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Scoping Infrastructure for Peace in West Africa: Lessons from Political Peace Processes and Religious Deradicalisation in Sierra Leone

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Acknowledgement

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Abstract

The pursuit of conflict prevention and peacebuilding has been given a renewed impetus in West Africa. This paper discusses the steps taken by ECOWAS to formalise national infrastructure for peace in member states. The Sierra Leone experience provides unique insights into the character of post-conflict infrastructure for peace. While there are several institutional arrangements, each focusing on different aspects of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the country, the Office of National Security (ONS) and its local-level structures still play a significant role in spearheading and interfacing with political, community-based, and religious actors in building peace in the country. The paper analyses a post-conflict peacebuilding experience in Sierra Leone where bottom-up structures are integrated into the implementation of a national counter-terrorism strategy.

Introduction

West Africa is currently faced with complex political challenges: (a) Jihadism and violent extremism[1], (b) weak democratic institutions[2], and (c) democratic reversals[3]. The rising trend and spread of these manifestations have strong implications for peace, stability, and justice in the region.[4] Consequently, the regional economic body has triggered the institutionalization and strengthening of national infrastructures for peace, as well as building resilience for conflict prevention in member states across the region. Adopted in 2008, the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) provides an opportunity for member states to adopt indigenous and/or homegrown structures to proactively respond to conflict situations and drive sustainable peace and security.[5] Further, in December 2001, ECOWAS member states adopted the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.[6] The protocol enjoins member states to adopt measures to consolidate constitutional rule and reject unconstitutional accession to power. This leads to "a new agenda for democratic governance based on the conduct of peaceful and credible elections that are free, fair, and transparent."[7]

Often found and common within member states are mechanisms, groups, and structures which have played diverse roles in building and deepening resilience for conflict prevention.[8] ECOWAS is seeking to garner political support to establish and or turn such existing local structures – albeit fragmented in their present nature- into nationally-owned and nationally-led infrastructure for peace. However, forming a nationally-owned and nationally-led infrastructure for peace, even though can generate the needed political will and support, may risk being politicised as with other similar national or state institutions such as, for example, the armed forces and security agencies.[9] A politicised national infrastructure for

peace may suffer a legitimacy crisis even before its birth. It will merely add to the many hierarchies of state bureaucratic architectures unable to convene dialogue and mediation between disputing parties. Such will be another missed opportunity to a fresh start to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a region whose political ans economic development has been impeded by conflict, violent extremism and instability.

This paper seeks to analyse steps taken by ECOWAS to formalise the process of adopting and establishing national infrastructure for peace in member states. In particular, the paper analyses a post-conflict peacebuilding experience in Sierra Leone where bottom-up structures are integrated into the national counter-terrorism strategy. The paper is structured into three (3) main sections: (a) steps taken to develop national infrastructure for peace in West Africa; (b) infrastructure for peace in Sierra Leone; and (c) religious deradicalisation in counter-terrorism strategy.

Steps at Developing National Infrastructures for Peace

Much of ECOWAS's conflict prevention effort is inspired by the 1999 Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security. The Mechanism places full responsibility on ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture to manage conflicts in the region.[10] However, whereas the architecture served the superstructure needs and response to conflict situations at the regional level, it seldom had any visible footprints and impact at the national and local levels where conflicts often evolve. In 2010 when ECOWAS marked its "Two Decades of Peace Processes in West Africa" at an international

[1]. Molenaar, et al., 2019. *The Status Quo Defied The legitimacy of traditional authorities in areas of limited statehood in Mali, Niger and Libya.* The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'. Also see for instance, Le Roux Pauline, 2019. "Responding to the Rise in Violent Extremism in the Sahel". *Africa Security Brief No. 36.* Washington, DC: Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

[2]. Hougnikpo, C. Mathurin, 2012. "Africa's Militaries: A Missing Link in Democratic Transitions," *Africa Security Brief No. 17.* Washington, DC: Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

[3]. Noor, O. Salih, 2018. "Democratic Progress and Retreat in Africa: The State and Institutions of Good Governance". Conference Paper delivered at *African Studies Association 63rd Annual Conference.*

[4]. Aning, Kwesi, 2021. West Africa Security Perspectives. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Affairs Also see Aning, E. Kwesi, 2004. Investing in Peace and Security in Africa: The Case of ECOWAS". In *Conflict, Security and Development.* 4:3.

[5]. *Reuben J.B. Lewis*, 2018. "National Election Response Groups as Infrastructures for Peace: Experiences from West Africa". *Conflict Trends:* 2018/4.

[6]. See ECOWAS, 2001. *Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.* Abuja: ECOWAS

[7]. Reuben J.B. Lewis, 2018. op cit. <National Election Response Groups as infrastructures for peace – ACCORD> Accessed: 13 June, 2021.

[8]. Molenaar, et al., 2019. op. cit.

[9]. See further discussions on how African military and security services are politicised in, for example Houngnikpo, C. Mathurin, 2012. op. cit.

[10]. Aning Kwesi and Lartey A. Ernest, 2014. "The Role of RECs in Peacebuilding in Africa: Past Experiences & the Way Forward". *Cairo Policy Briefs,* No.3. <Policy Brief (1) International Support to Credible Regional Political Processes in Africa (cccpa-eg.org)>. Accessed: 13 June, 2021. Also see Lucey Amanda, *How ECOWAS has Got Peacebuilding Right.* How ECOWAS has got peacebuilding right - ISS Africa. Accessed: March, 2021.

conference in Liberia, stakeholders agreed on the need to adopt bottom-up mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of local and low-intensity conflicts. Equally, it was noted that ECOWAS should engage member states to enhance their capacities to manage and resolve local and low-intensity conflicts by developing national mechanisms for peace and security.[11]

Following the above impetus, ECOWAS engaged member states in regional consultations with the aim to explore the feasibility and modalities for establishing and strengthening national infrastructures for peace. These regional consultations culminated in a joint declaration on 10 September 2013[12] where ECOWAS member states were called upon to develop national infrastructures for peace. In 2016, the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate (EWD) adopted a strategic plan (2016-2020) in which the theory of change was emphasised to promote the concept of human security.[13] Coupled with the increasing spreading of Jihadism, terrorism, and violent extremism in the region, the Ouagadougou Summit in 2019 further reiterated the call to promote inter-community dialogue as a tool to foster peace in member states. An important part of the dialogue was the call on member states to involve key actors such as religious groups, traditional and community leaders, women and youth groups, and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations (CSOs) to promote social and national cohesion.[14]

Combined with Jihadism and violent extremism, the COVID-19 pandemic which struck in 2019 further exposed institutional weaknesses which undermine human security. In this wise, a typical infrastructure for peace mechanism should not only seek to respond to violence or armed conflict situations but must equally embrace human security needs which are fundamental to peace and stability. The EWD and the Directorate of Political Affairs (DPA) of ECOWAS have initiated a process to review, strengthen and support the establishment of National Peace Infrastructures (NPIs) in member states.[15] The NPIs will comprise the National Centres for Coordination of Response Mechanisms (NCCR) and National Platforms for Dialogue and Mediation (NPDM). This joint effort is seen as a way of bridging the age-long gap between early warning alerts and early response.[16] Whereas the NPDM is in the process of being activated in member states[17], the NCCR is already in the inception phase in 5-pilot countries, namely Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Mali, and Liberia. By 2021, the NCCR is expected to be extended to Benin, Ghana, Guinea, The Gambia, Nigeria, Togo, and Sierra Leone.[18] Even though these mechanisms are at their inception and infant stages, staff have already been recruited and received induction and specialised training to build their capacity in early warning, security, and mediation.[19]

Clearly, the several processes and attempts at fully adopting and developing national infrastructures for peace in the region have produced uneven results. This paper forms part of a 4-country study, which is aimed at scoping local structures and initiatives to prevent conflicts in West Africa. This paper looks at identifying early warning structures and platforms for dialogue and mediation in Sierra Leone. The analysis is based on field interviews conducted with key stakeholders in March 2021 in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Infrastructure for Peace in Sierra Leone: Statutory Bodies and Mediation Platforms

Prior to the Civil War, the peace and security space was fragmented[20]; most activities in the sector remained uncoordinated in the country. Security decisions were largely based on "bogus informants"[21], and there was no centralised coordination of responses in the peace and security sector. The fragmented nature

11. Extracts from ECOWAS Concept Note for the "Virtual Scoping Workshop of National Peace Infrastructures in Member States from a Human Security Perspective". March, 2021.
12. See the Declaration on Strengthening National, Regional and Continental Co-ordination Towards Building National Peace Infrastructure for Conflict Prevention, Accra, Ghana, 10 September, 2013.
13. The emphasis on the concept of human security at this level means the desire to move ECOWAS of States to ECOWAS of People. See for example Adedeji Ebo, 2007. *Towards a Common ECOWAS Agenda on Security Sector Reform.* Policy Paper, Nº23: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.
14. Extracts from ECOWAS Concept Note for the "Virtual Scoping Workshop of National Peace Infrastructures in Member States from a Human Security Perspective". March, 2021.
15. ibid, pp. 3.
16. ibid, pp. 3.
17. ibid, pp. 3.
18. Extracts from ECOWAS Concept Note for the "Induction Course for National Early Warning and Response Centres in ECOWAS Member States" held at the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Accra; November, 23-27, 2021.
19. ibid, pp. 1.
20. Obi, Cyril, 2009. "Economic Community of West African States on the Ground: Comparing Peacekeeping in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire". In *African Security*, Volume 2, Issues 2-3: 119-135, 2009.
21. For example, see explanation of "Bogus Informants" in Quantson B. Kofi, 2004. *Bogus Informants: Nation Wreckers.* Accra: Napasvil Ventures.

of information flow, coupled with the widespread use of misinformation in the security sector allowed insurgent activities to fester without any effective and coordinated responses to counter these threats. The state became more fragile and subsequently slipped into violent conflict (civil war) in 1991.[22] After several attempts at ending the war through regional and United Nations (UN) mediation and peacekeeping efforts, the country returned to peace in 2002 after the Lome Peace Accord was signed in 1999. During the post-conflict peacebuilding phase, two major processes took place in the country: Disbarment, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR), and Security Sector Reform (SSR).[23] These two processes paved the way for further consolidation of stability in the country. However, stability alone could not guarantee resilience for local peacebuilding efforts and responses. Thus the consequence of the SSR process was the:

> establishment of community security structures such as the Local Police Partnership Boards (LPPB), Provincial Security Committees (PROSEC), District Security Committees (DISEC), and Chiefdom Security Committees (CHISEC). These community-level structures created the synergies and complementarity needed at the local level between SSR and other reform and reconstruction processes.[24]

It is argued further that these initiatives were undertaken to prevent conflict relapse in Sierra Leone.[25]

1. Office of National Security: In the absence of the National Peace Commission, the Office of National Security (ONS) seems to be the leading statutory national actor in local peace efforts. The SSR process which followed the peace agreement has been reviewed twice.[26] More importantly, the SSR process led to the creation of the Office of National Security (ONS). Coupled with the review processes, the following themes have emerged and become consolidated:

1. Early warning in security governance,
2. Human security in the affairs of political governance, and
3. Decentralisation of security.

Consequently, the Sierra Leone NCCR has been established. While the office has become part of the ONS structure for early warning and response; it will interface with the key topics stated above.[27]

At the Chiefdom level, incident reports from the Chiefdom Security Committees (CHISECs) are forwarded to the ONS in Freetown for appropriate action. These reports are analysed on regular basis and form part of the security briefings to Cabinet. Part of the responsibility of the CHISECs is to promote peaceful coexistence among the people in the communities. This task includes:

1. Inter-religious tolerance,
2. Inter-denominational harmony,
3. Inter-ethnic coexistence, and
4. Sectoral resilience (for example, managing clashes between motorbike riders and the police)[28].

The Provincial Security Committees (PROSECs), District Security Committees (DISECs), and Chiefdom Security Committees (CHISECs) are used to coordinate mediation responses at the local level. There is a National Security Council Coordinating Group (NSCCG), which is concerned with enhancing the capacity of the PROSECs, DISECs, and CHISECs in their coordination and convening roles at the local levels. The focus of the capacity-building process includes:

1. How to extract "action points" from committee meetings,
2. Coordinate response actions, and
3. Keeping to the code of conduct by CHISECs and PROSECs members.

The CHISECs, DISECs, and PROSECs are composed of standing members and co-opted members. Co-

[22]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.
[23]. See Aning, Kwesi and Lartey, A. Ernest, *From Consumptive to Distributive Security: Interrogating the Domestic Security Sector Governance in Sierra Leone.* Occasional Paper, KAIPTC (forthcoming).
[24]. Bangura, Ibrahim, 2016. *Assessing the Impact of Orthodox Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone.* Ontario, Centre for Security Governance.
[25]. Albrecht Peter and Paul Jackson, 2014. "State-building through security sector reform: the UK intervention in Sierra Leone", in *Peacebuilding*, 2:1, 83-99. See also Aning Kwesi and Lartey, A Ernest, op. cit.
[26].Jackson, Paul and Peter Albrecht, 2014. Reconstructing Security after Conflict. Palgrave Macmillan, London, UK.
[27]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.
[28]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.
[29]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.

opted members are usually brought in as critical members who have specific stakes and influence in the response process of specific issues.[29]

The ONS is strictly not in charge of mediation and dialogue, but it has the capacity to engage actors in the dispute or in conflict (especially actors whose actions threaten the security of the people and the state). For example, before the 2018 elections, political party militias were involved in electoral violence in the country. However, the police were unable to bring the situation under control. The ONS facilitated a dialogue among the political parties. The meeting called on the parties to denounce and disband their party militias before the elections. This helped to reduce armed violence by party militias during and after the elections. Even though there is no concrete effort at disbanding the party militias, the phenomenon is less prevalent in the country. Hitherto, the militia activities which used to be a trending issue on social media are no longer topical after the parties resolved to heed their consensus at the instance of the ONS. Beyond this, the ONS architecture often persuades stakeholders to pursue their differences and disputes through judicial processes. Resort to force or violence is strictly within the domain of the police and security services which must, at all times, act within the framework of the rule of law and human rights.[30]

2. Parliament

Aside from being the legislative arm of government, the Sierra Leonean Parliament plays a crucial role in promoting peace in the country. This is done either through motion papers or questions raised on the floor of the house. For example, parliament has been involved in "settling" disputes over concessions between mining companies and communities. Agitations, attacks, and protests are mostly common in mining communities, even though compensations are usually paid to the people who are affected by large-scale mining operations.[31]

3. National Peace Commission

The National Peace Commission (NPC) is in the process of being established. The National Peace Commission aims to enhance peacebuilding efforts in the country. It will become the coordinating body for both national and local peace initiatives in the country. This is because it will have the capacity and mandate to deal with issues of tribalism (ethnic, religious, and sectoral disputes) in the country. Part of the aim is also to build, maintain and promote national cohesion.[32]

4. Political Party Registration Commission

The Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC) is also a critical player in ensuring adherence to the code of conduct by political parties in the country. An excerpt of the background narrative of the establishment of the PPRC is as follows:

> Noting the recent violent past of Sierra Leone, and the need for continued peace; and given the desirability for a free, fair, peaceful, and well-regulated election and the avoidance of political discord, as provided for by the Political Parties Act, 2002, which establishes the PPRC for the registration and regulation of the conduct of political parties in accordance with sections 34 and 35 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. The institutional mandate and independence of the Political Parties Registration Commission are enshrined in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. The Political Parties Act, of 2002, establishes the PPRC for the registration and supervision of the conduct of political parties in accordance with Sections 34 and 35 of the Constitution. In conformity with the Political Parties Act - 2002, the Commission in collaboration with registered political parties and civil society established a Code Monitoring Committee to function as a forum for discussion of issues of common concern, including breaches of the Code before, during, and after elections.[33]

Before the 2018 general elections in Sierra Leone, the PPRC facilitated a meeting of the participating Political Parties and Presidential Candidates. The meeting concluded with a joint communique on peace. An excerpt of the meeting is shown in Figure 1 below:

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[30]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.
[31]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.
[32]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.
[33]. Source: Background (pprc.gov.sl). Accessed: March, 2021.

Figure 1: Presidential Candidates Dialogue and Pledge Peace in 2018 General Elections

Source: PBF_Story_final.pdf (pprc.gov.sl). Accessed: March 2021

5. Paramount Chiefs

Paramount chiefs occupy the "Chairman" position of the CHISECs. Other players in the CHISECs are mandated to support the Chairman to maintain peace in their chiefdoms. However, the Coordinators (i.e. ONS seconded officers in the Districts) take records of meetings and forward same to ONS headquarters in Freetown. Mostly, when an issue appears on the agenda and/or is captured in minutes of meetings, or on security updates, then they (CHISECs, including

the DISECs, PROSECs, and/or even the ONS) call the attention of key stakeholders to activate their internal dispute resolution mechanisms (usually in the form of dialogue and mediation).[34]

6. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is a regional peacebuilding organization founded to respond to civil wars that affected West Africa in the 1990s. WANEP has national networks in every Member State of ECOWAS, including Sierra Leone. WANEP places special focus on collaborative approaches to conflict prevention, and peacebuilding.[35] The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding-Sierra Leone (WANEP-SL) comprised a national network of peacebuilding civil society organizations such as women's groups and religious institutions with a focus to encourage, facilitate and mobilize local initiatives for peacebuilding, promotion of gender justice, conflict resolutions, and transformation.[36] Similar to the experiences in Ghana and Liberia, and as part of its contribution to promoting peaceful elections in West Africa, WANEP replicated the formation of the National Election Response Group as an infrastructure for dialogue and mediation during the March 2018 General Elections in Sierra Leone. The exercise involved field monitors, data monitors, situation room analysts, and the deployment of eminent persons' who lead in the dialogue and mediation processes where appropriate.[37]

Religious Deradicalisation in National Counter-Terrorism Strategy

The Counter-Terrorism Strategy of Sierra Leone (CTS-SL) and its Implementation Plan were adopted in 2013. This strategy has four (4) Pillars. The pillars are as illustrated below:

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[34]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.
[35]. See WANEP: About Us – West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Accessed: 12 June, 2021.
[36]. See further details about WANEP-SL: Sierra Leone – West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Accessed: 12 June, 2021.
[37]. Reuben J.B. Lewis, 2018. "National Election Response Groups as Infrastructures for Peace: Experiences from West Africa". Conflict Trends: 2018/4.

Figure 2: Pillars of Counter-Terrorism Strategy of Sierra Leone

1. Pillar 1: Prevention
a. Counter radicalisation
b. Enhance criminal justice and law enforcement

2. Pillar 2: Pursue
a. Improve intelligence collection
b. Deploy Resources

3. Pillar 3: Protect
a. Strengthen border control
b. Addressing the security of critical infrastructure

4. Pillar 4: Prepare
a. Enactment of appropriate legislation
b. Addressing capacity building
c. Mobilisation of resources
d. Simulation exercises

Source: Extracted from interviews in Freetown, March 2021.

Although the strategy is seen as a security document, its design and drafting process included inputs from different stakeholders from both security actors and non-securocrats (especially civil society actors). However, as a security document, the content, implementation, and spearheading of the process remains under the purview of the security apparatus (i.e. the ONS), but with political oversight by the executive and parliament.[38]

The component where civil society inputs have been recognised and incorporated relates to counter-radicalisation under the prevention pillar (Pillar 1). Under the prevention pillar, religious tolerance is captured as a core value in nation-building in the country. As a result, religious groups and leaders have been included in the design and implementation strategy. At the initial stages of the implementation process, some development partners and advisors raised some reservations over the decision of the government to include religious bodies in the strategy. However, this position changed when the link between religion and deradicalisation was strongly established by the religious leaders, using and drawing on the lessons and experiences from the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel region of West Africa. Their deep insights into how religious messaging, especially using the Quran to influence radical thoughts of the youths proved useful in the final drafting and adoption of the strategic policy document.[39]

Being preventive also suggests a focus on religion as a tool to address "Islamic" radicalization which could further lead to violent extremism in the country. Since the country does not have a sound economic base, it was arguably a prudent idea to focus on prevention as opposed to deployment and enforcement which will require more financial resources, and which could also lead to human rights violations if enforcement measures were to be adopted first in the implementation phase of the policy. Sociologically, Sierra Leonean society is based on an extended family system; "only a few families can be said to be exclusively Muslim or exclusively Christian". There are inter-marriages amongst people from different religious and ethnic groups, which, in itself, is a resilience factor for peacebuilding and stability in the country. In fact, many domestic disputes are resolved by either an Imam or a church leader, or both.[40]

It is further argued that it will be a rear case for a Sierra Leonean citizen to use extremism or Jihadism to attack the society or the state. No one or no group is ever seen to have exhibited or perpetrated extremist tendencies in the country as yet. However, given the recent war experience in the country where extreme

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[38]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.
[39]. Interview in Freetown, March 2021.
[40]. Interview with a University Lecturer, Freetown, March 2021.

atrocities were committed, the counter-terrorism strategy and, for that matter, the religious groups are under no illusion to discount or downplay the risk of some people (especially the youth) being influenced to adopt extremist behaviours or becoming radicalized.[41] Thus the approach has been to sensitise the public through various channels:

1. Council of Imams: The Council of Imams is the umbrella body of all the Islamic sects in the country. The three major Islamic groups in the country are:
a. Sunni,
b. Shiite, and
c. Ahmadiyya.

These religious sects have wide geographical reach in the country with executive officers overseeing religious activities from the national to the chiefdom levels. They monitor sermons that are preached in the various mosques and media stations (including social media) to ensure that none of the messages is contaminated with Jihadist and radicalised motives.[42]

2. Sierra Leone Muslim Missionary Union: The union is made up of Muslim missionaries, and Islamic scholars who have received higher/advanced education abroad and have returned home to impart society. Generally, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism are rightly or wrongly skewed against Muslims. These missionaries are the channels through which such misconceptions and perceptions are corrected by their nuanced teachings and education amongst the Muslim youth.[43]

3.Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone
It is argued that the Inter-Religious Council seldom calls for meetings, but they are more active during election periods where they engage political parties separately and/or jointly to promote peaceful elections. The Council often issues press releases after such engagements to build public confidence in elections. Their role is mainly in the domain of moral suasion; they do not have any enforcement powers like the police and the other security agencies. The Religious Council is especially relied upon in the prevention and counter-terrorism

strategies since the Imams in the Islamic religion know which of the Quran verses can be used to preach peace, and non-violence messages.[44]

Whereas the Council embodies membership from both the Christian and Muslim religions, those on the Christian side are less vocal or less involved in the counter-terrorism and deradicalisation advocacy. This is due to reasons already assigned; violent extremism and terrorism are mostly perceived as a Jihadist agenda that is skewed against Muslims. The unfortunate narrative is that Muslims are seen as perpetrators while Christians are perceived as victims. The role of the Council is to expose common and shared vulnerabilities (as experiences in the Sahel region of West Africa have shown), and also to forge a common front against the threat.[45]

Conclusion

One can argue that building infrastructure for peace at the "national" and "sub-national" levels was not part of the initial intent of the ECOWAS protocols. This was because matters of the "national" and "sub-national" were still viewed primarily within the domain of sovereign authority. Traditional authorities, religious groups, community leaders, and community-based groups are not state-centric, but with all intent and purposes, bear and represent a dominant influence on local dispute resolution, especially in areas where the state is unable to reach. After decades of neglect, their relevance is surfacing and they are now being recognized as part of the ECOWAS regional peace and security architecture.

The bottom-up approach to dispute resolution, now considered part of the new infrastructure for peace in the region has been formalized, somewhat, in Sierra Leone in the form of local security committees in the Provinces, Districts, and Chiefdoms. Parallel to this structure is the religious (inter-faith-based) groups and initiatives which have been invigorated to spearhead the religious deradicalisation efforts against violent extremism and terrorism in the country.

However, given the fact that most governments in the region have not formally endorsed dialogue and

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[41]. Interview with Islamic Scholar, March 2021.
[42]. Interview with Islamic scholar in Freetown, March 2021.
[43]. ibid
[44]. ibid
[45]. Interview with Inter-Religious Council member in Freetown, March 2021.