



Concept Note
Policy Dialogue on
Regional Economic Communities and Peace Building in the Maghreb,
Sahel and Central Africa
28, 29 September 2017
Rabat-Morocco

Summary and Introduction

The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), in collaboration with the Social Science Research Council-Africa Peacebuilding Network (APN-SSRC), and in partnership with the African Institute for Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation (AIPECT), plans to organize a Two-Day Policy Dialogue on Regional Economic Communities and Peace Building in the Maghreb, Sahel and Central Africa in Morocco. This activity is a follow up to a successfully executed project through a partnership that involved the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), SSRC-APN and the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR). A Two-Day Policy Dialogue was successfully organized in Abuja-Nigeria (1-2 September 2016).

Context, Rationale, and Justification

The increased role of regional organizations in conflict management, peacekeeping and peacebuilding are important features of the emerging post-Cold War system. Given the growing complexity of conflict dynamics and security challenges in the post-Cold war world require greater cooperation and coordination among states within regions. The current waves of globalization are already provoking consensus formation and international coordination on a regional basis. Many national governments are coming together to address problems/threats with cross-border or transnational dimensions such as pandemics, desertification, drought, climate change, HIV/AIDS, drug, arms and human trafficking have further influenced many states to embrace regionalist approaches and mechanisms. This is the context in which the emergence of the African Union

(AU) as an import peace and security actor represents a renewed commitment of African states to the regionalist approach.

The AU recognizes the RECs as officially representative regional associations of African states. Although the RECs were set up primarily to promote economic integration economic integration, they have increasingly taken up a prominent role in conflict resolution and peace support operations as evident in the recent peace processes in Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Mali, Congo DRC, Sudan, South Sudan and elsewhere. The intervention of the ECOWAS in the Liberian crisis was the first experiment with intervention by a sub-regional organization in post-Cold war Africa. It is

interesting to know that the lessons learned from peacekeeping and mediation efforts in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the early years of ECOWAS/ECOMOG contributed to the consolidation of mechanisms for conflict prevention and peace building in West Africa. More recently, the example of the ECOWAS “success story” in peace mediation, peace building and peacekeeping has been replicated by other regional economic communities (RECs) on the continent.

The AU main mechanism for promoting peace and security is the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Its key elements include the Peace and Security Council (PSC), a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Stand-by Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise (PoW) and the Peace Fund. The APSA is designed to function in collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms. The African Standby Force (ASF) is a critical element of the APSA and a major block in the AU’s peace keeping capacity. Article 4 (d) of the Constitutive Act therefore provides for the establishment of “a common defence and security policy for the African Continent”. And the ASF was established in 2003 with responsibility to conduct observation and monitoring missions, other types of peace support missions, intervention in a member state if necessary, preventive deployment, and peace-building including post-conflict disarmament and demobilization. It is not a standing army but it is designed to enable the AU respond with swift deployment of troops on the continent for the preservation of peace and conflict. It has five multinational standby brigades, each hosted by one of five African regions (North, South, East, West and Central).

The five RECs – the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development

Community (SADC) are closely associated with the operations of the ASF. To avoid unwholesome developments in a region where not all countries belong to the same REC, or where countries in a region belong to more than one economic groupings, the AU opted to form Regional Mechanisms for the ASF. For example, AMU could not take over the responsibility for a standby brigade because Egypt is a member of AMU and Morocco until recently was not a member of the AU. Thus, the African Regional Capability (NARC) was formed as the Regional Mechanism for North Africa and the NASBRIG as its standby brigade. The regional force of the ECCAS is known as the Central African Multinational Force (Force Multinationale de l’Afrique Central, FOMAC). It however failed to stabilize the threatening situation in East Africa in early 2013. There were serious capacity gaps and the deployment of a small contingent of 200 additional South African troops did not make much impact ECCAS eventually asked South Africa to withdraw its troops after the latter recorded some casualties.

While appreciable progress has been recorded in the ECOWAS region, a careful examination of the involvement of RECS in regional peace and security processes

in the Maghreb and Central Africa reveal daunting challenges that the RECs are facing. Some of such challenges include the lack of adequate resources and capacity, including weaponry, technical and professional know-how, lack of political will among decisions makers, competing national interests, etc. Resource and capacity deficits partly explain the tendency of African RECs to rely on external funding and technical support. Some analysts note that the dependence on external funding may compromise the integrity, legitimacy and ownership of peace mediation, peacekeeping and peace building processes and operations. The divergence of interests among member states, coupled with the strategic and economic interests of powerful donor states is also capable of undermining the consensus necessary for the effectiveness of the RECs.

The Proposed Activity: Process, Outputs and Deliverables

The records of AMU and ECCAS are not impressive about promoting peace, stability and development in their respective regions are mixed. Despite the challenges, they face, these RECs can be empowered to play important roles in peace mediation, peacekeeping and peace building. This calls for a broad intellectual engagement among scholars, analysts, and policy makers on the status and roles of RECs in relation to regional peace and security in the Maghreb, Sahel and Central Africa with focus on AMU and ECCAS, including exploring new ideas and actions that are likely to strengthen their capacity to effectively address the peacebuilding challenges in the regions.

It is against this background that the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) in collaboration with Social Science Research Council-Africa Peacebuilding Network (SSRC-APN) and in partnership with the African Institute for Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation, will hold a two-day policy dialogue on RECs and peace building in the Maghreb, Sahel and Central Africa. Issues and sub-themes to be addressed include:

- Analysis of Regional Contexts – Conflict Trends, Actors, Linkages, Opportunities and Constraints
- Comparative Perspectives on the Status and Roles of RECs - AMU and ECCAS's status and roles in Regional Peacebuilding
- International Community: Support and Complicity of Global Actors
- Peace and Security Architectures of RECs
- Transnational Actors and Regional Peace and Security in Maghreb, Sahel, and Central Africa
- Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Sahel, Maghreb and Central Africa
- Challenges to provisioning of Public Goods and Regional Security: What prospects for the future?

About 30-45 participants drawn from among researchers, policy makers,

practitioners and representatives of civil society organizations are expected to engage in the two-day policy dialogue. It will include the opening session, 5-6 plenary sessions, and a concluding session that will focus essentially on key recommendations and way forward for the RECs in their mandates. The proceedings of the policy dialogue will be consolidated into a communique, policy briefs and a book length manuscript that will be submitted to NAI.