

Peace, security and the Millennium Development Goals in West Africa

Anatole Ayissi

Most programmes targeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have a mainly economic thrust.¹ Political aspects in general, and peace and security in particular, are either skirted or completely ignored. Yet experience shows that it is hard for some poor countries to attain the MDGs without addressing the challenges of security and governance. With security and development so closely intertwined, the Millennium Declaration has an entire section on peace, security and disarmament in which, alongside their commitment to overcome poverty and strive for development, the heads of state and government pledge to “spare no effort to free our peoples from the scourge of war, whether within or between States”.²

Five years on from the Millennium Declaration, at the 2005 World Summit, world leaders again asserted that there can be no sustainable development without peace and security. As they stated in the World Summit Outcome: “peace and security, development and human rights are the pillars of the United Nations system and the foundations for collective security and well-being. We recognize that development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.”³ By way of illustration, the World Bank notes in a recent report that the majority of countries with little chance of attaining the MDGs are those beset by conflict and insecurity:

Looking ahead, the challenge to reach the MDGs will increasingly be concentrated in low-income countries, and especially fragile states On all MDGs, fragile states lag behind other developing countries. This group of countries poses particular development challenges, as many are dealing with conflict or post-conflict environments that make the delivery of development finance and services especially problematic.⁴

This nexus between armed conflict, fragile states and the lack of progress on the MDGs is an emerging regional trend in West Africa. At least half the states in the subregion⁵ are either in post-conflict recovery (Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone) or greatly weakened by creeping or endemic crisis situations (e.g. Guinea, Mali, Niger).

The West African states themselves recognize that such situations of conflict or institutional instability impact negatively on their progress toward the MDGs, and post-crisis West African countries are now tending to include peace, security and governance as one of the pillars of their poverty reduction strategies (PRS) and their MDG strategies. Liberia’s PRS has four pillars, the very first of which is “consolidating peace and security”.⁶ In Sierra Leone, too, the first pillar of its PRS in pursuit

Anatole Ayissi is Senior Political Adviser at the United Nations Office for West Africa, Dakar, Senegal.

of the MDGs is “promoting good governance, security and peace”, followed by promoting inclusive growth and promoting human development.⁷

So, although there is no explicit Millennium Development Goal on security and disarmament issues, the Millennium Declaration is sufficiently clear on the centrality of peace, security and disarmament in the processes of development of fragile states or states affected by armed crises. It is also clear, from the political action being taken in many crisis-affected states in West Africa, that these states see security and peacebuilding as a cross-cutting priority in the attainment of the MDGs. It could hardly be otherwise in a subregion plagued by armed crises for 20 years and where the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) continues to pose a formidable challenge not only to peace and security but also, and increasingly, to economic and social development.

The impact of SALW proliferation and armed violence on the MDGs in West Africa

How do the proliferation of small arms and the spread of armed violence affect progress toward the MDGs in West Africa? How do security and disarmament programmes affect development in the subregion? These are the questions to be answered in the remainder of this paper. The analysis concludes with some suggestions as to the most effective approach to take to the security and development nexus, with particular reference to the MDGs.

The first Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1) is to reduce poverty. One of the indicators of progress in this regard is the reduction by half, by 2015, of the proportion of people who suffer from hunger in the world. In West Africa, as indeed in the continent as a whole, efforts to meet this target will require the promotion of agriculture, and Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations Secretary-General, has called for a “green revolution” in Africa. But one of the features common to all West Africa’s conflict zones is the insecurity that grips much of the countryside and rural areas. Major roads, the main routes for transporting agricultural produce to urban centres and markets, are also subject to waves of the insurgent or criminal violence that rack fragile states. The problem of highway bandits—heavily armed criminals who use small arms to extort money from traders and prey upon ordinary people—is a depressing illustration of this.

In terms of the MDGs, armed violence of this kind, whether in the countryside or along the roads, blocks progress because it interferes with agricultural production and the reduction of hunger: the countryside and rural areas where insecurity prevails (for example Casamance in Senegal and many regions of Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone) are deserted and agricultural work has come to a halt. It also makes it difficult to sell agricultural produce, which prevents farmers from increasing their income, thereby putting yet another brake on progress toward poverty reduction. Specialist studies show that, during the civil war in Sierra Leone, for example, “some 500,000 farm families were displaced [and] production of rice (the main staple crop) during the 1991–2000 civil war fell to 20% of pre-war levels”.⁸

According to police data in Liberia, both from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and from the Liberia National Police, rape is now the most prevalent crime in that country, with

Table 1. Most frequently reported offences, Liberia, March–April 2008

	<i>Rape</i>	<i>Armed robbery</i>
March 2008	58	44
April 2008	52	55

Source: Compiled by the author from sources in UNMIL-CIVPOL, Monrovia, May 2008.

armed assault a close second. Data obtained by the author from the UNMIL Civilian Police (CIVPOL-UNMIL), for example, yield Table 1 for March and April 2008.

According to this data from the Liberian police and judiciary, many cases of rape occur during armed assault or armed robbery, usually at the victim's residence. Homeowners are attacked in their homes and stripped of their possessions, and the women and girls in the household are then raped at gunpoint. This kind of violence against women—in which the proliferation of SALW is a factor—has an adverse impact on the MDGs in at least two ways: first, it affects MDG 3 (“promote gender equality and empower women”) and efforts to combat violence against women; second, it has a direct impact on food security, which is one of the targets of MDG 1 and a major problem in Liberia today. Women are the backbone of agriculture in Liberia: they account for more than half the agricultural labour force and for more than 60% of the country's agricultural production. The spread of assault and rape in rural areas, which is where farming takes place, forces women to flee to the relative safety of urban centres. Two direct consequences of such terrorization are a slump in agricultural production and increasing poverty among women.

The situations in Liberia and Sierra Leone outlined here are by no means exceptional. Similar situations exist in other countries of the subregion, including Guinea-Bissau and some areas of Côte d'Ivoire.

Given the institutional difficulties faced by individual African states in making the required progress toward the MDGs on their own, cross-border cooperation and regional integration are indispensable, yet the proliferation of armed gangs in border areas prevents just such cooperation and integration. From time to time, criminals succeed in taking control of border areas in West Africa, jeopardizing any chance of continuing economic cooperation or sustainable development there. This is the case in parts of the Mano River Basin, for example, where there are large areas of lawlessness along the borders of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. A similar fate threatens the borders between Mali and Niger, and between Senegal and Gambia and Guinea-Bissau.

The impact of security programmes on development in West Africa

To overcome these challenges, numerous programmes have been put in place to address security and promote development in the subregion, usually with support from governmental and non-governmental development partners. Generally speaking, security and peacebuilding programmes have a beneficial effect on states and the subregion.

In Sierra Leone, “arms for development” programmes have helped improve security, especially in rural areas, once the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants has officially ended. It is well known that official DDR programmes can by no means collect and destroy all the weapons that enter a country during conflict, and arms for development projects are thus an excellent complement to DDR. Arms for development campaigns are more effective when undertaken in the communities themselves, especially in rural areas. Local engagement in getting rid of SALW in return for social projects improves safety within and around the community and promotes economic and social development.

This point is well illustrated by the Ribbi chiefdom in the Moyamba district of Sierra Leone. During the civil war in Sierra Leone, rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) made a village in the chiefdom their regional headquarters, with the result that the social and economic infrastructure was totally destroyed, children were recruited into combat units and the rest of the population, mainly women, fled into the bush. After the war, the area saw one of the highest small arms proliferation rates in the country. An arms for development project was launched with the support of development partners such as the United Nations Development Programme and local communities. The project

has enabled the community to eliminate SALW, and in return it has received US\$ 20,000, which has been used to build a school and a health centre.

According to local people, the building of the new school has increased school enrolment, parents being more willing to send their children to a new, safer school. The health centre, too, has improved primary health care for local people. These results have thus boosted progress toward the MDGs, particularly those related to poverty and famine eradication (MDG 1), universal access to primary education (MDG 2), and health care (MDGs 4, 5 and 6).⁹

Sierra Leone is not the only country in West Africa where efforts to halt SALW proliferation are helping progress toward the MDGs. It is becoming clear that disarmament efforts in several other countries in the subregion, including Ghana, Liberia, Mali and Senegal, are a catalyst for progress in several sectors directly or indirectly related to the MDGs (poverty eradication, the protection of women, the promotion of agriculture and so on).

Arms for development programmes work provided certain conditions are met. These include:

- close cooperation between all actors and stakeholders in the process: state, civil society, ex-combatants, local communities, community leaders, development partners, etc.;
- ownership of the process by the local communities, with a major role for youth, women and traditional leaders;
- significant support from non-governmental organizations, mainly local ones;
- funding must be in place and guaranteed over the long term; and
- incorporation of the programme into a broader national process of post-crisis and post-conflict peacebuilding.

New phase in efforts to address regional insecurity and SALW proliferation, and to promote development in West Africa

The Millennium Declaration and the pledges on MDGs coincided with West Africa's adoption of a new philosophy of regional integration based on four pillars: consolidating regional integration, in particular cross-border cooperation; promoting sustainable development; peacebuilding and combating insecurity; and promoting good governance and the rule of law.¹⁰

In terms of legal instruments and political strategy, this new framework for partnership between member states of ECOWAS has resulted in:

- the amendment of the ECOWAS Charter to take the new requirements for integration into account;
- the adoption of new peacebuilding and security instruments, including a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security and a Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons;
- the adoption of a Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance; and
- the reorganization of the ECOWAS Secretariat.

The new framework for partnership is intended to speed up progress toward the dual goal of security and development. There are two guiding principles, which may be termed the principle of regional integration and the principle of sectoral integration. In other words, security and development efforts, including endeavours to attain the MDGs, must be integrated in a coherent regional framework that places special emphasis on cross-border dynamics. Thus ECOWAS is currently preparing its first ever regional report on the MDGs. It will review progress at the regional level, what remains to be done and, most important, what new dynamics need to be activated in order to achieve the MDGs in

an efficient, consistent and mutually supportive fashion. In terms of peacebuilding and security, and efforts to curb the spread of SALW in particular, regional initiatives are driven by the ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP) within the legal framework of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

But the threats to peace and security in the subregion are changing, and this is one of the major challenges West Africa faces in its efforts to achieve the twin objectives of security and the MDGs. A new generation of threats is emerging, which is giving rise to a range of compound challenges that the subregion is as yet ill equipped to deal with. For example, West Africa is increasingly cited as one of the hubs of hard drug (cocaine) trafficking from Latin America to Europe, and this has several consequences relating both to small arms proliferation and to the MDGs. The criminal gangs that control illicit drug trafficking are causing a new wave of small arms proliferation in West Africa, and there are countries, Guinea-Bissau for example, where these gangs will soon have taken over some areas, making them dangerous for agriculture (MDG 1).¹¹ Already weak states are being further weakened by the trade in illicit narcotics (and by corruption in particular), making them less able not only to promote the MDGs at the national level but also to work effectively toward regional integration strategies.

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Conclusion

The MDGs represent a dual contract of trust and performance between poor countries and the international community. The idea underlying this contract is “we pay, you deliver”, “we” being the international community and development partners and “you” being the poor and developing countries. In other words, by adopting the MDGs, the rich countries have pledged to provide funding and poor countries have pledged to “deliver” development, including the conditions for that development and for the sustainability of development, namely peace, security and good governance. As with any contract, success is guaranteed only if each partner keeps its word. The ideal conditions for success are still by no means in place, not only in West Africa but in general.

In terms of the pledges from the development partners’ side, we are still waiting for those promises to bear fruit, as the report of the Blair Commission for Africa, inter alia, pointed out.¹² On the West African side, the dream of peace and security, the commitment to good governance and the rule of law, and the pledges to fight corruption and waste are far from being a universal reality. Not only are there failures at several levels but, more worryingly, significant ground has been lost.

Even so, there is still hope that the parties concerned can make up for lost time (with regard to the 2015 deadline) and keep their word. While it is recognized that this part of the continent continues to face “a myriad of challenges which impede its ability to attain the Millennium Development Goals”,¹³ West African countries prepared with great seriousness and determination for the High-Level Event on the MDGs on 25 September 2008 at the United Nations.¹⁴ Such commitment, supported by the necessary resources, will be essential if West Africa is to achieve the MDG by 2015. Poverty eradication has become a key component of economic growth policies, and in terms of strategic planning and strengthening of regional integration, policy makers’ conferences, including ECOWAS summits and ministerial meetings of various kinds, are tending more and more to look at questions of development and economic recovery in tandem with the issue of progress—or stagnation or regression—on the MDGs. A recent extraordinary meeting of ECOWAS finance, agriculture and trade ministers, held in May 2008, is a case in point: ministers developed a strategy to combat food insecurity, with emergency and long-range measures to back up regional initiatives under MDG 1.¹⁵ Similarly, West African heads of state and government devoted their summit on 23 June 2008 in Abuja, Nigeria, to food security

and poverty eradication. The ECOWAS spokesperson said the subregion's leaders had convened the summit because increasing poverty was "posing threats to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015". At this important meeting, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Mohammed Ibn Chambas, submitted to the heads of state a report on the status of implementation of regional programmes.¹⁶ These programmes are vital to progress toward the MDGs because they address conflict prevention and peacebuilding, poverty eradication and natural disasters, and harmonization of policies on investment, economic growth and development at the subregional level.

Notes

1. The Millennium Development Goals are: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality and empower women; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development. For more information, go to <www.un.org/millenniumgoals>.
2. United Nations Millennium Declaration, UN General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000, UN document A/RES/55/2, 18 September 2000, paragraph 8.
3. 2005 World Summit Outcome, UN General Assembly resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005, UN document A/RES/60/1, 24 October 2005, paragraph 9.
4. World Bank, 2008, *Global Monitoring Report 2008: MDGs and the Environment, Agenda for Inclusive and Sustainable Development*, Washington, DC, p. 22, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGLOMONREP2008/Resources/4737994-1207342962709/8944_Web_PDF.pdf>.
5. West Africa here means the area covered by the member states of the Economic Community of West African States, i.e., Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, plus Mauritania.
6. The other three pillars are, in order, "revitalizing the economy", "strengthening governance and the rule of law" and "rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services". For details see International Monetary Fund and Republic of Liberia, 2008, *Liberia: Poverty Reduction Strategy*, IMF Country Report no. 08/219, at <www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08219.pdf>.
7. International Monetary Fund and Government of Sierra Leone, 2005, *Sierra Leone: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, IMF Country Report no. 05/191, at <www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2005/cr05191.pdf>. This PRS covers 2005 to 2007; the new strategy, with the same priorities, is in the pipeline.
8. United Nations Development Programme, 2005, *Human Development Report 2005: International Cooperation at a Crossroads—Aid, Trade and Security in an Unequal World*, New York, p. 159.
9. "Choosing Development over Guns in Sierra Leone", UNDP, 1 December 2004 (originally published in *Choices* magazine, December 2004).
10. See A. Ayissi (ed.), 2001, *Cooperating for Peace in West Africa: An Agenda for the 21st Century*, Geneva, UNIDIR.
11. See Grant Ferret, 2007, "The Cocaine Warehouse", *World Agenda: The BBC's International Journal*.
12. Commission for Africa, 2005, *Our Common Interest: Report of the Commission for Africa*; Michael Abramowitz, "Panel Urges G-8 to Increase Africa Aid", *Washington Post*, 16 June 2008. See also the Africa Progress Panel, at <www.africanprogresspanel.org/english/newsreleases.php>, and The African Leadership and Progress Network, at <www.africanprogress.net/africa_G8.htm>.
13. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, President of the ECOWAS Commission, quoted in "ECOWAS—Niger Delta Crisis, Threat to Regional Security", *This Day*, 20 May 2008.
14. On the Summit, see United Nations General Assembly, "High-level event on the Millennium Development Goals: 25 September 2008—Committing to action: achieving the Millennium Development Goals, Background note by the Secretary-General", 25 July 2008, <www.un.org/ga/president/62/issues/mdg/backgroundmdg_sg.pdf>; regarding more specifically Africa, see "High Level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs: State of Implementation of Various Commitments, Challenges and the Way Forward, 22 September 2008, Summary Report", at <www.un.org/ga/president/62/ThematicDebates/adn/crimeimpedimentsd.pdf>.
15. Final Report of the Extraordinary Meeting of ECOWAS Ministers of Trade, Finance and Agriculture held at Abuja, 19 May 2008.
16. See "Yar'Adua, ECOWAS Leaders Meet Today over High Food, Oil Prices", *Daily Trust*, 23 June 2008.