

# Peace and Conflict Studies

## Humanitarian Intervention and Conflict Resolution in West Africa: From ECOMOG to ECOMIL

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*Humanitarian Intervention and Conflict Resolution in West Africa: From ECOMOG to ECOMIL* is the work of John M. Kabia, a Sierra Leonean. He completed his early education at St Francis Secondary School in Makeni and Government Secondary School for Boys in Magburaka, both in Sierra Leone, in 1989 and 1996, respectively. He proceeded to Fourah Bay College University of Sierra Leone and graduated with a Bachelor's of Arts in History and Politics degree in 2000. Kabia left the shores of Africa to bag Master's (2002) and Doctor of Philosophy (2006) in Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution degrees at the University of Bradford in the United Kingdom. While at the University of Bradford, he served as Associate Research Fellow at the Africa Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and previously worked with a local organization in Sierra Leone helping to reintegrate child soldiers (Editorial Team, 2021). In 2008, he served as a Programme Worker for the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace based in Warrington, United Kingdom. Kabia holds the position of West Africa Program Officer and Program Officer for Thematic Initiatives at the Fund for Global Human Rights where he oversees work on children's rights, corporate accountability and the enabling environment for human rights defenders, and manages funds and organizes outreach programs in West Africa (LinkedIn Kabia, 2021a).

Kabia has more than ten years research and work experience in designing and delivering conflict resolution and peacebuilding programs as well as facilitating training workshops and seminars on peace, conflict resolution and development to varied client groups ranging from civil society organizations, NGOs and academics to state security institutions in Africa and Europe. He also has several articles and other publications on African peace and security interventions. His research interests include peacekeeping, humanitarian intervention and peacebuilding in Africa, and the role of transitional justice processes (Editorial Team, 2021).

### Book Review

Kabia's *Humanitarian Intervention and Conflict Resolution in West Africa: From ECOMOG to ECOMIL* is a book of nine chapters that is anchored on the "solidarist approach," which advocates for the humanitarian intervention for human protection purposes and passes as a facet of international law. It underlines the need for complimenting the short-term aim of saving lives with the long-term goal of building sustainable peace through institutionalization of democratic values and the rule of law (Kabia, 2009).

The book concentrates on the ECOWAS and how it tackled complex political emergencies (CPEs) in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire. West Africa, being one of the

most affected regions in the continent, notable for most brutal and intractable conflicts, the research justifies ECOWAS' presence in the region for being at the forefront of developing humanitarian and peacekeeping response mechanisms. It traces ECOWAS' transformation from a purely regional economic integration organization to an assertive security mechanism in West Africa. ECOWAS deployed its military force, ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau in 1990, 1997 and 1998, respectively. In 2003, following the outbreak of conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, ECOWAS launched the ECOWAS Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (Ecomici); and, in August of 2003, the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (Ecomil) was deployed following the country's relapse into violence (Kabia, 2009; see also Tynes, 2010).

Following the review of arguments and framing of the concept of humanitarian intervention in the first chapter, Kabia in the second chapter points out that in view of the danger posed by CPEs to communities and global peace and security, arguments on humanitarian intervention should go beyond disputes over legality. He suggests that they should instead go to engaging with practical questions regarding the idea of proper conduct and ways to make it more effective. The book follows with an analysis of conflicts in West Africa. It reveals that conflicts in the region have had devastating political, economic and social effects on all the countries and this outcome can be tracked back to "flawed colonial policies, negative Cold War impacts, patrimonial and clientelistic politics, and political manipulation of ethnic and religious differences" (Kabia, 2009, p. 55).

In the third chapter, Kabia details the progression of ECOWAS from an economic integration project to ECOMOG, a security organization. The bushfires of conflicts in West Africa diverted ECOWAS' objectives and necessitated an extension into security regionalism. Thus; the organization assumed the new status by default rather than by design. Nevertheless, the enduring colonized language differences between the Anglophone and Francophone countries became so pronounced that it undermined the effectiveness of ECOWAS and ECOMOG. As Kabia notes, these tensions were heightened by the disruptive role of extra-regional actors like France, and likewise Nigeria's role as "big brother" in the regional proved contentious (Kabia, 2009).

Chapters 4 and 5 examine in more detail ECOMOG's humanitarian intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Liberia, the result was a mixture of failures and successes. Although the flexibility of ECOMOG's force enabled it to respond and adapt to the ever-changing security situation in Liberia, it also was able to build the Monrovia safe haven which served as a refuge for aid agencies and provided relief materials for conflict victims and gave it recognition. Nonetheless, it was unable to prevent two major attacks on the safe haven that led to the deaths of thousands. Again, ECOMOG lacked both the logistics and resources to drive rational policies within ECOWAS member states. Thus, there was a lack of consensus at the political level toward ECOMOG's peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts (Kabia, 2009).

In Sierra Leone, ECOMOG was successful in restoring democracy to a country notable for military coups and insurrections. It also enjoyed unusual support from the AU, thereby providing an opportunity for the regional body to play a helpful role in Africa's increasing civil wars. Despite these feats, ECOMOG's over-reliance on military preferences at the expense of a coherent political strategy made the security that the Sierra Leoneans enjoyed transitory. In addition to the reports of involving mercenaries, ECOMOG failed in its core objectives of safeguarding civilians. As Kabia rightly notes, ECOMOG did not learn from the mistakes of Liberia (Kabia, 2009).

In the sixth chapter, Kabia describes how ECOWAS had failed missions in Guinea Bissau and

Côte d'Ivoire. The major contributory factors were the withdrawal of Nigerian troops from the mission and the failure to resolve the longstanding rivalry between Francophone and Anglophone countries. Guinea Bissau, although a Lusophone country, had leaned more toward Côte d'Ivoire, a Francophone state. Kabia informs us that the Guinea Bissau mission ended in dismal failure when the troops were reduced to mere spectators after one of the parties to the conflict decided to break the terms of the peace accord. In Côte d'Ivoire, the ECOWAS Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ECOMICI) would have been a big failure considering the mission's low troop numbers had it not been for the presence of the French troops (Kabia, 2009).

The deterioration of security in Liberia as described in Chapter 7 and its relapse into conflict brought back ECOWAS on a second mission; this time around as ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL). Having learned its lessons, ECOMIL was more organized and professional in this peacekeeping mission. There was also a better relationship and collaboration between ECOWAS and the United Nations; nevertheless, Kabia notes that the mission still had logistics and financial challenges that hampered its effectiveness in managing and resolving conflicts (Kabia, 2009).

Reflecting on the outcomes of peacebuilding missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in Chapter 8, Kabia points out that there has been remarkable progress in consolidating the fragile peace that earlier existed by putting in place structures to ensure its sustainability. Moreover, the countries have enjoyed more support from the United Nations and other donors toward peacebuilding programs. Likewise, critical sectors that had erstwhile collapsed like governance institutions, economy, security and judicial sectors have been restored. Regardless of all these positive outcomes, Kabia notes that there are considerable threats to peace in both countries and their neighboring countries, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, still pose a significant threat (Kabia, 2009).

In the final chapter, Kabia commends ECOWAS for reviewing its security framework, which allows for the institutionalization and incorporation of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. He describes the new institutional structure designed by ECOWAS to enhance its effectiveness in humanitarian interventions. He also summarizes his core arguments and findings one last time and calls for more coordination and cooperation between regional security organizations and the United Nations in order to boost credibility and to address the problems of limited resources in the area of logistics and finances (Kabia, 2009; see also Tynes, 2010; Turack, 2009).

### **Book's Greatness**

One striking thing about this great book when searched on the Internet engines is its advertisement on the web pages of renowned academic institutions like Routledge, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Goodreads, Amazon, and Google Books. It has also been reviewed in *African Studies Review*, *Cambridge and Human Rights*, and *H-Net Reviews*. The strength of this comprehensive work lies in Kabia's demonstration that the evolution of ECOWAS is ultimately positive and progressive. It shows clearly that decision makers have learned from historical experiences and are making adjustments.

David J. Francis, a former professor at the University of Bradford in the United Kingdom, a former Chief Minister of the Republic of Sierra Leone, and the current Minister of Foreign Affairs and the International Corporations of Sierra Leone lauds the efforts of Kabia in documenting this great work. In his review on Routledge's website, Francis says that the book is not just timely and pragmatic in nature; it is also a regionalist book that touches on salient issues within the peacekeeping process and the surrounding political complexities. He adds that Kabia's

important and timely book makes a useful contribution to our understanding of the purpose and function of regional organizations in conflict management in Africa, especially in the troubled regions (Routledge, 2021).

Finally, Professor Emeritus Daniel Turack, who is noted for his expertise and extensive publications in International Humanitarian Law, credits Kabia for a very well-written and referenced book. He adds that Kabia takes the reader to all of the authors and the works mentioned in the text (Turack, 2010).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This review essay has clearly shown the practicability of Peace and Conflict Studies. It is one of those few disciplines whereby the theoretical is been experimented immediately. That it deals with human lives in their numbers suggests the sensitivity of this field of study and the attention from local and international actors and the enormous resources that have gone into it. In the five books reviewed, it is interesting to note how the basic tenets of human relations if discarded could result in unprecedented and unimaginable terror, resulting in the loss of lives, many of whom would be innocent of the conflicts.

It is therefore recommended here that promoters of peace and conflict resolution heed the observations of the author of the great book reviewed here, who unanimously contend that the approaches of foreign actors in resolving conflicts in Africa have not been successful. Thus, as the author contend, there is a need for promoters of peace and conflict resolution in Africa to look beyond the sophisticated dimensions which were usually handed down and laced with selfish interests to a more collaborative approach that takes on the peculiarity of the African states with which they intend to broker peace.

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