
ECOWAS, DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND THE COUP IN BURKINA FASO FISHER

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS

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ECOWAS, since 1991, has adopted various instruments which, at least in part, focus on the promotion of democratic governance within member states. Also, for the second time this year, military officers headed by Captain Ibrahim Traore have seized power in the West African state of Burkina Faso, saying they acted because former military ruler, who ousted his democratically elected predecessor in January, failed to address a growing Islamist insurgency. This paper makes an assessment of ECOWAS performance in this respect. Also it discusses the recent developments in Burkina Faso. It concludes by drawing lessons from both the successes and failures of the ECOWAS experience

INTRODUCTION

When the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was formed in May 1975, its main focus was the socio-economic development of the sub-region. Its objective was: to promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activities and in social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its peoples, of increasing and maintaining economic stability and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent (Article 2, ECOWAS Treaty of 1975).

Indeed, none of the sixty-five articles of the 1975 ECOWAS Treaty signed in Lagos contained any provisions of issues related to security or democratic governance. But it is now common knowledge that since 1990 when ECOWAS intervened in Liberia, the Community has become better known for conflict management than its original objective of regional economic integration. Conflict management has equally overshadowed the promotion of democratic governance, another important function of the organization.

Given the manner in which, over the last two decades and half, warlords have been pillaging the sub-region for natural resources, coercing disaffected and unemployed youth into violence and displacing unarmed citizens, it is not surprising that ECOWAS has been better identified with security. The fact however is that, since 1991, ECOWAS has adopted four instruments which, at least in part, focus on the promotion of democratic governance within member states- The 1991 Declaration of Political Principles; the 1993 Revised Treaty; the 1999 Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security; and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (Frempong, 2009)

Focusing on ECOWAS' role in ensuring democratic governance is of significance because of the close linkage between democratic governance, peace and regional economic integration. First, there is an interrelationship between democratic governance and sustained economic development (Economic Commission for Africa, 2004). Constitutionalism and rule of law ensure the political and social stabilization necessary

for the pursuit of a long term project like regional integration. It also ensures human interaction among individuals or groups of different nationalities (Adewoye, 1997). On the other hand, a system of governance that is devoid of defined mechanisms and structures of representation or participation undermines the kind of consistent political commitment and long term legitimacy that regional integration demands. Concentration of power also makes it difficult to promote healthy intergovernmental relations and a system of personal rule precludes the useful role which pressure groups play (Adewoye). Effective implementation of regional cooperation frameworks therefore will only take root in healthy and democratic environments where economic management is both transparent and accountable.

METHOD RESEARCH

The paper adopts an analytical and descriptive study using secondary sources from reputed published sources such as books, national and international journals, newspaper articles and websites from the internet sources. All the collected information is evaluated and interpreted using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The paper focuses on the performance of ECOWAS in promoting democratic governance within the sub-region and the instruments adopted in this respect. Also attempt to examine the response of ECOWAS to the recent coup in Burkina Faso is carried out in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The methodical identification and collection of literature assists the researcher in studying the various facets of the research data (Aswathy, 2022). Records have shown that certain theoretical foundation informed the establishment of the ECOWAS. Integration in the West African sub-region has largely been informed by the integration processes in Western Europe, Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere in Africa (Fisher & Oludemi, 2022). Generally, in all areas the main objectives of integration had been both economic and political. It is political, when the major concern of members is the political unity of the component states. On the other hand, it is economic, when the immediate preoccupation is the promotion of better economic development.

As regards the theoretical approach, the ECOWAS seems to share functionalism and neo-functionalism with the European Union (EU). The functionalist theory assumes that integration could be affected through the creation of a transactional complex of economic and social organization. To this end, proponents of the functionalist theory such as David Mitrany believed that international activities could be organized around basic functional needs such as transportation, health and welfare necessities, cultural activities, trade and production, and common currency. Also the theory further assumes that the internationalization of politics and economics would ultimately shift loyalty and sovereignty from states to international organizations. This philosophical underpinning, which was expected to guide the integration process in West Africa, is fraught with some difficulties and has not really impacted on the ECOWAS.

Similarly, the neo-functional approach to West African integration has not really transformed the ECOWAS into greater height because the neo-functional doctrine of spill-over seems not to be relevant to developing countries especially in the sphere of politics (Fisher & Oludemi). It has been established that leaders from a less-developed sub-region like West Africa will not relegate their powers and political sovereignty to the background, unlike their counterparts in the EU who are more liberal in this regard.

The neo-functionalist school is especially a modified version of functionalist and Ernest Hass was the proponent. The central thesis of the model was that there exists a continuum between economic integration and political union; this is contrary to the argument put forward by functionalist. In neo-functionalism, both economic and political factors are believed to be linked together by the spillover effect through which the various task and powers of the central institutions are increased while integration gradually encroaches on the political sensitive area.

African academics have created the new concept of democratic governance as an alternative to the highly praised idea of ‘good governance’ put out by the World Bank in reaction to ‘gross mismanagement by African government’ (Mafeje, 2002). Democratic governance seeks to connect with the people, their participation in the institutions and processes of government based on equality of opportunity and equity, in contrast to good governance, which places emphasis on such technocratic issue as efficiency, transparency, and accountability in governments (Mafeje). By making governance human-centered, democratic governance emphasizes the ‘social’ component of governing. The logic behind this way of looking at governance is found in the possibility of ‘excellent’ rule without democracy. As a result, the focus is placed on some less significant technical and procedural difficulties, leaving the people- who should be the major subjects of concern in limbo.

The essential component of democratic government is public engagement, not merely attention to technocratic matters. This is not meant to minimize the importance of concerns like accountability and openness. They matter because the welfare of the populace is of the most utmost importance. In pursuit of justice, welfare, and environmental preservation, Cheema (2005) defines democratic governance as ‘the range of mechanisms by which a society establishes consensus on and implements regulations, human rights, laws, policies, and social structure.’ When defined this way, democratic governance refers to democratic institutions and procedures that are used to carry out authoritative value distribution. It focuses on the many different aspects of democratic processes, such as, elections, access to justice and the enforcement of human rights norms, decentralization and local governance capacity.

These several aspects all point to how complicated governance is. It also demonstrates the need for coordinated actions from many levels of government, including local, national, regional and international, across all social strata. Therefore, activities pertinent to some of these democratic institutions are considered while analyzing the role of regional organizations, in this instance ECOWAS, in the advancement of democratic governance.

INSTRUMENTS ADOPTED BY ECOWAS

Since 1991 ECOWAS has adopted four instruments which, as mentioned earlier, focus on the promotion of democratic governance within member states- The 1991 Declaration of Political Principles; the 1993 Revised Treaty; the 1999 Mechanism; and the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

The 1991 Declaration

The Declaration of Political Principles, signed in Abuja, Nigeria on 6 July 1991, enshrined a minimum set of democratic principles as guidance to member states in their quest for well established democratic states (Bundu, 1997). It pledged commitment to the establishment and smooth functioning of democratic institutions, human rights and rule of law.

In the Preamble, ECOWAS leaders reaffirmed the objectives of promoting better relations and ensuring a stable and secure political environment for their peoples to live in freedom under the law. They also vowed to concert their efforts to promote democracy in the sub-region on the basis of political pluralism and respect for human rights.

The 1993 Revised Treaty

A committee put together to consider the revision of the 1975 Treaty took into account the changed circumstances in terms of governance, peace and stability and worked over the 1991-1992 period. This eventually emerged as the Revised Treaty of 1993, signed in Cotonou, Benin, on 23 July 1993.

A number of the fundamental principles enshrined in Article (4) of the new Treaty were governance-related. These included recognition, promotion and protection of human and people's rights (Article 49, ECOWAS Treaty of 1993), accountability, economic and social justice and popular participation and promotion and consolidation of a democratic system of governance in each member state.

Two institutions provided for in the Revised Treaty are the Community Parliament and the Community Court of Justice (Article 5(e), ECOWAS Treaty). In addition, there were provisions for mobilization of various sections of the population, consultation of civil society groups and press freedom (Articles 18 & 19, ECOWAS Treaty).

The 1999 Mechanism

The Mechanism was signed on December 1999 in Lome, Togo. Though the focus of the Mechanism is the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, it adduces to several governance-related concerns.

In the Preamble, ECOWAS leaders indicate they are mindful of the Revised Treaty and reaffirm their commitment to the Declaration of 1991 on freedom, people's rights and democratization. The leaders further express awareness of the fact that good governance, the rule of law and sustainable development are essential for peace and conflict prevention.

Among the principles provided for in Article 2 are the promotion and consolidation of a democratic government as well as democratic institutions in each member state; and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms and the rules of international humanitarian laws. Article 20 provided for the creation of a Council of Elders to use their good offices and experiences to play the role of mediators, conciliators and facilitators

In Article 25, ECOWAS leaders are empowered to apply the Mechanism in the event of the overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically elected government. According to Article 42, 'ECOWAS shall be involved in the preparation, organization and supervision of election in member states. ECOWAS shall also monitor and actively support the development of democratic institutions of member states.

The 2001 Supplementary Protocol

The 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance is ECOWAS most comprehensive governance-related instrument (Alexander, 2009). Signed on 21 December 2001, the Protocol is an expression of a new collective political resolve of ECOWAS member states to take the process of preventing and resolving violent conflicts forward and to achieve peace and security through the development of democracy and good governance (WANSED, 2005).

In the Preamble, ECOWAS leaders show concern for the increasing incidence of conflicts caused by, marginalization and non-transparent elections and their

determination to enhance provisions on the prevention of internal crises, democracy and good governance, the rule of law, and human rights.

Section I (Article 1) of the Protocol covers the constitutional convergence principles which seek to introduce uniformity in the constitutions of ECOWAS member states. Other provisions in that article covered secularity and neutrality of the state in religious matters, non-discrimination, and freedom of the opposition are also guaranteed in Article 1(i).

The protocol makes crucial provisions on Elections, Election Monitoring and ECOWAS Assistance in Section 11 and 111 prohibits substantial modification to electoral laws in the last six months before the elections, except with the consent of a majority of Political actors; and in Article 2(2). All the elections shall be organized on the dates or at periods fixed by the Constitution or the electoral laws.

These provisions are very significant in a sub-region where majority of leaders are yet to institutionalize an orderly transfer of political power and politicians do not appreciate politics as a vocation, a gentlemen's game, and not a life and death struggle (Alexander). If elections were conducted peacefully and freely, it would certainly promote peace and security in the sub-region (Fisher and Oludemi).

The protocol, on elections, further provides for independent electoral authorities (Article 3); the involvement of civil society organizations in educating the citizenry particularly the need for peaceful elections devoid of all acts of violence. Significantly, Article 10 caution 'all holders of power at all levels' against acts of intimidation or harassment against defeated candidates or their supporters.

Section IV of the Protocol titled "The Role of the Armed Forces, the Police and Security Forces in a Democracy," targets a very important segment of the citizenry whose role in national politics had in the past impacted negatively on democratic governance. Article 19 emphasizes the non-partisanship and loyalty of the security agencies to the state, in the discharge of their duties. Article 20 focuses on civil-security relations; while the security agencies are to remain 'under the authority of legally constituted authorities, the civilian authorities are in turn to 'respect the apolitical nature' of the agencies.

Article 45 strengthens ECOWAS leaders zero tolerance for unconstitutional accession to power. Sub-section 1 provides: In the event that democracy is abruptly brought to an end by any means or where there is a massive violation of Human Rights in a Member State, ECOWAS may impose sanctions on the State concerned.

ECOWAS JOURNEY IN TERMS OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

To appreciate how far ECOWAS has journeyed in terms of democratic governance we take a historical sketch of the sub-region.

At the time of its formation, ECOWAS member states were ruled by either military juntas or sit-tight civilians who presided over one-party systems. There were eight military regimes among the 15 founding member states- Ghana, Togo, Benin (then Dahomey), Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta), Mali, and Mauritania. Of the seven civilian regimes four were one party systems led by the leaders who won them independence- Guinea then 17years under Sekou Toure, Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire then fifteen years each under Leopold Senghor and Felix Houphouet-Boigny respectively and ten years for Jawara in The Gambia. Siaka Stevens and his All People's Party were eight years in power, while William Tolbert, four years in power in Liberia had been preceded by William Tubman's 27 years rule. It was only Luis Cabral in newly independent Guinea-Bissau that had been only a year in office,

The governance-climate had not changed drastically sixteen years later in 1991 when the Declaration of Political Principles was adopted. Seven members still had military heads- Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria. Civilian leaders in Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia and Senegal had been in power for 31years, 26years and 10years respectively. It was only Benin which had transited to multi-party democracy, while Liberia and Sierra Leone were bedeviled with internal conflicts. For a sub-region that was still dominated by undemocratic (military and one party) regimes therefore, the public declaration in support of democratic governance was a step in the right direction. But how committed were the leaders of the sub-region to the declaration.

By mid-1993 when the ECOWAS Revised Treaty was signed, the democratic wind of change had only succeeded in producing or about to produce civilianized military presidents in Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. In all these instances long ruling military leaders supervised transitional elections in which they contested. They emerged victorious often under acrimonious circumstances and assumed constitutional first terms. These soldier-turned-presidents were also hopeful of fulfilling the maximum terms that the constitution they crafted allowed, irrespective of how long they had stayed as military rulers. It was also ironical that as the Revised Treaty, crafted by a committee headed by a former military Nigerian head of state was being signed, an incumbent Nigerian military ruler was in the process of annulling perhaps the freest and most detribalized election in the country's annals and installing a puppet civilian regime (Frempong).

Between the Revised Treaty and the Mechanism (1993 and 1999), the democratic governance record of West Africa was mixed. On the positive side, Benin made another democratic history when its 1996 elections led to another alternation of power, albeit, it was the return of former president Kerekou. There were also second multi-party elections in Ghana and Mali, as well as a 'mid-conflict' election in Sierra Leone. However these gains were negated by military putsches in Nigeria (1993), The Gambia (1994), Niger (1996), Sierra Leone (1996, palace coup, and 1997), and a mutiny in Guinea-Bissau had degenerated into a full scale civil war.

Furthermore, the sub-region witnessed the paradoxical situation of undemocratic governments, particularly Sani Abacha's Nigeria, trying to export democracy into war-weary member states (Sierra Leone and Liberia). By mid-1999, Nigeria had by divine intervention made a quick transition to constitutional rule while Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau were all grappling with different levels of post-conflict situations (Alexandra).

In December 1999, the ECOWAS Mechanism was called to test barely two weeks after its adoption by the Ivorian coup of 24 December 1999. One of its signatories, Konan Bedie, had been overthrown in a coup in direct contravention of Article 25(f) of the Mechanism which called for ECOWAS intervention in the event of an overthrow of a democratically elected government. ECOWAS' reaction to the take-over by Robert Guei had serious implication for the Community in terms of democratic governance, as elaborated below.

The coup no doubt presented ECOWAS with a dilemma. While it provided an opportunity to test the validity of the Mechanism, the coup appeared popular within Cote d'Ivoire. Worse still, at the Lome summit, Bedie had scuttled attempts by some sub-regional leaders to discuss the tense situation in his country following the disqualification of Ouattara, dismissing it as a little legal matter that could be sorted out internally. And

yet when it did happen, Bedie rushed to Accra and Abuja in search of support. As it were the coup threw a cat among the pigeons and dared ECOWAS for action

The events following Guei's failed attempt to scuttle the electoral process in October 2000, set Cote d'Ivoire on its path of self-destruction for which several subsequent attempts by ECOWAS has failed to reverse. Perhaps, if ECOWAS had in 1999 insisted on a democratic regime change, it could have been spared the trouble of managing a more complicated crisis.

As it were, by the start of the new millennium, coups, rebellions, civil wars and general militarization of society had virtually eclipsed whatever progress in terms of democratic governance had been achieved in the sub-region since the 1991 Declaration.

THE COUP IN BURKINA FASO

A former French colony till 1960, Burkina Faso has a long history of military rule and coups. Former President Blaise Compaore, who took power in 1983, was ousted in a popular uprising in 2014 after attempting to amend the constitution to extend his rule. Elections were held in 2015 and in 2020, when President Roch Marc Christian Kabore was re-elected in polls that was considered to be fair but marred by ongoing insecurity.

On January 24, 2022 the military overthrew Kabore and seized power. Coup leader Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba became head of the military-led Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration MPSR that replaced the government. The military blamed Kabore's failure to halt an insurgency by jihadist groups in the north.

However, Kabore's ousting was not unexpected, according to Ochieng ([BBC, 2022](#)), discontent among security forces had been growing over the lack of support. She notes this was exacerbated further by reports that security forces at a military base in Inata had run out of food in the weeks before they were attacked by an armed group in November 2021. Forty-nine military police officers and four civilians were killed in the attacks.

Residents of Burkina Faso on Friday 30 September woke up to the sounds of heavy gunfire near the main military camp and residential areas of the capital, Ouagadougou. A large blast also rang out near the presidential palace. The coup was confirmed by army Captain Ibrahim Traore who announced that former military ruler Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba had been deposed and his government dissolved. The MPSR subsequently appointed Traore as President and head of the armed forces. Traore has since announced plans to hold a national meeting on 14 and 15 October to select a transitional President.

In ousting Damiba, Traore gave the same reason as his predecessor; the failure to address the Islamist insurgency. In a written statement, Traore said that, faced with a deteriorating situation, they had tried to persuade Damiba to refocus the transition on the security question. The statement went on to say "Damiba's actions gradually convinced us that his ambitions were diverting away from what we set out to do. We decided this day to remove Damiba" ([Reuters, 2022](#)).

In recent years, Burkina Faso has replaced Mali as the epicenter of Islamist violence in the Sahel, according to Heni Nsaibia ([Nsaibia, 2022](#)). There have been devastating attacks on civilians in recent years. More than 130 people were killed by armed militants in the northern town of Solhan in June 2021, believed to be the deadliest attack for years. An attack on Seytenga in June 2022 prompted almost 16,000 people to leave their homes. UNHCR says Burkina Faso's displacement crisis is "one of the world's fastest growing" with an estimated 1.9 million people internally displaced ([UNHCR, 17 June 2022](#)).

The Government has also struggled to assert authority, and controls only 60% of the country, according to Mahamadou Issoufou, a former president of Niger and ECOWAS' mediator to Burkina Faso (Al Jazeera, 2021). Jihadist groups have blockaded northern towns, and just before the latest coup, an Al Qaeda affiliated group claimed responsibility for an attack on a supply convoy near Gaskinde that resulted in the deaths of 27 soldiers and 10 civilians (Al Jazeera, 2022). The trucks were heading for Djibo, which has reportedly been under an effective blockade by jihadist groups for months (Al Jazeera).

The latest coup in Burkina Faso is the most recent in West Africa where countries like Chad, Mali and Guinea recently experienced coups. The country has been locked in a conflict with militant groups linked to Islamic State and al-Qaida for almost seven years, experiencing its second coup in eight months. ECOWAS is expected to establish relations with the new junta leader, Captain Ibrahim Traore, and to reinforce a two year transition period for the country to return to democracy set up under the previous junta.

Burkina Faso is seen as a strategic lynchpin in the western Sahel conflict, with terrorism already spreading from its southern border to West Africa's coastal states. ECOWAS has a major stake in Burkina Faso's success in security matters. According to Michael Shurkin, an analyst with 14 North Strategies, a Washington based consultancy, if Burkina Faso falls, or as it falls, it puts in danger a lot of other countries that surround Burkina Faso. Thousands have died in Burkina Faso due to the conflict, almost two million people have been displaced, representing roughly 10% of the country's twenty two million population.

Damiba, who has reportedly fled to neighboring Togo, offered his resignation under seven conditions, which Traore accepted- including a promise that the country would continue with the commitments made to the ECOWAS on a two year transition to democratic power.

However, it is increasingly likely that in seeking to reduce attacks by armed groups and thereby keep themselves in power, the new coup leaders will join Mali and pursue support from the Wagner Group, a private military company founded by Russia Oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin. Burkinabe soldiers see the relative success that the Wagner Group had in seizing back territories from armed militias in the Central African Republic and in preventing rebels from deposing its government.

Russia has sought closer ties with African countries wracked by insecurity by offering military arms and support. Damiba had started on a path of cooperation with ECOWAS, having so far held out against Russia's offer to train Burkinabe troops. He also allowed former President Blaise Compaore back into the country within a framework of national reconciliation, despite Compaore's life sentence for the murder of Sankara. Many felt Damiba was becoming more of a politician than a military leader who could succeed against the jihadists.

The future of these relations will partly depend on how the Western powers support the new authorities. But what is certain is that part of the public opinion which supported this counter coup will continue to demand a shift in favor or Russia.

Russian flags were waved by some of Traore's supporters in Ouagadougou due to grievances against former colonial power France. Meanwhile, the French Embassy was attacked by angry protesters after an officer said France was sheltering Damiba at a French military base and that he was planning a counteroffensive. Both Damiba and French authorities have denied those allegations. Demonstrators also attacked the French cultural center in Bobo-Dioulasso, the country's second largest city.

ECOWAS RESPONSE TO THE COUP

ECOWAS, the regional grouping of West African countries, condemned “in the strongest terms” the seizure of power and reaffirmed its “unreserved condemnation of any seizure or retention of power by unconstitutional means (ECOWAS, 1 October 2022, Communiqué of the ECOWAS Commission on the Socio-Political situation in Burkina Faso).

The West Africa regional bloc, ECOWAS, has suspended Burkina Faso in the aftermath of the military coup, making it the third member to be punished for a military takeover in only eighteen months. ECOWAS said it found the new coup inappropriate at a time when progress had been made in ensuring an orderly return to constitutional order in Burkina Faso.

ECOWAS reaffirmed its unreserved opposition to any seizure or retention of power by unconstitutional means and demands the scrupulous respect of the timetable already agreed with the Transitional Authorities for a rapid return to constitutional order.

Ghanaian President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the current ECOWAS chairman, called the recent spate of coups in West Africa a direct violation of our democratic tenets. In the past eighteen months, the fifteen nation ECOWAS has suspended two other members- Guinea and Mali- where coups have occurred.

ECOWAS suspended neighboring Mali after a coup there in August 2020 and then took similar action against Guinea after the President was overthrown in September 2021. Mali is also under punishing economic sanctions, including flight bans and asset freezes, after its coup leader failed to organize elections within eighteen months as promised.

The latest suspension on Burkina Faso has very little effect as the sanctions put in place in Guinea and Mali has done very little to change things. ECOWAS has faced criticisms for its handling of the coups, particularly in Mali where mediators negotiated with the military government on the eighteen month deadline for holding democratic elections. Mali’s coup leader has said that will not be met, citing security conditions, and has announced a vote to take place four years from now instead.

ECOWAS representatives had been doubling their efforts in neighboring Mali to negotiate the release of Ivory Coast soldiers that the Malian junta had deemed mercenaries. ECOWAS mediators arrived in Ouagadougou on Tuesday to demonstrations against the bloc’s delegates. As a result, the meeting with the junta had to be held at the airport.

Traore’s comments so far suggest he is open to working with all international partners excluding France, who Burkinabe perceive as having worsened civilian casualties in the region. The junta could also seek out the assistance of Turkey, which has increased its military sales to Africa.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious from the foregoing discussion that while constitutionalism has assumed new prominence in West Africa in the last two decades, compliance with the constitutions and the law is often vulnerable and minimalist, rendering ineffective the basic constitution-guaranteed rights and freedoms. Under the circumstances, a lot more needs to be done both at the level of ECOWAS and within member states in translating the rhetoric on democratic governance and stability into practice. At the sub-regional level, the following should be made priority:

ECOWAS should design ways to mitigate elements that lead to political breakdown and coups. Issues which should be of regional concern include clear breaches of the constitution by a state's own government, rigged or suspect elections, clear and significant breaches of human rights including exclusionary practices, high and continuing level of corruption.

ECOWAS should monitor the constitutions of member states to ensure that they abide by regional standards with particular reference to term limits. To this end, the Secretariat is to prepare annual reports on transparency and good governance in each of its member states.

The ECOWAS Parliament as presently has practically no oversight role and lack powers to enforce its decisions and to elicit compliance from member states. To be effective, therefore, the ECOWAS Parliament should be empowered to censure erring governments and to have the power to order international investigation into reported and suspected cases of human rights abuses.

Within each member states, the following should be prioritized:

The government needs to accept a tacit level of supervision of their domestic politics by other states within the region, permitting regional mediation between governments and opposition forces, a measure of external pressure where this is needed to induce compliance.

There is also an urgent need for social dialogue among stakeholders in the political process to ensure the minimizing of bitterness, avoiding the stigmatization of others, and broad consensus on the rules of the game. The introduction of inter-Party Advisory Committee which has worked so well in Ghana is recommended. To ensure some level playing ground, it is essential that there is some form of state funding of political parties.

Civil societies should be empowered not only as a means of expanding political participation but also to promote popular vigilance and enhance the watchdog role of civic actors and citizens groups. The massive and vigorous manner in which the National Civil Coalition against Third Term Agenda in Nigeria pressured the national legislature to reject the amendment to lift the two-term is worth emulating.

In conclusion, the constraints that persist in the form of institutional resources and of socio-cultural practices need to be addressed, if the vision of a truly representative and participative system is to be fully translated into reality. In particular, West African leaders should be constantly reminded that power entails responsibilities to protect, care for and be accountable, to the people. What is required within the sub-region is not the mere trappings of democratic changes, but a change of mentality by leaders in particular and West Africans in general, consistent with constitutional rule and better appreciation of the rule of law in a modern state. The success of the governance protocols depends on the democratic credentials and actions of their subscribers. And on this matter, ECOWAS should not glorify itself with half-victories.

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