This brief is based on deliberations and resolutions reached at a two day policy dialogue on the future of democracy and peace in West Africa. The event was organised by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Abuja, in collaboration with the African Peacebuilding Network/the Social Science Research Council (APN/SSRC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) between 27 and 28 of July 2015 at Sheraton Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria. The policy dialogue reviewed efforts towards consolidating peace, stability and democracy in West Africa during the four decades of ECOWAS existence. DEMOCRACY AND PEACE IN WEST AFRICA

In spite of a few setbacks in the management of elections, multi-party democracy is now established and accepted as a legitimate form of government in West Africa. At the moment, all countries in the region have embraced democracy in one form or another. Even post-conflict countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone have been able to consolidate post-war democracy by holding successive elections and changing government without violence. However, elections - a hallmark of democratic progress - are yet to lead to development in terms of human, social, political and economic transformation. Concerns remain that electoral management and democracy in West Africa, and elsewhere in Africa, have faced several challenges. These include institutional weaknesses, factional struggles, poor political leadership, prolongation of power, inequality, marginalisation, social injustice, lack of rule of law and respect for human rights, amongst others.

Following the prevailing socio-political situations in West Africa, it can be asserted that the sub-region is facing a real threat of democratic regression. A review of the 2014 the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy 2014 Index Report reveals that (with the exception of Ghana that scored 57.2% (2012-13)), most of the countries in the region found themselves at the lowest rung.

1In an attempt to underscore the inherent democratic challenges in West Africa and elsewhere in Africa, Rwakaza Mukandala (2001) situates this within the continued domination of the logic of colonial state and global capitalism. According to him, the current realities mirrored the historical mode of Africa’s incorporation into the world capitalist system and the driving or dominate forces of that process (See Mukandala R. (2001), The State of African Democracy: Status, Prospects and Challenges, African Journal of Political Science, Vol 6, No. 2). In another view, Victor Adetula (2007) submit that Africa’s democratic predicament is as a result of disconnection between the political culture of African people, with its communal orientation, and liberal democracy’s projections of possessive individualism as characterised by western societies (See Adetula V. (2007), Measuring Democracy and “Good Governance” in Africa, retrieved at on the 25 October 2015). 2

of the democratic ladder. For example, four countries (including Nigeria, Togo, Guinea and Cote D’Ivoire) were included among the ten worst democracies in the world. This is not surprising given the resurgence of coup d’état and other forms of unconstitutional changes of government in the region. In some countries where the military could not intervene in politics, incumbents sought to prolong their stay in power by a range of methods from changing the constitution to get a third term or removing term limits altogether, repressing or dividing opposition parties, or merely allowing multi-partyism to the extent that is only a symbolic value. This was the case under former presidents Tandja and Blaise Compaoré of Niger Republic and Burkina Faso respectively. If this anti-democratic practice goes unchecked, the gradual erosion of political participation has the potential to reverse hard won democratic gains, in turn contributing to violence and instability in the region.

Fig: 1 above presents line graph of the Human Development Index (HDI) estimate of some African countries, showing all countries in West Africa. For the purpose of analysis, it is important to note that countries below 0.756 and 0.573 are regarded as Medium and Low HDI countries respectively.

3 The Democracy Ranking model refers to one political dimension and five non-political dimensions, which are: (1) gender (socio-economic and educational gender equality); (2) economy (economic system); (3) knowledge (knowledge-based information society, research and education); (4) health (health status and health system); (5) environment (environmental sustainability). To every dimension different indicators are assigned, therefore the dimensions behave as indicator-based (See http://democracyranking.org/press/?page_id=590)


1ECOWAS, DEMOCRACY AND PEACE IN WEST AFRICA
Since the formation of ECOWAS in 1975, the regional body formed to integrate the economics of West African States has refocused its mandate. This is a reaction to the realisation that in order to achieve economic integration in the region, peace and stability of its member states have to be guaranteed. The organisation has made conscious efforts to put in place institutions and mechanisms for a more inclusive regional framework, through its numerous activities to promote peace, stability and democracy. Indeed, ECOWAS has shifted its strategy on peace-keeping, moving from military intervention to preventive diplomacy and mediation.

It has also made substantial efforts to develop peace and security frameworks and promote the emergence of a more democratic political culture in the region. Several normative frameworks, including the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), the Conflict Preventive Framework (2008), the Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (2006), amongst others, were adopted to strengthen democratic institutions and security architecture of member states. For instance, through the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, ECOWAS has consistently reinforced zero-tolerance policy for political power obtained by unconstitutional means. ECOWAS’s intolerance for undemocratic processes can be seen as it suspended all forms of cooperation with Niger when former President M a m a d o u T a n d j a a t t e m p t e d t o unconstitutionally
extend his stay in office. ECOWAS went on to promptly condemn the coup détat that followed Tandja's efforts to remain in power and facilitated the immediate conduct of elections. The reaction of ECOWAS was no different in Republic of Guinea and Coté d'Ivoire in 2010, with democracy installed in the two instances. Burkina Faso also followed suit, when a transitional committee was instituted and elections planned.

The regional body has also provided electoral and financial assistance and technical expertise to its member states to aid the conduct of credible elections. For example, ECOWAS assisted Guinea Bissau to overcome security challenges, which created an enabling environment for the conduct of elections in the country. It also provided space for other state and non-state actors such as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and political parties to advance democratic norms and practices, including the harmonisation of policies at the ECOWAS Parliament and other processes pertinent to promoting peace and democracy at regional level. Despite the democratic gains made so far, ECOWAS continues to face a number of challenges deriving from the inherent weakness in the political systems of member states, including: challenges of leadership; political will; low levels of citizen participation; and absence of adequate and independent monitoring and evaluation frameworks, amongst others. These challenges have to be addressed to enable the organisation to achieve its broader goals of promoting democracy, peace and security in the region.

Recommendations

a. ECOWAS should adopt a harmonised approach to election management and observation; play a more active role alongside other African organisations to develop a comprehensive electoral management and electoral observation strategy; strengthen long-term approaches to election observation; and integrate elections into wider conflict prevention strategies.

b. The Community should address the conflict of interest that results from its dual roles as mediator and election observer as both roles are important aspects of its mandate to build democracy and ensure stability in the region.

c. Cutting-edge research to promote knowledge-based development planning, leading to pro-poor and inclusive growth conducive to social equality and durable peace, is urgently required.

d. Streamlining of ECOWAS procedures is required to help consolidate democracy and forge a de facto union of West African people and states.

e. Governments should muster the necessary political will to implement treaties, conventions and protocols, to enable ECOWAS to achieve the goals of regional integration and development.

f. ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Mechanism should be fully operationalised and action should be taken to anticipate, prevent and sanction democratic reversals.

g. The ECOWAS Parliament should be constituted on the basis of direct elections of the parliamentarians, rather than hand-picking members from national parliaments. The decisions of the Parliament should also be made binding on member-states rather than being mere declarations.

h. All necessary steps should be taken to give concrete expression to ECOWAS Vision 2020 to ensure that citizens enjoy the benefits of a “borderless, peaceful, prosperous and cohesive region” built on good governance.

i. ECOWAS should provide a conscious and sustained security system that will eliminate social insecurity and promote tolerance for diversity. If this is implemented, it will facilitate the emergence of a peaceful and healthy environment where women, children, youth and other vulnerable groups are offered equal opportunities for development and