



Ending the Vicious Cycle of Instability in Guinea Bissau: What Next After 2014 Elections?

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The political history of Guinea Bissau has been characterized by multiple



Angolan Army in Guinea Bissau
Source: www.globalvoicesonline.org

coups d'état and assassinations of some presidents since independence in 1974: three presidents were overthrown, one assassinated and one died due to illness in office. Drug trafficking spanning over a decade has further exacerbated the instability of the country and also accounts for the power struggles and deterioration of relations between the army and political elites.

In 2010, Malam Bacai Sanha was elected into office following a coup d'état in March 2009 that ousted the then democratically elected president Nino

Vieira. Following the death of President Sanha in January 2012, Raimundo

Pereira took over as interim president to facilitate new elections within 90 days as stipulated in the constitution. However, two weeks to the presidential election run-off, the army staged a coup on April 12 truncating the interim government. Interim President Raimundo Pereira and outgoing Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior were arrested and detained by the army on allegations of "secret deal" with Angolan troops to wipe out the Guinea Bissau army¹, plunging the country into further turmoil.

Following international pressure on the coupists, a transitional government headed by President Manuel Serifo and Prime Minister Duarte de Barros was inaugurated in 2012 to conduct presidential and parliamentary elections within a year. The elections have been postponed several times due

to various reasons including limited funds and lack of consensus on the electoral processes. With 13 presidential and 102 parliamentary candidates contesting in the April 13, 2014, elections many are hopeful that the polls will restore constitutional order in the country. However, others remain skeptical that this may not address the vicious cycle of instability.

Against this background, this policy brief aims to provide insights on the political situation related to the elections and offer possible options for response to ensure peace, democracy and development in Guinea Bissau.

2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A country of about 1.6 million people², Guinea-Bissau became a sovereign state in 1974 following violent liberation struggles against Portuguese colonial rule; and has since grappled with series of coups d'états.

¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17700886>

² www.guineabissau.com

West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of

this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

Six years after independence, Guinea-Bissau experienced its first coup on November 14, 1980 when João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira overthrew Luís Cabral. Nino Vieira remained in power for 19 years before he was overthrown by a military junta led by Brigadier General Ansumane Mane on May 7, 1999 after a yearlong civil war. Elections were held after the civil war and Kumba Yala of the Party for Social Renewal (PRS) was elected as the president and served from February 2000 until September 2003 when he was ousted in a military coup, which brought in Henrique Rosa as



April 2012 coup in Guinea Bissau
Source: www.southworld.net

the new president. Nino Vieira returned to power in July 2005 through elections. In 2008, Vieira escaped an assassination attempt but was subsequently assassinated on March 2, 2009 by the army in an alleged retaliation for the death of General Batista Tagme Na Waie, Head of the Armed Forces Joint Chief of Staff, who was murdered the previous day. His assassination was perceived as a retaliatory act characterizing the internal struggle for power and control of resources among the military and government officials.

To prevent the country from sliding again into a civil war, a presidential election was hurriedly organized allowing ousted President Kumba Yala to contest. Malam Bacai Sanha won the election over Kumba Yala, forcing the latter into a self-imposed exile in Morocco. A year later, on April 1, 2010, the then Deputy Army Chief António Indjai, led a mutiny, arrested and detained several people including Rear Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto, who led a foiled coup in 2008; Zamora Induta, the then Head of Guinea Bissau army, and Prime Minister Carlos Gomes.

From the foregoing, the military has been a major obstacle to political stability and democratization of Guinea Bissau. The culture of revenge has characterized the political landscape in which the elites manipulate the military to settle political scores. This has undermined state institutions and created a fertile ground for criminality and impunity to thrive. With the April 2014 elections, the risk of political instability remains high unless the culture of democratic norms are understood and applied. The application of such democratic norms and principles is even more pertinent for the Guinea Bissau Armed Forces who must make the transition and be submitted to civilian democratic rule.

3.0 KEY ACCELERATING FACTORS

In almost three decades, the major drivers of instability in Guinea Bissau are deep-rooted and interwoven, superseding electoral processes. While several issues such as poverty, bad governance and drug trafficking have been identified as the major causes of conflict in Guinea Bissau; other peculiar factors contributing to the political instability include the followings:

The Military Factor: The perennial meddling of the military in politics in Guinea Bissau has derailed the political process and continues to weaken national institutions. Since the rise to prominence in the war against colonialism in 1974, Guinea Bissau's army has remained the most powerful institution of the state. The army estimated to be between 4,000 to 8,000 soldiers (1,800 holding the rank of major and above), in a country of 1.6 million people demonstrates the militarization of the state. However, some political elites are alleged to

manipulate the military for political gains when they cannot get to power through peaceful democratic elections. In addition, a poor pension scheme for the army with a heavy hierarchical structure is also attributed to the unwillingness of commanders to retire from the service for fear that retirement will translate to their vulnerability to prosecution and lack of access to state resources

Illicit Drug Trade and Corruption:

Military instability and coup d'états are perceived as the major factors underlying drug trafficking since the control of the armed forces is crucial to control of the sources of income related to drug trafficking. According to a UNODC report, politicians and the military are allegedly involved in the trade and those who dare to challenge the traffickers are killed or abducted³. Proceeds from the drug trade not only proliferate small arms and light weapons but also provide political actors and the military hierarchy with enough resources to influence electoral processes. Incessant abuse of power, secret dealings and bribery ranks Guinea Bissau as the most corrupt country in West Africa and the 163 out of 177 nations according to the Global Corruption Index of 2013⁴.

Impunity: Politically connected drug lords and their associates purportedly operate with total impunity in the country given the fact that no major drug seizures have been reported since 2008. This has resulted in persistent political instability, thereby weakening institutions with particular reference to the judiciary. The weakness of the criminal justice system provides safe haven for criminals and hinders the consolidation of peace, democracy and development in the country. The arrest by United States authorities in April 2013 of former Navy Chief, Rear admiral Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchuto and four others for drug related crimes, who were hitherto enjoying liberty in the country was an important development towards curbing the drug trade though it further exposes the weakness of the

³ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, February 2013

⁴ <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2013/results>

judicial system. Moreover, pervasive corruption allegations and assassination of high profile politicians including a sitting president and military commanders without any arrests or prosecutions is an epitome of a failing judicial system.

4.0 CURRENT DYNAMICS

The April 13 elections is deemed as a major platform for the restoration of constitutional rule as well as the advancement of the economic and social stability in Guinea Bissau, therefore, it is imperative to look beyond the elections and to focus on the post-electoral transition. The ratification of the ethical code of conduct by candidates and political parties to abstain from violence and accept the outcome of the elections signals a potential prospect for the post-election phase. However, finding the right balance between the necessary reforms, including governance, security sector and economic reforms, as well as the need to manage the relationship between the military and the political class may be difficult in the post-electoral period considering the current issues.

- **Death of Former President Kumba Yala:** the death of Kumba Yala shortly after actively campaigning for Nuno Gomes Nabiam, an independent presidential candidate against Abel Incada of PRS, brings about a mixed feeling. While some people are celebrating the timeliness of the demise under the perception that he was behind several coups including the April 2012⁵ where he was to contest against former Prime Minister Carlos Gomes in the second round; others are saddened believing that he was murdered contrary

to the official report that he suffered a cardiac arrest. Whatever the case, the situation is a source of apprehension given speculations over Kumba Yala's last wish that he should only be buried after his candidate wins the presidential election. This is further compounded with the perception that his supporters and the army may reject the outcome of the elections should a non-Balanta⁶ win; especially Jose Mario Vaz, the PAIGC's candidate who is perceived as an ally of Carlos Gomes Junior and by extension friend of Angola, the country accused of attempting to wipe out the Balanta from the army.

- **Deteriorating State of Economy:** The protracted political crisis has weakened the economy with a



Cashew production
Source: www.watradehub.com

deficit estimated at 6.5 percent of the country's \$897 million Gross Domestic Product in 2012⁷ from 1.2 percent in 2011 as a result of the withdrawal of foreign aid to the country by international multilateral agencies. A decline in the prices of cashew, the country's key export has left majority of the population impoverished. Several sections of civil services including teachers have repeatedly embarked on strikes over delays in the payment of salaries, a situation that undermines the already low quality of education. On April 2, 2014, few days to the election, the National Union of Workers in Guinea Bissau (UNWG) embarked on a 72-hour warning strike in protest against alleged government's delay in the payment of their salary arrears. The

illegal activities of foreign companies especially in timber and fish trade have also exacerbated the economic situation.

- **Biometric Registration:** to better ensure the integrity of votes, civil society actors proposed that biometric identification be introduced ahead of the elections. However, government's initial insistence on the usage of the manually generated voter identification on grounds of limited resources prompted some level of political tension. Be that as it may, about 776,000 out of the 800,000 eligible voters have registered for the April polls through the biometric platform according to a government decree of February 2014⁸. In support of the effective implementation of the biometric process, there is a notable presence of ECOWAS troops on the ground to compliment the efforts of Guinea Bissau's security forces to ensure the conduct of credible and transparent elections.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION ON GUINEA BISSAU AND WEST AFRICA

- It is hoped that the successful conduct of the elections may end the two-year transition in Guinea Bissau and lift sanctions and suspension of aid, which has rendered the country bankrupt. This will provide the needed resources for the government to pay the salary arrears of workers and revive the economy.
- The potential stability after the elections will reduce the negative effects of the drug trade across the region. The new government with support from ECOWAS is expected to

⁵ www.irinnews.com

⁶ Balanta is the largest ethnic group in Guinea Bissau, representing one third of the population (www.wikipedia.com/Balanta) Late president Kumba Yala is of the Balanta ethnic group

⁷ International Monetary Fund

⁸ http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/23/us-bissau-elections-idUSBREA1M0JJ20140223

initiate functional modalities for curbing the thriving illicit trade given the fact that Guinea Bissau is the transit hub of drug trafficking in West Africa.

- Illicit drug trade exacerbates criminal activities in the region where money derived from the trade is used to fund criminal activities including the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across the region. The threat of instability in Guinea Bissau coupled with the ongoing conflict in Casamance has a wide range of humanitarian and socio-economic consequences, and poses serious threats to peace and security across the region.

6.0 SCENARIOS

In view of the ongoing trends, we foresee the following playing out before, during and after the elections:

Best Case Scenario

- Elections hold successfully with all parties including the military and supporters of Kumba Yala accepting the outcomes as pledged. President Kumba Yala is accorded a state burial as a former president. The new government commits to run a government of popular participation and implements the necessary reforms to ensure peace, stability and development. **(Likely)**

- The military adheres to security sector reforms under the aegis of ECOWAS and the international community and plays its constitutional role in maintaining peace and security. Conditions of service for the military and other security agencies are enhanced; standards of living are improved, reducing the incentives from criminal activities and other actions that threaten peace, democracy and stability **(Less Likely)**.

Realistic Case Scenario

- The first round of the election ends without an outright winner, leading to a run-off between the two candidates with the majority votes. Preparations for the second round are

conducted under intense competition and political rivalry within 30 days as stipulated in the electoral laws. The results are disputed and international community prevails for the winner to be accepted. **(Most Likely)**

- The result of the run-off is heatedly disputed along ethnic lines and by the military, which leads to calls for fresh elections on grounds of malpractices. Supporters of the winning candidate take to the streets demanding the inauguration of their candidate, prompting chaos which the military capitalizes on to intervene as a justification to “save the country”. **(Likely)**

Worse Case Scenario

- The army is divided following the outcome of the elections. An uprising ensues with several persons including the acclaimed winner of the poll and other contenders as core targets of arrest or assassination. The international community imposes further sanctions on Guinea Bissau and elections are annulled. The country slides into deeper political instability



Uprising in Guinea Bissau
Source: african-business.blogspot.com

with an uncertain long haul political transition. **(Most Likely)**

7.0 OPTIONS FOR RESPONSE

To The Government:

- The interim government should provide a level playing field for free, fair and transparent elections
- The incoming government should embark on a comprehensive security sector reform and provide incentives for the military to be professional in the discharge of their

duties for the consolidation of peace.

- The elected government with support from ECOWAS and the International Community should embark on democratic reforms to promote good governance and democracy.

- The government should show commitment to fighting impunity by reforming the judicial system and promoting accountability mechanisms.

- Embark on national dialogue and reconciliation process to heal wounds and build trust among communities.

To the National Electoral Commission (CNE):

- Exhibit professionalism and uphold the electoral laws governing the conduct of elections in the country.

- Endeavor to be neutral and seen as such by the electorate in order to gain their trust and confidence and in order for results to be accepted by all.

- Conduct massive civic education, clarifying the rules and procedures of the elections to voters across the country

To the Political Parties and Candidates:

- Political parties and candidates should abide by the electoral laws and uphold the electoral code of conduct they have ratified. Where disputes arise, parties should seek redress through peaceful and lawful means

- Should hold joint-public campaigns and educate the electorate on democratic values and the rule of law, entreating their supporters to eschew violence.

To the Security Agencies:

- Ensure that the pre-electoral climate is devoid of human rights violations including non-intimidation of the candidates as well as the press

- Provide improved security conditions and cooperate with UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea Bissau (UNIOGBIS) and ECOWAS Mission in Guinea Bissau (ECOMIB) to ensure successful and peaceful elections

- Embrace security sector

reforms as an essential requirement for peaceful and cordial civil-military and civil police relationships.

To ECOWAS and the International Community:

- The visit of ECOWAS to Guinea Bissau on April 10, 2014 led by President John Mahama as the new Chairman is a good sign of ECOWAS proactive engagement. ECOWAS should carry Guinea Bissau along and ensure a post-election plan to support the newly elected government and promote a government of national unity as a requirement for sustainable peace and stability
- Apply the principle of solidarity and international cooperation through the provision of technical, material and financial contribution towards the democratization process and economic development of the country.
- Support the establishment of a transitional justice mechanism as a remedy for reconciliation, healing and forgiveness.
- Increase funding for civil society and non-governmental human rights organizations, especially the Guinea Bissau Bar Association to curb impunity and promote respect for human rights.
- Deploy long and short-term election observation missions to oversee the conduct and management of the elections as a confidence building mechanism.

To Civil Society Organizations:

- Civil Society must be willing to demonstrate a good example of Good Governance in their own institutional management and be the inspiration for change.
- Monitor and report compliance or lack thereof of the ratified electoral code of conduct by parties and candidates.
- Embark on civic education for peaceful elections; and canvass for the acceptance of the outcome of the elections.
- Conduct advocacy on necessary policy reforms to promote good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights.
- Support the inclusion of women groups in peace processes in line with UNSCR 1325.

To the Media:

- Demonstrate professionalism through balanced and conflict sensitive reportage.
- The state media should provide equitable time distribution for political campaigns on its platform
- Provide the platform for civic education that promotes tolerance and respect for divergent views.

8.0 CONCLUSION

With the elections over, sustaining peace in Guinea Bissau in the medium to long term will require the establishment of a national architecture for peace that will promote, enhance and facilitate dialogue and reconciliation. This platform should be used for socio-political dialogue to address all issues related to electoral disputes.

Beyond the elections, it is crucial to create an enabling environment for sustainable peace that will facilitate improved standards of living for the people in Guinea Bissau. This requires active citizen participation in public decision-making processes to ensure that public policies and programs reflect the interests and aspirations of the majority rather than the wishes of the few in positions of power and authority.



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