

# Developmental challenges facing west african regions



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Today, development is also being defined in terms of the following Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were established by the United Nations (UN) and adopted in 2000 by 189 world leaders to help developing countries promote change in eight core areas that would help reduce poverty and improve peoples' livelihoods[1]:

Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Achieve universal primary education

Promote gender equality and empower women

Reduce child mortality

Improve maternal health

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Achieve environmental sustainability

Develop a global partnership for development

In its Human Development Report for 1995, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stated that " the real wealth of a nation is its people both women and men. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives"[2].

Unfortunately, the majority of men and women in West Africa are unable to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives due to several development challenges facing the region. The West Africa region is made up of 16 countries - Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea,

Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, all of which, except Mauritania, are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

This essay highlights what I consider to be the major development challenges facing the region. Although the region faces several challenges, in my view the major ones are three, and these are corruption, armed conflicts and religious/ethnic conflicts.

## **Challenges to Development in West Africa**

### **2. 1 Corruption**

Corruption is a major development challenge facing most, if not all countries in West Africa. The gravity of the problem in the region is well articulated by the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) when it states that since their inception, West African states have been facing corruption as a major problem. In some cases, it has attained levels of gross and egregious theft, for which no possible moral or historical justification can be advanced, and which has played a major role, both in the impoverishment of the region as a whole and specifically in the alienation of its people from their rulers[3]. The negative impact of corruption on development is well documented.

According to Lawal[4], among others, it limits economic growth because it reduces the amount of public resources, discourages private investment and saving and impedes the efficient use of government revenue and development assistance funds. It is also worth to note that in the case of West Africa, corruption and embezzlement of public funds have often been cited among the reasons for military takeovers[5].

## 2.2 Armed Conflicts

Over the years, West Africa has experienced several armed conflicts resulting in “sustainable” political instability, and I have no doubt that this is one of the reasons why, in January 2002, the United Nations set up its Office for West Africa (UNOWA) with the overall mandate of enhancing the contributions of the UN towards the achievement of peace and security in the region. Although the brutal civil wars in Sierra Leone (from 1991 to 2002) and Liberia (from 1989 to 2003) are finally over, the two countries still remain fragile. For example Liberia has, since 2003, depended heavily on thousands of United Nations’ troops for security[6]. Other areas of continued armed conflict in the region include Casamance, the southern province of Senegal, where rebels have been fighting government troops since 1990, and the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, where several militant armed groups, under the collective name Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), have been waging a war against the Government fighting for a greater share of Nigeria’s oil revenues to go to the impoverished oil producing regions. Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea Bissau have also experienced armed conflicts. Recently, there has also been a return to military rule in some countries in the region. On 6 August 2008 the military in Mauritania overthrew the country’s first freely-elected leader[7]; in December the same year, soldiers took over power in Guinea Conakry[8]; and in February 2010, mutinous troops in Niger captured the country’s President after a gun battle and suspended the constitution and dissolved all political institutions[9].

Armed conflicts in the region are obstacles to development. They are leaving millions of people in a state of insecurity and deprivation. They are also driving away potential foreign investments from the region.

## **2. 3 Religious and Ethnic Conflict**

Religious and ethnic conflicts are another development challenge facing the region. Although in general these are localized in certain countries, they tend to have a disturbing effect on the development activities of the region.

Nigeria leads the list of countries with religious and ethnic conflicts in the region. For over a decade now, the country has experienced several conflicts between Christians and Moslems, with the recent ones occurring in January 2010 in the city of Jos in Plateau State. The political instability in Côte d'Ivoire, where presidential election has been postponed seven times in five years, partly has its origin in religious and ethnic factors. In 2000, Alassane Ouattara, a presidential candidate from the Northern part of the country, was disqualified by the country's Supreme Court, due to his alleged Burkinabe nationality. This resulted in violent protests in which his supporters, mainly Muslims from the country's north, felt they were being discriminated against in Ivorian politics.

Ghana, a country that has received international praise and recognition for its relatively free and fair elections and smooth handover of power since 2000, also has had its own fair share of ethnic conflicts. The country's three Northern regions and the Volta Region have long standing conflicts between various ethnic groups, and sometimes among clans in the same ethnic group. Recent highlights include in 2001 when more than 50 people were

killed in clashes involving members of two tribes – the Kusasis and Mamprusis; March 2002, when the king of the Dagombas, Ya-Na Yakubu Andani, in Yedi, Northern Ghana was brutally killed in a chieftaincy dispute between the Abudu and Andani loyal clan who share the leadership of the Dagombas; and May 2010, when the BBC[10], although the figure was later disputed by Ghana's Minister of Information, reported that Togo's Security Minister had indicated that some 3, 500 victims of ethnic conflict and land disputes in the northern part of Ghana has crossed into Northern Togo.

There are various causes of religious and ethnic conflicts in the region, among them fights for land and resources, long years of discriminations, segmentation of ethnic groups during the colonial days, chieftaincy disputes, and in some cases political affiliations[11]of the ethnic groups. These conflicts result in loss of hundreds of lives, wanton destruction of private and public property, and internal displacement of thousands of people.

## **Conclusion**

Corruption, armed conflicts and religious/ethnic violence, among other challenges, are contributing to the slow pace of development in West Africa. One major impact of the absence of sustainable development in the region has been wide spread poverty. Severe poverty in the region is forcing children to leave their homes to look for employment elsewhere, resulting in an increase in child labour in cocoa plantations and fishing industry, and child trafficking in the region. In addition, young men and women are engaging in illegal activities such as drug peddling and smuggling, Internet fraud, armed robberies and prostitution. The need to look for a better life elsewhere is also making the youths to resort to desperate measures. There <https://assignbuster.com/developmental-challenges-facing-west-african-regions/>

have been reports of young men and women from the region attempting to cross the Sahara desert by road with the hope of crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. The gravity of this matter was highlighted recently by Odemwingie[12]in his article when he indicated that “ in the last decade, virtually every house hold in Benin-City had a relative or two who had attempted the trip across the desert with hopes of reaching Europe”. Poverty and the search for a better life in Europe and North America is also fueling human trafficking, especially women, for the purpose of prostitution.