ECOWAS and Mediation in West Africa: Toward an Enhanced Capacity

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ABSTRACT:
The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been involved in mediation in West Africa for the past two decades. Over the years such mediation efforts have produced mixed results, successes and failures alike. This article provides the background to ECOWAS mediation and recommends the following for the future: (1) All stakeholders should support ECOWAS’s efforts to establish a mediation-facilitation division to bridge the gap between its mandate and capacity; (2) ECOWAS should combine president mediators with professional mediators who have expertise and experience in creating win-win solutions; (3) ECOWAS should develop enforcement capacity for decisions arrived at through mediation; and (4) ECOWAS should explore traditional modes of conflict resolution to supplement modern methods.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was formed in May 1975 to “promote cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability,” as written in Article I of the 1993 ECOWAS Revised Treaty. ECOWAS is now better known for its involvement in conflict prevention, management, and resolution through mediation and peacekeeping. Between the 1990s and early 2000s, ECOWAS intervened in such a manner in four member states: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and Côte d’Ivoire. More recently, ECOWAS has been involved in mediation in two additional member states, Guinea and Niger; in addition, the resurgence of political crisis in Côte d’Ivoire following the disputed November 2010 election calls for ECOWAS’s reengagement to restore stability.

ECOWAS’s involvement in the mediation of interstate conflicts in West Africa raises a number of questions. First, where does the organization derive its mandate to mediate in member states? Second, how has this mandate been pursued and how effective has it been? And third, what can be done within policy circles to improve mediation processes in West Africa? This article attempts to answer these questions by discussing ECOWAS mediation and offering suggestions for the consideration of policy makers. The article recognizes ECOWAS’s efforts to improve mediation and conflict prevention processes but posits that a gap remains between its mandate and the capacity to successfully mediate regional crises (see Nathan 2007 for a similar argument).

The first section examines ECOWAS’s mandate to mediate in regional conflicts...
while the second looks at ECOWAS’s role in selected West African conflicts since the 1990s. The third sections draws lessons from these cases. Finally, the fourth section offers recommendations for the consideration of policy makers toward the enhancement of peacemaking capacity in West Africa. The article concludes by suggesting that ECOWAS and the entire West Africa region stand to benefit from a more institutionalized and professional approach to mediation and conflict prevention.

THE MANDATE OF ECOWAS TO MEDIATE IN INTERSTATE CONFLICTS
This article defines mediation as a third-party intervention to assist groups in conflict to arrive at a mutually acceptable settlement. In West Africa, a region characterized by conflicts, mediation has been used to limit the spread or escalation of crises with a regional dimension and to promote an environment for better relations between conflicting parties. Given that ECOWAS is a regional body, mediation in West Africa should be understood within the context of its mandate to mediate in conflicts, promote peace and stability, and protect civilians.

ECOWAS’s mandate to mediate in conflicts in its member states to promote peace and security in West Africa has evolved over time and is captured in number of protocols and documents. In 1981, ECOWAS declared that mediation would be used to resolve any conflict between two of its member states (in its Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Defence, Article 17). In 1993, ECOWAS again committed itself to the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes among member states, including the use of mediation (in its Revised Treaty, Article 4). Then, in 1999, in order to develop a more comprehensive peace and security architecture, ECOWAS adopted the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security. In Article 58 of this protocol, ECOWAS committed itself to “employ, where appropriate, good offices, conciliation, mediation and other methods of peaceful settlement of disputes.” Under Article 4 of the Mechanism, the Authority of Heads of State and Government, the Mediation and Security Council, and the ECOWAS Commission have specific roles to play in mediation and conflict prevention, resolution, and management in West Africa.

The Authority of Heads of State and Government, the highest decision-making body of ECOWAS, is mandated to act on all issues relating to conflict prevention, management, and resolution. On its behalf, the Mediation and Security Council decides on all matters relating to peace and security, conflict prevention, and authorization of the deployment of

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military and political mediation missions. The Commission implements decisions of the Authority and the Mediation and Security Council relating to conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, and security in West Africa. In line with this responsibility, the president of the ECOWAS Commission deploys fact-finding and mediation missions and appoints members of the Council of Wise. This body, formerly named the Council of Elders, is made up of eminent personalities from all fifteen ECOWAS states who use their good offices and experience to play the role of mediators, conciliators, and facilitators on behalf of ECOWAS (as in Articles 17 and 20 of the Mechanism). Members of the Council are not necessarily professional mediators.

Next, in 2001, ECOWAS made further attempts to improve its systems when it called on its member states to institutionalize national mediation in Article 36 of its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. In spite of this call, such efforts in West African states and within ECOWAS itself have been slow and responses to conflicts in the region have been largely ad hoc.

Finally, in 2008, the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) was adopted to institutionalize and enhance mediation capacities in West Africa. The ECPF, among other documents, commits ECOWAS to the development of a comprehensive preventive diplomacy architecture that seeks to address gaps in mediation with the participation of major stakeholders. Preventive diplomacy, according to ECOWAS, is considered to be an operational conflict-prevention tool to deal with imminent conflict. It is to be used to promote conflict resolution within member states through good offices, mediation, conciliation, and facilitation based on dialogue, negotiation, and arbitration.

**ECOWAS MEDIATION: FROM MANDATE TO PRACTICE**

ECOWAS interventions in the 1990s, beginning with the Liberian conflict, were initiated with a rudimentary and weak mandate. The organization’s security architecture and authority to mediate in regional crisis evolved gradually in response to conflicts in the region. This may explain in part the reason why some conflicts (such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d’Ivoire) have been protracted in spite of ECOWAS intervention.

The conflicts in which ECOWAS has intervened that are examined here share similar characteristics: they were civil conflicts based on a struggle primarily for political power and, at times, over resources. While ECOWAS’s approach in these situations has been similar (using mediation, peacekeeping, or the threat of military intervention), each engagement has produced different outcomes. The following cases detail ECOWAS mediation in six of its member states: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d’Ivoire, Niger, and Guinea.
Liberia

Conflict broke out in Liberia in December 1989 when the National Patriotic Front of Liberia led by Charles Taylor launched a rebellion, ostensibly to overthrow the government of Liberia under the presidency of Samuel Doe. At the height of the conflict the number of both internally displaced persons and refugee flows into neighboring states grew dramatically. For example, the population of the Liberian capital of Monrovia grew from 600,000 in 1991 to approximately one million at the height of the crisis, while refugees flowing into neighboring countries were estimated at 700,000 (Ero 1995). In response to the unfolding catastrophe, ECOWAS intervened in Liberia in line with its mandate to promote peace and stability within member states, prevent the regionalization of the conflict, reduce human suffering, and protect civilians.

ECOWAS’s approach was to set up a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) in August 1990 that approved the formation of the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to intervene militarily in the conflict as peacekeepers (Ero 1995). In addition to peacekeeping, from 1989 to 1997, when the first post-conflict elections were held, ECOWAS mediation efforts resulted in thirteen peace agreements. This article reflects on the major peace agreements and why some of them failed to bring peace to Liberia.

First, the Lomé Peace Agreement in February 1991 led to the formation of the Interim Government of National Unity, which was conceived earlier under the ECOWAS Peace Plan for Liberia in December 1990. But mediation efforts unravelled as Taylor refused to cooperate with the interim government because he believed he could capture state power through military action; Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia was the biggest of the rebel groups. At the time there were allegations that Côte d’Ivoire was backing the rebellion.

Second, four more rounds of mediation by ECOWAS under the auspices of the late Côte d’Ivoire President Félix Houphouët-Boigny led to the Yamoussoukro IV Accord in October 1991 to salvage the peace process. A major false step was the selection of the then-president of Côte d’Ivoire, who was alleged to be supporting one of the factions, to mediate in the conflict. The fairness of the mediator was in doubt. It is therefore not surprising that the Yamoussoukro IV Accord suffered setbacks due to continued fighting between the rebel groups amidst doubts about ECOMOG’s impartiality (Ero 1995). Mediation efforts continued in 1992, this time with the participation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, now the African Union) and the United Nations (UN). Joint efforts from ECOWAS, OAU, and the UN resulted in renewed talks in Cotonou, Benin, and Accra, Ghana, in September and October 1994, respectively. Both mediation efforts resulted in some agreements but failed to resolve the conflict largely due to lack of commitment by the main factions (Ero 1995).

One important reason for the failure of most of the peace agreements was the inability of ECOWAS to enforce the agreements and or support the parties in their implementation. The last of the agreements during Liberia’s first civil war (from 1989 to 1997) was the Abuja Peace Agreement of 1995. The reason why Abuja may have held is likely because Taylor saw the possibility of him coming to power through elections. Indeed, the
1997 elections paved the way for Taylor to become the president of Liberia.

In 1999, a second civil war started with the formation of new rebel groups, the Liberia United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), which considered Taylor’s government undemocratic and sought to overthrow it. With this resumption of conflict in Liberia (from 1999 to 2003), ECOWAS embarked on another peacemaking and military intervention. The most significant outcome of ECOWAS mediation held in Accra was the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003. The agreement was signed between the government of Liberia, LURD, MODEL, and Political Parties. This agreement, unlike previous ones, made room for the participation of civil society groups in the negotiations and their eventual inclusion in the transitional government. The agreement also facilitated the formation of a government of national unity, which led the country until general elections were held in October 2005.

The success of the 2003 peace agreement could therefore be attributed to the unity of purpose of West African leaders, most of whom were now committed to lasting peace, and to the inclusion of civil society organizations in the peace-building process and the transitional government. The combined efforts of ECOWAS and a strong UN peacekeeping force made it possible to sustain the peace.

Sierra Leone

While ECOWAS was trying to resolve the conflict in Liberia, another conflict broke out in neighboring Sierra Leone in March 1991. A rebel group known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh, began a rebellion to overthrow the All People’s Congress government, led by President Joseph Momoh, and restore democracy. The conflict lasted until January 2002, during which some 70,000 people lost their lives and 2.6 million people were displaced (Kaldor and Vincent 2006, 4).

The search for peace in Sierra Leone was prolonged as a result of military coups (1992, 1996, and 1997) that brought leaders to power who preferred military solutions over negotiations. However, when a democratically elected government took office in February 1996 (under Ahmad Tejan Kabbah), negotiations began, and the Abidjan Peace Accord was signed in November 1996. ECOWAS played a less visible role in the 1996 peace negotiation. Instead, it was hosted by the government of Côte d’Ivoire and driven by the OAU (Lord 2000, 23). But, following a military coup in May 1997 that overthrew Tejan Kabbah and led to his exile to Guinea, which made the implementation of the Abidjan Peace Accord impossible, ECOWAS became more engaged in the quest for peace. The organization met with the military leadership of Sierra Leone and adopted a six-month peace plan in Conakry, Guinea. The primary objective of the plan included the ending of hostilities and the restoration of the government of Tejan Kabbah. When the military junta in Sierra Leone refused to comply with the peace plan, ECOWAS worked through its military wing, ECOMOG, to depose the military junta and restore Kabbah to office in February 1998. This paved the way for another round of peace talks in May 1999 in Lomé under the auspices of Togo President Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who was at the time the chairman of ECOWAS. In the Lomé peace talks, ECOWAS was part of the mediation
committee alongside the UN and OAU, among other interest groups (Lord 2000, 30). The Lomé Peace Accord of July 7, 1999, gave amnesty to the rebel leadership and instituted a UN peacekeeping force with a robust mandate. After an attempt by the RUF to violate the peace agreement, its leader, Sankoh, was arrested by UN forces and imprisoned. The Lomé Peace Accord remained the key road map to peace in Sierra Leone until the war was declared over in January 2002. The first post-conflict elections were held in May 2002, contributing to the restoration of democracy.

It should be noted that the peace was sustained in Sierra Leone largely due to the presence of a UN peacekeeping force with a sufficiently strong mandate and personnel to enforce the peace agreement. This is because, like in Liberia, the rebel leadership in Sierra Leone showed a lack of commitment to respect the peace agreements it had signed.

Thus, in looking for ways to improve negotiated outcomes in West Africa, ECOWAS and the international community needed to become better at designing peace agreements that would have the true commitment of conflicting parties. The peace process in Sierra Leone also showed that there is the need for a strong peacekeeping force to enforce peace agreements in West Africa.

Guinea-Bissau

In June 1998, Guinea-Bissau became the third ECOWAS member state to become involved in violent conflict, triggering the need for mediation and peacekeeping. The conflict began when President João Bernardo Vieira fired the head of the armed forces, Brigadier Ansumane Mane, accusing him of allowing arms to be smuggled to rebels in the southern Senegalese province of Casamance (BBC News 1998). Compared to the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, this was not a large-scale conflict. It lasted for just eleven months, but it had a devastating effect on the people of Guinea-Bissau (Massey 2004, 1).

ECOWAS got involved in mediating the conflict with backing from the OAU and UN, alongside other mediators, most significantly, the community of Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP) (Massey 2004). Initial mediation efforts by ECOWAS produced a cease-fire agreement in August 1998 and the Abuja Accord in November 1998. The key highlights of the agreement were the deployment of ECOWAS forces, formation of a government of national unity, and the holding of elections by March 1999. While efforts were underway to implement this Abuja Accord, a coup d’état on May 7 1999, ousted President Vieira, brought the peace process to an end, and prompted the departure of ECOWAS forces from Guinea-Bissau. Thus, the case of Guinea-Bissau is similar to that of Sierra Leone in that a military coup disrupted efforts by ECOWAS to implement a mediated solution. It is therefore difficult to assess whether this solution would have succeeded in establishing a lasting peace. In any case, ECOWAS’s involvement in Guinea-Bissau helped avert large-scale conflict as was experienced in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Côte d’Ivoire

Côte d’Ivoire was the fourth country to experience violent conflict in West Africa after the establishment of ECOWAS. The conflict in Côte d’Ivoire began on September 19, 2002, when a section of the military started a rebellion (which was initially believed to be a mutiny) in
several cities including the capital of Abidjan. The result of the rebellion was a country divided into the rebel-held north and the government-controlled south.

ECOWAS’s initial response resulted in a preliminary agreement in September 2002 and a cease-fire agreement signed in Bouake, Côte d’Ivoire, the following month, leading to talks in Lomé in November 2002. The Ivorian peace process follows the same pattern as the previous cases described above: several mediation processes were undertaken resulting in numerous, in this case ten, peace agreements. What further complicated the peace process was the proliferation of actors. Although ECOWAS was the lead mediator in the conflict, other actors such as France, the African Union (AU), and the UN played roles at different stages of the conflict. For instance, the role of France led to the Linas-Marcoussis Peace Agreement in January 2003. Equally, the role of AU through Thabo Mbeki, then-president of South Africa, resulted in the Pretoria I and II Agreements in 2005. Finally, in 2007, the mediation process reverted to the leadership of ECOWAS. The then-chairman of ECOWAS, Blaise Compaoré, became the lead mediator and brokered another peace agreement, the Ouagadougou Peace Accord of March 2007. This accord provided for a power-sharing arrangement in which the leader of the rebellion, Guillaume Soro, became the prime minister of the sitting president, Laurent Gbagbo.

Again, the Ivorian peace process has shown ECOWAS’s commitment to peacemaking in West Africa. Further, it shows that the efforts of ECOWAS always need to be complemented by the AU and UN. For instance, the presence of a UN mission in Côte d’Ivoire has contributed immensely to upholding a level of stability in the country.

The elections of November/December 2010 marked the last stage of the peace process and were designed to bring about lasting stability. Instead, such hopes have been dashed as violence has broken out over disputed results. As of the time of this writing in January 2011, both presidential candidates, Alassane Ouattara and Laurent Gbagbo, are claiming the presidency. Renewed hostilities in Côte d’Ivoire call for renewed negotiations. The resurgence of conflict in Côte d’Ivoire shows that perhaps the previous peace process did not address all the fundamental causes of the conflict. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the current post-election dispute and violence in Côte d’Ivoire is another example of election-related violence in Africa (similar to that of Kenya and Zimbabwe) and may have nothing to do with the previous peace agreements. Either way, there is therefore the need to ensure that the quest for peace this time around creates the opportunity for lasting stability.

**Niger**

ECOWAS became involved in Niger when the sitting president, Mamadou Tandja, attempted to change the country’s constitution. He sought to run for a third term in office in 2009 in contravention of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which prohibits unconstitutional change of government.

ECOWAS’s response to this situation was to suspend the country from its membership while appointing a special representative to resolve the crisis. General Abdul Salami Abubakar, a former president of Nigeria, took charge of the Niger crisis. ECOWAS requested that “Niger
authorities suspend indefinitely the holding of legislative elections scheduled for October 20, 2009, in favor of dialogue with other leading political parties on resolving the political crisis in the country” (ECOWAS 2009b). The statement by ECOWAS added that “failure by President Tandja to comply with the decisions of the Authority would lead to the automatic and immediate imposition of full sanctions.” Niger did not comply with the above decision of ECOWAS. Rather, on October 20, 2009, President Tandja went ahead with the legislative election, which was boycotted by the opposition. In a move to demonstrate that ECOWAS would not tolerate the continuing refusal of Niger to comply with its decisions, the regional body stated that it would no longer recognize the presidency of Tandja (BBC News 2009).

The refusal of Niger to comply with ECOWAS’s decision is a further demonstration of the unwillingness of ECOWAS member states to comply with the decisions of the organization, its mediated solutions, and the principles to which they have signed. Usually ECOWAS continues to engage members who refuse to comply with its decisions because there is a limit to what the organization can do; it does not possess the capacity to remove an erring president by force, for example. Even if it had this capacity, ECOWAS believes in mediated solutions and is unlikely to apply force unless it is absolutely necessary, especially where West African populations are at risk.

A coup d’état in February 2010 ended formal ECOWAS mediation in Niger with a call on the new military leadership to work toward the restoration of democracy. Although all coup d’états are in contravention of ECOWAS norms and the formal engagement was ended, ECOWAS continued its engagement with the new military leadership in trying to work toward returning the country to constitutional rule.

Guinea

Following a coup d’état on December 23, 2008, ECOWAS joined with the AU, UN, and EU to condemn the situation in line with the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. On January 10, 2009, ECOWAS also suspended Guinea from its meetings until constitutional rule was restored (ECOWAS 2009a). The security situation in Guinea deteriorated over time: first, on September 23, 2009, security forces in Guinea opened fire on supporters of opposition parties who had gathered at a stadium in Conakry. The demonstration was organized by the opposition to protest against the apparent intention of Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, the leader of the junta, to stand for presidential election in January 2010. Human rights groups estimate that more than 150 people were killed and 1,700 injured (International Crisis Group 2009). Second, the attempted assassination of Camara on December 3, 2009, exacerbated the already tense political atmosphere. As a result, the military launched a crackdown on people they believed could be linked to the attempt. Following these developments, on December 13, 2009, ECOWAS threatened to intervene in Guinea with “preventive deployment force” for civilian protection (Ouedraogo 2009). On the political front, ECOWAS appointed President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso to mediate in the Guinean crisis. ECOWAS engagement in Guinea continued until elections in October.
2010, when the opposition leader won and was installed as president.

ECOWAS mediation efforts have succeeded in Guinea for two major reasons. The first is the patience of ECOWAS and the international community to continuously engage the military leadership and opposition parties in Guinea in spite of initial challenges. The second point is the realization of both ECOWAS and the military leadership in Guinea that violence or the use of force was not the best alternative to negotiated settlement. (Initially ECOWAS had threatened to use force if the military junta did not show commitment to the restoration of democracy (Ouedraogo 2009)).

LESSONS FOR IMPROVING MEDIATION PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES IN WEST AFRICA

Several lessons can be drawn from this history of ECOWAS’s mediation. First, most of ECOWAS’s interventions, especially in the 1990s, began on an ad hoc basis and were backed by a weak mandate. Both the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflicts took place at a time when ECOWAS’s security architecture was still evolving—before the revised ECOWAS treaty of 1993 and the other protocols that mandate ECOWAS to mediate and resolve regional conflicts. As a result, most often there was lack of consensus among leaders of West Africa on how the crisis should be resolved. In fact, some leaders in West Africa were alleged to have offered support to some rebellions (Liberia, for example).

Second, although ECOWAS’s security architecture and mandate to intervene in regional conflicts are now relatively well-developed, there are gaps between its mandate and its capacity to intervene. The mediation processes in the region that have been seen in the past few years have lacked the institutional structures that would have provided expert support for designing peace agreements that could hold in the field. Thus, often, peace agreements have broken down as soon as there were signed.

Third, in West Africa there has been an overreliance on mediators who are presidents. Usually, mediators have been chosen either because they are the chair of ECOWAS or because of a belief that they could use their influence as elders and experienced leaders in the region. For example, between 2002 and 2006, to be a mediator in the Ivorian conflict was “to validate one’s own diplomatic credentials, to raise the profile of oneself and one’s country, and to show oneself a champion of political correctness and of democracy. What is validated here is the function [and position] of the mediator, not the success of the mediation” (Dévérin 2006). Most often, once a president becomes the chair of ECOWAS, he or she automatically assumes the role of mediator in the region’s conflicts. This logic ignores the fact that mediation is a challenging endeavor that requires training and professionalism. The point also needs to be made that sometimes it is difficult to guarantee the neutrality of a president mediator, and the choice of someone perceived to be biased complicates the conflict rather than solves it. There is a tendency for sitting presidents to propose solutions instead of allowing the parties to do so themselves. Under such circumstances, parties to the conflict sign peace agreements out of reverence for the president mediator but are unlikely to follow through with the implementation. Sitting presidents who serve as mediators may also not have the luxury of time to allow mediation processes to take their
course, leading to a rush to have an agreement, which may end up being premature and difficult to implement. The mediation process of the Ivorian conflict, in which twelve mediators were current or former country presidents (from Togo, Mali, Ghana, Gabon, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Congo, Burkina Faso, and two from Senegal) and most were also chairs of ECOWAS or AU (Dévérin 2006), is a good example of the overreliance on president mediators in West Africa conflict.

A fourth lesson is that there is lack of commitment by parties to conflicts in West Africa to respect mediated agreement by ECOWAS. The cases above show that parties to conflicts in the region will respect ECOWAS’s settlements only when it is in their interest. This shows the absence of a culture of respect for agreements in the region, which needs to be addressed. Most often, the rebel leadership in West Africa is unable to bring members of its groups to follow the implementation of agreements the leaders have signed, perhaps because the leaders have weak control over their followers. In some cases where the peace agreements address the needs of the rebel leadership rather than the entire group and the populations affected by the war, it is not likely to be respected and implemented.

Fifth and finally, ECOWAS still does not have the capacity to enforce its own decisions without the involvement of external actors, especially the UN. In Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d’Ivoire, the UN had to take over the peacekeeping missions and the implementation of the peace agreement. Although within the global context there is nothing wrong with joining hands to solve a regional crisis, ECOWAS’s ability to enforce its own decisions would help improve its leverage in West Africa. In this issue, it is expected that when the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) becomes fully operational it will have the capacity to intervene in conflicts to enforce ECOWAS decisions and restore stability.

**RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARD AN ENHANCED PEACEMAKING CAPACITY IN WEST AFRICA**

Based on the lessons identified above, the article makes several policy recommendations. First, to address the gap between mandate and capacity in mediation processes in Africa, this article echoes calls for setting up mediation-support units within the AU and regional organizations. Such units would be staffed by personnel with adequate skills who would provide technical support for African mediators. Within ECOWAS there is a gradual policy shift toward closing the gap between the mandate of the organization to mediate in conflicts and its capacity to do so. Under the ECPF, ECOWAS has crafted a new vision of preventive diplomacy through which it intends to address such capacity gaps. The process has already started to set up a mediation-facilitation unit to provide technical and expert mediation support for the Council of Wise and Special Mediator. The proposed ECOWAS mediation-facilitation unit should be properly mandated and resourced to discharge the function of providing professional mediation support to ECOWAS. The implementation of the ECPF should lead to the availability of skilled and professional mediators with the necessary institutional and financial support to peace mediation in West Africa. Efforts by ECOWAS to set up a mediation-facilitation division should therefore be supported by all stakeholders as one of the measures to help bridge the
People still hold their cultures and traditions in high esteem, [so] it is important for ECOWAS to explore what contribution traditional conflict resolution methods can offer.

gap between mandate and capacity and to improve mediation in West Africa.

Second, there is the need to address the challenges associated with using president mediators. To improve peacemaking in West Africa there is the need to combine president mediators with professional mediators who have expertise and experience in mediation and who have greater neutrality. In the long term, however, appointment of mediators in West African conflicts should be based on the competence of the mediator to help the parties work toward win-win situations.

Third, there is the need for ECOWAS to further develop the capacity to enforce its decision arrived at through mediation. To this end, it should ensure that the ESF is well-equipped, has adequate personnel, and is fully operational. It also requires that the civilian dimension of the ESF be given equal attention as the military component to ensure that ECOWAS has the full capacity of future missions or intervention. This is in recognition of the fact that ECOWAS has made a lot of progress with regard to its military preparedness under the ESF, but the same cannot be said of its civilian component.

Fourth, in view of the difficulties encountered in resolving conflicts in West Africa and in light of the fact that the region remains largely traditional in which people still hold their cultures and traditions in high esteem, it is important for ECOWAS to explore what contribution traditional conflict-resolution methods can offer. For instance, the capacity of traditional rulers, in particular, in conflict resolution can be built, and they can be supported to utilize their own traditions to aid national and regional mediation efforts.

CONCLUSION

Faced with the challenges of conflict and political instability, ECOWAS has undergone the necessary transformation that has positioned it as the leading institution for conflict prevention, management, and resolution in West Africa. The organization’s involvement in mediation is part of a comprehensive approach to the promotion of peace and stability within its sphere of influence. ECOWAS’s involvement in mediation in West Africa is clearly defined in several important documents, but what has not yet emerged is a clearly defined approach and practice of mediation. For two decades, ECOWAS mediation has been ad hoc and has revolved around president mediators. Such an approach has been short of professionalism and strong institutionalization. There is the need to step up the implementation of the preventive diplomacy component of the ECPF, which will lead to a marked improvement in mediation processes within West Africa. In doing this, there will be the need for a shift in thinking within the policy-making field and recognition of the need for a comparable
amount of investment in the training of mediators as has been devoted to the training of the military for peacekeeping. It is hoped that if the set of recommendations proposed in this article is implemented, ECOWAS will be in a good position to contribute more effectively to peace and security in West Africa.

REFERENCES


ENDNOTES
1 The 29th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, held in Niamey, Niger, in January 2006, approved the transformation of the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat into the ECOWAS Commission. The purpose of the transformation was to enhance the power of the Commission and strengthen its influence and its degree of supranationality.
2 Foday Sankoh was arrested by UN forces in 2000 and imprisoned. He died in 2003 while still facing charges of war crimes at the UN Tribunal on Sierra Leone.
3 At full strength, the UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone numbered about 19,000.