

**AN EVALUATION OF ECOWAS FIRST  
PEACEKEEPING OPERATION IN WEST AFRICA:  
THE CHALLENGES OF ECOMOG MISSION IN  
LIBERIA**

**By**

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ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) whose mission or intervention in Liberia raises a number of questions about the intervention of regional organisations in the internal affairs of countries within a region. One critical question that has been raised, concerns the *legality* of the intervention of West African regional economic organisation ECOWAS, using West African regional peace-keeping force ECOMOG, in the resolution of West African regional political conflict in Liberia.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervention in Liberia has been justified on a number of different grounds and one clear and sound justification was based on the so called *spill over* effects of the war; “with the crisis in Liberia creating unbearable refugee problems for Sierra Leone, Ghana, the Gambia, Guinea, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast, it is obvious that the situation in Liberia has gone beyond the boundaries of that country and has ceased to be an exclusive Liberian

question” (*General Erskine in Africa Forum, Vol.1, No.1, 1991:27*).

However, there is no support in international law for the idea that a country which creates a refugee problem has caused a threat to international peace and security which permits intervention; (*Clark Arend and Robert Beck, 1993:55*).

Another justification for the ECOMOG intervention was based on the argument of *humanitarian intervention*. The Liberian civil war was noteworthy for the massive violations of human rights on both sides, the incidents of mass starvation and the displacement of about one half of the total population of 2.2 million. Under these circumstances, the then Chairman of ECOWAS, General Ibrahim B. Babangida of Nigeria, justified the intervention as an action that was necessary “to prevent Liberia, a member state of ECOWAS, from sinking further into anarchy and destruction” (*West Africa, 26<sup>th</sup> November –2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1990*).

However, a review of international practice and the consensus of international legal authority showed the traditional view to be that; humanitarian concerns cannot legally be used to justify intervention either by individual states or international organisations, (*Reed and Carl Kaysen, 1993*).

The third and most important justification advanced by the ECOWAS leadership was that the intervention was a duty of the regional organisation prescribed by the 1981 *ECOWAS Mutual Defence Protocol*. According to Article 16 of the Protocol, the head of state of the member country under attack may request

action or assistance from the community, **(ECOWAS Mutual Defence Protocol, 1981:9-13)**.

It has been cautiously observed that the then leader of Liberia, President, General or Sergeant Samuel Doe did request military assistance but not from ECOWAS directly. Rather, he requested for a military assistance from a brother military head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria for 2000 troops to help him squash the Liberian rebellion. It was then General Babangida who took the issue of mutual defence assistance to ECOWAS.

More important than the legality of the ECOWAS mission, there are also questions about the performance of the operation. It has been expected that ECOWAS had several options open to it or at its disposal, as an instrument of conflict management and resolution. These options include peacekeeping (arresting the situation, containment), peacemaking (mediation and conciliation), provision of humanitarian assistance and peace enforcement. ECOWAS via ECOMOG was involved in all these activities. In order to determine or evaluate the success of these operations, it is necessary to assess the performance of ECOMOG, in which case the criterion to be used in this assessment is whether the intervention of ECOMOG was successful in creating a condition leading to;

- a)** A reduction in the intensity and the duration of the violence.
- b)** A facilitation of the provision of humanitarian assistance and
- c)** The emergence of an equitable, peaceful and secure resolution to the conflict.

## **Peacekeeping**

Based on the fact that ECOMOG soldiers were deployed in Liberia with “ambiguous mandate of peacekeeping” and there was no peace to keep on their arrival coupled with insufficient number of troops (3500) for the operation and lack of coordination between ECOMOG Force Commander and ECOWAS Headquarters, the initial mission of ECOMOG in the Liberian crisis was directed at negotiating a cease-fire and separating warring factions with a view to creating that absent **“peace”** for the peacekeepers to keep. Viewed in terms of this objective, the initial cease-fire that was established between November 1990 and October 1992 should be seen as a success. At least, ECOWAS increased the number of ECOMOG soldiers from 3500 to 6000 which relatively stopped the combatants from active fighting and created a condition which eliminated some of the more grotesque human rights violations, even though there were sporadic violations on all sides, **(US Country Report, 1991:192)**.

With the signing of the Cotonou Agreement, ECOWAS entered into a new phase of peacemaking in collaboration with the United Nations and the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU). Although there were still some problems, the process of disarmament and the installation of the new interim government seemed to be moving forward. However, the desire and efforts of ECOMOG to contain the Liberian conflict were unsuccessful until February 1993 when the UN and ECOWAS were able to impose and enforce an effective arms embargo on Liberia; **(West Africa, 8<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> March 1993:369)**.

In March 1991, the Liberian civil war spilled over into Sierra Leone, when Charles Taylor's rebel group National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) elements made incursions into Sierra Leone. In a few months, the NPFL had captured about 25% of Sierra Leonean territory, prompting Nigeria and Guinea to send troops to repel them. On May 29 of the same year, another rebel group United Liberation Movement of Liberia for democracy (ULIMO) was formed in the Guinean capital Conakry and quickly became one of the main factions in the war operating out of Sierra Leone and Guinea; **(West Africa, 7<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1992:151).**

Until January 1993, ECOWAS was unable to isolate Charles Taylor diplomatically and ECOMOG was unable to stop him from acquiring weapons for maintaining his rebel insurrection. At the very beginning, it was clear that Charles Taylor had the active support of Felix Houphouet Boigny in Ivory Coast, Blaise Compaore in Burkina Faso and Col. Muamar Gaddafi in Libya. In addition, he was able to obtain the cooperation of some overseas business interests, particularly in France and United States who helped to finance his war machine **(West Africa, 25<sup>th</sup> -31<sup>st</sup> January 1993:104).**

In addition, ECOWAS was unable to seal-off the Liberian borders and quarantine the war. Due to the open borders, Charles Taylor was able to receive armed shipments through Cote d'Ivoire; **(West Africa, 8<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> March 1993:366).**

After ECOWAS imposed economic sanctions on NPFL held territory on 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1992 and the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo, ECOMOG appears to have at least

been able to isolate Charles Taylor diplomatically and territorially. In the second half of 1992, President Houphouet Boigny began limiting access of Ivorian territory to NPFL military shipments. In November, he actually sent 500 troops to the border to interdict arms supplies to Taylor's forces; (***West Africa, 23<sup>rd</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1993:40***).

Even President Blaise Compaore announced in February 1993 that he was ready to contribute troops to ECOMOG and to abide by all decisions of the Joint Committee; (***West Africa, 8<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1993:209***).

Furthermore, ECOMOG became more successful at monitoring the embargo. Starting in February of 1993, a beefed-up air and naval component of ECOMOG was able to patrol both Liberian land borders and ports. As a consequence, ECOMOG was finally able to do serious damage to Charles Taylor's war making capability, leading to an improvement in his willingness to negotiate rather than fight.

### **Humanitarian Assistance**

From the standpoint of humanitarian assistance, the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia has recorded some successes. Not only that the cease-fire did reduce the number of atrocities, it also created the conditions under which ECOWAS, UN and Relief Agencies could more effectively carry out their operations. Between November 1990 and May 1991, the UN World Food Programme was able to distribute about 14,000 tons of food through the Catholic Relief Services and the Lutheran World Service. Other Agencies that were active in the area were the

Medicines Sans Frontiers, the Swedish Relief Agency and the International Committee of the Red Cross. It has been estimated that by June 1991, some 67 million US\$ worth of emergency assistance had been distributed in Liberia; **(West Africa, 21<sup>st</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1993:162).**

With the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1993 cease-fire, more relief activities returned and increased.

Representatives of relief agencies did report that they were feeling secure enough to resume their work in the Liberian hinterland. It was anticipated that barring a resumption of hostilities, 500 trucks loaded with relief supplies will be sent into the interior every month **(West Africa, 10<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1993:93).**

### **Peacemaking**

In terms of the regional organisation's mandate of mediation and conciliation, ECOWAS had a long string of failures until July 1993. After establishing the ECOWAS Peace Plan at Banjul on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1990, the Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) met three times; at Bamako (27<sup>th</sup> November 1990), Lome (12<sup>th</sup> February 1991) and Monrovia (15<sup>th</sup> March 1991).

At all these conferences, the committee was unable to get Charles Taylor to agree to the Peace Plan. In the face of all these failures, the task of mediation was handed over to the Five Member Committee in the hope that the group headed by the then Ivorian President, Houphouet Boigny would have more influence with the conflicting parties. The Yamoussoukro meetings (30<sup>th</sup> June 1991; 30<sup>th</sup> July 1991; 16<sup>th</sup> September 1991; 30<sup>th</sup> October 1991) and their follow-up meeting at Geneva (6<sup>th</sup> April, 1992) were equally

unsuccessful in terms of cessation of war-war on ground as jaw-jaw were ongoing.

Finally, ECOWAS decided to combine these two committees. The Joint Committee held meetings at Cotonou (19<sup>th</sup> October 1992) and Abuja (7<sup>th</sup> November 1992). However, it did not achieve the desired result in spite of its decision to establish sanctions against the NPFL. It was not until 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1993 that a final cease-fire agreement was successfully signed after intensive negotiations involving both the United Nations and the then OAU (*Inter Press Service: New York, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1993*).

### **Enforcement**

Peace enforcement actively involves superior firepower, enough and superior troops, intelligence and materials to outnumber and subdue the recalcitrant rebels to the negotiation table. ECOMOG seriously lacked these qualities and was initially unsuccessful in its attempt to enforce a peace settlement on the Liberian warring factions, with only 3500 troops without Naval and Air firepower. After the initial stalemate of November 1990, ECOMOG was unable to disarm and encamp the fighters.

This could be one of the latent reasons why ECOMOG could not contain the Liberian crisis within the Liberian borders and the manifest reason why the Liberian political crisis lasted almost seven years.

ECOMOG made several unsuccessful attempts to disarm Charles Taylor's forces, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), yet ECOMOG was unwilling to disarm Yormie Johnson's Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), the

Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and ULIMO forces, since they were fighting side by side with ECOMOG troops against Charles Taylor's NPFL rebels.

Conversely, it was after the siege of Monrovia that ECOMOG adopted an offensive against NPFL rebels which finally led to the destruction of Charles Taylor's war making capability. The major characteristics of this offensive were a massive ECOWAS increase of ECOMOG soldiers from 3500, 6000 and 12,000 coupled with the change of ECOMOG's rule of engagement from "Peacekeeping to Peace Enforcement" and the diversification of those forces to include Air and Naval units capable of sealing Charles Taylor off from potential sources of troops and weapons.

According to ***Lt. General C. I. Obiakor (2013)***, in spite of ECOMOG's initial difficulties, it was able to make a significant contribution to the final negotiations that produced the final settlement via 1996/1997 Liberian General and Presidential Elections, in which ECOMOG also played a noteworthy role before, during and after the inauguration of Charles Taylor as elected President of Liberia.

### **ECOMOG CHALLENGES IN LIBERIA**

Closely viewed in the light of the criterion outlined above, one must conclude that the ECOMOG intervention has been successful. However, there are also indicators which suggest that what ECOWAS achieved in Liberia in six and half years could have been achieved at less cost, time and energy. In particular, there is reason to conclude that due to numerous difficulties that ECOMOG had to face, the intervention has taken much longer

than it needed to take and consequently it had been needlessly costly in lives and further dislocation of the Liberian society.

In this regard, the most serious challenge of ECOMOG was the **inability to contain the conflict** within Liberia and its **spill over or spread** into Sierra Leone and Guinea. If containment had been ECOMOG's top priority from the outset, it might have succeeded in limiting the intensity and duration of the violence.

Another weakness, shortcoming, problem or difficulty of ECOWAS was its two year failure to mediate the Liberian conflict. If ECOWAS had recognised the optimal conditions for mediation it could have attempted to create or maintain those conditions by maintaining its **impartiality and neutrality** through confidence creation and confidence building measures or by precluding unilateral solutions through selected enforcement measures. On the basis of such actions, it could have brought all the warring sides to the negotiating table sooner. It was therefore noteworthy that in the end, the agreement that was worked out with the assistance of the UN was still based on the same conditions on which Charles Taylor had been insisting.

If ECOWAS had not adopted a partisan view of the NPFL, it might have been able to see the value of some of Charles Taylor's earlier demands such as the presence of UN observers.

### **Peacekeeping Challenges**

One of the most important conditions for successful peacekeeping operations is the trust and the cooperation of the warring parties. Specifically, they should indicate a willingness to

stop fighting, establish a cease-fire and welcome the peacekeeping force. The latter condition is based on the ability of the force to gain the confidence of the warring parties with regards to its impartiality, neutrality and legitimacy.

Since Charles Taylor had already declared his determination to fight ECOMOG from the onset, the conditions for successful peacekeeping in the traditional sense did not exist. Nevertheless, after the initial encounter between the NPFL and ECOMOG forces, they were able to conclude the Bamako Accord which maintained the cease-fire for two years, **(Alan, 1993:43)**.

But as the situation unfolded, it became clear that peacekeeping was essentially a temporary solution designed to hold the situation in place, pending a more permanent solution. Typically, both sides of the conflict attempted to use whatever means they could muster, including the manipulation of the peacekeeping forces to improve or consolidate their position. Thus the eventual effectiveness of a peacekeeping force depended not only on freezing the situation but on reducing the capacity of the factions to resume hostilities at the same or at higher level. In that situation, the development of a post cease-fire objective proved to be difficult due to opposing objectives and policies of Nigeria and Ghana on one side and Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso on the other. The resulting lack of consensus had a deleterious effect on ECOWAS mediation efforts and ECOMOG effectiveness.

## **Mediation Challenges**

In order to have a successful mediation, it is imperative that the parties come to the realisation that they cannot impose a unilateral solution to the dispute and that any attempt to do so will result in either an interminable debilitating stalemate or a catastrophic **“precipice”** leading to an abrupt decline in their fortunes.

In the absence of such a realisation, it is the responsibility of the mediator to **“encourage”** them to this conclusion, through actions designed to block unilateral solutions. At the beginning, Charles Taylor was in a strong position, having had control of over 80% of Liberia, he had access to military weapons and materials due to the cooperation of Cote d’Ivoire, Libya and Burkina Faso. Charles Taylor did not see any reason to make concessions to anybody. He was therefore confident and ever determined not to loose what he had already won on the battle field at the conference or negotiation table.

On the other hand, Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) controlled only the area around Liberian capital, Monrovia. However, its security was being guaranteed by ECOMOG. Also, it had a sort of legitimacy based on its recognition by ECOWAS, the OAU and the UN. This gave IGNU a sense of security which encouraged it to be equally uncompromising.

From the analysis of Dr. H.P. Golwa (2012), the Director General of Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja, he noted that;

ECOWAS having created IGNU, ECOMOG had no choice but to support IGNU. Therefore, by its own actions, ECOWAS encouraged IGNU to believe that it was the legitimate government of Liberia and therefore it did not have to make any concessions to the NPFL of Charles Taylor.

Thus by its own actions, ECOMOG was not able to get the warring parties to recognise the stalemate or the precipice which they would have had to endure if they persisted in their attempts to impose unilateral solution.

Another responsibility of a mediator is to make proposals regarding the resolution of the conflict. This requires that the mediator be able to win the trust of the parties. ECOWAS was never able to win the confidence of Charles Taylor and his NPFL rebel group within and outside Liberia.

Right at the outset, Charles Taylor rejected ECOMOG as a Nigerian attempt to come to the assistance of President Samuel Doe and was bent on defeating Samuel Doe at the battle field.

Dr. Golwa (2012) was also of the view that:

Under the circumstances, Charles Taylor's refusal to disarm his troops under the supervision of ECOMOG is understandable. The circumstances and lesson of the murder of President Samuel Doe after he had allowed his men to be disarmed by ECOMOG troops was not lost on Charles Taylor.

In-spite of Taylor's suspicions, he was willing to present alternative proposals. For instance, he offered to have his commanders disarm his men and secure the weapons, pending

the agreement of ULIMO, INPFL and other factions to disarm too. He also offered to disarm and en-camp his men but only under the auspices of the United Nations. Both of these offers were rejected ECOWAS led ECOMOG.

The unwillingness of ECOWAS to consider these offers seriously and offer them to IGNU as viable proposals not only deprived the parties of the opportunity to consider other proposals but confirmed Charles Taylor's super conviction, that the purpose of the entire exercise was to eliminate him. Thus the mediation efforts of ECOWAS were also carried out under less than supportive conditions.

In that fluid situation, the difficulties faced by the decision-making process were compounded by the lack of institutional and procedural frameworks within ECOWAS for the peaceful settlements of disputes. Both the Standing Mediation Committee and the Committee of Five were ad hoc.

Furthermore, the insistence of the West African Heads of State on making all these decisions at ECOWAS summit meetings coupled with the absence of permanent committees which slowed down the decision making as it regards whether it should concentrate on mediation and conciliation or whether it should recommend to ECOWAS the imposition of proposals on the opposing sides through collective measures.

Decision making was further slowed down by the vacillation of committee members between monitoring, disarmament, encampment and enforcement. In the absence of consensus among the ECOWAS members, the warring factions were given a

great deal of opportunity to play off ECOWAS against the United Nations, **(Newswatch, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1997)**.

Thus, a great deal of the blame for the diplomatic impasse in the early years of the crisis should go to ECOWAS and ECOMOG, for its inability to create the conditions under which all the warring factions would and should be motivated to negotiate in good faith.

### **Enforcement Challenges**

In the realm of enforcement, ECOMOG was also plagued by some difficulties. The three conditions associated with success in enforcement action are:

- a. The existence of a leader willing to take responsibility for directing the enforcement action,
- b. A quick identification of the target of the enforcement action
- c. The ability of the group to attack the target with a force superior to that of the target and its allies, **(Zartman, 1989:268)**.

Until November 1992, ECOMOG had not been able to fulfil this role of an enforcement machine due to a number of political problems. Chief among these was the challenge of arriving at a consensus on the three criteria indicated above.

It was clear from the beginning that Nigeria had taken on the role of the leader in originating and orchestrating all the ECOWAS activities. With regard to ECOMOG, the operation was initiated by Nigeria, mostly paid for by Nigeria and overwhelmingly manned by Nigerian troops.

Also Nigeria almost conducted all the diplomatic activities surrounding the operation, including the sending of emissaries to the various West African capitals to encourage their cohesion, making representations to the United Nations and making requests for assistance to the USA, UK, the former USSR, France etc.

The high and heavy-handed “way and manner” in which Nigeria led the ECOMOG coalition was a source of considerable annoyance for some of the ECOWAS member nations. It was rumoured that one of the members of the Mediation Committee charged in anger that ECOMOG... is nothing but a convenient camouflage for an effective Nigerian war machine.

After Nigeria unilaterally replaced Lt. General Arnold Quainoo of Ghana with the Nigerian Major General Joshua Dogonyaro as ECOMOG Force Commander in Liberia, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Ghana complained bitterly that such decision should have been made collectively. President Soglo of Benin is reported to have claimed “that Nigeria has taken over ECOMOG and that ECOWAS was too divided to have a common policy for a peaceful resolution of the problem” (*West Africa, 3<sup>rd</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> May, 1993:25*).

The visible lack of consensus on the identification of the target of enforcement action is only one aspect of a general lack of consensus on the outcome that ECOWAS wanted to achieve and the strategies that they considered appropriate. Thus, as the situation unfolded and some of the internal actors were eliminated or changed their positions, it became difficult to make adjustments regarding the objectives of the force, the character of

the force and the relationship between the force and the major internal actors. The consequence of this type of confusion is responsible for the awkward position that ECOMOG found itself in, fighting alongside AFL, ULIMO, INPFL and LPC which were among the warring factions in the Liberian crisis.

The lack of in-depth knowledge of Liberia's historical background including their demography, political, economic and psycho-social development made ECOMOG, which took on the Liberian political and security challenge a few months after the initial outbreak of the conflict **“grossly underestimated”** the war in all its ramifications and never expected that the intervention would be long and a very difficult task.

Given that the immediate cause of the conflict was NPFL's guerrilla incursion into Liberia, ECOWAS envisaged, in the words of Clement Adibe (1993), “a short, surgical police action”, (***Third World Quarterly, Vol. 18, No. 3***).

This ECOWAS perception of the Liberian conflict probably explains its approach to the ECOMOG intervention.

Part of the problem with the determination of force levels was due to the limited resources of the ECOWAS members. It was evident from the onset that many ECOWAS member states only had a small number of troops that they could spare for the operation. Indeed, some of them agreed to the operation on the basis of the expectation that only a few men would be needed to accomplish the peacekeeping mission. Also, even if they had the troops, many of the ECOWAS countries were handicapped by the fact that they did not have the resources to finance even the 50

million US Dollar initially estimated as the cost of the operation, since their own economies were in extreme difficulty; (***Africa Research Bulletin, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1993:98***).

The lack of resources has become a recurring example of a serious problem that all international organisations have to face. This is particularly true, noticeable and traceable to regional organisations like the ECOWAS, EAC, SADC and AU which have members with extremely limited resources. It was clear that without the heavy investment of Nigeria in men and material, the entire ECOMOG operations could not have been mounted and sustained. That situation posed a serious problem for ECOMOG.

While it made it easier for Nigeria to adopt a leadership role, it also made it easier for Nigeria not to be appreciated, which created bad blood, envy and animosity on the part of other ECOWAS member states.

What was needed in those situation was a delicate and diplomatic style of leadership which should be sensitive to the interests and feelings of other ECOWAS member states and therefore, has the capacity to achieve real consensus. As it was evident, this was difficult for Nigeria to do.

Another solution to the problem of meagre resources is to raise funds from outside ECOWAS. This was recognised at the time ECOMOG was created and ECOWAS led by Nigeria has continued to solicit and receive some financial support from outside the region, particularly from the United States. This situation also has its problems. There is always the danger that the entire

peacekeeping operation could be controlled by the outside powers that were paying for it, would hijack and dictate the operation.

Some of the political problems of ECOWAS were manifested at the level of Field Commanders (FC). According to the Protocol, the Field Commander was directed to work with the competent authority in the country where the operation was proceeding **(Article 9)** or the Chief of Defence Staff **(Article 14:2)**.

This was a distinct problem for ECOMOG. At the time the force was deployed, President Samuel Doe was technically the head of state. However, it was clear that the Force Commander, Lt. General Arnold Quainoo decided very quickly that President Doe should be forced to resign. Whether this was based on his orders or not is not clear. It may be that in the absence of a clear-cut decision at the political level, the Force Commander made his own decisions. Immediately afterwards, it became clear that such decision was contrary to the objectives of the Nigerian government which was committed to Samuel Doe at the time.

After Samuel Doe's death, Lt. General Quainoo's successors had some difficulty deciding who to take orders from. There was no Chief of Defence Staff and there was no government in Liberia until ECOWAS created the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU). Under these circumstances, the Field Commander had to decide on an ad hoc basis, how to react to the changing conditions in the field, while trying not to fall afoul of the political leaders in ECOWAS especially Nigeria. For instance, when General Joshua Dogonyaro took over from General Quainoo, he was under Nigerian orders to "inject more vigour into ECOMOG

operations.” However, after engaging the forces of NPFL and INPFL and pushing them back, he was instructed by Amos Sawyer to stop, (*The Guardian*, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1991).

### **Challenges of Internal Conflicts**

The problems that ECOWAS faced as an international organisation were compounded by the fact that the Liberian conflict was internal with “strong seated and deep rooted” **ethnic components and colourations**. Ethnic conflicts usually have a zero-sum character about them, with extremely high passions, fuelled by fundamentalists with primordial animosities and complicated by ethnic patterns of deprivation.

In such situations, warring groups usually see themselves as being involved in a protracted struggle, the high point of which is to seize the governmental apparatus for the benefit of their ethnic kinsmen, at the expense of other ethnic groups. Under such circumstances, negotiated promises are fragile, not only because they are seen as temporary negotiating ploys, but also because most leaders who make such promises have less than complete control over their followers.

Thus, in international conflicts, cease-fires are used by the factions to reinforce their positions and to consolidate the diplomatic and material support of their external allies. In addition, these factions attempt to co-opt peacekeeping forces to their cause, and these forces are in turn almost compelled by the fluidity of the local conditions to take or be seen as taking sides, thus severely compromising their role as mediators. Ethnic

conflicts have such longevity that it is extremely difficult for outsiders to develop and implement solutions without an intimate understanding of the history of the society involved. Peacekeeping forces have seldom this historical background and as such relatively lacks, understanding of the mission area and environment.

Furthermore, beyond ECOWAS legality and justifications for and against ECOMOG intervention, another question concerns the prudence of the operation. If the Government of Liberia had in fact requested assistance as the ECOWAS Protocol of 1981 actually demanded for, should ECOWAS have responded with the intervention?

After all, the United States with long history of mutual economic and defence pacts with Liberia declined the invitation to intervene, notwithstanding over 2000 US Marines off the Liberian Coast. They preferred to “watch from a distance” over their strategic interests which included the Omega Navigation System and the Voice of America, their largest station in Africa, **(Akabogu, 1992:73-93).**

According to ECOWAS Defence Protocol, community action is required in a case of an internal armed conflict which is “engineered and supported actively from outside” which is likely to endanger the security and peace of the community (Article 4). As in the case of the Security Council of the United Nations, this is open to political interpretation and as such very “relative”. The question of what is a danger and what constitutes danger to the peace and security of ECOWAS is difficult enough. The question as to whether the conflict is “engineered... from the outside” is

even more vague and therefore open to all sorts of political, religious, legal and ideological interpretations. The case of ECOMOG demonstrates the type of bizarre situation in which the regional organisation could find itself, when some of the ECOWAS countries that were providing support to Charles Taylor from outside, like Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso were also members of the “mediating committees and peacekeeping operations”.

- a. What are they mediating?
- b. Where is the morality of keeping the peace during the day and taking the peace at night?
- c. How can ECOMOG troops be expected to keep the peace in Liberia with “Double Agents” as their Heads of State and Government?
- d. Why participating in ECOMOG operations in Liberia when there is no loyalty to ECOWAS and sincerity of purpose?

Another issue is the possibility that ECOMOG may be used by some ECOWAS states to shore up dictatorial regimes that are faced with popular insurrections. It is a well known fact that an “embattled or besieged regime” can easily cite outside intervention as the source of all its problems. Such a state may be able to involve ECOWAS in collective action against even popular internal revolution (***Burkhalter and Omaar, 1996:28***). Conversely, it may be argued that the ECOMOG operation in Liberia was not only a mechanism for the resolution of internal conflict but one which was intended to go beyond that. In short, ECOMOG was a foreign intervention to impress and impose

democracy on Liberia. The idea of intervention to “restore” democratic rule as in the case of the US invasion of Panama, is legitimate on the basis of a principle of popular sovereignty, has been advanced by some writers, **(Imobighe, 1990:172)**.

However, the argument has been found by most international legal scholars to be without merit, **(Olonisakin, 1996:35-51)**.

The notion that a group of countries headed by military dictatorships have the right to intervene in another country being led also by a military head of state in order to establish a democratic government is grotesque. The notion that these undemocratic countries can in fact achieve that objective by the application of outside force in collaboration with United Nations and established western democracies like France, UK and USA is democratically retrogressive, worryingly unthinkable and morally unacceptable which could be cited and counted as precedence in the future.

This is not to suggest that there should be aversion to the use of regional organisations in the resolution of regional and internal conflicts. There is certainly a role for them. First, even taking into consideration all the problems of collective decision-making, these operations are preferable to unilateral intervention. Second, for a variety of reasons, universal institutions for the management and resolution of internal conflict may not be available and practicable.

## **ECOMOG AND REGIONAL POLITICS**

From all indications, it was clear that Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso initially rejected the ECOWAS peace plan for Liberia and they were later joined in their opposition by other Francophone countries in the region namely Togo and Mali. This division had very serious repercussions not only for the performance of ECOMOG in Liberia but also its stance as a neutral force working to restore peace to the beleaguered country.

**Robert Mortimer (1996:162)** notes that “the multilateral, but Nigerian-dominated force is more a classic study of competing national interests in the West African sub-region than a case study in regional peacekeeping.”

In this regard, **Howe (1993:145-176)** argues that political tensions and ineffectiveness within regional organisations like ECOWAS are often a reflection of linguistic and political rivalries. Within ECOWAS two sub-regional cleavages; the Francophone/Anglophone divide and Nigeria’s military and economic preponderance created difficulties for ECOMOG. Each is considered in turn. From the outset of the conflict the perennial Anglophone/Francophone rivalry was influential, **(US Council on Foreign Relations, 1993:165)**.

The Francophone countries in West Africa vehemently opposed the intervention, which they viewed as a tool for furthering Anglophone domination in the region. According to Peter de Costa **(West Africa, 1<sup>st</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> October 1991:25)**, the Francophone countries saw the ECOWAS Peace Plan as an “Anglophone road show.”

As a consequence, the two leading Francophone countries in West Africa, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast covertly supported Taylor's NPFL. Burkina Faso is alleged to have supplied arms to Taylor's rebels while Ivory Coast allowed the rebels free transit across its border into Nimba County in Liberia. According to **David Wippman (1993:167)**, attempts made in 1990 to place the Liberian crisis on the Security Council's agenda failed, partly because of the Ivory Coast's opposition and partly because the Council's members shared the US view that the problem should be solved by Africans.

For example, on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1990, in a terse message to ECOWAS members, President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso declared his country's "total disagreement" with the intervention. He stated that the Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) had "no competence to interfere in member states' internal conflicts, but only in conflicts breaking out between member countries." He warned of "an eventual expansion of the internal conflict, which could break out among member countries if an intervention force is sent to Liberia against the will of the Liberian people" (**BBC Report, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1991**).

Thus, without full political support and unity of purpose from the members of the sub-regional organisation, the diplomatic initiative of ECOWAS was bound to encounter serious difficulties as it did. For Charles Taylor, regarded as being arrogantly intransigent by ECOWAS, he had, after all, sympathisers within the same regional organisation. This could be both latent and manifest reasons, why ECOMG's conflict resolution efforts in Liberia took almost seven years

Finally, this academic paper is assessing the efforts and weaknesses, obstacles problems or the challenges of ECOMOG at resolving the conflicts in Liberia which was championed by ECOWAS, a regional economic organisation that transformed itself over time, in realisation of the fact that; regional peace and security constitutes the essential platform for any meaningful economic development.

The methodology of ECOMOG's involvement in conflict resolution has been through intervention, peace enforcement and peacekeeping. The applications of these methodologies have produced mixed results with specific regards to conflict resolution. In Liberia, ECOMOG applied all the methodologies which led to disarming the rebels and subsequently the conduct of general elections that ushered in the democratic presidency of Charles Taylor.

It is therefore unimaginable what the fate of Liberia and its immediate Mano River neighbours: Sierra Leone, Guinea, Senegal etc; who were swamped and overrun by hordes of foreign and Liberian refugees, would have been today had ECOMOG not been established to help bring peace to Liberia.

The fact that the "Liberian Crisis" took nearly seven years for ECOMOG which operated at all times under the firm political control of ECOWAS, to finally succeed in creating an environment which made the conduct of 1997 general and democratic elections throughout Liberia possible, underscores how intractable and difficult the prospects for peaceful resolution of the conflict had been.

Let us take a walk through memory lane and see how ECOMOG troops helped to sharpen the resolve of ECOWAS leadership and so helped to shape the eventual and inevitable outcome of the Liberian conflict. Indeed, without the ECOMOG interventions, it would have been a different ball game in Liberia as the popular saying goes.

ECOMOG's modest achievements underscored the need for closer regional cooperation in economic, political and security spheres. In retrospect, it may be argued that had ECOMOG been in place earlier, the Liberian crisis would not have been prolonged and more lives would have been saved.

In addition, the fears and suspicion of some ECOWAS members on Nigeria's sincerity, neutrality and impartiality were laid to rest when Charles Taylor, the principal adversary of ECOMOG, emerged as elected President of Liberia in an election secured and policed by the same ECOMOG soldiers, led by the same Nigerian dominated ECOMOG troops, under the watchful eyes of Nigerian Brig. General Chikadibia Isaac Obiakor as ECOMOG Chief Coordinator, 1997 Liberian General Election.

In spite of controversies over legality, force composition and intention of ECOMOG, the ECOWAS conflict resolution efforts achieved resounding success in Liberia due mainly to the resilience of Nigeria to accept the enormous burden in terms of finance, human and logistic resources.

According to ***Lt. General Obiakor (2013)***, the enviable and excellent performance of Nigeria led ECOMOG forces, stabilised and restored peace, law and order in Liberia within the period of

1990-1997. As he further narrated that; relieved Liberians in expression of gratitude to Almighty God for the return of peace and security to Liberia coined the cliché **“Thank God for ECOMOG”**.

Therefore, the inadequacies and shortcomings of ECOMOG can be said to be structural and logistical. Having been institutionalised in the ECOWAS Mechanism, ECOMOG structure needs to be reviewed with a view to achieving the desired efficacy.

Indeed, ECOWAS is the first regional economic organisation in the world that intervened in a regional political conflict using their home grown regional peace-keeping force popularly known as ECOMOG, which is a rare experiment in the practice of conflict resolution in post Cold War Africa. As such, ECOMOG represented an;

uncommon attempt by African States, to resolve African Conflicts, within African Continent, in the spirit of African Brotherhood, thereby demonstrating African Unity.