

## TELL IT LIKE IT IS

The role of civil society in  
responding to serious and  
organised crime in west Africa

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Layout by Nick Purser

Front cover image: A young inmate sits, head in hands, in his cell in Freetown Central Prison, Sierra Leone. © Fernando Molerés/Panos

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## The role of civil society in responding to serious and organised crime in west Africa

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## Abbreviations

<b>CBO</b>	Community-based organisation
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organisation
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>ECPF</b>	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
<b>IDPC</b>	International Drug Policy Consortium
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organisation
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>JLOS</b>	Justice, law and order sector
<b>MAOC(N)</b>	Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (EU)
<b>MINUSMA</b>	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
<b>NAPTIP</b>	Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>OSIWA</b>	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
<b>REC</b>	Regional Economic Community
<b>SOC</b>	Serious organised crime
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>UNOWA</b>	United Nations Office for West Africa
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VAWG</b>	Violence against women and girls
<b>WAANSA</b>	West African Action Network on Small Arms
<b>WACD</b>	West African Commission on Drugs
<b>WACSI</b>	West Africa Civil Society Institute
<b>WADPN</b>	West Africa Drug Policy Network
<b>WANEP</b>	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
<b>WASAF</b>	West Africa Strategic Assistance Framework
<b>WOTCLEF</b>	Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation

## Executive summary

The challenges posed by serious organised crime (SOC) in west Africa are significant and wide ranging. The spectrum of consequences threatens to reverse democratic and development gains of past decades. Such consequences include worsening development indicators, risk of violent conflict, deteriorating governance contexts and mounting fragility, major public health and safety threats, as well as environmental damage. The expansion of organised crime is a direct function of the political economy of governance in the region and needs to be understood as a structural phenomenon. Serious organised crime in west Africa is likely to be a critical development and security factor for generations to come.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, as well as other major multilateral and bilateral institutions and partners, have established a series of policy frameworks and interventions designed to curtail the pernicious effects of organised crime. However, despite some successes, the region continues to be used as a transit point for trafficking to Europe, regional domestic consumption rates of drugs are rising, and the corrosive effects of organised crime on national governance and security settings is deepening.

A brief review of response initiatives immediately conveys that an emphasis on security, as well as strengthened law and order, lies at the heart of the collective policy response. This emphasis assumes that the political and operational will exists across government to run with the anti-crime agenda, when evidence conclusively confirms that this is not always the case in practice. Arguments for more strategic and holistic responses highlight how law and order approaches may overlook problems of state legitimacy that exist in many of the affected countries and how political actors may themselves be complicit in aspects of organised crime. Collusion in organised criminality by government officials, traditional authorities, political parties, as well as justice, law and order sector (JLOS) officials, significantly undermines formal efforts to tackle it.

### The West Africa Strategic Assistance Framework – a new era of response?

The West Africa Strategic Assistance Framework (WASAF) on Serious and Organised Crime is the latest in a line of international and regional policy frameworks emerging over the past decade. Designed to tackle SOC in west Africa, it is an initiative of the G7 member states, together with Colombia, Portugal and Spain, as well as ECOWAS, the EU Commission, Europol, Interpol, the EU Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC(N)), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA). WASAF is “an articulation of the essential ingredients of a holistic approach to SOC” (see Annex 1), covering a range of policy areas. In contrast to other initiatives, the WASAF initiative emphasises the need to strengthen the role of civil society in crime prevention, to advance a culture of lawfulness and drug harm reduction, and to increase awareness of the social and economic harms associated with organised crime. As such, it presents a significant opportunity for new and more strategic approaches.

It will be important for policy-makers and officials tasked with actualising the WASAF initiative into concrete projects and programmes to plan carefully in order to harness its potential approach. Moreover, despite its reference to civil society, it will be important to ensure that WASAF does not simply continue along well-trodden paths of citizens’ exclusion. Given all that is now known about the nature of organised crime, it is clear that the significant funding and attention gap needs to be urgently narrowed between state-centric law enforcement efforts, on the one hand, and community-driven resilience initiatives as well as citizens’ demand for accountability and improved performance by governments in tackling organised crime, on the other.

## Understanding civil society's role

This report offers a rapid assessment of the civil society terrain in west Africa from the lens of tackling organised crime. The assessment is offered in preparation for a hoped-for increase in support mechanisms that will rebalance the breadth of international and regional response to organised crime towards more inclusive and strategic approaches that embrace citizens' involvement. Civil society cannot be expected to suddenly achieve a 'magic bullet' impact. Nonetheless, citizens have been overlooked for too long by international and regional responses to organised crime in the region. As harmful effects on communities deepen, and as the grip of organised crime on political systems also becomes more entrenched, citizens' proactive involvement is now critical. In the first instance, mechanisms for supporting civil society's role in mitigating the harmful consequences of organised crime in communities are in urgent need of support and expansion. In parallel, efforts to address the structural context in which organised crime is flourishing, and to tackle the political and governance effects through advancing an accountability agenda in relevant policy areas, are also needed. To achieve its intended results, the WASAF initiative must rapidly translate into support for an increase in citizens' engagement in tackling organised crime. Indeed, the overall success of WASAF in achieving meaningful progress in reducing the nexus between organised crime and worsening security and development indicators in the region may well hinge on its success in creating a coordinated and substantial international and regional push in this direction.

The challenges faced by civil society in west Africa – and its definition beyond non-governmental organisations alone – need to be taken into account. Too often, new policy agendas lead to superficial funding mechanisms that may not play to real strategic opportunities. Different country contexts pose different specific sets of issues and priorities that need to be addressed. Given issues of representativeness and capacity, it will be important to map out and identify the right partners in different west African countries, and to provide institutional support to these, noting that many are emerging as new organisations responding to new challenges. Funding and reporting requirements must serve to build capacity, and not the reverse. In addition, funding partners must be sensitive to the kinds of risks that civil society activists may face in this work – whether as a result of political sensitivity or societal taboos, providing necessary safety nets where possible. Moreover, given that one of the fundamental rationales behind WASAF has been to coordinate the various partners' initiatives on organised crime, it will be important that such partner support to civil society as emerges is also well coordinated, and advanced and monitored at a strategic level across the partners. Launching WASAF to a representative civil society audience will be an important first step moving forward. This should be combined with a commitment to ongoing dialogue fora that provide platforms for exchange and solidarity among the many civil society actors that have already emerged around different components of the 'serious organised crime' agenda.

Through a rapid review of emergent initiatives and stakeholder recommendations in Abuja (Nigeria), Accra (Ghana) and Bamako (Mali), this report identifies that a range of primarily nascent types of civil society activity is apparent, reflecting four globally recognised essential functions: as an *advocate* representing interests of its constituencies; in *service delivery* in education, health and other sectors; as a *partner* with government in development planning; and as a *watchdog* over government. Based on a discussion of indicative case studies, the following typology is presented.

### Typology of civil society functions responding to serious organised crime in west Africa

1. Mitigating the harmful effects of organised crime in communities	Treatment and support/counselling for drug users and families
	Rehabilitation and reintegration services for users, victims, gang members, former prisoners
	Grassroots community security and violence prevention initiatives
	Community awareness-raising about health and safety risks posed by different forms of organised crime; sensitisation work that addresses stereotypes
	Passing information about criminal activities to authorities



2. Policy advocacy advancing public health and safety, governance and security dimensions	Research – deepening context knowledge base; assessing perceptions, attitudes and norms; data mapping; political economy analysis
	Lobbying for improved policies and legislation; monitoring implementation
	Public awareness-raising about public health and safety/governance and security dimensions
	Building constituencies for accountability and change
	Protecting the political process
3. Citizens’ oversight of key justice, law and order sector (JLOS) agencies dealing with organised crime	Monitoring performance of JLOS agencies; raising awareness of abuses
	Investigation of public officials’ complicity in organised crime
	Building civil society representation into design of JLOS capacity-building projects
	Conducting capacity-building in rights-based approaches with JLOS agency staff
	Promoting JLOS accountability through multi-stakeholder community security fora
	Integrating organised crime into anti-corruption and rule of law interventions
4. Civic ‘voice’ influencing and monitoring regional initiatives	Representative civil society engagement mechanisms as part of regional and international response initiatives, including WASAF, monitoring performance of these
	Regional networks around specific dimensions of organised crime, linked vertically and horizontally
	Integration of organised crime lens into existing regional networks

Citizens thus need to be proactively engaged across the four areas of WASAF, including not only the socio-economic environment, but also in relation to good governance, criminal justice and crime disruption. It is particularly important that efforts to enhance law enforcement build mechanisms for citizens’ oversight into the project design, in order to thwart opportunities for collusion in criminal activity by these institutions.

It is also apparent from this research that civic efforts to grapple with the ‘serious organised crime’ agenda as a whole are rare. Instead, the initiatives that emerge are issue-specific, focused on different dimensions of organised crime, whether drugs, people trafficking, oil bunkering or other. The initiatives reviewed by this report are primarily those that explicitly set out to tackle organised crime of different types. However, it is a further overarching recommendation that the entire range of democratic governance, rule of law and livelihood interventions involving civil society be intensified in at-risk countries. Ongoing anti-corruption work, work to strengthen the independence of the media or to improve the integrity of electoral processes, as well as youth empowerment, will – where results are achieved – serve to build a country’s resilience to further encroachment by organised crime on the political context and state institutions. Longer-standing civic awareness-raising across democratic governance and peacebuilding agendas in west Africa have created infrastructures and networks that can be readily drawn on to help create the necessary momentum. Thus, partner support to civil society through WASAF in countries facing high levels or the threat of deepening organised crime may wish to adopt a two-tier approach: firstly, identifying explicit initiatives to tackle different forms of organised crime at different levels; and, secondly, expanding commitments across the wider spectrum of relevant sectors.

# 1. Introduction

Organised crime has gained increasing recognition as a prominent threat to security, governance and development in west Africa over the past decade. It has intersected with deeper governance and underdevelopment challenges in the region, the activities of increasing numbers of violent extremist groups, as well as long-standing separatist and insurgency movements. This has compounded the effects and intractability of these dynamics and threatened to reverse political and development gains.<sup>1</sup>

The West Africa Strategic Assistance Framework (WASAF) on Serious Organised Crime is the latest in a line of international and regional policy frameworks emerging over the past decade. Designed to tackle organised crime in west Africa, WASAF is an initiative of the G7 member states, together with Colombia, Portugal and Spain, as well as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the EU Commission, Europol, Interpol, the EU Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC(N)), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA). WASAF is “an articulation of the essential ingredients of a holistic approach to SOC” (see Annex 1 for summary framework), covering a range of policy areas. With representation from each of these powers and institutions, the WASAF Committee agreed a broad framework of priorities in November 2014, and plans to launch in early 2016 following a phase of analytical work.

In contrast to other initiatives, the WASAF initiative emphasises the need to strengthen the role of civil society in crime prevention, to advance a culture of lawfulness and drug harm reduction, and to increase awareness of the social and economic harms associated with organised crime. These objectives fall under its first pillar: socio-economic environments.

As one of several observers calling for greater involvement of civic actors in addressing organised crime, International Alert, through this study, has taken the opportunity to put forward some further reflections and recommendations to policy stakeholders involved in WASAF. The objective here is to help maximise the opportunity for targeted and strategic investments in supporting civil society’s engagement in this domain moving forward.<sup>2</sup> Definitions of ‘civil society’ vary. The term is often used as shorthand for referring to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Other uses encompass a wider array of formal and informal institutions, where people come together to advance common interests; this may include women’s organisations, youth organisations, trader associations, trade unions, faith-based organisations, students’ organisations and the

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1 There is a growing body of research documenting these dynamics at regional level as well as in specific west African countries. UNODC began highlighting these issues in 2005 – see UNODC (2005). *Transnational organised crime in the west Africa Region*, Vienna: UNODC; see also subsequent UNODC reports on the region. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung has published a useful collection of essays, including: E.E.O. Alemika (2013). *The impact of organised crime on governance in west Africa*, Abuja: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. See also T. Reitano and M. Shaw (2014). ‘People’s perspectives of organised crime in west Africa and the Sahel’, Institute for Security Studies Paper No. 254, Pretoria: ISS. See also the Center on International Cooperation, Kofi Annan Foundation, ECOWAS GIABA and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (2012). ‘The impact of organised crime and drug trafficking on governance, development and security in west Africa – expert meeting’, Summary of proceedings; and West African Commission on Drugs (WACD) (2014). *Not just in transit: Drugs, the state and society in west Africa – An independent report of the West Africa Commission on Drugs*, Geneva: WACD. Country-specific research includes: W. Lacher (2012). ‘Organized crime and conflict in the Sahel-Sahara region’, Carnegie Papers; H. Vigh (2012). ‘Critical states and cocaine connections’, in M. Utas (ed.) *African conflicts and informal power: Big men and networks*, London: Zed Books

2 This reflects the findings of earlier Alert studies reviewing organised crime through a peacebuilding lens. See International Alert (2014). *Crime and conflict: The new challenge for peacebuilding*, London: International Alert

media, among others.<sup>3</sup> While civil society is in many respects well developed in west Africa, a number of challenges and constraints also affect civic participation in development processes, notwithstanding variations from country to country. The specific set of issues related to organised crime may add a further note of complexity, being frequently highly sensitive. Furthermore, the framing of a cluster of issues under the organised crime heading can also lead to conceptual confusion. Creative thinking through the WASAF policy process – in terms of how best to reach and engage with civic actors in advancing this agenda and ensuring maximum impact – will be required.

This study set out to shed further light on these issues. It draws on literature on organised crime both in west Africa and elsewhere, together with the findings from field research conducted by Alert in Abuja (Nigeria), Accra (Ghana) and Bamako (Mali) during June and July 2015. Consultations in these three locations sought to:

1. Identify and review current engagements by civic actors in tackling organised crime in west Africa;
2. Identify additional potential entry points for civic actors in tackling organised crime in specific west African locations;
3. Assess challenges and opportunities for enhanced civic engagement in tackling organised crime in west Africa.

The methodology consisted of a light-touch qualitative field research process, involving interviews with a total of 50 key stakeholders from across civil society, government and the international community. These interviews were conducted over a three- to five-day period in each setting, with some follow-up skype consultations.

Taking into account the significant heterogeneity of the region and the different manifestations of organised crime affecting it – as well as the brevity of the research and its limitation to three capital city locations – the review of past and current initiatives is far from comprehensive, and the overall analysis panoramic. Although framed as a mapping of existing and potential initiatives, full analysis of the quality of, and results from, existing initiatives was beyond the scope of the research process. Indeed, one clear recommendation arising is that the issues around civic engagement in tackling organised crime warrant much closer examination and in-depth research in different contexts moving forward. Nonetheless, the readiness of stakeholders to share reflections and ideas during the consultations has generated a body of material sufficient to envisage a tentative framework for civic engagement in responding to serious organised crime (SOC) as proposed by WASAF, which will be the main subject of this report.

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3 See West African Civil Society Institute (WACSI) (2009). 'Towards an ECOWAS of peoples', Paper presented at the 3rd East African CSO Forum, March, Arusha

## 2. Overview of serious organised crime in west Africa and efforts to reduce it

Organised crime is not new to west Africa. While UNODC first signalled increased drug trafficking across the region in 2005,<sup>4</sup> the issue had already been flagged by a number of west African and European experts since the 1980s. The enmeshing of organised criminal activity with the transformations, conflicts and political instability of the 1990s affected a number of countries in the region, creating an enabling environment for organised crime.

By 2005, the range of illicit activities reported by UNODC had grown, and the UNODC report highlighted how west Africa had already become an important transit point for drugs being smuggled to Europe. It also noted the possibility of links between different types of organised crime and terrorism expanding over time. A subsequent UNODC publication in 2008 focused exclusively on different dimensions of drug trafficking in the region – noting a spike in cocaine at around 50 tonnes.<sup>5</sup>

Following on from the UNODC reports and responding to broader global security priorities, policy attention has tended to focus on the clearly transnational forms of SOC, emphasising trade in different illicit commodities. Thus, UNODC's most recent study on west Africa prioritises six 'flows' in a list that is acknowledged to be selective. These are:<sup>6</sup>

- Cocaine from the Andes via west Africa to Europe;
- Methamphetamine from west Africa to east Asia;
- Smuggling of migrants from west Africa to Europe;
- Firearms trafficking in west Africa;
- Fraudulent essential medicines from south Asia and east Asia to west Africa; and
- Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

To these can be added, among others: oil theft,<sup>7</sup> illegal logging and fishing,<sup>8</sup> and other environmental crimes such as electronic waste dumping, as well as cyber crime,<sup>9</sup> kidnapping for ransom<sup>10</sup> and armed robbery (including household robberies, large-scale cattle theft, bank robberies and car-jacking). These activities are undertaken with different levels of sophistication and intent, by different actors, organised into different types of networks across different parts of west Africa,

<sup>4</sup> See UNODC (2005), Op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> UNODC (2008). *Drug trafficking as a security threat in west Africa*, Vienna: UNODC. It is worth noting that some doubt has been cast on these figures: the challenge in sourcing accurate data on these trends emerges repeatedly across the institutional and research literature. UNODC's World Drug Report (2014, p.38) highlights the difficulties in collecting data for Africa as a whole. Controversy over the figures put forward by UNODC is discussed in J. Csete and C. Sanchez (2013). 'Telling the story of drugs in west Africa: The newest front in a losing war?', Global Policy Observatory, Policy Brief 1.

<sup>6</sup> See UNODC (2013). *Transnational organised crime in west Africa: A threat assessment*, Vienna: UNODC

<sup>7</sup> A useful analysis is provided in: C. Katsouris and A. Sayne (2013). 'Nigeria's criminal crude: International options to combat the export of stolen oil', London: Chatham House.

<sup>8</sup> Illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is thought to account for up to 40% of the region's catch, with west African waters estimated to have the highest levels of IUU fishing in the world, mainly undertaken by fishermen from other regions, especially China. See GDSRC (2015). *Fragility, violence and criminality in the Gulf of Guinea: A literature review*. See also <http://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News/2015/N2015-012>

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.unodc.org/nigeria/en/1st-west-africa-cybercrime-summit.html>

<sup>10</sup> A wider typology of different forms of organised crime is offered in E.E.O. Alemika (2013), Op. cit., pp.25–26.

and they are often overlapping.<sup>11</sup> Some forms of organised crime take place at localised levels, although most others take place across borders regionally and are connected to global networks, with west African diaspora cells known to be actively connected to other organised crime groups around the world.

## Definitional challenges

Given this terrain, difficulties around definitions and interpretations immediately present themselves when discussing the topic of ‘serious organised crime’ in such a diverse region. This reflects conceptual difficulties found globally, including in the academic and policy literature. According to Interpol, “definitions of what constitute organised crime may vary widely from country to country”.<sup>12</sup> The UK Serious and Organised Crime Strategy adopts a broad definition, whereby organised crime is deemed “serious crime, planning, coordinated and conducted by people working together on a continuing basis... Their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain”.<sup>13</sup> Other definitions introduce different characteristics, some seeing organised crime as a “*non-ideological* enterprise, involving a number of persons in close interaction, organised on a *hierarchical basis*”. Some are more normative: “organised crime does not exist as an ideal type, but rather as a *degree* of criminal activity or as a point on the *spectrum of legitimacy*”; several definitions emphasise the complicity of public officials as part of the definition.<sup>14</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that, even without the ‘serious’ prefix, the term ‘organised crime’ tends to elicit mixed reactions among west African stakeholders, as evidenced by research for this report as well as other recent studies.<sup>15</sup> Primarily, some interviewees were reluctant to separate ‘organised crime’ from government corruption, providing examples and perspectives on the scale of organisation required to facilitate the embezzlement of public resources. Some respondents also pointed to the way in which a major part of the economy in each of the countries reviewed functions through informal networks. The distinction between informal economic activity and law-breaking or criminality may be blurred, at times creating an environment where more serious forms of organised crime can easily take root; however, it is also a livelihood strategy deemed entirely legitimate in contexts with few employment alternatives. A third set of objections to the term arose from respondents’ sensitivity to western policy discourse ‘blaming’ African countries for negative global dynamics without taking responsibility for their own countries’ perceived complicity. Perceptions of rich-world banking sector profiteering from the proceeds of organised crime were shared in several of the interviews, constituting one of several ‘examples’ informing scepticism around the agenda.

Deeper and contextually closer readings of organised crime at national and local levels in different west African states are required – readings that may not take the transnational and global security dimension of particular forms of organised criminality as its starting point. This need is articulated in a number of recent policy-oriented research studies.<sup>16</sup> More detailed assessments of organised crime and its intersection with local political economies and power structures, as well as of citizens’ perspectives and priorities in tackling it, will equally be an essential starting

11 This report is largely focused on the ECOWAS region, noting that trafficking routes and dynamics spread further north across the Sahel and into the Maghreb countries of the greater western Africa region. See Map in Annex 2.

12 According to the Interpol website, available at: <http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Organized-crime/Organized-crime>

13 HMG (2013). *Serious and organised crime strategy*, London: HMG. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/248645/Serious\\_and\\_Organised\\_Crime\\_Strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf)

14 These definitions are taken from the excellent discussion of different available definitions in E.E.O. Alemika (2013), *Op. cit.*, p.17

15 See T. Reitano and M. Shaw (2014), *Op. cit.*, p.4. This is further complicated by the ‘serious’ label used by WASAF, given its subjectivity. While the concept of SOC is clearly defined in UK policy, its connotation is not globally recognised.

16 Especially by participants of the expert meeting of the Center on International Cooperation et al (2012), *Op. cit.*; and E.E.O. Alemika (2013), *Op. cit.*

point for comprehensive strategies to engage civic actors.<sup>17</sup> This report will now consider five sets of key causes and consequences of serious organised crime in west Africa that are relevant to its identification of actual and potential civil society responses, drawing out differentiating context factors per country as gleaned through the research.

## Key causes and consequences of serious organised crime in west Africa

### *Underdevelopment*

Many of the west African states that are most affected by organised crime score at the bottom of human development indicators. In contexts characterised by massive unemployment or underemployment – often existing side by side with significant wealth – participation in organised crime may represent a rational economic choice.

Mali, in particular its expansive, underdeveloped desert regions to the north, now represents a major drug-trafficking hub – particularly for cocaine smuggled from South America to Europe, as well as methamphetamine increasingly produced in west Africa and pharmaceuticals such as Tramadol. It is also a transit point for trafficking of less profitable but still lucrative ‘commodities’ including people, petrol, weapons and cigarettes. Landlocked at the centre of the Sahel, Mali is “a land of commercial exchanges where communities depend on trade strategies with their closest neighbours for economic development and survival”.<sup>18</sup> Experts have shown how Mali and the wider region’s trading traditions and practices have readily lent themselves to the uptake of trade in more pernicious commodities. The penetration of organised crime therefore represents an organic evolution of long-standing socio-economic activity in a context of wider neglect of northern regions, and requires responses that are sensitive to the livelihood needs provided by such networks. Similar links between unemployment or underemployment and participation in lower levels of organised criminal activity were reported in both Ghana and Nigeria.

At the same time, a societal acceptance of the economic gains of crime was noted in all three settings reviewed for this study. Possibly a function of wider economic inequities, as well as other cultural factors, participants in Ghana highlighted that ‘money talks’ and that big crime bosses are often highly respected figures within local churches and communities, investing in important community social infrastructure. Citizens interviewed for another study reflecting on these issues in Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Niger were clear that illicit trafficking and organised crime were not considered criminal behaviour locally – instead “the capacity to smuggle contraband, derive profit from trafficking, and migrate across the porous borders of the region is the resilience strategy that most communities employ to survive”.<sup>19</sup> While some recognition of the more detrimental effects of higher-value contraband on the social fabric were also noted, in the absence of alternatives for wealth creation, visibly lucrative work and its rewards measured in property accumulation and political influence may be equally admired. A further dimension of this is the wider social disenfranchisement of poor communities, living at the margins of society either figuratively, in urban slums, or literally, in remote and peripheral border or rural regions. According to one report: “In the context of poor or non-existent delivery of basic services, organised criminal activities are often deemed legitimate sources of funding for services, at times providing income and employment or investment in local communities.”<sup>20</sup>

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17 As noted in T. Reitano and M. Shaw (2014), Op. cit.

18 Global Initiative (2014). *Organized crime and illicit trafficking in Mali: Past, present and future*. Available at: <http://www.globalinitiative.net/wpfb-file/global-initiative-organized-crime-and-illicit-trafficking-in-mali-jan-2014-pdf/>

19 T. Reitano and M. Shaw (2014), Op. cit. This analysis is shared by: DDG (2014). *Border security needs assessment: Liptako-Gourma region, Bamako*: DDG – which assesses community perceptions in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

20 Ibid.

Various dimensions of underdevelopment enable organised crime to take root in different west African contexts. It is also anticipated that organised crime will have detrimental effects on longer-term development outcomes, as a negative feedback loop is established, whereby the other types of impacts noted below cumulate and further undermine development gains.<sup>21</sup> In Nigeria, a major obstacle to its development as a whole is the significant loss of oil revenue through theft by public officials and criminal gangs: the region's low score on human development indicators provides ample evidence of misuse of these huge resources.<sup>22</sup> In Ghana, one study exploring the links between drug use and unemployment raises concerns about a new generation whose parents are drug users,<sup>23</sup> highlighting the societal fall-out of drug trafficking in the region. Taking advantage of its relative stability, good airport and ports, Ghana is being used by criminal organisations as a hub in the region for transiting contraband and money laundering. This trend is reflected in the country's real estate boom: such economic distortions can be found as a result of laundering of criminal earnings, across the region. While some have argued that these represent positive spin-offs of organised crime in such settings, the overall prognosis points to a real risk of development gain reversal as a result of organised crime's interaction with stability, governance and other dimensions.<sup>24</sup>

### *Violent conflict*

Organised crime has been a powerful dynamic in armed group formation in northern Mali, as the dramatic increase in profit associated with newer illicit commodities in the early 2000s quickly attracted the interest of politico-military elites, also serving to destabilise local hierarchies and power relations. Research on the conflict concurs that the interests of competing groups in preserving their stake in the illicit economy was an important factor tipping Mali into war.<sup>25</sup> Today, top military and political figures and pro- and anti-government militias are thought to be involved in controlling different sections of high-value trafficking routes.<sup>26</sup> One interviewee suggested that the recent attacks in Bamako were the result of conflict between traffickers and police, underlining the potential for instability to erupt at any time. However, despite strong recommendations from experts, neither the Algiers process nor the wider international intervention under the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), or the efforts of other multilateral or bilateral partners, are presently taking explicit notice of the criminal dimensions of Mali's conflict and political settlement.<sup>27</sup> The nature of the political settlement in Mali will thus most likely consolidate the power of criminal networks, even expanding their ability to operate and deepening their connections with government structures.<sup>28</sup>

In Nigeria, research pointed to a trend of criminalisation of longer-standing identity, grievance and politically motivated conflicts. In the Niger Delta, successive generations of social protest highlighting community concern about the impacts of the oil industry gave way during the 2000s to a wave of ethnically based militancy. These groups' tactics included hostage-taking, illegal oil bunkering, acts of piracy, among others, and their activities have closely implicated political figures, embroiled in their own fierce power struggle in the affected states. In the Middle Belt

21 For example, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime shows how a large number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are threatened by organised crime. See Global Initiative (2015). *Measuring and monitoring transnational organised crime within the framework of sustainable development for the post-2015 development agenda*. See also OECD (2012). *Think global, act global: Confronting global factors that influence conflict and fragility*, Paris: OECD; and USAID (2013). *The development response to drug trafficking in west Africa: A programming guide*, Washington: USAID

22 K. Higgins (2009). 'Regional inequality and the Niger Delta', Policy Brief No. 5, Overseas Development Institute

23 N. Agbodza (2014). 'Narcotic trafficking as a national security threat: A case study of Ghana', Masters Dissertation submitted to KAIPTC

24 J. Cockayne (2014). 'Breaking the crime trap: Factoring crime into development policy', Global Observatory

25 W. Lacher (2012). 'Organised crime and conflict in the Sahel-Sahara region', Carnegie Papers, 13 September

26 Interview with UNODC official conducted for this report

27 The Algiers peace process does make a passing reference to issues related to organised crime, but the agenda has not received concrete attention in the formal process. MINUSMA does address the issues to some extent since creating a taskforce under its policing department in April 2015, but it is not mandated to act to curtail criminality in practice.

28 W. Lacher (2012), Op. cit.

states, where conflict between pastoralists and herders dates back generations, a significant drift towards increasing violence and criminalisation of these conflicts over the past decade is also apparent.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, in the north-east of the country, extreme levels of violence associated with the terrorist activities of, and state reprisals against, the Islamist group Boko Haram have, in recent years, created a humanitarian disaster of regional proportions, bringing in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Some analysts have pointed to links between Boko Haram (and affiliated groups) and organised crime.<sup>30</sup> However, the actual evidence demonstrating these links is scant, and others caution against false assumptions that Nigeria's wider organised crime networks are actively contributing to Boko Haram and affiliates.

Other examples of either longer-standing conflicts acquiring a criminalised dimension and/or organised crime itself generating armed violence can readily be found across the west Africa region. However, it should be noted that, compared with the levels of armed violence linked to organised crime seen in Latin America and the Caribbean, organised crime overall seems to be less violent, at least to date, in west Africa. Some experts have flagged the dangers that this may create, whereby international actors are slow to respond to the penetration of organised crime until or unless it is accompanied by significant levels of armed violence or conflict.<sup>31</sup>

### *State fragility*

As observed at an expert meeting convened in 2012, the close relationship forged between public authorities and organised criminal groups across the region is a major threat to governance.<sup>32</sup> Some argue that these relationships are evidence of the predominance of patronage and clientelism as against the Westphalian nation-state model of government in parts of Africa, itself a consequence of the coercive, exploitative and ultimately brief colonial systems that created its institutions.

Across the region, political parties are increasingly accused of using illegal monies emanating from organised crime to fund politics. Laws governing political party financing, asset disclosure and money laundering may be in place, but are not upheld rigorously enough to prevent this seepage. Multi-partyism is itself a new phenomenon in several west African countries, and the cost of political competition is fast squeezing out honest politicians, while electoral commissions remain weak.<sup>33</sup> The service delivery functions of states are also affected. In Mali, crime profits finance patronage networks and political systems, and are densely linked at the local level to different tribal leaders and communities: several interlocutors for this study drew parallels between Mali and Afghanistan in this regard. In Ghana, drug barons are reportedly eroding state power at local levels, as their philanthropic efforts eclipse those of weak institutions. At the national level, there is also evidence that organised crime has penetrated close to the centre of power, in turn often linked to the country's business and political elites: in 2005, for instance, a Ghanaian MP was arrested in the US with USD 6 million worth of heroin; it was reported that the MP in question was "known by his constituents to be a generous man who helped finance road-building projects".<sup>34</sup> In Rivers State in Nigeria, following the Amnesty Programme, militants have secured lucrative contracts to protect oil infrastructure, as well as in some cases political rewards, with several high-profile figures in the Niger Delta political scene clearly identifiable as former militants. Complicity of different state security agencies in oil bunkering is also seen to be an essential part of its *modus operandi*. Dysfunction across all sectors of local government administration is openly reported by civil servants and directly attributed to the political-level power struggle, which is itself ultimately based on competition for illegal access to oil wealth.

29 See also J. Banfield and M. Pace (2015). 'Organised crime in Nigeria', Unpublished background paper prepared for USAID (2015). *Organized crime, conflict and fragility: Assessing relationships through a review of USAID programs*, Washington: USAID, forthcoming

30 F. Onouha and G. Ezirim (2013). 'Terrorism and TOC in west Africa', Al Jazeera Center for Studies

31 This challenge is noted in: WACD (2014), Op. cit.; and Center on International Cooperation (CIC) (2013). *Getting smart and scaling up: Responding to the impact of organized crime on governance in developing countries*, New York University, p.7

32 Center on International Cooperation et al (2012), Op. cit.

33 This analysis was put forward by several interviewees, particularly in Ghana and Nigeria. See also E.E.O. Alemika (2013), Op. cit., p.26. On Nigeria's recent campaign, see: 'The men behind the money', *The Africa Report*, February 2015

34 'Ghana MP in US "heroin" arrest', *BBC News*, 22 November 2005. This case and others in which Ghanaian politicians have been implicated in drug trafficking are discussed in more detail in both CIC (2013), Op. cit., pp.36-37, and WACD (2014), Op. cit., p.24



While the corrosive effects of organised crime on already weak state institutions cut across different sectors, one area highlighted repeatedly during research for this study was the interplay between organised crime and the very institutions mandated to curb it, namely in the criminal justice, law and order sector (JLOS). The independence of the judiciary in all three countries was questioned repeatedly. While Mali has established several specialised agencies and positions within the police force to deal with trafficking, these are thought to lack legitimacy and to be significantly under-resourced and degraded. Linkages and collaboration across states that may be required to deal with the transnational nature of organised crime remain weak.<sup>35</sup> Discussions highlighted the relative impunity of those close to political power who engage in organised criminal activity. Despite increasing conviction rates by Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crime Commission and related institutions, Nigeria's political and business elite are adroit at exploiting legal loopholes even where cases are prosecuted. While the Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) is heralded in the region for its prosecution of human trafficking crimes, it has no mechanisms to investigate complicity of customs officials, despite acknowledgement by a key official at NAPTIP in an interview for this report that nobody is smuggled across a border without some degree of complicity by a law enforcement official at some point along the journey. In Ghana, despite allegations about the VVIP lounge at Accra airport being used to traffic drugs,<sup>36</sup> the Ghanaian Attorney General has reportedly claimed there is not enough evidence to justify further investigation. While the children of elites are seen to be increasingly using drugs recreationally, mules and disenfranchised individuals are the primary focus of police; moreover, seizures and evidence in police care, according to one interviewee, have frequently gone missing.<sup>37</sup>

### *Public health and safety*

Concern is mounting around increasing consumption of illicit as well as pharmaceutical drugs used illegally in west Africa. UNODC estimates that as much as one-third of cocaine passing through the region is being consumed locally.<sup>38</sup> Countries in west Africa are ill-prepared to deal with rising drug consumption rates – most lack adequate harm reduction policies and infrastructure. Myths around drug use and the effects of different drugs are common, as is stereotyping of their association with socially excluded groups, unemployed youth, and ex- or active combatants in some contexts. Real evidence of who is consuming, and with what effects, is extremely under-researched. Despite regional commitments, national policies and strategies are generally not developed from sound baseline data. In addition, there is a lack of deep analysis and contextualisation of the issues needed to mainstream a public health response. A critical need for baseline data, assessment and research, legislative reforms and public awareness-raising to stave off a looming public health crisis linked to drugs was raised repeatedly in interviews for this study, echoing the findings of the West African Commission on Drugs (WACD), among others. In Ghana, interviewees highlighted that there has been no nationwide study to date on drug-use trends or perceptions. Unconstructive legislative environments are a further major challenge flagged strongly by the WACD, associated with rights abuses and prison overcrowding, again echoed in interviews conducted for this report in all three of the countries reviewed. Frustrations with the legislative environment in Nigeria were also mentioned.<sup>39</sup> In Mali, which has some of the most progressive drugs legislation in the region, implementation is hampered by political and security prerogatives and, by extension, lack of resources. Drug treatment and rehabilitation sectors are significantly underdeveloped against demand, with availability in only a few countries, and are predominantly provided by overburdened mental health care systems, highly localised community-based organisations (CBOs) or religious institutions.<sup>40</sup>

35 One interviewee reported the fact that 130kg of methamphetamine was seized in two separate cases in Mali during 2015. The man arrested in association with the seizure has subsequently been released and disappeared, anecdotally serving to illustrate the ineffectiveness of law enforcement efforts around organised crime.

36 'Cocaine lady used VVIP because of Ibrahim Mahama', Ghana Web, 26 November 2014

37 Interview with key expert conducted for this report

38 UNODC (2013), Op. cit., p.13

39 Discussed fully in Youth Rise Nigeria (2015). *We are people: The unintended consequences of the Nigerian drug law on the health and human rights of young people who use drugs*, Abuja: Youth Rise Nigeria

40 I.S. Obot (2013). 'Prevention and treatment of drug dependence in west Africa', WACD Background Paper No. 2

A further area of public health and safety directly linked to organised crime concerns the various dimensions of human trafficking. Nigerian legislation recognises the following: child labour, sex work, organ transplant, rituals, baby factories, begging. Women and young people are known to be disproportionately affected.

### *Environmental impacts*

Finally, it is clear that organised crime directly and negatively impacts the natural environment in a number of different settings. Illegal fishing and logging are rife in the region, and are thought to be causing significant strain on sea and forest resources.<sup>41</sup> Oil bunkering – the informal syphoning of actual crude oil from industry infrastructure, which takes place across the Delta region in Nigeria with varying degrees of sophistication – is thought to account for at least 150,000 bpd, more than Ghana or Brunei's official production.<sup>42</sup> Due to its informal processing, the environmental consequences are known to be damaging. Illicit e-dumping in west Africa and its offshore areas is a further source of concern, with both environmental and security implications. More indirectly, the erosion of states' governance performance occasioned by organised crime is likely to lead to further de-prioritisation and weak capacity in managing essential municipal and country-level environmental services and issues.

## Regional and international policy responses to organised crime

West Africa's Regional Economic Community (REC), ECOWAS, the African Union, as well as other major multilateral and bilateral institutions and partners, have established a series of policy frameworks and interventions designed to curtail the pernicious effects of organised crime. While, in principle, regional initiatives led by ECOWAS ought to be at the fore, with other partners to a large extent aligning their interventions to support these, in the area of drug trafficking, some have observed that external actors have tended to take a lead, reflecting a lack of political ownership of the issues in the region until more recently.<sup>43</sup>

A brief overview of key policy actors and initiatives illustrates that an emphasis on security, as well as strengthened law and order, lies at the heart of the collective policy response to organised crime in west Africa.<sup>44</sup> This emphasis on a securitised law and order approach as the natural policy 'home' for crime prevention has been a logical starting point. The global and regional security threat posed by the hybridisation of criminal and ideological agendas, particularly linked to the rise in violent extremism in Africa, has further contributed to energising response momentum as part of security agendas.

Real challenges exist in enabling states' criminal justice systems to adapt to new challenges posed by organised criminal networks, including through more effective cooperation among these across the region. With the goal of tackling these and other constraints, interventions have yielded some significant results, although the common practice of measuring these in terms of volume of drug seizures in different west African countries is also controversial.<sup>45</sup> Other gains in some countries

41 See 'Fishing fraud in west Africa', Greenpeace; 'Illegal logging and fishing prolong poverty in Africa, says Kofi Annan', *The Guardian*, 8 May 2014

42 'Nigeria's former oil bandits now collect government cash', *Wall Street Journal*, 22 August 2012

43 See also C. Kavanagh (2013). 'International and regional responses to drug trafficking in west Africa: A preliminary overview', WACD Background Paper No. 6

44 A more detailed summary is included in Center on International Cooperation et al (2012), *Op. cit.* With a focus on drug trafficking, see also C. Kavanagh (2013), *Op. cit.*

45 UNODC maintains a drug seizure database and provides summaries of seizures per country in its regular report. See UNODC (2013), *Op. cit.*, p.10. ECOWAS GIABA annual reports also record arrests and convictions. However, others are critical of these types of measurements as success indicators alone.

have also been achieved regarding review of penal codes, establishment of anti-drug commissions and other specialised agencies, and anti-money laundering frameworks. Again, however, progress is hampered by a range of issues. The region continues to be used as a transit for trafficking to Europe; regional domestic consumption rates are rising; and the corrosive effects of organised crime on national governance and security settings is deepening.

In seeking to explain this, a number of practitioner and research voices have begun to challenge the effectiveness of a narrow law enforcement emphasis.<sup>46</sup> These assume that the political and operational will exists across government to run with the anti-crime agenda, when evidence conclusively confirms that this is not always the case. Normative commitments at the level of ECOWAS have not been translated into meaningful policy responses within member states: despite the gains, significant implementation lags with national and regional initiatives have also been noted.<sup>47</sup> Arguments for more strategic and holistic responses highlight how law and order approaches may overlook the problems of state legitimacy that exist in many of the affected countries; they also point to the way in which political actors may themselves be complicit in aspects of organised crime, or otherwise connected to it through patronage networks that are essential to regime survival. Collusion in organised criminality by government officials, traditional authorities, political parties, as well as JLOS officials significantly undermines formal efforts to tackle it. The high levels of impunity for organised crime in the region have been highlighted as one indicator of these dynamics.<sup>48</sup> It is now increasingly recognised that state-centric efforts to build domestic capacity to clamp down on criminal activity runs the risk of reinforcing malign structures, rather than the reverse.<sup>49</sup> One recent report exploring these dilemmas in Mali argues that: “Concentrating on capacity building in the judicial and security sector is the right approach only if governments stand behind efforts to combat criminal networks. Donors should thus focus more on political engagement, encouraging strategies that make the political accommodation of influential players contingent upon their disengagement from the illicit economy and commitment to containing drug and weapons smuggling.”<sup>50</sup>

The conclusion to be drawn is not that law enforcement as a category of response to organised crime has failed entirely or ought to be abandoned. Rather, it is that the design of interventions needs to be improved and complemented by other types of remedies that cross into other policy areas.<sup>51</sup>

The WASAF initiative responds to this perspective, representing a deliberate attempt to both coordinate and complement earlier international and regional response frameworks that prioritise strengthening of law enforcement capacities and institutions as the primary pillar of response to organised crime. It advances a more holistic approach, including a number of envisaged intervention areas in the wider social and governance spheres. Of particular interest to this study is the WASAF initiative’s explicit inclusion of the need to strengthen the role of civil society in crime prevention, to advance a culture of lawfulness and drug harm reduction, and to increase awareness of the social and economic harms associated with organised crime. These priorities fall under the first pillar of WASAF: socio-economic environments. The summary framework of WASAF is shown in Annex 1.

46 See WACD (2013), *Op. cit.*; E.E.O. Alemika (2013), *Op. cit.*, p. 96; and Center on International Cooperation et al (2012), *Op. cit.* See also J. Cockayne and P. Williams (2009). *The invisible tide: Towards an international strategy to deal with drug trafficking through west Africa*, New York: International Peace Institute

47 Center on International Cooperation et al (2012), *Op. cit.*

48 *Ibid.*

49 R. Locke (2012). *Organised crime, conflict and fragility: A new approach*, New York: International Peace Institute

50 W. Lacher (2012), *Op. cit.*

51 Key among these are complementary and strategically coordinated interventions by development actors who are beginning to grapple with the problem of how to reduce the receptivity of fragile states to organised crime, as highlighted for instance in: OECD (2012a). *Think global, act global: Confronting global factors that influence conflict and fragility*, Paris: OECD; and OECD (2012b). *Transnational organized crime and fragile states*, OECD Development Cooperation Directorate (DAC) INCAF Working Paper, 3/2012, Paris: OECD

### 3. Engaging west African civil society in tackling organised crime

WASAF's emphasis on citizen involvement and the wider socio-economic environment presents an important opportunity, potentially paving the way for a new generation of thinking and a re-balancing of interventions away from state-centric capacity-building towards a more inclusive 'push-pull' or 'supply and demand' rationale. It thus, potentially, reflects a broader theoretical discourse running through international development practice since the 1990s, emphasising the importance of 'bottom-up' approaches. Evolving into an emphasis on 'voice and accountability' in development interventions, this school of thought is seen to emanate both from the field of human rights, which asserts citizens' right to participation, and from a recognition that citizens' demand for accountability will contribute to delivery of better government performance and better development results.<sup>52</sup> Regarding situations of armed violence and conflict, citizens' participation is again emphasised as a basic premise of the human security agenda,<sup>53</sup> and also by more recent policy and operational processes around the nexus between security and development.<sup>54</sup>

Civil society's role in democratic governance has, according to one commonly accepted framework, four major functions: as an *advocate* representing interests of its constituencies; in *service delivery* in education, health and other sectors; as a partner with government in development planning; and as a *watchdog* over government.<sup>55</sup> A 2014 report by Alert concluded that research and analysis using a conflict lens, dialogue, and civic empowerment and activism across a whole range of factors shaping organised crime will be critical components of lasting change.

Recognition of the frequent association between organised crime and predatory and complicit state authorities and political actors, as well as the profound socio-economic contributing factors and consequences of organised crime, has led to an acknowledgement of the importance of civic 'voice', engagement and awareness-raising in other recent research efforts and policy discussions. The engagement of citizens in pushing for states to adopt appropriate measures in line with regional commitments, in monitoring and informing interventions designed to tackle organised crime, and in responding to the impacts of organised crime on communities is increasingly seen as critical in the growing body of research literature. The presence of an empowered civil society and media thus "offers a hook on which to hang hopes of societal resilience to the pernicious effects of organised crime".<sup>56</sup> Improved information and greater involvement of citizens in tackling organised crime was also a core recommendation of the WACD report.<sup>57</sup>

The global context provides substantial evidence in favour of community involvement in crime prevention initiatives.<sup>58</sup> UNODC's portfolio of crime prevention and criminal justice work

52 OECD DAC (2007). *Evaluation of citizens' voice and accountability: Review of the literature and donor approaches report*

53 As first defined in the 1994 UNDP *Human Development Report*

54 As evidenced in the extensive emphasis on citizens' participation placed in World Bank (2011). *World Development Report: Conflict, security and development*, Washington: World Bank.

55 Summarised in OSI (2007). *An evaluation of Malian civil society's role in governance*

56 International Alert (2014), Op. cit.

57 WACD (2014), Op. cit.

58 See, for example, UN (2015). 'The role of the public in strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice', 13th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Doha, 12-19 April 2015

indicates a strong community-based dimension: examples are mainly derived from Latin America and the Caribbean contexts, and include community-centred crime and drug abuse prevention projects in Bolivia, Brazil and Colombia, among others.<sup>59</sup> One study hypothesises that Bolivia and Nicaragua have experienced lower levels of violence than their regional neighbours because of the relatively advanced level of civic engagement on the issues – although other factors are also relevant, including differences between rural and urban settings for organised crime.<sup>60</sup>

### Empowerment and civic activism as part of a transformational peacebuilding approach to organised crime

Enhancing civic resilience to the impacts of organised crime, and empowering citizens' voices to address structural causal factors, strongly emerge as gaps in the overall current response to the nexus between organised crime, armed violence and fragility.

Peacebuilding takes a broad approach in its perspective on societal levels linked to a conflict and its transformation. [...] Those designing interventions need to identify critical resource people and leaders at each societal level to be mobilised in building peace; the types of activities to undertake with these constituencies; as well as potential links across levels. National actors working within their societies and communities are of paramount importance in peacebuilding, although an enabling role for international partners is also recognised.

The commitment to involve a wider range of actors in responses to armed violence and conflict has profound importance when considering the path of contemporary conflict, including armed violence related to organised crime, where the distinction between combatant (and/or criminal) and civilians has broken down, and entire populations may be affected or take part in different ways.

The achievement of sustainable peace hinges on meaningful efforts to address and transform long-term grievances held by citizens. These grievances can be reflected in inequitable or unsatisfactory governance systems, economies, or legal and justice systems. Therefore, the empowerment of citizens to engage with these issues is crucial. This points to the importance of working with civil society – not only NGOs but also business leaders, women's organisations, religious institutions and academics – as key agents of lasting peace, ideally based on a sound analysis of how civic actors are themselves positioned vis-à-vis conflict dynamics.

Source: International Alert (2014). *Crime and conflict: The new challenge for peacebuilding*.

While it is beyond the scope of this report, a full diagnostic of different types of civic responses to organised crime around the world is overdue. There is a growing consensus regarding the importance of citizens' involvement. However, less attention has been given to understanding lessons from those initiatives that are already underway, the kinds of civic processes and experiences that may actually yield positive results, how best these might be supported, and variables by context.<sup>61</sup>

59 See summary on UNODC website, available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/CrimePreventionProjects.html>

60 J. Cockayne (2011). *State fragility, organised crime and peacebuilding: Towards a more strategic approach*, Noref report, Oslo: Noref

61 This gap was also noted in a recent literature review on organised crime in the Gulf of Guinea. See GDSRC (2015), Op. cit.

It appears that much of the crime and violence prevention work at the community level, taking place particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, does not explicitly address the ‘organised’ crime dimension, and its structural context, namely the wider political economy in which crime is taking place. These initiatives are about making an immediate contribution to community resilience, while the structural context in such aggravated settings prohibits and punishes citizens who dare to challenge it. One gruesome example is the extreme abuses perpetrated against journalists investigating organised crime in Mexico.

Yet, arguably, finding ways to address these more sensitive dimensions will push further at the causes of entrenched criminality than initiatives targeting symptoms alone, critical though these are in enabling communities to survive day-to-day threats. The space to do so in many west African countries is more open than in some Latin American and Caribbean contexts, notwithstanding risks. However, there is less evidence in the global literature of the types of civil society-led initiatives that might impact on wider crime-enabling factors and structural dimensions. One report identifies a number of indicators that influence a country’s exposure to the risks associated with organised crime from a governance perspective. Included in this is “a strong culture of freedom of and access to information, a culture of asset disclosure among elected officials and political parties, and citizen perceptions of organised crime”.<sup>62</sup> In Latin America and the Caribbean, there have been some efforts to campaign and implement initiatives against “dirty money in politics”, sensitising electorates to the dangers of criminally funded political campaigns.<sup>63</sup>

The most evolved set of recommendations regarding the types of actions citizens can undertake to address these more structural dimensions reviewed for this report is provided in the CIC’s 2013 report.<sup>64</sup> The report, based on a review of organised crime in six different settings across different continents, offers an ‘organised crime-sensitive programming framework’ that recommends entry points for development programming across five areas: (i) protecting the political process; (ii) modernising and strengthening criminal justice and law enforcement; (iii) strengthening economic and social development policy; (iv) engaging civil society and the media; and (v) deepening the knowledge base. Despite the focus on civil society as the fourth of these, other functions are envisaged, or implied, across all areas.

## Civil society initiatives responding to organised crime in west Africa

Research for this report set out to review current initiatives that have emerged on the ground to explicitly address organised crime, as well as stakeholders’ proposals for strategic entry points going forward. Due to the brevity of the research and potential breadth of relevant initiatives across the four different locations, it should be noted that the following pages are not intended as a comprehensive mapping. The initiatives mentioned are instead offered as indicative evidence of types of relevant initiatives, as well as entry points identified by stakeholders, in order to help envisage an overall framework to guide future support to civil society interventions tackling serious organised crime as part of WASAF, going forward. These have been grouped below according to a tentative typology of civic response. They are:

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<sup>62</sup> CIC (2013), Op. cit. pp. 42-46

<sup>63</sup> See IDEA (2014). *Illicit networks and politics in Latin America*, Stockholm: IDEA

<sup>64</sup> CIC (2013), Op. cit.

- Efforts to mitigate the harmful effects of organised crime in communities;
- Policy advocacy advancing public health and safety, governance and security dimensions;
- Citizens' oversight of key JLOS agencies; and
- Civic 'voice' influencing and monitoring regional initiatives.

### *Efforts to mitigate the harmful effects of organised crime in communities*

As noted by the WACD, UNODC and others, a serious public health crisis related to drug use in west Africa is looming. Treatment, counselling and other forms of support to drug users are significantly under-resourced, relying on the largely voluntary efforts of religious institutions, hospital mental health facilities and CBOs. Due to funding constraints, such initiatives are largely focused at a micro level, and suffer from lack of technical capacity as well as resources to implement lasting programmes.

### **Philip Foundation Programme**

The Philip Foundation Programme in Ghana, which chairs the Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development (GAPVOD), has been working on drug-use prevention since 2009. The focus of its work is on youth development and empowerment of community members in decision-making on issues that affect their lives. Among a range of other community development issues primarily in the health arena (HIV-Aids prevention, reproductive health issues, anti-malaria campaigns), the organisation is now working to mobilise communities to fight drugs and substance abuse. The Philip Foundation is working with the support of a US-based foundation, the Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America, to establish anti-drug coalitions in six districts within the three regions of Central, Eastern and Greater Accra. The project is designed to build communities' capacity to deal with drug and substance abuse and related crimes.

Generally, interviewees in Ghana and Nigeria pointed to a stark lack of funding for this work. In Ghana, UNODC issued a call for proposals for NGOs providing services in this area, with a ceiling of US\$8,000 (about €7,200).<sup>65</sup> Compared with government investment in the security domain related to drug trafficking, these sums pale into insignificance, and underline the overall lack of support for mitigating the public health consequences of organised crime.

CBOs are also attempting to provide longer-term programmes supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of criminal gang members, drug addicts and trafficked persons. In the Niger Delta, a generation of earlier programmes on militancy and cultism seeking to provide alternatives to cult-gang members were scaled back during the Amnesty period; however, this is an area of programming that needs urgent revival. There are two grassroots rehabilitation centres for cult-gang members in the whole Niger Delta region, run by a former 'kingpin' leader, with the support of several CBOs.

In Nigeria, CBOs are also involved in drug treatment and rehabilitation initiatives, with some engaging in more established reintegration work around victims of human trafficking.

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<sup>65</sup> UNODC Call for Proposals, Drug Abuse Prevention Centre Grants, June 2015

### **Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF)**

WOTCLEF was initiated and founded in 1999 by Chief (Mrs) Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar, married to the Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The organisation's goal is to eradicate people trafficking, child labour and violent abuses of the rights of women and society, as well as HIV/AIDS. It has chapters in states across the country.

Having the goal to eventually reintegrate victims into society by ensuring that they are economically self-sufficient and psychologically well adjusted, WOTCLEF offers assistance to young women, boys and girls who are victims of trafficking and child labour. Psycho-social counselling is provided for repatriated victims. They also receive medical treatment, clothing, legal assistance and shelter. Whenever possible, victims are reunited with their families and offered vocational training.

It should be noted that a whole area of civic intervention in safeguarding communities from the harmful effects of organised crime that is prominent in other settings – namely, community-based security, protection, mediation and violence prevention initiatives as found across Latin America and the Caribbean – did not emerge strongly from this research. To some extent, this may reflect the fact that, compared with those contexts, organised crime is not yet associated with the same levels of armed violence. This is probably more a result of the speed and focus of the research, which did not reach grassroots communities living with insecurity linked to organised crime at a local level. One initiative was highlighted, however, and it seems logical to assume that others also exist and need to be considered going forward.

### **Kebetkache Women's Development and Resource Centre**

The Port Harcourt-based CBO is offering training and dialogue sessions in communities on how to manage difference non-violently, in an effort to reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG) in areas where cult groups are rife. The dialogue sessions have deliberately tried to involve cult-gang members. Demand for these sessions reportedly exceeds the capacity of the CBO to provide sufficient space and opportunity for sought-after rehabilitation.

In addition, several government interviewees consulted for this study were quick to name the role of civil society in combating organised crime as one of intelligence – emphasising their responsibility to pass on information about criminals and victims at large in communities to the relevant authorities. In particular, NAPTIP has designed its public awareness campaigns around trafficking in a way that relies on civil society organisations (CSOs) and schools as implementing partners. This role as implementing partner to government is entirely valid and important – although it clearly needs to complement broader monitoring and advocacy roles influencing government's own behaviour, for all the reasons already articulated in this report.

Community awareness campaigns with objectives around sensitisation of citizens on the health and safety dangers associated with organised crime are also underway, communicating messages on how to avoid these – whether related to drug use, people trafficking in all its manifestations, or environmental risks associated with oil bunkering and illegal logging. Efforts to challenge



stereotypes around drug use are also an important part of this work. Reports of rising domestic drug use underline the urgent need to significantly scale up existing initiatives on public health, as already highlighted by the WACD and others. Magnifying the efforts of the CSOs that have stepped into this space will require creative alliances with other public figures capable of communicating messages far and wide. Interestingly, in each of the three countries visited, stakeholders advised activists to consider strategies to reach out to celebrities, as allies in the campaign against drugs.<sup>66</sup> Pressure on governments to invest adequate resources in public health campaigns as well as facilities is also required.

Efforts to work with the media to help increase public awareness are also clearly needed, with a few examples of initiatives supporting the capacity of journalists to report on drug issues emerging from research for this report.

### Telling the story: Drug policies and the media in west Africa

A workshop organised by the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), the West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD) and the Kofi Annan Foundation equipped 30 media practitioners from across west Africa with knowledge and understanding about balanced drug policies, harm reduction, stigma and effective reporting. The two-day workshop took place on 3–4 June 2015 in Accra, Ghana, with financial support from the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Participants came from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

The Executive Director of WACSI called on the media to leverage their role in opinion formation to ensure that the drug policies adopted by governments do not cause more harm than good to society, and highlighted the need for the media to engage in accurate reporting to help sensitise the general population. Representatives from the IDPC also spoke to participants about the current drug control system, and the global policy context. With WACD Commissioners present, as well as a former drug user from Accra who told his own personal story, the workshop proved a great opportunity to educate everyone about the negative effects of criminalisation on people who use drugs (effects which outweigh the harms of drug use itself).

*Extract from an article first published on [idpc.net](http://idpc.net)*

*See also 'West Africa drug policy training toolkit' developed by IDPC and partners, available at: <http://idpc.net/publications/2015/04/west-africa-drug-policy-training-toolkit-facilitation-guide>*

Such one-off events need to be developed into ongoing efforts to train and support a cadre of journalists able to investigate and monitor the issues. Talk-shows and radio dramas also offer huge potential. For instance, the EU-supported radio initiative, Studio Tamani, broadcasts a weekly talk-show in all languages across Mali, debating wide-ranging issues.<sup>67</sup> Unique in Mali, it aims to provide a reliable source of news and information as well as a platform for dialogue and reconciliation for people in Mali, in turn making a contribution to national reconciliation and peacebuilding. Drug trafficking has featured on the agenda, reportedly prompting constructive exchange and debate among listeners.

<sup>66</sup> Interviews in Ghana pointed to the success of recent celebrity-endorsed campaigns to end power outages. Malian musicians have made populist interventions by singing against conflict and corruption and, it was suggested, could perhaps take up the agenda. The influence of Hollywood actors was also highlighted as a resource to be leveraged.

<sup>67</sup> See <http://www.hirondelle.org/index.php/en/our-media-outlets/current-programmes/mali>

### *Policy analysis and advocacy advancing public health and safety, governance and security dimensions*

The work of the WACD, already referenced in this study, stands out as the pre-eminent civic effort to document, analyse and influence policy related to organised crime in west Africa – specifically drug trafficking and the crime associated with it.

#### **The West African Commission on Drugs (WACD)**

The WACD was launched in January 2013 by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, in consultation with international and regional partners, national governments and CSOs, and supported by the Kofi Annan Foundation. The WACD – hosted at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Accra – comprised a group of distinguished west Africans, including two former heads of state and a number of researchers and experts. With three major objectives around developing policy, enhancing coordination and mobilising public awareness, it represents the realisation that, despite the efforts of ECOWAS and other institutions, drug trafficking and its consequences are rapidly worsening. The research process overseen involved extensive grassroots consultations, leading to a number of excellent background papers as well as the landmark *Not Just in Transit* report, which make a number of critical policy recommendations – above all the need for increased emphasis on the public health dimensions of the problem.

Further information is available at: <http://www.wacommissionondrugs.org/report/>

At the time of its publication, the *Not Just in Transit* report received high-level attention among heads of state and other actors in the region. The second phase of the WACD project is still ongoing and has included several capacity-building workshops around its findings, jointly undertaken by the Kofi Annan Foundation and the IDPC, as well as planned visits by commissioners to different countries. The work was intended to be catalytic, and has indeed given rise to the emergence of new civil society networks, discussed below, while several of its commissioners have gone on to become champions of the drug policy reform and harm reduction agenda in their respective countries.<sup>68</sup> However, regret was expressed during consultations for this study that, since publication of the report, WACD activities have slowed down. This points to the need to scale up follow-up activities to continue to capitalise on the excellent groundwork and analytical base generated. Stakeholders suggested that the WACD ought to be reinvigorated through identification of a dedicated and permanent institutional home, supported to conduct follow-up analysis and advocacy, producing knowledge and conducting trainings with the growing number of CSOs and media involved in the drug-trafficking and drug-use agenda. This will help to ground the discourse in the region, recognising that much of the research work continues to be generated from international sources, among other benefits.

Smaller research and dialogue projects have also emerged to date, although largely driven by international NGOs (INGOs). The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime has convened networks of west African researchers to debate the issues at high-level policy seminars.<sup>69</sup> Attempting to bring this conversation into an affected country context, the Global Initiative also collaborated with Alert to jointly organise a roundtable event convening civil society, government and international development partners to discuss the issues in 2014 in

<sup>68</sup> The funding for the first phase was provided by the Open Society Foundation (OSF) and OSIWA, as well as the EU and a contribution from the government of Côte d'Ivoire, while funding for the second phase has come from USAID together with ongoing contributions from the OSF.

<sup>69</sup> See <http://www.globalinitiative.net/>

Bamako.<sup>70</sup> Alert also organised a smaller donor roundtable event in Bamako in 2015. Both events confirmed the existence of a gap in national discourse about peace and security priorities in Mali, which urgently needs to be filled. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung published a volume of analysis on organised crime in west Africa that similarly involved a number of policy dialogue events in west Africa during its compilation and launch.<sup>71</sup>

In addition to supporting the ongoing work of the WACD or a regional knowledge hub, the importance of CSOs taking up aspects of the agenda relevant to their settings at the national level is a further key entry point identified by this research. The importance of ongoing research and analysis on different dimensions of organised crime and its causes and consequences, and growing national-level expertise within civil society with which to advocate for accountability and policy change, cannot be over-emphasised. In Mali, for instance, sharper and ongoing investigation of the links between organised crime and Mali's governance and post-conflict processes is urgently required to help place and keep the issue overtly on the agenda of government and international partners.<sup>72</sup> Different styles of research and advocacy may be needed to help push the agenda forward in different contexts. To encourage government and international donors to address the issue explicitly, harder investigative work may be needed to shine a light on the complicity of named political actors in organised crime – where such information is currently firmly below the radar. The risks to such organisations will be considerable and would perhaps best be borne by specialised INGOs (such as the International Crisis Group, Global Witness); a national think tank as described above would be better placed to engage in long-term policy processes as well as capacity-building within civil society. Safety nets for activists engaged in this type of investigative work need to be factored into relevant initiatives.<sup>73</sup>

Analysis, dialogue and advocacy work also aims to galvanise momentum around new policies or legislation relevant to organised crime, as well as political accountability. Perhaps the most advanced initiatives by west African civil society in this domain to date are the efforts of civil society coalitions focused on anti-trafficking in Nigeria, which led to the creation of an entire new set of laws and agencies.

### WOTCLEF – new legislation

A significant landmark in the activities of WOTCLEF was the enactment of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act in 2003 and the subsequent establishment of NAPTIP by the federal government of Nigeria. WOTCLEF's activities to push government to take actions responding to the rising wave of people trafficking across Nigeria are credited with securing this legislation.<sup>74</sup> In July 2003, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) granted WOTCLEF a Special Consultative Status. This distinguished status gives WOTCLEF the rare opportunity to maintain a regular presence at UN meetings and conferences that are relevant to WOTCLEF's programmes and activities. WOTCLEF's awareness-raising activities have not been restricted to Nigeria, but the organisation has also brought awareness campaigns to a number of European countries known to be recipients of young women and children trafficked from Nigeria. Similar campaigns have been organised in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, the UK and the US.

<sup>70</sup> International Alert and the Global Initiative (2014). 'Sustainable approaches to organised crime in Mali and the Sahel', Meeting report, October

<sup>71</sup> E.E.O. Alemika (2013), Op. cit.

<sup>72</sup> One opportunity is the current government's emphasis on restructuring Mali's defence forces. If this process really moves ahead, discussion on the military's role in combating and facilitating criminal activity ought to be on the agenda. Several large international projects of the EU, Danida and others are supporting this government agenda and include provision for fostering higher levels of civic confidence in Mali's security agencies – an aspect that could be equally expanded into the organised crime agenda.

<sup>73</sup> This issue is also discussed in CIC (2013), Op. cit.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with NAPTIP official, Abuja, conducted for this report

The focal points of the recently constituted West Africa Drug Policy Network (WADPN), itself an outcome of the WACD discussed more fully below, are mandated to take forward public awareness-raising and lobbying for improved policy environments on drugs across the region – although the initiative is at a nascent stage and has much further to go in securing the necessary resources and momentum. Activism by civil society groups on drug-use and policy issues is relatively well advanced in Nigeria compared with the wider region – although not as advanced as work on trafficking. A number of advocacy groups pushing for policies and legislative reforms that de-stigmatise drug use and address the scope of the challenges more effectively are in evidence, although the overall sector is still seen to be dramatically short of meeting needs. At the national level, the Centre for Research and Information on Substance Abuse has been at the forefront of advocacy for greater involvement of civil society in these issues, and is currently leading a coalition on data collection from civil society that is feeding into ECOWAS work. The WADPN focal point for Nigeria, Youth Rising, has been working since 2012 on advocacy for drug policy reforms. In Mali, the WADPN focal point *Osons parler de la drogue au Mali* (Let's dare to talk about drugs in Mali) has an ambitious vision for change.

### **Osons parler de la drogue au Mali (OPDM)/Let's dare to talk about drugs in Mali**

The OPDM network was founded in 2012 as a direct response to the political silence on issues related to drug trafficking, production and consumption in Mali, and the gaping need for citizens' response. It has the overall goals of influencing public opinion and conducting advocacy with authorities with the aim of reducing the harmful effects of drugs on Malian society. Its specific objectives are to:

- Open debate on the problem of drugs in Mali and make it a subject of national interest;
- Serve as an interface between public authorities and populations for improved information and sensitisation about drug-related problems in Mali;
- Monitor implementation of relevant policies and laws adopted in Mali;
- Facilitate exchange of experience among members regarding management of the effects of drugs;
- Promote enhancement of expertise among member organisations on these issues;
- Conduct research to contribute to a reliable analytical base concerning drugs in Mali; and
- Conduct advocacy and lobbying with public authorities on questions of drugs in Mali.

OPDM is an open network welcoming all Malian CSOs that are working either directly or indirectly in areas relevant to tackling drugs in Mali. It currently has nine affiliated member organisations.

Advocacy with the wider public to build constituencies for accountability and change and to prompt new approaches from political actors is also needed. Indeed, research and policy dialogue alone is likely to achieve very little without mass movements being mobilised around the issues, given the incentive structures, interests and scale of consequences involved. Campaigns highlighting the governance and security implications of organised crime to wider populations, even exposing political complicity, are urgently required, alongside those concerned with risks to public health and safety – although little has been done in this regard to date. Dedicated hubs of expertise and analysis mentioned above can serve to inspire and inform broader-based citizens' movement where results of research are properly disseminated. The range of recommendations laid out in the CIC report referenced above concerning “protecting the political process” may yet have to be experimented with in the west African context, but are urgently required given the close nexus between political systems and organised crime. Longer-standing civic awareness-raising across related issues of integrity in the electoral process, anti-corruption and peacebuilding have created

infrastructures and networks that can readily be drawn into the necessary momentum. Turning these networks to attend to west Africa's slide into greater fragility and instability as a result of organised crime should be feasible, provided resources and support are made available.

Once again, the media will be a critical partner in highlighting the governance aspects. Several promising initiatives were highlighted through interviews in Nigeria. These include the provision of support by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) to the *Premium Times* in order to enhance the newspaper's investigative capacity. In another example, the work of the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism has sought to expose corruption, regulatory failures and human rights abuses through investigative journalism. One expert underlined the importance of using organised crime-related cases tried in the region as rallying points, shedding light on the types of issues and actors involved and in so doing raising public awareness about them.<sup>75</sup>

### *Citizens' oversight of JLOS agencies*

Civic monitoring and oversight of the JLOS agencies mandated to tackle organised crime is urgently required, combined with upgrading civil society's capacity to play this role. Here again, the media's capacity to monitor court cases and other developments related to organised crime in the JLOS was highlighted as critical, moving away from the one-off sensationalist reporting and enhancing the watchdog function of the media. A central recommendation arising from the consultations held for this study is that civil society, including the media, should be more seriously involved in law enforcement and other initiatives to address the lack of political will hindering these initiatives to date. This potential is illustrated by the *Brekete Family* 'voice of the voiceless' call-in radio programme in Nigeria, which reportedly serves as an informal police complaints service.

#### ***Brekete Family (the voice of the voiceless) radio programme***

*Brekete Family* ('the voice of the voiceless') is an award-winning radio talk-show that currently airs on 104.5 Crowder Love FM, stationed in the heart of Abuja, Nigeria's capital city. It is the first and only such programme in Nigeria at present, and is aired in pidgin English, featuring real-life issues and events concerning human rights and contemporary social issues.

The programme's presenter and President of *Brekete Family* worldwide, Ahmad Isah (Ordinary Ahmed), is known for his strong criticism of underperforming government agencies and officials. Police misconduct is a particular theme of discussion, and complaints against the police made on-air have been relentlessly followed up by its presenter, leading more than once to official redress for community members.

Nigeria also shows good examples of projects that have closely involved CSOs in monitoring specialised JLOS agencies.<sup>76</sup> Such initiatives should be scaled up and replicated across the region.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with expert conducted for this report

<sup>76</sup> Nigeria's new political environment – including a vice-president with a background in JLOS reform – has provided opportunities to advance the agenda, such as reaching out to civil society to devise a new framework on criminal justice more broadly.

### **The CLEEN Foundation – monitoring specialised organised crime agencies in Nigeria**

The mission of the CLEEN Foundation, founded in 1998 in Nigeria, is to promote public safety, security and justice through empirical research, legislative advocacy, demonstration programmes and publications in partnership with government, civil society and the private sector.

Among many other initiatives in this domain, the CLEEN Foundation is implementing the Accountable Governance for Justice and Security project (or 'Access Nigeria') with the US State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), which seeks to improve transparency and accountability in Nigeria's fight against corruption and transnational organised crimes. Through the Access Nigeria project, the CLEEN Foundation works closely with the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), NAPITIP, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). The project seeks to promote transparency and accountability in the work of these agencies, and to facilitate an increase in citizen-held information, which in turn seeks to increase popular interest and to contribute to the fight against corruption and TOC. The CLEEN Foundation also provides trainings to these agencies, primarily on their human rights obligations, and is mandated to request information and reports, to follow up on cases and to put its findings into the public domain. It also supports CSOs, journalists and computer programmers to work closely with the agencies in creating tools and models that improve their efficiency and accessibility.

Further information is available at: <http://www.cleen.org/>

A number of interventions have emerged in Nigeria to try to advance higher levels of accountability of state security agencies to citizens – most notably, through use of multi-stakeholder dialogue processes jointly discussing security threats and responses. The US-based INGO Search for Common Ground has one such initiative in the Middle Belt states, where issues of drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime have surfaced in community security discussions.<sup>77</sup> If such processes are sustained and well managed, the assumption is that over time they can enhance the accountability of security actors and narrow the space for complicity in criminality where this is occurring.

### **Search for Common Ground – Promoting Accountability for Ethno-Religious Violence in Plateau and Niger States Project<sup>78</sup>**

The Promoting Accountability for Ethno-Religious Violence in Plateau and Niger States Project was a two-year project implemented with the Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP) in Niger State and the Centre for the Advocacy of Justice and Rights (CAJR) in Plateau State, and funded by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (DRL). The project aimed to tackle ethno-religious violence in the Plateau and Niger States by strengthening the reporting of human rights violations and institutional linkages between accountability institutions supporting state/civil society engagement through investing in CSOs' skill and capacity-building. The project helped to improve CSO skills in human rights monitoring and reporting, the capacity of target CSOs to advocate for more effective accountability, the collaboration between CSOs in each target state for more effective accountability action, and the collaboration between the National Human Rights Commission and civil society groups for more effective accountability action.

Further information is available at: <https://www.sfcg.org/tag/nigeria-evaluations/>

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Search for Common Ground, Nigeria official

<sup>78</sup> Evaluations of Search for Common Ground Nigeria projects are available on the organisation's website at: <https://www.sfcg.org/tag/nigeria-evaluations/>

As part of the various sub-regional strategies for the Sahel, a number of interventions focused on community border security are now also being implemented that take note of trafficking across borders.

### Danish Demining Group – Sahel Border Security and Management Programme

The Danish Demining Group (DDG), with support from Danida's Sahel Programme and the UK Conflict Pool, has launched a Border Security and Management Programme focused on the Liptako-Gourma region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

As a first step to inform roll-out of this programme, DDG conducted a Border Security Needs Assessment, consulting with communities and other key stakeholders in this area. This assessment provides a snapshot of trade across the borders, as well as an insight into the perspectives of communities and security providers about insecurity. The analysis demonstrates how long-standing challenges around inter-ethnic tension over use of natural resources in the Liptako-Gourma region have been exacerbated recently by trafficking in drugs and weapons as well as the emergence of extremist groups. The goal of the programme is to stem the flow of arms, reduce armed violence and strengthen border management capacity, through fostering better relationships between communities and security authorities, among other aspects.

Further information is available at: <http://www.danishdemininggroup.dk/about-danish-demining-group/where-we-work/sahel/>

Other similar initiatives are emerging at other borders – including a new initiative led by Alert at the Mali-Senegal-Mauritania border, focusing on the city of Kayes and also funded by the UK Conflict Pool. The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) has also started work on a perceptions survey about border security in the Sahel region as part of the UN Development Programme Community Border Management Programme. The criminal dimensions of insecurity are noted as a clear part of the rationale behind these initiatives; however, the envisaged activities are less overtly focused on this dimension of border insecurity – partly for reasons of sensitivity.<sup>79</sup> The opportunity to gradually sharpen the focus and process towards tackling criminality, sensitising people to longer-term implications of the criminal transit economy, is still there to be taken as these initiatives evolve over time and expand to other borders. Deeper analysis of localised impacts of organised crime to identify appropriate messages and processes in border-affected communities, taking into account the livelihood issues raised earlier in this report, is required. In particular, the longer-term governance and security impacts need to be highlighted.

Finally, it is worth noting that the range of rule of law and anti-corruption interventions and campaigns by civil society, even where less directly linked to organised crime, are indirectly relevant to this agenda, contributing to the WASAF priority of advancing a 'culture of lawfulness'. Nigeria has a well-established anti-corruption sector, boasting a plethora of campaigns and coalitions. Although these organisations have not taken up the 'organised crime' agenda per se, the work of some of them touches directly on aspects, and the overall thrust of it is also indirectly relevant. One project mentioned convenes a number of CSOs (Centre for Democracy and Development, National Resource Governance Institute, Trust Africa) and collaborates with other agencies such as UNODC to track illicit financial flows out of Nigeria. In Ghana, disaffection with the worsening picture of corruption is growing. The EU's 11th European Development Fund (EDF) new rule

<sup>79</sup> Interviews with DDG, Danida and Alert staff

of law programme emphasises anti-corruption and accountability work and the importance of holding accountable mandated anti-corruption institutions themselves (Ministry of Justice, Police, Attorney General, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice), including through work with civil society – with funds also being made available through the donor-basket fund STAR Ghana. This suggests that a good infrastructure might evolve around which more explicit work on organised crime takes place as part of an overall anti-corruption agenda.

### *Civic ‘voice’ influencing and monitoring regional initiatives*

Regional and international interventions pre-dating WASAF in some cases have involved some CSOs in consultations during preparatory stages and/or included some role for civil society. However, this has been a small element compared with the more dominant theme of capacity-building of state-centric law enforcement, as above. Moreover, such interventions have often relied on state signatories or participants putting forward their own recommended civil society participants (usually NGOs), raising questions over the representativeness of these CSO channels.

The key regional framework on these issues, the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan, envisages a role for NGOs and CBOs across several thematic areas. For instance, CSOs are mentioned as partners in conducting training and advocacy around illicit drug trafficking, and in monitoring corruption within the criminal justice systems – both as contributions to the second thematic area on ‘Effective law enforcement and national/regional cooperation against the high-level increase in drug trafficking and organised crime’. Civil society is mentioned again with regard to collection and dissemination of improved data on drug trafficking and organised crime under the fifth thematic area. A number of regional civil society dialogue meetings have been convened by the ECOWAS commission, which is also actively engaged in building relationships and supporting the efforts of specific civil society actors in this area.<sup>80</sup> ECOWAS has also established formal channels of collaboration with key regional civil society networks in other areas of its peace and security agenda.<sup>81</sup> Despite these efforts, however, the overall perspective of interviewees – both on ECOWAS’s institutional and member states’ engagement with civil society in practical terms regarding roll-out of commitments under the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan – was that it has been extremely limited compared with overall need and opportunity.<sup>82</sup>

A number of CSO workshops have stemmed from the work of the WACD. These were co-convened with WACSI, which hosted a subsequent regional meeting on drug policy organised by the INGO the IDPC and the OSIWA, taking place in Accra in February 2015; a follow-up meeting was also held on World Drug Day in June 2015. These steps led to the launch on World Drug Day of a new WADPN. The WADPN is a fledgling initiative for which current funding (provided by WACSI) will run out in December 2015. It has identified focal points in 12 out of the 15 ECOWAS countries. The agreed goals of the in-country and regional networks are around policy change that is more responsive to the rights and needs of drug users, as well as public awareness-raising to overcome stigmas and mobilise constituencies for change. It will be an important step for the

80 The Central University of Ghana is working with ECOWAS on human trafficking, while the Centre for Research and Information on Substance Abuse in Nigeria is managing a project to gather data on drug use.

81 The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) has a project to support ECOWAS with development of early warning indicators as part of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF). Mechanisms for exchange and interaction were also established through the creation of the West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) as the formal civil society body liaising with the institution; and a partnership between the West African Civil Society Initiative (WACSI) and ECOWAS also exists as part of the ECOWAS Vision 2020 Strategy.

82 At a 40th anniversary event hosted by WANEP, it was noted by participants that, despite improved interactions between ECOWAS and civil society, closer engagement with CSOs and citizens on regional issues was still needed for ECOWAS to attain its Vision 2020, which is geared towards “transforming the ECOWAS of states to the ECOWAS of people”. See [http://www.wanep.org/wanep/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=789:wanep-hosts-interactive-forum-to-mark-ecowas-40th-anniversary&catid=25:newsreleases&Itemid=8](http://www.wanep.org/wanep/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=789:wanep-hosts-interactive-forum-to-mark-ecowas-40th-anniversary&catid=25:newsreleases&Itemid=8)



WADPN to grow and mature in institutional and advocacy strength. Achieving this will require careful attention to supporting the institutional capacity of member organisations, seeking to ensure their representativeness and general ability to overcome the numerous constraints in the overall operating environment. While the first set of priorities of WADPN centres around the public health dimensions of drug addiction in the region, its consolidation and expansion will increase the likelihood of its expanding its attention into governance, political and security dimensions going forward.<sup>83</sup>

Lessons for the WADPN can be established through careful reflection on the achievements and constraints faced by other similar and more established regional networks – for example the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA), the regional subsidiary of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), as well as its national member organisations.

### The West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA)

WAANSA grew out of several parallel coalitions of concerned organisations coming together from the late 1990s in different west African countries. WAANSA's original goal was to support the implementation and evaluation of the moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of small arms and light weapons, adopted by the ECOWAS heads of state. This role evolved into WAANSA successfully pressing for more binding responses from ECOWAS heads of state to curtail weapon flows through the region. These efforts helped to secure ECOWAS's adoption of the Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons in 2006, as well as the ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme, around which WAANSA and its members continue to advocate, researching and monitoring weapons flow and pressing for government action in member states. WAANSA's activities continue, most recently pushing for regional adherence to the Arms Trade Treaty, and actively supporting the technical and practical work of in-country members.<sup>84</sup>

Research for this study did not reveal any evidence of a dedicated regional civil society network focused on human trafficking, although, among the countries visited, in-country networks exist in Nigeria. The issue has also been addressed through various human rights coalitions as well as occasional reports of regional university centres for migration studies. In addition, a regional migration project jointly implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and ECOWAS, with funding from the EU, involves civil society. Similarly, while networks of environmental activist organisations exist in the region, evidence of clear programmes of work around illegal logging and fishing – the two most prominent environmental/organised crime challenges in the west Africa region – did not emerge – neither did evidence of any dedicated network looking at the impacts of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Despite the efforts of ECOWAS to engage civil society to date, most interviewees for this study felt that a genuine broad-based effort to involve civic actors was missing and was an essential component determining the success of such future initiatives. Several respondents made the direct recommendation that the WASAF initiative be presented and discussed among civil society representatives as soon as possible, especially those that are well networked to local levels.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with WACSI representative, Accra, conducted for this report

<sup>84</sup> During 2015, the WAANSA director has been visiting all ECOWAS member states, discussing the importance of the treaty to regional security with presidents, ministries of defence and internal affairs. See <http://vibeghana.com/2014/01/27/waansa-assists-ecowas-to-sign-att/>

Moreover, clear channels of citizens' engagement in monitoring its achievements ought to be established going forward.

Several opportunities emerged from the research whereby an organised crime dimension could be added to existing regional civil society initiatives in related areas. For example, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) project under the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) includes development of indicators around violent extremism that may touch on organised crime. Moreover, WANEP has raised the idea that their newly envisaged scope of work around community border security, also under the ECPF, might incorporate a sharper organised crime and trafficking dimension, and that the network's expertise on women, peace and security could naturally lend itself to a focused review of the impacts of organised crime on women and girls across the region. Other networks, such as the Media Foundation for west Africa and Africa Security Dialogue and Research, have been active in the region promoting wider anti-corruption and human rights agendas, which may suggest further entry points.

## Constraints faced by civil society in west Africa

Taking the definition referenced in the Introduction above, civil society is in many regards very well developed in west Africa. Moreover, it is clear that, at all levels and across a number of types of organised crime and issues of concern, this form of 'social capital' is organising itself to respond to serious organised crime in the region. However, a number of challenges and constraints also affect civic participation in development processes in general, and it is useful to identify these in moving ahead with efforts to support a larger role for civil society in responding to organised crime, as envisaged by WASAF. These include the following constraints.

### *Political capture of and/or restrictions on operating space*

A recent assessment of civil society in west Africa, conducted by the global civil society umbrella organisation CIVICUS with WACSI, found aspects of the "political and legal operating environment [for civil society], including relations with government", to be one of several common challenges identified in six west African countries.<sup>85</sup> Across the region, the regulatory environment in which civil society operates is prone to manipulation by governments seeking to control dissent or the overall political environment, particularly with regard to the activities of NGOs active in governance fields.<sup>86</sup> However, the issue is not limited to one of state/civil society polarisation. A further dimension impacting west African civil society performance is a tendency towards political capture of CSOs at different levels, whether by ruling party interests or opposition political party agendas, through more informal means. Across the spectrum, from the smallest traders' association through to national-level interest groups, the independence of CSOs in resource-constrained environments is all too easily compromised.

Regarding the organised crime agenda, it should be noted too that the issues themselves are often particularly sensitive, both in terms of political and security implications, as well as in relation to culturally strong stereotypes around drug use. Overly blunt efforts to tackle organised crime may thus risk further narrowing an already shrinking space. Indeed, several interlocutors

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85 CIVICUS (2014). *CIVICUS civil society index – rapid assessment: west Africa regional report*, Accra: CIVICUS. The participating countries were: Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. See also USAID (2013). *Civil society sustainability index for Sub-Saharan Africa*, which identifies a similar set of challenges.

86 This effort to control the operating space of such NGOs is all the more apparent when other voluntary organisations such as orphanages and churches are left significantly under-regulated, often resulting in direct harm to vulnerable people.

reported receiving threats as a result of their work in this area. Other, subtler constraints were also mentioned that also serve to prevent activists from speaking out on these issues – such as the ‘old boy’ school network and other social ties, mentioned by interviewees in Ghana.

### *Representativeness of NGOs compared with other sectors of civil society*

There is a tendency in available international funding and support measures for civic engagement in development agendas to overly emphasise the role of NGOs compared with the other actors that make up civil society. This is an inevitable consequence of the demand for financial integrity and reporting requirements that is attached to donor funding, as well as an outcome of the transaction costs of managing grants, which seems to preclude the disbursement of micro-grants except through larger contractors. In west Africa, community-based or membership organisations are often very close to the communities they serve, highly respected and valued. National-level organisations equipped to tackle governance issues may be less so. Accountability upwards to donors, as opposed to horizontally and downwards to constituencies, is flagged as an issue of concern in the CIVICUS report. Another issue mentioned during the research is the pull of a secure career in motivating some people into the NGO sector, where other opportunities are scarce. Whether fairly or not, this idea of ‘professional’ NGO workers as opposed to ‘genuine’ activists was raised several times. Sustained efforts to build genuine civil society movements that are networked across different levels and societal spaces are rare – indeed, networking among CSOs to ensure real constituencies for change was another shortfall noted in the CIVICUS report. It is also worth noting that, despite the challenges, where this is successfully achieved, the potency and influence on public discourse can be significant.

In terms of advancing social messaging and widespread demand for change, recent events in the region have shown that NGOs themselves may often not be at the fore. While NGOs working on governance in Nigeria contributed significantly to the positive electoral process, grassroots campaigns in Burkina Faso and Senegal tell a different story. Regarding the organised crime agenda, the priorities emerging that require a civic response similarly point to the need for mass engagement, which may not be best served by an exclusive focus on the formal NGO sector, pointing to the need for creative and strategic thinking.

### *Knowledge base*

Despite the outstanding input of numerous west African researchers and institutions to this and other agendas, the low quality and limited accessibility of tertiary education in the region overall directly limits the capacity of future social leaders wishing to influence development outcomes in their countries. Even basic writing skills and computer literacy are identified as major operating constraints by a significant number of NGOs surveyed for the CIVICUS report.<sup>87</sup> This feeds into a ‘one man show’ syndrome affecting NGOs, mentioned in each of the countries reviewed for this report, whereby the charismatic principal figurehead of an organisation is often the strategic director, public spokesperson and overall representative, but without a properly skilled team around him or her. The organisation’s chances of survival without this leader should they turn to another career are slim.

Regarding the organised crime agenda, the types of issues involved, across the spectrum, are likely to be highly complex and technical in nature. The gap in the locally owned knowledge base has been repeatedly highlighted as a particular challenge in the various high-level fora already referenced in this report. The framing of a cluster of issues under the ‘serious organised crime’ heading can also lead to conceptual confusion.

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87 Ibid., p.6

### *Funding constraints*

Inadequate financial resourcing of civil society emerged as a “systemic and entrenched challenge” across the six countries surveyed by CIVICUS – as reported by a strong majority of CSOs involved in the assessment, with no positive change occurring since earlier assessments were carried out. Funding is a key limiting factor affecting recruitment and retention of quality staff, procurement of proper infrastructure and equipment, and scope of activities. The bulk of CSO funding relies on donors, rather than private sector philanthropic partnership, sales or individual donations in-country, which many INGOs rely on – although private sector associations, smaller CBOs or traders’ associations may rely on membership dues.<sup>88</sup> Lack of expertise in fundraising and the increasingly sophisticated requirements attached to securing funds were identified as part of this challenge. Furthermore, the age-old challenge of over-reliance on donors continues to raise questions over the independence of CSOs in the eyes of other stakeholders, and also works against coalition-building and networking, as organisations compete with each other for funds.

Regarding the organised crime agenda, it is apparent that, until now, the funding available for organisations working on either the public health or governance dimensions of the issues has been virtually non-existent. As this begins to shift, questions need to be addressed regarding how to target the right organisations, how to mitigate unconstructive competition, and the risk of organisations rushing to re-define themselves as organised crime specialists simply to match donor priorities. North/south partnerships between INGOs and CSOs working on related issues constitute one familiar approach that may provide some models for the organised crime agenda. Transfer of skills through such partnerships as well as longer-term financial support were seen as potential benefits of such partnerships in the CIVICUS report,<sup>89</sup> although INGO/CSO partnerships can bring their own challenges.

### *Internal governance challenges*

As noted in the CIVICUS report, the public, donors and government expect high standards of CSOs, which should “apply and embody strong norms of democracy, transparency, accountability and inclusion”.<sup>90</sup> However, capacity in these areas is frequently low, ultimately threatening organisations’ legitimacy, donor confidence and survival. While formal structures are often in place to monitor these issues, implementation proves challenging. In each of the countries reviewed for this report, these issues were raised in one way or another. In extreme cases, specialised government agencies may in effect create NGOs to give the appearance of interacting with civil society, in reality using these organisations as a way to recycle funds.<sup>91</sup>

Such constraints manifest differently from organisation to organisation and to different extents in different west African countries across the region. Civil society in Nigeria is extremely diverse, well developed and active, championing a number of reform agendas. Channels for exchange and debate are well established, even while interviewees pointed to the constant need for expansion and improvement of these.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, there is considerable evidence in Nigeria of the challenges affecting civil society in the region at large. The overall political context also renders civil society particularly prone to polarisation along political and religious lines. In Ghana, government’s wariness of civil society was mentioned repeatedly. Topical policy debates around new legislation to regulate NGOs as well as a Freedom of Information Act have pushed the

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88 CIVICUS (2014), *Op. cit.*, p.4

89 *Ibid.*

90 *Ibid.*, p.7

91 Interview with civil society representative, Nigeria, conducted for this report

92 Although the recent change in government has prompted a mood of optimism among civil society respondents of this research, who noted that a number of key figures in President Buhari’s new administration are themselves respected civil society figures.

relationship between state and non-state actors up the agenda, while also demonstrating how coordinated efforts by civil society, together with the media, can have important impacts on the policy environment. Finally, Malian civil society is seen to be particularly exposed to the above challenges, and the questions around what civic actors might do to tackle organised crime generated some scepticism during research for this study as a result. A culture of respect for elites, combined with a limited tradition of advocacy, was flagged as one of several barriers to civil society activism grappling with the types of issues raised through the organised crime agenda. Particularly striking is the absence of a unified civil society peace movement in Mali, itself an indication of polarisation within society.

Some of the challenges that affect civil society in the region can be amplified when civil society – usually its larger NGO element – forms networks at the regional level. Issues of representativeness highlighted above can be magnified when discussion is pushed to a regional level, and overall impact on the ground of regional NGO networks that shadow international or global policy processes may be questioned. Networks may suffer from a ‘boom and bust’ cycle, whereby their currency linked to a particular policy agenda (for instance the Millennium Development Goals) expires with that policy process. The more established regional networks have developed close systems of governance, oversight and accountability in support of member organisations and the overall network – as reported by interviews with WANEP for this study, for instance. However, integrity issues may be harder to track and monitor for regional initiatives.<sup>93</sup> Coordination between different thematic or institutionally focused networks presents further challenges, although interviews for this report also pointed to careful efforts to achieve coordination. Controversies around the way in which secretariats of regional networks are viewed competitively by member organisations often emerge, with accusations of the network itself taking away opportunities for funding rather than simply serving as conduits to member organisations. Challenges facing civil society in west Africa are systematically explored by organisations such as CIVICUS and WACSI, two organisations that are dedicated to supporting civil society to fulfil its potential as an active and influential democratic force. Numerous other INGO and international development partner programmes and initiatives exist to strengthen different types of civil society actors across different development sectors.

Related challenges confronting both the media and academia in the region can also be identified in each of the countries reviewed for this report, and across the region. Despite important gains in press freedom in many west African countries, the media is still all too often seen to be almost entirely in the hands of rival political factions, and struggles to perform its watchdog function due to being beholden to political paymasters. In extreme cases, messages of hate are reportedly broadcast in local languages across Mali, whose media infrastructure is seen to have been severely weakened by the 2012 crisis.<sup>94</sup> Weak capacity of journalists to cover complex organised crime-related cases and to report on these beyond sensationalist headlines were mentioned repeatedly in interviews for this study. A further issue was journalists inadvertently contributing to stereotyping around drug users. Meanwhile, similar issues around lack of research expertise on issues concerning organised crime have been noted as a major constraint to locally owned civic response to organised crime.<sup>95</sup>

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93 The fact that the former executive director of the West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) is reportedly currently in prison on fraud charges perhaps serves to illustrate this challenge well.

94 IREX (2012). *Media sustainability index: Mali*

95 Center on International Cooperation et al (2012), *Op. cit.*, p.5

## 4. Understanding citizens' response to SOC in west Africa as part of WASAF

The challenges posed by serious organised crime to west African countries are significant and wide-ranging. The spectrum of consequences threaten to reverse the gains of past decades and includes worsening development indicators, risks of violent conflict, deteriorating governance contexts and mounting fragility, major public health and safety threats, as well as environmental damage. The expansion of organised crime is a direct function of the political economy of governance in the region and needs to be understood as a structural phenomenon. In this sense, 'solutions' will not be easy or quick, and serious organised crime in west Africa is likely to be a critical development and security factor for generations to come. Long-term horizons appropriate to change goals must be accepted and planned for.

### Proactive engagement of citizens is critical

Under such circumstances, civil society cannot be expected to suddenly achieve a 'magic bullet' impact. Nonetheless, citizens have been overlooked for too long by international and regional responses to organised crime in the region. As the harmful effects of organised crime on communities deepen, and as its grip on political systems also becomes more entrenched, the proactive involvement of civil society is now critical. In the first instance, mechanisms for supporting civil society's role in mitigating the harmful consequences of organised crime in communities are in urgent need of support and expansion. In parallel, efforts are needed to address the structural context in which organised crime is flourishing and to tackle the political and governance effects through advancing an accountability agenda in relevant policy areas, if longer-term transformation of the problem of organised crime in west Africa is ever to be achieved. Moreover, the issues around civic engagement in tackling organised crime warrant much closer examination and in-depth research in different contexts moving forward to help inform these efforts.

### Balance the funding and attention gap in favour of human security and 'demand' side solutions

In short, the significant funding and attention gap needs to be closed between state-centric law enforcement efforts, on the one hand, and community-driven resilience initiatives as well as citizens' demand for accountability and improved performance by governments in tackling organised crime, on the other. In other words, the distribution of resources for response initiatives must be re-set, tipping the scales more in favour of supporting the human security dimensions and 'demand' side of resolving the problem. While international development partners, to date, have been ready to fund research and dialogue initiatives exploring the impacts of organised crime on the security/development nexus, financial support for concrete follow-up interventions, including those led by citizens, has yet to materialise.

### Harness WASAF's potential

The articulation of the WASAF initiative offers some cause for optimism through its overt inclusion of civil society as well as wider public health priorities, governance and socio-economic environments.

It will be important for policy-makers and officials tasked with actualising the WASAF initiative into concrete projects and initiatives to plan carefully in order to harness the potential offered by a more holistic approach. Moreover, despite its reference to civil society, it will be important to ensure that WASAF does not continue along well-trodden paths of citizens' exclusion.

## **Ensure support to civil society is strategic and mitigate risks**

The challenges faced by civil society in west Africa need to be taken into account. Too often, new policy agendas lead to superficial funding mechanisms that may not play to real strategic opportunities. Given issues of representativeness and capacity, it will be important to map out and identify the right partners in different west African countries and to provide institutional support to these, given that many are emerging as new organisations responding to new challenges. Funding and reporting requirements must serve to build capacity, and not the reverse. In addition, funding partners must be sensitive to the kinds of risks that civil society activists may face in this work – whether as a result of political sensitivity or societal taboos – providing necessary safety nets where possible. Moreover, given that one of the fundamental rationales behind WASAF has been to coordinate the various partners' initiatives on organised crime, it will also be important that such partner support to civil society as emerges is also well coordinated, advanced and monitored at a strategic level across the partners. Launching WASAF to a representative civil society audience will be an important first step moving forward. This should be combined with a commitment to ongoing dialogue fora that provide platforms for exchange and solidarity among the many civil society actors that have already emerged around different components of the 'serious organised crime' agenda.

## **Allow for context specificity and align WASAF and the organised crime lens with diplomatic positions in-country**

Comparison of different contexts serves as a reminder that, while west African countries, and civil society, the media and academia within those, may share multiple challenges, each setting is unique and entry points and priorities for tackling organised crime will be specific. In Nigeria, for instance, respondents were adamant that forms of organised crime of 'game-changing' significance (especially drug trafficking) elsewhere within west Africa have been far less significant in Nigeria's case, given the context of extreme wealth available from public resources, particularly oil-related resources. The need to address oil bunkering and theft as a peculiar manifestation of organised crime is a strategic priority for Nigeria, and the wider region by implication. In Ghana, the key issue of concern appears to be the steep rise in drug addiction, combined with the way in which the country's once-privileged status as a bastion of stability in the region has been challenged by a series of scandals that point to an ever-closer relationship between governance and organised crime. In Mali, the silence of the international community about the criminal aspects of instability and conflict was raised repeatedly in interviews. One senior official went so far as to describe discussion of organised crime as a 'taboo' in diplomatic circles. While organised crime features in several of the sub-regional Sahel strategies that have proliferated since the conflict broke out in 2012, leading to several initiatives supported by various partners at border areas in the Sahel that do include activities related to trafficking, at the level of national discourse within Mali it is, in effect, being ignored. This also points to the need for policy processes such as WASAF, and the organised crime lens in general, to be urgently aligned with diplomatic positions on the ground.

## Appreciate the breadth of contributions that civil society can make and support emerging work

A range of civil society roles is apparent from the brief review conducted for this report, recalling the four types of role mentioned earlier. The types of role identified here resonate with earlier studies seeking to propose possible intervention areas, demonstrating that west African citizens are already undertaking initiatives even while these may be at an early stage. It appears critical that the groundwork conducted to date should be capitalised on and expanded to respond to the urgent needs identified, noting the pervasive lack of funds highlighted in this report.

It is entirely likely that individual organisations or projects might adopt multiple roles in their response to the multifaceted challenges posed. Accepting inevitable areas of overlap, the core civil society functions emerging from this research are summarised in the table below.

### Typology of civil society functions responding to serious organised crime in west Africa

<b>1. Mitigating the harmful effects of organised crime in communities</b>	Treatment and support/counselling for drug users and families
	Rehabilitation and reintegration services for users, victims, gang members, former prisoners
	Grassroots community security and violence prevention initiatives
	Community awareness-raising about health and safety risks posed by different forms of organised crime; sensitisation work that addresses stereotypes
	Passing information about criminal activities to authorities
<b>2. Policy advocacy advancing public health and safety, governance and security dimensions</b>	Research – deepening context knowledge base; assessing perceptions, attitudes and norms; data mapping; political economy analysis
	Lobbying for improved policies and legislation; monitoring implementation
	Public awareness-raising about public health and safety/governance and security dimensions
	Building constituencies for accountability and change
	Protecting the political process
<b>3. Citizens' oversight of key justice, law and order sector (JLOS) agencies dealing with organised crime</b>	Monitoring performance of JLOS agencies; raising awareness of abuses
	Investigation of public officials' complicity in organised crime
	Building civil society representation into design of JLOS capacity-building projects
	Conducting capacity-building in rights-based approaches with JLOS agency staff
	Promoting JLOS accountability through multi-stakeholder community security fora
<b>4. Civic 'voice' influencing and monitoring regional initiatives</b>	Integrating organised crime into anti-corruption and rule of law interventions
	Representative civil society engagement mechanisms as part of regional and international response initiatives, including WASAF, monitoring performance of these
	Regional networks around specific dimensions of organised crime, linked vertically and horizontally
	Integration of organised crime lens into existing regional networks



It emerges from this discussion that the role of civil society should not be restricted to the first pillar of WASAF's conceptual framework alone. Rather, citizens need to be proactively engaged across the four areas of WASAF, as shown in Annex 1. This should include not only the socio-economic environment, but also good governance, criminal justice and crime disruption. It is particularly important that efforts to enhance law enforcement should build mechanisms for citizens' oversight into the project design to thwart opportunities for collusion in criminal activity by these institutions, and to achieve better performance in this domain than has been seen to date.

## Unpack the 'serious organised crime' agenda

It is also apparent from this research that civic efforts to grapple with the 'serious organised crime' agenda as a whole are rare. Instead, the initiatives that emerge are issue-specific, focused on different dimensions of organised crime, whether drugs, people trafficking, oil bunkering, or other. The initiatives reviewed by this report and summarised in the typology above have primarily been those that explicitly set out to tackle organised crime of different types.

## Intensify wider democratic governance, rule of law and livelihood interventions in at-risk countries

It is a further overarching recommendation that the entire range of democratic governance, rule of law and livelihood interventions involving civil society be intensified in at-risk countries. Ongoing anti-corruption work, work to strengthen the independence of the media, or efforts to improve the integrity of electoral processes, as well as youth empowerment, will – where results are achieved – serve to build a country's resilience to further encroachment by organised crime on the political context and state institutions. Longer-standing civic awareness-raising across democratic governance and peacebuilding agendas in west Africa have created infrastructures and networks that can be drawn upon to help create the necessary momentum. Thus, partner support to civil society in countries facing high levels or the threat of deepening organised crime may wish to adopt a two-tier approach: firstly, identifying explicit initiatives tackling different forms of organised crime at different levels; and, secondly, expanding commitments across the wider spectrum of sectors mentioned above.

This report has offered a rapid assessment of the civil society terrain in west Africa from the lens of tackling organised crime. The assessment has been offered in preparation for a hoped-for amplification of support mechanisms geared towards rebalancing the breadth of international and regional response to organised crime towards more inclusive and strategic approaches that embrace citizens' involvement. To achieve its intended results, the WASAF initiative will need to enable citizens' voices to 'tell it like it is' at all levels, and take into account the spectrum of challenges posed by the different sectors of organised crime evident across west Africa today. At the same time, the initiative must translate into support for the rapid increase of community-led resilience to the harmful effects of organised crime. Indeed, the overall success of WASAF in achieving meaningful progress in reducing the nexus between organised crime and worsening security and development indicators in the region may well hinge on its success in creating a coordinated and substantial international and regional push in these two directions as part of its envisaged support for 'the role of civil society'.

## Annexes

### Annex 1: West Africa Strategic Assistance Framework (WASAF)

West Africa Strategic Assistance Framework (WASAF)			
An articulation of the essential ingredients of a holistic approach to serious and organised crime			
1	2	3	4
<p>Poverty reduction, i.e. promoting economic growth that helps vulnerable people, with a view to preventing these people being drawn into SOC</p> <p>Raising awareness of the social and economic harms of SOC</p> <p>Enhancing a culture of lawfulness where the population in general follows the law and has a desire to access the justice system to address their grievances</p> <p>Strengthening the role of civil society in measures to enhance crime prevention and criminal justice</p> <p>Drug demand reduction, i.e. creating an environment where the vast majority of people never use illicit drugs, and where those who do are protected from drug-related harm, provided with effective voluntary treatment if needed, and are reintegrated into society</p>	<p>Legal frameworks capable of disrupting SOC</p> <p>Regulatory frameworks that shape conduct and compliance with SOC-relevant law</p> <p>Oversight mechanisms that oversee institutional and judicial conduct</p> <p>Judicial councils that help strengthen the independence of the judiciary</p> <p>Courts administration to support the courts to carry out judicial functions</p> <p>Public finance and broader economic governance reform</p>	<p>Effective international cooperation made possible through effective central authorities and mutual legal assistance provision</p> <p>Public prosecutors capable of presenting complex SOC cases fairly, effectively and independently</p> <p>Public defenders capable of providing effective legal representation</p> <p>The judiciary, i.e. reforms that enable it to administer justice fairly and manage cases effectively</p> <p>Penal institutions suitable for the incarceration of criminals</p>	<p>Basic (but fundamental) policing skills</p> <p>Effective capabilities in relation to intelligence collection, analysis, management and oversight</p> <p>Effective investigation capabilities, particularly in law enforcement and gendarmerie, and in relation to investigative judges/magistrates</p> <p>The ability to attack criminal finances, and to recover, manage and recycle the proceeds of crime</p> <p>Border management and immigration services capacities capable of responding to cross-border threats</p> <p>Effective inter-agency cooperation on disrupting crime</p> <p>Effective international cooperation and information exchange on disrupting crime</p> <p>Building police confidence in the criminal justice system</p>
<p>← Cross-cutting principles →</p>			
<p>When engaging with each pillar, we should be cognisant of the importance of five cross-cutting principles/aims:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building political will</li> <li>2. Implementing anti-corruption measures</li> <li>3. Fostering effective inter-institutional cooperation, both within and across national borders</li> <li>4. Coordinating with international partners, working to spot capacity gaps and avoid duplication</li> <li>5. Supporting assistance that is sustainable – that the host state can carry forward as a regional and international anti-crime partner with little to no additional donor assistance</li> </ol>			

## Annex 2: The 15 ECOWAS member states



Source: Brookings Institution





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