



A Diagnostic Research Report

**Mainstreaming the
role of Media in ECOWAS:
Policies & Practices**



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Acknowledgement

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Executive Summary

Background and Context

The premise of this report is that there is a positive and mutually conditioned relationship between strong and sustainable media and the practice of good governance and democratic development in West Africa. On one hand, the quality of discourse within the polity depends on the freedom and pluralism of the media in a country. At the same time, free and pluralistic media systems offer the ideal subculture for nursing and nurturing the seeds of political and economic growth.

Given the role and relevance of ECOWAS as the principal regional inter-governmental body in West Africa, it is important to find out the interest and involvement of the media in its policies and practices. By comparing the mainstreaming of media in ECOWAS policy documents with situated practices of the regional body it is possible to produce a diagnostic portrait of the presence and prospects of the vision for democracy and development in the region.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the project was to produce an empirical account of the involvement and prioritisation of the media in the policies and practices of ECOWAS. The findings should provide objective insights towards forging synergies and fostering mutually-beneficial policy platforms for action between ECOWAS and the media in West Africa.

By way of scope and sources, the study combined the stakeholder analysis tools of document reviews and individual interviews. The policy commitments to the media were ascertained through a review of relevant protocols and principles, conventions and charters. The practices of ECOWAS were evaluated through the interviews of key actors within media organisations, their value-chain allies, and other support industries.

Design and Steps

The study combined the interpretive document analyses technique and the responsive interviewing process in order to access and assess the presence and prioritisation of the media in the policies and practices of ECOWAS. Specifically, the document reviews involved auditing all relevant and publicly available instruments, conventions and protocols for the mention of media – and their derivatives, synonyms and permutations. The individual interviews were conducted with the broad range of industry actors and institutional development stakeholders from seven of the 15 ECOWAS member countries; purposively chosen to reflect the diversity and balance of opinions, expectations, and experiences of stakeholders.

Findings and Recommendations

The findings on policy revealed that while there is no composite policy document on mainstreaming the media in the delivery of its mandate, there is an impressive array of Articles in the ECOWAS Revised Treaty (notably in chapters II, III, VII, X, XI) as well as in the enabling instruments and initiatives (specifically, the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the Protocol on the Fight against Corruption, the Conflict Prevention Framework, and the more recent ECOWAS Mediation Guidelines) to suggest a disposition, in principle, towards involving the media, in practice.

The findings on practice, however, suggests gaps in appreciation and application of the media in the work of the ECOWAS Commission and its institutions and agencies. This notwithstanding, there is an underlying understanding that the media and ECOWAS share common interests in promoting the processes of regional integration as a means to realising the vision of a West Africa that is characterised by political good governance and economic development. This potential will, however, require a more purposeful and comprehensive policy framework and strategy on the role of the media within the ECOWAS governance system

The following recommendations are made for improving the instrumentality of the media in the policies and practices of ECOWAS.

1. Pivot the recent policy reorientation “from a body of states to a community of people” (Vision 2020) and the further pivoting towards “an ECOWAS for the people by the people” (Vision 2015) to build mutually-beneficial relations with region, national, media and support institutions.
2. Develop a comprehensive media policy for news coverage and corporate publicity; in a way that sees and treats the media not just as channels for the unidirectional transmission of information, but also as the arena for fruitful public participation in discourses and decisions of the ECOWAS;
3. Create a system of periodic engagements and interactions – based on the terms of a memorandum of understanding with a regional media support organisation such as the MFWA – oriented towards building a network of media organisations and ECOWAS communicators for connecting with their national and regional citizenry;
4. Provide a media development fund to support media organisations – to improve their institutional infrastructure and efficiencies – and journalists – to improve their professional practices and understanding of the workings of ECOWAS – and relevant ECOWAS officials – to equip them with requisite media literacy skills for effectively engaging with the media;
5. Develop strategies to exploit the potentials of the (particularly the public service) media as a growth pole for developing common policy responses to such issues as disease outbreaks and climate change, for defining foreign policy positions, for curating the cultural goods and tourism artefacts of the region, and for accruing social capital among citizens of a politically and economically integrated subregion.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

A situation analysis of the media landscape in West Africa reveals intra-national vicissitudes as well as inter-national variabilities in measures of free expression and media pluralism (Asante, Norman, Tzelgov & Lindberg, 2013; MFWA, 2021; Tietaah & Braimah, 2019). This verdict is reflected in differential deficits in the capacities of national media systems to contribute to accountable governance and democratic consolidation around the region. At the same time, it invites introspection into and review of the efficacy of microscopic approaches to media rights advocacy and capacity development initiatives.

This diagnostic report is based on the argument that the media have an important contribution to make towards fulfilling the mandate of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the principal regional inter-governmental body in West Africa. In turn, an ECOWAS that is able “to encourage, foster and accelerate the economic and social development” (ECOWAS Authority, 1993) of the region provides the most conducive conditions for media pluralism, professional development and sustainability.

Three interrelated arguments offer the rationale for leveraging the role of ECOWAS in this regard. First, is the logic of a mutually conditioned and dependent benefit for ECOWAS and the media, of the practice of democratic governance in West Africa. The normative role of the media in a democracy is to serve as the public square where government, as duty bearer, might render downward accountability to citizens, as rights holders. At the same time the media, as metaphorical marketplace of ideas, provide the avenue for citizens to inform themselves and form their opinions about the mandate of the incumbent or the merits of the opposition.

Secondly, the ECOWAS was conceived on the assumption that a supranational governance mechanism could deliver dividends, the benefits of which would be more propitious than the sum of individual national initiatives. A parallel advantage in scale and synergy may be argued about a regional front and framework for the promotion of media and free expression rights in West Africa. At any rate, in the contemporary networked society, media work is inevitably implicated by factors and actors that extend beyond the bounds of national jurisdictions.

Thirdly – and while allowing for adaptations to peculiar national needs – a harmonised media and communications technology policy should help sequester national media systems against techno-authoritarian controls; such as is argued to be the spectre represented by the recent role of StarTimes in the deployment of broadcast signal distribution systems in some countries. It should also enable national media organisations build transnational solidarities and capacities for resisting capture; whether by political, economic or other sectarian actors.

The study is part of a project being implemented by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) aimed at enhancing the capacity of the media to contribute towards the improvement and consolidation of gains in democratic governance within the region. It was guided by the following specific terms of reference:

1. To access the instruments and interventions of ECOWAS on such factors as good governance; peace and security; conflict management; democratic transitions, elections;
2. To assess the integration or involvement by ECOWAS of the media in these instruments and initiatives;
3. To highlight the challenges and gaps in involving the media in the interventions undertaken by ECOWAS;
4. To make recommendations on how ECOWAS could effectively support media development initiatives; and, in turn, draw on the instrumentality of the media for operationalising the objectives of ECOWAS.

These terms of reference should produce empirical evidence about the interest, involvement and implications of ECOWAS policies and practices on freedom of expression and institutional sustainability of the media. The findings are intended, therefore, to offer a baseline and basis for pragmatic policy response and action on the media in West Africa – both as means of delivering on the ECOWAS mandate, and as a growth pole in its own right. In effect, the study responds to Mosco's (1996) idea of praxis; namely, that normative principles should inspire the practice of policy.

This report is organised into four broad parts. The first part covers the background and context of the study. The second part discusses the design and steps in producing the diagnostic. Part three comprises an interpretive presentation and discussion of the findings. The final part draws conclusions and makes recommendations for policy and practice on operationalising the potential of the media for delivering on the ECOWAS mandate.

1.2 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the project was to produce a mapping report on whether and how the media are mainstreamed in the objectives and operations of ECOWAS. It sought, as such, to assess the involvement by ECOWAS of the media in operationalising its mandate; in particular, the provisions stipulated in chapters II, III, VII, X, and XI of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993) on or relevant to:

- (a) promoting good governance and democratic development;
- (b) adopting common economic policies and instruments;
- (c) fostering social harmony and cultural propinquity; and
- (d) preventive diplomacy and conflict mediation interventions.

Based on the evidence on these factors, the study also sought to address challenges and contradictions, and make recommendations for consolidating gains and closing gaps, in ECOWAS policies and practices; relative to promoting the rights and responsibilities of the media; and in turn, to drawing on the agency of the media for defining and delivering the dividends of democracy and development. It should also provide the empirical basis for designing a comprehensive, stakeholder-driven, media policy and operational strategy for ECOWAS. This is important because at a consultative meeting with Leberor Doscof Aho, then Acting Director of Communication of the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja on September 27, 2018, the MFWA team was informed that the directorate had no codified communication policy. However, there is some indication of a currently ongoing process towards a communication policy; in which case the recommendations of this report should provide useful insights for a complementary media policy and strategy.

To achieve these outcomes, and by way of scope and sources, the study combined the stakeholder analysis tools of document reviews and individual interviews. The document reviews involved, firstly, producing an inventory of all relevant and publicly available instruments, conventions and protocols and, secondly, performing a keyword search for evidence of the policy orientation and commitment of ECOWAS to the role of the media in democratic development.

The individual interviews were conducted with the broad range of industry actors and institutional development stakeholders involved or implicated within the ECOWAS policy-practice axis; notably: public and private media operators, civil society/NGO leaders, media and human rights advocates and lawyers, media industry analysts and academics, respected independent journalists, and professional association leaders, representatives of national media policy and regulatory bodies, and national units/agencies/directorates of ECOWAS. The interviews were conducted across seven of the 15 ECOWAS member countries; purposively chosen to reflect the diversity and balance of opinions, expectations, and experiences of stakeholders about the possibilities, priorities and pathways for a more effective engagement and integration of the media into the ECOWAS Authority and its agencies.

The combined findings from the document reviews and key informant interviews should provide objective insights towards forging synergies and fostering mutually-beneficial policy platforms for action between ECOWAS and the media in West Africa.

2.0 Design and Steps

The research design for this report was grounded in Bardach's (2009: 69) observation that, "in policy research, almost all likely sources of information, data, and ideas fall into two general types: documents and people." The study combined the interpretive document analyses technique (Bowen 2009) and the responsive interviewing process (Rubin & Rubin 2005) in order to access and assess the presence and prioritisation of the media in the policies and practices of ECOWAS – as they pertain to the promotion of good governance and democratic development within member states. Specifically, the policy commitments to the media were ascertained through a review of relevant protocols and principles, conventions and charters. The practices of ECOWAS were evaluated through the interviews of key actors within media organisations, their value-chain allies, and other support industries.

The interpretivist orientation of this study breaks ranks with the conventionally quantitative approach to such large scale, cross-national research designs. While this option does forfeit the possibility of generalising findings across subjects and scenarios, it also enables the discursive analysis and generation of context-sensitive insights. Furthermore, aggregating and generalising data overlooks the usefulness of unique insights; although, as Flyvbjerg (2006: 224) has argued, "Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is... more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals."

The specific strategies and steps in each of these methods are briefly explained, in turns, in the sections which follow.

2.1 Document Analysis

The document analysis involved three simple steps:

- (a) identifying and assembling all publicly available ECOWAS legal and normative instruments and initiatives – notably protocols, frameworks and mechanisms;
- (b) performing a keyword search to produce an inventory of the relevant documents pertaining to media – and derivative concepts;
- (c) reading, synthesising and constructing the evidence into a semantic narrative – about the policy commitment of ECOWAS to integrating/prioritising media issues.

The database of relevant documents was generated through an initial reading of the titles of all the publicly available legal and normative instruments for a determination, on face value, of those policies and provisions that have relevance or implications for media and free expression. This produced a shortlist of 20 documents – treaty, protocols, frameworks, mechanisms. A key word search was then performed, using descriptors – and, where necessary, their derivatives such as (mass) media, journalism, journalist(s), free(dom of) expression, press, newspapers, magazines, broadcasting, radio, television, audio visual media – to produce a redacted account of the integration/prioritisation of media in ECOWAS policy.

The process produced evidence of mentions of these descriptors in only five of the 20 documents identified. The provisions in each of the five shortlisted documents – pertaining to these media-related concepts – were identified through a focused reading and coding process. The evidence was then annotated according to the specific protocols and principles they sought to address.

This inventorying and accounting process formed the basis for a determination of the presence and representation of media and free expression issues in the legal instruments and normative provisions of ECOWAS. The interpretive analysis also provided the empirical insights for recommendations on how policies might better leverage the instrumentality of the media for promoting the ECOWAS vision.

2.2 Individual Interviews

An interview guide was designed for administration to informants across seven purposively selected countries; namely: Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Mali, and Nigeria. One field researcher was recruited for each of the seven countries. Field researchers were either seasoned media scholars or experienced journalism practitioners in the country. They were given individual orientations/instructions on the research purpose and plan.

On account of the interpretivist tenor of the study, the field researchers were advised to treat the interview questions as compass, not commandment; and to therefore feel able to introduce follow-ups and probes as may enable informants express “what they have seen, heard, or experienced” (Rubin & Rubin 2005:27) about the ECOWAS in relation to mainstreaming media in their programs and practices.

Eight key informants were planned to be interviewed in each of the seven countries; for a total of 56 individual interviews. The eight key informants were purposively sampled, with the view to ensure that they collectively reflected width of the specified categories of stakeholders. Furthermore, only a maximum of two people were interviewed for each stakeholder category: public and private media operators; civil society and NGO leaders; media and human rights advocates and lawyers; media industry analysts and academics; respected independent journalists; professional association leaders; representatives of national media policy and regulatory bodies; and national directorates/institutions of ECOWAS. Field researchers were instructed to ensure that interviewees were factually informed about the issues being discussed and to assure that they were independent-minded and able to provide clear, complete, representative information and views.

With the consent of each key informant, interviews were audio-recorded. The recordings were subsequently transcribed and, where interviews were originally in French, translated back into the English language. Data collection in each country lasted an average of two weeks. Data analysis was then carried out using Corbin and Strauss' (2008) coding strategy to distil

key informant responses and identify common or contrary experiences and expectations. An axial coding of the data was performed to develop and refine emergent themes into a coherent narrative.

The important responses are reported in the form of descriptive discussions with illustrative quotes where appropriate. The direct quotes are attributed using first names only; although informants' full names and designations are presented as an appendix at the end of this report, as Annex C.

3.0 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Policies: Instruments and Provisions

As indicated earlier, of the 20 protocols and conventions shortlisted for analysis, only five of them directly addressed or implicitly referenced the role of the media; with varying degrees of engagement or prioritization. These are:

- (1) The ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993)
- (2) The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy & Good Governance (2001)
- (3) The ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight against Corruption (2001)
- (4) The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (2008)
- (5) The ECOWAS Mediation Guidelines (2018)

The **ECOWAS Revised Treaty** was signed in Cotonou on July 24, 1993 (and entered into force upon ratification on August 23, 1995) by the 15-member heads of state and government, to replace the original constitutive Treaty of May 28, 1975. The Treaty enjoins ECOWAS to foster and accelerate the economic co-operation and integration of member states through a “determined and concerted policy of self-reliance.”

This vision, together with the expressed expectation of engendering the “partial and gradual pooling of national sovereignties to the Community within the context of a collective political will” may explain the implicit concession made for the role of information and the media in Article 3 – on the aims and objectives of the organization. Specifically, the Treaty requires ECOWAS to ensure:

- *The encouragement and strengthening of relations and the promotion of the **flow of information** particularly among rural populations, women and youth organisations and socio-professional organisations such as associations of **the media**, business men and women, workers, and trade unions.*

More importantly, the Treaty positively asserts the imperative of the media, and elaborates a direct role for the broadcast media in particular – to facilitate the curation of cultural goods and accrual of social capital (Article 65) – and the print media in particular – to foster the processes of regional integration and development (Article 66). Specifically, the provisions of Article 65 require that Member States should harness their information, radio and television resources to:

- a) *co-ordinate their efforts and pool their resources in order to promote the **exchange of radio and television programmes** at bilateral and regional levels;*
- b) *encourage the establishment of programme exchange centres at regional level and strengthen existing programme exchange centres;*
- c) *use their **broadcasting and television systems to promote the attainment of the objectives of the Community.***

Furthermore, Article 66 stipulates a requirement for member states to establish or enable a deliberative public sphere in which the press and communication media act as the connecting tissue for citizens to contribute to the regional integration process. Specifically, the provision states that:

1. *To involve more closely the citizens of the Community in the regional integration process, Member States agree to **co-operate in the area of information.***
2. *To this end they undertake as follows:*
 - a) *to maintain within their borders, and between one another, **freedom of access** for professionals of the **communication industry** and for **information sources**;*
 - b) *to facilitate **exchange of information** between their **press organs**; to promote and foster effective **dissemination of information** within the Community;*
 - c) *to ensure respect for the **rights of journalists**;*
 - d) *to take measures to encourage **investment capital**, both public and private, **in the communication industries** in Member States;*
 - e) *to **modernise the media** by introducing **training facilities** for new information techniques; and*
 - f) *to promote and encourage dissemination of **information in indigenous languages**, strengthening **co-operation between national press agencies** and developing linkages between them.*

Journalists are furthermore mentioned in Article 82 (1) in relation to co-operation with organised groups and associations:

- *The Community, with a view to mobilising the various actors in socio-economic life for the integration of the region, shall co-operate with socio-economic organizations and associations, in particular.... **Journalists**... with a view to ensuring their involvement in the integration process of the region.*

These provisions underscore the role and relevance of the media to the rights to freedom of opinion and expression of citizens. They acknowledge, furthermore, that an information provides the currency for full and fruitful participation in the processes of regional integration, economic co-operation, and political accountability.

Adopted at the 25th Conference of Heads of State and Government in Dakar, the **Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance** (2001) seeks to institutionalize political accountability and democratic best practices in the Region by committing Member States to a set of “constitutional convergence principles”; notable among which are the following provisions in which the role of the media is either implicated or directly asserted:

- “Every accession to power must be made through free, fair and transparent elections” (Article I(b));
- “Popular participation in decision-making, strict adherence to democratic principles and decentralization of power at all levels of governance” (Article I(d));
- “The freedom of the press shall be guaranteed” (Article I(k)).

Furthermore, Article 37 imposes specific obligations on Member States to create conditions that ensure the pluralism and independence of their media and information systems; including independent mechanisms for extending financial support to private media. These expectations are expressed in the following two provisions:

1. *Each Member State shall work towards ensuring **pluralism** of the **information** sector and the development of the **media**.*
2. *Each Member State may give **financial assistance to** privately-owned **media**. The distribution and allocation of such assistance shall be done by an **independent national body** or by a body freely instituted by the **journalists themselves**.*

These provisions clearly anticipate and account for the normative symbiotic links between media freedom and the tenets of democratic best practice; namely, the capacity of the media to contribute to the exercise of deliberative politics, free and fair elections, and accountable governance. Adopted as a **Supplementary to the protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security** the Protocol would seem to also imply a role for the media in securing these outcomes.

The ECOWAS **Protocol on the Fight against Corruption** was signed into being on December 21, 2001 with the stated objective of preventing, suppressing and eradicating corruption (Article 2(i); and to enable this outcome by taking steps to promote, harmonise and coordinate national anti-corruption laws and policies in order to make the anti-corruption effort more effective.

To this end, the Protocol stipulates a set of 10 measures that each country must establish or consolidate; the ninth of which is for **freedom of the press and the right to information** (Article 5 (i)).

The **ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework** was assented to in Ouagadougou on January 16, 2008 as the frame of reference and mechanism for averting conflict, brokering peace and achieving human security within the region and among member countries. It makes one of the most comprehensive and far-reaching concessions about the agency of the media in any preventive diplomacy and conflict mediation efforts.

Starting with the definition of terms (Section III) through provisions on components and benchmarks (Section VIII) to strategy and plan for forestalling conflict and fostering peace (Section IX), the Framework underscores the metaphor of the media as a double-edged sword; with the possibilities to help or hurt, abet or abate, the values and pursuit of democracy, peace and security.

First, Section III, on Definitions, identifies a number of emotive factors that might be instrumentalised to ignite or exacerbate conflict:

- *Direct and structural forms of violence are given expression and aggravated through... art, music, education, the **media** and cinema (note #15)*

Secondly, Section VIII identifies the causes, consequences and components of the conflict-prevention and peace-building architecture; including the instruments and initiatives that are to be deployed to combat conflict. It identifies a gamut of issues, individuals and institutions involved in, affected by, and responsible for preventing conflict and making peace.

However, the centrality of the media to the framework for preventing conflict and promoting peace is more focally addressed in Section IX (notably paragraphs 102 – 105). Significantly, the provision starts by touting as “laudable and impressive” the “track-record” of ECOWAS in the area of conflict mediation; but laments the inability “to capitalize sufficiently on its successes by selling its achievements to the wider public in Member States and within the international community” (para. 102). The provision recommends the development of an advocacy and communication strategy to deal with the affective antecedents of adversarial behaviour – such as attitudes, perceptions, motivations, suspicion. These bear repeating exhaustively below.

Specifically, in order to operationalize both the public awareness advocacy and corporate communication efforts paragraph 103 requires that:

- *ECOWAS shall promote the following activities:*
 - a) **Awareness promotion:** *ECOWAS shall launch a mass awareness drive around concrete ECOWAS protocols and activities in collaboration with the media, eminent persons and celebrities drawn from the region. In this exercise, ECOWAS shall work with local authorities, civil society organizations, youth and women’s associations and FM Radio Stations.*
 - b) **Branding the ECOWAS product:** *ECOWAS shall ensure the production and wide distribution of ECOWAS-related audio-visual material, including documentaries on ground-breaking initiatives, posters, slogans, face-caps, T-Shirts, CDs, songs, jingles, calendars, pens, radio, and TV jingles and advertisements.*
 - c) **Selling the ECOWAS product:** *(i). ECOWAS shall secure the cooperation of regional and national news networks to ensure that speeches, interventions and appearances by the Chairperson, President and the hierarchy of ECOWAS secure prime time news slots in the major channels across the region. (ii). ECOWAS shall broaden ‘ECOWAS Day’ activities to include greater media coverage, sponsored polls on policy issues, cultural and school activities in Member States. (iii). ECOWAS shall facilitate the incorporation of ‘Regional Integration’ as a compulsory read in the school curriculum during the first two years of secondary education and in the first year of university education in Member States.*
 - d) **Documentation and Publication:** *ECOWAS shall take immediate steps to produce, publish and disseminate an annual analytical journal ‘Human Security in West Africa (conflict analysis in West African Clusters corresponding to the Zonal Bureaux demarcations) and Conflict Prevention & Peace-building in West Africa (Report of ECOWAS interventions, partnerships, tools, perspectives).*
 - e) **Partnerships:** *ECOWAS shall maintain and reinforce partnerships with development partners, research institutions and civil society organizations with a view to sharing and selling views and best practices as well as reinforcing mutual capacities in advocacy and communication.*

Furthermore, in order to empirically document the incidence, understand the trends and monitor progress towards preventing or controlling conflict in and among countries, paragraph 104 stipulates that:

- *The benchmarks for assessing progress in Advocacy and Communication shall include the following:*
 - a) *Well-stocked libraries (physical and electronic) and documentation centres with up-to-date information on all aspects of ECOWAS activities at the Commission, decentralized structures and other institutions of ECOWAS.*
 - b) *Up-to-date literature on ECOWAS in schools and institutions of higher learning in Member States.*
 - c) *The emergence of the ECOWAS brand as a reference point and recurrent theme in the press and in international discourse.*
 - d) *The emergence of an ECOWAS-friendly population in West Africa.*
 - e) *Greater international interest in ECOWAS and greater goodwill of development partners towards the institution.*

Finally, paragraph 105 provides that:

- *To achieve the goals set under Advocacy and Communication, stakeholders shall undertake to provide capacity in the following areas and form:*
 - a) *Strengthen the capacities of the Communication and Documentation Departments with experts, particularly in public relations, editing, production and translation, and with state-of-the-art audio-visual and documentation equipment.*
 - b) *Reinforce the capacities of PAPS, the Departments of Communication and Human Development and Gender, and other relevant units to produce publications on ECOWAS interventions in peace and security.*
 - c) *Capacity-building workshops on publication and documentation for relevant departments.*
 - d) *Media and publicity consultants to assist in documentation and advocacy.*
 - e) *Financial resources to ensure regular and timely distribution of ECOWAS products to client institutions.*
 - f) *Financial support to civil society organizations in Member States for the production, dissemination and popularization of abridged versions of ECOWAS Protocols, Conventions and related legal and policy documents.*

The media are cited or implicated in several of these provisions, including: 42(5), 66(b), 78(c), 90(e)(l), 98(c)(h). Significantly, this inventory does not account for constructs, attributes and derivatives that implicitly involve or invoke a role for the media; such as education, awareness, information, communication, campaign, publicity.

The following other provisions are relatively more elaborate in their ascription of the role of media and in the peace and security mechanisms:

- *Establishment of platforms of stakeholders of democracy and political governance (including **media** and civil society); for conduct and peaceful resolution of election-related disagreements ((53 (i));*

- Role of **media in promoting credible and transparent electoral and governance processes** (53 (k))
- **Capacity-building for media** and other actors; for delivering effective electoral oversight (53 (l));
- **Media** as part of benchmarks for assessing progress in promoting democracy and political governance; specifically: ‘Increased **vibrancy and non-partisanship of the media** that do not propagate hatred’ (54 (s));
- An enabling West African information landscape of freedom, transparency and accountability, where the **electronic and print media** shall become veritable **watch dogs** of human security, and **platforms for mobilization and discourse** on the processes to promote human rights and the rule of law, common citizenry, social cohesion and integration, social harmony, democracy and development (60);

Towards operationalizing 60, there are progressive provisions in 61, 62, 63; which envisage a truly **free and independent, professionally competent and economically sustainable media** system within and among the member states of ECOWAS.

The **ECOWAS Mediation Guidelines** (2018) which identifies the instruments and institutions mandated or implicated in preventive diplomacy and mediation initiatives, only affords a parenthetical remark (on page 20 of the 66-page document) for the media. This is expressed in reference to the importance of the 2001 **Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance** in conflict resolution – in which it echoes the need for:

- ... *promotion of non-partisan and responsible press...*

3.2 Practices: Interventions and Possibilities

Mandates and Synergies

The mainstream view affirms the relevance of informants’ organisational mission and mandate to the protocols and practices of ECOWAS; and as such, to the expectation that a collaborative, mutually-dependent, relationship inures to their collective benefit. This is reflected in the following three responses of interviewees from Burkina Faso, Ghana, and The Gambia; on the relevance of their work to the pursuit and outcomes of good governance and democratic development:

- *I would say the mandates of the MFWA and ECOWAS intersect at the level of democracy and good governance. The MFWA promotes press freedom and freedom of expression, which are key drivers of democracy and good governance. We also support the media to be strong and independent in order to support accountability outcomes. By the same token ECOWAS, as we all know, has a mandate to promote good governance and democracy in West Africa (Muheeb, Ghana)*
- *The mission of ECOWAS, which is to promote democracy and good governance, is consistent with our corporate mission because freedom of the press and freedom of expression are important*

conditions as well as catalysts of good governance. Such a context allows the media to provide information to citizens about public management (Boureima, Burkina Faso)

- *What we do at the Globe is to promote freedom of expression and media freedoms. The mandate of ECOWAS is relevant to the goal of our organization. For if you are going to promote people's participation and integration into a cohesive regional body, then freedom of expression is key to the outcome (Haddija, The Gambia).*

These responses echo the normative argument that freedom of expression and media rights are contingent to good governance, political efficacy and sustainable economic growth.

Other informants indicate that the focus of their organisational mandates and activities is to enable the rights to free movement of persons within and across member states. This resonates with the foundation mandate of the ECOWAS Treaty; namely, “the harmonisation and co-ordination of national policies and the promotion of integration programmes, projects and activities, for speeding up the processes of regional integration” (Article 3(2a)). Specifically, they observe, variously, that:

- *Our work has implications for the free movement of people and goods because without free movement, it is not possible to promote regional integration, and so, the main work we do here is to promote free movement... Our work also focuses a bit on infrastructure. So, our first focus is free movement, then peace and security, and then we have infrastructure and transport which heads of states consider as an important angle to address poverty in West Africa (Désiré, Burkina Faso).*
- *ECOWAS has three main objectives, ensure regional integration thus the integration of consumers, facilitate and ensure free movement of goods and services, remove customs duties. These missions of ECOWAS are directly in line with the overall mission of FACACI's mission (Alain, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *The working areas of ECOWAS that are related to that of our organization include the free movement of people and goods. As a citizen movement, we advocate for pan-Africanism. And so, ECOWAS's work that aim at promoting citizen mobility, including the creation of an ECOWAS passport, is of great interest to us (Ousmane, Burkina Faso).*

For other organizations – such as The Organisation of Active Women in Ivory Coast (OFACI), the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) and the Council of Information and the Monitoring of Governmental Actions (CISAG) in Burkina Faso – their corporate mandates and program activities intersect with the primary purpose of ECOWAS to promote democratic good governance, encourage transparent, free elections and transitions, and facilitate the peaceful resolution of disputes. Operationally, these organisations mostly engage in advocacy and action for conflict prevention and mediation. They encourage the respect for the rights of individuals, especially of vulnerable women and children:

- *OFACI promotes women's rights. It also promotes agenda 1325, which consists of involving women in initiatives on peace. We are also members of the RESFECOCI, ECOWAS Women's Network, through which we are promoting and involving women in conflict prevention. Our activity in conflict prevention is relevant to the mandate of ECOWAS (Doumbia, Côte d'Ivoire).*

- *The activities of the ECOWAS are certainly related to the goals and mandate of the NAWOJ, which is the umbrella body of women journalists in Nigeria. Our mandate is basically protecting the rights of our members especially in the workplace and advocacy for the protection of fundamental human rights of women and children (Jamila, Nigeria).*
- *ECOWAS does a lot of work around elections; we do a lot of work around electoral reforms. ECOWAS works around conflict issues; we do a lot of work around conflict issues. At CISLAC, we do a lot of work around peace and security, and it is very clear that there are so many areas that the ECOWAS is working in; which also coincide with what we do. Of course, ECOWAS has a parliament, and we do a lot of work around parliamentary engagements, and a lot is also being done in that respect. The ECOWAS also has a gender unit; we also do a lot of work around gender. In other words, there are lots of areas in which ECOWAS is working, and we are equally working in that regard (Awual, Nigeria).*
- *Apart from being a subregional organisation whose mission is to bring people together politically and economically, the specific issues that ECOWAS deals with in terms of democracy, elections, security, peacebuilding, participation of women are all linked to the work of the civil society. So, the work of ECOWAS is hugely relevant. The work of ECOWAS in combating corruption especially on money laundering goes to show the relevance of what ECOWAS does to those of us engaged in civil society work (Madi, The Gambia).*

Involvement of Organisations

While informants unanimously identify resonances in their organisational aims and activities with various ECOWAS policies and practices, their experiences or impressions about the role or relevance of the regional body are far less affirmative. According to informants, their organizations have had varying levels of involvement with ECOWAS activities, as expressed below.

Some informants testify that they have been indirectly involved in some activity of the regional body by virtue of the intersecting mandates and activities. These are reflected in the following responses by informants from The Gambia, Ghana and Mali.

- *Not directly but indirectly in the sense that we participate in the IGF [Internet Governance Forum]. We have offered trainings in the run-up to the IGF, which we provided to young people within the ECOWAS subregion (Demba, The Gambia).*
- *Directly? No, not with ECOWAS. Indirectly? Yes. In that, we have had the opportunities of sitting in some meetings, some conferences where we have met member state people from other countries within the ECOWAS subregion (Andrew, Ghana).*
- *Yes and no. Indeed, we have never been directly involved in any of ECOWAS activities. We are not even aware of activities ECOWAS implements. But most recently, we had a visit from the WACSOF delegation, which represents a group of civil society organizations operating in the West Africa. They also participated in one of our press conferences and then invited us for a discussion on the civic space in Mali, and we tried to see how our visions could go together. During the*

discussion, I personally criticized the delegation for their absence in member countries (Nouhoum, Mali).

Other informants have had no involvement with ECOWAS whatsoever. They believe that, given the complementarity of their mandates, ECOWAS should collaborate more actively with them. ECOWAS, being a supranational body, ought to directly collaborate or be involved in their activities.

- *Never! We have never been involved in an activity organized by ECOWAS. I do not know why. Maybe the sub-regional organization does not need the media that much in the member countries. Anyway, we have never been involved in an activity organized by the organization (Tougan, Mali).*
- *I must say that we are a relatively young organization as we have only been in existence since 2015, and actually started operating in 2017. So, for an organization like ECOWAS, I guess we are not yet part of those organizations that would feature in their address book. To tell the truth, we have not been involved in an ECOWAS activity (Arnaud, Burkina Faso).*
- *Our organization has never been involved in any of ECOWAS activities. As you know, we are a civil society organization, and so if ECOWAS approaches us or consults us on specific thematic areas, it will be a pleasure for us to support them, especially by playing our watchdog role. But on our side, it will be difficult to approach ECOWAS and tell them about our bona fides and what they ought to be doing with/for us (Issiaka, Burkina Faso).*
- *So far, we have not been involved in any activity of ECOWAS. Either they are unaware of us, or do not value the potential we have to support the realisation of their organisational goals and objectives (Charlemagne, Burkina Faso).*

Some informants indicate that they have had only incidental, and mostly ad hoc, associations with the work of ECOWAS. These experiences are expressed in the following three perspectives of informants from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Mali.

- *Our association is not much involved in ECOWAS activities... However, members of the network are once in a while invited by ECOWAS during its activities for media coverage. Hence, the individual media organizations attend these meetings and activities not under the umbrella of the Network for Media and Human Rights, but as individual media organizations invited for coverage (Boukari, Mali).*
- *I don't remember any ECOWAS activity that the MFWA has participated in... it just appears that ECOWAS themselves have not initiated any project that has required our support. What I can remember is communiques that ECOWAS issued, and in order to facilitate their wide circulation and publicity, enlisted the resources of our institutional network and relations with media organisations throughout West Africa (Muheeb, Ghana).*
- *We have not been involved in any of ECOWAS activities. Our organization was created in 2008, and we initiated an award scheme named the Alfred Dan Moussa prize for integration and peace in the ECOWAS region. We initiated the award under the auspices of ECOWAS since it is on regional integration. On the third edition of the award, we received institutional support from ECOWAS, which allowed us to use its logo on communication materials (Lassina, Côte d'Ivoire).*

Other organisations have been more directly and actively involved with the ECOWAS; but this is mostly by virtue of their formal institutional relationships as institutions and agencies of the ECOWAS Commission. The views of two informants each from Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire reflect these perspectives.

- *We first participate in statutory meetings called CAF (Administrations and Finance meeting); which are really the statutory body in terms of the preparation of budgets of all institutions under ECOWAS. So if you are director of this office, you are automatically a statutory member of the meeting... The second bit is about applying at the national level the decisions adopted by ECOWAS. We also honour all invitations from institutions, including the court of justice, WAHO, and other organizations related to the ECOWAS. But with the advent of COVID-19, meetings are now online. Basically, our role is that of an interface between ECOWAS and other institutions. Also, the principles governing the bureau give us the mandate to do everything ECOWAS does in member countries (Désiré, Burkina Faso).*
- *Since we are represented in all ECOWAS states, in Ivory Coast, we have a perfect collaboration with the Ivorian ECOWAS office that supports us. Last year during the celebration of the National Day of Peace, ECOWAS helped in organizing our activity which was called “Ivory Coast women want peace.” The bureau assists us in our activities Dosso, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *Yes, we can say that we are involved since ECOWAS is made up of countries in the region, and as a state institution, we participate in the development of programmes and are involved in the adoption of budgets and the implementation of development projects in direct partnership with ECOWAS. These projects are implemented as part of measures undertaken to achieve the ECOWAS mandate (Boukaré, Burkina Faso).*
- *We are involved in ECOWAS activities, especially when it comes to metrology and product quality control at the Ministry of Industry. We are also involved in the borderless system which is about the so-called Abidjan – Lagos road, and which seeks to lift barriers to allow the realization of the free movement of goods (Alain, Côte d'Ivoire).*

Some organisations have been directly involved in ECOWAS activities, principally on account of their organisational mandates and activities. This experience is shared by informants from across countries and stakeholder categories; represented in the following views of stakeholders from Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria:

- *We have taken part many times in ECOWAS activities; such as the campaign against small arms proliferation, terrorism, and organized crime (Fode, Guinea-Bissau).*
- *TANGO used to be involved in ECOWAS peacebuilding efforts. It has also taken part in a number of ECOWAS activities in term of conflict resolution, election observation and governance generally (Madi, The Gambia).*
- *Yes! We have in the past been involved in several ECOWAS activities in raising awareness of young ECOWAS migrants (N'takpe, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *We have been involved by way of media coverage of their activities sometimes if they have meetings and we are invited (Desmond, Nigeria).*
- *Yes. For instance, under the big umbrella of ECOWAS, some of our reporters and editors have the opportunity to participate in training programs that have either been sponsored or partly organized by ECOWAS (Victorson, Nigeria).*

Imperative of Collaboration

Informants have had varying levels of involvement with ECOWAS. By involving stakeholders, ECOWAS will be leveraging the networks and human resource potentials of civil society and other stakeholders to achieve their common goals for regional integration, democratic accountability, and economic development. On the question of how close collaboration with ECOWAS could help improve their activities, the majority of informants believe that if they were to collaborate with the ECOWAS, the activities and outcomes of programs of the regional body would yield positive affordances; the benefits of which would devolve to their organisations at the operational level.

According to informants, ECOWAS could benefit from collaborating with media organisations in terms of visibility within the public sphere. According to them, the essentiality of ECOWAS seems taken for granted among technocrats and policy actors; but the public do not share the same assumptions. For them, people do not seem to know or appreciate the relevance of ECOWAS to their realities. Given the surveillance and agenda-setting potentials of the media, they suggest a public relations benefit of collaborating with the media to create public awareness and goodwill towards the regional and national institutions of ECOWAS.

- *I don't think Gambians know fully the work of ECOWAS. Working with us will help journalists to better understanding of ECOWAS and filter it down to the public (Lamin, The Gambia).*
- *There should be improved communication and coordination. The challenge the CSOs have is how to communicate with ECOWAS. The country offices are limited in their delivery of services and engagement. Moreover, ECOWAS has to give a lot more recognition and resources to civil society to enable them to carry out activities which at the end of the day serves to promote the objectives of ECOWAS. It is in the interest of ECOWAS to create mechanisms to better engage with the civil society. At the regional level, there is relationship with WANEP and WACSO, but when it comes to national level engagement that is low (Madi, The Gambia).*
- *Well, I think that the ECOWAS, for example, has a radio station in Dakar, Senegal. But I believe that it will be quite important for it to have relay stations in the other ECOWAS countries so that it will be able to engage more. And the MFWA as an organization does support the media; at least we would be able to work with the ECOWAS media outlets to be able to roll out programmes to make ECOWAS more visible to educate ECOWAS citizens on their civic responsibilities and to know more about what ECOWAS is doing and what their roles are in promoting the integration that ECOWAS is to do (Muheeb, Ghana).*
- *First, ECOWAS is supposed to have a personal relationship with organizations like ours. And if I say personal relationship, at least, a meeting with the editor or editors, maybe some journalists, to have that one-on-one, so that there could be a direct contact. So, for direct contact, it means ECOWAS could reach out to more Ghanaians with their activities, their information, announcement through the media because the media is the tool that disseminates the information to the people. So, there should be some direct contact- that's the first point of call. Then after, ECOWAS should also invite the media from all countries to any of their events anywhere (Ismail, Ghana).*

- *A collaboration with the media is always beneficial not only beneficial in improving the visibility of the organization but also for the population. If ECOWAS decides to collaborate with the media, it will be a good thing. In Mali, for example, we currently have international armed forces as part of a security mission. Their actions must be supported by sensitizing the population on the purpose of their presence on the Malian territory. Such sensitization can only be done by the media and could be done only through a collaboration with ECOWAS (Tougan, Mali).*
- *Our Forum (FORDPCI) works on addressing challenges faced by newspapers, and therefore by collaborating with ECOWAS, we could have a partnership where both sides win since ECOWAS is a large sub-regional organization which I believe is still unknown to the general public (Charles, Côte d'Ivoire).*

Informants also suggest that to enable the benefits of close collaborations between media and ECOWAS, the ECOWAS must hold or sponsor training activities for journalists to acquaint journalists with the structure, objectives and operations of the organisation and enhance the capacity of journalists to cover its activities appropriately and adequately.

- *Secondly, they need to also work hand in hand with media organizations to train journalists assigned for coverages of institutions like this to enhance their capacity that way they will better portray all activities of ECOWAS in the manner that will suit ECOWAS itself (Omolola, Nigeria).*
- *We would need more of training. There should be a benchmark to access the output, performance, and conduct of journalists across the sub-region. ECOWAS focuses on building and promoting democracy, but you and I know that journalists play a vital role in this regard. So, these dramatis personae - editors, reporters- who play these vital roles have to be encouraged and empowered to do more (Victorson, Nigeria).*
- *I think there could be some more interactions engagement between the media. It could be under the auspices of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Nigeria Guild of Editors, and other rights activists in the media space. Sometimes they can come out with policies or interface workshop that could also help (Desmond, Nigeria).*

Aside from the media organizations giving visibility to ECOWAS informants indicate that since their work and activities are related to the various mandates of the ECOWAS, there are synergistic benefits to ECOWAS in working with media. They believe that the particular objectives of ECOWAS of promoting peace and security, democratic governance, regional integration, and monitoring projects or activities in at the levels of institutions and units ntries, could be efficiently and effectively achieved if they collaborated more effectively with the media. These views are reflected across the range of countries and institutions; as illustrated by the following responses.

- *Well, our organization usually develops and implements projects in different thematic areas. I think it is under these projects that ECOWAS and the Network for Media and Human Rights can effectively collaborate since the projects revolve around many thematic areas including democracy, good governance, transparent elections, peace and security (Boukari, Mali).*
- *An organization like ECOWAS needs an organization like ours to monitor or play a watchdog role. We are an organization of journalists, an investigative center, and we know that some activities and programmes are adopted at the ECOWAS level; however, there is the bit about*

implementation and prevailing regulations and context on the ground. If there is a good framework of collaboration between ECOWAS and our organization, we can together implement some projects to enable ECOWAS to better understand what is happening on the ground (Arnaud, Burkina Faso).

- The problem we have in the day-to-day management with ECOWAS is the lack of leadership/contact person in managing cases/situations/projects, and there is as well a problem of monitoring and evaluation that ECOWAS will have to work on to achieve results. There are many projects that come by, and when we do follow-ups to take updates, we hear nothing, and by the time you realize, the project is long gone, and when we make follow-ups on some issues, it takes long before we get a feedback (Désiré, Burkina Faso).
- I do not see any implication of civil society organizations in the decision-making process at ECOWAS, and even CSOs do not agree with some of their decisions, especially on the issue of democracy. The protocol on governance is poorly formulated, and that is not how civil society organizations would have formulated it (Ousmane, Burkina Faso).
- I think that ECOWAS authorities do not know that their mission which consists of peoples' integration or regional integration, must go through the media. The media is the primary channel through which such a mission can become reality. This means that the place of the media and communication is essential for the realization of the mission of ECOWAS (Guillaume, Côte d'Ivoire).

The ECOWAS has the mandate to promote economic cooperation among member states to raise living standards and promote economic development. To do this, they engage in activities of achieving regional integration, peace and security, democratic governance, health. Informants were asked if they perceived the ECOWAS to be fulfilling its mandate in their countries or what they had observed in other member states. To some, though the ECOWAS is doing well and fulfilling their mandate, their neglect of the media in Member States forfeits the opportunity to cover their activities, and hence, increase awareness among the populace of ECOWAS and its vision, as well as their stake in its realisation. The public, therefore, do not know about or acknowledge the relevance of ECOWAS to their lives.

- If you look at ECOWAS activities such as peacekeeping, the stability of states, the restoration of rule of law, and its missions for democracy and transparent elections, ECOWAS plays an essential role in states. But now, with regard to its collaboration with the press, although I confess that all its activities and missions are often very successful, little is known about them. This is because there is no communication strategy around the activities and no partnership with media associations in countries where that missions/activities are undertaken (Boukari, Mali).
- ECOWAS is already doing its job, but for better visibility, the media is essential. I have seen the importance of the media during some work with the Panos Institute 4 years ago in the project 'Women Occupy the Media.' For 4 years, we trained women and the media. We learned to interact with the media and find out how to improve the image of women through the media (Dosso, Côte d'Ivoire).

For others, ECOWAS as a regional body has, at best, only notionally fulfilled its mandate of promoting regional integration as a means to accumulating social-cultural and political-

economic capital for member states and citizens. They point, again, to the poor partnership with the media as the basis for that conclusion. According to them, if the ECOWAS is to involve the media, they can effectively fulfil their mandate.

- *They have done good work over the years; some of it effective, but certain aspects, such as economic integration, have not been very effective. Trade is low within the subregion, and despite Ecowas protocols, freedom of movement of goods and people remain a challenge. This is an area the media can support in terms of writing stories about issues that are hindering ECOWAS' integration efforts (Modou, The Gambia).*
- *Perhaps ECOWAS could work towards improving some aspects of the implementation of its mandate because if you take into account the views of the populations on ECOWAS, you get a sense that ECOWAS could do better by involving the media that can make inputs to inform decisions based on the views of the citizenry (Guillaume, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *Since the representatives of ECOWAS are not everywhere on the territory while the media have a larger network and cover the whole country, they have a more generic and contextual view of issues. If ECOWAS could at least take up the issue on the free movement of people and goods. Many journalists have made important and remarkable reports often at the risk of their lives, but has ECOWAS taken action based on these reports? No. The media has the potential to help the regional integration agenda, but if ECOWAS does not address the concerns raised, it will be more difficult (Guézouma, Burkina Faso).*
- *Perhaps ECOWAS could work towards improving some aspects of the implementation of its mandate because if you take into account the views of the populations on ECOWAS, you get a sense that ECOWAS could do better by involving the media that can make inputs to inform decisions based on the views of the citizenry. And so a collaboration between the media and ECOWAS could be beneficial (Boukaré, Burkina Faso).*

Some informants feel that the poor partnership with the media, making it quite difficult for them to support the body, has affected the perception of people of the ECOWAS and, in that regard, they do not think the regional body is fully fulfilling its mandate.

- *If we have to assess ECOWAS on this, it would be difficult to give it a good rating, as long as the media is underestimated. We also believe that we are being relegated to the back seat when it comes to ECOWAS. As a result, in most cases, ECOWAS missions have not yielded expected results. From a media viewpoint, let me underline that ringing the alarm bell is one of our roles. Whenever there is a crisis or signs of a crisis, we ring the alarm bell to call on public officials to quickly take action. But unfortunately, our calls have often fallen into death ears, especially those to ECOWAS. The current crisis in Mali has been predicted and spoken of years ago by the media, but there hasn't been any action from ECOWAS. Whenever there is a looming situation on a country, only the media can warn public officials since one of our duties is the ensure that citizen do not suffer the consequences of poor governance. Unfortunately, ECOWAS hardly listens (Boubacar, Mali).*
- *Today, when I am asked such a question, quite honestly to comment on such an issue, I think that ECOWAS is not carrying out its mandate effectively in relation to the media. I say it sincerely and honestly. I don't even know in which language ECOWAS communicates. These are very important aspects in terms of organizations that bring together several countries. If ECOWAS*

were to communicate exclusively in English, French-speaking countries would have less and less access to the information provided. However, I personally am not aware of an active communication channel set up by ECOWAS in Mali that can allow the citizen of the Community to be regularly informed of its activities and initiatives in the region (Nouhoum, Mali).

- No. Because I must approach it from the angle of relationship with us. I cannot sit down and applaud them that they are fulfilling their mandate. When we are not part of what they do. We are not involved in any form. When we are integrated, we will be able to appraise what they do, whether they are meeting up with their mandates or not. But when we have been clearly alienated, I cannot applaud them. So let's get a closer working understanding that way we can appraise each other (Christopher, Nigeria).
- Seriously, the ECOWAS Vision 2020 was supposed to be promoted and actualized by the ECOWAS through the partnership with non-state actors which one of it is the media. I am not too sure beyond just coverage of activities. I am not too sure how media has been monitoring mainstream to support the ECOWAS programs. I think there's need for the ECOWAS to intensify efforts to mainstream media in order to achieve its vision and also programs. So much need to be done (Awual, Nigeria).
- No, I do not think so. In these kinds of organizations, many of the people agree on what they want to communicate to the masses and set up on their own communication system; however, we do not see much on the ground. While they should rather rely on existing media and communication channels which have a certain popularity and have a certain impact to make themselves known and communicate to the population (Charlemagne, Burkina Faso).

Operating a People-centred Vision

The ECOWAS Vision 2020 had a goal of transforming the body from a previously known body from an ECOWAS of states to a community of people. The idea was to make the people in member states have a voice in the decision-making processes and thus be more inclusive of the people and ultimately ensure that the integration and development processes are people-centred and people-driven. Some informants have not seen anything change in terms of the orientation of ECOWAS. For them, the ECOWAS still operates as a “Union for Heads of State.” The ECOWAS, according to them, still make decisions that favour the heads of government which are usually detrimental to the ordinary citizen. Their adverse verdict on Vision 2020 should offer evaluative insights for improving the practical utility of a current process towards an ECOWAS Vision 2050; which, incidentally, also purports a people-centred orientation.

- I don't believe in this new vision/focus of ECOWAS. The coup d'état that recently took place in Mali shows that ECOWAS has turned into a union of heads of states. They take action only to defend/protect one of theirs who is in a difficult situation. That is how we see it. Some even use the sub-regional organization to hold on to power (Tougan, Mali).

- *Advocates for the new approach “ECOWAS of Peoples” originally perceived ECOWAS a corporation, a union of heads of state, defending the interests of the President in power. Unfortunately, the reality is not that different. It is very rare to see ECOWAS criticizing actions undertaken by a sitting President. It is usually after the President has left office that we see ECOWAS going for peacekeeping missions, and transition (Boukari, Mali).*
- *I do not think there is much difference. Well, I see the same thing. Our interactions remain more about governments rather than the people. The people do not know much about ECOWAS, what it does and what it does not do. If I remember quite well, there used to be some form of public forums on ECOWAS in the Gambia. That is not happening now, so the people do not have platform to contribute or participate meaningfully in the affairs of ECOWAS (Anna, The Guinea).*
- *I see ECOWAS more as an entity of States, not of Peoples (Haddija, The Gambia).*
- *I think these are just slogans, but in practice, I don’t think that the ECOWAS we have today is an ECOWAS of the Peoples (Nouhoum, Mali).*
- *These are still just words; ECOWAS remains the same ECOWAS in all. We do not feel the implementation of this vision since, from our point of view, nothing has actually changed. An evidence to this is the inability of ECOWAS to prevent the 3rd mandates of presidents in Côte d’Ivoire, and Guinea despite the deaths recorded (Boureima, Burkina Faso).*
- *I think ECOWAS is not doing enough regarding this new vision. We have the impression that ECOWAS is a union of heads of state. We see at various summits, Heads of State coming together to make decisions, adopt resolutions, etc., without consulting their populations. And very often these decisions are barriers to regional integration (Bandioukou, Mali).*
- *Unfortunately, not. It has been a while they’ve been talking about ECOWAS of people. I think even the revised Treaty seeks to speak to that. But in practice, ECOWAS is operating as a head of state mechanism. That is simply because (1) ECOWAS is not proactive in terms of how it engages CSOs. ECOWAS has a number of good protocols but to ensure accountability for member states is a challenge. It is not enough to have a Country Office but ECOWAS presence in the country is important. It is still ECOWAS of bureaucrats. Officials run institutions but average Gambian is yet to see or feel the relevance or existence of ECOWAS in his or her life (Madi, The Gambia).*

To operate a people-centred vision, informants believe that the people must be actively engaged in the decision-making of the body and be fully aware of the various activities of the body. They believe it is one of the best ways through which ECOWAS can make decisions and embark on activities that are truly driven by the needs and aspirations of the people, not just a select few in privileged positions. However, they do not see the people actively involved and adequately informed.

- *You do not necessarily see a lot happening around this vision. There are still a lot of dealings between member states. If you ask ordinary members in the streets about ECOWAS trying to move from ECOWAS of States to ECOWAS of Peoples, they won’t see much happening (Modou, The Gambia).*
- *We still haven’t seen anything about that: it remains a statement. They say that they work for the people, but we have realized that eventually, they work for people who are of a certain level, and ultimately, the work done does not trickle down. We need to find solutions so that decisions*

and measures adopted go down to the people. It is necessary to explain decisions to the people and at the same time have decisions informed by the people (Charlemagne, Burkina Faso).

- *It is supposed to be a people-centred organization or commission. Economic Community. It's a community. A community is made up of people. If you don't bring people together, let them know what you're doing. You run around the place as a cartel. Let it not just be about individualism (Christopher, Nigeria).*
- *The vision is indeed a beautiful one, but ECOWAS has not done anything yet. They can be credited for thinking such a vision. But I think that the first instrument of this vision is to have an ECOWAS parliament where representatives are directly elected by the citizen. There must be candidates representing their countries (Guillaume, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *From an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of the peoples. What does that mean? To me, it means that ECOWAS must be understood by the people at the grassroot, and to achieve this, ECOWAS actions must be communicated by us who are in charge of media outlets. Until this is achieved, ECOWAS will remain an organization for states like we have seen in Mali and Cote d'Ivoire (Charles, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *Well, I think that there is the ECOWAS parliament, and that is one of the vehicles that the ECOWAS is using to get closer to the people, believing that, these parliamentarians when elected by their constituents, will represent the interest of the people. But I think that by a large, a lot of people do not feel that their parliamentarians are really representing them at the ECOWAS level. In fact, some people don't even know that the parliamentarians that the elected into their national assembly have also been elected or appointed to also serve in the ECOWAS parliament (Muheeb, Ghana).*
- *Gambians would have to see ECOWAS as a voice, a voice for good governance, for human rights, for accountability – holding national governments to account. In most of our countries, governments are more or less beyond the ability of the people to check. So, ECOWAS has to implement its own protocols. Furthermore, it is to make its presence or create better communication and coordination with the CSOs, private sector, academia, media, and others. These are structures ECOWAS should engage and run projects in communities. What stops ECOWAS from having an ECOWAS House or Centre, which will be there to promote multiculturalism (Madi, The Gambia).*
- *I've not seen any change, at all; because ECOWAS does not; I can't pinpoint any single ECOWAS organization for people, in Ghana, unlike United Nations, which has United Nations groups in the country. It has groups of Ghanaians who are involved in cultural activities of the United Nations, and everybody knows that there is a group like this. It has a group of people who are involved in some political or debate, structures of the United Nations, all of these are people-centred, and it's just to draw more people into the activities to know more about the status, the direction, and all that. But ECOWAS has nothing like that, and I can't really say much about ECOWAS in terms of people-centred relations and activities (Ismail, Ghana).*

However, some of the informants indicate that they have realized the change in ECOWAS orientation towards becoming more people-centred; as illustrated in the following two responses from Mali and Burkina Faso.

- *This trend is, however, changing and increasingly we see an ECOWAS that is more and more close to the people. If we take the example of our country Mali, ECOWAS has done a lot to restore the rule of law (Boukari, Mali).*
- *Ten years have already passed, and now there is a new referendum for vision 2050, and so the vision 2020 is being forgotten as its 10-years period spanning from 2010 to 2020 has expired. During that period, the vision took into consideration the aspiration of the populations that are the beneficiaries and sought to create a paradigm shift in the way it functions so as to reduce the level of bureaucracy and transition into a pragmatic organization involved in field work. And that is what we see ECOWAS trying to do on the daily basis now (Désiré, Burkina Faso).*

With many informants indicating the ECOWAS failure or inability to run a body dedicated to the people/people centred, it was necessary to find out how they think the ECOWAS could be more open to the people and be able to reach its vision of being people-oriented. The informants indicate various ways through which the people could be integrated into the activities of ECOWAS. For some respondents, the most important way the ECOWAS could be more people-oriented is by simply being more open to the people and involving them in their decision-making and activities. They suggest ways through which the ECOWAS could be open to participate of citizens.

Informants believe the ECOWAS could be more people-oriented if it changes the system through which representatives are selected from various states into the ECOWAS parliament, where many decisions they make, affect the people. The system has to enable various states to select their representatives into the parliament. That way, they would be fully aware of who acts as their liaison to the ECOWAS and properly channel their needs to them so that their voices and views are taken into account when making decisions that ultimately affect them.

- *A lot of the issues around that is about the decision-making process at ECOWAS. I know that it runs a consensus model where everyone has to agree on something before it is adopted. That is a good thing, but at the same time, I see no reason why we can't adopt the idea of transnational approach to it. Why can't we directly vote ECOWAS parliamentarians or have an ECOWAS-oriented media? (Demba, The Gambia).*
- *We have the ECOWAS parliament. Why can't we directly elect members of the ECOWAS parliament or at least make it a bit more participatory? We can't we have quarterly media briefings regarding what's on at ECOWAS in various countries? (Anna, The Guinea)*
- *First, I think that the Parliament must be set up through direct vote by the people. Also, ECOWAS created the West African civil society forum (WACSOF) to involve civil society in its activities; however, the forum has been abandoned. In 2016 I was in Abuja to elect Mrs. Tall to lead the forum; however, her term ended since 2019 and we are now in 2021. The platform does not have the means to organize elections to function meanwhile, it was considered as a means of regional integration (Guillaume, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *First, media have to know ECOWAS. Unfortunately, the West African media do not know ECOWAS simply because ECOWAS does not engage the media effectively. A lot of journalists do not know about ECOWAS – the mechanisms, institutions, protocols, decisions. When ECOWAS makes decisions in meetings, these do not become headline news in West African countries*

because the media are not even aware. The only way out is to create awareness within the media. Then the next step is for the media to begin to link issues to ECOWAS. So that if there is an issue of corruption or gender-based violence, journalists will see how does it link with ECOWAS because there are ECOWAS instruments dealing with such an issue (Madi, The Gambia).

For others, the ECOWAS is an inert bureaucracy that that is disconnected from the realities of citizens. Informants, therefore, suggest a devolution of the functions and offices of ECOWAS in member states and investing them with the authority and responsibilities of the larger body. By doing this, the people can now walk into an ECOWAS office and channel their social needs, suggestions, and complaints to them. That way, the ECOWAS will become more participatory.

- *So, I've mentioned United Nations and all that they are doing. There's nothing wrong with copying a module that is working. Copy the United Nations module of decentralizing groups, creating organizations in member countries and even getting it down to as low as high school level, where high schools could have organizations or I mean associations for ECOWAS and then they would just mimic the activities of ECOWAS (Ismail, Ghana).*
- *In my opinion, ECOWAS must already create the conditions to make its representations / representatives in the Member States more active. We must not have one person coming to speak on behalf of ECOWAS in the entire country. There must be an active ECOWAS office in each member state. This office of ECOWAS must be made up of nationals and carry out activities on behalf of ECOWAS. This Office of ECOWAS may be likely to receive complaints, suggestions, and even observations from the citizens of in the various member countries. In these circumstances, ECOWAS will be very close to the citizens of the community. Citizens will therefore be in constant contact with ECOWAS (Nouhoum, Mali)*
- *I think that ECOWAS can actually decentralize its parliament and have parliaments in every country they are in. For example, they take parliamentarians from national assemblies to constitute the ECOWAS parliament, but these parliamentarians are not free. They are subjected to the will of the political parties they belong to as well as the stakeholders in their countries of origin. Also, ECOWAS needs to be felt in the daily lives of the citizen in the region in terms of Education, Health, etc. I know of the existence of the WAHO, which is an amazing organization, but it must be decentralized to allow citizens to see its impact. I don't even know if there is a representation of ECOWAS in Burkina Faso (Ousmane, Burkina Faso)*

Informants indicate that there have been instances where ECOWAS activities, like the activities of the state, are not aligned with the actual needs of the beneficiaries (people). The reason is that there is no research or inquiry to assess the expectations or experiences of the people in the determination of priorities and execution of projects. They suggest that, for ECOWAS to be more people-oriented, they must seek the validation of the citizens so that their decisions and activities.

- *ECOWAS must proceed to the implementation of the project. And the ECOWAS Commission must not implement the project without knowing first the reality of the people of each member-state and its priorities (Fode, Guinea-Bissau).*

- *There are practical issues, for example, people have needs, there is the question of health, currently the coronavirus. Which member country of ECOWAS has the resources to afford a vaccine, has ECOWAS thought about the issue? we tend to dwell or think more of the heads of states, and we forget the people. Also, our states are suffering from malnutrition and so on, these are practical issues on which ECOWAS must take leadership role, it must not leave space for the EU and the UN (Guézouma, Burkina Faso).*
- *The work of ECOWAS must take into consideration the concerns of the people. Know their needs and work towards addressing them (Cissé, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *For ECOWAS to get closer to the people and for people to partake in ECOWAS activities, it is necessary that ECOWAS takes into account the concerns of the populations in order to find direct solutions because the general impression we have is that ECOWAS comes in or takes action whenever there is a conflict (Issiaka, Burkina Faso).*
- *Focus on the people, initiate programs and ideas that would directly impact and impart on the people (Victorson, Nigeria).*
- *It is to listen to the people, to understand the problem of the peoples. Because the challenges are huge. We must listen to people, understand them and their challenges and address them. We must listen to the people whether it is on cultural, economic, or social matters (Dosso, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *We need to know what the people want, and as soon as we know what the people want, we can fine-tune our interventions so that we can move towards this vision of the peoples (Boukaré, Burkina Faso).*

For the vision of a people-centred ECOWAS to be realised, citizens must feel an identity with policies and assume ownership stake in the activities of member states. Informants suggest a role for the media as bridge between the ECOWAS Commission and citizens. They also suggest other methods such as ECOWAS operating an effective and responsive mechanism where peoples' questions, complaints, or suggestions can be addressed. They also suggest including the study of the ECOWAS into the curriculum of young students and observing holidays where various events such as quizzes can be held to continually educate and inform the people about the regional body and its activities.

- *A participatory and people-oriented organization I think must take into account a very important media component because to have the people's support for its policies, ECOWAS must warm up its collaboration with the media. You know, today, whatever project is being implemented, until the population understands what is happening, it is not possible to have the desired results, and for people to understand what is happening, there is the need for the media that carries information to the people. And so, there is ground to conquer, and this will be to the advantage of ECOWAS because more than 90% of the laws, protocols and possibilities/opportunities it offers are not known (Arnaud, Burkina Faso).*
- *Also, let us ask ourselves what: What space ECOWAS occupies in our schools' textbooks for our children to know about it. From my point of view, part of the educational curriculum should be dedicated to ECOWAS. But it is not done. When it comes to the media, we have already spoken about it (Guillaume, Côte d'Ivoire).*

- Also, celebrate days memorable for ECOWAS. I think that would be one of the solutions ECOWAS can employ to be more people-centred (Ismail, Ghana).
- If we want to talk about democracy, then we must reach out to journalists. Reporters and editors in the sub-region have to be targeted through programs that would deepen democracy and broaden their horizon. Move democracy from just elections to actually improving on the lives of individuals (Victorson, Nigeria).
- ECOWAS should be encouraged to continue to be closer to the people. And I sincerely believe that the press can play a key role in this process (Boukari, Mali).
- They should beef up their response mechanism. You don't just sit in your offices and condemn crisis-prone areas, maybe when the government is highhanded on protesters. For example, you condemn, and you don't do anything. There should be sanctions; there should be help mechanism for victims (Stella, Nigeria).

Informants suggest some ways through which the media could be significant in helping the ECOWAS become the people-oriented body.

- Because the press is very close to the people and is abreast with the concerns of the population. The media can relay the most relevant concerns of the people to ECOWAS so that they can be taken into account. And I believe that a good strategic collaboration with the press can make this ECOWAS of peoples a reality. (Boukari, Mali)
- To understand the merits of ECOWAS' new vision, there is a need for awareness raising, and for that, ECOWAS needs to work with the media for the people to understand its new vision. Raising awareness about the new vision (Charles, Côte d'Ivoire)
- We have to go back even to the roles of the media. And so, I think that such a vision needs communication and so the involvement of the media. I believe that the media has an important role to play in this vision. (Lassina, Côte d'Ivoire)
- The media can play an instrumental role for the realization of an ECOWAS of the Peoples. Today everyone has a TV set or radio at home. We also have smartphones and internet that allows us to listen to what is going on. The media represents a communication conduit for ECOWAS. ECOWAS must have a communication program for its people and put greater emphasis on local media so that their messages can reach ordinary citizen. Today, we hear of ECOWAS in Cote d'Ivoire when there is war and when ECOWAS has to intervene with its army. ECOWAS needs the media to communicate its new vision, make and implement policies in such a way that a Guinean can feel comfortable in Mali and a Malian can feel comfortable when in another country (Alain, Côte d'Ivoire)
- If ECOWAS wants to become a people-oriented organization, you can only advance your cause via the involvement of media, media engagement deepened, sustained media involvement, media engagement (Christopher, Nigeria).

As indicated, the primary functions of the media are to inform and educate the public. Thus, aside from communicating this vision of ECOWAS, the media could also educate and inform the people of the ECOWAS, its statutes, mandates, and activities. A vision that is inspired or endorsed by the critical mass will be more valuable and meaningful to the process and outcome of regional integration and development.

- *The media is crucial – not just as the intermediary between the government and the people but also the platform for free expression, especially social media. It is important that we have policies and programmes that are ECOWAS-oriented. If ECOWAS is to succeed, they need to hammer home the point that the individual country citizens see ECOWAS as more important than their smaller countries (Demba, The Gambia).*
- *The media could through its role that consists of informing, educating, and sensitizing the population play a key role in achieving an ECOWAS of the people (Tougan, Mali).*
- *The primary role of the media is first of all that of communication and then raising awareness at the level of the population. What would be sad for the population would be the lack of information. Also, the media must disseminate the various laws and report on the daily lives of the population as well as activities being undertaken by the organization on infrastructure, transportation, freedom of movement, peace, and democracy, as well as human rights (Désiré, Burkina Faso)*
- *The media are always relevant because, as I said, everything will depend on how ECOWAS wants to communicate with the citizens of its space. Today, we are in a world of communication and information. Communication and information are provided by the women and men of the media. These men and women must be on the first and final line of all the initiatives that ECOWAS wants to undertake in the region. It was when the Mali crisis started that we heard of the transition of the ECOWAS of States to the ECOWAS of People. I had no such information before. But if it is the ECOWAS of peoples, we recognize ourselves as citizens of ECOWAS. But there must be sustained information campaign directed at those peoples on whose behalf ECOWAS is acting (Nouhoum, Mali).*
- *It is the media that informs, educates, mobilizes the people and in some cases entertain the people. Without media being involved. All these things are gone. The role of the media is very clear. It is the media that sets the agenda by the time they involve the media. We can equally draw a more people-oriented program. (Christopher, Nigeria).*
- *The media will definitely be relevant. Media is mainstream and not just invited to cover events. There is the need for the media to be fully integrated into ECOWAS beyond just being invited to cover events which means that there must be way in which strategic communication is developed to reach out to the people from the grassroots to understand why this ECOWAS exist. (Awual, Nigeria)*
- *I think that country-level media organizations can provide some help, especially in raising awareness on ECOWAS programmes and improve the visibility of projects. This could lead to citizens adhering to the vision of ECOWAS and even to its policies (Boukaré, Burkina Faso)*

ECOWAS is committed to the improvement of member states. Acting towards this commitment, they occasionally make interventions to promote peace and security, facilitate peaceful and free, and fair elections, ensure smooth democratic transitions, and promote the health and wellbeing citizens of member states. Informants who rate ECOWAS highly in terms of commitment to their peace and security cite examples of how ECOWAS intervenes in cases of conflicts and brings calm to the situations. Though some indicate there are deficits in the peace and security situations of some countries, these do not undermine the success ECOWAS has achieved in this area.

- *I think that ECOWAS has done quite a lot of work in building peace and security. It has shown a lot of interest and taken a lot of initiatives to prevent political situations from exploding into full-blown conflicts, and the latest is what we saw in Mali- their intervention in Mali, which was able to bring the military leaders and civilians back together to discuss a transition government and then a roadmap towards restoration of a full democratic rule (Muheeb, Ghana).*
- *This emerged out of the Liberian conflict, then Sierra Leone, forcing ECOWAS to come up with early warning mechanism. But ECOWAS approach is reactive. The elements that guarantee peace – human rights, accountability, ECOWAS is weak in emphasizing or enforcing them in member states. So, I know it has a peace infrastructure and works with WANEP in terms of peacebuilding but there is a lot more that is not done (Madi, The Gambia).*
- *Well, the West Africa region is more secured than almost all the other regions in Africa. And West Africa is more peaceful. So, just looking at it from a general perspective, I think ECOWAS is doing well (Ismail, Ghana)*
- *I think so far ECOWAS has done well. When you look at how they have managed to resolve issues, I mean from time immemorial, like what happened in Liberia, those are the things we can remember in recent times. I think peace and security, ECOWAS, is doing well but is not on top of it. Sometimes the response seems to delay a little. I'm asking myself, for instance, if the situation in Mali had degenerated, would ECOWAS be ready as it were to move with an intervening force? I'm not sure. So, yes, they are doing well, but I think there is the need for us to step it up (Andrew, Ghana).*
- *Anyhow, I know that ECOWAS is very active in terms of peacekeeping and security. I think it does what it can based on available resources. Interventions in peacekeeping and security require a lot of resources. The question is, however, about knowing if ECOWAS has adequate resources to carry out its policies (Boukari, Mali).*
- *ECOWAS has been doing a good work here. Gambia as an example – how they resolved our political impasse when everyone thought they were headed for a big conflict. They have done similar things in other countries such as Guinea Bissau – they've stabilized that country despite the challenges. But still, there are problems. If ECOWAS cannot stop leaders from self-perpetuating like we have seen in Ivory Coast and Guinea Conakry, there will remain problems because that is a recipe for conflict (Modou, The Gambia).*
- *ECOWAS has made some good interventions here in Gambia with respect to peace and security. We have ECOMOG here, and they are helping with the political transition (Haddija, The Gambia).*
- *In terms of Peace and security, I think that ECOWAS plays its role despite the challenges. When there is a crisis in a country, ECOWAS leaders quickly take action to negotiate (Lassina, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *ECOWAS has done a lot in terms of building peace and security. For instance, we have seen the organization intervene in cases such as where a multinational task force was forwarded by some ECOWAS countries to combat menace in other countries (Victorson, Nigeria).*

Some informants acknowledge the efforts ECOWAS is making some towards ensuring peace and security. However, they indicate that there is much more work to do to sustain the gains and avoid recessions.

- *If we try to do an assessment in terms of peace and security, I think that ECOWAS deserves only 4 out of 10. The organization under -regional must rethink its strategy in order to ensure peace and security in the sub-region. ECOWAS performance in terms of peace and security is below average (Vitorino, Guinea-Bissau).*
- *I think they have tried, but not good in the past years. We had ECOMOG and some other peacekeeping troops, but for now, I don't think I have heard anything about ECOMOG or troops deployment that is helping any of the countries. I don't know I might be wrong, but is not that popular and as widespread as it used to be (Stella, Nigeria).*
- *ECOWAS is facing a lot of challenges, especially when it comes to peace and security. However, there are already major actions undertaken on security, especially on the issue of terrorism. On that issue, there are a lot of actions and synergy (Dosso, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *ECOWAS needs to work more on the safety of women in the region. Because when it comes to the issue of peace and security, women are the first victims (Doumbia, Côte d'Ivoire).*

However, some informants are less ebullient about the intervention of ECOWAS in terms of peace and security in the subregion. They assert that ECOWAS has been lethargic and ineffective in brokering peace and stemming conflict on several occasions, and they cite some examples to support their verdict.

- *In terms of peace and security, ECOWAS is incapable of ensuring the safety of countries engulfed by terrorism and is incapable of restoring peace in countries where are post-electoral crisis and uprising (Tougan, Mali).*
- *Talking about peace and security, let's start with our country. In fact, in the management of our crisis, we have not seen ECOWAS in the spotlight. As you said so well, when we talk about peace and security, we start with our country. Whether it is ECOWAS and other African organizations such as the African Union, they have not been at the forefront... And for such a sensitive issue as peace and security in one of the ECOWAS member countries, in principle, we should have seen the organization at the forefront. But it's always been as silent as a fish and has never taken decisive actions to meet the expectations of member countries and citizens as well (Boubacar, Mali).*
- *In terms of peace and security, we are in a situation where peace is compromised in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria, followed by Côte d'Ivoire. There are many states in this situation, and France, which is active in our region, has just informed us that terrorist groups are spreading to coastal countries, which means that we have more problems. But since 2015 that Burkina Faso is experiencing this situation of insecurity, we have not seen ECOWAS (Guézouma, Burkina Faso).*
- *ECOWAS has not been able to guarantee peace in any country, on the other hand, in terms of security, it has always mobilized its army to frighten some people with bad intension (Charles, Côte d'Ivoire).*

A theme that is shared by informants is that, in terms of ECOWAS interventions in ensuring peace and security, is that the institution is more reactive than proactive. This testimony is reflected in the following three responses.

- *On peace and security, ECOWAS likes playing the role of firefighters. It does not intervene early enough to prevent a crisis from occurring. It waits for the conflict to erupt before coming to play the role of firefighters. In most crises that have struck the West African sub-region, rarely have we seen ECOWAS playing a preventive role. It is after the crisis happen that they intervene. There is much work to be done to ensure that ECOWAS plays its role and takes up its responsibilities for conflict prevention” (Boureima, Burkina Faso).*
- *ECOWAS is often seen as reactive, as in they are always responding to crisis here in Ivory Coast and other countries. Of course, when there is conflict, it is a neutral party coming from outside that can help in bringing peace. And indeed, it is a great thing to look for peace. However, ECOWAS must be more focus in preventing a war or a crisis. It must address the burning issues first and not expect a crisis to happen before taking action (Cissé, Côte d’Ivoire).*
- *In terms of peace and security, we clearly see ECOWAS condemning coup d’états. But it does so after interventions or condemnations of organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations. It’s not good, ECOWAS must learn to take the lead and take steps to establish order. ECOWAS is our organization, and so there must not be any form of fear and people must not be hostile towards it (Alain, Côte d’Ivoire).*

The ECOWAS is an important stakeholder in election processes of member states. They stage interventions during elections, especially sending observer groups to monitor the process and produce a report – an intervention recognized informants as a useful accountability mechanism. The informants who express a vote of confidence in the work of ECOWAS election management indicate that these observer missions have been effective in ensuring successful elections.

- *Elections, I will say five; because elections are good. ECOWAS sends its observer mission; they are all over. Presidents lead these missions, and we’ve had peaceful elections; If I would say, yeah. I think they are peaceful; peaceful elections in the past ten years. Then the few ones that had issues and tensions, they were resolved quickly afterwards and those are normal for elections that are quite huge and of interest to people (Ismail, Ghana).*
- *Elections, so far so good. The violence that are associated with elections in the West African subregions seems to have gone down with the exception of probably the most recent being the situation in Togo; otherwise, I think there is a little more to be done with elections (Andrew, Ghana).*
- *I know ECOWAS sends observer missions before and after the elections. I think their assessments help member states to run smoother or freer elections because they normally make recommendations. Also, the fact that they have a protocol on democracy and good governance is good for member countries (Modou, The Gambia).*
- *In terms of elections, ECOWAS is doing a lot. I am aware that plans are underway to send election observers here for our upcoming elections in December. Observers were sent to Niger quite recently and before that Guinea Conakry and Ivory Coast (Anna, The Guinea).*

For those whose assessments is less upbeat, they feel that the ECOWAS has a lot more to do aside from just sending observers to member states during elections. They believe that observers are not as fair and truthful in their verdicts as an impartial arbiter ought to be.

They suggest that ECOWAS should also ensure that member states are guided by their constitutions during elections.

- *The ECOWAS has always delegated observers to monitor elections in the various countries, and there is much more that the ECOWAS can do to help promote free, fair, and transparent elections in West Africa. But compared to the other regional blocks, the ECOWAS region has been one of the most democratic, to the extent that, apart from the recent problems in Mali, all governments in the ECOWAS region are democratically elected; and apart from the recent problems that we are encountering in Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire and to some extent Togo, all the other countries respect the two mandate limits; so that you don't have a President who after serving two terms insists on staying (Muheeb, Ghana).*
- *That's a 50-50 for me. ECOWAS is good at monitoring elections, but the problem is they hardly follow up on recommendations towards making elections free and fair (Haddija, The Gambia).*
- *In the context of the elections, I see that ECOWAS sends observers. After that, they hold the same usual conferences to validate the results. But ECOWAS must be even more effective in looking at the stability of the member states. You know, in Africa, in general, the instability of many of our countries starts from the elections. Who wants to talk about elections in our country? It is as if it is wars will start the day after the elections. I think ECOWAS has an interest in working a lot on this. If ECOWAS is to be more effective in this regard, it must ensure that there is respect for the Constitution in its member countries (Nouhoum, Mali).*

Other informants rate ECOWAS interventions in elections to be in deficit. They attribute this verdict to what they observe to be a failure to prevent incumbent regimes from violating constitutional injunctions on term limits, integrity of electoral systems and political efficacy generally. Informants from Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Mali share this view.

- *A lot of the conflicts surround elections. Almost every election cycle, we see this happening. The 2011 election triggered crisis in Senegal. The Gambia in 2016. We saw similar crisis in Ivory Coast and Guinea. So, yes ECOWAS does election observation but it does not go further to support Member countries to build capacity in election management. If you look at the IEC in Gambia, in all their communication, hardly do they mention ECOWAS. Which means ECOWAS is not engaging them at all. If ECOWAS wants to ensure credible elections, Election Management Bodies should be key partners (Madi, The Gambia).*
- *ECOWAS hasn't been very successful in election interventions as far as democratic governance is concerned. Few years ago, there was almost a consensus on term limits. That would have been great, and maybe something would have come out of it. Since then, a lot of countries that had two-term limits have taken a U-turn. Because it is not an ECOWAS wide decision, there is impunity around it (Demba, The Gambia).*
- *When it comes to elections, it is confronted with the problem of credibility. ECOWAS often than not supports election results announced by ruling governments. Regarding democratic transition, ECOWAS does not do much if not, we wouldn't have witnessed so many social movements, uprisings, and post-electoral crisis in the subregion (Tougan, Mali).*
- *In terms of challenges, we can note that ECOWAS failed on the restoration of the rule of law in terms of promoting democracy in our West Africa sub-region. ECOWAS was unfair in terms of support in all the countries where elections are held. The ECOWAS is seen sometimes as part of*

electoral process in many countries instead of being neutral for the settlement of every electoral dispute. Even the ECOWAS observation missions are unfair (Fode, Guinea-Bissau).

- *The elections that are being held in the sub-region have not been at all successful in recent times. We were faced with a lot of electoral disputes. ECOWAS has presidents who want to impose their influence within the organization; there are groups of people who consider themselves to be the most important within ECOWAS; ECOWAS should not be made up of strong states and weak states (Vitorino, Guinea-Bissau).*
- *When it comes to elections, ECOWAS has failed. ECOWAS has drafted a charter on governance that is not respected. In the charter it is said that constitutions should not be amended in a specific country for the president to stay longer in power. However, of the 16 countries in the region, over ten of them do not respect the charter, and so far, ECOWAS has done nothing about it. We have all seen the case of Cote d'Ivoire and what happened (Guillaume, Côte d'Ivoire).*

Another issue that emerges from the data is that informants believe the observers ECOWAS send to the member states are usually not objective in their reportage of the elections as they try to project the good side of the elections that favour the state and the incumbent. Some feel that the ECOWAS is a fraternity of Heads of State. They believe that the verdicts of the election observers are mostly proforma, and predictable; intended more to avoid disrupting the status quo than secure the legitimate will of the electorate. In a nutshell, they doubt the transparency and fairness of the ECOWAS in terms of acting as arbiter of electoral processes and outcomes.

- *When we take the observers who come to observe elections, it is almost practically the same thing all the time: the elections went well. And they say this even if everyone suspects that there has been fraud. We saw the elections in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea that have been certified by ECOWAS as normal. I even doubt ECOWAS's willingness to play the card of transparency and fairness when it comes to elections in Africa (Boureima, Burkina Faso).*
- *ECOWAS always wants to be in the good books of the member state. It is very rare to see the ECOWAS come out with any contrary election observation which does not favour the state. Usually, there's not much critical observation with that of other international observers. It always seems that the government's interest is that of ECOWAS. So, the rigging and every other thing that goes on is not of interest to the observers (Ausual, Nigeria).*
- *With elections, ECOWAS has not yet successfully achieved its mission because it seems that it steps up to support incumbent heads of state to hold on to power, notwithstanding the true will of the people (N'takpe, Côte d'Ivoire).*

Informants assessed the ECOWAS regarding their interventions to ensure smooth democratic transitions from an outgoing government to another democratically elected one. A number of the respondents share the view that ECOWAS has sufficiently helped member states conduct problem-free democratic transitions. They cite recent cases of Mali and Côte d'Ivoire to support their view.

- *Although democratic transitions in the region is becoming more frequent, there is the current situation in Mali, which represents a dent. However, ECOWAS representatives have negotiated*

with officials there to ensure a democratic transition. I believe that ECOWAS is playing a key role in stabilizing and facilitating democratic transitions in the region (Boukaré, Burkina Faso).

- *We have seen ECOWAS intervene in situations of failed political processes and systems. Mali, Cote d'Ivoire' etc., are cases in point. Former Presidents Abdulsalami Abubakar and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, other top envoys, and former presidents have also embarked in such missions. We have also seen opposition parties removing incumbents such as the Jonathan-Buhari saga in Nigeria, the Mahama-Addo saga in Ghana, and ECOWAS leaders have been involved in ensuring smooth transitions in these regards (Christopher, Nigeria).*
- *At this level, I think it is important to adopt a framework on how transitions are organized. Looking at the situation in Mali, we have seen the intervention of ECOWAS, and this is a great thing. There is President Good Luck who was in Mali, and I think it's already good (Cissé, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *As far as the case of Mali is concerned today, we see that the country is in a transitional phase. Certainly, at the beginning of the crisis, we did not agree very much with ECOWAS, but I think that today we must recognize the support that ECOWAS brings to the Malian transition is much appreciated. Because we have seen that even for commitments not observed by some parties, ECOWAS had to step up and force each party to order. This support is really appreciated. I think what has been achieved can be strengthened. I think ECOWAS is on the right track when it comes to this (Nouhoum, Mali).*
- *In terms of democratic transition, when Yahya Jammeh refused to step down, ECOWAS sent in delegation to meet him and to tell him to step down. They tried to convince him until they had to force him out. If not for ECOWAS, we wouldn't have democratic transition, and we probably would have gone to war. And ECOWAS continues to support the democratic transition. Quite recently, in December, the ECOWAS Commission President was in the country to meet the president after the rejection of the Draft Constitution in parliament. That shows ECOWAS is monitoring the situation here and are making interventions (Anna, The Guinea).*
- *Talking from Gambia experience, ECOWAS' intervention in democratic transitions is very effective. The 2006 election was going to be snatched from the citizens if not for ECOWAS (Lamin, The Gambia).*

Other, less optimistic, reviews suggest that ECOWAS tries to ensure that member states have democratic relations. However, their interventions are not enough and also not consistently successful.

- *Yes, ECOMIG is in Gambia but in terms of providing guidance to the new government that is very limited. It looks more or less ECOWAS has kept its hands off and waiting for another crisis so that they can come in. We are having constitutional crisis and even before that, this country has derailed. They have summits but even then, the decisions taken on Gambia are weak (Madi, The Gambia)*
- *I think things are gradually changing. Especially when you look at the case of Mali, you'll see a slight improvement of the situation. However, I think that democratic changes in other countries in the region are not that obvious. It is true that since 2010 we have not yet seen any war within Countries of the region (Alain, Côte d'Ivoire).*

For the informants who are less complimentary, they feel that ECOWAS has generally failed to secure smooth democratic transitions within member states. Some indicate that ECOWAS only intervenes to keep fellow heads of state in power, and are less committed to ensuring a respect for the legitimate will of citizens. The following responses across four countries echo this sentiment.

- *Just take the bit about democratic governance. I'll mark ECOWAS 1 out of 10 because it seems like they are afraid to act for the interests of the peoples (Ousmane, Burkina Faso).*
- *ECOWAS does not often have a view or say on issues of democratic transition. On this issue, ECOWAS just allows everyone to do what they want. ECOWAS must begin to take action (Doumbia, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *Most of these member states you hardly find peaceful transition and peaceful handover of power it is because ECOWAS has not been able to take more proactive measures to punish anybody to do what it is supposed to do (Awual, Nigeria).*
- *The issue of democratic transitions brings us back the issue of peace because in the sub-region, transitions rarely go smoothly, and most often ECOWAS is called to take action. Also, we have a relatively young democracy in the ECOWAS space, and so we will not put the bit of transitions to the account of ECOWAS because people see ECOWAS as a Union of Heads of States. They are always exercising restraint in their communications or are quiet. And when they speak to condemn, it is never frank. They will perhaps condemn the killings, but in fact, rarely would you see sanctions imposed on culprits (Arnaud, Burkina Faso).*
- *Democratic transition is a problem. It's a problem because we have, I mean chairpersons of ECOWAS who are Presidents themselves, regardless of the democratic activities in their countries; they are leading ECOWAS, and there is a bit of some mistrust of the regional body just because of some of these people who are chairing the block, and I think it's failing- ECOWAS is failing in that regard, and it will take maybe a concerted effort to put together all these leaders to sign a pact to agree that they will just move or just stick to their constitutions, hand over power when the time is due and create this democratic peace that we are all looking for (Ismail, Ghana).*

Informants have varying assessments of ECOWAS interventions in managing the public health of citizens of member states, especially regarding epidemics and pandemics. For those who think ECOWAS had done well, they explain that ECOWAS has working structures in place that have helped member states, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

- *On the other hand, in terms of health management and pandemic management, ECOWAS has a system that works. I know that ECOWAS has a number of technical bodies on health issues and even on livestock, there is also a mechanism for responding to epidemics. We find ECOWAS more efficient on health-related issues than political ones (Arnaud, Burkina Faso).*
- *In terms of public health, WAHO based in Bobo did its best with regards to COVID-19 to support the member states. It's very recent action has been the harmonization of the COVID-19 test (Désiré, Burkina Faso).*
- *When it comes public health, we saw that with the Covid-19, ECOWAS tried to show that it has a role to play. First of all, for the essential health consumables, had it not been for ECOWAS, I think that some countries would have had serious issues in procuring some. We saw at a point the great relief provided by ECOWAS when it did a bulk purchase of the consumables. And with*

the logistical support provided to ECOWAS by Nigeria, we were able to transport the equipment to countries in need. I think that ECOWAS's presence is beginning to be felt by the population (Boukaré, Burkina Faso).

Those who give an average rating believe that ECOWAS interventions in terms of public health could be better than the prevailing state of affairs. They cite, in particular, the lack of resources and systems for concerted regional response to recent public health crises such as Ebola and Covid-19.

- *I think health-related matters are subjected to concerns at the highest level of ECOWAS. Addressing health-related matters is essential in order to tackle developmental issues in the region. Ebola and COVID-19 led to some level of efforts mobilization at ECOWAS to help the affected countries however, the support provided were and are still insufficient (Boukar, Mali).*
- *ECOWAS has the West African Health Organisation. I think that it is based in Burkina Faso and that they are working with the various governments to ensure a robust public health system in the various ECOWAS countries but, I believe that their efforts are hampered by the fact that the individual countries themselves are not making enough investments in the area of public health. So, I wouldn't say that ECOWAS has achieved much, but I wouldn't blame the ECOWAS as a body (Muheeb, Ghana).*
- *We have seen that during the pandemic, the WAHO [West African Health Organisation] has been trying to work with member countries, looking for funds, and securing vaccine. I think they need better coordination, do their own research into viruses and vaccines so that we can better be prepared for future outbreaks. But mainly ECOWAS member states have been dependent on handouts from others, and they've not initiated some important conversations around the pandemic, so we rely on WHO initiatives (Modou, The Gambia).*

Some informants assert that ECOWAS has been lacking in this regard. According to them, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ebola virus disease outbreak and how they have been handled by the regional body is evidence of the unsatisfactory nature of ECOWAS interventions in public health disease management. To some of them, ECOWAS has been ineffective in that regard due to a lack of policy.

- *To put it blankly, I think in the area of health, when we talk about the West Africa subregion, that is one area the ECOWAS has not done well. We don't seem to understand or hear or see from where I sit a lot being done from that angle, like when there is an outbreak, you can talk of the ECOWAS nations falling on each other for assistance or information-exchanging information fluently. What we rather would see is west African country reaching out to an East African country or a Southern African country where they rather the AU is spearheading the fight against a particular disease in a particular area; I think ECOWAS needs to step it up more in that area (Andrew, Ghana).*
- *We did not see the impact or the involvement of ECOWAS to the point of meeting expectations. Countries are trying their best, but so far, it is not clear to what extent ECOWAS has been involved in containing the pandemic among its members. What we have seen are individual countries taking action at their own levels. In Côte d'Ivoire, they took action to get some vaccines, and Guinea, too, is doing something. In Mali, too, measures have been taken for a vaccine. So, these*

are individual efforts at country levels not at the regional level, and such actions are not enough (Boubacar, Mali).

- *Let me tell you something: when the pandemic started, I travelled to Ghana. Before leaving here, I did my COVID test, but I upon arrival in Ghana, I was compelled to do another test there, and I paid US\$150 and another US\$150 for another test when I was leaving. So, that shows you that we have not yet harmonized our health systems (Anna, The Guinea).*
- *When it comes to public health issues, epidemics and pandemics, and since COVID-19 is topical, ECOWAS has not moved at all, to the extent that hand washing equipment with the logo of other organizations are everywhere. I have not seen a single one from ECOWAS. We are struggling to see how well ECOWAS is positioned on the issue of access to the vaccine (Guézouma, Burkina Faso).*
- *I have not felt a regional policy in relation to the management of public health issues, and the COVID-19 hit the whole world head-on and exposed the lack of policy. We've seen everyone taking action except ECOWAS. ECOWAS has been the major absentee in relation to initiatives to prevent this pandemic that has spread across the region (Nouhoum, Mali).*
- *This is one area where ECOWAS has failed woefully. Its approach to the current Covid-19 pandemic has been abysmal. The Ebola case was not different (Christopher, Nigeria).*

Unlike the other interventions assessed by informants above, the data showed an unusual number of informants who were simply oblivious to the interventions ECOWAS had made in terms of managing the public health of member states. This observation is a pointer to ECOWAS to shore up the visibility of their interventions, especially the public health disease management, as it is crucial for the people to be aware and informed that the ECOWAS work to ensure they are free from diseases. As stated, when asked to assess the ECOWAS in this regard, some informants were unable to do so due to their lack of knowledge on ECOWAS interventions in this area of public health disease management (epidemics and pandemics).

- *Well, I have heard nothing. I know ECOWAS may be trying, but I have not seen any concrete evidence of their effort in the management of public health diseases in the country. If they are doing so, they should also be saying so (Ismail, Ghana).*
- *Regarding COVID-19, I have no idea of what ECOWAS is doing for its member states. Rather, what we see is each national government looking up to the neo-colonial masters and benefactors for support (Tougan, Mali).*
- *I have not seen them doing anything on that front. If they are doing something in this time of increased public attention to the pandemic and how to combat it, we should have known about it (Haddija, The Gambia).*
- *In the area of public health, I can't speak much because I am not aware of any regional institution that is driving such a process within the country (Christopher, Nigeria).*
- *Well, so far, we haven't seen anything yet that is being done at the level of ECOWAS. Each country is concerned with how to deal with the deficits in its national health delivery system, and tries to prevent cross-border transmissions (Charlemagne, Burkina Faso).*
- *[Public health] is another overwhelming issue that ECOWAS could have done better because apart from Ebola and now Covid-19, we still have malaria and other preventable diseases. It is about ECOWAS having a strong CDC. I know they have a health association of sort but all member*

states have their health systems and you hardly get to hear or see the presence or impact of ECOWAS on, say, Gambia's national health delivery system. For me, truly that needs to be looked at. Now that Covid-19 is here, where is the subregional body to see that the whole region has consignment? (Madi, The Gambia)

Improving the Delivery on Mandates

The informants suggest various ways through which ECOWAS could better deliver on its mandates. The suggestions include ensuring the people are well informed and involved in ECOWAS activities, enlisting and enabling the media to cover their activities, and sensitizing, educating, and informing the public about the ECOWAS and its activities. Some informants also indicate that the vision of ECOWAS to be people-oriented depends on the extent to which the media are supported to bridge the gap between the Authority citizens.

According to the informants, one of the ways through which ECOWAS could better deliver better on the mandates is to ensure that people living within member states are routinely given information about the ECOWAS, what they exist to do, their principles, protocols and mandates, and the various interventions and actions they stage. Their work will not be successful if the people who supposedly make up the community are left in the dark in matters relating to the regional body and what it does. Therefore, informants suggest ways such as creating more robust, vibrant communication channels, publishing their protocols and policies, and engaging the people through the media as ways to enhance the level of engagement with the people.

- *More engagement with the people is very important. ECOWAS is not just about the government. It is also about the people. If you look at the mission, it is broad and caters for everybody, but in practice, you see meetings and meetings and communiques but that is it (Demba, The Gambia).*
- *And secondly, I think ECOWAS must also engage the citizens of the member states themselves much more and that is where they would need the media to play to a very critical role. If the citizens themselves buy into the principles and the ideals, I think they would demand that their governments take actions in the various sub-themes and sectors and ensure that they deliver (Muheeb, Ghana).*
- *ECOWAS should undertake infrastructural development, particularly in the provision of electricity and water and to connect to sub-region in order to realise its potential in terms of trade. Moreover, ECOWAS should practice what it preaches. If you say there should be free movement of people but then you have all those borders and the checkpoints, it does not help. Another area is academia. How do you strengthen collaboration between Universities of the subregion? Why can't ECOWAS have an ECOWAS University that will draw students from every part of the sub-region. This will be good for the creation of the ECOWAS of people because people coming from different places in an ECOWAS university means knowledge of ECOWAS becomes widespread. ECOWAS should also support other regional structures aimed at bringing closer collaboration (Madi, The Gambia).*

- ECOWAS should have some sort of stronger vibrant communication. First you need to inform people, inform government, inform leaders and not keep it as a kind of family and friends affair where only the leadership knows, and the people don't know so people don't really see the effectiveness of the ECOWAS (Ismail, Ghana).
- What ECOWAS could do is to publish more and more its protocols and policies. Little is known about ECOWAS's protocols and conventions among even some top official. After the coup in Mali, there were hostile reactions towards ECOWAS in the country. People do not know or understand what ECOWAS is doing here meanwhile, there are protocols that specify ECOWAS peacekeeping, conflict prevention, management and resolution actions. These protocols are unknown. If they were largely published, people will be less hostile to the organization and welcome it (Boukari, Mali).
- Populations must know about ECOWAS activities. It is only when they know about that that they can contribute on how to improve them for a better implementation (Issiaka, Burkina Faso).

According to informants, it is not enough for ECOWAS to inform the population about their work and activities. For ECOWAS to better deliver its mandate, there has to be a deliberate effort to create two-way channels of communication that enable the Authority to provide information and receive feedback. This will also enable them implement or stage interventions that address the specific needs of the people. Bearing in mind that effective communication is a two-way process, it is essential to have effective channels through which the people can voice their opinions and exact downward accountability from duty bearers.

- For me, it's about listening to your people. We know the problems and how to solve them. Every time a group takes power in its hands, it opposes anything that can be of hindrance to its own privileges. The group is there for its people, for the country and must make the ultimate sacrifice, however, people come to power and think only of their own pockets (Boubacar, Mali).
- I think they should listen to the people more, instead of just working to promote the parochial interests of fellow heads of state (Haddija, The Gambia).
- What ECOWAS can do is to be closer to the citizens and communities on whose behalf it is acting. It would have to look for ways and means to achieve this goal. It must listen to the citizens, take their concerns and translate them into concrete action. It is only then that ECOWAS will be able to really carry out its mission (Nouhoum, Mali).
- In order to make the idea of an ECOWAS of the people a reality, there must be greater participation and ownership by the people. So far, that does not seem to be the case in practice (Charles, Côte d'Ivoire).
- I think they are on the right path with the change of focus from ECOWAS of States to ECOWAS of peoples. The expectation is that the body will grow to become a people-centred and people-oriented organization. They need to actively demonstrate their commitment to this change in orientation by what they do to make national citizens feel a part of each other (Jamila, Nigeria).
- I would say generally, the engagement is low. I am not aware of ECOWAS having a communications outfit in the first place. There are lots of engagements that could go on if such an outfit exists. I am on the ECOWAS mailing list because I have engaged with ECOWAS and receive updates from the Commission. I mentioned the issue of University – ECOWAS can create

a sort of Media Institute to promote exchange which could be a meeting place for ECOWAS media operators in the sub-region (Madi, The Gambia)

The media, according to informants, are pivotal to any efforts of ECOWAS at delivering on its mandate in an effective and enduring way. The media provide the arena within which ECOWAS could send information to the people and also receive insights from the people. Therefore, ECOWAS needs to open up to the media for dialogic engagement with the public, and to give voice and visibility to the activities of the body.

- *In my opinion, the organization can do better by involving the media that must support its activities. Without the active role of the media, there is little possibility of the public appreciating and identifying with ECOWAS as anything more than a club of self-serving leaders and bureaucrats (Tougan, Mali).*
- *ECOWAS has to provide space for journalists so that the stories of the people of this region are better told. And, not only that stories are told, but also if someone reports about the challenges facing free movement of peoples, ECOWAS should be able to come up with policies informed by these stories. I think an empowered media could help ECOWAS deliver better on its mandate (Modou, The Gambia).*
- *ECOWAS must also create the framework if not the bridge to better interact with the media, the world of journalists, that is, the media world that constitutes the corridor of the connection between ECOWAS and the people (Arnaud, Burkina Faso).*
- *As opposed to not treating them as enemies, yes, I think they do so. It is limited but I think they treat the media as allies. The protocol on Good Governance and Democracy recognises freedom of the media. But in terms of specific instrument on media, it doesn't seem to exist (Madi, The Gambia).*
- *Apart from enhancing the structure they put in place, I think they should let their doors be opened more to possible engagement and interaction with the media and the information will get to the grassroots, not just people who are in the diplomatic corps or the elite that get to know the activities of ECOWAS (Omolola, Nigeria).*
- *ECOWAS must get closer to the peoples in the region through civil society organizations since they are closer to the people. ECOWAS must also work with the media to better communicate its actions and vision to the people (Doumbia, Côte d'Ivoire).*

Informants are of the view that, for ECOWAS to prime itself to deliver on its mandates, it ought to ensure that, Members strictly adhere to their own laws and respect the protocols. Some suggest sanctions against members that fail to respect the rules of the ECOWAS.

- *Firstly, ECOWAS should place emphasis on respect for its protocols, particularly the ones on free movement [of people and goods]. ECOWAS is credited as the most vibrant regional bloc in Africa when it comes to free movement, but a lot of the times people encounter challenges at the borders within ECOWAS (Lamin, The Gambia).*
- *ECOWAS must first of all enforce the adopted principles and protocols. It could for example, adopt a charter on democracy and ensure that the charter is being implemented in its member states. When there is the desire to create an imposition force, it is necessary to create it, a framework that can be followed as best practice (Guézouma, Burkina Faso).*

- *ECOWAS must enforce its own laws. When heads of state meet, they vote laws, and so they must enforce them (N'takpe, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *Member states must strengthen the organization by regularly paying their contributions. And countries that do not pay their dues must be sanctioned. When it comes to the AU, they do pay their contributions on time, but why don't they do same when it is ECOWAS? (Alain, Côte d'Ivoire).*

Informants indicate that the ECOWAS is challenged in delivering on its mandate because they are not very open to media, is not a listening organization, has poor communication, and is unable to enforce its laws and respect protocols.

Some informants agree that for the ECOWAS to deliver on its mandates, it has to engage in a healthy relationship with the media in Member States. They indicate that the press is the most effective channel to inform, sensitize and educate the public. Also, they believe that ECOWAS should respect the editorial independence of the media. Thus, the media should be allowed to play their watchdog role effectively, and this role must not affect how ECOWAS relates with the media.

- *In order to meet its objectives in member countries, ECOWAS must adopt development and security programmes with components focused on informing, sensitizing, and educating the population. You are aware that in our countries about 80% of citizens are illiterates. So, it is essential to get the media, especially community media outlets to help populations better understand the missions carried out by ECOWAS (Tougan, Mali).*
- *The press is to be encouraged. The leaders of ECOWAS do not support the press at all. Journalists must feel free to do their job in the sub-region and ECOWAS must give the press the right conditions (Vitorino, Guinea-Bissau).*
- *It's always about promoting its protocols through good communication. Protocols, conventions, instruments adopted at the international level are only valid when adopted by the national parliament and we have a parliamentary press. As soon as the Parliament ratifies these conventions, the press must take over and publish them. This won't happen if there is no close collaboration with the medias and things get more complicated (Boukari, Mali).*
- *There are communication issues because often the mistake that institutions make when they approach the media for collaboration, is that they think the media is there at their disposal and that they can make them say what they want, like a platform to echo whatever they want. ECOWAS must put in place an effective communication structure providing information that journalists can rely on because when journalists come to ask questions, they are questions from the people, and there must be assigned officials to respond, but very often, public authorities think that the media must be content to disseminate what they give them as information while the media have reports from the field contesting what ECOWAS says (Arnaud, Burkina Faso).*
- *ECOWAS could overcome these challenges by engaging more with professional media organizations, in order to effectively reach people (Bandioukou, Mali).*
- *And then give more room to the media and civil society organizations so that they can play their watchdog role and throw more lights on defects in the system when there are issues of malfunctions (Boureima, Burkina Faso).*

Informants suggest that ECOWAS must explore different avenues through which it could pool resources for its activities. They also indicate that the Member States must be encouraged to pay their dues to the organization as that is a significant source of revenue for the body to work and deliver on their mandates.

- *It all starts with resource mobilization. States must be sensitized and called on to pool resources for the organization. ECOWAS must also look for resources outside the region. There are a lot of projects that don't get materialized because of the lack of resources. There is also a need to gather media organizations from various countries to work together. But this requires resources, as well as ECOWAS, need to look for resources (Cissé, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *The issue of ECOWAS is like that of the African Cup of Nations. It is necessary for ECOWAS to have resources to carry out its activities. Just imagine that we are going to the African Cup of Nations and we invest only One billion. And look at all the stars we have on the Continent, they will not be much enthusiasm. That is the same situation with ECOWAS. It needs to increase its budget and resources in order to play a key role in the region and make its vision a reality (Alain, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *For ECOWAS to address its challenges, although there are some difficulties, member states must really and effectively be involved. That is to say, when you have a sub-regional organization like ECOWAS, it needs substantial financial resources. But if Member States do not contribute their share for the organization to operate and carry out activities, it will be difficult for the governing body to carry out its mission. It also brings up the question of the political will of decision-makers in member countries. When a state wants to be a member of ECOWAS, it must agree to really pay the necessary dues so that ECOWAS can be efficient to the benefit of citizen in the region (Nouhoum, Mali).*

According to informants, ECOWAS needs institutional reorganization, refocusing, and renewal They encourage that ECOWAS fast-tracks its agenda to become more people-oriented. Some also suggest reorganizing its current parliamentary systems and committees, how people are selected to join them, and giving them as much authority as is given to the Heads of Member States. They believe that, by reorienting its perspectives and refocusing attention on the public, the ECOWAS could more effectively overcome challenges with delivering on mandates.

- *Challenges could be addressed if we have a refocused ECOWAS. As we are reprogramming ECOWAS from ECOWAS of State to ECOWAS of People, we have to truly translate that into action then we'll be able to resolve this concern (Awual, Nigeria).*
- *I think that the first thing ECOWAS has to do is to organize itself. By organizing itself, ECOWAS can better plan, and also improve on its transparency which has increasingly become an important factor for a policy success and the implementation of projects. This approach would also help ECOWAS position itself among transparent and well-organized institutions. I believe this approach could help to a certain extent (Boukaré, Burkina Faso).*
- *To overcome these challenges, ECOWAS must reorganize itself, give more power to the committees and the commission that manages its daily activities. The commission must not be only bent to the will of the heads of states because as long as the commission is functioning based on the will of the heads of states, it will be at their service rather than the people. So, it is*

necessary for the commission to be independent and have independent powers like the European Union Committee (Boureima, Burkina Faso).

- *By organizing itself better and by deploying its resources in issues of interest to the people of West Africa (Guillaume, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *To overcome these challenges, I think we need to find another mechanism. What you see on paper is different from what we have on the ground. In the governance structure of ECOWAS, there are heads of state, foreign ministers, and advisers. What is now necessary is for ECOWAS to try to see how they can involve people more. Even if it is not at very high levels of decision-making, make sure that peoples are represented, and their aspirations taken into account (Boubacar, Mali).*
- *ECOWAS needs to reform its parliament and give it more power, rather than just the conference of heads of state that gathers all the powers of the organization. ECOWAS must integrate in the reforms a direct voting system for the election of its parliamentarians, and the creation of an ECOWAS parliament branch in all member states, and so, parliamentarians will be more independent and distance themselves from national MPs. The new ECOWAS parliamentarians can gather and form the federal parliament and ratify agreements in the stead of heads of states (Ousmane, Burkina Faso).*
- *Again, this boils down to how they organize themselves, their activities, and mission. However, I don't know how it's going to be done. Maybe make sure that activities are organized by the citizens and not between the heads of state. If citizens had the opportunity to see what they want and that it is required of ECOWAS to be driven by its peoples desires then, that should be the governing principle and mode of operation at ECOWAS. ECOWAS must be freed from the grip of the heads of state (Charlemagne, Burkina Faso).*

For some informants, ECOWAS has to shed its bureaucratic encumbrances and become a more nimble, less complex, organization that swiftly responds to the needs of the people. It must disabuse the impression of orthodoxy and self-preservation and respond to the changing contexts and dynamics of an information society in which the public are more aware of their rights and the obligations of those who represent them.

- *ECOWAS should avoid being a governance institution and reduce the level of bureaucracy because, although there are situations that require following due process, some issues need a swift response (Désiré, Burkina Faso).*
- *We must work and work, stop giving the impression, to show the people that we are there to maintain a machinery, because the functioning of our States is already heavy and swallows up our resources so ECOWAS must not engage in such a cumbersome system, must be visible so that it can assist populations when they have a concern (Guézouma, Burkina Faso).*

Engagement with Media

The study sought to find out how the ECOWAS has engaged them over the years in terms of invitations to cover events, sending information through them and collaborating on relevant and mutually beneficial projects. The major theme that emerges from the data is that engagement between the media and ECOWAS has been very minimal and limited.

To informants, their engagement with ECOWAS has been limited to the regional body using the media as conduits for piping information and issuing press releases. Aside from that, they are only invited occasionally to cover events. They think that the media should be engaged as an entity that could also contribute to enhancing the overall communication of the regional body and even helping to deliver on its mandates, instead of being regarded and treated as tools and channels of information dissemination.

- *I don't think they have engaged the media enough. I can hardly think of any, except maybe some ECOWAS sanctioned research. We have some ECOWAS institutions engaging the media, but generally ECOWAS as an institution engaging the media is very limited (Dembe, The Gambia).*
- *I think that ECOWAS to me has not engaged the media enough. Most of the media organizations in the sub-region when they happen to do anything about ECOWAS itself, they would have just stumbled upon it; it is not something that ECOWAS itself has consciously undertaken to promote. So, as far as I am concerned, ECOWAS has not engaged the media adequately because I have not even seen any of the media organizations deciding to dedicate some column space or airtime to discussing ECOWAS and ECOWAS issues. And I think that that is a key indicator that ECOWAS itself is not engaging enough and demanding to be talked about as much as it should (Lamin, The Gambia).*
- *So, in Ghana for instance, I think it's minimal. And I know this because I had worked with the GNA before. And at the GNA, they send their information and the media stuff, but for other media they don't; and most of the time, ECOWAS will send information, news, invitations to events by APO which I think is one of these services in Africa that push out information then they expect other media to just pick on them. But these media houses are supposed to be directly involved in these activities (Ismail, Ghana).*
- *Through press releases and its website that is often not updated, and you'll see on the site information of more than a quarter old and that often ends up on the front page of the site. We believe that ECOWAS and public authorities for that matter have not assimilated the way the media operate because they spend time watering the media with public communiqués, but when the media wants to meet someone to answer important questions, they hardly find someone (Arnaud, Burkina Faso)*
- *Are they interested and do they appreciate the role of the media? I don't think so. I have seen huge meetings/gathering organized by ECOWAS but unfortunately without the involvement of the media. And yet, we know that the media is the link between duty bearers and the public (Charles, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *ECOWAS does not engage the media. Otherwise, we would have known its activities and projects. We don't even know the decrees and conventions they adopt during their meetings. Most of what they do stays at the institutional level. We do not know what is going on meanwhile, with the media we would have been much more informed (Alain, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *The media are considered to be relays, points of transmission of a message while they should have been seen as actors with a neutral view of the situation, that can help in making decisions or actors that can even help in drafting of the final communiqué (Bandiougou, Mali).*

- *The engagement with the media is just engagement to report activities of events not mainstream media as strategic partner or communication strategy for dissemination of vital information and feedback (Awwal, Nigeria).*
- *I will say ECOWAS pushes out only what they want us to know. They should let us know that they need the media and appreciate the support the media could give in making their work more effective and relevant to the people they represent. There are various platforms available for them to explore; but the reality is that if they are not doing much that is noteworthy, they cannot be keen for media coverage (Omolola, Nigeria).*

Informants point out that, though they would appreciate more fruitful engagements with ECOWAS, they have challenges of resource constraints in attending events and reporting on ECOWAS activities. They recount that in their experience ECOWAS has not initiated or supported media development causes in Member States; which has reflected in the inability of the media to engage effectively with ECOWAS. They believe that resource support in terms of logistics deployment or human resource training, could help contribute effectively to the work of ECOWAS and enhance engagements.

- *ECOWAS does not also do its work which consists of supporting the media with resources allowing them to play their watchdog role of in the governance process at the country level. ECOWAS is practically absent and in fact aside from the usual speeches, we do not feel the presence of ECOWAS (Boureima, Burkina Faso).*
- *The press must have adequate resources for its own functioning. ECOWAS must create a support fund for the press in general, television and radio in particular, and ensure the training of journalists in order to preserve peace and stability. ECOWAS must create funds to be made available to the press in terms of grants and training (Vitorino, Guinea-Bissau)*

ECOWAS–Media Collaborations

The media are universally acknowledged as important, and even indispensable, stakeholders to participatory democratic governance. They provide the public sphere for the exchange of ideas, formation of public opinion, and mobilisation of popular support. Informants were asked if they think that in practice, the ECOWAS considers media as allies in promoting peace/security, facilitating social/economic development, and fostering political/democratic pluralism in West Africa. The responses are reported from the perspective of the media organizations and the ECOWAS institutions, respectively.

Informants from media organizations do not think that ECOWAS sufficiently demonstrates a regard of media as a stakeholder. According to them, ECOWAS does not engage them enough for them to suggest a significant stake in the activities of the organisation. At best, they are invoked for the expediency of relaying information. The media have to be seen as more than just communication channels to consider themselves as stakeholders in the ECOWAS system. For the media to count as bona fide allies and to function effectively as such, ECOWAS would have to commit resources towards media development; including professional capacity building and logistics support for institutional sustainability.

- *I must confess that the press is not considered an ally of ECOWAS. The press is only invited to cover the activities however, we expect more than that and desire to be more involved in the activities of ECOWAS as stakeholders (Boukari, Mali).*
- *I don't think ECOWAS see media as stakeholders or allies. I think ECOWAS is doing its own work, ignoring the role of the media (Modou, The Gambia).*
- *Frankly we have no information to answer to this question but we must first ask ourselves if there is a partnership between the media and ECOWAS, and if indeed there is such a relationship then some media organizations must be struggling with the organization since it is on mute when it comes to important issues such as democracy, peace and security and on the other hand there is the fact that the organization only communicates using communiqués and that is not a good relationship (Arnaud, Burkina Faso).*
- *ECOWAS can get closer to the media and collaborate with them by supporting their initiatives. This can come in forms of institutional, financial, or other kinds of support. Other organizations do that and I think that ECOWAS can as well (Cissé, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *I think in summary they have not treated the media as a stakeholder. I've been in office for two years plus and we have not engaged ourselves. So the media is a very critical stakeholder and should be within the ECOWAS. But nothing. We even have better relationship with other global organizations than the ECOWAS (Christopher, Nigeria).*
- *Honestly, I don't think the body sees the media as allies or partners. However, there is need to change the narrative because there so many areas and issues the ECOWAS can engage the media. It can only be a mutually beneficial partnership (Jamila, Nigeria).*

From the perspective of ECOWAS institutional stakeholders, the regional body sees and treats the media as important stakeholders and allies, which is why they are invited to some of the meetings and gatherings of ECOWAS. The media are also the principal channel through which the ECOWAS engages the public, which makes them a valuable stakeholder in the aims and activities of ECOWAS. They concede, however, that ECOWAS could do more to enhance the utility of a collaborative relationship with the media.

- *The media is involved in everything that we do. We invite them to conferences, seminars, etc. We have a national committee on media and we have a representative from the media on the committee. At our level we involve the media in what we do and when there is an activity requiring communication or media coverage, we invite the media (Désiré, Burkina Faso).*
- *I think ECOWAS considers journalists as allies in these endeavours. I am aware of the formation of certain journalist organizations that were sanctioned by ECOWAS and that organizations works in the area of peace and conflict resolution. Unfortunately, ECOWAS has one of the committees in which the media should be represented, but that seat has been vacant, and the media has not been occupying the seat (Lamin, The Gambia).*

All the informants indicated good faith and willingness to support ECOWAS to achieve its objectives and realize its vision. In terms of the ability to do so, informants stated support required to enable them support the regional integration and development efforts in a useful way. The primary requirement is for a greater inclination and initiative by ECOWAS to engage with media. For informants, their willingness to support the ECOWAS would not yield

anything if the ECOWAS is reluctant or passive about involving the media in their activities and to provide conducive conditions for collaboration. They claim that if ECOWAS demonstrates a willingness for full collaboration, cooperation, and involvement of media, the outcome would be mutually beneficial. They admonish against any precipitous posturing that sees and treats the media as adversarial by default.

- *I think there is a will to support these initiatives. A lot of the things that ECOWAS does are interesting to the public. The media is also able, but it would need the cooperation and support from ECOWAS. Like I said earlier, let the media be involved in their activities and programmes (Modou, The Gambia).*
- *I think the media are willing. They are able if engaged. There may be a need to sensitize them or raise their awareness on a lot of issues that ECOWAS is doing (Anna, The Guinea)*
- *I think the media is willing and able. I think ECOWAS just needs to involve them more (Haddija, The Gambia)*
- *Unfortunately, it is ECOWAS that is afraid of the press otherwise we are here to inform the people of the vision (Charles, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *The media is certainly willing and able to support the realization of the vision of ECOWAS in all its ramifications. Media practitioners in the region have proved themselves in all areas of the industry, print, electronic and the new media. What is missing basically is the platform for collaboration and partnership on activities of body (Jamila, Nigeria).*
- *I would say in principle, the media would be willing and I think the media are capable. But in practice, that is not the case. The fault is on both sides. ECOWAS is not proactively and strategically engaging the media but it is also the duty of the media to know about ECOWAS and help to do what the media are supposed to do. The media is not holding ECOWAS accountable. This probably is in ECOWAS interest – letting the sleeping dog lie. But certainly, the media are capable and are willing but in practice they are not showing that (Madi, The Gambia).*

While willing to support ECOWAS, informants feel that the media are not adequately resourced to provide meaningful support to ECOWAS. To enhance their ability to support ECOWAS they would need training and capacity building support to understand the structures of the organisation and its operations.

- *If we are able to understand that this is the direction ECOWAS is going, we then should be able to bring on board the mechanism that will help ECOWAS to achieve its aims. I believe strongly that given the right education, given the right information, given the right involvement, free press, private press, private broadcasting in West Africa should be able to help ECOWAS to achieve its aims (Andrew, Ghana).*
- *I think the media are able and willing, but it depends on how you prepare the media. Journalists are not experts on issues of integration or ECOWAS. So, you need to prepare them (Lamin, The Gambia)*
- *Absolutely, the media can be a strategic partner to ECOWAS. And I don't even think there can be any other way. To succeed in its mission, a close collaboration with the press is essential... Media professionals can be trained and develop projects and develop activities revolving around issues tackled by ECOWAS. It is also possible for ECOWAS to support such organisations to enhance the visibility of its activities and for large publication of protocols (Boukari, Mali).*

- *Well, I know the Nigerian media practitioners are sensitive when it comes to development. They are willing to support anything that is for the good of the people so I can say without fear that the Nigerian media is ready to support ECOWAS. They are ready to sacrifice in the process but they should also be given the opportunity and tools in the process to help and advice and push out information (Stella, Nigeria).*
- *The media can do a lot for ECOWAS. What we just need is a well-defined framework guiding the collaboration. Per what I know, media organizations in Cote d'Ivoire have financial sustainability challenges and so they need some kind of support. If indeed resources are provided to the media, they can help ECOWAS achieve its vision (Cissé, Côte d'Ivoire)*
- *Yes, we believe that the media can support ECOWAS. If indeed ECOWAS is willing to achieve its vision and relies on the media, and at the same time provides the means necessary to support the media. It is not just enough for ECOWAS to say that it needs the media, it is essential for them to talk to us the media and also support us with the necessary means to work effectively on the field if necessary (Boureima, Burkina Faso).*

In addition, informants believe that the current structures and processes of regional integration are inadequate for enabling the effective discharge of their work, and as such, for supporting ECOWAS achieve the vision envisaged in its founding treaty and enabling protocols, frameworks and mechanisms. These two responses from The Gambia and Ghana reflect this sentiment.

- *Well, willing yes, able may be not so much because the media in west Africa is fragmented. We don't have a region wide media. So that is an issue. The will is there but not the ability in terms of the structure and infrastructure (Demba, The Gambia)*
- *Yes, yes. I think the West African media is willing- and our will comes from the fact that if something is happening in Nigeria, we have Ghanaian media watching and interested; and it also affects us directly. Almost every country, well almost all countries in West Africa affect the other and the media is quite interested; but we always look out for that. But unfortunately, we can't even move because of the difficulty in maintaining democracy and also, other countries' readiness to be part of the entire ECOWAS scheme of economic development and also open borders. So, as a journalist, moving from Ghana to even Nigeria, you have to go through Togo, Benin. You will face some difficulties in Togo, where your equipment will be questioned, and your motive will be questioned... So, journalists will be willing, because already we are trying; so, we just need the ECOWAS to meet us halfway and enable us to do our work (Ismail, Ghana).*

Challenges of Collaboration

Informants identified a number of issues that made it difficult for the media to be fully engaged with the ECOWAS. These challenges are presented in the following themes.

First, a major challenge militating against the ECOWAS engaging the media is the (in)ability of the media to contribute more constructively to the vision of regional integration and democratic development is that ECOWAS treats the media merely as a medium for the

transmission of information. However, they believe that the media have more to offer if they are more productively engaged and enabled.

- *I think it has to do with ECOWAS own idea or perception and their willingness or lack of commitment to transparency and accountability. If ECOWAS is indeed committed to their own principles and objectives, naturally, they would be interested to engage the media because they would have realised that the media is an indispensable tool. The fact that they are not utilising this huge opportunity, for me tells me that ECOWAS is either not committed or not conscious of the value of transparency and accountability (Madi, The Gambia).*
- *I think the challenge is that the media is misunderstood by those who are not in the profession. We are often demanding. Organizations think that it's all about inviting a media to cover an activity and that is all. However, we do not see things that way, and that is not how we perceive our role. We need to be involved. We understand that communication comes at a cost and must be budgeted for, however we need to think about how to use the budget to build a win-win relationship between the press and organizations that need the services of the press (Boukari, Mali).*
- *So I think the main challenge is involving journalists at the core of their programmatic issues. Often, ECOWAS would organize programmes for journalists without adequate consultations with journalists' organizations (Lamin, The Gambia).*
- *What I could say is that it is necessary to give more importance to the media. They say it all day long, but in practice this has never been the case. Without the media's involvement, support, and without a proper partnership with ECOWAS, the organization will never reach its objectives. In reality, at ECOWAS and the AU, the media does not occupy an important position. When compared with the EU and European countries, we see that it is quite the opposite. When you take the European Union, the United Nations, the media is at the centre of their operations. But over here, that is not the case. To understand the people's view on a particular issue, the media's contribution is necessary. But unfortunately, when it comes to ECOWAS interventions in Mali, we do not see such involvements of the media (Boubacar, Mali).*
- *I don't think there are challenges rather it's the lack of appreciation of what the media has to offer that is the problem. Expectedly, with the people-oriented ECOWAS may be things will be done differently (Jamila, Nigeria).*

Even when media included in ECOWAS frameworks and protocols or mechanisms there is no clear and comprehensive strategy for operationalising the provisions. Informants believe the perception of the media as mere muckrakers and purveyors of scandal is also a barrier to effective collaboration. They believe ECOWAS has a responsibility to be accountable to dues-paying member states and must therefore be open to media involvement and inquiries.

- *ECOWAS must first address the challenge of its commitment to and involvement of the media then after that we can talk about other challenges (Charles, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *The first challenge is that of inclusiveness. Project must be more inclusive (citizen must be involved). There is also that lack of financial resources for current of future collaboration and projects (Cissé, Côte d'Ivoire).*

- *It is partnerships, inclusiveness, and transparency. ECOWAS does not associate the media. ECOWAS is like a witch club that meets in Abuja, we never know when they are doing (Guillaume, Côte d'Ivoire).*
- *So, I think out of the challenges that I see is the mindset. "Don't bring media, they will come and know what we are doing, they will come and let people understand certain things." It's a mindset, and until you address that mindset to see the media as partners in progress, not as enemies, you will have a challenge. So there is need to make media part and parcel of their plans (Awual, Nigeria).*
- *The first challenge I see is that of transparency because of the bit about accountability. Since ECOWAS receives funds from all its member states. It must be accountable. This can be done through the press. The organization must have a communication unit that gathers all media outlets and journalists operating in the ECOWAS region (Alain, Côte d'Ivoire).*

Two key issues arise relative to the communication challenges in engaging with ECOWAS. First, informants assert that language is a barrier that needs to be overcome in order to enhance engagement. According to them, language challenges do not necessarily refer to issues with dialect differences, but also clarity in how ECOWAS communicates with them. They indicate that journalists should undergo training under the auspices of the ECOWAS to understand the diplomatic language and jargon so that they might be able to communicate effectively when disseminating information from ECOWAS. Second, they identify a communication challenge when documents of proceedings are published in only one language, usually English. They feel it will be better to translate these to other languages of Member States to ensure mutual intelligibility. Secondly, they believe that ECOWAS lacks a clear communication policy or strategy, which hampers the effectiveness of their engagement with media.

- *Some of the challenges may be language; yes, language. And when I say language not necessarily French and English or Portuguese but the way information is packaged. There is diplomatic language; and a lot of media houses despite giving out information, they also need to be closer to understanding the diplomatic work of ECOWAS and its mandate and without education in that line, that information will just be an announcement to everybody and we will not see the future of it; so, it wouldn't be of interest to media houses. So, language should be looked at as some training, because it could be of a challenge, especially when reporting on certain communications from ECOWAS (Ismail, Ghana).*
- *I think the first major challenge is the implementation of an effective communication policy at the ECOWAS level. This policy must take into account institutional communication. This means that there will be basic bureaus at the state level that will communicate with citizens in their languages so that they can understand. The second challenge is the promotion of languages spoken in the space. ECOWAS must have two to three languages of communication. All communications and documents of ECOWAS, which are published at the level of its proceedings, must be translated into either English, French and even Portuguese. Because these are states that are also part of ECOWAS. But when you put all the documents in English and there is no simultaneous translation into French, francophones will feel excluded, even if they have an interest. Because when you don't understand English, you can't use the documents. Today, perhaps the final challenge is for*

ECOWAS to know that without the media, all its missions and initiatives are doomed to failure (Nouhoum, Mali).

- *The challenges ECOWAS faces when it comes to its engagement with the media is essentially that of communication and ensuring that information is well-provided to avoid rumours. It is true that press conferences are held, but I do not believe that through these press conferences alone the media can have enough information to inform the population (Bandiougou, Mali).*

Recommendations for improved partnership

To improve the partnership between ECOWAS and the media, informants made the following recommendations:

First of all, it will be important for the collaboration between ECOWAS and the media in member states to be strengthened to improve the partnership between them. Informants point out the need for ECOWAS to be open and transparent. Media have to be involved at the various levels of praxis. If the media are treated in good faith and fidelity, they will be best positioned also to disseminate relevant and constructive information to the people.

- *ECOWAS has to make sure that journalists are involved in issues that have to do with the media. If a project is being conceived, perhaps they should reach out to journalists or organizations within the member states to find out what the issues are. ECOWAS should exercise pressure on member states to make sure that journalists are treated in accordance with laws and standards of best practice in a democracy. What we see is that member states would clamp down on journalists, and ECOWAS would sit idly by and watch. That defeats the purpose of media independence in the sub-region. ECOWAS should be a proactive player by making sure that members respect media freedoms and the rights of journalists (Lamin, The Gambia).*
- *What I can say is that ECOWAS must really involve the media in all its endeavours in member states. I think that is the only solution (Tougan, Mali).*
- *First, the media have to get organised even before you start talking about ECOWAS. In various counties, you have media organisations but how robust are they? And how does, say, Gambia Press Union engage with National Union of Journalists in Nigeria. If media is organised, they can effectively engage ECOWAS. But a disjointed media cannot engage ECOWAS effectively. At the sub-regional level, we have WAJA which is moribund because journalists cannot even organise themselves. All of these explain why ECOWAS would not bother engaging media. It rather uses media only as PR. At the level of ECOWAS, on the other hand, if they're interested in creating an impact, they should realise that one indispensable tool we have is the media (Madi, The Gambia).*
- *I believe that ECOWAS needs to identify and collaborate with the states and the media associations that work in its thematic areas. In each country, there are media associations whose activities are in line with those of ECOWAS and I think they have to identify these organizations and work with them (Boukari, Mali).*
- *ECOWAS has to see the media as partners in development. It also has to improve on its communication with journalists and media organizations in the subregion. Journalists should be well informed of the plans of ECOWAS. Probably, there is a need for an annual in-country*

sensitization programmes for journalists on the mandate and programmes of ECOWAS (Modou, The Gambia).

- *ECOWAS should just strengthen the collaboration with media organizations. I believe that this is the only recommendation that one can give especially when we know the importance of the media for the achievement of the ECOWAS vision (Cissé, Côte d'Ivoire)*
- *One of the things we lack is that most government and businesses are treated with secrecy. Open government is very important, accountability and transparency in government is necessary. ECOWAS needs to put openness alongside the media (Desmond, Nigeria).*

Furthermore, ECOWAS and the media must both explore innovative ideas for policy and plan towards effective involvement and partnership with media. Media houses must also craft objective, public interest, terms of reference for engaging with ECOWAS. Regarding digital improvements, informants indicated that ECOWAS should explore more dynamic, dialogic platforms.

- *There should be regular ECOWAS media sessions especially at the level of the commission and there should be a central commission system which can be handled by the commission. The website is boring, and the media centre is not handy. There should be focus on internet and digital rights because this is very essential (Demba, The Gambia).*
- *I think the ECOWAS itself must craft a chart or a certain roadmap towards involving the media in its activities. Getting some of the influential outlets in the various countries to sign unto a pact to promote the ideals and the agenda of the ECOWAS. And finally, I think that even the journalism training institutions in the sub-region must have the ECOWAS protocols and the ideals of the ECOWAS incorporated or integrated into their training modules (Muheeb, Ghana).*
- *We already believe that ECOWAS needs to have a West African media directory, we also need the media to have a map of ECOWAS communication (Arnaud, Burkina Faso).*

Informants also suggest that if the partnership between media and the ECOWAS is to be mutually fruitful and enduring, ECOWAS must offer as well as undertake training and capacity-building sessions and forums for their members and for the media. These sessions would be geared, on one hand, towards educating journalists about the ECOWAS and its mandate and building their capacity to cover the activities of the ECOWAS effectively; and on the other hand, providing media literacy skills for their members. Respondents from Ghana, Mali and Nigeria conveyed this sentiment, as reflected below.

- *Training and also involvement. So, the media has to be involved directly. So, I don't know how, but I'm sure ECOWAS is getting money small, small. But they should move journalists around. ECOWAS should move journalists around from country to country, to the headquarters, to other places to be part of it; to feel the direction, to feel the dream, the goal of the whole organization; so, there should be more involvement (Ismail, Ghana).*
- *In this context, ECOWAS must initiate many capacity-building sessions for the media in relation to its vision, its mission and the issues facing the community. Because today, in our country, which is really unfortunate, we often have meet media personnel that are not necessarily trained. So, they don't necessarily have the right information and are eager to communicate information that doesn't bring peace and social security. And so, ECOWAS must have a policy for sustained*

capacity building of the media to promote peace, security and above all promote peaceful democratic transitions (Nouhoum, Mali).

- *I think the ECOWAS Commission should take the media as partners in progress. They should once in a while train and enable the media understand the mission statement of the commission, the policy statement of ECOWAS and with that it will help reorient the media in the discharge of their duties (Stella, Nigeria).*

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was designed to provide formative evidence on initiatives and involvement by ECOWAS, of the media in its instruments and interventions towards the vision of regional integration for democratic governance and economic development in West Africa. The following conclusions and recommendations are derived from the findings reported above, and should provide informed insights for addressing the challenges and leveraging the possibilities of prioritising and mainstreaming the media into the policies and practices of the ECOWAS Authority.

4.1 Conclusions

In an age in which information is defined as the new currency the media are an increasingly indispensable factor; not only of corporate identity and visibility, but also of organisational agency and goal attainment. Given the recent policy reorientations of ECOWAS “from a body of states to a community of people” (Vision 2020) and the further shift towards an “ECOWAS for the people by the people” (Vision 2050) there is an added value in leveraging the facility of the media for enlisting citizen support for, and participation in, discourses and decisions around the ECOWAS and its activities. The study sought to find out what the policy and practice of ECOWAS in involving/prioritising the media might suggest about the limits and possibilities of such a relationship.

The review revealed that while there is no composite policy document on mainstreaming the media in the delivery of its mandate, there is an impressive array of Articles in the ECOWAS Revised Treaty (notably in chapters II, III, VII, X, XI) as well as in the enabling instruments and initiatives (specifically, the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the Protocol on the Fight against Corruption, the Conflict Prevention Framework, and the more recent ECOWAS Mediation Guidelines) to suggest a disposition, in principle, towards involving the media, in practice. Key among the findings on protocols and provisions of the ECOWAS Authority that make a direct or implicit acknowledgement of the role of information and the media are those on:

- (I) Fostering the curation of cultural goods and accrual of social capital, and facilitating the processes of regional integration and development (Revised Treaty, 1993);

- (2) Ensuring free and fair elections, enabling popular participation in governance, and guaranteeing the freedom, pluralism and independence of the media and information systems (Protocol on Democracy & Good Governance, 2001);
- (3) Fighting against corruption, including through ensuring the freedom of the press and the right to information (Protocol on the Fight against Corruption, 2001);
- (4) Creating awareness of, and goodwill for, ECOWAS; by engaging in partnership with the media to give appropriate publicity to the Commission and its activities; as well as through advocacy and capacity building efforts (Conflict Prevention Framework, 2008);
- (5) Preventing conflict and brokering peace through interventions that include promoting non-partisan and responsible media practice (Mediation Guidelines, 2018).

The practice, however, suggests gaps in appreciation and application of the media in the work of the ECOWAS Commission and its institutions and agencies. This notwithstanding, there is an underlying understanding that the media and ECOWAS share common interests in promoting the processes of regional integration as a means to realising the vision of a West Africa that is characterised by political good governance and economic development. This potential will, however, require a more purposeful and comprehensive policy framework and strategy on the role of the media within the ECOWAS governance system. Specific findings on stakeholder expectations and experiences of the limits and possibilities of ECOWAS to mainstream media in the delivery of its founding vision are that:

- (1) There is a confluence of mandates between ECOWAS and the media, inviting a need for synergies around issues of good governance and democratic development; regional integration and free movements; conflict mediation and peacebuilding; elections and democratic transitions; public engagement, citizen participation and institutional publicity;
- (2) The media are seen and treated more as channels and conduits for information relay, rather than as strategic ally for participatory discourse and decision within the ECOWAS Commission and its institutions and agencies;
- (3) There is mutual distrust and suspicion between ECOWAS and media practitioners – about the motives of media as mere muckrakers and purveyors of sleaze and scandal; about the ECOWAS as a self-serving bureaucracy that is nervous about failing the probity and accountability test;
- (4) The media and ECOWAS lack understanding of their respective roles and workings – the media lack the capacity and logistics for enterprise/beat reporting on ECOWAS; the ECOWAS members have limited appreciation or application of the media to its corporate goal attainment;
- (5) There is sufficient good faith and willingness to among stakeholders to support ECOWAS in efforts to achieve its objectives and realize its vision for democracy and development in West Africa.

4.2 Recommendations

Flowing from the conclusions reported above, the following recommendations are made for improving the instrumentality of the media in the policies and practices of ECOWAS.

- (1) Leverage the recent policy reorientation “from a body of states to a community of people” (Vision 2020) and the further pivoting towards “an ECOWAS for the people by the people” (Vision 2015) to build mutually-beneficial relations with region, national, media and support institutions.
- (2) Develop a comprehensive media policy for news coverage and corporate publicity; in a way that sees and treats the media not just as channels for the unidirectional transmission of information, but also as the arena for fruitful public participation in discourses and decisions of the ECOWAS;
- (3) Create a system of periodic engagements and interactions – based on the terms of a memorandum of understanding with a regional media support organisation such as the MFWA – oriented towards building a network of media organisations and ECOWAS communicators for connecting with their national and regional citizenry;
- (4) Provide a media development fund to support media organisations – to improve their institutional infrastructures and efficiencies – and journalists – to improve their professional practices and understanding of the workings of ECOWAS – and relevant ECOWAS officials – to equip them with requisite media literacy skills for effectively engaging with the media;
- (5) Develop strategies to exploit the potentials of the media (particularly the public service) as a growth pole for developing common policy responses to such issues as disease outbreaks and climate change, curating the cultural goods and tourism artefacts of the region, and accruing social capital among citizens of a politically and economically integrated subregion.

Annex A: Interview Guide

ECOWAS MEDIA ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Commitment of ECOWAS to Freedom of Expression & Media Development in West Africa

PART A: INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate this research effort in your country.

We are conducting a situational analysis and documents mapping study that seeks to enable ECOWAS integrate media freedom and development in its governance and democratic development interventions in West Africa.

Specifically, we wish to:

- (a) gain consultatively-driven understanding of the potentials of the media to support the good governance and overall regional development mandates of ECOWAS;*
- (b) highlight the gains and gaps in past efforts by ECOWAS to integrate/mainstream media in such important issues and interventions as peace and security, conflict management, democratic transitions, and elections;*
- (c) make key recommendations on how ECOWAS can more effectively support media freedom and empower the media to contribute to democratic and good governance processes in the region.*

The success of this exercise relies entirely on the quality and integrity of responses received; and we feel confident that we could not achieve that outcome without your professional competence and local experience. Thank you, again, for your time and input.

PART B: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Country:

Interviewer:

Respondent & Position Held :.....

.....

.....

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

PART C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. To what extent/in what ways would you say that the activities of the ECOWAS in the sub-region are related/relevant to the mandate and goals of your organization?
2. Has your organization been involved in any activities of the ECOWAS?
 - (i) If yes, in what ways/areas?
 - (ii) If no, why not?
3. In what ways do you think the work of ECOWAS could be better enabled by a close/collaborative relationship with organizations such as yours?
4. Do you perceive the ECOWAS as fulfilling its mandate effectively; especially as relates to the possibilities for the media to support such outcomes? Please explain your answer.
5. The ECOWAS has recently sought to re-orient its focus from an “ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of Peoples.”
 - (i) To what extent do you think it is operating according to this people-centred vision?
 - (ii) In what ways do you think ECOWAS can better operate as a participatory, people-oriented organization?
 - (iii) In what ways could the media in particular be relevant to such a cause?
6. What is your assessment of interventions of the ECOWAS in the following areas of democratic governance in the sub-region:
 - (i) Peace and security?
 - (ii) Elections?
 - (iii) Democratic transitions?
 - (iv) Public health disease (epidemic/pandemic) management?
7. What more do you think that the ECOWAS should be doing to better deliver on its mission and mandates?
8. How could these challenges be addressed?
9. What is your observation about how/whether ECOWAS has engaged the media generally in its activities within member states?
10. To what extent would you say that ECOWAS sees/treats the media as stakeholders/allies in the promotion of peace/security, social/economic development and democratic pluralism in West Africa (whether in its protocols and conventions or in practice)?
11. Would you say that the media in West Africa are (i) willing (ii) able to support the realization of the vision of ECOWAS for democracy and economic development? Please explain your answer
12. What do you see as the main challenges the ECOWAS faces in engaging the media in their activities?
13. What would you recommend to improve the partnership between the media and the ECOWAS in building democratic governance in the sub-region?

Annex C: List of informants/respondents interviewed

Burkina Faso

1. Issiaka Ouedraogo, President, The Council of Information and the Monitoring of Governmental Actions (CISAG)
2. Boureima Ouedraogo, President of the Media Owners Association of Burkina Faso (SEP)
3. Charlemagne Abissi, President of the National Union for Audio-visual Press in Burkina Faso
4. Ousmane Lankoande, Executive Secretary, *Le Balai Citoyen*
5. Arnaud Ouédraogo, Coordinator of the Norbert Zongo Center for Investigative Journalism
6. Boukaré Zouanga, Director of Finances, Ministry of Economics and Finance (DAMOF)
7. Z. Désiré Sawadogo, Director of the National ECOWAS Bureau at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
8. Guézouma SANOGO, President of the Burkina Association of Journalists (AJB)

Cote d'Ivoire

1. N'takpe Boka Bernard, Secretary of WACSOFF
2. Alain Tahé, President of Fédération des Associations de Consommateurs Actifs de Côte d'Ivoire/National Federation of consumers association of Cote d'Ivoire (FACACI)
3. Charles Lambert Tra Bi, President of the Forum of Heads of Publication (FORDPCI)
4. Cissé Sindou, Journalist, Director of publication of Nord Sud, President of MS Medias (Private Media Professionals Welfare Association)
5. Dosso Mafélina, General Secretary of the Women Peace and Security of ECOWAS in Cote d'Ivoire
6. Doumbia Fanta, President of the Active Women of Cote d'Ivoire, OFACI
7. Lassina Serme, President of the REPRELICI, (Network for online media professionals)
8. Guillaume Gbato, Journalist and President of the SYNAPPCI, National Union of Private Press Professionals

Gambia

1. Anna Wadda, Director of Regional Integration, Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration
2. Haddija Jawara, Treasurer, The Globe Media
3. Modou S. Joof, Senior Programme Officer, Gambia Press Union (GPU)
4. Demba Kandeh, Coordinator, Globe Media
5. Lamin Jahateh, Acting SG, GPU
6. Madi Jobarteh, Member, TANGO – Umbrella organisation for NGOs

Ghana

1. Muheeb Aseed, Senior Programme Officer, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
2. Ishmail Akwei, Editor-in-Chief, Ghanaweb
3. Andrew Danso-Aninkora, President, Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA)

Guinea Bissau

1. Fode Sanha, Chairman, Civil Society
2. Vitorino Ndecky vice president of bissau human rights league (LGDH)

Mali

1. Bandiougou Dante, President, Maison de la Presse
2. Nouhoum Diakite, Coordinator of the Coalition “Publish What you Pay”
3. Tougan Konaté, General Secretary, National Union of Journalists (UNAJOM)
4. Boubacar Yalcoué, Président Movement for the Protection against Press violence (Mouvement de Protection contre les violences de la Presse)
5. Boukari Dao, President of the Network for Media and Human Right (Réseau Média et Droit de l’Homme RMDH)

Nigeria

1. Stella Jibril, Director, Nigeria Press Council
2. Jamila Abubakar, Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) National Vice President, Zone D
3. Christopher Isiguzo, President, Nigeria Union of Journalists, NUJ
4. Awual Musa Rafsanjani, Executive Director, Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre, CISLAC
5. Desmond Utomwen, Publisher, Fresh News Media/Co-Founder, Centre Against Brutality & For Safety of Journalists in Africa
6. Victorson Agbenson, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Politics Editor
7. Omolola Oladimeji, (Headliner) Founder, Women In Media Forum

Annex D: Policies and Instruments Consulted

ECOWAS Authority (1975). *Treaty of the Economic Community of West African States*. Lagos, Nigeria (28 May 1975)

ECOWAS Authority (1981). Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance on Defence, A/SP3/5/81. Freetown, Liberia (29 May 1981)

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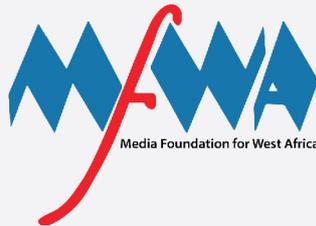
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