



# **Analysis of Nigeria's Contributions to ECOWAS Peacekeeping Missions: Successes, Challenges, and Implications for Regional Stability**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The role that Nigeria plays in peacekeeping within ECOWAS is very central towards regional stability and security in West Africa. The paper discusses the huge contributions that Nigeria has made towards various missions of ECOWAS, assessing successes and challenges experienced and the implications of such efforts. As a regional peacekeeper, Nigeria has made a good record for leadership, through which peace is secured and cooperation is ensured among the member states, in addition to increasing its diplomatic influence through this leadership. These achievements are, nonetheless, tinged with challenges related to resource strains and international scrutiny over alleged misconduct. The review shows how Nigeria's peacekeeping has been crucial for stability in the West Africa region while also applying immense economic and political pressures that Nigeria will have to balance if the current role is to be sustained conscientiously. This paper identifies research gaps and discusses some potential future directions which could be used for improving the effectiveness and credibility of peacekeeping under the auspices of ECOWAS.

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## **Introduction**

With more than 200 million people and numerous economic resources, Nigeria is one of the leading juggernauts in African politics. As the largest economy in Africa, Nigeria has immense influence in West Africa, where it has remained at the forefront of regional political, economic, and security issues since time out of mind<sup>1</sup>. The Economic Community of West African States has, since its inception, provided a ready platform through which Nigeria has played strategic regional influence. The establishment in 1975, initially created for the promotion of economic integration, soon grew to include peace and security challenges in its mandate in response to conflicts in the region<sup>2</sup>. The evolution of ECOWAS towards peacekeeping also finally thrust Nigeria to the center-stage efforts toward regional stabilization—an implication of its long-standing policy of peace and cooperation within West Africa.

Accordingly, Nigeria became a key player in peacekeeping missions by ECOWAS, more especially in the early 1990s during the Liberian Civil War. With Nigeria as its largest contributor, the majority of the troops, finance, and logistics needed for the mission fell upon it, therefore marking the country's major commitment to regional security<sup>3</sup>. The contribution of Nigeria to ECOMOG thus established a ground for further leading roles which the country subsequently played within the peacekeeping missions of ECOWAS in Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali<sup>4</sup>. These operations have become a cornerstone in West Africa, where leading military and political positions of Nigeria enable it to be at the helm in organizing multi-national peacekeeping forces and to act swiftly in case of conflict in the region<sup>5</sup>.

However, Nigeria's active role within ECOWAS peacekeeping also involves high costs, including financial burdens and domestic complications, which act as a deterrent to the potential of committing to long-term engagements<sup>6</sup>. The high mission costs undertaken by Nigeria clearly overstretch its resources, given the need for the country to address parallel internal security issues related to the Boko Haram insurgency while maintaining regional commitments<sup>7</sup>. While these domestic challenges do not make the situation any easier, from it all, one sees a constant tussle of Nigeria trying to balance her leadership imperatives and aspirations with complex political pressures sometimes making fulfilment of commitments within ECOWAS rather complicated<sup>8</sup>. This paper discusses Nigeria's contribution to the peacekeeping mission led by ECOWAS, embedding both the successes and challenges that have characterized its involvement. The analysis also goes on to measure the impact such missions may have on the regional influence of Nigeria and stability in West Africa as a whole, hence underlining the dual role of Nigeria, acting both nationally and regionally in African security.

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## **Background on Nigeria's Role in ECOWAS Peacekeeping**

Nigeria's involvement in peacekeeping within ECOWAS dates back to the formation of the organization's military wing in 1990 when various civil wars had been declared in neighbouring Liberia and Sierra Leone<sup>9</sup>. These civil wars had threatened regional stability, hence creating the need for regional states to take military action against them on a unified basis. As one of the driving forces of ECOMOG, Nigeria invested massively in manpower, finance,

and logistics, thus assuming the leading role in the peacekeeping operations of the ECOWAS<sup>10</sup>. Nigerian forces were the backbone of the initial ECOMOG missions and were integral to peacekeeping efforts ranging from ceasefire enforcement to overseeing demobilization and facilitating elections aimed at political transition within these war-torn nations<sup>11</sup>.

Nigeria played a central role in ECOMOG, focusing attention on both military and financial contributions, thus setting a precedent for regional intervention within ECOWAS. By investing huge resources in these missions, Nigeria established itself as a leader in West Africa's security affairs and was influential in setting the tone of development for ECOWAS as a peacekeeping body<sup>12</sup>. In ECOMOG, Nigeria sought to undertake the responsibility for the neutralization of threat to security, which would have otherwise spilled over into its borders if left unchecked, as a means of ensuring regional stability. Success in the operations of ECOMOG proved that Nigeria was capable of undertaking a leading role in conflict resolution and, therefore, set the stage for future interventions by ECOWAS<sup>13</sup>. This served as an assurance of Nigeria's commitment to regional order and minimizing the negative impacts caused by spilt-over conflicts from neighbouring states.

Following the example of ECOMOG, Nigeria has, since then, taken part in a peacekeeping role throughout West Africa, with influence extending to such countries as Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, and Mali, among others, in which its troops have played key roles in the stabilization process<sup>14</sup>. This commitment has consequently also cemented Nigeria's position as a peacekeeping agent in the region and further enhanced ECOWAS' reputation as a workable mechanism in conflict resolution<sup>15</sup>. Leadership provided in such missions by Nigeria does not only include military support but also the needed diplomatic engagement in the mediation and resolution of disputes among conflicting parties<sup>16</sup>. These latter ambitious commitments have come rather at enormous costs to Nigeria, as the country's peacekeeping role often stretches her financial and military resources thin<sup>17</sup>.

Domestically, Nigeria is confronted with security threats, including the Boko Haram insurgency, which require huge attention and resources<sup>18</sup>. Most often, the need to balance an internal and external security imperative overburdens Nigeria's capabilities and raises a complex task for its government<sup>19</sup>. The fact that, under ECOWAS, Nigeria has been highly involved in peacekeeping missions identifies it as fully committed to securing stability in West Africa, though amid all sorts of challenges involved in its dual role: being a national actor and a regional leader<sup>20</sup>. Although peacekeeping methods strengthen the diplomatic influence of Nigeria and build regional security, demands related to peacekeeping raise questions about the degree of involvement in such activities in light of pressing domestic security needs<sup>21</sup>. Despite these challenges, Nigeria's dogged ace in missions of the ECOWAS simply underlines a relentless pursuit for a stable West Africa and the necessity of collective mechanisms of security to address regional conflicts<sup>22</sup>.

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### Successes of Nigeria's Contributions

The difference Nigeria has made in and inside the sub-region is credited to some of the achievements of its involvement in the ECOWAS peacekeeping mission. First among the seminal contributions of Nigeria's involvement has been its commanding role in ECOMOG during the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflicts<sup>23</sup>. These missions epitomized Nigeria's ability to lead complex multinational peacekeeping missions in which the Nigerian contingent played the salient roles of enforcing ceasefires, managing processes for disarmament, and supporting the transition to democratic rule. For example, in Liberia, contributions by Nigeria were instrumental in stabilizing the political environment, thereby ensuring a heavy reduction in the intensity of the conflict and the numbers of civilian casualties recorded in the country<sup>24</sup>. While sustained Nigerian efforts and intervention in conflict have been critical, her engagement with the ECOWAS mission has also played a very crucial role in the shaping and ensuring a stabilized institutional framework of ECOWAS. Nigerian expertise became, hence, quite fundamental in the making of an operational framework, command structures, and professional training that have empowered ECOWAS toward efficient response mechanisms against regional conflicts<sup>25</sup>. This has facilitated the commitment of resources by other member states of ECOWAS to peacekeeping, which cumulatively enhances the region's capacity for stability maintenance. Through Nigeria's sustained engagement, ECOWAS has increasingly taken the form of a more organized and responsive body able to tackle regional security challenges a lot better and in a much more cohesive manner<sup>26</sup>. Active involvement of Nigeria in peacekeeping operations has positively changed the country's diplomatic status both in regional and international scenes, by its continued commitment to the peace-keeping operation, Nigeria also solidified its image as a committed regional player in the realms of stability and security, thus placing it firmly within major organizations, such as the AU and the UN. The peacekeeping engagements of Nigeria have therefore reinforced its credibility as a dependable partner in international diplomacy to its positive image on the global scene.<sup>27</sup>

Lastly, the extensive involvement of Nigeria in the various missions of ECOWAS queues for the Nigerian Army the invaluable experience needed, especially in the handling and managing of complex, multi-national activities. Such experiences ripened the military in peacemaking and combating insurgency, thus building cooperation and interoperability with other African armies. This exposure to multi-national coordination and training not only strengthens Nigeria's armed forces but positions the country for continued leadership in regional security initiatives. These gains in operations serve to show the role of Nigeria in shaping a force that is professional and resilient, competent enough to support national security objectives as well as regional ones<sup>28</sup>.

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### Challenges in Nigeria's Peacekeeping Efforts

While Nigeria has indeed been successful in contributing to the ECOWAS peacekeeping initiative, it has also faced its share of challenges that really test how functional and sustainable the role has been. Resource constraints and human rights violations are only some of them, of course, each with a different impact on Nigeria's peacekeeping activities.

One of the major issues is resource constraints, Nigeria bears an enormous part of the costs of the peace-making missions of ECOWAS, many times bearing the operational expenses, providing essential equipment, and supporting the troops deployed in most of the conflict zones<sup>29</sup>. This is against the huge domestic challenges such as widespread poverty, deficits in infrastructure, and unresolved insurgency problems, among others, that Nigeria has to deal with. According to Ikelegbe (2020)<sup>30</sup>, the necessity for dedicating a major chunk of Nigeria's financial resources toward peacekeeping missions may restrict its ability to attend to very pertinent internal security challenges. This may lead to a shift in funds away from health, education, and infrastructure, thus creating a spiral of problems in within-country and international levels of stability<sup>31</sup>. Then, there is also an operational and logistical challenge in its peacekeeping missions. Building operations in conflict zones that are normally characterized by a breakdown of infrastructure and difficult terrain poses a great logistics challenge for Nigeria to navigate effectively on the ground. Coordinating multinational forces operating under different command structures with their ways of operating has equally presented a major challenge<sup>32</sup>. These complexities often result in congestion and miscommunication during missions, which is often a drain on the general mission of peacekeeping operations<sup>33</sup>. The inequality in training or resources provided for some member states of ECOWAS adds to these logistical worries and leads to operational inefficiency that may stand in the way of mission success<sup>34</sup>. The challenges in logistics show the need for increased collaboration and sharing of resources by members of ECOWAS to enhance the general effectiveness of peacekeeping missions in this region.

A further set of critical challenges emanates from the leadership role that Nigeria plays in the peacekeeping missions of ECOWAS, as it both generates significant political tensions and places diplomatic pressures. Though many view Nigeria's efforts as a stabilizing force in the region, they have sometimes caused friction diplomatically with host countries and other members of ECOWAS<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, several instances of a high-handed approach to peacekeeping operations on the part of Nigeria have led to accusations of interference in the internal affairs of other nations more than once.

Therefore, leadership under the aegis of ECOWAS must be balanced and, overall, respectful of other nations' sovereignty<sup>36</sup>. Other unsettled issues that have recently involved human rights are no less important. Because of numerous operations that ECOWAS undertook with the participation of Nigerian troops accused of committing human rights abuses, this sub-regional organization has undergone criticism and reproach from the international community, which further solidified negative attitudes towards Nigeria<sup>37</sup>. The allegations of misconduct in peacekeeping zones have indeed raised more questions on how seriously Nigeria takes international humanitarian standards concerning peacekeeping. Taking such accusations seriously is vital in retaining integrity and credibility for Nigeria, together with sustained support from international<sup>38</sup>. This calls for a proactive approach in terms of training and oversight, with transparent mechanisms to address human rights issues that must be laid down if Nigeria is ever to regain prestige and efficiency in these future peacekeeping missions.

In summary, even though Nigeria has indeed been very instrumental in the ECOWAS peacekeeping processes, she needs to address many serious challenges that might continue to threaten her role, these are caused on resource constraints, operational difficulties, political tensions, and human rights concerns. The holistic approach to addressing these challenges will not only ensure its leading role is secured for a long time but also ensure efficiency in peacekeeping itself, therefore ensuring continued reassurance of Nigeria's commitment to regional stability with respect to international humanitarian principles. It is finding a solution to these multidimensional issues that will develop the state's peacekeeping role and make an abiding contribution toward stability in West Africa.

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### **Implications for Regional Stability**

Involvement in the regional peacekeeping missions of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has wide ramifications for stability and security in West Africa. Whereas consolidated successes of Nigeria further underpin the position of ECOWAS as a peace-ensuring regional organization, the challenges that came along with those efforts underlined the complexities toward the maintenance of regional security. These dynamics can be looked at from the point of view of a number of aspects: promotion of regional security; encouragement of regional cooperation; constraining domestic resources; and affecting Nigeria's sovereignty and diplomacy.

Since Nigeria takes the lead in key missions of ECOWAS to contain conflicts that would possibly destabilize the whole region. This proactive involvement by the country in maintaining peace tries to contain the violence and create a better security situation, after all, a prerequisite that is so essential for economic growth and development across West Africa.<sup>39</sup>

According to Campbell (2018)<sup>40</sup>, Nigeria's leadership is imperative in holding volatile areas together with its potential for military support, added to diplomatic engagement in conflict resolution. The comprehensive approach underlines Nigeria's commitment to the furtherance of lasting peace and stability across West Africa.

Secondly, Nigeria's leadership inspires other member states in the ECOWAS region to commit collective security. Thus, it creates a culture of cooperation in solving the shared problems. This phenomenon of regional cooperation also solidifies the institutional capacity of the ECOWAS and points out the importance of having a unified body in peacekeeping missions<sup>41</sup>. By this active participation, Nigeria had shown how cooperation acts effectively in crisis management and advanced the view that collective security is essential to the success of peacekeeping missions. As explained by Zenn (2020)<sup>42</sup>, such cooperation among member states improves both operational efficiency and engenders trust, which is so important for any possible future joint security operations.

However, Nigeria's numerous contributions to missions under ECOWAS are equally stretching its domestic resources to unprecedented levels. This could impact ultimately making it less capable of responding to internal security threats such as the continuous insurgency dramatized by Boko Haram for over a decade in parts of the country<sup>43</sup>. What can be expected from Nigeria in regard to regional peacekeeping is further complicated by the dual responsibility

of addressing external obligations and internal security needs, since such a country would at all times have to balance the two responsibilities. The economic realities facing Nigeria further complicate this challenge, since any commitment to peacekeeping often comes at a high cost to critical domestic concerns like healthcare and education<sup>44</sup>.

Furthermore, Nigeria's engagement in ECOWAS missions exposes it to international pressure over issues that touch on its military behaviour and respect for rights. Though such missions boost the diplomatic standing of Nigeria and present it as a leader in peace-keeping within the region, the country can be exposed to criticisms that will make its foreign relations problematic<sup>45</sup>. According to Human Rights Watch<sup>46</sup>, the allegations of human rights abuses carried out by the Nigerian troops during a peacekeeping operation have called into question the commitment of the country to international humanitarian norms. Such scrutiny would no doubt help shape perceptions of Nigeria's commitment to regional stability, and any whiff of misconduct would undermine its credibility and effectiveness as a peacekeeping force, as noted by Amnesty International<sup>47</sup>. How this enhanced diplomatic standing is balanced with increased fault-finding presents a challenge for Nigeria.

This suggests that Nigeria's contributions to the peacekeeping missions of ECOWAS bear serious implications for regional stability and security in West Africa. In so doing, Nigeria promotes the cause of regional security, infuses life into the cooperation of member states, and increases its diplomatic status. On the other side of these so-called contributions are resource strain at home and international scrutiny.

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## Conclusion

What this means, in a nutshell, is that these various peacekeeping commitments by Nigeria to ECOWAS constitute an effort undertaken toward devoting itself to the cause of regional stability within the West African sub-region. This merit indeed singles out Nigeria for the leading role it plays in devoting itself to collective peaceful efforts through the promotion of security, encouragement of regional cooperation, and rise in diplomatic standing. Contributions such as these are not without their own enormous challenges to Nigeria in particular, felt more at home and in the form of international scrutiny over its military conduct. To continue its role effectively, Nigeria must adopt strategies that balance its external commitments with its internal needs. Ensuring a sustainable approach will reinforce Nigeria's position as a stabilizing force within ECOWAS, allowing it to contribute meaningfully to regional security while safeguarding its own national interests.

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