"CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE POST-2015 AGENDA IN WEST AFRICA"[1]

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[1] The scoping paper was prepared by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Abuja, Nigeria.

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Treaties, Protocols and Regulations

Economic Community of West African States Treaty of 1975

Revised Economic Community of West African States Treaty of 1993

The Economic Community of West African States Conflict Prevention Framework Regulation MSC/REG.1/01/08

Acronyms/Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CCP-AU	Centre for Citizens' Participation on the African Union
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
GCAP	Global Call for Action Against Poverty
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECPF	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
HIV	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
OWG	Open Working Group
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WACSOF	West African Civil Society Forum

Abstract

The United Nations (UN) initiated Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) life cycle runs out in 2015. Different countries post different results as we approach the much anticipated terminal date. The consensus is that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa will not meet most of the goals. With the impending end to MDGs came agitations for a post-MDG framework. This has generated intense discussions at all levels – global, regional and national – leading to a plethora of ideas about what the new goals should be. As a sub-region, West Africa has a number of peculiar threats, which ought to receive careful consideration in, framing or at least in determining how far states can go in implementing them. The sub-region confronts such threats as security threats, including insurgency/terrorism, piracy, proliferation of small arms and light weapons; environmental threats, including the adverse effect of greenhouse gases and the attendant impact on food security; and the threat of governance and rule of law, amongst others. In the midst of these threats, there is a ray of hope. Partnership between civil society organisations, government, development partners, bilateral and multilateral agencies offer the best opportunity to respond appropriately. But how can civil society leverage on these relationships to keep governments focused on the priorities that matter the most to ordinary citizens? How can they play their diverse roles as partners, potential planners, co-implementers and often part-evaluators of the process? These questions deserve careful consideration in the build-up to a new post-2015 development agenda.

1.0   BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) with support from the Commonwealth Foundation commissioned this research paper as part of broader discussions on civil society and regional development agenda. It analyses civil society engagement in the post-2015 development discourse in West Africa.

In order to contend with poverty and promote sustainable development, the global community adopted the United Nations Millennium Development Declaration in September 2000. Development has in recent times taken on the meaning of activities conducted by development agencies particularly directed at the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Sage Publications, 2007), namely eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other communicable diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). As the life cycle of the MDGs winds down, there is now a need to develop and implement a sustainable development plan across West Africa as well as the rest of the world. Thus it has become necessary to re-examine the challenges faced by existing development efforts in West Africa and indeed challenges which might unfold as the new development programme starts to unfold.

Development has been largely funded by externally generated finances and as a result has been largely tailored after the projections and aspirations of the donors, not necessarily along the lines of what is needful or beneficial to the donee in context (Centre for Democracy and Develpment, 2014). This has invariably resulted in the proliferation of a host of less than successful projects. Curiously, the potential for donors to dictate is hinged on the quantum of the funds they provide. For example in Nigeria, donor funds represent a minuscule percentage of the annual federal budget. This gives an idea that the country should have greater ownership of its development agenda. Conversely, the United Kingdom government provides a significant proportion of Malawi's national budget and therefore often attempts to influence its justice sector reform agenda.

To drive inclusion, all stakeholders, including civil society organisations (CSO's), should be privy to processes and actually participate in ways that serve the best interest of society. This is the principle encapsulated by the donor and recipients commitments in the Accra Agenda for Action[2] (AAA) which *are ownership, alignment, harmonisation, management for results and mutual accountability* (Pereira, 2011).

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the threats and projected threats over a decade from the terminal date of the millennium declaration from 2015 until 2025. It also synthesizes key post-2015 discourse regionally, continentally and globally as well as map civil society engagements with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other development partners. It also identifies opportunities for more effective engagements and offers suggestions and recommendations for enhancing the post-2015 development agenda in the ECOWAS sub-region.

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[2] The Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) was drawn up in 2008 in order to spur on the implementation of the Paris Declaration. It comprised a number of clear and comprehensive commitments by donor and recipient countries. It places more emphasis on non-state actors as opposed to the process leading up to the Paris declaration which essentially bypassed/sidelined non state actors including CSO's.

1.1   THREATS AND PROJECTED THREATS TO DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA (2015-2025)

A plethora of threats contend with development efforts in West Africa including but not limited to climate change, population explosion, poor governance, insecurity/violence, inflation and general economic decline/recession, poverty, infectious and non-infectious diseases such as Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), cholera and HIV/AIDs. For the purposes of this paper, we shall consider the threats in clusters – security, environmental, demographic, governance and rule of law, and international development assistance.

1.2   Security Threats

Globally, security threats are not nascent. However, they have gained and continue to gain prominence in recent times in West Africa (United Nations Security Council, 2011). These threats include but are not limited to insurgency, terrorism, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, piracy, and transnational organised crimes. All of these threats are seen in the Boko Haram insurgency of Nigeria as well as the crisis in Mali. These threats often result in violent conflicts, deplorable living conditions and a high number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). In addition, security threats have impeded development and economic activity in the sub-region (Institute for Security Studies, 2010).

1.2.1   Insurgency and Terrorism

Insurgencies and terrorism have unfortunately taken a hold on the region partly as a result of bad governance, poor law enforcement, porous borders and religious extremism. Regrettably, Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Ghadafi's ouster in Libya has negatively impacted West Africa as may be gleaned from the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, escalation of drug trade, human rights abuses by government agencies fighting insurgency and terrorism leading to loss of lives. Remarkably, the increasing number of unemployed youths presents a ready recruitment ground for insurgents and terrorists (Ibe, 2014:56). Similarly, escalating refugee problems in West Africa due in part to the huge movements across borders in order to avoid the killings and wanton destructions associated with these activities. It is also the case that food security is impacted as the populations disperse and farming activities are stalled as farmers move to safer places. Insurgency and terrorism negatively affect investments and business opportunities thus robbing the region of significant revenues needed for development.

1.2.2   Proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW):

 The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is known to be partly responsible for violent conflicts, civil wars and general insecurity in the region (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2012). Unfortunately national governments have not done enough to check this potentially explosive problem. The ease with which weapons change hands and move across borders is a worrisome development. It certainly increases government spending on security thereby reducing investments on more important human security essentials.

1.2.3   Piracy

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reports that as much as $2 billion in potential revenue is lost every year by West Africa's economies as a result of pirate activities (UNSC, 2012). These acts of piracy include the theft of crude oil and hijack of merchant vessels. In oil-producing countries such as Nigeria, this is exceedingly devastating given the remarkable loss of income and investments.

1.2.4   Transnational organized crime

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), transnational organized crime encompasses virtually all profit-motivated serious criminal activities with international

implications. A major attribute of transnational organized crimes, such as human trafficking, smuggling, drug trafficking etc, is that it takes place across national boundaries (UNODC, 2000). It undermines financial systems through money laundering, weakens and undercuts legitimate economies and may go as far as to negatively influence governance processes. For example, procuring election outcomes by corrupt means is perceived as a by-product of transnational organized crimes (UNODC, 2014).

1.3   Environmental threats

There are several environmental threats that are potentially detrimental to human development in West Africa. Under this cluster, we will consider the related threats of climate change and food insecurity.

1.3.1 Climate Change

Although West Africa is not one of the biggest contributors to greenhouse emissions globally, it unfortunately belongs to the category of regions that suffer the most. Loss of agricultural lands, water bodies etc. often make lives extremely difficult for the populations that reside in arid and semi-arid regions. In addition, reduction in volume of rainfall and change in rainfall patterns make investments in agriculture a lot more difficult.

1.3.2 Food Insecurity

Linked to the challenge identified above is the problem of food insecurity which is one of the direct consequences of loss of farmlands, unpredictable rainfall patterns and the rapidly changing climatic conditions. To get better results, governments must spend more per square mile and this has consequences for development in the short, medium and long term.

1.4   Demographic threats

There are several demographic threats affecting West Africa. Here we review the threats occasioned by high fertility rates, increasing population and rapid urbanization.

1.4.1   Population Explosion

Population explosion puts a strain on available infrastructure and resources in West Africa. In addition, increasing population coupled with the negative effect of climate change means that far less food is produced for more people leading to hunger, malnutrition and sundry health consequences that directly impact on development (Muhammad Bello, et al., 2013).

1.4.2   Rapid Urbanisation and Migration

 Increasing population and decreasing expenditure on infrastructure or outright outstripping of these infrastructures often mean that people migrate to the cities – putting pressure on available resources. In some cases, communities rapidly urbanize to meet up with these challenges without necessarily going through the appropriate cycles often to the detriment of those populations. Most capitals in West Africa have experienced population explosions without adequate infrastructure to cope with rapid urbanisation and its attendant consequences.

1.5   Governance and Rule of Law

Governance challenges include the well-known problems of corruption, poor economic policies and the denial of fundamental rights, including what Paul Farmer (Farmer, 2003) refers to as the "rights of the poor", namely economic, social and cultural rights – which are unfortunately luxuries for many West Africans (Ibe, 2014). These challenges often result from or lead to rule by law[3] rather than rule of law[4]. In a sense, governance challenges reflect or arise from poor

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[3] The existence of laws, which allows specific acts to be done i.e. administering the letter of the law.

adherence to principles of the rule of law – supremacy of the law, equality before the law and the presence of an independent judiciary to safeguard the liberties and fundamental freedoms of individuals. This is partly because law underpins development, which is one of the more significant outcomes of good governance. For example, the forthcoming elections in Togo, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria in 2015 present opportunities to change the dynamics in these countries which have experienced electoral violence and vote rigging in the past (Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2014). If these elections lead to positive outcomes, the elected leaders will, to a large extent, be more accountable to the people, respectful of the rule of law and inclined to provide the dividends of democracy, notably good governance.

1.6   International Development Assistance

Foreign donors often prefer a top-down[5] approach to development and this invariably presents problems when implementing important development programmes (Unite for Sight, 2013). For development implementation plans using a top-down approach, there have been less than satisfactory outcomes as this approach impedes the provision and application of the intended development support in the ways and mode in which they would benefit the recipient communities. For example, the Chad Cameroon Oil and Pipeline project was launched without input from the local community. As a result, many communities had to migrate without adequate planning or provisioning. In addition, corruption in the project led to massive diversion of funds (Unite for Sight, 2013). Ironically, donor countries are sometimes creditor nations to West African states leading to the unfortunate scenario in which these countries provide development assistance which end up being used to service debts owed them thereby prolonging poverty and foisting powerlessness on these countries.

1.7   SYNTHESIS OF POST-2015 DISCOURSE

Since 2000, the MDG's have been the standard against which development progress has been measured globally (Lucci, 2012). They have also provided a compelling vision for international development (Higgins, 2013) as well as served as an aid and international corporation reference point. In the impending expiry of the MDGs in 2015, there have been intense consultations and negotiations about the post-MDG framework. Indeed, the MDGs are believed to have been conceived in an era when there was relative stability and strong growth (Higgins, 2013). Although the MDGs remain relevant, there have been significant changes in the socioeconomic and geopolitical terrain hence the need to adjust appropriately. One such change is the increased participation/involvement of CSOs etc. in global affairs (Higgins, 2013).

The formulation of the post-2015 framework by the UN is on two fronts viz; the post-2015 development agenda as formulated by a high level panel of eminent persons whose report was submitted to the UN general assembly in September 2014. The sustainable development goals were agreed on in principle at Rio+20[6].

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[4] This guarantees the equality of all persons before the law. It enables the delivery of good governance to the citizens. It is not a synonym for law and order, available online at http://www.newindianexpress.com/columns/soli_j_sorabjee/Rule-of-law-should-not-be-confused-with-rule-by-law/2013/09/22/article1796377.ece (accessed 12 November, 2014).

[5] According to Daniel Stiles "Top down" or classical approach to development involves planning a project from above without involving the local population intended to carry out the project and benefit from it. On the other hand, "bottom up" or grassroots development is where the people of a community plan their own projects and seek financial and technical support themselves. See Daniel Stiles 'Classical versus Grassroots Development' available online at http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/c-te-divoire/classical-versus-grassroots-development (accessed 25 November, 2014).

[6] The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) organized in pursuance of General Assembly Resolution 64/236 (A/RES/64/236) which held in Brazil on 22 June 2012 to mark the 20th Anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

A number of issues have been identified and proposed as global priority for the post-2015 development agenda. Some of the identified issues, which featured as MDGs as well include; health, poverty eradication, education, gender equality. Other issues include, environmental sustainability, growth, jobs, inequality and governance including governance of fragile and conflict affected states (Higgins, 2013).

In West Africa, issues which have gained traction include, in order of importance - education, health, sustainable infrastructural development (energy, water and transport), inclusive economic growth, diversification and transport, good governance and rule of law, agriculture and food security, environment and natural resource management, social protection of the poor and vulnerable, sanitation and water management, and peace and security.

In this part of the study, we focus some attention on sub-regional, continental and global discussions on post-2015 development priorities as enumerated by the ECA in 2013 (Economic Commission for Africa, 2013).

2.0   Regional Discourse

For its 2020 agenda, ECOWAS appears to prioritize the development and management of natural resources as against the resource curse under whose weight the African continent has suffered. The prognosis for development is not great in the region. For instance, poverty is worsening year by year. Population growth in the region is relatively higher than other regions globally - this impacts on food security. Additionally, the region records fairly high fertility of more than 5 children per woman and this impact negatively on population growth (Economic Commission for Africa, 2013). Rapid urbanization means governments need to invest more in infrastructure. The region is one of the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change around the globe although it is one of the least contributors to greenhouse emissions (Economic Commission for Africa, 2013). In view of this unfortunate prognosis, the 2020 agenda prioritizes the following issues:

1. Participatory governance in which every sector of society has a voice in the development agenda.
2. Women and girls' development and empowerment as well as enhancing regional prosperity and cohesion.
3. Equal access of women, girls and youth to natural resources (ECOWAS Commission, 2011).
4. Partnerships: Government, private sector and civil society partnerships are critical to the success of this and indeed any development agenda. To be clear, goals are better achieved if interlinked and institutions coordinate better.
5. Adequate and innovative financing and capacity for implementation is another crucial ingredient for success. To that extent, official development assistance needs to increase to meet the needs of low income countries like many in West Africa. In addition, engagement with China, Brazil and India has become necessary in view of the opportunity they offer in terms of meeting shortfalls in development assistance.
6. Accountability and transparency in government are also necessary to bring these all together.
7. Equality and inclusion: Proportional representation of women is necessary to facilitate development. Regardless of sex/gender, people need to be mobilized, sensitized and included in development discourse to ensure plans reflect their aspirations;
8. Integration of trade and monetary unions crucial to take advantage of the huge market the sub-region offers; and
9. Vibrant and regionally-oriented private sector (ECOWAS Commission, 2011)

To guarantee accountability and transparency in government, systems for monitoring, evaluating and reporting need to be established and made efficient. Crucially, official development assistance should be aligned to national priorities (Economic Commission for Africa, 2013). Harmonization of regional and national policies is as important for achieving development objectives as is harnessing the potentials in the region's diaspora population. Institutions of democratic governance are often drivers of development. To guarantee good outcomes, they need to be strengthened, particularly in a region prone to violence, to guarantee good governance and ultimately, peace, security and economic growth. In order to assess progress, the processes must be inclusive and transformative. In addition, development should be aimed at:
- reducing income poverty
- creating decent jobs
- enhancing quality and access to social services
- reducing inequality
- enhancing security and peaceful co-existence
- promoting resilience to climate-related hazards (ECOWAS Commission, 2011).

Under the auspices of the Global Call for Action Against Poverty (GCAP) Nigeria, an alliance of over 30 organizations, unions and professional associations campaigning locally to see a Nigeria where poverty, hunger and preventable diseases are eradicated in a sustainable manner (GCAP, 2014), a number of points/issues of development as well as possible CSO engagement have been identified. They include:
1. Participatory governance; actively including women, minority groups and youth.
2. Prioritising anti-corruption, promoting transparency and accountability at all levels of government
3. Rapid infrastructural development
4. Intense anti-corruption campaign led by CSOs to create traction for liberation of resources for the implementation of development goals
5. Improved social cohesion to improve security
6. Security sector reforms to improve rules of engagement and stave against extrajudicial killings
7. Promote community policing
8. Agricultural development
9. Bridging inequality gaps by:
    - Implementation of 35% affirmative action
    - Promoting participation of all persons including youth and persons with disabilities
    - Mainstreaming gender in policies
    - Promoting equal opportunity and access regardless of age, sex, gender
10. Promoting education, reducing learning gap between the poor and rich
11. Improvement in health sector to improve maternal and child health.
12. Population control
13. Environmental sustainability
14. Employment/job creation

Also of note is the *Lome convention* featuring CSOs across West Africa. Amongst other things, they identified a number of issues and points of engagement with the states including;
1. inclusive democratic governance and accountability to citizens
2. sustainable agricultural practices
3. prioritising climate change, renewable energy, and implementation of national action plans on disaster management

4. sustainable management of natural resources and climate justice (Enviro News Nigeria, 2013)

2.1 Continental Discourse

In the general discourse, Commonwealth CSOs think it is necessary that the sustainable development /post 2015 discourse should include mechanisms that promote respect for life and human dignity as well as ending all forms of conflict and violence in Africa (The Commonwealth Foundation, 2013). They also envision a shift from the current situation in which development is driven with external financing to a future where internally generated revenue funds the development agenda. This will engender local ownership and participation.

2.2 Global Discourse

At the UN conference on sustainable development (Rio+20), the member states agreed to commence a process of developing a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To this end, the Open Working Group (OWG) was established on January 22 2013 and tasked with the responsibility of preparing a proposal on SDGs (United Nations, 2014). The OWG prepared and presented same to the UN General Assembly on July 22, 2014.

According to this proposal, the OWG identified 17 goals with 169 targets that cover a broad spectrum of sustainable development issues including health, education, poverty and hunger eradication, sustainable cities, combating climate change, and the protection of forests and oceans. The OWG proposed goals are:

1. end poverty everywhere,
2. end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. promote health and wellbeing for all at all ages
4. promote inclusive and equal education and lifelong learning
5. gender equality, women and girls empowerment
6. access to reliable and sustainable energy for all
7. available and sustainable water
8. promote inclusive, sustained and sustainable economic growth
9. build resilient infrastructure and promote inclusive economic growth
10. reduce inequality among countries
11. make cities safe and sustainable
12. ensure sustainable consumption and production
13. take urgent steps to combat climate change
14. conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. protect and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystem
16. promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development
17. strengthen and revitalise global partnerships for sustainable development" (United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 2014)

According to the Commonwealth, there are indications that civil society would want, as part of the post-2015 sustainable development discourse, the inclusion of:

• a specific goal for women and girls empowerment as well as to mainstream issues of women and girls (e.g. political and social empowerment, sexual and reproductive health rights etc.) through all the sustainable development goals
• a youth specific goal as well as mainstream youth through all the development goals
• guarantee of livelihoods and provision of decent work conditions, combat child labour and trafficking in humans, build capacities for entrepreneurship and accessing jobs particularly amongst the youth

- recognition of migrants as development partners and the protection of migrants' rights to decent work with or without documentation
- participatory governance
- prioritizing urbanization and human settlements
- transport, health and waste management. Provide periodic state of the city reports as basis for developing urban development policy
- establish a sectoral group on human settlements to build partnerships between government, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the private sector
- quality and equality in education at all levels
- food security and food sovereignty assured for all as a basic entitlement etc. (Commonwealth People's Forum, 2013)

There is a perceived need for the inclusion of CSO's as partners in development frameworks. This would include the recognition of their roles in implementation, development and engagement. Further, there is a need to promote:
- relationships between CSO's and states
- respect for their roles and responsibilities for good governance and CSO's rights to advocate and represent interests
- provision of information, skill, capacity and other resources to support CSO partnerships, as well as CSO and private sector partnerships (Commonwealth People's Forum, 2013)

3.0   MAPPING OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENTS WITH ECOWAS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

There are a number of overlaps between the ECOWAS state development priorities and the post-2015 sustainable development goals. The process of synthesising the post-2015 SDGs has been a long tenuous one that has seen the participation of a host of CSOs, donor agencies and governments. On the CSO side, we have seen coalitions and several other efforts at formulating the relevant and acceptable SDGs. Some of such CSOs and their efforts include the activities of WACSI, WACSOF, CDD and GCAP discussed below. Other CSOs have also been vocal in this regard. For example, at the end of the Pan African Consultative Meeting on Fiscal Justice and Financing Sustainable Development in Africa held on March 24th 2014 in Abuja, Nigeria, the participating development partners and CSOs articulated their common position to include a call on African leaders to take action on the need to link structural transformation agenda to sustainable human development. In regard to the post-2015 development agenda, the CSOs argued that it is important for Africa that a measurable goal on "structural transformation" is established (Pan African Consultative Meeting on Fiscal Justice and Financing Sustainable Development in Africa 2014).

Although ECOWAS was established in 1975 to ensure the harmonisation and co-ordination of national policies and the promotion of integration programmes, projects and activities, particularly in food, agriculture and natural resources, industry, transport and communications, energy, trade, money and finance, taxation, economic reform policies, human resources, education, information, culture, science, technology, services, health, tourism and legal matters (ECOWAS Treaty, 1975), the treaty did not provide for any special role for CSOs in its activities. The Revised ECOWAS Treaty of 1993 also did not specifically mention CSOs. However, it can be argued that the establishment of the economic and social council may have heralded the involvement of CSOs in the activities of ECOWAS (ECOWAS Revised Treaty, 1993). Article 14 of the revised treaty provides that the Economic and Social Council shall have an advisory role and its composition shall include representatives of the various categories of economic and social activity. Despite this development, CSO engagement in the activities of ECOWAS has been very limited. However in 1999, the ECOWAS Secretariat decided to start collaborating with other

stakeholders such as the civil society, and private sector among others in order to enhance the efforts of ECOWAS aimed at achieving regional integration in West Africa (CCP-AU 2012).

To consolidate this relationship, in 2003, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in collaboration with International Alert and other CSOs in West Africa organized the first West African Civil Society Peoples' Forum (WACSOF) held from 11 to 12 December 2003, at Regency Hotel, Accra, Ghana. This led to the formation of the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF, 2012;13). WACSOF envisions a well-organized and vibrant civil society in West Africa which contributes to the attainment of a stable and prosperous West African region characterized by democracy, human rights; good governance, the rule of law, constitutionalism, economic prosperity, and social justice". In addition, WACSOF's vision is with the ultimate aim of facilitating the building of dense associational networks, promotion of solidarity, trust and reciprocity among CSOs such that they can better enhance the efforts of the ECOWAS towards fostering regional integration and development in West Africa (WACSOF, 2012). Furthermore, WACSOF's mission is to serve as a receptacle for civil society organizations feeding into the ECOWAS system processes, and to empower them to exploit the public space at the national and regional levels, in order for them to contribute to an integrated, stable and developed West Africa. WACSOF's mission is therefore to create the avenues through which CSOs can more constructively engage with the authorities at the national levels as well as the institutions of the ECOWAS system (WACSOF, 2012).

 WACSOF operates with six main objectives. First, to strengthen and institutionalize a relationship between West Africa's civil society constituency and the ECOWAS system institutions. Second, to facilitate consultations and interactions between and among civil society, most notably through the WACSOF Periodic Peoples' Forum, for the purpose of developing and submitting recommendations to the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government. Third, to audit the implementation and legislative domestication of ECOWAS treaties, protocols and decisions relating to human security, development and regional integration issues in West Africa. Fourth, to establish regional, national (and sub-national) mechanisms to monitor and ascertain the status of human security, development and regional integration in West Africa. Fifth, to popularize ECOWAS in the consciousness of West Africans, particularly the youth, through appropriate media; and sixth, to actively promote a sense of community citizenship between ECOWAS member states and CSOs (WACSOF, 2012).

WACSOF argues that the ECOWAS Revised Treaty of 1993 and ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) of 2008 'specifically allotted specified spaces of engagement to WACSOF where it is specified that ECOWAS would seek to cooperate and collaborate with the civil society in the region in realizing the visions and mandate of the regional body' (CCP-AU, 2012). This is true to the extent that the ECPF provides for cooperation between ECOWAS and CSOs through the facilitation of WACSOF. For example, Regulation 114 of the ECPF provides that civil society organizations and the private sector shall constitute valued and bona fide partners at the regional, national and local levels in the implementation and evaluation of the ECPF and in cooperation arrangements with external partners. In addition, the ECPF provides that ECOWAS shall facilitate **(a)** the periodic evaluation of WACSOF and other partner civil society networks in the region with a view to strengthening internal democracy, inclusiveness, programming and oversight; **(b)** the establishment of a mechanism similar to the United Nations Economic Cultural and Social Council with modalities for Memorandums of Understanding and different levels of accreditation to serve as an interface with civil society networks; **(c)** information sharing with civil society networks and setting up of communication channels for civil society inputs into ECOWAS policies and programmes (ECPF, 2008: Regulation 114).

In addition, the ECPF provides for CSO participation in the activities of ECOWAS through **(a)** contributing to the conceptualization, development, implementation and monitoring of ECOWAS policies and programs on peace and security; **(b)** mobilizing and channelling CSO concerns and findings into ECOWAS initiatives; **(c)** leading advocacy in member states through awareness raising, lobbying and campaigns around ECOWAS resources, including the Community Court and Parliament, policies and interventions; **(d)** spearheading conflict prevention and peace-building activities in member states, especially at the national policy and community levels; **(e)** providing, alongside the private sector, technical and financial support for the implementation of activities within the regional conflict prevention framework (ECPF, 2008: Reg. 114).

According to WACSOFs Strategic Plan 2012-2015 WACSOF, 12 different thematic groups have been identified as a basis for the classification CSO activities to address specific issues and processes with bearing on the regional integration and development agenda of the ECOWAS. These are Agriculture and Food Security, Democracy and Governance, Environment and Climate Change, Health and HIV/AIDS, Humanitarian and Social Affairs, Migration and Freedom of Movement, Peace and Security, Trade and Investment, Women and Gender, Youth and Employment and Regional and Continental integration (WACSOF, 2012). Since its formation in 2003, WACSOF has gone through changes to position itself as one of the leading platforms for civil society engagement in West Africa. However, it is not the only platform on which post-2015 type engagements have occurred. GCAP has also provided a useful avenue.

GCAP is the Global Call for Alliance against Poverty. It is one of the world's largest civil society networks committed to challenging the institutions and structures that perpetuate poverty and inequality. In line with this objective, GCAP has an active portfolio dedicated to the post-2015 development agenda. It has organized consultations on the theme in more than 40 countries around the world. Perhaps, one of the most significant contributions of GCAP to the post-2015 development agenda was the "Dakar Declaration," (African CSO Dialogue, Strengthening Citizens Voices in the Rio+20 and Post 2015 Processe) which envisioned strengthening citizens voices in the Rio+20 and post-2015 processes. Hosted in Dakar, Senegal on May 14, 2012, the African CSO Dialogue on preparations towards Rio+20 and post-2015 development agenda, made some interesting recommendations, including integrating the processes leading to the two agenda and ensuring they become mutually reinforcing. The more specific post-2015 focused recommendations called for an inclusive and accessible process; reduction in corruption and increase in domestic income by African governments to make more funding available for the new development agenda. It also called for "transparency, inclusion of affected communities and judicious management of land, mineral and other natural resources and income derived from them" as a means of conserving the environment and making available resources to sustain development. For its part, civil society undertook to work with governments at all levels to implement all recommendations.

The International Forum of National NGO Platforms (IFP) has been committed to the fight against inequalities. It is a network of national NGO platforms and regional NGO coalitions committed to a fight against inequalities and contributing to development, peace and justice. Its platforms are spread across four continents. It has partnered with GCAP and Beyond 2015 in the formulation of a position for a universal and inclusive post 2015 agenda (International Forum of National NGO Platforms, 2013).
Towards a post 2015 agenda, IFP has recommended that:
-       A rights based approach to the post 2015 development agenda would facilitate the full realisation of potential without leaving anyone behind

- Commitment of a broad spectrum of actors would guarantee the mitigation of the effects of climate change on vulnerable populations.
- Promoting food security, which could potentially take people out of poverty.
- An enabling environment for the participation/inclusion of civil society in defining, implementing and monitoring social and environmental projects.

To ensure that recommendations made at the conclusion of this study take into cognizance the existing efforts at engagement between WACSOF, ECOWAS and civil society in West Africa and efforts toward meeting MDG's and the post 2015 sustainable development agenda, we assess the achievements and opportunities in WACSOF's role while identifying weaknesses and threats in the next section.

3.1   Achievements and opportunities

WACSOF has achieved regional recognition as one of the platforms for engagement between CSOs in West Africa and ECOWAS. As earlier discussed, WACSOF's status is recognized by the regional framework for conflict prevention in West Africa (CCP-AU, 2012). Second, WACSOF has also been involved in peace processes in West Africa. For example, WACSOF fed the ECOWAS Commission with the civil society views and analysis on the Tuareg rebellion in North Niger and Mali. Third, WACSOF has been proactive in issues affecting the region. For instance, WACSOF recently issued a press release on the threat of the Ebola Virus Disease in West Africa and called for 'massive awareness and sensitization by governments, civil society and the media to create well-informed communities and individuals on the causes and prevention of the Ebola Virus. In addition, WACSOF also demanded for medical support from advanced nations to achieve technological know-how to curtail existing and future outbreaks (WACSOF, 2014). Furthermore, WACSOF issued a strong worded press release when Boko Haram insurgents kidnapped over 200 school girls from Chibok Girls' Secondary School, in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria. WACSOF argued that the regional nature of conflicts and terrorist threats in the West African region necessitated a united front and common purpose among ECOWAS member states to deal with the increasing cases of insecurity and destruction of lives and properties (WACSOF, 2014). Fourth, WACSOF in collaboration with the Electoral ssistance Unit of ECOWAS and the Network of Electoral Management Bodies in the region are working to facilitate the harmonisation of the electoral processes in West Africa. In addition, WACSOF is exploring the possibility of countries sharing some electoral equipment that may ordinarily be very costly for poor countries in the region (WACSOF, 2012).

Also of significance is the role of the GCAP thus far. GCAP has established itself as a leader in the global effort to craft a post 2015 development agenda. In this regard, GCAP has engaged in one of five ways namely:
- Thematic consultations; which have seen GCAP leading/facilitating conversations around issues such as governance, youth, inequality etc.
- National consultations
- High level panels
- Online engagements; GCAP has been working, alongside other CSO groups, to provide content for the UN online effort: "The World We Want 2015 website."
- Developing a coherent CSO narrative including the voices of the ordinarily unheard (Global Call to Action Against Poverty, 2013)

    The IFP has recorded among other achievements multiple positions at the international level and inclusion of its recommendations in the post 2015 agenda. The strengthening of cooperation of civil society actors on issues /themes of common interest as evinced in IFP's collaboration with GCAP and Post 2015 development framework.

IFP believes that the collaborative efforts in the design of a post 2015 agenda has by itself created an opportunity to contribute to economic, social and environmental transformation. At the same time, it has provided individuals with the opportunity to participate in the creation of equitable societies (International Forum of National NGO Platforms, 2013).

3.2   Identified weaknesses and threats

WACSOF is generally regarded as an elitist CSO with little grass root support in West Africa. This means that there are several factors that have impeded WACSOF from performing optimally in its interventionist roles in West Africa. For example, Professor Oumar Ndongo (CCP-AU, 2012) argues that WACSOF was created by actors at the top echelon of the society such as actors from ECOWAS, international organizations and the diaspora, hence, the process trickling down of the vision, mission and structures of WACSOF to the grassroots and at the national levels has been fraught with severe challenges. This has impaired the effectiveness and efficiency of WACSOF with regards to its engagement of the ECOWAS as well in its thematic interventions in West Africa (CCP–AU, 2012). Funding is a major issue affecting the activities of WACSOF. In addition, there seems to be a lack of clarity on the role of WACSOF in ECOWAS. The fact that ECOWAS funds WACSOF means its independence may be a serious issue. Furthermore, Professor Ndongo argues that there is unhealthy competition for space of engagement within WACSOF, difficulty to harmonise actions of civil society to speak with one voice, linguistic differences and differing colonial experiences which manifest in difficulty in ensuring that representational structures reflect the diversity in the region (CCP-AU, 2012).

4.0 IDENTIFICATION OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

It seems a way forward is to rethink the role of WACSOF within ECOWAS and how it can deliver on the promise of robust civil society engagement in West Africa. Although its activities are commendable, there is still room for improvement. This means that WACSOF should commence exploring partnerships with the private sector, the academia and the media. Although these partnerships may not offer all the answers to the questions of the effectiveness of WACSOF in today's West Africa, it will be a good start. As long as WACSOF's funding is tied to the activities of ECOWAS, its independence and objectivity will be an issue.

5.0   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The post-2015 development agenda offers the most significant opportunity to advance development in West Africa. However, to do better than the MDGs' framework, the post-2015 agenda must:

1. Avoid the top-bottom approach to development by reflecting the priorities of civil society and other actors in the region

2. Make partnership between states, civil society, bilateral and multilateral development agencies and other relevant institutions an important pillar of the development efforts

3. Create equal stake holding between the developed and developing world in the sense that every country should owe an obligation to promote the development agenda within and beyond their territories

4. Create more measurable goals, for instance – get 10% of children currently out of school back to school or lift 10% more women out of poverty in the developing world by providing education, skills and support to make them self-sufficient

5. Develop a framework for feedback on annual basis so the agenda can be adjusted, if necessary and

6. Develop a framework for monitoring, evaluation and reporting, not just by governments, but also by non-governmental institutions. Regional CSOs like WACSOF should develop partnerships with the academia, the private sector and the media to enhance activities and service delivery

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