



Coexistence International at Brandeis University

Complementary Approaches to Coexistence Work

Focus on Coexistence and Democracy-building in West Africa

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There are many different definitions of what constitutes a democracy, yet they all have in common the following two principles: a democracy must protect the freedoms and liberties of all groups and must involve open electoral processes. Finnish political scientist Tatu Vanhanen defines democracy as a political system in which different groups are entitled by law to compete for power and institutional power holders are elected by and responsible to the people.¹ Dr. Ibrahim Nasr el-Din, of the African Research and Studies Institute at Cairo University argues that democracy seeks to provide a platform “that allows all societal groups to express their interests in an attempt to coordinate those interests to attain a minimum consensus.”² In other words, democratic political systems define relationships between groups and help determine the role of people vested with political power.

Because democracy explicitly values inclusivity and consensus-building and implicitly values peaceful expression of difference, it would seem a natural tool to promote positive coexistence in multi-cultural societies. Yet democracies in the West African region show that coexistence and democracy do not always go hand in hand. This paper examines the interplay in West Africa between democratization and coexistence, and the way the region has experienced the dynamic between the two.

Many countries in the region have sought to achieve liberal democracy in which the people are ruled by their chosen representatives, who in turn are moderated by a constitution that establishes rule of law and ensures the rights and liberties of all. Ideally, democratic countries guarantee the inclusive and credible election of the peoples’ representatives in government. In reality, many West African nations are failing at consolidating their democracies. Ethnocentric politics, rooted in the colonial

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past and driven by neo-paternal systems of patronage, exacerbate and perpetuate ethnic division and thus contribute significantly to these failures. As Mathurin Hounnikpo, Academic Chair of Security Studies at the Africa Center of Strategic Studies, writes, “If democratic politics is to be sustained and a political culture supportive of democracy built, [electoral and parliamentary systems and democratic structures] should facilitate political inclusion and encourage the formation of representative parliaments, responsive to the needs of all citizens.”³ Governments that actively recognize the ethnic diversity of their citizens and are socially inclusive and equitable in the implementation and enforcement of public policy allow a nation to capitalize on the strength of its diversity, rather than suffer for it. Applying a coexistence lens to democratization efforts can help build a fundamental foundation for sustainable democracies in many countries, but particularly in West Africa, with its rich ethnic and religious diversity. This foundation in turn helps a country achieve the peaceful coexistence of its citizens.

Methodology

This paper is part of a series of initiatives by Coexistence International (CI) on coexistence and democracy. It draws from and builds on two CI papers—“Focus on Coexistence and Democracy-building”⁴ and “Coexistence and Democracy in West Africa: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities”⁵—as well as on the meeting report of the CI workshop “Democracy, Conflict and Coexistence in West Africa.” Informed by a review of publications from previous initiatives, journal articles and other documents, this paper highlights some of the challenges and good practices surrounding coexistence work within democratic institutions in West Africa, and makes recommendations for enhancing this work.

Names used for coexistence in West Africa include peaceful cohabitation, unity in diversity, collaborative tolerance, inclusiveness, and tolerance.⁸ In post-conflict countries such as Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, activities in the area of coexistence are commonly referred to as national reconciliation, national integration, and/or peacebuilding. These activities include the use of peace education, human rights promotion and protection, international criminal justice, and attempts to establish the “truth” through truth commissions.

Coexistence in West Africa

According to Oxfam Great Britain, coexistence can be defined as “recognizing each other’s status and rights as human beings, developing a just and inclusive vision for each community’s future, and implementing economic, social, cultural or political development across former community divides.”⁶ In their 2007 paper, Jessica Berns and Mari Fitzduff expanded on this definition, explaining that “Coexistence describes societies in which diversity is embraced for its positive potential, equality is actively pursued, interdependence between different groups is recognized, and the use of weapons to address conflicts is increasingly obsolete.”⁷ Other terms for coexistence often used internationally include social inclusion and social cohesion.

This paper shares examples and examines the history of coexistence and democratic-consolidation from the West African countries of Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. These countries share common experiences such as colonial pasts, a history of repressive governments, the absence of the rule of law, and deep social inequalities. However, there are differences in the ethnic make-up, religions, and languages of the countries, and how they have managed inter-group relationships. This provides an opportunity to examine the issues of coexistence and democracy in a range of socio-political environments and contexts.

Pre-colonial coexistence

Though the African continent is inarguably rich in its social diversity, the interconnectedness of the multitude of ethnic groups is also noteworthy. K.K. Prah, observes that there are “. . . extensive convergences and structural similarities between superficially distinct cultures.” In pre-colonial Africa, ethnic identity was often fluid. “In most instances, interpenetrative institutional relations existed between proximate and cognate ethnic groups. . . . Pre-colonial ethnic formations in Africa were largely in this sense open systems.”⁹ Thus, though inter-group conflicts doubtless occurred, the extent to which they fell along lines of ethnic division is in question. In fact, Africa’s fluid ethnic-identity structure likely facilitated inter-group relations. Indeed, political scientist at the University of South Africa, J.G. Yoh, references “. . . a historical coexistence of thousands of African ethnic groups bound not only by kinship, but also by principles.”¹⁰ Traditionally, coexistence in the West African sub-

region has been manifest in different forms and through different means, particularly in the structure and processes of its traditional governance institutions. For example, different mechanisms were put in place to give both the majority and minority groups access to resources and justice. The governance structures were hierarchical, with a chief who was the overlord of a traditional area, but lower-level leaders of the minority groups were part of that hierarchy, and had some say in resolving disputes. Thus, attempts were made to resolve an issue of injustice hierarchically from the primary unit—the family head to the level of the appropriate “chief.” When this failed, the issue was taken to the overlord.

Coexistence under colonialism

This fluid sense of ethnic identity, peaceful coexistence, and pervading inter-dependence among groups was uprooted by colonialism. During the colonial era the traditionally cohesive institutions existing in many West African cultures were systematically corrupted or destroyed, and replaced with institutions that served the purpose of the ruling class. For instance, the traditional hierarchies were exploited to increase divisions among groups and thus increase the power of the colonial governments. “Colonialism in general and colonial administration in particular encouraged the articulation of social structures which would make colonial rule easier by contriving the elevation of headmen . . . to positions of authority far beyond what they might enjoy in the traditional order.”¹¹ In Sierra Leone, chiefs who led the revolt against the Hut Tax imposed by the British were punished, while those who were faithful to the British governor received military and other forms of support.¹²

Following the Second World War, colonial powers shifted gears by investing more in their colonies and increasing economic integration of the colonial populations, but in ways this worsened underlying tensions.

[What] was seen by colonial regimes as rapid economic growth and development [was] often experienced as increasing instability, inequality, and social disorder and conflict by ordinary people. The growing internal conflict in ethnic communities over the distribution of wealth and the mutual obligations of leaders and their people, along with increasing external competition with other communities for control of the resources of development produced the modern politics of ethnicity.¹³

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In other words, colonialism exacerbated the ethnic fissures undermining democracies in West Africa. Under colonialism, although generally the people coexisted peacefully on the

surface, there were many expressions of hushed displeasure, and the State survived in an atmosphere of repression rather than true coexistence.

Post-colonial coexistence

The immediate post-independence period in West Africa carried with it vestiges of this forced coexistence as citizens were encouraged to form nation states and integrate without reference to their diversity. “The post-colonial state in the name of unity denied [and] wished away . . . all serious reference to ethnic identities and denied their place in post-colonial political, social and economic order.”¹⁴ In this period, diversity was greatly discouraged and oneness promoted. (See for example, the repressive rule of Nkrumah in Ghana’s *National Reconciliation Commission Report* submitted on October 12, 2004.) As the nascent governments started making decisions on the distribution of resources, the cracks in the various societies were revealed.¹⁵

In fact, while there were calls for unity on the surface, post-colonial rule was marked by remnants of the ethnic-driven competition for resources of the late colonial era. At the urging and with the funding of international institutions such as the World Bank, this era saw tremendous investment by the State in human development. This “intensified the focus on the state as the source of benefits and wealth and internal conflicts of regions, ethnic communities and classes over access to it. It also promoted a patron-client politics that penetrated the state and appropriated its resources for extensive, largely ethnically defined clienteles.”¹⁶ This trend reached its apex when Nigeria fought a brutal civil war in the 1960s to keep the Igbo region of Biafra within its fold, portions of which would later become the heart of Nigeria’s oil industry. Over time however, the World Bank advised that the state pull out considerably and allow market forces to more or less set the pace and agenda for development. Consequently, many countries in the sub-region were asked to cut down on public spending and retrench people. This exacerbated the client patronage system as those who were well connected kept their jobs while those without the necessary connections were retrenched. Growing unemployment and abject poverty led to dissatisfaction and agitation.

Amidst this splintering in much of West Africa, the leaders at independence had to find adhesives to hold their countries together. Most of them resorted to corruption and repressive rule. The status quo became neo-patrimonial systems of patronage, which were used to obtain and sustain access to nations’ limited resources. In these systems “relationships of loyalty and dependence pervade a formal political and administrative system and leaders occupy bureaucratic offices less to perform public service than to acquire personal wealth and status.”¹⁷ These patronage systems further exacerbated splits among groups as people often aligned themselves along ethnic and/or religious lines to press demands for resources. It is from this frame that the dynamic interplay of coexistence and democracy in West Africa emerges.

West Africa's trend toward democracy

The West African sub-region was riddled with coups, military dictatorships, one-party authoritarian rule and armed conflicts until the mid 1990s. With the collapse of communism, the systems propped up to a large extent by Cold War powers no longer served the needs of the victorious West, which now turned its attention towards pressuring African leaders to democratize.¹⁸ However, in many of these countries, those at the helm circumvented the process to their advantage, maintaining ethnic-driven patronage systems behind a veil of corrupted principles of democracy. In Nigeria, for example, there is a deep sense of ethnic-based identity among the political leadership. In addition, there are strong divisions between the political leadership and the masses who believe their leaders are taking much more than their share of state resources. Explaining Nigeria's failure at "establishing an enduring democracy," former governor of Ebonyi State Sam Egwu provides three reasons: the legacy of colonialism which left behind intolerance and authoritarian rule, the profitability of state power for the ruling elite and the politicization of ethnic, regional and religious identities by politicians.¹⁹

In the sub-region, because of the tie between political power and access to limited resources, leaders have little incentive to encourage political participation by all segments of society. Full political participation would mean the introduction of people into the process whose loyalties to the regime cannot be guaranteed—thereby increasing the possibility of demands by the "outsiders" for transparency and accountability.

This undoubtedly presents a challenge for those who have monopolized resources to the advantage of a select group, leaving others on the margins. Consequently, in the countries of the sub-region there tends to be an over-emphasis on elections (which are characterized by irregularities and vote rigging) and the electioneering process, with little attention paid to the other principles of democracy such as political pluralism, multi-party systems, public participation in governance at the national level and through decentralization, a conducive legal environment which promotes the rule of law, human rights and justice, tolerance, transparency and accountability. The democratic project in almost all of West Africa is still incomplete, with many fundamental institutions underdeveloped and inaccessible to the majority of citizens. This has led to tensions and violence in parts of the sub-region and growing apathy to democracy among some parts of the electorates.

Despite this gloomy picture, some countries in the sub-region (such as Benin, Ghana, and Senegal) are deepening their democracies and have lessons to share with others. And given that democratic rule returned to the region just a decade ago, most of the institutions required for effective democratization—including independent and efficient judiciaries, an informed and qualified legislature and a robust civil society—are still embryonic.

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Current coexistence and democratization initiatives

In recent years, there have been considerable improvements in the efforts made at coexistence. The existence of democracy—either real or a semblance of it—has created the opportunity for people to exercise their voice and demand their rights. In Sierra Leone, for instance, the influx of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the post-war period led to a number of initiatives that sought to address the marginalization of certain groups. According to Hannah Mallah, Treasurer of the Mano River Women's Peace Network, one result of this work has been the development of policies seeking to address the grievances of women, including the Domestic Violence Act, the Marriage and Divorce Act and the Devolution of Estate Act. Still, the effective implementation of such policies in Sierra Leone and elsewhere remains a challenge.²⁰

In Ghana, the move toward democracy has resulted in the liberalization of the media and a phenomenal increase in the number of privately owned radio and television stations and newspaper companies. The repeal of the criminal libel law in 2000 further contributed to this liberalization. Citizens thus have plenty of sources of information, providing opportunities for them to make informed decisions with respect to political choices. Benin, too, has a vibrant media landscape, according to the International Press Institute, although journalists there still face harsh libel laws. The liberalization of the airwaves in these countries have benefited both the citizens and the governments because it provides avenues such as telephone call-in programs and text messaging to air their grievances openly, and government representatives also have the opportunity to become aware of such grievances. The liberalization has also meant the use of languages that citizens understand, which allows for the effective communication of government policies and decisions. These benefits promote accountability and transparency and break the culture of silence behind which official discrimination has flourished.

There have also been cases in which governments have been inclusive of and worked together with civil society, making positive gains towards sustained peace and contributing to coexistence. In Ghana there is a healthy engagement between civil society, government and political institutions which allows civil society to constructively criticize government and help in

policy development and in the re-engineering of governmental policy. One example of this is the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC), a platform facilitated by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), a CSO that promotes constant discussion between the Electoral Commission (EC), the political parties, and the donor community that have contributed to improvements in Ghana's electoral process.

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The IPAC deliberations have led to the development of a code of ethics for political parties, the formation of a media watchdog committee by the EC, special training for media practitioners, constant review of remuneration for poll workers to enhance their commitment to duty and the introduction of modern technology by the EC to link its district and regional offices to the head office thereby facilitating data transmission and limiting the possibilities of data manipulation. In 1990 in Benin, a national conference convened by the then military leader Mathew Kerekou was organized and numerous groups representing many sectors of society were invited to discuss the state and fate of the country. Despite some of the challenges encountered in Benin's march toward democracy, decisions made at this meeting, reflective of the views and aspirations of many Beninois, ushered the country onto a path of relatively sustainable democracy.²¹

West African governments and organizations seeking coexistence in their countries are often guided by their constitutions, which tend to have provisions for integration, non-discrimination, and the promotion and protection of human rights. For example, Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees fundamental rights and freedom from discrimination. Article 10 of the 2004 constitution of Côte d'Ivoire provides *inter alia* that, "All propaganda aimed at or having the effect of making one social group superior to another or encouraging racial or religious hatred, is forbidden" and Article 5 (a) and (c) provides for national integration and eschews sectionalism and tribalism. While the provisions made in the various constitutions are often manifestations of the country's international obligations, they are also acknowledgements that there are divisions in each particular country. Apart from the legal provisions, very few frameworks and institutions exist to manage the issues around which discrimination occurs. Rather, discussions on issues of discrimination are hushed and mainly dismissed as the propaganda of elements opposed to governments. Despite this, there are efforts to sensitize government employees to the connection between good governance, peace, and coexistence. For example, the International Training Programme on Peace Building and Good Governance for African Civilian Personnel

runs training that includes principles of coexistence in its conflict analysis and democracy modules.

The courts, which interpret and adjudicate the provisions of the constitution, tend to be the institutions that redress violated constitutional rights. In addition, many of the countries in the sub-region have alternative institutions and commissions whose work promotes principles of coexistence. For example, bodies that monitor human rights are common.²² While these institutions provide redress for violations, they also serve as watchdogs to ensure that the policies and practices of their countries meet their human rights obligations. They investigate alleged abuses in both the public and private sphere and provide redress or suggestions for redress such as a court action. They also tend to be more informal and inexpensive than the court system, which means that aggrieved persons can access them with relative ease. However, accessing these institutions is not without challenges, which are addressed in the next section.

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in West Africa have consistently attempted to foster coexistence by educating their congregants and the general public on inclusiveness and tolerance of diversity. Religious leaders in West Africa tend to command respect and credibility from a large proportion of the population. As a result, leaders of FBOs have served as an influential link between coexistence and democratic practice in West Africa. In many instances they have condemned certain exclusionary policies and called for responsible governance that promotes fair and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

In Ghana, when ethnic loyalties were once again aroused by politicians during the early part of the 2008 election campaign, Christian and Muslim leaders were unanimous in condemning the exploitation of ethnicity by the leadership of the various political parties. The efforts of the religious leaders in this case were successful, in part due to the coverage given by the media. In a related vein, traditional authorities were also unequivocal on the need to foster unity and eschew tribalism. This led to a drastic minimization of the manipulation of ethnic sentiments by the leaders of the various parties. In the end, the flag bearers of all the political parties, traditional rulers and other role models joined in a campaign to promote non-violence in the elections.

Throughout West Africa, CSOs, academic institutions and CBOs have become effective partners of governmental agencies. Through research and the authoring of policy papers, academic institutions provide policy options that promote principles of peaceful coexistence to governments.²³ CSOs serve as watchdogs that guard the provisions of coexistence and work towards their implementation, and through the use of conflict-sensitive approaches in their work, can foster a spirit of community among their beneficiaries through the platforms they create for dialogue and consensus building. In Nigeria, where natural resource conflicts have raged for years, CSOs continue to lobby for effective platforms for engagement between the governments and the people to encourage a non-violent

resolution. CBOs, which work closer to the ground than CSOs, are better able to transmit the message of coexistence and promote its principles among the people.

In Côte d'Ivoire, CSOs such as the West Africa Network for Peace (WANEP) have been undertaking peace education since 2006 to address the xenophobia against foreigners that reached alarming proportions during the armed conflict in 2002. Similarly, WANEP includes women in much of its work in Côte d'Ivoire related to United Nations Resolution 1325 which calls for the inclusion of women into the peacebuilding processes in the country. By including women and men in its work WANEP successfully models the coexistence principles it is promoting.

Challenges to coexistence and democracy in West Africa

Despite the above efforts, the greatest challenge to democracy in West Africa is the lack of inclusiveness there—in other words, the lack of coexistence. Yet in West Africa, due to the high level of exploitation of cultural divides such as ethnicity, tribal affiliation, and religion, discussing diversity is taboo. Rather, there is pretence of unity and oneness, making it extremely difficult to find entry points for honest and open dialogue where fears, aspirations and hope are expressed.

Another challenge to social cohesion in West Africa is how democracy has been manipulated thus far. In many instances, the democratic process has been wielded to punish groups, intimidate old enemies, and withhold the rights of citizens. For example, contractors who openly support a particular political party may lose contracts once the party they support is out of power. Elections in West Africa are characterized by a “winner takes all” attitude; only those who are part of the winning team have access to the resources of the state.²⁴ Thus, winning political power has become a “do or die” affair. In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, the ruling party disenfranchised many people from the northern part of the country in order to consolidate power, sparking violence that raged intermittently for four years. In Benin, gatekeepers emerge during elections to prevent those outside their networks from campaigning in their sphere of influence. In Nigeria, General Sani Abacha and his cronies were quick to convict Ken Saro Wiwa in a military court and sentence him to death by hanging because he had led calls for ethnic self-determination and equitable distribution of the region's oil wealth.

There are also structural and procedural challenges to democratic-consolidation that could be addressed through the application of a coexistence lens. For instance, Pyt Douma reveals that in Senegal, one of the root causes of the decade-old dispute between the Jola and the Senegalese state is the:

nature of the mechanisms employed by the state to penetrate local society and to exercise political control. As the nature of political allegiance was brokered through a hierarchy of formal and informal elites (mostly Muslim marabouts), the Jola, who stand out as a rather egalitarian and socially unstratified society, were not effectively integrated in the national polity. The application of a new constitution transferring previous communal land rights to the state has had a profound impact on local customs and resource management in the Casamance region. (Douma, Pyt. 2006: 64)

Although the constitution, the presumed voice of the majority, vests these lands in the state, the Jola, who are traditionally cultivators of the land, have lost one of their main resources—land. This process lacked the inclusion of the Jola in political decision-making and resulted in a constitution that seriously harmed one group of citizens it is intended to protect.

In addition, the growing gap between the rich and the poor is a deepening fault line in the region. More and more collectives based on status are being formed in West African countries. On the one hand are the elites whose members share common educational, political, and economic affinities. They are the new bourgeoisie of urban society. On the other hand are the poor and marginalized who have left the social network of rural life for urban areas, and struggle under sometimes inhumane conditions to make ends meet. Members of this collective feel aggrieved because of perceived social injustices and blame their plight on the inequity and injustice in their countries. They congregate and live in slum areas, often close to new housing developments for the elite. Pyt Douma notes that inequalities between different groups in the urban settings have become exacerbated, thereby providing a fertile recruitment ground for local power brokers trying to wrest power from the incumbent political elite.²⁵ As such, there is increasing mistrust, intolerance and lack of basic respect between these groups.

Since the principles of democracy presume inclusion and participation of all members of the society, it is easy to assume that democracy would inherently enhance coexistence. Yet, as we have seen, the reality is more complicated and it would be a risky assumption to lay one's hopes for social inclusion uncritically in the lap of democracy. And even though the application of a coexistence lens in developing democracies could be a first step in rolling back the specter of politically driven economics and ethnic-driven politics, not all who have a stake in the current state of affairs are ready to support the true promotion of coexistence-sensitive democracies.

The atrophied democracy project in most West African countries has resulted in the exacerbation of the ineffectiveness of existing government institutions, and the creation of weak institutions where there were none. Thus, even though protective mechanisms from which excluded citizens can seek redress do exist, they are often ineffective. The high procedural

costs and long delays which characterize some of these institutions often prevent people from making use of the systems put in place. Furthermore, most of the people who need these mechanisms are ignorant of their existence and functions due to high levels of illiteracy. Finally, despite the increasing efficiency of the judiciary in some countries there are still many instances where the judiciary is compromised.²⁶ This therefore contributes to the lack of faith in the judicial system.

The actualization of the principles of coexistence into democracies in West Africa has mainly been through the work and activity of CSOs. However, CSOs are themselves struggling for a place and a voice in the democratic process as they are often expected by their governments to be apolitical and neutral. As such, it's difficult for them to demand that governments live up to their responsibilities of inclusion and participation. Those who dare to be outspoken face being shut down or criminalized. CSOs are thus resigned to mainly discussing issues that are politically correct.

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Recommendations

Given the vast number of identity-groups divided by legacies of colonialism and facing significant challenges, a coexistence-sensitive approach to democracy building is essential. The essence of coexistence goes beyond tolerance and peace. Coexistence is about relationships which demonstrate mutual respect, equality, and which value diversity and interdependence. Promoting these values of inclusivity within West African societies and especially in the process of democratization can serve to create the space for more open dialogue, acceptance of others' way of life, and ultimately to a government that is responsive to the needs and interests of all segments of society.

Recommendations to West African governments for enhancing coexistence-sensitive democracy in the sub-region

- Sensitize the leadership of countries to the concept of coexistence efforts, including offering them opportunities to learn that coexistence benefits the leaders of the

country as well as its citizens. While participation of the people at the grassroots is essential for the promotion of coexistence and the enhancement of democratic values, the acceptance of the leadership is equally important for the development of the appropriate institutional frameworks needed to deepen democracy.

- Build the capacity of individuals working for state institutions by providing appropriate platforms for them to familiarize themselves with the principles of coexistence and the benefits of including them in democracies. With the support of governments, this can be done by local groups working in the area of coexistence, with assistance from coexistence networks in the sub-region and international organizations.
- Work towards the depoliticization of state institutions, especially those mandated by the constitution to guarantee equality, equity, and justice.
- Empower civil society to help marginalized groups use the institutions provided by the government to exercise their voices and assert their rights. This may first be achieved by providing space within the political arena for civil society to act as advocates. Empowerment may be deepened by governments providing civil society actors with literature and financial assistance.
- Demystify justice systems by translating laws into local languages and into user friendly formats, and provide effective legal aid. This would ease some of the knowledge and financial constraints that prevent people from turning to the courts for redress or enforcement.
- Build the confidence people have in the judicial systems by promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms that operate with the principles of rule of law and can resolve cases swiftly.

Recommendations to West African civil society organizations for enhancing coexistence-sensitive democracy in the sub-region

- Strengthen the capacities to promote, utilize, and model coexistence principles among those doing peacebuilding work. This is important given the integral role coexistence principles such as inclusivity, equality, and interdependence have in facilitating positive intergroup relations. This includes the capacities required to strengthen relationships among groups, including ethnic groups, religious groups, and those who have been previously engaged in violence and/or who may be competing for scarce resources.
- Build a cadre of peacebuilders who are able to train those who work in complementary fields such as human rights, transitional justice, governance, and judicial reform to help build a foundation throughout levels of society upon which coexistence can be more broadly developed. Although there are a number of training initiatives in the sub-region that have components of coexistence, they

often do not address the intricacies of coexistence work.

- Develop documentation spelling out good practices and the steps taken by other organizations to attain the goals of coexistence in West Africa. Currently there is a dearth of literature throughout the sub-region, making necessary research very difficult for both academics and practitioners.
- Develop ways to integrate the coexistence model into organizations that already have funding. This will expand the reach of coexistence work while benefiting from existing sources of funds.²⁷
- Coexistence practitioners should develop alliances with groups who promote access to justice for vulnerable groups.²⁸ Together they may more effectively work for the promotion and protection of coexistence principles in democratic processes. These alliances provide coexistence practitioners with a stronger support base and a pool of resources (both informational and material) that are important for furthering coexistence in democracies.

Recommendations for enhancing cooperation between West African governments and civil society organizations to strengthen coexistence-sensitive democracy in the sub-region

- Develop strong networks and build alliances between policy makers and coexistence practitioners. This would be useful as coexistence work is complex and requires a web of interactions between different agencies and organizations. To this end, workshops, seminars and conferences should be hosted by practitioners for discussions on coexistence and how civil society and governments can support each other.
- Educate people who would benefit from coexistence but who may not be aware of the concept. This would include not only education on the concept itself but also about the institutions available for the realization of coexistence principles. This can be done through theatre, workshops, seminars, conferences, newspapers and e-platforms. The message must be packaged in formats that are best suited for the different target audiences, and it must engage people to examine their own identities, seek to understand the identity of others, and build new relationships across divides. This includes addressing past harms.

Conclusion

The West African experience with coexistence has evolved significantly in the past few centuries. Moving from an era with relatively little emphasis on ethnic identity and generally peaceful intermingling of cultures with adequate access to abundant resources, it has devolved to its current state of fierce

competition for control of resources to support exclusionary ethnic-based systems of patronage. Even where the democracy story has been somewhat successful, the challenge of ensuring effective inclusion remains. West Africa faces a unique challenge because of its diverse populations, which makes majoritarianism inadequate for effective representation

Due to the diversities in almost all West African countries, it is important to ensure that the practice of democracy goes hand in hand with the principles of coexistence so as to minimize tensions between the majority and minority groups.

The relationship of coexistence and democracy is in fact symbiotic. A multi-cultural society that values coexistence is best positioned to build sustainable democracies. Similarly, a democracy built upon a foundation of coexistence-sensitivity is poised to nurture and sustain the coexistence among the citizens it represents. Democracy offers opportunity for inclusion in West Africa where governance has largely been exclusionary—but only if it's paired with coexistence.

Therefore, utilizing the opportunities present in the various institutions and structures for the promotion of coexistence in the sub-region is essential, as is bridging the existing gaps between democracy and coexistence. Efforts by coexistence practitioners should transcend the traditional structures of conflict resolution, which have largely been limited to tolerance and peaceful cohabitation with little emphasis on the creation of new spaces for minorities. At the base of all this should be honest dialogue on the value of diversity and the strengths and challenges peculiar to each society. Before a democratic government can instill coexistence, it must first itself be nurtured by a people who value coexistence. With this in mind, promotion of coexistence must begin at the grassroots level. There, citizens in collaboration with civil society can begin to engage in a new relationship with each other, and with those elites who hold power. The global community can contribute to enhancing coexistence-sensitive democracy in West Africa by advocating for and supporting efforts linked to the recommendations put forth in this paper.

Economic concerns and marginalization of those not favored by political elites have limited the sustainability of many efforts to democratize in the region. Yet the application of a coexistence lens to democracy could change things for the better.

This paper has provided examples where coexistence-sensitive approaches to democratization in the region have yielded stronger and more peaceful democracies in diverse societies. Efforts to support those nations must be maintained, while efforts to promote and support coexistence among the people and governments of other countries should be expanded. As the message of coexistence grows, so too does the hope for a socially just, peaceful, and democratic West Africa.

Additional Resources on this Topic

Coexistence International Reports and Publications

- A Survey of Coexistence Sensitivity in International Democratization and Governance Policies *
- Coexistence Sensitivity in International Democratization and Governance Policies: Lessons Learned *
- Democracy, Conflict, and Coexistence in West Africa Report Report *
- Insiders and Outsiders: A Review of Policies that Recognize Diversity and Promote Inclusion and Coexistence (July 2006) *
- Report on the Discussion Seminar: Coexistence and Democracy-Building: What is the Connection? *

*Document available at www.coexistence.net

Other Papers and Publications

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- Jinadu, L. Adele. "Explaining and Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa: Towards a Cultural Theory of Democracy," Claude Ake Memorial Paper Series (CAMP), no. 1. (The Nordic Africa Institute, 2007).
- Lewis, Peter. "Identity, Institutions and Democracy in Nigeria," *Afrobarometer Working Papers*, no. 68 (2007).
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- Osaghae, Eghosa E. "Democracy and National Cohesion in Multiethnic African States: South Africa and Nigeria Compared," *Nations and Nationalism*, 5, 2 (1999), 259–280.
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Organizations and Websites

- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) <http://www.idea.int/>
- Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) <http://www.idasa.org.za/>
- The Shared Societies Project of The Club of Madrid <http://www.thesharedsocietiesproject.clubmadrid.org/>
- United Nations Development Programme: Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (UNDP BCPR) <http://www.undp.org/cpr/index.shtml>
- West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) <http://www.wanep.org/>

Endnotes

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11. Prah, 9.
12. Again, chiefdoms were created and loyalists appointed without going through the traditional due process for installment. For more on this, see "Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission," vol. 3a.
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14. Prah, 10.
15. See Adejumbi, 77-96. See also, Kelechi A. Kalu, "Constitutionalism in Nigeria: A Conceptual Analysis of Ethnicity and Politics," *West Africa Review*, issue 6 (2004).
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19. Egwu, Sam. "The Context and Lessons of the 2003 Elections in Nigeria" in *Perspectives on the 2003 Elections in Nigeria* (Abuja: IDASA – Nigeria, 2007), 13.
20. Hannah Mallah's response to questions in an electronic mail survey on coexistence in West Africa by author. Received on 1/14/2009.
21. Houngnikpo, Mathurin. "Benin's Ongoing Struggle for Democracy." *West Africa Review*. Issue 10 (2007).
22. In Ghana, there is the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice; in Sierra Leone, there is the Human Rights Commission and in Nigeria, there is the National Human Rights Commission. See, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, vol. 3a and Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission Report.
23. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria have already begun mainstreaming Peace and Conflict Studies into their syllabi. In Ghana, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports has incorporated the peaceable school approach by integrating peace education into the curricula of schools at the tertiary level. In 2006, a National Consultative Workshop brought together policy makers, policy analysts, civil society organizations and academics from various tertiary institutions to dialogue on mainstreaming peace and conflict studies into the syllabuses of tertiary institutions. The proceeds of the workshop were shared with the government.
24. For more on how corruption thrives in democracies to create exclusion, see Muniye M. Mulinge and Gwen Lesteddi, "Corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards a More Holistic Approach," *African Journal of Political Science* vol.7, no.1 (2002). 51-77.
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26. Some case studies suggest some independence in the judiciary in some countries in West Africa. For example in Ghana, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) resorted to the courts to get redress for what they perceived as electoral fraud in the 1996 elections. One of its parliamentary candidates, George Amoo, also went to court to contest the results of the parliamentary elections in his constituency. Although the NPP was in opposition, he won the case, albeit belatedly, as the judgment came at the end of four years—the end of the parliamentary term. In Nigeria, the then Vice President Atiku Abubakar went to court to fight the decision of the electoral commission to disqualify him from contesting the Presidency. He won and the electoral commission had to reprint new ballot papers at the last minute so that he could be included.
27. For example, in Ghana, the Rights and Voice Initiative (RAVI), a DFID funded program, provides funding to CSOs to help realize its aim of seeking to increase the ability of rights-holders to participate in public debate and promoting dialogue with government and other duty-bearers to inform national policies, legislation, and institutional reform processes on rights issues.
28. These include the International Federation of Female Lawyers (FIDA), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), Abantu for Development, the Legal Resources Centre (LRC), and the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD).

For the purposes of this paper, West Africa is defined as Cameroon and Mauritania and the 15 nations that currently comprise the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.



About Coexistence International

Based at Brandeis University since 2005, Coexistence International (CI) is an initiative committed to strengthening the resources available to policymakers, practitioners, researchers, advocates, organizations, and networks promoting coexistence at local, national, and international levels. CI advocates a complementary approach to coexistence work through facilitating connections, learning, reflection, and strategic thinking between those in the coexistence field and those in related areas.

What is Coexistence?

Coexistence describes societies in which diversity is embraced for its positive potential, equality is actively pursued, interdependence between different groups is recognized, and the use of weapons to address conflicts is increasingly obsolete. Coexistence work covers the range of initiatives necessary to ensure that communities and societies can live more equitably and peacefully together.

About the Series

Fragmentation within the coexistence field, as well as divisions between coexistence and related areas, impede the achievement of effective, sustainable peace. Without cooperation and a recognition of complementarity, key players often work in isolation from one another—a situation that leads to missed opportunities or incomplete responses to conflicts.

With this publication series, Coexistence International examines where and how certain fields intersect with coexistence work. What challenges and opportunities exist when disciplines work together toward the common goal of a more peaceful, just world? This series illustrates the possibilities of effecting positive coexistence through cooperation among related fields.

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