

# Mainstreaming minority concerns into early warning mechanisms in West Africa

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- The problem of minorities has been and will, in the foreseeable future, remain a major security concern in African.
- There has been a shift from inter-state conflicts which characterized most part of the late 1980s to mainly intra-state conflicts in recent times.
- Most intra-states conflicts are in turn related to minority rights issues. Examples are the Casamance (Senegal), the Niger Delta (Nigeria), the Ambazonia struggles in Cameroun, the Touareg conflict in Niger, Mali.

- However, ethnicity by itself does not relate to minority issues and needs to be examined separately in some situations as the missing link to conflicts in many parts of Africa.
- Discrimination, domination and marginalisation of minorities expressed in denial of power, resources or recognition result in violation of their human rights as peoples/communities.
- The African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have established early warning mechanisms to nip conflicts in the bud.

- Revised Treaty of ECOWAS (1993) (for example, article 58(3) thereof)
- Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace Keeping and Security (1999).
- ECOWAS has established institutions, and programmes to support the realisation of the commitments in above mentioned instruments, including the Early Warning and Response Network and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework.
- However, both at the regional (AU) and sub-regional (ECOWAS) levels, mechanisms have not mainstreamed minority issues into these processes.

- Poor understanding of minority rights, particularly in the African context due to the colonial context and the modus operandi of the anti-colonial struggle.
- The 'War on Terror' has moved the focus toward a 'risk/fear/threat' project. In response, most African leaders have exploited this new environment to their advantage by shrinking the political space and criminalising dissent without attracting sanctions from the international community. Example is the Malian crisis, the root cause of the conflict is attributed to terrorism but the actual factor is ethnic marginalisation of the Azawad people.

- The lesson is that where human security concerns of minority groups are neglected, the gap that is created between the minority group and the government will be exploited by lurking terrorist groups.
- Lack of coordination between and among ECOWAS agencies and its partners; and non-inclusive peace-building processes.

- Early warning mechanism within the context of minority rights should have two angles to it: conflict analysis tools and conflict prevention mechanisms.
- Detect distant or imminent threats, adopt measures to transform patterns of human rights violations and institutionalise substantive equality measures to promote minority rights.
- Early warning mechanism. Application of the principle applied to exemptions to the use of force as provided under article 51 of the UN Charter in self-defence

- Self-defence is a lawful reaction to the ‘armed attack’ against the territorial integrity of a state, which is based on the State-centred approach to security.
- There are two types of self-defence: anticipatory and pre-emptive self-defence.
- Anticipatory self-defence refers to self-defence actions where there exists an “imminent” attack. This should relate to the application of early warning mechanisms.
- Pre-emptive self-defence refers, on the contrary, to non-imminent threats or more remote threats. This should relate to human security approach.

- The discussion should be linked to transnational organised crime: the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, human and drug trafficking, illegal exploitation of natural resources and banditry.
- Third, the intersectionality of violence against women and girls belonging to minorities should be factored in. Without explicit recognition of the different life experiences such discrimination will often go unnoticed and not be addressed adequately.

- An indigenous needs theory founded on autonomy, identity, security, recognition and dignity should be brought into the discussion, in line with the human security approach.