



WEST AFRICA PEACE AND SECURITY REPORT

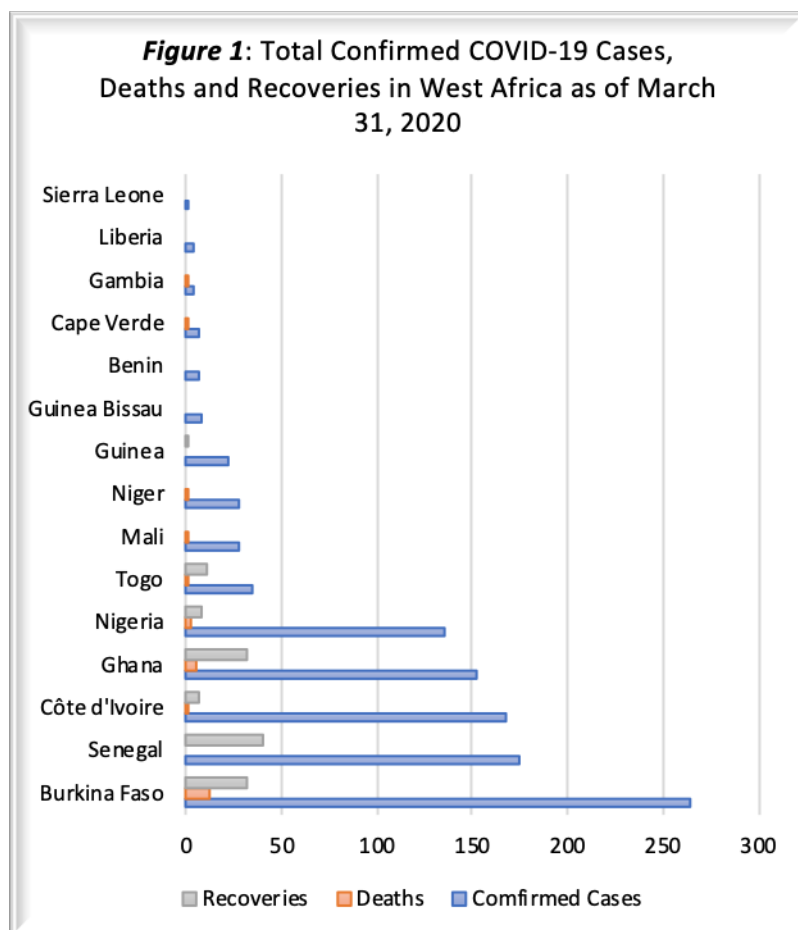
Quarter 1 (January – March 2020)

WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING (WANEP)

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

1.0. Introduction

The first quarter of 2020 has been dominated by the global spread and impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Since the first outbreak of the virus in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, over 777,187 confirmed infections have been reported with cumulated death of 37,911 across the world as of March 31, 2020. The West Africa region has stepped up efforts to contain the transmission of the virus in the region which has spread to all the 15 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). By the end of the first quarter, the region had recorded a total of 1,015 confirmed cases and 27 fatalities as of March 31, 2020¹. Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria have recorded the highest number of more than 100 confirmed cases but with relatively low fatalities, totaling 21. Available data also indicates that Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Togo have the



highest recorded cases of recoveries of 40, 32, 31, and 10 people, respectively, as of March 31, 2020. However, ongoing projections indicate that the region will continue to face an upward curve in the spread and mortality rate from the pandemic due to existing poor health infrastructure and weak capacity to effectively manage the public health standards required to mitigate the pandemic in the region.

Furthermore, the dense urban population across most West African cities is likely to hamper enforcement of social distancing as a measure to curtail the spread of the pandemic. Population

¹See: <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/> (Accessed 30/03/2020).

density as well as the existence of slums across these cities makes it difficult to effect physical distancing in households and neighbourhood.

Also, the region continues to be dogged with incidents of communal conflicts and violent extremist attacks in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mali and Niger with a rise of more than 1.5million new cases of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees as of December 31, 2019². These IDPs and refugees are in camps with little or no water, poor sanitation and limited access to healthcare. These challenges make social distancing, handwashing and other restrictions on human movement ineffective and difficult to enforce. This is also further complicated by the many porous borders and illegal migrant activities which may facilitate cross border transmission in the region. In addition, incidents of transnational organized crimes including kidnapping, human and drug trafficking and proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are reported across the region in the reporting period. Public insecurity was exacerbated by the reported cases of armed robberies, gang and cult violence, especially in Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and The Gambia.

In the governance space, parliamentary elections and referendum to change the Constitution in Guinea was conducted as well as parliamentary elections in Mali despite the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and public protests over the transparency of the election. Fear, anxiety and discrimination among the population have also triggered public demonstrations against lockdown and other COVID-19 preventive measures in the district of Yopougon in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire which led to the destruction of the Coronavirus testing centre while in Nigeria, it led to the death of at least 21 people, especially in Kaduna, Abia, Niger, Katsina, Cross River, Delta and Anambra States³. Similarly, more than 27 police officers were assaulted by some civilians during the lockdown in some of these States⁴.

The pandemic and the associated lockdown by governments in the region also spiked the number of cases of Gender Based Violence. The frequency of domestic violence and child abuses increased significantly leading to advocacies and campaigns by various Civil Society Organisations for the introduction of measures that protect vulnerable children, women and men across the ECOWAS member states.

This report highlights and analyses the key threats to human security recorded across West Africa in the quarter and proffers recommendations for response and mitigation.

²See: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2019/downloads/report/2019-IDMC-GRID-sub-saharan-africa.pdf> (Accessed 11/03/2020).

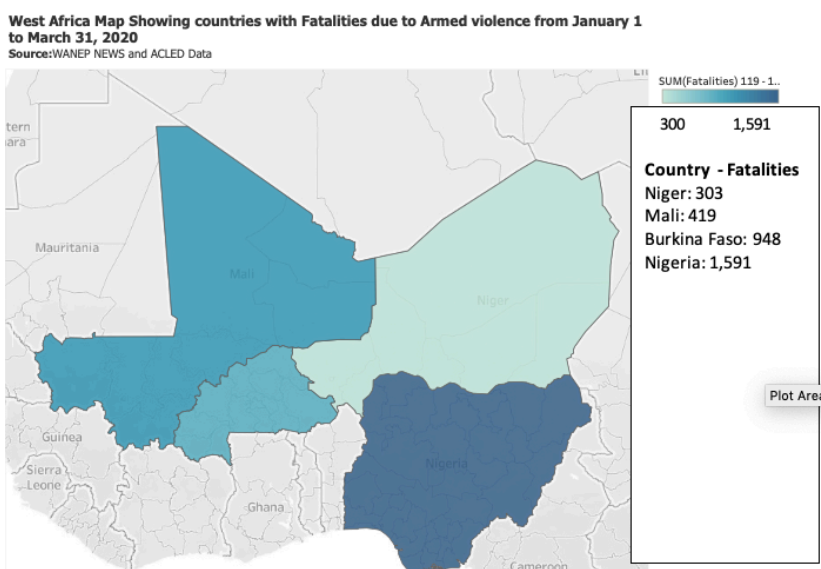
³WANEP NEWS – Nigeria (January – March 2020).

⁴Ibid

2.0. Organized Crimes and Violent Extremism

The prevalence of violent extremism in the region especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria has complicated the effort by these States and ECOWAS to respond to the pandemic. Between January 1 and March 31, 2020, there have been 265 terrorist and armed attacks⁵ with 3,261 fatalities in the region⁶. On the March 23, 2020, the United Nations (UN) called for ceasefires in all corners of the world to halt the spread of COVID-19. However, terrorist and armed groups attacks have not stopped in the Sahel and Nigeria. For instance, Boko Haram killed around 92 Chadian soldiers and wounded 47 people in the village of Boma, in Chad's Lake province, near the border with Nigeria and Niger, while also the Nigerian army was also attacked and about 70 soldiers killed on March 23, 2020⁷. In retaliation, a joint Nigeria-Chad military offensive – operation *colère de Boma* – dislodged Boko Haram from the Lake Chad border⁸.

The humanitarian situation in the affected countries continues to worsen with the increase in IDPs, refugees and migrant flows across the Sahel. For instance, more than 765,000 people, particularly women and children have been displaced with 95 per cent in camps in host communities in Burkina Faso⁹. Over 25,000 people have fled the country as refugees in



neighbouring countries¹⁰. Increased insecurity and violence in Burkina Faso have also forced the closure of 60 health centres, while services in 65 others have been impaired, leaving 626,000 people with limited access to healthcare¹¹. This condition places women and children at risk of health-related diseases which will further aggravate and complicate the ongoing

pandemic in the country. In Niger, violent extremism has led to a total reported figure of 246,000 refugees (mostly from Nigeria and Chad) while 186,000 people who were forced to flee from

⁵ See: WANEP Monthly Bulletins (January – April 2020). Available at www.wanep.org (Accessed 11/03/2020).

⁶ See: <https://acleddata.com> (Accessed 11/03/2020).

⁷ See: <https://www.theafricareport.com/26215/chad-will-stop-fighting-boko-haram-outside-its-borders/> (Accessed 25/03/2020).

⁸ Ibid

⁹ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/burkina-faso/> (Accessed 12/03/2020).

¹⁰ See <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1054981> (Accessed on 12/03/2020).

¹¹ Ibid.

violent extremist attacks have been displaced especially in Diffa, Tillabéri and Maradi¹². Reported figures of displacements in Mali stand at 200,000 displaced persons from the violence in the Central region of Mopti¹³. This also has further implication for peace and security not only in the affected countries but also for neighbouring States in terms of refugee flow, violent extremism and organised crime. In the face of the pandemic, IDP and refugee camps are ideal spaces for the transmission of the coronavirus. Host communities of IDPs and refugee camps located in the Sahel are faced with the challenges of competition for scarce resources such as water, food and land. The sanitation and hygiene protocols are poor which has raised concerns that these areas have higher risks of turning into hotspots of COVID-19 infections and spread. Persistent extremist attacks in Nigeria, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso undermines States responses and capacities to adequately protect citizens from the pandemic in hard-to-reach communities.

Also, increase in public insecurity has been reported in some major cities of the region caused by neighbourhood gangs and criminals who have capitalized on the lockdown to attack and rob homes with limited protection of citizens from security agencies. Between January and March 2020, 509 gang violence and other criminalities occurred in the region with Nigeria recording 301 cases¹⁴. Other countries including Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, The Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo accounted for a total of 208 cases¹⁵. Out of these incidents, death tolls of 915 persons and 538 injuries were recorded¹⁶. Given that there are several recorded hotspots of criminal activities in the period, the risk of criminal groups exploiting the uneasiness created by the lockdown measure to increase their activities is likely. Furthermore, while the resistance of some citizens in the affected areas reveals the economic impact of the lockdown on their livelihoods, on the other hand, it mirrors the seeming trust deficit evident in dwindling State-citizens relations.

The security agencies have also been implicated in human rights abuses, violence and fatalities due to the application of extreme measures to enforce the lockdown orders in some major cities of the region. For instance, the National Human Rights Commission in Nigeria is reported to have received and documented 105 complaints of incidents of human rights violations perpetrated by security forces in 24 states and Federal Capital Territory (FCT)¹⁷. In Senegal, the first night of a nationwide curfew in March 2020 was marred by violence as allegations of police abusing civilians with batons was reported.

¹²See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/niger/overview> (Accessed 12/04/2020).

¹³See: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/mali-votes-long-delayed-parliamentary-election> (Accessed 12/03/2020)

¹⁴WANEP NEWS (January – March 2020). Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed 31/03/2020).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷See: <https://www.nst.com.my/world/world/2020/04/585078/18-killed-nigeria-security-forces-enforce-covid-19-lockdown> (Accessed 31/03/2020).

Incidents of transnational organized crimes including armed robberies, kidnapping, human and drug trafficking and proliferation of arms were also recorded in the quarter. Nigeria recorded 408 cases of kidnapping across the 36 States¹⁸. Within the same period, 41 people were kidnapped in Diffa, Tillabéri and Maradi regions of Niger¹⁹. Burkina Faso recorded five kidnapping incidents and 11 missing soldiers²⁰. By the end of 2019, trends emerging on human trafficking indicated that more than 50 percent of trafficking victims in Sub-Saharan Africa were mostly children from West Africa²¹. Notably, while girls tend to be trafficked mostly for domestic labour, sexual exploitation and prostitution, boys constitute the majority of trafficked children primarily used for forced labour²². This reveals inadequate protection of children and their vulnerability to organized crime networks operating in the region²³.

Other cases of armed attacks including armed robberies, communal, ethnic and cult violence, were also recorded in the reporting period. Between January and March 2020, Ghana recorded at least 67 cases including armed robberies, homicides, and armed aggression among others across the 16 regions of the country²⁴. This resulted in over 24 fatalities and 30 injuries in the affected areas of the country²⁵. According to WANEP NEWS, the Ashanti and Greater Accra Regions are among the key hotspots of organised crimes in the country²⁶. Within the same period, armed robbery, banditry and cult violence accounted for over 781 fatalities in Nigeria²⁷. Other countries including Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, The Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Senegal recorded more than 180 cases and 120 fatalities²⁸. Persistent cases of armed violence reveal a proliferation of arms and weaknesses in regulation and manufacturing of arms in the region.

Available data from *WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS)* for the first quarter also indicate 280 recorded cases of arrest and seizure of drug, especially marijuana, cocaine, opioid, codeine and tramadol mostly among youth populations in Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Guinea, The Gambia and Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Senegal.

Key Resilient Factors

¹⁸WANEP NEWS Nigeria (January – March 2020). www.wanep.org (Accessed 12/03/2020).

¹⁹WANEP NEWS Niger (January – March 2020). www.wanep.org ((Accessed 12/03/2020).

²⁰WANEP NEWS Burkina Faso (January – March 2020). www.wanep.org (Accessed 15/03/2020).

²¹See <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/myths-about-human-trafficking-in-africa/> (Accessed 12/03/2020).

²²Ibid.

²³WANEP NEWS (January – March 2020). www.wanep.org (Accessed 12/03/2020).

²⁴WANEP Monthly Bulletin (January-March, 2020). Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 22/03/2020).

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷WANEP NEWS (January – March 2020). Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed 25/03/2020).

²⁸Ibid.

- Member States have heightened preventive measures such as state of emergencies, lockdowns, curfews and other restrictions. The deployment of security personnel to support and ensure compliance with the lockdown restrictions and police crime hotspots.
- The recent ECOWAS virtual Summit of Heads of States and Governments held on April 23, 2020, on the situation and impact of COVID-19 pandemic in the region. Key among the deliberations of the summit was the reaffirmation by Heads of States and Governments to protect citizens and residents of the Community and combine their efforts to find a lasting solution to the health crisis. A Ministerial Coordination Committees on Health, Finance and Transport was created to coordinate regional efforts to fight the pandemic.
- The level of religious tolerance in Burkina Faso has averted escalation of recent terrorists and violent extremist attacks on mosques and churches from degenerating into inter-religious violence.
- There are some levels of multilateral and bilateral collaboration and cooperation among States in the area of combating transnational organized crimes and terrorism. For instance, on March 31, 2020, the Chadian forces of the Multinational Joint Task Force (NJTF) succeeded in pushing back the Boko Haram insurgency from Chad borders and reportedly killed 1000 of their fighters as they chased them into the Nigerian border.

Recommendations

- ECOWAS and development partners should reinforce bilateral cooperation with G5 Sahel, MNJTF, especially Chad and Nigeria military to stem attacks from Boko Haram and ISWAP;
- There is also the need to create space for robust engagement with CSOs to ensure effective implementation of the action plan (2020-2024) on countering violent extremism, especially in the area of enhancing community resilience.

3.0. Governance and Democracy

The governance landscape in the first quarter was dominated by policy decisions and responses by member states to COVID-19 as well as efforts to respond to community protests against the socio-economic impact of the lockdown. A presidential election was held in Togo on February 22, 2020, while two parliamentary elections were held in Guinea and Mali. A referendum was concurrently held with the parliamentary election in Guinea on March 22, 2020, while the Mali elections was conducted on March 29, 2020. These elections were held despite concerns of the spread of COVID-19 infection. In the Togo presidential election, the incumbent, President Faure Gnassingbé was declared the winner by the Independent Electoral Commission and the country's Constitutional Court with 72% of the vote, compared with about 18% pulled by the leader of

opposition party²⁹. However, the opposition leader, Agbéyomé Kodjo has accused the authorities of widespread fraud in the polls³⁰. President Gnassingbé has been re-elected for his fourth term and under the country's current law, he could remain in office until 2030, if he keeps getting re-elected. Following the constitutional referendum in Guinea, the National Election Commission



President Alpha Condé votes in Constitutional Referendum and Parliamentary Election on March 22, 2020
(Source: <https://twitter.com/alphacondepresi>)

announced a 91.59 per cent of the votes and approved a change in the Constitution to increase presidential term from five to six years with a two-term limit³¹. The referendum sparked renewed protest over suspicion that President Alpha Condé is manipulating the Constitution to extend his tenure in power³². The new constitutional change led to violent demonstrations and clashes between opposition groups such as the National Front for the Defence of the

Constitution (FNDC) and state security. These protests have resulted in the death of at least eight people, including two children, and wounded over 20 others in the country³³. Human Rights Watch reported that security operatives fired teargas and live rounds on protesters on election day, killing at least six people, including one woman.

As the number of COVID-19 infected cases in West Africa continues to increase, Governments in the region have put in place a raft of measures including the closure of the borders (land, sea and air), mandatory quarantines, state of a public health emergency, lockdowns, curfews and other preventive measures to contain the spread of the virus. Many of these measures were adaptations of existing good practices from other countries in the West and China which flattened the curve of spread and fatalities. It reflects how in exceptional emergencies, the urgent need to save lives justifies government's actions and response for the common good of its citizens. This notwithstanding, these measures have not been spared by the politicized acrimony,

²⁹See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51606972> (Accessed 22/03/2020).

³⁰ Ibid

³¹See: <https://www.africanews.com/2020/03/30/guinea-opposition-rejects-referendum-result-pledges-to-respect-2010-constitution/> (Accessed 22/04/2020).

³² Ibid

³³See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/10/guinea-violence-during-referendum> (Accessed 22/03/2020).

especially between Government and major opposition parties, that has become dominant in the socio-economic and political governance landscape of most States in the region.

The pandemic has affected preparations towards the 2020 Presidential elections in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Niger. Owing to the restrictions on movement and other preventive measures introduced to curtail the spread of the pandemic among populations, the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in the various affected countries are challenged to implement scheduled pre-election action plans. The existing social distancing and lockdown poses challenges to electioneering campaigns of political parties given the technological limitations and capacity to explore and fully utilize the digital space for political campaigns. In Ghana, for instance, the Electoral Commission (EC) has halted proposed voter registration process. The Ghana National Identification Authority (NIA) halted its registration exercise which was ongoing before the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic. Disagreements over the new register has also led to tension between the EC and the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and sections of civil society. Also, in Côte d'Ivoire, political parties' pre-election preparations including the primaries and electioneering campaigns have been affected by the pandemic. In Burkina Faso, extremist groups in the North and North East continue to attack and destroy communities despite the nationwide threats of COVID-19. These threats have reinforced government's action to close the border and issuance of Voter ID cards. Political uncertainty has also deepened in Guinea, as results from the constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections are disputed by opposition groups.

Given the limited space of time ahead of the slated elections and the impact of the COVID-19 in the region, there are concerns among stakeholders about the various EMBs capacity to conduct peaceful and credible elections within their current electoral calendar. If the trends in increased cases continue, voter participation is also likely to be affected. This could further be compounded by increased fake news through social media, which continues to heighten fear and panic among citizens ahead of the elections. Importantly, the risk of political challenges before, during and after the elections is also a critical concern that requires stakeholders' attention.

In the reporting period, protests and agitations against the lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions were reported. A total of 97 incidents of protests were reported in the region, especially from Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. For instance, a number of these protests resulted in violence that led to 18 fatalities in Nigeria³⁴ and the destruction of a Coronavirus testing facility in Côte d'Ivoire³⁵. Such hostile attacks on health workers and facilities were also

³⁴See: <https://www.nst.com.my/world/world/2020/04/585078/18-killed-nigeria-security-forces-enforce-covid-19-lockdown> (Accessed 22/04/2020).

³⁵See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52189144> (Accessed 22/04/2020).

recorded during the Ebola outbreaks in West Africa (2014-2016). In Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, people attacked health centres and workers, suspicious that they were bringing the disease to their communities, rather than offering crucial medical care³⁶.

Another trend observed in this emergency period is the growing tension between citizens and the Police over enforcements of the laws and the COVID-19



Residents protest after ransacking a half-built coronavirus testing centre in Yopougon, Abidjan, on April 6, 2020 (© Luc Gnago, REUTERS)

preventive measures. This, to a large extent, stems from fake news and dwindling trust for the State by the citizens. It resulted in mob attacks on Police and State structures, as evident in Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, The Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo. For instance, in Guinea, authorities reported that protesters attacked and injured at least nine members of the security forces, vandalized police vehicles and other public property in March 2020³⁷. In The Gambia, at least 18 paramilitary officers were allegedly injured during a protest action by civilians demanding President Adama Barrow to resign based on the coalition's pre-election agreement that called for a transitional government to prepare for fresh presidential election within three years of being sworn in³⁸. This indicates dwindling public confidence and trust in the State. Given that the Police Service is a symbol of protection of lives and properties in the State, continued trust deficit is a recipe for lawlessness and insecurity that will aggravate the already fragile political stability and human security in most of the countries.

Key Resilient Factors

- State-private partnership and cooperation have also been an integral part of responses. Across the region, individual philanthropists, religious groups, Non-Governmental Organisations and private companies have been donating health equipment, food and financial resources to support governments' efforts to curb the pandemic.

³⁶See: <https://www.africanews.com/2020/04/07/photos-ivory-coast-protesters-destroy-coronavirus-facility-in-abidjan/> (Accessed 22/04/2020).

³⁷Ibid

³⁸See: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/516021501649448939/pdf/117432-WP-P163176-OUO-9-Patricia-Geli-authorThe-Gambia-Fragility-Risk-and-Resilience-Assessment-FINAL-2017-06-27.pdf> (Accessed 10/10/2019).

- Governments in the region introduced and enforced a mandatory 14 days quarantine of all travelers arriving into the country through various borders (land, sea and air) to mitigate community spread of the virus.
- Some Governments have announced economic stimulus packages to reduce the impact of the pandemic on citizens and businesses. For example, Nigeria earmarked additional 1trillion Naira to support the critical formal and informal sector of the economy; Ghana also provided subsidy of electricity and water, in addition to a 600billion Cedis stimulus package earmarked to support the business community.
- The media, both traditional and social media have been playing a critical role in educating and sensitizing the public on safety measures and updating on the current state of the pandemic.
- The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the G20 and Africa Development Bank have endorsed financial stimulus supports, loans and grants to African countries that will alleviate the economic and social impact of the pandemic on the continent.
- There are regional and international actors including ECOWAS, UNOWAS and AU using preventive diplomacy and mediation to address the governance and security challenges in the region. The existing frameworks of these institutions, especially the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and AU Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance are instances of mechanisms to respond to governance challenges in the region.

Recommendations

- The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) to support strategies that would facilitate the successful and peaceful conduct of the 2020 elections in countries such as Guinea, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana;
- ECOWAS, through WAHO, should continuously provide technical and financial support to member states in the fight towards eliminating the virus from the region;
- In collaboration with the international community, the West Africa Governments should initiate policies to address the immediate needs of poor communities and groups whose livelihoods have been impacted by the pandemic as well as support to IDPs and refugees who are at risk of infection of the virus;
- Governments in the region should ensure timely disbursement of stimulus financial packages to cushion the effects of the pandemic on the economy as well as follow up with strategies to ensure transparent and equitable distribution of such packages to the formal and informal sector.

4.0. Gender, Peace and Security

Women and girls continue to suffer varied forms of abuses including Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), especially rape and physical assault. Prior to the first confirmed COVID-19 case in West Africa on the February 27, 2020 in Nigeria, the region recorded a total of 83 incidents related to SGBV and assaults on women and girls³⁹. By the March 31, 2020, more than 280 cases, resulting in 30 fatalities and about 20 injuries were reported in the region, especially in Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, The Gambia, Guinea, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone⁴⁰. This suggests an increase of about 30 per cent in violence against women and girls within a month of implementing the various lockdowns and preventive measures. Notably, these cases continue to increase and heighten women and girls' vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence. In particular, it continues to jeopardize young girls' education largely due to stigmatization and other forms of discriminations that affect their emotional and psychological well-being. The increased cases of SGBV against women and girls in the region reveal weaknesses in the safety nets that protect them in communities, especially during emergencies.

In addition, the pandemic also has implications for the economic security of women in the region. Women make up roughly 85 per cent of the wholesale and retail industries and about two-thirds of manufacturing sector, working mostly at the informal levels of the region⁴¹. In the agriculture sector, 70 per cent of Africa's food is produced by women⁴². The restrictions on movements and partial lockdown measures introduced have a negative impact on the socio-economic roles women play in the informal sector and their families. This is likely to affect household income and livelihoods.

With the ill-equipped healthcare systems across member states, maternal healthcare, sexual and reproductive health and rights are likely to be further compromised as governments in the region prioritize their attention to the fight against the pandemic. For instance, past epidemics, such as the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia have impacted the availability of routine prenatal and maternity care, leaving women more at risk to preventable maternal deaths or morbidities. Also, other lessons learned during the Ebola outbreak indicate high cases of sexual and gender-based violence during lockdowns and quarantine.

Prior to pandemic, schools were closed in communities, regions and States impacted by violent extremism in Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria and Niger. According to the United Nations Office for

³⁹WANEP NEWS (July-September 2019). Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed 30/09/2019).

⁴⁰Ibid

⁴¹World Bank Group, African Region. "Ghana: Women Role in Improved Economic Performance". Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTFINDINGS/Resources/FindingsEnglish/find145.htm> (Accessed on 22/04/2020).

⁴²<http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit/english/fsheets/women.pdf> (30/03/2020).

the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), increased insecurity and violence have forced the closure of 2,024 schools, depriving over 330,000 children of education in the North, East and central regions of Burkina Faso⁴³. Mali had over 800 schools closed, affecting almost 250,000 children many of whom are in the Central region of Mopti⁴⁴. This situation continues to deny children's access to education as well as entrench child labour, early marriage and household poverty in the affected communities. It is further compounded by the indefinite closure of educational institutions in the region for fear of COVID-19 transmission. Even though remedial actions have been instituted through specially designed radio and television programs and e-learning, there are challenges of access due to limited access to reliable internet, the erratic nature of electricity supply in most communities in the region, limited coverage of TV/radio station to urban areas, availability of radio sets at homes and batteries to power them in remote and isolated communities. The weak economic base of most West African states limits their capacity to provide resources to educational institutions to undertake e-learning.

Key Resilient Factors

- The political will and commitments demonstrated by States, especially creating and popularizing Police complain hotlines to respond to SGBV and domestic violence during lockdown and beyond;
- The Governments and education providers have close down schools and universities indefinitely for fear of the spread of COVID-19 resulting in the development of e-learning programs in countries across the region.

Recommendation

- The Governments should support and strengthen alternative medical structures at community level to ensure health security of women including alternative sexual and reproductive health information services during the COVID-19 crisis;
- The Governments, ECOWAS and international partners to mobilize support and additional funding to implement initiatives to end SGBV, improve girls' education and empower women in member states;
- The Governments and education providers should develop gender balanced assessment teaching and listening surveys of the impact of the e-learning in order to rapidly respond to gaps that could mar participation especially on the girl child. It will also enable them to draw lessons to inform future responses during emergencies;

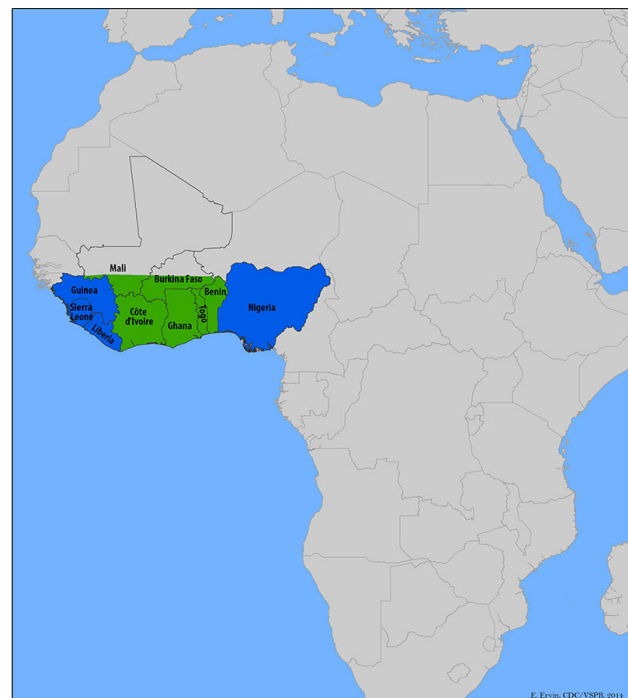
⁴³OCHA, Burkina Faso Situation report, September 11, 2019. Available at: <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/burkina-faso/> (Accessed 11/03/2020).

⁴⁴See: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Mali%20Situation%20Regional%20Update%20-%20April%20-%20June%202019-.pdf> (Accessed 29/03/2020).

- Governments, ECOWAS and development partners should mobilize and direct additional resource (financial and technical) to support micro level businesses and also ensure that women in agriculture and its value chain are provided with incentives to cushion their losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.0. Environmental Security

The environmental security in the region has been affected by COVID-19 at the community level in all 15 ECOWAS countries. This is further compounded by the ongoing impact of Lassa Fever and meningitis epidemics in Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia. Given the weaknesses in the healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural communities, the spread of the pandemic in local communities is likely to be difficult to contain. This places health security of the population, particularly vulnerable groups including the aged and physically challenged at risk of further threat from Coronavirus. Also, given the dense population and poor city planning and development of slums in urban centres of the country which hamper social distancing, the risk of the spread of the pandemic in such areas is likely. Additionally, acute water shortages in urban communities across the region is also likely to undermine the campaign for constant handwashing as a tool to mitigate spread of infection.



Despite the ongoing pandemic, there has been significant reported cases of Lassa Fever and Meningitis. Between January and March 2020, health authorities have also reported more than 906 confirmed cases of Lassa Fever with over 161 fatalities across 27 States in Nigeria⁴⁵. Liberia has also recorded 24 cases of Lassa Fever with nine deaths mainly in Grand Bassa and Bong Counties⁴⁶. Health officials in Ghana confirmed an outbreak of meningitis 'C' in the Upper West, Central, Northern and the Ashanti regions with cumulative record of 409 cases and 40 fatalities⁴⁷. The Upper West region has been identified as

⁴⁵WANEP-Nigeria, *Situation Tracking on COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria, Vol 8*. Available at: www.wanep.org. Accessed on 25/04/2020).

⁴⁶WANEP Liberia Monthly Bulletin (January – March 2020). Available at: www.wanep.org. Accessed on 25/04/2020).

⁴⁷See <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/national/csm-epidemic-equally-demands-urgent-attention-togbe-afede/> (Accessed on 24/04/2020).

the epicentre of the meningitis outbreak with 258⁴⁸ recorded cases and 18 deaths in the first ten weeks of 2020. It represents 150 per cent increase fatalities when compared to four deaths recorded within the same period in 2019⁴⁹. The Ashanti region recorded 15 cases with three fatalities as of February this year⁵⁰, while the Central region recorded 13 cases with three deaths in the Asin South District⁵¹. Despite the higher number of fatalities associated with Lassa Fever and meningitis outbreaks in Nigeria and Ghana, the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have overshadowed the looming threat of these diseases in local communities. Given the increased spread, the threat it poses the countries and the region is significant.

Key Resilient Factors

- Member States have heightened preventive measures and ensured the maintenance of law and order through the introduction of state of emergency legislatures and regulations to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
- There are existing national and community-based environmental and basic healthcare such as community-based environmental advocacy groups, customs and traditional norms, health centres, hospitals and public health awareness services which support the resilience of affected communities.
- Rapid response teams led by health experts in Nigeria, Liberia and Ghana have been deployed to support outbreak response activities. In addition, surveillance, contact tracing, testing and treatment of infected persons have been enhanced in the affected communities.
- There are an ongoing national and international awareness campaigns on the impact of COVID-19, Lassa Fever and Meningitis to the communities in affected countries of the region.

Recommendations

- The Governments of Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia through the West Africa Health Organisation (WAHO) and other relevant agencies, should strengthen community environmental and healthcare delivery structures to adequately respond to threats posed by COVID-19 and other diseases to target communities.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹See <https://allafrica.com/stories/202003170696.html> (Accessed on 24/2020).

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹See <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/2-die-from-meningitis-outbreak-in-ghanas-central-region/> (Accessed on 24/04/2020).

- ECOWAS/WAHO and WHO should intensify coordination and coherence with all countries endemic to Lassa fever and Meningitis on the need to enhance early detection and treatment of cases to reduce the case fatality ratio.
- It is also imperative for Governments to enhance decentralization of responses to COVID-19, Lassa Fever and Meningitis at the local community levels to ensure effective mitigation in respective countries.