

Enhancing the Civilian Dimension of the ECOWAS Standby Force in Combating Terrorism: A Social Resilience and Civil-Military Cooperation Perspective

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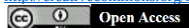
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ABSTRACT

The persistence and geographical expansion of terrorism and violent extremism in West Africa increasingly demonstrate the limitations of predominantly kinetic approaches to regional security. Although military and police capabilities remain indispensable, the sustainability of counterterrorism efforts depends substantially on the capacity of civilian institutions, communities and security actors to work together in preventing radicalisation, strengthening early warning, protecting civilians, restoring social cohesion and consolidating peace. This study examines the enhancement of the civilian dimension of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Standby Force (ESF) from the perspective of social resilience and civil-military cooperation. It adopts a qualitative documentary research design supported by descriptive analysis of recent regional and international data and policy documents published between 2021 and 2026. The study draws on evidence from ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Bank and the Global Terrorism Index. Recent evidence shows that the Sahel accounted for more than half of global terrorism-related deaths in 2024, while West and Central Africa hosted 12.7 million forcibly displaced and stateless persons by April 2025. UNDP evidence from nearly 2,200 respondents across eight African countries further indicates that economic opportunity, governance deficits and experiences involving security forces can influence pathways into violent extremism. The study argues that the civilian dimension of the ESF should be conceptualised as a strategic capability rather than a supplementary function, integrating civil-military cooperation, civic engagement, community stabilisation, early warning, strategic communication, civilian protection, social resilience and partnerships. It concludes that strengthening these capabilities can improve the ESF's legitimacy, preventive reach and sustainability. The study recommends the institutionalisation of a regional civilian-capability architecture, strengthened civil-military cooperation, an integrated civic and community resilience framework, systematic civilian early-warning and stabilisation mechanisms, and a sustainable regional partnership and resource-mobilisation framework.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The security environment of the twenty-first century has increasingly demonstrated that terrorism cannot be effectively addressed through military force alone. Contemporary terrorist and violent extremist organisations operate within complex political, socioeconomic, technological and community environments in which grievances, weak governance, poverty, unemployment, displacement, social exclusion, misinformation and limited state presence can interact with armed violence. Consequently, contemporary counterterrorism increasingly requires the integration of military, police, intelligence, justice, humanitarian, developmental and community-based capabilities.

At the global level, the evolution of security thinking has consequently moved beyond the traditional protection of territorial integrity towards broader approaches concerned with human security, civilian protection, resilience and the prevention of violent extremism. The United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP, 2022) emphasises that contemporary insecurity is multidimensional, with economic, political, social, environmental and personal vulnerabilities interacting to produce conditions in which individuals and communities may experience insecurity. This perspective is particularly relevant to terrorism because the durability of extremist organisations depends not only on their military capabilities but also on their ability to exploit social vulnerabilities and undermine relationships between citizens and legitimate institutions.

The European experience provides further evidence of the movement towards integrated security and resilience. European security policy has increasingly incorporated protection of critical infrastructure, community resilience, counter-radicalisation, strategic communication, civilian preparedness and cooperation between state and non-state actors. The broader lesson is not that European security models can simply be transferred to Africa, but that contemporary security systems increasingly recognise the civilian population as an active component of resilience rather than merely a beneficiary of military protection.

Africa presents a substantially more complex security environment. Terrorism, violent extremism, organised crime, unconstitutional changes of government, climate-related insecurity, communal violence, displacement and socioeconomic vulnerability frequently overlap. The African Union (AU) has therefore established a continental peace and security architecture in which the African Standby Force (ASF) constitutes a major component. The AU describes the ASF as a multidisciplinary arrangement incorporating civilian and military components and capable of undertaking peace support, intervention, prevention, peacebuilding and humanitarian functions.

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) similarly operates across conflict prevention, peacebuilding, counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, democratic governance and human rights. Its mandate includes ensuring implementation of continental instruments against terrorism and promoting coordination between the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). This architecture establishes an important conceptual foundation for treating civilian capabilities as an integral element of African peace and security rather than as an adjunct to military operations.

The scale of the contemporary African terrorism challenge reinforces this argument. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2025 reported that the Sahel had become the global epicentre of terrorism, accounting for more than half of terrorism-related deaths worldwide in 2024. The region recorded 4,794 terrorism-related fatalities in 2024, while five of the ten countries most affected by terrorism globally were located in the Sahel.

The humanitarian consequences are equally significant. UNHCR reported that West and Central Africa hosted approximately 12.7 million forcibly displaced and stateless people as of April 2025, including 8.2 million internally displaced persons and 2.9 million refugees and asylum-seekers. The regional figure represented a 48% increase from 2020. Approximately one-third of the region's displaced population was concentrated in the Central Sahel. These figures demonstrate that terrorism is not merely a military problem. It produces displacement, destroys livelihoods, weakens public services, disrupts education, increases humanitarian needs and erodes community resilience.

The socioeconomic dimension is equally important. The World Bank reported that countries in the Sahel remain among the world's poorest, with an average national poverty rate of approximately 40% across Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. The region's human-capital deficits are compounded by conflict, climate pressures and fragility.

Evidence on the pathways into violent extremism further strengthens the case for a civilian-centred component of counterterrorism. UNDP's *Journey to Extremism in Africa* study, based on interviews with nearly 2,200 respondents across eight African countries, found that economic opportunity, particularly expectations of employment and livelihoods, featured prominently among motivations for voluntary recruitment. One-quarter of voluntary recruits identified employment opportunities as their primary reason for joining, while 40% reported urgent livelihood needs at the time of recruitment. Nearly half reported a specific triggering event, and 71% of those identifying a trigger pointed to human-rights abuses, frequently involving state security forces.

These findings are particularly significant for civil-military cooperation. If relations between security institutions and communities influence information-sharing, legitimacy and perceptions of state authority, then the quality of civil-military interaction becomes a component of counterterrorism

effectiveness. The objective is not to substitute military capabilities with civilian activities, but to create a system in which military, police, civilian, humanitarian and community capabilities reinforce one another.

Within West Africa, the ECOWAS Standby Force provides an important institutional platform for such integration. ECOWAS has historically conceptualised the ESF as a multidimensional force comprising civilian and military components. The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework envisages the ESF as a mechanism capable of observation and monitoring, preventive deployment, humanitarian intervention and other peace and security functions through multipurpose standby units incorporating military and civilian capabilities.

ECOWAS's counterterrorism framework similarly recognises the need to protect human security, human and peoples' rights and civilian populations while strengthening operational capabilities. Its counterterrorism strategy emphasises cooperation, prevention, criminal justice, human rights, protection of civilians and regional coordination.

Recent regional developments have increased the urgency of operationalising this multidimensional approach. In 2025, ECOWAS Defence and Finance Ministers considered options for activating a regional counterterrorism force, including a 5,000-person force and a phased 1,650-person brigade. The projected first-year cost of the larger model was estimated at US\$2.61 billion, while the phased model was estimated at US\$481.5 million. The discussion highlighted not only the scale of the security challenge but also the importance of sustainable financing.

The 68th Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja in December 2025, further reaffirmed the Community's commitment to peace, security, democratic governance and the wellbeing of its peoples. The Summit considered the changing regional security environment within the broader context of ECOWAS Vision 2050 and reaffirmed the importance of building a safer, more integrated and prosperous West Africa.

Against this background, enhancing the civilian dimension of the ESF is not a peripheral policy concern. It represents an opportunity to transform the ESF from a principally reactive security instrument into a more comprehensive regional capability in which military force is complemented by civilian expertise, community participation, social resilience, early warning, humanitarian coordination and stabilisation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

West Africa continues to confront a complex terrorism environment in which terrorist groups operate across borders and exploit governance deficits, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, weak community resilience and distrust of state institutions. The concentration of global terrorism in the Sahel, rising displacement and persistent humanitarian pressures demonstrate that military operations alone cannot resolve the wider conditions that sustain insecurity.

The challenge is therefore not the absence of military capability. Rather, it is the insufficient institutionalisation of civilian capabilities alongside military and police capabilities within regional counterterrorism arrangements. Although the ESF has a civilian component, the strategic potential of that component has not been sufficiently developed as an integrated capability encompassing civic engagement, civil-military cooperation, community stabilisation, early warning, strategic communication, civilian protection and social resilience.

This creates a significant policy and scholarly gap. Counterterrorism discussions frequently concentrate on force generation, weapons, intelligence, logistics, financing and operational deployment. Comparatively less attention is given to the civilian capabilities necessary to prevent recruitment, maintain community trust, facilitate humanitarian access, support stabilisation and consolidate military gains.

The central problem addressed by this study is therefore the limited conceptual and institutional integration of social resilience and civil-military cooperation into the civilian dimension of the ESF. The study argues that unless the ESF's civilian capability is strengthened alongside its military and police components, the Force may remain better equipped to respond to manifestations of terrorism than to the social conditions that enable terrorist organisations to regenerate.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine how strengthening the civilian dimension of the ECOWAS Standby Force through social resilience and civil-military cooperation can enhance regional counterterrorism effectiveness.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the evolving nature and scale of terrorism and its socioeconomic and humanitarian consequences in West Africa;
- ii. assess the conceptual and institutional place of the civilian dimension within the ECOWAS Standby Force and the wider African peace and security architecture;
- iii. analyse the contribution of civil-military cooperation, civic engagement and community resilience to counterterrorism and prevention of violent extremism;
- iv. examine the strategic mechanisms through which an enhanced civilian dimension can strengthen prevention, early warning, community stabilisation and legitimacy of the ESF; and
- v. propose policy measures for institutionalising a stronger, measurable and sustainable civilian capability within the ESF.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the evolving nature and scale of terrorism and its socioeconomic and humanitarian consequences in West Africa?
- ii. What is the conceptual and institutional place of the civilian dimension within the ECOWAS Standby Force and the wider African peace and security architecture?
- iii. How can civil-military cooperation, civic engagement and community resilience contribute to counterterrorism and the prevention of violent extremism?
- iv. Through what mechanisms can an enhanced civilian dimension strengthen prevention, early warning, community stabilisation and the legitimacy of the ESF?
- v. What policy measures are required to institutionalise a stronger, measurable and sustainable civilian capability within the ESF?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the literature by shifting the analysis of the ESF from a predominantly force-centred perspective towards a multidimensional conception of regional security. It argues that the effectiveness of a regional counterterrorism force should be assessed not only by its capacity to deploy military and police personnel but also by its capacity to engage populations, protect civilians, support stabilisation and strengthen social resilience. The study is also relevant to ECOWAS policy because the Community is actively considering the operationalisation, financing and strengthening of regional counterterrorism capabilities. It provides an analytical basis for integrating civilian capabilities into these processes. For the AU, the study is relevant because the ASF is explicitly conceived as a multidisciplinary force with civilian and military components. Strengthening the civilian dimension of the ESF can therefore contribute to the broader development of African peace support capabilities.

Finally, the study provides a framework for civil society organisations, development partners, humanitarian agencies, research institutions and communities to understand their potential role within regional counterterrorism architecture.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising the Civilian Dimension of the ESF

The civilian dimension of a peace support or counterterrorism force encompasses the expertise, functions and relationships required to ensure that security operations are connected to civilian governance, community protection, humanitarian needs, human rights, political processes and post-conflict stabilisation.

Within ECOWAS, the civilian component is not a new institutional idea. ECOWAS has previously defined responsibilities involving the development and management of the civilian component of the ESF, multidimensional planning and the integration of civilian capabilities into peace support operations. The strategic question is therefore not whether a civilian component should exist, but what capabilities it should possess and how those capabilities should contribute to the ESF's counterterrorism mission.

This study conceptualises the enhanced civilian dimension around six interconnected capabilities: civil-military cooperation; civic engagement; community stabilisation; early warning and preventive action; civilian protection and humanitarian coordination; and strategic communication and social resilience.

2.2 Civil-Military Cooperation

Civil-military cooperation refers to structured interaction between military institutions and civilian authorities, communities and organisations for purposes connected with security, humanitarian assistance, stabilisation and peacebuilding. In counterterrorism environments, such cooperation can improve information exchange, humanitarian access, community confidence and understanding of local conditions. It can also help military institutions understand community grievances and civilian priorities.

The relationship must nevertheless remain complementary. Civil-military cooperation should not result in the militarisation of civilian governance or humanitarian action. Its value lies in connecting specialised military capabilities with civilian institutions and communities while preserving civilian authority, human rights and humanitarian principles.

2.3 Civic Engagement and Community Resilience

Civic engagement refers to the active participation of citizens and community institutions in processes affecting their security and wellbeing. In counterterrorism, citizens can provide early warning, identify emerging tensions, challenge extremist narratives and support social cohesion. Community resilience refers to the ability of communities to withstand, adapt to and recover from violence, displacement and other shocks. A resilient community is not necessarily one that is free from insecurity; rather, it is one capable of resisting fragmentation and recovering from disruption.

The UNDP evidence is instructive. Its research across eight African countries demonstrates that pathways into violent extremism are influenced by socioeconomic conditions, expectations of employment, governance and experiences with state institutions. This suggests that counterterrorism strategies must engage with the social environment in which extremist recruitment occurs.

2.4 Community Stabilisation

Military operations can degrade terrorist capabilities but may not automatically restore schools, markets, livelihoods, local administration, social services and community trust. Stabilisation therefore constitutes an important bridge between security operations and sustainable peace. Within an enhanced ESF civilian capability, stabilisation should include needs assessment, restoration of essential civilian services, support for local governance, community dialogue, reintegration, psychosocial support, livelihood recovery and coordination with humanitarian and development actors.

The enormous displacement burden across West and Central Africa illustrates the importance of this function. By April 2025, 12.7 million people in the region were forcibly displaced or stateless, including 8.2 million internally displaced persons. The civilian dimension of a regional force must therefore be capable of addressing the civilian consequences of military and security crises.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

2.5.1 Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory provides the broadest foundation for this study because it shifts attention from the protection of territory alone to the protection of people from fear, want and indignity. The UNDP's contemporary human-security framework emphasises interconnected threats and the importance of prevention, resilience and collective action (UNDP, 2022). Applied to the ESF, the theory suggests that counterterrorism effectiveness should be assessed partly by whether communities become safer, more resilient and less vulnerable to extremist recruitment.

2.5.2 Civil-Military Relations Perspective

The civil-military relations perspective emphasises the appropriate relationship between military institutions, civilian authorities and society. It provides the basis for examining how military capabilities can support civilian objectives without displacing civilian authority. For the ESF, this means that military force, police capability and civilian expertise should operate within a coordinated architecture governed by appropriate political and legal mandates.

2.5.3 Social Resilience Perspective

Social resilience theory focuses on the capacity of individuals, institutions and communities to absorb shocks, adapt to changing circumstances and recover from disruption. In terrorism-affected

environments, social resilience can reduce the ability of extremist groups to exploit fear, displacement, grievances and institutional weaknesses. The perspective is particularly compatible with the ESF because it shifts attention from simply defeating terrorist actors to strengthening the communities in which terrorist organisations seek to operate.

2.6 Empirical Review

The empirical evidence increasingly supports multidimensional approaches to terrorism. The GTI 2025 established that the Sahel accounted for more than half of terrorism-related deaths globally in 2024, with 4,794 terrorism fatalities recorded in the region. Five of the ten countries most affected by terrorism globally were located in the Sahel. The displacement figures reveal another dimension. UNHCR reported 12.7 million forcibly displaced and stateless persons in West and Central Africa by April 2025, representing a 48% increase over 2020.

The socioeconomic context is equally concerning. The World Bank reported an average poverty rate of approximately 40% across six Sahelian countries and noted that conflict, climate change and fragility compound human-capital deficits. The UNDP study adds evidence on recruitment. Among nearly 2,200 respondents, 25% of voluntary recruits identified employment opportunities as their primary reason for joining violent extremist groups, while 40% reported urgent livelihood needs. The research also identified human-rights abuses as a significant tipping-point factor among respondents who experienced a specific triggering event.

These findings have direct implications for the ESF. If terrorism thrives partly in environments characterised by socioeconomic vulnerability, weak institutional legitimacy and community insecurity, then the civilian dimension of the Force must possess capabilities capable of addressing these vulnerabilities in partnership with appropriate civilian institutions.

2.7 Knowledge Gap

Existing literature and policy documents have extensively examined terrorism, military operations, peace support operations and regional security architecture. However, three significant gaps remain.

First, relatively limited scholarship conceptualises the civilian dimension of a regional standby force as a strategic counterterrorism capability rather than as a supporting administrative component.

Second, existing counterterrorism research often treats civil-military cooperation, community resilience, civic engagement, early warning and stabilisation as separate activities rather than interconnected capabilities.

Third, there is insufficient analytical attention to how the civilian dimension of the ESF can provide an institutional bridge between military operations and longer-term community resilience.

This study addresses these gaps by integrating terrorism data, regional security policy and social resilience into a single analytical framework for strengthening the ESF.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative documentary research design supported by descriptive analysis of recent statistical evidence. This approach was considered appropriate because the research examines an evolving regional security institution and seeks to analyse policy, institutional and socioeconomic relationships rather than estimate a single causal effect.

Secondary data were obtained from authoritative sources including ECOWAS, the African Union, UNDP, UNHCR, the World Bank and the Institute for Economics & Peace. The principal period of analysis was 2021–2026, allowing the study to capture recent developments in terrorism, displacement, regional security policy and the evolution of the ESF.

Documentary analysis was undertaken through thematic examination of regional policy documents, institutional reports and statistical evidence. Particular attention was given to indicators relating to terrorism fatalities, displacement, poverty, recruitment pathways, institutional mandates, regional force activation and civilian capabilities.

The study uses descriptive evidence rather than causal statistical modelling. Consequently, the findings demonstrate relationships and policy implications but do not claim that any single civilian intervention independently causes reductions in terrorism.

4.0 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Terrorism and the Limits of a Predominantly Kinetic Response

The statistical evidence demonstrates the severity of the regional challenge. The Sahel's share of global terrorism fatalities, the continuing spread of violent extremist groups and the scale of displacement indicate that terrorism has become embedded within broader social and political crises. A predominantly kinetic approach remains necessary for disrupting terrorist organisations. However, its sustainability depends on what happens after territory is cleared, terrorist cells are degraded or supply routes are disrupted. Where communities remain impoverished, displaced, distrustful of government and excluded from decision-making, terrorist organisations may retain opportunities to regenerate. Military success can therefore become temporary if it is not accompanied by civilian stabilisation.

The ESF must consequently be designed to perform both security intervention and security consolidation. The former requires military and police capabilities; the latter requires civilian expertise, community engagement, humanitarian coordination, social resilience and stabilisation.

4.2 Civilian Capability as a Strategic Enabler

The civilian component should not be regarded as a secondary component activated only after military operations. It should be incorporated into the planning cycle from assessment through deployment, operation, transition and post-operation stabilisation.

An effective civilian capability could contribute to conflict analysis, community mapping, political and socioeconomic assessment, civilian protection, humanitarian coordination, communication, gender and youth analysis, community engagement and stabilisation planning.

This approach is consistent with the original multidisciplinary conception of the ASF and ESF. The AU expressly recognises civilian and military components within the ASF, while ECOWAS's own framework envisages multipurpose standby units incorporating civilian and military capabilities.

4.3 Civil-Military Cooperation and Trust

Trust represents an important operational asset. Communities that trust security institutions are more likely to communicate information, cooperate with authorities and support preventive interventions. However, trust cannot be commanded. It must be built through predictable engagement, professional conduct, respect for rights, responsiveness and accountability.

This is particularly significant given the UNDP evidence that experiences involving state security forces can constitute tipping points towards extremist recruitment. The implication is that enhancing the civilian dimension of the ESF should include mechanisms for strengthening professional civil-military interaction and ensuring that security operations contribute to rather than undermine community confidence.

4.4 Civic Engagement as a Regional Security Capability

Citizens should be regarded as participants in regional security rather than passive recipients of security services. An ESF civilian capability could institutionalise mechanisms through which traditional leaders, religious institutions, women, youth, civil society, community organisations, academia and local authorities contribute to early warning, prevention and stabilisation. This would provide the ESF with a broader information environment and improve its ability to understand local conditions. Importantly, civic engagement would also strengthen ownership of regional security initiatives and reduce the perception that counterterrorism is exclusively a military or governmental responsibility.

4.5 Community Stabilisation as the Bridge Between Operations and Peace

The principal weakness of many security interventions is the gap between tactical success and sustainable recovery. Once an area is secured, communities require functioning markets, schools, health services, local administration, livelihoods and social relationships. Where these do not return, insecurity may re-emerge.

An enhanced ESF civilian capability should therefore be prepared to work with national governments, humanitarian organisations and development partners to support transition and stabilisation. This is particularly important given the scale of forced displacement. With millions of people displaced across West and Central Africa, military operations increasingly take place within humanitarian and civilian environments.

4.6 Early Warning, Technology and Social Intelligence

Regional early-warning mechanisms can be strengthened by integrating community-generated information with institutional and technological systems. The civilian dimension should therefore incorporate social and community intelligence, while maintaining appropriate safeguards for privacy,

human rights and responsible information management. Digital platforms can support reporting, mapping, trend analysis and rapid communication, while traditional community structures remain important sources of contextual knowledge.

Technology should not replace human engagement. Rather, it should connect community knowledge with institutional decision-making. This is particularly important in an environment where terrorist organisations increasingly exploit digital communication, misinformation and social grievances. An effective civilian ESF capability should therefore combine community-based intelligence with data analysis, strategic communication and technology-enabled early warning.

5.0 Strategic Findings

The study establishes five principal findings.

First, terrorism in West Africa is simultaneously a security, humanitarian and social-resilience challenge. The scale of terrorism-related deaths and displacement demonstrates that military responses must be complemented by civilian capabilities.

Second, the civilian dimension of the ESF already has an institutional foundation, but its potential as a strategic counterterrorism capability requires further development. ECOWAS frameworks and the wider ASF architecture recognise civilian and military components, providing a basis for deeper institutionalisation.

Third, civil-military cooperation can strengthen counterterrorism effectiveness through trust, information exchange, humanitarian access and community engagement, provided that it remains consistent with civilian authority, human rights and humanitarian principles.

Fourth, community resilience is a security capability. The evidence on recruitment pathways demonstrates that socioeconomic vulnerability, lack of opportunity and institutional grievances can create conditions exploited by extremist organisations.

Fifth, the ESF requires a stronger institutional bridge between military intervention and civilian stabilisation. This bridge should connect force deployment with civic engagement, early warning, civilian protection, humanitarian coordination and post-operation recovery.

6.0 Conclusion

Terrorism has evolved into one of the most consequential threats to West Africa's peace, development and regional integration. The concentration of global terrorism in the Sahel, the scale of displacement and the socioeconomic vulnerabilities affecting communities demonstrate that the problem cannot be resolved through military force alone. The ECOWAS Standby Force remains an important instrument for collective regional security. Its development and activation therefore provide an opportunity to strengthen not only its military and police components but also its civilian capabilities.

This study has argued that the civilian dimension should be understood as a strategic enabler of counterterrorism. Civil-military cooperation, civic engagement, community stabilisation, early warning, civilian protection, humanitarian coordination and social resilience are not peripheral activities. They can determine whether military gains translate into sustainable security. The evidence further demonstrates that communities constitute an important but underutilised security resource. Citizens possess local knowledge, social networks and contextual understanding that can strengthen early warning and prevention. Conversely, exclusion, distrust, unemployment, displacement and negative interactions with security institutions can increase vulnerability to extremist mobilisation.

Enhancing the civilian dimension of the ESF should therefore not mean reducing the importance of military power. Rather, it should enable military power to operate within a broader regional security system in which civilian institutions and communities contribute to prevention, protection, stabilisation and recovery. The strategic objective should consequently be to build an ESF that can detect, prevent, respond, stabilise and consolidate. Such an approach would strengthen not only the operational effectiveness of the Force but also its legitimacy, regional ownership and long-term contribution to peace and security.

7.0 Recommendations

Recommendation One:

ECOWAS Commission (PAPS), in collaboration with Member States and the Centre for Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMICO) should strengthen the civilian component of the ESF into an integrated

strategic capability covering civil-military cooperation, civilian protection, civic engagement, stabilisation and humanitarian coordination.

Implementation Strategies

- i. ECOWAS PAPS in collaboration with CIMICO Centre to develop an integrated Civilian Capability Framework for the ESF, defining civilian functions, competencies, deployment arrangements, coordination procedures and performance indicators.
- ii. The ESF Planning Element to establish multidisciplinary civilian planning and assessment mechanisms that integrate civilian expertise into operational planning from pre-deployment through stabilisation.

Recommendation Two:

ECOWAS PAPS should institutionalise civil-military cooperation and structured civic engagement as core capabilities for strengthening community trust, information exchange and citizen participation in counterterrorism.

Implementation Strategies

- i. ECOWAS PAPS, in collaboration with Member States, and the Centre for Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMICO), to develop a regional ESF Civil-Military Cooperation and Civic Engagement Framework incorporating traditional authorities, women, youth, religious institutions, academia and community organisations.
- ii. ECOWAS PAPS, to support the establishment of the West African CIMICO Centre Cell as a platform for strengthening civil-military cooperation, enhancing the civilian dimension of the ESF, supporting policy coordination, research, civic engagement and capacity development.

Recommendation Three:

ECOWAS Commission should integrate community stabilisation and social resilience into the ESF operational cycle.

Implementation Strategies

- i. PAPS and the ESF Planning Element to develop a Regional Civilian Stabilisation Toolkit covering community assessment, civilian protection, humanitarian coordination, social cohesion, livelihood recovery and reintegration.
- ii. ECOWAS Commission, in collaboration with development and humanitarian partners, to establish a regional civilian stabilisation partnership mechanism capable of mobilising technical expertise and resources in support of ESF-related stabilisation requirements.

Recommendation Four:

ECOWAS PAPS should strengthen the civilian dimension of the ESF through integrated community-based early warning, responsible technology and strategic communication capabilities.

Implementation Strategies

- i. ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate, PAPS and the ESF Planning Element to develop interoperable mechanisms linking community-generated information with regional early-warning, assessment and response systems.
- ii. ECOWAS Commission, in partnership CIMICO Centre and relevant technology, research, to establish a regional innovation platform for data-driven early warning, counter-narratives, community resilience and responsible digital engagement.

Recommendation Five:

ECOWAS Commission should establish a sustainable partnership and resource-mobilisation framework for the civilian capabilities of the ESF.

Implementation Strategies

- i. PAPS, working with the ECOWAS resource-mobilisation structures, Member States and development partners, to develop a dedicated financing and partnership framework for civilian ESF capabilities, including civil-military cooperation, stabilisation, early warning and civic engagement.
- ii. ECOWAS Commission to institutionalise regular regional country-level engagements with governments, security institutions, communities, development partners, diplomatic

missions, civil society and research institutions to generate policy feedback, strengthen regional ownership and sustain civilian participation in the ESF.

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