

Cross-Border Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing in Combating Transnational Crimes in ECOWAS Region

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Abstract

Transnational crimes, such as human trafficking, arms smuggling, terrorism, drug trafficking, and cybercrime, continue to threaten the stability and development of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Porous borders, weak institutions, and limited intelligence-sharing mechanisms hinder the collective security efforts of ECOWAS's fifteen member states. This study investigates the role of cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing in combating these transnational crimes. It critically examines

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existing regional frameworks, evaluates their effectiveness, and explores the structural and operational challenges undermining cooperation among member states. The findings underscore the necessity of enhanced coordination, trust-building, and technological investment to strengthen regional security architecture and disrupt criminal networks. The study contributes to understanding how integrated intelligence efforts can fortify West Africa's response to complex security threats.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Transnational Crime, Intelligence Sharing, Cross-Border Cooperation, Regional Security

Introduction

The rise of transnational crimes such as human trafficking, arms smuggling, terrorism, drug trafficking, and cybercrime has become a pressing security concern in the West African sub-region. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional bloc of fifteen countries, has witnessed a surge in these criminal activities due to its porous borders, weak institutional frameworks, and fragile security infrastructures (Aning & Pokoo, 2014). The increasing sophistication and interconnectedness of criminal networks across West African states have made it evident that no single country can effectively combat these crimes in isolation. West Africa's geopolitical and socio-economic context further complicates the fight against transnational crimes. With a combined population of over 400 million people, ECOWAS is marked by diverse cultures, languages, colonial legacies, and uneven economic development, all of which affect the coordination and implementation of security policies (Omeje & Githigaro, 2019). According to the 2025 Global Crime Index, West Africa remains a global hotspot for cocaine trafficking and is increasingly becoming the global "epicenter" of terrorism-linked criminal activities (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC). (2025).). Political instability, widespread poverty, youth unemployment, and weak rule of law contribute to the vulnerability of the region, making it fertile ground for criminal enterprises and non-state actors.

Porous and poorly monitored borders remain one of the most significant facilitators of transnational criminal activity in the ECOWAS region. Many borders stretch through remote, rural areas that lack adequate surveillance and are often managed with minimal cooperation among neighbouring countries (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2020). This enables not only the illicit flow of people, goods, and arms but also complicates the ability of law enforcement and intelligence agencies to effectively respond to threats. Moreover, weak institutions and limited intelligence-sharing mechanisms have hindered regional efforts to combat organised crime and terrorism. The absence of standardised legal frameworks, inadequate training and resources, and political will among member states have all played a role in the failure to build cohesive and responsive regional security architecture (Alemika, 2013). While ECOWAS has made commendable strides through protocols on mutual legal assistance, extradition, and counter-terrorism cooperation, the implementation of these protocols often suffers due to national interests, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and mistrust among security agencies.

The need for enhanced cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing has therefore become imperative. Effective collaboration among ECOWAS member states in intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination is essential to tracking and dismantling transnational criminal networks. This study investigates how improved intelligence coordination and strategic cross-border cooperation can significantly reduce the threat of transnational crimes in the ECOWAS region, and explores the institutional, political, and logistics factors that either facilitate or hinder such cooperation.

Problem Statement

Despite the adoption of various regional protocols and strategic frameworks aimed at promoting security cooperation, transnational crimes continue to pose significant threats to the West African region. A critical trend in 2024–2025 is the blurring of lines between organised crime and terrorism, particularly in the Sahel (Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso). Terrorist groups exploit illicit trades (arms, drugs, and cattle rustling) to build legitimacy among local communities and finance operations. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has developed mechanisms

such as the ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight against Corruption (2001), the Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (2006), and the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2013). However, the prevalence of crimes such as arms trafficking, drug smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism across national borders has not abated (Alemika, 2013; Aning & Abdallah, 2013). A core challenge lies in the inadequate sharing of intelligence and weak inter-state cooperation among member states. National security agencies often operate in isolation, and intelligence is seldom shared in a timely or comprehensive manner due to issues of mistrust, institutional weaknesses, and lack of harmonised security frameworks (Onuoha, 2013). Moreover, overlapping jurisdictions and a lack of coordination between ECOWAS institutions, such as the West African Police Chiefs Committee (WAPCCO) and the Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff (CCDS), further weaken the region's collective capacity to tackle transnational threats (Edeko, 2011). Additionally, state-centric security practices, compounded by political instability, inadequate technological infrastructure, and resource constraints, have made regional cooperation in intelligence gathering and operational coordination difficult (Abatan & Spies, 2016). These challenges hinder the implementation of collective security mechanisms and create loopholes that transnational criminal networks continue to exploit, thereby undermining peace, security, and development across ECOWAS member states.

Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. Identify and evaluate the existing regional mechanisms for intelligence sharing and cooperation in ECOWAS;
- ii. Assess the effectiveness of these mechanisms in combating transnational crimes among ECOWAS member states;
- iii. Examine the structural and operational challenges facing intelligence sharing and cross-border cooperation among ECOWAS member states.

Research Questions

- i. What are the existing regional mechanisms for intelligence sharing and cross-border cooperation among ECOWAS member states?
- ii. How effective have these mechanisms been in combating transnational crimes among ECOWAS member states?
- iii. What are the structural and operational challenges facing intelligence sharing and cross-border cooperation among ECOWAS member states?

Justification/Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its multidimensional contribution to regional policy formulation, security sector reform, and academic literature. The ECOWAS region has witnessed an upsurge in transnational crimes such as terrorism, drug and human trafficking, arms smuggling, and money laundering, which have continued to undermine regional peace, development, and governance (Alemika, 2013). These challenges transcend national borders and necessitate a cooperative and coordinated response rooted in shared intelligence and joint security strategies. This study offers valuable insights into how ECOWAS member states can enhance regional mechanisms for cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing. Despite the existence of protocols such as the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, implementation remains inconsistent due to institutional and political challenges (Bah, 2005). By examining best practices and highlighting existing gaps, the research provides evidence-based recommendations that can inform policy dialogues, particularly in areas of harmonising security frameworks, promoting trust among intelligence agencies, and strengthening legal instruments governing regional security cooperation.

Conceptual Clarifications

Cross-Border Cooperation

Cross-border cooperation refers to the collaborative efforts between sovereign states that share geographical boundaries, aimed at addressing common challenges and promoting mutual interests, particularly in areas

such as security, trade, health, and infrastructure. In the context of West Africa, cross-border cooperation is essential for managing the fluid movement of people, goods, and services, as well as for addressing shared security concerns such as terrorism, trafficking, and armed conflict (ECOWAS, 2021). Effective cross-border cooperation typically involves formal agreements, joint patrols, intergovernmental task forces, and bilateral or multilateral treaties that facilitate harmonised approaches to border governance (Alemika, 2013).

Intelligence Sharing

Intelligence sharing is the systematic exchange of information and data relevant to national and regional security among governmental agencies, security institutions, or states. It involves both strategic and operational intelligence aimed at identifying, preventing, or mitigating security threats (Gill, Marrin & Phythian, 2009). Within the ECOWAS framework, intelligence sharing has been institutionalised through mechanisms such as the ECOWAS Early Warning System (ECOWARN) and the West African Police Chiefs Committee (WAPCCO), which aim to enhance situational awareness and coordinated responses to emerging threats (ECOWAS Commission, 2020). The effectiveness of intelligence sharing is largely dependent on trust, interoperability of systems, political will, and the protection of classified information. Intelligence sharing within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a cornerstone of the regional security architecture, particularly as the bloc faces a proliferation of terrorism, coups and transnational crime.

Transnational Crimes

Transnational crimes are offenses whose execution and impact transcend national boundaries. These include but are not limited to human trafficking, drug smuggling, terrorism, arms proliferation, and money laundering (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2023). In the ECOWAS region, weak state institutions, porous borders, corruption, and economic disparities contribute to the prevalence and persistence of transnational crimes (Okereke, 2019). The dynamic and networked nature of these crimes demands cooperative strategies that cut across national jurisdictions and institutional barriers. Transnational organised crime (TOC) in West Africa

has evolved from a series of localised illicit activities into a global, multi-billion-dollar shadow economy that threatens regional stability, national security, and state sovereignty.

Regional Security Architecture

Regional security architecture refers to the institutional and policy frameworks designed to maintain peace, security, and stability within a specific geographic region. It encompasses both formal institutions (such as ECOWAS, the African Union, and regional military forces) and informal mechanisms (like traditional conflict resolution systems and community-based security) (Bach, 2007). The ECOWAS regional security architecture is anchored on normative frameworks such as the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) and the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security. These frameworks are reinforced by regional organs such as the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), which facilitate multilateral responses to crises (Aning & Pokoo, 2014).

The Regional Security Architecture of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a complex, multi-layered framework designed to manage peace and security. As of late 2025, this architecture is facing its most significant test due to a wave of military coups and the formal withdrawal of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)—Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (Africa Security Analysis, 2025). The architecture is primarily governed by the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security. It operates through three main pillars:

- i. The Mediation and Security Council (MSC): The decision-making body that authorises military interventions and diplomatic missions. In December 2025, the MSC declared a regional State of Emergency in response to persistent instability (Vanguard December, 2025).
- ii. ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF): A multidisciplinary force (military, police, and civilian) ready for rapid deployment. While historically successful in places like The Gambia (ECOMIG), its activation for

recent crises in Niger and Mali has been hampered by political divisions.

- iii. Early Warning System (ECOWARN): A network of reporting center that monitors “stressors” like food insecurity, small arms proliferation, and political tension to prevent conflicts before they escalate (Africa Policy Research Institute, 2025)

	Threat Category	2025 Status / Impact
1	Unconstitutional Changes	Five countries remain under military rule or in “stalled” transitions (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger. Coup was recently attempted in Benin/Guinea-Bissau).
2	Terrorism, Insurgency and Transnational crime	Violent extremism is moving from the Sahel toward “Coastal States” like Benin, Togo, and Ghana.
3	The “AES” Rupture	The withdrawal of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso in January 2025 has created a massive gap in intelligence and counter-terrorism cooperation in the heart of the region.
4	Electoral Violence	ECOWAS now identifies elections as a “major trigger of instability” due to exclusion and third-term bids.

Source: Authors’ compilations, 2025

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and the Collective Security Theory to explain the dynamics of cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing in the fight against transnational crimes in the ECOWAS region.

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

Developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, RSCT posits that security interdependence is most intense among states within a geographically proximate region, forming what is called a “regional security complex” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). The theory asserts that security challenges such as terrorism, insurgency, and organised crime often transcend borders and create shared vulnerabilities that demand cooperative responses. In the ECOWAS context, threats like Boko Haram, Sahelian jihadist networks, and cross-border criminal syndicates affect multiple states simultaneously, reinforcing the necessity for regionally integrated security strategies (Onuoha, 2013). The RSCT framework helps to explain why states in West Africa cannot afford to address security threats in isolation. It underscores the relevance of regionally institutionalised cooperation, such as ECOWAS’ mechanisms for peace and security, as indispensable tools in addressing shared vulnerabilities.

Collective Security Theory

Rooted in liberal internationalist thought, the collective security theory argues that peace is best preserved when states agree to collectively respond to threats against any member of the group (Claude, 1962). It underpins institutions like the United Nations and ECOWAS, where member states pledge to protect each other against aggression or security threats. In the ECOWAS region, this theory is operationalised through instruments such as the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention and the establishment of regional security bodies. The theory supports the idea that effective intelligence sharing and cross-border cooperation are not merely optional strategies but obligations rooted in collective interest. The shared response to the Malian crisis and efforts to counter Boko Haram are practical demonstrations of collective security in action (Aning, 2005).

Empirical Literature

Existing Studies on Security Cooperation in ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has progressively embraced regional security cooperation as a critical framework for addressing transnational crimes, including terrorism, human

trafficking, and arms smuggling. Several empirical studies underscore the growing significance of cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing in the sub-region. For instance, Aning and Pokoo (2014) emphasised that ECOWAS has developed normative and institutional mechanisms that promote regional security governance, particularly the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), which underscores intelligence coordination as being essential in addressing regional insecurity. Similarly, Eselebor and Adebayo (2020) argue that ECOWAS's strategies, including the Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), are designed to facilitate timely data sharing and preemptive actions among member states. However, research by Iwilade (2017) suggests that while the legal and institutional frameworks are in place, their implementation is often constrained by sovereignty concerns and national interests that hamper effective operational cooperation. Consequently, the literature acknowledges the normative strides ECOWAS has made, but also points to a persistent gap between policy intent and practical enforcement, particularly in the realm of intelligence sharing (Adetula, 2016).

Success Stories: ECOWAS Standby Force and WAPCCO

Despite challenges, there have been notable successes in regional security collaboration. The ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) is often cited as a flagship achievement in regional peace and security operations. According to Obi (2015), the ESF has provided a coordinated military framework for rapid deployment in crisis zones, such as in Mali and The Gambia, thereby reinforcing the capacity of ECOWAS to intervene decisively in security threats with cross-border implications.

In the domain of law enforcement, the West African Police Chiefs Committee (WAPCCO) has played a pivotal role in fostering transnational cooperation among police institutions in the region. WAPCCO facilitates operational collaboration through joint investigations, capacity building, and the establishment of a regional criminal intelligence database (INTERPOL, 2021). For example, coordinated efforts under WAPCCO have led to the dismantling of several transnational human trafficking and drug smuggling networks across Nigeria, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire (ECOWAS Commission, 2020). These initiatives highlight the potential of regional cooperation mechanisms when adequately resourced and politically supported.

Challenges in Intelligence Sharing

Notwithstanding these successes, challenges to intelligence sharing continue to undermine the efficacy of regional cooperation. Chief among these is the issue of mistrust among member states, which is rooted in historical rivalries, fears of espionage, and domestic political sensitivities. According to Ebo (2013), intelligence institutions in the region often view one another with suspicion, which stifles collaboration. Furthermore, resource disparities among member states lead to asymmetrical capacities for data gathering and analysis. Some countries lack modern surveillance technologies or trained intelligence personnel, making equitable participation in intelligence sharing difficult (Okome, 2018). Political instability also exacerbates the challenge, as fragile states with volatile leadership often have weak institutions that are unable or unwilling to engage in systematic intelligence cooperation. The cases of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea post-coup environments illustrate how internal instability can render regional intelligence initiatives ineffective (Amnesty International, 2023). The absence of a central coordination hub with binding enforcement powers also weakens ECOWAS's ability to institutionalise intelligence exchange frameworks (Akinola, 2020).

Limited Comparative Analyses of Practical Cooperation and Policy Implementation

A significant gap in the literature is the dearth of comparative empirical analyses evaluating how different ECOWAS countries implement regional security agreements. Most studies focus on normative frameworks or provide broad overviews of regional security architecture without delving into country-specific performance metrics. As noted by Bach (2016), this lack of granular, comparative data limits our understanding of best practices and the conditions under which cross-border cooperation thrives. Moreover, little has been done to assess how national legal systems integrate ECOWAS protocols or the degree to which national agencies comply with them in practical security operations (Ukeje & Mvukiyehe, 2011).

Need for Content-Based Evaluation of Regional Protocols, Communiqués, and Reports

Recent scholarship emphasises the necessity of conducting content-based analyses of the numerous protocols, communiqués, and reports produced by ECOWAS and its affiliated bodies. While these documents articulate aspirations and frameworks for cooperation, there is limited scholarly interrogation of their actual policy content, clarity, and enforceability. For instance, Boås and Torheim (2013) argue that many ECOWAS communiqués lack actionable indicators, timelines, and mechanisms for monitoring compliance. A content evaluation could reveal whether regional frameworks possess the internal logic and specificity required to guide intelligence sharing and cross-border operations effectively. Furthermore, such an analysis would help clarify how ECOWAS documents address contemporary threats like cybercrime, terrorism financing, and maritime piracy—areas that are often mentioned but not systematically operationalised in member states' security agendas (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011). There is therefore a pressing need for future research to bridge the gap between declaratory policies and operational realities, particularly through grounded content analysis and implementation studies.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis design. Qualitative content analysis is suitable for exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena such as cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing among ECOWAS member states (Schreier, 2012). This method facilitates the systematic interpretation of textual data through the process of coding and thematisation, which helps in identifying patterns and meanings that reflect regional efforts, institutional frameworks, and security collaborations. Given the policy-driven and institutionally embedded nature of transnational crime control mechanisms in West Africa, qualitative content analysis allows for an in-depth understanding of how relevant actors interpret and implement security and intelligence protocols across borders (Mayring, 2014). Data for the study were drawn from a wide array of secondary sources, which include official and publicly accessible documents, reports, and academic literature. The primary sources of data include ECOWAS legal instruments such as

treaties, protocols, communiqués, security declarations, resolutions, and meeting minutes from the ECOWAS Commission and its specialised agencies; and reports from regional and international security institutions. These sources provide critical insights into the operational dynamics of cross-border intelligence coordination, institutional arrangements, legal frameworks, and challenges confronting the region in its effort to combat transnational crimes.

Findings

Existing Cross-Border Cooperation Mechanisms in ECOWAS

Cross-border cooperation remains a central pillar in the ECOWAS framework to tackle transnational crimes such as terrorism, trafficking, and irregular migration. ECOWAS has institutionalised several protocols and mechanisms to promote coordination among member states.

ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement: The ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment (1979) is one of the most prominent regional frameworks. It facilitates the legal movement of citizens across borders without visas, thereby promoting regional integration. However, the protocol has also unintentionally created vulnerabilities that transnational criminal networks exploit due to porous borders and weak enforcement mechanisms (Adepoju, 2007).

ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy: The ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2013) provides a multi-faceted approach to prevent and combat terrorism through regional collaboration, information sharing, and capacity-building among national security institutions. The strategy emphasises intelligence-led policing and collaborative investigations, although implementation across member states remains uneven (Onuoha, 2013).

Joint Border Patrol Initiatives: Member states, such as Nigeria, Niger, and Benin, have established Joint Border Patrols to enhance border security. These efforts aim to reduce smuggling, arms trafficking, and terrorist infiltration. The Nigeria-Niger Joint Border Patrol, for instance, has led to significant seizures and arrests but continues to face logistical and personnel challenges (Ukeje & Motsamai, 2017).

Multilateral Agreements on Arms and Drug Trafficking: Several ECOWAS states have signed multilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) focusing on curbing arms and drug trafficking. The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (2006) is notable, as it prohibits the transfer and manufacture of illicit arms in the region. Yet, enforcement has been limited due to corruption and inadequate monitoring (Aning, 2005).

Intelligence Sharing Practices and Frameworks: Efficient intelligence sharing is critical to combating transnational crimes, but in the ECOWAS context, it is constrained by infrastructural, political, and institutional limitations.

Role of WAPCCO: The West African Police Chiefs Committee (WAPCCO) acts as a key regional body for coordinating police efforts, facilitating intelligence exchange, and harmonising crime-fighting strategies. WAPCCO has initiated joint training sessions and maintains regional crime databases, but limited data integration remains a concern (INTERPOL, 2020).

Intelligence-Sharing Platforms and Databases: Platforms like INTERPOL's I-24/7 network and AFRIPOL have been adopted by several ECOWAS member states. These platforms allow for the swift transmission of alerts on criminals and stolen items. However, connectivity issues and inconsistent updates hinder their effectiveness (Chapsos & Hamilton, 2019).

National Intelligence Coordination and Bilateral Security MoUs: Many countries in the region have bilateral security MoUs, including Nigeria-Niger, Nigeria-Cameroon, and Ghana-Togo. These MoUs facilitate the exchange of intelligence on border security, trafficking, and insurgency. However, effectiveness often depends on political will and trust between the cooperating states (Edeko, 2011).

Challenges Identified

Despite efforts toward cooperation and intelligence sharing, several persistent challenges impede effectiveness.

Mistrust and Sovereignty Concerns: One of the major obstacles is mistrust among ECOWAS states, often arising from historical tensions,

political rivalry, or fear of sovereignty infringement. This reluctance to share sensitive intelligence creates gaps in transnational investigations (Oshewolo & Akintola, 2020).

Lack of Technical Capacity and Infrastructure: Many member states face limited technological capacity, inadequate forensic laboratories, and outdated surveillance systems. This undermines real-time intelligence sharing and the ability to analyse or respond to threats swiftly (Akinrinade, 2018).

Political Interference and Inconsistency in Enforcement: The effectiveness of regional agreements is frequently hampered by political interference, regime changes, and weak institutions. National interests often override regional commitments, leading to inconsistent enforcement of protocols and joint operations (Olaniyan, 2019).

Language and Institutional Differences: ECOWAS comprises Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone countries, creating language and administrative disparities. These differences complicate joint operations, intelligence processing, and the implementation of regional agreements (Zounmenou & Ojo, 2016).

Success Stories and Best Practices

Despite challenges, some notable examples demonstrate the potential of coordinated efforts in the ECOWAS region.

Joint Task Forces (e.g., Nigeria–Niger Joint Border Patrol): The Nigeria-Niger Joint Border Patrol has made strides in curbing cross-border crimes, particularly trafficking and terrorism. Coordinated operations, backed by local intelligence, have enhanced mutual trust and operational success (Ukeje & Motsamai, 2017).

Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) Against Boko Haram: The MNJTF, comprising troops from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, is a successful regional initiative. It has significantly degraded Boko Haram's operations through coordinated military and intelligence efforts, despite funding and logistics challenges (Aning & Bah, 2013).

ECOWAS Early Warning Mechanism: The ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) collect and analyses conflict-related

data to alert member states of potential threats. Its integration with civil society inputs has enhanced community-based intelligence and preventive action (Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, 2015).

Use of Digital Surveillance and Data Networks: Member states are gradually adopting digital tools, surveillance systems, and biometric data collection, such as Nigeria's national identity system. These developments promise improved border control and criminal profiling, although data privacy remains a concern (Adegbite, 2021).

Growing Role of Civil Society and NGOs in Intelligence Support: Civil society organisations increasingly contribute to community-based intelligence, conflict monitoring, and reintegration of ex-combatants. NGOs have filled gaps in early warning systems and victim support services (Iwilade, 2014).

Shift towards Preventive Diplomacy: There is a growing emphasis on preventive diplomacy and mediation within ECOWAS. The deployment of diplomatic missions and peace envoys to fragile states reflects a regional preference for early engagement before crises escalate (ECOWAS, 2020).

Conclusion

This study has examined the critical role of cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing in combating transnational crimes within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region. The findings reveal that cross-border cooperation remains an indispensable tool for enhancing regional security and effectively addressing complex criminal networks that transcend national boundaries (Aning & Atuobi, 2016). However, despite its importance, cross-border collaboration faces significant challenges, particularly institutional and political barriers that impede seamless coordination among member states. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of harmonised legal frameworks, and political mistrust limit the potential of joint security efforts (Ibrahim, 2019).

Intelligence sharing, a key component of effective cross-border security cooperation, has shown notable improvement with the establishment of regional security bodies and initiatives such as the ECOWAS Standby Force and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (Ojo, 2020). Nonetheless,

the study identifies persistent under-utilisation due to fragmentation across national intelligence agencies, lack of trust, and inadequate technical infrastructure (Onuoha, 2018). These shortcomings hinder the timely exchange of actionable intelligence and limit the operational effectiveness of security forces against transnational threats like terrorism, human trafficking, and organised crime (Adeoye, 2021). In conclusion, while cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing within ECOWAS have laid a foundation for regional security collaboration, there remain significant gaps in institutional capacity, trust, and technology that must be addressed to optimise their impact on combating transnational crimes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing in the ECOWAS region:

- i. **Strengthen Institutional Frameworks and Technical Capacity:** ECOWAS member states should enhance their institutional frameworks by harmonising legal and operational procedures for intelligence sharing. Investment in modern communication and data analytics technologies is essential to support and secure efficient information exchange (Aning & Okyere, 2019).
- ii. **Foster Trust-Building Initiatives and Joint Training:** Regular joint training programmes and workshops among security agencies should be institutionalised to build interpersonal relationships, professional trust, and interoperability. Such initiatives can mitigate suspicion and foster a collaborative culture across borders (Onuoha & Olorunfemi, 2020).
- iii. **Establish Standardised Intelligence Protocols and Secure Data-Sharing Platforms:** Developing standardised protocols for the classification, handling, and dissemination of intelligence will reduce fragmentation. The establishment of secure, interoperable digital platforms will ensure confidentiality and real-time sharing of critical security information (Adeoye & Abubakar, 2022).
- iv. **Engage Regional and International Actors for Support:** Collaboration with regional bodies such as the African Union and

international partners, including the United Nations and INTERPOL, can provide technical expertise, funding, and logistical support vital for capacity building (Ibrahim, 2019).

- v. **Encourage Political Will and Enforcement of Regional Agreements:** Sustained political commitment at the highest levels is crucial to enforce ECOWAS protocols and agreements. Governments should prioritise security cooperation agendas and ensure accountability mechanisms are in place to uphold agreed commitments (Aning, 2020).

Implementing these recommendations will enhance the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing, ultimately strengthening the ECOWAS region's capacity to combat transnational crimes and promote regional stability.

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