

A REGIONAL APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING - THE MANO RIVER REGION¹

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“Contemporary conflict creates a web of interlocking conflicts involving the transfer of populations, arms, armies, finances, and conflict goods across increasingly porous borders”²

THE MANO RIVER REGION



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The Mano River Region

Scholars and practitioners have varying perspectives on the definition of peacebuilding, as the concept is extremely broad and conflicts around the globe diverse. In spite of the widespread debate on its instrumentalities, there is common agreement on the goals of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding seeks to prevent, reduce, transform and help people recover from structural and other forms of violence. It empowers people to foster relationships

¹ This Policy and Practice Brief emanates from the Mano River Region: Peacebuilding Challenges, Prospects and Interventions workshop hosted by ACCORD's African Peacebuilding Coordination Programme (APCP), in Monrovia, Liberia, on 27-29 October, 2010.

² Tschirgi, N. (2002). Making the Case for a Regional Approach to Peacebuilding. *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, 1(1), pp. 25-38.

at all levels that sustain them and their environment. Further, peacebuilding seeks to break cycles of violence by taking a series of actions. It is a systematic process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the reoccurrence of violence by addressing the root causes and effects of conflict.

Photo: The Mano River Region refers to the geographic arrangement of the countries within the broader region of West Africa, while the Mano River Union is a regional institution aimed to foster economic cooperation amongst member states.

Key peacebuilding components include:

- Developing and/or strengthening social relations;
- Creating accountable and transparent institutions;
- Ensuring that peoples' economic needs are met in an equitable manner; and
- Ensuring that their dignity and human rights are upheld.

Peace is built when people carefully plan for the long term, anticipate potential problems, engage in ongoing analysis of the conflict and local context, and coordinate different actors and activities in all stages of conflict and at all levels of society.

Peacebuilding requires a combination of approaches through a nexus for collaboration. These approaches include:

- Conflict transformation; mediation, restorative and transitional justice;
- Legal and judicial systems;
- Environmental protection; human rights; humanitarian assistance;
- Early warning and response; civilian and military peacekeeping;
- Economic, social and political developments;
- Education; activism and advocacy;
- Research and evaluation;
- Trauma healing; and
- Good governance, policy making and national visioning processes.

The promotion of national peacebuilding initiatives shows the now widely accepted acknowledgement that the root causes of conflict in general, and in Africa in particular, are context specific. With the end of the Cold War and at the end of the last millennium, a global decline in violent conflict was noted in all regions – except for Africa and Asia. Over half of these conflicts were linked to conflicts in neighbouring states³. The linkages are multifaceted and sustained through a range of interconnected political, socio-economic and cultural factors that tend to have deep roots in the history of the different regions. Instability easily spills over national boundaries. Consequently, efforts to solve these conflicts are bound to fail if they do not take into account such cross-border dynamics⁴.

The success of national peacebuilding efforts thus depends heavily on progress made towards finding regional solutions,

3 EURAC, *An EU Regional Approach for the Great Lakes, Africa*, Position Paper, Belgium, June 2004, and Wallenstein, P. and Sollenberg, M., *Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes, 1989-97. Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 35, No. 5, (1998) pp. 621-634.

4 *Ibid.*

as regional dynamics affect national contexts in what is commonly referred to as *regional conflict complexes/formations*. A regional conflict formation is a set of transnational conflicts that form mutually reinforcing linkages with each other across state borders⁵. These links may be so substantial that changes in conflict dynamics and the resolution of one conflict will have an effect on a neighbouring conflict⁶.

Where there are strong regional connections, peacebuilding efforts will have to acknowledge this, be flexible and develop processes to accommodate the multi-level character of the conflict, proliferating actors at different levels, and rapidly shifting boundaries⁷. Regional peacebuilding can, therefore, be summarised as a collective initiative by various actors aimed at ensuring the absence of violent conflict and the presence of positive/sustainable peace from a regional perspective – taking into account the geographic and functional elements of the regional conflict complex. Regional peacebuilding does not negate national peacebuilding efforts, but instead complements these with additional levels of action, that would not ordinarily be targeted through the latter. National peacebuilding initiatives focus on promoting peace on a national level, but are not designed to accommodate specific transnational problems, which have arisen out of particular dynamics of the conflict. Regional mechanisms can play a crucial role in bridging the gap.

As many conflicts are found to take place in states with weak government authority, and have been preceded by a break up of the state or a loss of legitimacy of the incumbent government, creating regional mechanisms for peacebuilding across state-lines has the added advantage of bolstering national institutions. On the other hand, strong and legitimate states are necessary for effective regional peacebuilding. The weakness of state institutions, including citizenship and border control, facilitates transnational trade networks, war/shadow economies, and the spread of rumours, all of which can further undermine the state.⁸

5 See Centre for International Cooperation, New York University and Africa Peace Forum, Nairobi, Kenya, *Regional Conflict Formation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: Structure, Dynamics and Challenges for Policy*, Conference Report, Nairobi, Kenya, November 2001.

6 EURAC, *An EU Regional Approach for the Great Lakes, Africa*, Position Paper, Belgium, June 2004, and Wallenstein, P. and Sollenberg, M., *Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes, 1989-97. Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 35, No. 5, (1998) pp. 621-634.

7 Centre for International Cooperation, New York University and Africa Peace Forum, Nairobi, Kenya, *Regional Conflict Formation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: Structure, Dynamics and Challenges for Policy*, Conference Report, Nairobi, Kenya, November 2001 and Wallenstein, P. and Sollenberg, M., *Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes, 1989-97. Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 35, No. 5, (1998) pp. 621-634.

8 *Ibid.*

Regional peacebuilding enhances regional cooperation and trade, with the hope of transforming war/ shadow economies to peace economies. In addition to addressing issues connected to cross-border networks, it can help synergise regional cooperation of states in a complex setting, where diplomatic relations may have suffered from conflict. Regional cooperation can in turn contribute to a platform for peace discourse at the regional (political) level, when it may still be challenging at the national level.

Regional peacebuilding efforts can potentially be hampered by the absence of, or weakness of, regional mechanisms through which to engage. Once conflict starts there is need for an entity that has a standing mandate and legitimacy to intervene. For example, the lack of legitimacy of the first Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) intervention in Liberia was one of its biggest challenges. In addition, this entity will need to have early warning and rapid response capability. The positive or negative impact of global actors and networks on regional conflict dynamics can also potentially hamper or enable regional peacebuilding efforts.⁹ Regional peacebuilding efforts need to ensure they do not focus on individual states, as this could unintentionally intensify cross-border economic linkages, increasing resources available to armed groups and states in regional conflict complexes¹⁰.

SYNOPSIS OF REGIONAL CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN THE MANO RIVER REGION

An assessment of the regional conflict dynamics of the Mano River Region (MRR)¹¹ requires a holistic understanding of the common trends across the region. The Mano River Region is made up of Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea (Conakry), Liberia and Sierra Leone, countries that are linked beyond their geographical shared borders. Their colonial legacies, histories, political dynamics and economies are intrinsically linked and cannot be separated. It can be stated that successful national peace processes in the region have the tendency to fail due

9 Centre for International Cooperation, New York University and Africa Peace Forum, Nairobi, Kenya, *Regional Conflict Formation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: Structure, Dynamics and Challenges for Policy*, Conference Report, Nairobi, Kenya, November 2001 and EURAC, *An EU Regional Approach for the Great Lakes, Africa*, Position Paper, Belgium, June 2004, and Wallenstein, P. and Sollenberg, M., *Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes, 1989-97. Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 35, No. 5, (1998) pp. 621-634.

10 Centre for International Cooperation, New York University and Africa Peace Forum, Nairobi, Kenya, *Regional Conflict Formation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: Structure, Dynamics and Challenges for Policy*, Conference Report, Nairobi, Kenya, November 2001.

11 The Mano River Region refers to the geographic arrangement of the countries within the broader region of West Africa, while the Mano River Union is a regional institution aimed to foster economic cooperation amongst member states.

to the spill over of conflict from neighbouring countries. This creates a constant sense of insecurity and instability. For instance, most of Guinea's post-colonial history has been marred by war in its neighbouring countries¹².

The regional conflict dynamics in the MRR require conflict analysis that takes on a robust and nuanced approach within the broader West African region. Conflict linkages across MRR states tend to be unique from what is witnessed in the rest of the region. A clear example is the Liberian Civil War of 1989 – 1998, which crossed into Sierra Leone in 1991 and spread to Guinea in 2000-2001 and had an impact on Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002¹³.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a political and economic decline across the MRR owing to the constant failure of peace accords and sustained conflicts which had grave impacts on the economic, political and social spheres. To-date, MRR countries are characterised by fragile states. The failure of the state to protect its people, perform its duties and its use of violence, resulted in illegal activities in the border areas to challenge the state's control and monopoly of resources.¹⁴ This remains the case, with border areas tending to be the most insecure and unstable. Furthermore, some political leaders contribute to insecurity in the region through their support of rebel groups or rogue governments. It is reported that Guinea President, General Lansana Conte supported rebels movements against President Charles Taylor of Liberia.¹⁵ On the other hand, President Taylor had the backing of Presidents Blaise Compaore and Houphouet-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso respectively¹⁶. In 2011, it was reported that the members of the Forces Nouvelles (FN) who supported Ouattara's bid to take up his seat as the elected President of Côte d'Ivoire included combatants from outside the country¹⁷.

Weak governance at the border areas is largely responsible for porous borders in the MRR region. Silberfein and Conteh highlight the fact that African political leaders opted to

12 Arieff, Alexis. (2009) "Still Standing: Neighbourhood Wars and Political Stability in Guinea", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 47 No. 3, pp. 331-348.

13 Silberfein, Marilyn and Conteh, Al-Hassan. (2006) "Boundaries and Conflict in the Mano River Region of West Africa", *Conflict Management and Peace Science* Vol. 23 pp. 343-361.

14 Ibid.

15 The support from President Conte involved giving anti-Taylor rebel groups a rear base in Guinea territory. Arieff, Alexis (2009) "Still Standing: Neighbourhood Wars and Political Stability in Guinea, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 47 No. 3, pp. 331-348.

16 Ibid.

17 IRIN News. (2011) Côte d'Ivoire, A Changing of the Guard. Available from: <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MUMA-8FN2SJ?OpenDocument> 6 April 2011: Accessed 4th January, 2011.

control and concentrate their resources in the core areas while boundary areas remained largely uncontrolled.¹⁸. Historically these border regions were of little importance and received very little investment and services, further making them a haven for illegal activities such as growing of banned substances and smuggling¹⁹. These poorly governed and largely insecure remote areas have become the arena where illicit activities and armed groups continue to flourish.

The MRR for decades has experienced the economic migration of ethnic groups across the Mano River Region (MRR) and intermarriage. As a result of years of coexistence and easy movement across borders, ethnic groups are not focused within the geographical territory of a country, but are spread across the different countries. This brings to the fore the ethnic and economic dimensions in the MRR. Specific examples in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Conakry highlight the impact of identity and ethnicity in these national conflicts. The conflicts between indigenous groups, such as, the Kpelle and Guerze, and settlers, like the Mandinka and Kouranka, have raged on in Guinea as they fight for control over land and other resources²⁰. The forest areas of Côte d'Ivoire experienced severe rural land scarcity in the 1980s, coupled with high unemployment. This created tension between natives and non-natives.²¹ On that basis, exclusionary policies, as in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, have continued to divide the country.

The constant refugee flows across the different countries due to conflict have become integral to understanding the history of the MRR. The huge influx of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone into Guinea from 1990 to 2005 provides an example of this ongoing trend. A situation update released by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on 31 March, 2011 states that over 120,000 Ivorian refugees are in Liberia after crisis broke out in Côte d'Ivoire in early 2011²². This will most likely create tight competition and increase disputes over land and other resources. Over time, refugees have had to battle with indigenous groups for resources and the influx of refugees has implications for already struggling economies. Furthermore, the number of unregistered refugees who are with host families and relatives will also strain limited resources.

18 Silberfein, Marilyn and Conteh, Al-Hassan. (2006), "Boundaries and Conflict in the Mano River Region of West Africa", *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 23, pp. 343-361.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Rocco, L. and Ballo, Z. (2008) "Provoking a Civil War", *Public Choice* 134 pp. 347-366.

22 United Nations Refugee Agency (Date) Côte d'Ivoire Situation Update No. 7, Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/4d997bee9.html>. 31 March 2011: Accessed 4th January, 2011.

The MRR has been characterised by ineffective disarmament, unsuccessful reintegration processes, and the presence of former fighters still involved in conflicts and ready to fight if given the chance. The realisation that the MRR is a conflict hotspot that will impact negatively on the stability of the broader West African region thus requires specific attention and focus.

EMERGING AND ONGOING CONCERNS FOR PEACE

Lack of civil society coordination and coherence:

Following the conflicts in evidence in the MRR, there has been rampant growth in the number of civil society organisations (CSOs) working in the area of peacebuilding. While there have been attempts to coordinate the different civil society initiatives in the region, by organisations such as West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), and Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), there is still a major need for coherence and coordination. This has resulted in duplication of peacebuilding activities and unhealthy rivalry between and among many peacebuilding institutions. It also manifests in the way CSOs work with national governments, inter-governmental, and regional organisations. While the value of synergising the activities of CSOs is desirable, this has not been realized in the region, so as to avert future conflict through concerted peacebuilding work.

Uneasy government – CSO relations:

Post-conflict states are characterised by weak and fragile institutions and structures. The reality of rebuilding these states from a base of weak economies and traumatised populations is a real challenge. In a bid to assist in reconstructing post-conflict states, the international community does invest in both the government and CSOs. Civil society should not presume to replace the state, as the state is ultimately responsible for the welfare of its citizenry, a right borne out of social contract. The difficulty is that the state is often characterised by weak public sector institutions that are struggling to realize development objectives. It is not uncommon for these states to be formed by former belligerents, which raises concerns over their neutrality, impartiality, transparency, accountability and capability. This in turn breeds the mistrust that often denotes the relationship between the government and civil society. This has meant that CSOs that partner with governments are often regarded with suspicion. There is value, however, in partnership between governments and civil society, as the government has a mandate beyond that of civil society, and civil society have sufficient knowledge of the realities on the ground and represent the interests of the broader population. Working together, the two can have greater impact. While civil society must serve as a

constant countervail to check the state, thus ensuring delivery on its social contract obligations, this does not mean the two cannot work together towards common goals, such as, peace. The pursuit of this working relationship continues to be a challenge in this region.

Insufficient funding for sustainable peacebuilding:

Peacebuilding is daunting and the financial resources required can be overwhelming. While there has been donor support and aid from the international community to assist, through different actors including the United Nations (UN), this falls short of the real needs and development challenges which continue to plague these states. The real challenge lies beyond the amount of aid given, and should be concerned with the focus and design of peacebuilding programmes and support. The sustainability of the different processes and initiatives is questionable and there must be a conscious effort by all peacebuilding actors to formulate viable initiatives. Foreign aid can often lead to vulnerability and dependency on the part of beneficiaries. The challenge, therefore, is how to ensure that funding serves to transform and empower local populations so that in time they can provide for themselves. To this end, it is important that the private sector in these states is engaged in the peacebuilding conversation. Finding innovative ways to include the private sector in peacebuilding efforts in the region continues to be a challenge for civil society.

Structural reform challenges: Most of the problems of African states have often been blamed on history. The same holds for the problems in the MRR, where the contingency of the past continues to dictate the politics of the day. The boundaries drawn out of the Berlin Conference continue to hinder regional approaches to peace. While this could serve as a good explanation for the problems that plague the region, this is not a sufficient explanation. Many of the problems in the region are underpinned with structural issues and the way institutions and structures have been constructed. States today must engage in the exercise of structural and institutional reform such as electoral reform and constitutional review to address disabling factors that inhibit the region's progress in realizing peace.

Presumption of the lack of local agency: In an effort to assist with peacebuilding in post-conflict states there is a tendency to presume that local communities lack the necessary agency to administer peace. There is a disregard of indigenous structures and institutions in favour of what is regarded as 'modern'. If the peace realised is to be sustainable that peace must be contextualized within the agency of the different local communities in the region. Finding a way in which to integrate the different expressions of agency in peacebuilding

is a challenge that must be countered in achieving strong peace. The inclusion of these home-grown peacebuilding initiatives is also likely to divide communities and creative ways to include local actors while safeguarding the peace need to be explored.

Electoral violence: This continues to be a challenge on the continent, and in the MRR specifically. The disputed 2010 election result in Côte d'Ivoire between presidential candidates Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara clearly illustrates this. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of Côte d'Ivoire declared Mr Ouattara the winner of the presidential elections of 28 November, 2010. The Constitutional Court thereafter declared Mr Gbagbo the winner of the presidential elections. The country is now characterised by violence between the two camps. Voting patterns in the region and the polarisation of countries on the basis of ethnicity are a source of concern. Governments need to be built on a platform of nationhood. Where cabinets are dominated by a specific ethnic group and governments are characterised by political intolerance, there is a threat to peace. As noted, the regional dynamics have a bearing on the exercise of democracy in the different MRR states. The benefits of regionalism must be balanced with the exercise of a democratic dispensation in each of the states.

The challenge of the youth population: Following the realization of peace, many former combatants in the region surrendered arms, and became party to a second social contract with the state. Urban centres are populated by unemployed youth, who are used by politicians for violent activity. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Sierra Leone identified youth marginalization and political exclusion as one of the root causes of the Sierra Leone conflict. The same constituency continue to threaten the consolidation of peace. Regional stability in the MRR is threatened by many unemployed, unskilled youth populations that can be easily instigated to violence. The socio-economic realities that characterise these environments force many youth to engage in violence for survival.

Transnational crimes: The region is faced with the proliferation of small-arms and light weapons and crimes such as kidnapping and drug trafficking. The high prevalence of weapons and availability of retired or ex-military trained personnel is a real challenge. The porous borders in the region facilitate the movement of these persons and weapons of violence. This has adverse implications for peacebuilding. The lack of political will to implement the protocols associated with small-arms proliferation, and failure to consolidate efforts to deal with this challenge, means that it continues to undermine security in this region.

Security Sector Reform Linked to Ineffective DDR Efforts: This still remains a challenge at different levels. In Sierra Leone, for example, there is need to build the capacity of parliament and civil society to enhance their oversight over the security sector. There are efforts to build strong, professional, transparent and accountable armed forces and police. This is necessary to ensure that there is capacity to safeguard internal peace. In the same breath, the mechanisms to check and balance these forces must be empowered as well. Moving forward, it is critical that the ethnicisation of the security forces be eliminated. This can only be done through effective oversight.

Engendering reflective peacebuilding: A critical challenge in all peacebuilding initiatives in post-conflict states is how impact is measured. Following years of peacebuilding in the MRR, it is imperative to explore whether what has been done over the years has been effective in contributing towards sustainable peace. The reflective practice of monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment is critical, to not only understanding the outputs, but in assessing the impact and outcome of all interventions. There has been limited research in this regard, but this remains key to understanding what the obstacles to peace are. The lack of reflective spaces to analyse and judge the efficacy of different engagements continues to be a challenge to the realization of sustainable peace in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Mano River Union (MRU) Member States:

1. Revive and empower the MRU Secretariat and other organs, like the MRU Civil Society Forum. This will foster effective coordination amongst member states and between member states and other actors. Platforms, such as MARWOPNET and WANEP that are committed to peacebuilding efforts in the region must also be enhanced. Given the complex and multi-faceted challenges in building peace in the region, interventions from all actors at the national, regional, continental and international levels are required to effectively address the challenges. The MRU Secretariat is therefore a vital actor in ensuring an all-inclusive, coherent and coordinated approach to peacebuilding in the region.
2. Addressing youth unemployment is central to long-term economic growth plan. Reviving agricultural production and marketing, and creating an enabling environment for private-sector development, geared to employing young people, is critical to ensuring that the youth population

is re-engaged. The unemployment and disempowerment of high-risk-and-vulnerable youth could also be addressed by increased vocational training and apprenticeship programmes, which could also have a regional perspective, thus enhancing social cohesion.

3. Transnational crimes can be addressed by implementing existing regulatory frameworks developed by ECOWAS and the African Union (AU) on specific issues. The 2007 Declaration on the African Union Border Programme and Its Implementation Modalities and the 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) are examples of regional frameworks, which if implemented, would help promote regional security and cooperation. These could also minimize negative cross-border crimes in the region. Further, there are some practical regional arrangements to minimize the circulation of small-arms and armed groups. One of these is the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Peacebuilding initiatives must incorporate cross-border initiatives that include border communities and strong cross-border trade.

To the Civil Society, Governments and International Partners of the Mano River Region:

4. Increase coherence and coordination of different stakeholder activities and initiatives to avoid duplication and enhance efficiency. Partnerships must be encouraged and already existing networks among civil society actors in the region must be strengthened so as to facilitate a consolidated effort to ensuring strong peace. Negative competition and adversity between civil society organisations and other actors must be discouraged and enhanced coordination should be pursued so as to ensure quality peacebuilding initiatives. There must be a realisation that different stakeholders contribute different strengths to peacebuilding. If peacebuilding is to succeed, civil society, government and private sector must work together to that end. The fight against the proliferation of small-arms and light weapons, for instance, must be a concerted effort between state structures, civil society efforts and other stakeholders. In contributing to this coherence and coordination, civil society should be strengthened in parallel to the strengthening of state institutions, to enable civil society to fulfil its role as a countervailing power, promoting a healthy system of checks and balances²³.

²³ Centre for International Cooperation, New York University and Africa Peace Forum, Nairobi, Kenya, *Regional Conflict Formation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: Structure, Dynamics and Challenges for Policy*, Conference Report, Nairobi, Kenya, November 2001 and EURAC, *An EU Regional Approach for the*

5. A transformational peacebuilding approach is needed. This should include the creation or reform of old institutions and structures. These would need to enable societies to enhance social, political and economic conditions that will eliminate exploitation, corruption, and all forms of insecurity that contributed to violent conflict in the past. There is need for strong institutions that support a development agenda, which can be held accountable and perceived as transparent and representative. Robust and in-depth conflict analysis that addresses the underlying causes of the challenges in the region will therefore be pertinent. This ensures that all actors - their interests, strengths and weaknesses, and impact on the conflict and peace - are identified to ensure that any solution takes a nuanced approach.
6. It is imperative that a preventive action mechanism is established. In addition, early warning mechanisms need to be properly linked to response mechanisms, to ensure conflict prevention or mitigation. For instance, elections are increasingly becoming triggers to violent conflict, and whilst there is sufficient warning, it is not matched by adequate response. The case of Côte d'Ivoire is illustrative of this. The response mechanisms in the ECOWAS region must thus be enhanced.
7. There is need for a more rigorous assessment of peacebuilding initiatives and programming. These must be analysed for their success in contributing towards: the development or strengthening of social relations; creation or rebuilding of accountable and transparent institutions; meeting people's needs in an equitable manner; and the prevention of future conflict or breaking cycles of violence. The lessons learned should inform funding priorities to maximise impact. Due to the intricate connection of conflicts in the MRR, CSOs and international agencies that operate in countries in the region should make concerted attempts to include a regionalized component in their programming to address crosscutting issues.
8. It is imperative for peacebuilding initiatives to be sustainable. This can only be realised through local ownership by communities. The agency of local populations and their ideas of what peace should look like, and how peacebuilding initiatives should be carried out, must never be ignored. Peace will only be sustainable

if it is a product of the people seeking it. On that basis, there needs to be a deliberate effort from all stakeholders to take ownership of all peacebuilding initiatives within their domain. It is important to note here, that issues of faith, shared history and tradition play a pivotal role in peacebuilding and must not be ignored whilst designing peacebuilding programmes in the region.

9. Organizations with a regional mandate such as the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) should be strengthened to further their capacity to design and implement regional peacebuilding initiatives.

CONCLUSION

A solid regional peacebuilding approach must critically examine and analyse the dynamics and security threats in a region. The MRR requires such an approach due to the unique nature of the region and the common characteristics and experiences that tie member states together. The role of the MRU, its Secretariat and Joint Security Commission (JSC), play an important role in contributing to conflict prevention and the achievement of sustainable peace. In aiming for conflict prevention and in contributing to peacebuilding, the MRU can be enhanced through sustained dialogue, creation of stronger regional management and coordination bodies, and constant information sharing amongst the different actors and institutions within the region. In the end, collaboration and integrated partnerships with commitment to local ownership and responsibility by all actors in all peacebuilding efforts will contribute to stability in the MRR.

Great Lakes, Africa, Position Paper, Belgium, June 2004, and Wallensteen, P. and Sollenberg, M., *Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes*, 1989-97. *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 35, No. 5, (1998) pp. 621-634.

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