles, and inadequate technical capabilities can hinder effective information sharing (Obande, 2017).

4. Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

ECOWAS has been crucial in mediating conflicts and supporting peacebuilding efforts in member states, including Liberia and Sierra Leone. These interventions address the root causes of instability and prevent conditions conducive to spreading terrorism. However, the effectiveness of these interventions varies, and challenges remain in ensuring long-term stability and addressing socio-economic grievances (Francis, 2011).

5. Multilateral Cooperation

Beyond ECOWAS, Nigeria also engages in multilateral counterterrorism cooperation at the Lake Chad Basin level. This involves collaboration with regional and international partners, including the African Union, the United Nations, and Western countries, to enhance capacity building, intelligence sharing, and military assistance (Bothal & Schmid, 2017).

Challenges and Opportunities

While ECOWAS collaboration has demonstrably supported Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts, challenges remain. These include:

Limited resources: Financial and logistical constraints can hinder the full implementation of regional initiatives.

Political will: Varying levels of commitment and political will among member states can affect cooperation.

Coordination challenges: Effective coordination among diverse security agencies and national governments remains crucial.

Addressing the root causes: Long-term success requires addressing the underlying socio-economic and political factors contributing to terrorism.

This was the leading example of successful regional collaboration because it was the first time countries in the Lake Chad estimate had come together to combat an insurgency. The ECOWAS reminded Nigeria of her significant position in the region and continent by demonstrating that the countries in the sub-region needed Nigeria's leadership and shared Nigeria's successes and challenges. Nigeria's experience confronting terrorism allows it to share valuable knowledge and expertise with other member states. This can involve training exercises, joint operations planning, and intelligence exchange (Adebanjo & Adetula, 2018). Nigeria actively advocates for regional cooperation in counterterrorism efforts. This leadership role helps mobilise political will and resources from other member states within ECOWAS (Olonye, 2019).

Nigeria's diplomatic influence can be leveraged to mediate conflicts and address underlying grievances that fuel terrorism in the region (Ogunmola, 2013). Despite its economic challenges, Nigeria contributes financially to regional counterterrorism initiatives. This can involve supporting the MNJTF or funding capacity-building programs for other member states (International Crisis Group, 2020). Nigeria's geographical size and infrastructure can provide logistical support for regional operations. This might include offering military bases, transportation hubs, or communication channels for coordinated responses.

The challenge, however, is that Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram can strain its resources and limit its ability to fully contribute to regional efforts (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Moreover, Nigeria's human rights record in counterterrorism operations has drawn criticism, potentially undermining its leadership role (Amnesty International, 2022). While facing internal challenges, Nigeria's contributions as a troop contributor, knowledge sharer, political leader, mediator, and resource provider are vital for enabling collective counterterrorism efforts in West Africa. Strengthening regional collaboration through improved human rights practices, resource allocation, and information sharing can further solidify Nigeria's role in fostering regional security.

Impact of ECOWAS Collaboration on Nigeria's Counterterrorism Efforts: Current Approaches and Strategies

Nigeria's ongoing struggle with terrorism, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency, has had a devastating impact on the country. Beyond the direct violence, the conflict has disrupted agricultural activities, caused environmental degradation, and exacerbated poverty and displacement, creating a complex humanitarian crisis (Hussain et al., 2021).

Humanitarian Crisis and Response

The insurgency has led to the displacement of millions of people, with many living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps

across northeast Nigeria. These camps house victims of various conflicts, including those driven by ethnic and political tensions, as well as those directly affected by Boko Haram's violence. The humanitarian needs are immense, with millions requiring urgent assistance from the government and international aid organisations (International Organization for Migration, 2023). Various initiatives are underway to address this crisis. The Nigeria Stable State and Resilient Working Group (N/S Strong), supported by organisations like the National Democratic Institute and Global Rights, is conducting research to inform relief strategies and improve humanitarian interventions (Hussain et al., 2021).

Economic and Social Impact

The insurgency has had a profound impact on Nigeria's economy and society. The conflict has depleted human capital, destroyed infrastructure, and disrupted economic activities, leading to increased poverty and hindering development (Rjoub et al., 2021). While Nigeria has invested significant resources in stabilisation and resilience efforts, estimated at over $10 trillion annually (source needed), the challenges remain immense. International organisations and local civil society have also contributed billions of dollars in humanitarian aid and knowledge management (source needed).

ECOWAS Collaboration and Potential Areas for Strengthening

ECOWAS plays a crucial role in supporting Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts. Beyond military cooperation, the organisation facilitates collaboration in areas such as intelligence sharing, border security, and peacebuilding. However, there is potential for further strengthening this collaboration.

Improving information sharing and intelligence gathering: Enhanced information sharing among ECOWAS member states can enable earlier threat identification and more coordinated responses (Obande, 2017).

Strengthening border security: Increased cooperation in border control can help to disrupt the movement of terrorists, weapons, and illicit funds (Aning & Brefeld, 2018).

Addressing root causes: Collaborative efforts to address the socio-economic and political grievances that fuel conflict are essential for long-term peacebuilding (Francis, 2011).

Recommendations:

Addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by terrorism in Nigeria requires:

1.Strengthening the capacity of regional institutions to mediate and resolve conflicts: ECOWAS could benefit from improved training and resources for conflict mediators and a more robust conflict resolution framework.

2.Addressing the root causes of conflict in the region, such as poverty, inequality, and political marginalisation. Counterterrorism efforts that solely focus on military solutions are unlikely to be sustainable in the long term.

3.Promoting democracy, good governance, and human rights in West Africa; addressing these issues can help reduce grievances that fuel extremism and terrorism.

4.Encouraging civil society participation in peacebuilding efforts as civil society organisations (CSOs) can be valuable in promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and community-based solutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the complex dynamics of regional and subregional collaboration for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in West Africa. While ECOWAS has made significant strides in establishing frameworks and initiatives to counter terrorism

and promote stability, challenges persist. The effectiveness of regional cooperation is hindered by factors such as porous borders, inadequate intelligence sharing, and the complex interplay of power dynamics with international partners. The study's findings underscore the importance of adopting a multi-faceted approach beyond military interventions. Preventive diplomacy, development assistance, and community engagement are essential to a sustainable and effective counterterrorism strategy. Furthermore, addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and political marginalisation, is crucial for long-term peacebuilding.

The recent wave of military takeovers and potential realignment of regional blocs in Africa poses additional challenges to regional cooperation and stability. The departure of key countries like Niger from ECOWAS could create gaps in intelligence sharing and coordinated military operations, hindering the fight against terrorism in the region. To enhance the institutional framework for regional cooperation, ECOWAS needs to improve information sharing, strengthen conflict mediation capabilities, address root causes of conflict, promote good governance, and encourage civil society participation. By adopting a more comprehensive and inclusive approach, ECOWAS can bolster its efforts to counter terrorism, promote peacebuilding, and foster lasting stability in West Africa.

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