



Regional Organizations and Response to Political Threat: A Review of the Role of ECOWAS in Ebola and Boko Haram Crises

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Abstract

The Economic Community of West Africa like all regional and international bodies takes priority in promoting peace and security for their members. However, the responses by ECOWAS have been contradictory in many cases where they have been confronted with issues of security in the region. This paper examines the response of ECOWAS' to the issues of Ebola outbreak and Boko Haram Crises. It delves into the origins of both Ebola and Boko Haram and assesses the damage it has caused the West African sub region. The paper further critically analyses the response of ECOWAS to these two issues in the context of the protocol established to deal with issues of regional security threat. The paper finds that even though the regional body's response to Ebola was unduly delayed, its actions contributed to the curtailment of the spread of the deadly disease. However, ECOWAS' response to the activities of Boko Haram has not been encouraging as the protocol established by the ECOWAS to deal with issues of terrorism relating to regional security threat has not been invoked to deal with the security threat posed by the members of Boko Haram. Therefore, the paper concludes that the regional body's response to Boko Haram has been poor and disappointing and calls on the governments of the countries in the ECOWAS region to take proactive steps to curtail the Boko Haram issues so as to bring lasting peace in Nigeria and the region.

Keywords: Ebola, Boko Haram, ECOWAS, Regional threat, Security, Nigeria.



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1. Introduction

Right after the First World War, the desire by states to achieve global peace has been unwavering. It started with the formation of the League of Nations, led mostly by President F.D Roosevelt of the United States of America. The league was tasked to ensure the non-occurrence of a global scale of violence. The league failed to achieve this mandate, which led to the Second World War. Subsequently, the United Nations was formed after the Second World War to among others:

- a. Maintain international peace and security and to that end, to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of peace (Article 1 of the UN Charter)

The effort of states in promoting global peace is also championed at the regional or continental level and supranational bodies such as the ECOWAS is known for that purpose in Western African region.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) formed on 28th May 1975 is made up of 16 member states to among other things;

1. Promote cooperation and integration leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its people and to maintain among and enhance economic stability among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent Article 3:1 of ECOWAS treaty (ECOWAS Commission, 1975).

The means of achieving the objectives was through the implementation of the provisions outlined in the subsections of the treaty. To that effect, ECOWAS signed a protocol on Non-Aggression on 22nd April, 1978. On 22nd April 1978, it signed another protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defense which basically aimed at giving mutual aid assistance for defense against any armed threat or aggression on a member state. ECOWAS further deepened its resolve in promoting the above protocol by signing another protocol that stipulated mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peace keeping and security.

The Protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defense seeks to among other things implement the relevant provisions of the protocol on Non-Aggression, Mutual Assistance in defense, free movement of persons, the right of residence establishment, strengthen cooperation in areas of conflict prevention, early warning, peace keeping operations, control of cross border crime, international terrorism and proliferation of small arms and anti-personnel monies. It also seeks to maintain and consolidate peace, security and stability within the community (ECOWAS Commission, 1999). The ideals of the protocol are mouthwatering however; its implementation has been quite problematic.

The Protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defense anticipates three types of aggression namely:

1. An internal armed conflict in a member state organized and actively supported from without and likely to endanger the peace and security of the entire community
2. An armed conflict between two or more member states or
3. Or an external armed threat or aggression.

The protocol further outlines how to deal with these types of aggressions, as follows:

1. An ECOWAS authority to act as the supreme organ to determine when to invoke the protocol and determine the necessity for military action.
2. A defense council composed of foreign and defence ministers of member states to assist the authority in this function.
3. A defense commission of chiefs of defence of member states responsible for examining the technical aspects of any defence issue and implementing any duties assigned to the defense council.
4. A deputy executive secretary (military who would be a senior serving military officer to take charge of the administration and implementation of defence; and
 - (a) Allied Armed Forces of the community consisting of designated units of armed forces of member states, under a force commander appointed by the ECOWAS Authority on the advice of the Defense Council.

1.1. Regional Security Threat

In modern times, the world faces little danger from direct military assault from opposing states. Rather the threats the world faces today ranges from environmental degradation, terrorism and drug trafficking. This has generated an argument as to the right definition of security in the 21st century. Lake and Morgan (1997) defines security as being free from deliberate man made violence. They explain further that security deals with the maintenance, use and management of capacities either to inflict or to defend against man made violence, especially war and by extension the conduct of political relationships. According to them, anything that affects these capacities or likelihood of their use may have an impact on security affairs and security concerns. On the other hand believes that state centric models of security are ineffective in coping with issues such as the spread of diseases that originate with sovereign boundaries but have effects that is felt regionally and globally. He agitates for focusing on human security which defines security in relation to the individual and not the state.

The definition offered by Lake and Morgan (1997) suggests that anything that reduces one's capability to be free from man-made violence is a security threat. However, the definition is quite ambiguous and makes it difficult in finding a place for it in modern security analysis. This is because issues such as drug trafficking and disease spread does not necessarily inhibit one's ability to be free from man-made violence. Yet, drug trafficking and disease spread has become a major security challenge in modern times. In light of this Brower's definition will be more appropriate in the context of this article.

1.2. Region

Lake and Morgan (1997) defines a region as a set of states affected by at least one trans-border but local externality that emanates from a particular geographic area. In a case where this externality is a security threat, it becomes a regional security threat. Therefore, by these definitions Ebola and activities of the Boko Haram can be considered as serious security threat to West African countries.

1.3. Ebola

Ebola is a virus disease spread through contact with body fluids of symptomatic patients. Before its outbreak in West Africa, Ebola broke out in central Africa in limited size and geographic spread. The largest previous outbreaks occurred in the districts of Gulu, Masindi and Mbarara in Uganda. The outbreak generated 425 cases over the course of three (3) months from October 2000 to January 2001. Additionally there was an outbreak of Ebola in West Africa which began in Guinea in December 2013. By September 14th 2014 there was a total of 4507 confirmed and probable cases of Ebola virus disease (EVD) as well as 2296 deaths from the virus had been reported from five countries in West Africa, namely; Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. According to the WHO Ebola Response (2014); the morbidity and mortality rate of EVD is far larger than all previous epidemic combined.

The map below in Figure 1.0 shows the districts that have been affected by Ebola virus disease in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The gray circles indicate the total numbers of confirmed and probable Ebola cases reported in each affected district, and the red circles are the number cases reported during the 21 days leading up to September 14, 2014. The Ebola Virus Disease was declared an epidemic with a “public health emergency of international concern” by the WHO in 8th August, 2014. Because of the means of transmission, it became a regional security issue as it was considered that the disease could be transmitted into any country and causes an epidemic.

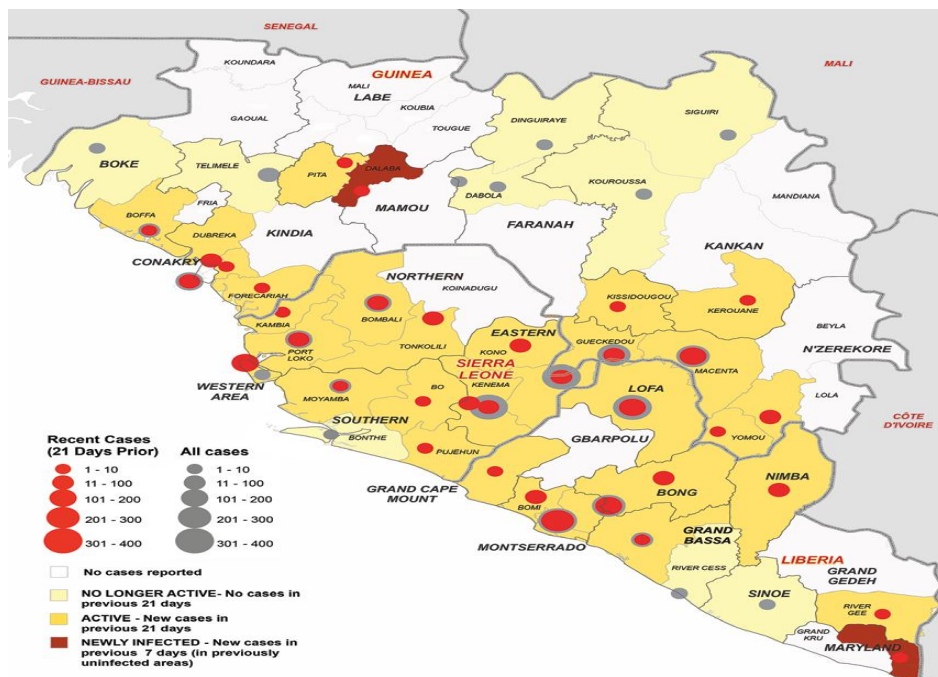


Figure-1. Districts Affected by Ebola Virus Disease in Three Countries in Africa

Source: WHO Ebola Response (2014)

1.4. ECOWAS Response to Ebola

As a result of the seriousness and rate of fatality of the disease, an emergency ECOWAS ministerial meeting on EVD was held in Accra from July 2-3, 2014 involving 11 countries and a number of key international partners. In a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, the ministers agreed that the EVD poses a serious threat to all countries in the ECOWAS sub-region and called for immediate action (GNA, 2014). They intimated that there has been adverse social and economic impact of the Ebola outbreak. They further called for coordinated actions by all stakeholders, national leadership, enhanced cross border collaboration and community participation in the response. The ministers called on the WHO to lead an international effort to promote research on EVD and other hemorrhagic fever (GNA, 2014).

Following this meeting, the 45th ordinary session of ECOWAS Heads of States and Government was held in Accra at which the chairman of the ECOWAS called on Presidents in the West African sub region to as a matter of urgency pull resources together to fight the Ebola virus. He challenged medical research institutions in the sub region to find a cure or vaccines for the disease. The chairman also took advantage of the opportunity to call on international partners to help with the fight against EVD. Prior to this meeting, the WHO had been invited to the emergency meeting of health Ministers at which Dr. Luis Gomes Sambo, Regional Director, WHO Regional Office for Africa, outlined the recommendations that WHO had made to West Africa member states. The recommendations were as follows;

1. The head of state of an affected country should declare a national emergency; personally address the nation to provide information on the situation, outline the steps being taken to address the outbreak and critical role of the community in ensuring its rapid control, provide immediate access to emergency financing to initiate and sustain response operations and ensure all necessary measures are taken to mobilise and remunerate the necessary healthcare workforce,
2. In areas of intense transmission (e.g. the cross border area of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia) the provision of quality clinical care and material and psychological support for the affected populations should

be used as the primary basis for reducing the movement of people, but extraordinary supplemental measures such as quarantine should be used as considered necessary.

3. States should conduct exit screening of all persons at international airports, seaports and major land crossings, for unexplained febrile illness consistent with potential Ebola infection. The exit screening should consist of, at least, a questionnaire, a temperature measurement and, if there is fever, an assessment of the risk that the fever is caused by EVD. Any person with an illness consistent with EVD should not be allowed to travel unless the travel is part of an appropriate medical evaluation.
4. There should be no general ban on international travel or trade, restrictions outlined in these recommendations regarding the travel of EVD cases and contacts.

Dr. Sambo further indicated that the WHO was working with various important partners through the ECOWAS Sub Regional Ebola Outbreak Coordinating Center based in Conakry, Guinea to manage the response of the outbreak. He further stated that he had signed an Agreement for USD 60 million Ebola grants, flexible money, to boost the immediate response capacity of health services in affected countries.

The Chairman of ECOWAS additionally embarked on a one day tour of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea to show solidarity to these countries because they were the worst hit of the EVD. He took advantage of this tour to condemn the isolation and discrimination against Ebola affected countries. The chairman also called on donors to fast track promises and pledges for the affected countries. Due to these efforts by ECOWAS, Nigeria, a country that contracted the disease on 20th July, 2014 was able to effectively fight the spread of the disease such that it was declared Ebola free country on 20th October 2014 (WHO Ebola Response, 2014).

Table 1.0 below outlines the chronology of some of the activities of Boko Haram.

Table-1.A Sequential Table Of Activities Of Boko Haram

Date	Event
December 2003	First known attack by Boko Haram at multiple police stations in the state of Yobe near the Niger bushes
July 2009	Boko Haram uprisings at Bauchi and spreads to the states of Borno, Kano and Yobe. The militant group kills scores of police officers
September 7, 2010	In the state of Bauchi, 50 Boko Haram militants attack a prison killing the people and releasing more than 700 inmates
May 29, 2011	On the day of president Goodluck Jonathan's inauguration. Boko Haram detonates 3 IEDS near a military barracks in the city of Bauchon in Bauchi state. At least 10 people die in attacks.
August 25, 2011	12 people die after Boko Haram militants attack a police station and two banks in the city of Gombi Adamawa
August 26 2011	Boko Haram attacks the UN compounds in Abuja. A car bomb kills 23 people and injures more than 75 others
November 4 2011	More than 100 die in multiple attacks in Yobe, Damaturo and Borno states. Boko Haram militants utilize IED's and vehicle borne IED's to target security forces and other offices, markets and churches
January 20 2012	More than 200 people are killed when Boko Haram launches coordinated attacks targeting police, military a prison and other target s in the city of Kano in Kanu state
April 19 2013	Boko Haram battles with multinational security forces from Niger, Nigeria and Chad in the city of Baga in Borno state leaving nearly 200 people dead including many civilians
June 2013	Boko Haram targets churches in various states on three Sundays in a row leaving more than 50 people dead
September 17 2013	Boko Haram gunmen dress in military uniforms and stage a checkpoint near Benisheik in Borno, executing travelers and burning vehicles leaving at least 143 people dead.
January 26, 2014	At least 45 are killed in Kanuri in Borno after Boko Haram militants open fire
February 11, 2014	At least 23 people are killed when suspected Boko Haram militants torch houses in the village of Konduga according to governor of Borno state
April 14 2014	Boko Haram militants kidnap approximately 276 teenage girls from a boarding school in Chibok in Borno
May 13 2014	Hundreds of Boko Haram militants storm three villages in the state of Borno. Villagers resist, killing more than 200 Boko Haram fighters
May 20 2014	Town blast in the city of Jos kill 118 people at a market.
June 3-4 2014	Hundreds of people are killed in raids by Boko Haram militants in the state of Borno with some sources putting the death toll at 400 to 500
June 7-8 2014	Suspected Boko Haram militants kidnap at least 20 young women over a weekend in the north eastern Nigeria village of Garkin Fulani 8 kilometers from a town where more than 200 school girls were taken nearly two months earlier
June 18-22 2014	Boko haram militants hold the village of Kummabza in Borno state northeastern Nigeria hostage for four days. The abduct more than 60 females including children and kill 30 men in the raid
July 17, 2014	Boko Haram raids the Nigerian town of Daboa. By the time the raid ends, 66 residents have been killed and more than 15000 fled
January 3 2015	A multi day raid begins where hundreds of Boko harm gunmen seize the town of Bage and neighboring villages in northern Nigeria as well as multinational military base, leaving bodies scattered everywhere and as many as 2000 people feared dead
January 10-11, 2015	At least 20 are killed and 18 injured in Maidugri after explosives strapped to a girl were detonated at a market place screening checkpoint. At least three are dead and 43 injured after two suicide bombs strapped to girls detonate in a mobile phone market in Potiskun. Boko Haram is suspected as being behind the attacks

Source: Cable news Network (CNN)and Irinnews.org

1.5. Boko Haram

1.5.1. Origins

The origin of Boko Haram seems to lie in a group of radical Islamist youth who worshipped at the Alhaji Muhammah Ndimi Mosque in Maidugri in 2002 (Anyadike, 2013). An offshoot of this youth group declared the city

and the Islamic establishment to be intolerably corrupt and irredeemable. The group moved from Maidugri to a village called Kanama, Yobe state near the border with Niger to set up a separatist community run on hard line Islamic principles (Adesoji, 2010). Its leader Mohammed Ali, espoused anti state ideology and called on other Muslims to join the group and return to a life under true Islamic law with the aim of making a more perfect society away from corrupt establishment (Anyadike, 2013).

Boko Haram is a term taken from the Hausa language for ‘the Boko is a sin’ which has the connotation that “Western education is forbidden”. This terminology is derived from the public perception of the ideology and operation of the group and clearly shows the groups anti-western nature (Adesoji, 2010). This public perception is closely connected to the group’s outright opposition to Darwinism and the position of its founder Mohammed Yusuf, that the teaching and acquisition of the knowledge of this philosophy is sinful for Muslims. Yusuf saw Darwinism as an absolute contradiction to the Islamic philosophy of existence and therefore advanced the belief that any knowledge that contradicts the principles of Islam is not allowed by Allah. The group’s ideology is not limited to its opposition to Western education, but it abhors western liberalism as a whole. Its founder maintained that “democracy and the current system of education must be changed otherwise this war that is yet to start will continue for long (Salkida, 2009).

The group declared in a statement released to the press in 2009 that they are opposed not to formal education but to:

western ways of life which include constitutional provision as it relates to for instance the rights and privileges of women, the idea of homosexuality, lesbianism, sanctions in cases of terrible crimes like drug trafficking, rape of infants, multiparty democracy in an overwhelmingly Islamic country like Nigeria, blue films, prostitution, drinking beer and alcohol and many others that are opposed to Islamic civilizations. (Vanguard, 2009).

1.5.2. Membership

In the early stages, the Boko Haram sect was widely known to have mobilized its membership from women and children ‘school drop outs’ and unemployed university and polytechnic graduates (Danjibo, 2009; Alozieuwa, 2012; Hussein, 2012). These recruits were indoctrinated to believe that their state of hopelessness was caused by government which imposed western education on them had failed to manage the resources of the country to their benefits. Serious concerns over the violent tendencies grew after the open confrontation between the sect and the government in July 2009 (Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012). Aside the local members of Boko Haram mentioned above, a number of its members were recruited from Nigeria’s neighboring states especially Mali, Cameroon and Republics of Chad and Niger (Omonobi, 2011).

1.5.3. International Links

Boko Haram by compelling indicators is believed to have substantial connections with individuals and organizations outside Nigeria. (Onapajo *et al.*, 2012). The groups association with international organizations started with Mauritania after the fall of the states country’s democratic government in 2005. Boko Haram was contacted by Mauritanian warlords who were to recruit mercenaries from among Boko Haram members to fight in the conflict that ensued after the military coup in the state. Some members of Boko Haram accepted the offer and received military training in the country (Sahara Reporters, 2011).

The group realized the need to establish networks with transnational groups. Following this, they employed the tactic of publicly identifying itself with Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden (Vanguard, 2009). In other instances, leaders of Boko Haram have claimed connections with Al Qaeda in the Mahgrib (AQIM) and Al Shabab in Somalia. This was authenticated by a claim first raised by a top US military commander, General Carter Ham, who hinted that Boko Haram was in the process of establishing cooperation with AQIM and wanted to have a loose partnership with Al Shabab (Adeyemi and Chukwu, 2011). The UN Security Council has reported that it received information that Boko Haram members had also trained in AQIM camps in Mali (Brock, 2012) and there are reports that further link Boko Haram to the insurgency in Northern Mali.



Figur-2.A Map of North-Eastern Nigeria Where Boko Haram Attacks Has Been Intense

Source: Irinnews.org

The activities of Boko Haram has spanned from December 2003 to date. However for analysis purposes and for the fact that their activities are in continuum, this study will limit itself to the period from December 2003 to January 2015. Undoubtedly the activities of Boko Haram are causing a lot of distress to the people and government of

Nigeria. But the consequence of these attacks on other West African countries is quite telling. The attacks of Boko Haram have spilled over the borders of Nigeria to other West African states like Chad, Niger and Cameroon (www.unhcr.org/546228896.html, 2014). On February 13 2015 Boko Haram attacked civilians in Ngouboua, Chad where many persons including the local traditional leader and several others were injured (www.unhcr.org/546228896.html, 2014). On February 6-8 2015 similar attacks were carried out by Boko Haram in Kerewa, Cameroon and Diffa in Niger (www.unhcr.org/546228896.html, 2014) more important of the effect of Boko Haram activities on other West African is the displacement of persons and refugee situations.

According to the UNHCR about 90,000 people including Niger nationals had found refuge in Niger's Diffa region since May 2013. It also reports that 200, 000 people have fled Nigeria to neighboring countries including Chad Cameroon and Niger, according to figures from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), due to ongoing violence in Nigeria's Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States caused by armed insurgents reportedly associated with extremist group Boko Haram. The UNHCR on 9th January 2015 further reported that attacks in Borno have uprooted about 300 Nigerians forcing them into Western Chad where most are staying with local communities in Villages around 450 kilometers north west of the capital, Ndjamena. Clearly the Boko Haram attacks have gotten to proportions of international threat to security and humanity.

1.6. Discussion

In order to assess the response of ECOWAS towards these two issues, one will have to conduct a comparative analysis of the steps ECOWAS took to address these issues. Outbreaks of Ebola in West Africa began in December 2013. By September 2014 a total of 4507 had been confirmed dead. ECOWAS as a regional body responded to the Ebola disease officially by July 2 2014 barely a year after the breakout of the EVD. The attention of Ebola continued persistently from July to November 2014 when the morbidity rate of Ebola had dropped drastically for instance, both Nigeria and Senegal were declared Ebola free countries in October 2014. Clearly there is no specific treaty or protocol that deals with the outbreak of diseases. However the outbreak was considered a regional security threat as stated by the council of Chiefs of Defence Staff of the ECOWAS. By this description, one would have expected that the ECOWAS protocol on Mechanism for conflict, prevention management, resolution, peace-keeping and security should have been enforced. The provisions of the said protocol do not make any explicit provisions for the fight against an epidemic disease. However, its security implications necessitated a response from the regional body and be it as it may, the response of ECOWAS towards Ebola even though reactionary could be said to be appreciable.

In the case of Boko Haram insurgency, the attacks started as far back as December 2003. From a face count of the timeline activities by CNN a total number 3400 people killed by January 11, 2015. Their actions fall directly in the provisions of the protocol on Mechanism for conflict, prevention management, resolution, peace keeping and security, anticipation of the types of aggression. For emphasis purposes this study will restate the anticipation of the protocol.

The three types of aggression anticipated by the protocol are:

1. An internal armed conflict in a member state organized and actively supported from without and likely to endanger the peace and security of the entire community
2. An armed conflict between two or more member states or
3. Or an external armed threat or aggression.

Clearly, Boko Haram is an internal armed conflict in a member state organized and actively supported from without and likely to endanger the peace and security of the entire community. As mentioned earlier, the activities of Boko Haram has spilled over the borders of Nigeria into neighboring countries like Chad, Cameroon and Niger. On June 4, 2013 President Goodluck Jonathan approved the proscription of Boko Haram and splinter group Ansaru as a terrorist organization. Again on November 13, 2013 U.S State Department added Boko Haram and Ansaru to its list of terrorist organizations ([CNN](http://www.cnn.com), 2014). Unfortunately ECOWAS has failed to designate Boko Haram as a terrorist organization, which makes it extremely difficult to understand why ECOWAS up until now has not been able to do same nor put in force the implementation of the Protocol stated above, which will have enabled member states to join force in fighting the Boko Haram insurgency

The protocol outlines how to deal with these types of aggressions, should it occur as follows:

1. An ECOWAS authority to act as the supreme organ to determine when to invoke the protocol and determine the necessity for military action.
2. A defence council composed of foreign and defence ministers of member states to assist the authority in this function.
3. A defence commission of chiefs of defence of member states responsible for examining the technical aspects of any defence issue and implementing any duties assigned to the defence council.
4. A deputy executive secretary (military who would be a senior serving military officer to take charge of the administration and implementation of defence; and
 - (b) Allied Armed Forces of the community consisting of designated units of armed forces of member states, under a force commander appointed by the ECOWAS Authority on the advice of the Defence Council.

It also becomes unconscionable to think that activities of Boko Haram started as far back as 2003 and yet as at 2015 not even an emergency meeting of the Authority of heads of states had been convened to deliberate on Boko Haram insurgency as a regional security threat. Clearly the designation of Boko Haram as a terrorist organization by ECOWAS and the invocation of the above stated protocol will have enabled the allied forces to mobilize to curtail the activities of Boko Haram in the ECOWAS region.

1.7. Conclusion

This paper has broadly examined the response of ECOWAS to the Ebola outbreak and Boko Haram issues. The paper finds that even though both issues qualify as a security threat to the West African Sub region, the response by

ECOWAS has not been encouraging. In the case of Ebola, even though the regional body did not respond in time, it has been able to help in curtailing the Ebola issue. Unfortunately, ECOWAS has failed considerably in addressing the Boko Haram issue, in spite of the fact that the activities of the insurgent group serves as a great security threat to the region. ECOWAS has failed to invoke the ECOWAS protocol on conflict prevention management that empowers them to act in case of any action that threatens the peace of the people in the region.

Based on this analysis, this paper safely concludes that ECOWAS has been nothing but lackadaisical and lazy about the issue of Boko Haram. ECOWAS continues to underrate the terrorist group Boko Haram and the security challenges it poses to the region. Even though ECOWAS has performed creditably well in dealing with Ebola, it has failed woefully in combating terrorist activities in the case of Boko Haram. It is hoped that the Head of States of member countries will take the necessary steps to bring an end to the activities of Boko Haram in the region.

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