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ORGINAL ARTICLE

# WEAK GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS AND CHALLENGES OF PEACEBUILDING IN WEST AFRICAN STATES: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION

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**Abstract**

The failure of the peacebuilding and post-conflict resolution mechanisms in West African states makes it imperative to reassess the impact of weak governance institutions on the sustainability of peace in the sub-region. This study analyses the challenges confronting peacebuilding mechanisms and strategies in West African States in relationship to weak governance institutions. It puts the challenges of peacebuilding strategies in institutional perspectives and intervening tendencies of the influences of non-state actors in West African States. The study examines the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16: "to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels", and argues that the realization of this goal in West African States is far-fetched. It employed a realist methodology to uncover the casual mechanisms and contextual factors behind the far-reaching outcomes. Structural functionalism theory is the theoretical framework that guided the study. Secondary data were collected from journals and published articles, and analysed using "context-mechanism-outcome" (CMO) configuration to determine the results. The study concludes that weak governance institutions have posed serious challenges to peacebuilding efforts in West African States, as it is the bane of democracy, weakens the mechanisms of controlling social conflict, exacerbates civil unrests, corruption and some cases, military coup. The study recommends that democracy remains the most viable option for ensuring freedom, participatory governance and sustainable peace. Leaders of post-colonial West African States should work assiduously to build strong governance institutions instead of strong men in their respective political domains.

**Keywords:** Weak Governance institutions, Conflicts, Peacebuilding, Security, Corruption. Unconstitutional Change of Government

## 1.0 Introduction

Institutions create specific political and economic incentives, solve or worsen coordination failures and define the set of feasible policies (Bluhm, Crombruggle & Szirmai, 2019). Extant literatures reveal that to avert outright social conflict, depends on the ability of political systems to quickly address the negative shock with relevant policies. Most political economy theory posits that the capacity of resilient political institutions to address social conflict enhances development and sustainable peace (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006, North et al., 2009, Besley and Person, 2011). According to North, D. C., Wallis, J & Weingast, B (2009), weak institutionalized states are prone to vulnerabilities because of their inability to handle prevailing negative impact on political structures. Weak institutions thus bring with them the seeds of increased vulnerability to crisis and potentially retard the process of peacebuilding.

The West African States have been bedevilled by alarming incidences of protracted violent conflicts and civil unrests with attendant consequences of deaths, instability, insecurity, massive displacement of population and outrageous number of internally displaced persons. This situation gave rise to unabated breakdown of law and order in the states, with grave consequences of political instability and human sufferings. The political composition of West African States varies in size, in colonially inherited languages and norms in levels of economic endowment and development, and the diversity of external linkages (Adeniji, 1997, Nyamadzawo, 2019). Out of the sixteen countries in West Africa, nine are collectively referred to as Franco-phone, five are Anglophone and two are Lusophone. This mixture of

colonial mastery and experiences gave rise to diverse multi-lateral cooperation arrangements and institutions, since the post-independence era. The consequence of this arrangement is the difficulty of coordinating peace efforts and regional integration in the region.

The unabated conflicts and civil unrests in the region are deep rooted in the multiplicity of factors-historical, political, economic and ethnic-nationalistic agitations (Baumann, 2019). The liberalization process, pressured by the demands of domestic constituencies, the granting of fundamental freedoms and quest for self-determination, due to socio-political marginalization, and neo-colonization have underpinned the major causes of crisis/violent conflicts and extremism in many West African states (Dickson, Masai & Samuel, 2021). A clear trend of pluralisation and multiple ethnicities affected the unity of the political entity of these states. The intra-State violent conflicts and "unconstitutional change of governments" have grave consequences, extending beyond the tragic loss of human lives to include domestic trauma, massive displacement of populations and destruction of critical socio-economic infrastructure and political institutions (Nganje, 2015). The post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding efforts in most of these countries have been complex and uneven, due to governance deficits, weak institutions, corruption, and inadequate public goods delivery. The rise in military coups, political sit-tightism, electoral manipulation and violence are outcomes of weak institutions (Bluhm, Crombruggle & Szirmai, 2019).

According to Nyamadzawo (2019), the blight on development in developing nations is weak institutions which make it difficult for governments to enforce laws, guarantee service delivery, promote good governance, enforce accountability and realize the equitable distribution of resources. Of course, the failure of the government to promote the aforementioned engenders poor governance which is inimical to peacebuilding in the West African States.

This study empirically assesses the challenges of peacebuilding mechanism in West African States in the perspective of weak governance institutions. It examines the impact of weak governance institutions on peacebuilding efforts in conflict-prone West African States. The next section is a review of literature, starting with the conceptual framework; the third section discusses the research methodology. Section four is a discussion of findings, while the final section concludes the study with policy implication and recommendations

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## 2.0 Conceptual Clarification

### Governance Institutions

Governance institutions are the organisations and structures that governments create to implement policies, manage public services and maintain order. They can be broadly classified into categories, such as legislative (law-making), executive (law-enforcing), and judicial (law-interpreting), but also include bureaucratic, local and specialised agencies that manage specific areas like finance, elections or infrastructure. These institutions are crucial for a country's economic development and overall functioning. Weak governance institutions therefore, are structures and systems of governance that lack the capacity, authority, or effectiveness to enforce laws, provide services, and maintain order. Weak institutions produce weak or fragile states. Weak governance institutions contribute to failed states undermining the government's ability to provide essential services, enforce laws, and maintain public order (Idowu, 2020). When governance structures lack effectiveness, it leads to widespread corruption and a breakdown of trust between citizens and the state. This erosion of legitimacy creates an environment where violence and chaos can thrive, making recovery and effective governance nearly impossible. Weak governance institutions significantly hinder state-building efforts in post-conflict societies by creating obstacles for governance and public service delivery. In these settings, there is often a lack of legitimacy and authority which makes it challenging for new governments to establish control and provide stability. Additionally, the absence of institutional capacity can lead to repeated cycles of violence and instability, as communities may resort to self-governance or rely on informal systems instead of the state. A weak governance institution reveals a state of decline or incapacity of government agencies to effectively discharge some of the fundamental responsibility of the state such as the maintenance of law and order, and the protection of territorial integrity (Usman, Romle & Bashir, 2015). According to World Bank (2024), indicators of weak institutions include: prevalence of corruption-high level of bribery and abuse of power within government agencies, often hindering development and sustainable peace; political instability- frequent changes in government, coups or significant unrest due

to weak political institutions; Lack of rule of law-when laws are not consistently enforced or are subject to arbitrary interpretation as a result of weal legal system; ineffective judiciary, where courts are unable to deliver timely justice and are influenced by political pressures. Others are Lack of transparency and accountability, evidenced in difficulty of assessing information about government activities and inability of holding officials responsible for their actions; Clientelism and patronage-political power concentrated among small elite who distribute benefits based on loyalty rather than merit; Low public Trust-citizens having low level of confidence in government institutions and their ability to function effectively; and poor service delivery-inability of the government to provide essential public services like health care, education and infrastructure, as a result of mismanagement (Nyamadzawo, 2019).

Most of the West African States are multi-ethnic in nature, and the basic metric for measuring the effectiveness of their government lies in the capacity to develop and maintain an institutional framework that can facilitate the harmonious existence of the citizens through integrative process of governance, sound judicial system and effective law enforcement agency (Baumann, (2019). Institutions are an integral part of any political society. It consists of systems that make rules which guide human behaviours and ensure the structuring of the resulting behaviour to promote social interactions, order, cooperation and economic progress (Nganje, 2015). Institutions are therefore responsible to law making and adherence to such. States with resilient political institutions produce strong legal frameworks while poor legal frameworks are associated with states that have weak institutions. However, the effectiveness of institutions depends on how independent, free from control, accountable and transparent, they are. Persistent weak governance institutions have profound long-term consequences on national development as they stifle economic growth, deter foreign investment, and perpetuate cycles of poverty.

**3.0 Governance**

Governance is seen in the fields of political science, public administration and development studies. There are various discourses regarding its definition/conceptualization and measurement. In politics, governance is the process of making decisions, managing resources and resolving conflicts. It can also refer to how well institutions functions and how the citizens assess them. Governance refers to the exercise of power to instil order in the administration of the citizen's expectations within a certain range (Keping, 2017). According to Kaufman et al. (2010), governance refers to the traditions and institutions through which a state practically exercises its power. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines governance as the application of political, economic and administrative power to handle all issues of a State at various levels. This involves the processes and institutional framework, through which citizens express their interests, exercise their legal rights, discharge their responsibilities and harmonize their disparities (UNDP, 1997). Schmitter (2019) observed that the concept of governance as used in the World Bank's perception, is equivalent to "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" Idowu (2020) posits that most successive political leaderships in Africa (military and civilian) have flagrantly and continuously denied their people good governance in the quest for materiality and maintenance of perpetual political relevance. Governance therefore is the administration of political, economic and development institutions by the State to provide its citizens with sustainable peace, inclusive democracy, even and equitable distribution of public goods and services.

In conceptualising governance, indices for measuring governance come to bear. Governance factors are usually measured on the outcomes of particular indicators: political regimes, economic management, content and quality of economic policy as well as legal and judicial framework (Quibria, 2006). The Worldwide Governance Indicator (WGI) presented an estimated governance scores basically on six aggregate indicators; political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, voice and accountability, government effectiveness, the rule of law, regulatory quality and control of corruption (World Bank, 2024). It was a sample of 214 economies over the period of 1996-2023. The aggregate indicators combined information from 35 different existing data sources, capturing subjective perceptions of the quality of various dimensions of governance reported by experts and survey respondents worldwide. This report indicted the West African States as below performance.

Dickson et al., (2021) employed a two-step GMM estimation procedure to analyse the effect of institutional quality on the economic growth of Sub-Saharan African Countries from 2006 to 2018. The result indicated a significant improvement in the quality of institutions; however, some of the state's performance was marred by persistent corruption.

**4.0 Corruption**

Corruption refers to the misuse of power for personal gain (Marchini et al., 2019). Corruption is seen in different forms, ranging from bribery, abuse of office and trading in influence. It manifests through various channels, such as theft and embezzlement of public funds, bribes and kickbacks, electoral manipulations, money laundering and other illicit financial flows and State capture (Hope, 2020 & 2021). Corruption can be seen from two perceptions: public and private. Public corruption relates to the use of public office for personal gain, while private corruption has to do with deliberate violation of legal regulations by an organisation for private gain at the detriment of the corporate objectives (Marchini, Mazza & Medioli, 2019). According to Francois Valerian the Chair of Transparency International, Corruption is an evolving global threat that does far more than undermine development-It is a key cause of declining democracy, instability and human rights violations. The international community and every nation must make tackling corruption a top and long-term priority. This is crucial to pushing back against authoritarianism and securing a peaceful free and sustainable world (Marchini, Mazza & Medioli, 2019). The dangerous trends revealed in 2024 Corruption Perception Index highlight the need to follow through concrete action now to address global corruption. Countries have different corruption levels with developing countries, especially West African States, at the top of the ladder.

Corruption Perception Index (CPI) is widely recognized as a measurement index of corruption. CPI is a governance indicator compiled by World Bank and Transparency International that ranks countries by their corruption levels. According to Baumann (2019:2) CPI is used as an umbrella term for a wide range of comparative evaluation technique-such as audits, rankings, indicators, indexes, baselines, or targets, which systematically assess the performance of actors, populations, or institutions based on standardized measurement metrics and rankings. 2024 CPI's assessment according to Transparency International reveals that Guinea-Bissau is 158 in rank, out of 180, Nigeria-140, Mali and Liberia- 135 each, Guinea-133, Togo-121, Sierra Leone-114, Niger-107, Gambia-96, Burkina Faso-82, Ghana-80, Senegal, Benin and Cote d'Ivoire rank 69, while Cabo Verda ranks 35, as the best of all the West African States. With this endemic systemic corruption level in most of these West African States; it is obvious that peacebuilding is challenged.

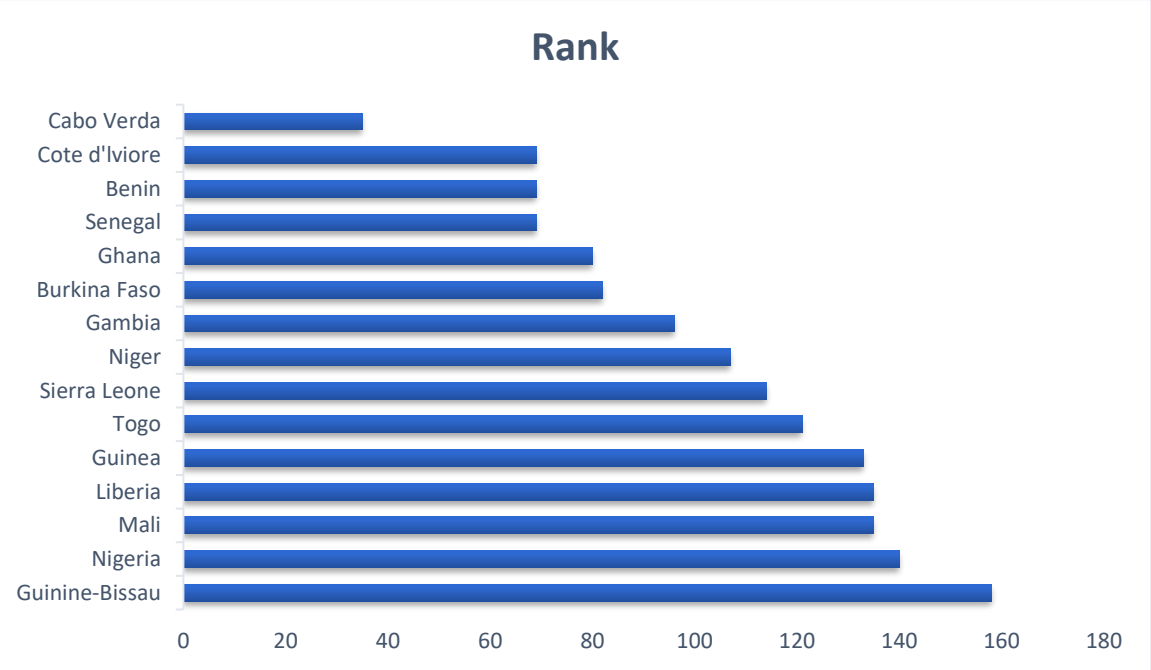


Figure 1

**Peacebuilding**

Peacebuilding refers to efforts to establish lasting peace by addressing root causes of conflict, rebuilding relationships and fostering social, economic and political stability. Peacebuilding activities include promoting human rights, supporting democratic governance, enhancing economic development, and facilitating reconciliation processes. Peacebuilding prevents recurrence of conflict, through addressing

the root causes of violent conflicts and transforming institutions and relationships. It promotes sustainable peace, by creating conditions for long term peace and stability. It strengthens the States, through empowering the states to resolve their disputes and build resilience for livelihood. Peacebuilding facilitates healing and reconciliation, by helping individuals and societies heal from past hurts and build trust among conflicting parties. Social structures and institutions are transformed for positive peace.

Galtung (1976:297-298) in his pioneering work: "Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding" argue that "Structures must be found that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur". These observations prompted the scholar discourse of today's concept of peacebuilding, which he defined as an effort aims to creating sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of violent conflict and eliciting indigenous capacities for peaceful management and conflict resolution. Lederach (1997:84-85), in his similar works, called for the expanded knowledge of peacebuilding. He asserts that "peacebuilding is more than post-accord reconstruction" and "is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships". Peacebuilding therefore, refers to a wide range of activities that contribute towards the transformation of society into a just and harmonious order and development of an infrastructure capable of maintaining and sustaining peace (Vande, 2019). The key concept revolves around transformation of social structures, institutions and behaviours of the individuals, both non-state and state actors.

The history of peacebuilding in the globe cannot be mentioned outside United Nations. It considered peace in broader view at the end of Cold war, recognizing that peacekeeping was insufficient to lay adequate foundation for long-term peace. In 1992 report "An Agenda for Peace", UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali established the conceptual basis for UN peacebuilding operations, especially post-conflict peacebuilding (UNSG, 1992). The document set forth an integrated approach that aims to strengthen social, economic, and political structures that are the foundation for lasting peace. Issues which were imperative in the framework include addressing natural resources, political and economic institutions. The UN and other organizations started to apply peacebuilding approaches from Guatemala to Cambodia and to Western Balkan States. Building on the experience, the UN and other regional and sub-regional organizations began to develop integrated peacebuilding approaches and strategies. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly inaugurated the UN Peacebuilding Commission in 2005 to address what the secretary-General called a "gaping hole in the United Nations institutional machinery" (UNSG, 2005:2). Peacebuilding involves a wide range of policy and intervention areas, from security, reconciliation and justice, and building socio-economic foundations, to reconstructing a political framework or structure for societal sustainable peace. Peacebuilding activities are not necessarily aimed to end violence, instead to create structures that will mitigate further conflicts or violence escalation.

**Research Methodology**

The study employed the "Context-Mechanism Outcome" (CMO) configuration, which is primarily used in realist evaluation framework for understanding how an intervention or programme produces outcomes by considering the specific context in which it operates, the underlying mechanisms that are triggered by the intervention within that context, and the resulting outcomes that are observed, especially it helps researchers explore 'why' and "under what conditions a programme works, not just "if" it works. The context explains the surrounding conditions, circumstances, or factors that influence how a mechanism operates, including social, political, economic and organisational aspects, while mechanism is the underlying process or "generative cause" that links the context to the outcome often involving individual thoughts, behaviours, or triggered by the intervention within a specific context.

The study used the CMO to analysed the data collected from Worldwide Governance Indicator (WGI), 2024 report and 2024 M O Ibrahim Index of African Governance. The 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) covers the 2014-2023 decade. The data considered the following variables: Voice and accountability, Political stability and absence of violence, Government effectiveness, Regulatory quality, Rule of law, and Control of corruption. The report reveals that most of the Africa's countries governance performance was worse in 2023 than it was in 2014. This is alluded to the deepening security crisis, escalated conflicts and deepening mistrust in democratic institutions due to their weakness.

According to the report, the governance trends of West African States (2014-2023):

| Underlying Measures | Score 2023 | 10-year change, 2014-2023 |
|---|---|---|
| Security & Rule of Law | **47.9** | **-1.6** |
| Participation, Rights, Inclusion & Equity | **48.7** | **-0.2** |
| Increasing Deterioration | Burkina Faso, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal, | |
| Increasing Improvement | Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, | |
| Warning Signs | Cabo Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Chad, Guinea-Bissau | |
| Slowing Improvement | Liberia, Sierra Leone, Benin, | |
| Slowing Deterioration | Mali, Niger | |
| Most Improved Countries | Gambia- **+7.2**, Sierra Leone- **+6.4,** Togo- **+4.2**; Côte d'Ivoire- **+4.1** | |

**Source:** IIAG, 2024 Index report.

**Theoretical Framework**

Structural Functional Theory: This theory guided the study. Structural functional theory grew out of the ideas of English philosopher and Biologist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), which compared society to human body. Spencer alludes to the analogy of human body; just as the structural parts of human body-the skeleton, muscles and various internal organs function dependently to help the entire organism survive, social structures and institutions work together to preserve society. Structural Functional theory is a sociological theory that views society as system of interrelated parts that work together to maintain stability and order. It posits that society is made up of institutions, roles, relationships, and norms that all serve a purpose. It believes that social order is based on shared values, languages and symbols, and social change is an adaptive response to tensions within the social system. The development of the West African states is intertwined with peaceful state of their societies. The social structures and political, and economic institutions are determinants of development, whereas no nation thrive in a chaotic and insecure environment. The relevance of this theory to the study is obvious because peacebuilding mechanisms are dependent on how resilient the political institutions and governance systems are in the West African States. The prevalent systemic corruption, lack of legitimate political regime, weak legal framework, and fragility which has engendered violence and security threats have undermined sustainable peace and development in the West Africa States. Societies with weak institutions are characterized by the inability to control corruption and state capture which limits economic growth and encourages autocrats to take power or sponsor the circumvention of term limits to ensure an indefinite stay in office. States with weak institutions are also vulnerable to internal shocks (competition for scarce resources, identity-based crises, inter-clan armed conflict, militias, corruption, and military takeover) and external shocks (regional influence, lack of political will and support from western countries). The weaker governance institutions are, the weaker peacebuilding capacities are imminent.

**Review of the Causes and Nature of Conflict in West African States**

Conflicts in West African States have been alarming with grave consequences of deaths, instability, insecurity and displacements of population. Consequently, it has resulted into severe breakdown of law and order in many of the states, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, and even Nigeria. The imperativeness of peacebuilding activities to address the root causes of the conflicts can guarantee a radical transformative impact on the societies. Many factors underpin the reasons behind emergence of unabated insurgence and violent conflicts in the region. The quest for democratisation and the re-emergence of ethnic nationalism have remained a significant factor. There is no doubt that democratic development has since the end of Cold War, triggered new opportunities and also new challenges. The challenges have in most times introduced serious conflicts. In Nigeria, for instance, democracy and democratisation have not produced the anticipated peace and the strengthening of the polity, instead escalated ethnic identity struggles for power and resource control. This is manifest in the increase of ethnic agitations and cry of marginalisation.

The causes of most civil unrest in West African States borders on resource control, such as civil unrest in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali and so on. According to Hyden (ibid:2), African conflicts are typically resource-based, then identity-superiority; they are triggered by competitive politics associated with election systems, it further extends to cultural and ethnic dimensions. Stedman (1991) posits that crises and conflicts in Africa's region and sub-region are defined by identity, participation, distribution and legitimacy issues. Some school of thoughts consider economic decline and weak institutions as main factors for civil unrests in the region. Furthermore, the process of political transitions to democracy in the region has also been advanced as providing conducive environment for the eruption of conflicts (Oche, 2004). Research reveals that conflicts in the West African States are expression of ethnicization of politics, mobilized by the use of religion, violent agitation for rights of self-determination; failed and near-failed states (weak institutions); resource-based conflicts and neo-colonial influences. Structural causes of conflict in the region include politics of exclusion and marginalisation; and overt suppression of group identities. Some scholars view the root causes of conflict in the region from the apocalyptic view (Enzenberger, 1993), the culturalist view (Ellis, 1998), neo-patrimonialism and civil wars (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1998), and rational civil wars (Ken, 1998). There is also the economic dimension to the root causes of conflicts in the region where insurgences and civil unrests are financed by conflict entrepreneurs for gain. Peacebuilding as a strategy therefore remains a conflict resolution mechanism that focuses more on the post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation, reintegration and rehabilitation of conflict actors and combatants. Its anticipation is that the process will address the structural, economic and cultural root causes, to develop a culture of peace as opposed to aggression and violence in the region.

**The Role of ECOWAS in Peacebuilding**

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was set up "to promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and in social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its peoples, of increasing and maintaining economic stability, of fostering closer relations among its members and of contributing to the progress and development of the African continent" (Treaty of the Economic Community of West African States, 1975, Article 2.1). Although the ECOWAS Treaty (1975) was silent on conflict management and prevention, it was appreciated quite early that no meaningful cooperation could take place within the sub-region without peace and security. The Protocol on Non-Aggression, and The Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance on Defence, was incorporated into the ECOWAS Treaty in 1978 and 1981, respectively, to address this concern. Unfortunately, this did not prevent internal dissension, conflicts, and large-scale violence in the sub-region, and it was indeed in response to these that ECOWAS came up with the idea of organised peace support operations in the region. This eventually became consolidated and codified in the 1999 Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.

After operating the ECOWAS Treaty for almost two decades, it was found inadequate for ensuring political cooperation, regional peace, and security. The ECOWAS Revised Treaty was adopted by the Heads of State in July 1993. The Revised Treaty contains 22 chapters, divided into 93 Articles. In Article 2 of the Revised Treaty, ECOWAS "shall ultimately be the sole economic community in the region for the purpose of economic integration and the realization of the objectives of the African Economic Community." The Revised Treaty seeks to extend economic and political cooperation among member states. It designates the achievement of a common market and a single currency as economic objectives. In the political sphere, it provides for a West African Parliament, an Economic and Social Council, and an ECOWAS Court of Justice, to replace the Tribunal. The Court of Justice shall carry out the functions assigned to it and it is independent of member states and other institutions of the Community. The judgments of the Court "shall be binding on the member states, the institutions of the Community and on individuals, and corporate bodies." The treaty also formally assigned the Community the responsibility of preventing and settling regional conflicts. Whereas it can be said that the overall logic and philosophy of ECOWAS has not changed fundamentally, it should be acknowledged that a new institutional framework was put in place under the Revised Treaty to enhance the delivery capacity of ECOWAS. The idea was to assert the supranationality of ECOWAS institutions and facilitate their functions and roles in integration processes. Also, the seemingly refreshed commitment to the ideals of democratisation and good governance informed the provision for the establishment of an ECOWAS Parliament, tailored after

the European Parliament, to exercise advisory and supervisory powers over the organs of ECOWAS (Adetula, 2016).

ECOWAS addresses peacekeeping, humanitarian support and peacebuilding capabilities as well as the issue of cross border crimes. Moreover, ECOWAS member states also adopted the supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001 as an instrument to promote peace and security in West Africa. In this context, ECOWAS established the institutions; ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture (EPSA) to enable it realize its commitments to peace, security, stability and governance, within the West African States. The West African region is a focal point of old and new forms of armed conflicts. This includes: violent extremism, organised crime, piracy, political unrests due to social inequality, agitation for self-determination and election-related violence. Many of these challenges call for regional coordinated interventions, hence the ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture is a set of institution and programmes that aim to enhance peace and security in West Africa. The arms include: the ECOWAS Standby Force, the Early Warning and Response Network, and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework. The ECOWAS Standby Force is a military force that can be deployed to respond to violence and other crisis. The Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) is a network that helps the community to identify and respond to potential threats, while ECOWAS Conflict prevention framework helps the community to prevent and manage conflicts. The goal of the EPSA is to make West Africa's peace and security efforts more systematic, consistent and strategic.

Since the initial deployment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group to Liberia, ECOWAS intervened successfully in the crises in Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, and Mali. ECOMOG is now institutionalised as the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) within the framework of the AU's elaborate African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). In this regard, ECOWAS has become an invaluable partner of the AU and by extension the UN in promoting peace and security in West Africa. An instance of such collaboration was the Africa-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), which was co-sponsored by the AU and ECOWAS. It should be recalled, however, that lack of adequate funding for the ECOWAS intervention in Mali was partly responsible for the re-hatting of AFISMA, to create the United Nations Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA. Notwithstanding the "success" stories about ECOWAS in conflict management in West Africa, it is plausible to argue that "the Organization literally stumbled on its peacemaking roles in the region by routinely brokering peace between its feuding leaders" (Sesay, 2016). In 2008, an ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) was adopted, to guide the organisation's preventive diplomacy, which has further been strengthened by the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, with the provision on zero-tolerance for ascension to power through unconstitutional means. There is an ECOWAS peacekeeping mission in Guinea Bissau, ECOMIB. Also, ECOWAS is implementing a multi-million-dollar defence and security sector reform programme in the country as part of the efforts to restore peace and democracy in there. The recent intervention of ECOWAS in the Malian crisis benefitted from the efficiency of the ECOWAS institutions that came with the on-going reforms. The success of the intervention by ECOWAS paved the way for the transformation of the African-led International Support Mission into the UN mission.

Arguably, the success story in the area of conflict management and peacebuilding can be linked to the commitment of ECOWAS to good governance and democratization. It suffices to say that ECOWAS worked closely with the African Union and the United Nations to restore order and legality in member states such as Guinea, Niger, and Ivory Coast. Similarly, the same principles of ECOWAS with respect to democracy and good governance guided the stand it took on the presidential elections in Guinea, Niger, Benin, and Nigeria. The concern about the implications of the "Boko Haram" for regional security in West Africa has been expressed by ECOWAS at different levels. However, the negative impact of weak institutions in the West African States has lowered the progress of peacebuilding in the region.

Closely looking at the conflict management and peacebuilding activities of ECOWAS, the following salient factors becomes imperative: the growing complexity of conflict dynamics and security challenges in region require cooperation and coordination among the West African states; and the socio-economic dimensions that heightening and sustaining the conflict dynamics in the region necessitates peacebuilding and development.

## 4. Discussion of Findings

The empirical assessment of this study reveals that states with high corruption index have weak governance institutions and low sustainable peace and development. This confirms the idea that

corruption which is endemic in the West African States is a major factor that hampers the attainment of the UN SDGs. The findings of Hope (2021) agree with the fact that bribery and corruption significantly undermine peacebuilding efforts, since it promotes political instability, uncertainties, uneven distribution of public goods, and further exacerbates internal conflicts. Corruption Perception Index (CPI) as a governance indicator shows that with the endemic systemic corruption level in most of West African States, government effectiveness is at a deteriorating level. Control of corruption and presence of the rule of Law have practical and profound impact on governance.

This study reveals that democracy does not thrive where there are ineffective institutions. The success or failure of democracy in West African States is linked to the ability of the States' governance institutions to deliver public or political goods to the citizens. Weak governance institutions foreshadow political instability especially in pluralistic societies. However, ethnic diversity is harmful and has more consequences where governance institutions are weak. The identity-superiority contests in West African States challenge peacebuilding process and national integration. The need for good governance should be more visible in ethnically divisive societies. Considering political-institutions variables, democracy promotes long-term development and sustainable peace. It helps to manage adverse shocks and deliver distributional outcomes. Furthermore, the Worldwide Governance Indicator (WGI) 2024 report revealed that the six aggregate indicators-political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, voice and accountability, government effectiveness, the rule of law, regulatory quality and control of corruption reveal that peacebuilding efforts in West African States are challenged. For instance, in Nigeria, where democracy have been destroyed by judicial recklessness and mistrust, due to the overbearing bribery and corruption, and weak institutions, good governance is a mirage. Consequently, peacebuilding in the troubled part of the country appears to be a far-reaching achievement as long as the legal framework and the legislative structure remain docile. According to the result of the study, weak corruption control system, government ineffectiveness and problems related to proper implementation of rule of law have significantly challenged peacebuilding efforts of the countries in the region. The success or failure of democracy in West African States is linked to the ability of the States' institutions to deliver public or political goods to the citizens. Political goods include "enforceable rule of law, security of property and inviolable contracts, a judicial system, and a set of values that legitimize and validate the local version of fair play" (Rotberg, 2016:3). In this case, the provision of these goods is a function of strong institutions. Therefore, the prevalence of weak institutions leads to a deficit in the delivery of political goods, thus increasing the risk of democratic recession and decline in sustainable peace. Weak institutions foreshadow political instability especially in pluralistic societies. The identity-superiority contests in these States challenge peace process and national integration. It is more apparent in weakly institutionalised societies where powers are concentrated in the executive branch; the leaders are often unrestrained and seeks to control other institutions of government, to perpetrate their long stay in office or unfettered access to state resources. This is the prevalent situation in most West African States.

In a state with weak institutions, the mechanisms of controlling social conflicts are also weak and have often resulted into intra-state conflicts, violence extremism, and political instability and in some cases military coup and "unconstitutional change of government". For instance, the return of military coup in the SAHEL, particularly Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), Chad (2021), and Burkina Faso (2022) has been blamed on failed state capacity and poor economic performance (Zeigler, 2021). Also, States with weak institutions are prone to endemic systemic corruption, perennial conflicts, and decline in sustainable peace and development goals.

**Conclusion, policy implication/recommendations**

This study examined the assessment of the effect of weak governance institutions on peacebuilding activities in West African States. The study employed the Context-mechanism Outcome configuration of the realist methodology to review the Worldwide Governance Indicators WGI) and Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The overall finding confirmed that weak governance institutions challenge the peacebuilding activities in the West African Conflict-prone States. Whereas, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16 aims to improve people's lives by reducing violence, improving access to justice, and promoting effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions; the findings of the study posit that this goal is far reaching in West African states due to lack of peace, justice and strong institutions. Furthermore, the research outcomes suggest that the prevalence of corruption, government ineffectiveness and lack of functional legal framework have grave magnitude impact and significant

effect on peacebuilding and sustainable development in West African States. Visionary leadership and strong institutions are Africa's surest route to achieving economic growth and sustainable development. As recommendation and policy implication, the following points are suggested:

(i) West African political leaders should work assiduously to build strong governance institutions and not strong men in their respective political domains, by strengthening democratic principles, like the rule of Law and free elections, creating long-term Afrocentric development plans.

(ii) The various governance institutions should be enhanced to make relevant laws that seek to improve the living conditions of the citizens and as well as improve service delivery; guarantee and respect the fundamental rights of all citizens, including the freedom of press and the right to participate in the political process.

(iii) West African countries should, as a matter of urgency, design an effective institutional structure that will help curb corruption that is hurting the region and hindering the realization of national objectives such as the Sustainable Development Goals; by prioritising skills and reflective practice, in other words, public service should shift from purely "certificate-based" trends towards skills, reflective practices, and a focus on what works.

(iv) Governance institutions should also be strengthened to espouse the principles of accountability, transparency and inclusion, through nurturing a culture of public services, embracing change through institutional reforms, and empower citizens for greater participation and accountability.

(v) There should be strong commitment of the leaders to the implementation of policy and reform measures on all governance factors to allow the impact of democracy and democratisation in the region. Government should champion institutional renewal and cultural adjustment that shifts from profligacy and consumerism to an investment orientation. Leaders and institutions should develop capacity to adapt to change, and modify approaches based on what is most effective.

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