



## The Role of the West African Police Information System and the Security of the Sub-Region

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### Abstract

This study investigates the function that the West African Police Information System (WAPIS) plays in bringing together the security and law enforcement agencies in the region to establish a strategy to combat crime and insecurity in West Africa. The paper describes the collaborative efforts they have made over time to make the ECOWAS region a safer place to live. In addition, it describes the state of criminal data management in the region prior to the WAPIS programme establishment. A qualitative method of investigation was used in this study through a case study of organizational and policy framework of WAPIS to collect and organize data for this study. The study applies historical and documents analytical approaches. The functionalist theory was used as the study's theoretical framework. Thus, the paper examines the significance of WAPIS to law enforcement organizations throughout West Africa and beyond. The WAPIS Programme's benefits are the article's focus, which concludes with some suggestions.

**Keywords:** West Africa, Police Information System, Regional Security Integration

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### Introduction

Since its economy is resource-based and has experienced waves of globalization, West Africa is an important destination for international trade. One of the World's fastest-growing regions is West Africa, which is developing rapidly. According to World Gold Council, 2020, the 15-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) currently oversees the sub-regional economy, estimated to have a GDP of almost US\$1 trillion. Nigeria, Ghana, and Cote d'Ivoire are the three major economic players in the ECOWAS region as global players. For instance, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire dominated 60 percent of global cocoa production for a considerable amount of time, while Nigeria played a significant role in the global oil supply chain. The rapidly expanding population and markets of West Africa offer significant opportunities for economic expansion. There is no doubt that the economy of West Africa is very important to the stability of the global economy. In some of the global commodity supply chains, West African nations like Senegal, Niger, Chad, Mali, Togo, and Burkina Faso, to name a few, supplement the efforts of Nigeria, Ghana, and Cote d'Ivoire, the three leading West African nations. The region's \$1 trillion economy, which is nearly the 10th largest in the world, must be protected for global peace and security. However, the West African sub-region's development history has been mixed. On the one hand, the region is made



up of beautiful, well-resourced nations with a lot of gold, diamonds, bauxite, manganese, oil, and other natural resources.

Some studies on the security situation in the sub-region claim that West Africa is a haven for organized crime, providing ideal conditions for the trafficking of illegal goods, because of its strategic location, open borders, poor governance, widespread poverty, and widespread corruption. As a result, criminals and rebels are taking advantage of the area. West Africa is a destination for counterfeit medicines and toxic waste, a source of stolen natural resources, particularly oil, and a transit point for cocaine worth \$1 billion between Latin America and Europe. The region is also home to human trafficking, whether for sexual exploitation or forced labor (UNODC, 2010b:31). Poverty is widespread, and unemployment rates are rising over time in most of the region's nations as a result of failed governance for years. It is believed that those who hold high-ranking political positions benefit themselves personally by amassing wealth from the nation's resources.

The study investigates the function that the West African Police Information System plays in bringing together the security and law enforcement agencies in the region in order to establish a strategy to combat crime and insecurity in West Africa.

### **Literature Review**

The traditional concept of security has largely focused on the threat and use of force. This largely military conception of security has focused on the state as the primary referent object of security. Various scholars have criticised the traditional military conception of security because it does not account for the emerging non-military sources of threat to security at the individual, societal, state, regional and global levels. This has led to the broadening of the concept to embrace non-military dimensions such as environment, migration, ethno-religious and nationalist identities, poverty and economic insecurity, and disease. This broadening of the security agenda is now described as Critical Security Studies. In the African context there are both military and non-military sources of security threat. Security is about protection and preservation from fear and danger that threatens the survival of societies and peoples. It is about survival and the conditions of human existence in a continent with depressing social and development indicators, with an estimated 47% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa living on less than a dollar a day. Security, therefore, is about peace, development and justice because the absence of all three of these creates the conditions for conflict and armed violence. In this conceptualisation we see the inextricable linkages between peace and security and the imperative for the securitisation of peace.

Different people have different ideas of what security means; there are differences in how it is pursued. However, there appears to be some agreement among security experts and academics regarding the meaning of these distinctions. According to Andreas (2003), a state's security is its capacity to safeguard its core values in terms of avoiding war and maintaining those values after it has won it. According to Abiodun, Oladejo, Adetunberu, and Nwannenaya (2019), security is the absence of threat or risk. It refers to a nation's capacity to protect and defend itself, advance its cherished values and legitimate interests, improve its populace's well-being, safety, and confidence. There are two primary perspectives on security (Abiodun et al., 2019).

The world began to adopt a functional conception of security by the end of the cold war. This strategy places a greater emphasis on non-state actors rather than the state in an effort to replace it



as the primary provider of security. According to Pogoson (2013), the state or sensation of safety, the safeguarding and preservation of fundamental values, and the absence of threats to these values are all components of the concept of security. Any nation-state's survival depends on its security. And society will descend into the Hobbesian state of nature, manifesting as lawlessness, chaos, and eventual disintegration, if adequate security for life and property is not provided. That is the explanation security is considered as a unique condition which includes the general capacity of a state to counter dangers to its fundamental beliefs and interests (Pogoson, 2013). Security also encompasses more than just military threat assessment. In addition, Abiodun (2016) cautioned that any society that attempts to achieve adequate military security in the face of a chronic unemployment problem, acute food shortage, population explosion, low level of production and per capita income, low technological development, ineffective public utilities, and inadequate and efficient public utilities has a erroneous sense of security. It is abundantly clear from the implication of these definitions that security encompasses more than just the maintenance of the state's national territorial integrity. As with development, security must have a human face (Obasanjo, 2000).

Regional Integration is a process in which neighboring countries enter into an agreement in order to upgrade cooperation through common institutions and rules. The objectives of the agreement could range from economic to political to environmental, although it has typically taken the form of a political economy initiative where commercial interests are the focus for achieving broader socio-political and security objectives, as defined by national governments. Regional integration has been organized either via supranational institutional structures or through intergovernmental decision-making, or a combination of both.

Past efforts at regional integration have often focused on removing barriers to free trade in the region, increasing the free movement of people, labour, goods, and capital across national borders, reducing the possibility of regional armed conflict (for example, through Confidence and Security-Building Measures), and adopting cohesive regional stances on policy issues, such as the environment, climate change and migration.

As discussed by Pallickara et al. (2007) and Shehab et al. (2010), the important research issues in distributed systems are security approaches. The different components of distributed system security are like authentication, encryption, authorization and system protection, as Anderson (2010) commented. On the other hand, the security management environment (Bai, 2008)), which used to be based on single authority systems is now used with groups' of shared responsibilities. The Distributed System access control mechanisms have been studied by Koshutanskai (2009) and the role based access mechanisms have been discussed in detail by Chadwick et al. (2003). For expressive economy, the term security is used to represent both its traditional meaning as well as those notions carried by the term privacy, as commented by Seamons and Winsbotough (2002).

An overview of distributed system architecture is usually given and employed as a framework for subsequent analysis. The major security attack issues such as eavesdropping, masquerading and message tempering (changing the content of the message), replaying the message and denial of services have been discussed by Oppliger et al. (1999).



### Theoretical Framework

The use of functionalist theory in this study is based on the fact that the topic under consideration is Regional Security Integration and that functionalist theory provides the most comprehensive explanation of regionalism. The functionalist theory is supported by David Mitchell (1966), Karl Duetsch (1968), Donald Puchala (1971), Amitan Etzioni (1966), and others. Mitrany was one of the first people to write about the interactive process and functionalism. During the time between the wars, he wrote that: The primarily technical, non-political task that the government faced had significantly increased as the governmental system became increasingly complex. He also emphasized that demand for highly skilled specialists at the national level also contributes to international issues that are primarily technical and can only be resolved through collaboration between technicians rather than political elites.

Mitrany discussed the ramification doctrine, which states that collaboration in one technical field leads to collaboration in other technical fields. A perceived need for functional collaboration in one sector leads to a perceived need for functional collaboration in another sector. To give you a better idea, the effort made by nation-states to create a common market is significant, leading to pressure to work together more on pricing, investment, transportation, insurance, taxes, wages, social security, and banking and financial policies (Mitrany, 1966). Realist theory, on the other hand, places emphasis on competition and conflict as the primary or dominant "gradual creation of a transnational way of economic and social organization should be geared toward remolding attitude and allegiances to make the majority of the people more amenable to international integration." Functionalism is in opposition to realist theory.

One of the most influential authors on political integration, Karl W. Deutsch, defines regional integration as the process by which a group of people "attained within a territory." A feeling of local area, foundations, and practices sufficient and inescapable enough to guarantee a long reliable assumption for serene change among its populace" (Nduba, 1998:3).

The functionalist school also received criticism, as did every other theory. Beginning with John Pinder, who criticized the functional model's predominance of behaviorist views of industrial society and welfarism (Pinder, 1986). The presumption that members' units' opposition to the integration process will be easily overcome by an unelected body like the European Commission, as well as the underestimation of states' ability "to stop or to slow down the building of a central political system" and national civil servants' "resistance to the transfer of power to the new central one" (Stanley, 1982). Particularly so is the presumption that there is a continuum between the political and economic sectors of the state, which allows for functionalist integration to spread. From welfare area to gross politics automatically and eventually to a new regional unit raises many questions about the likelihood of political integration made possible by economics' indirect generation of politics.

Given the WAPIS is a Regional Security Integration, the functionalist theory provides the most comprehensive explanation of regionalism. In an effort to establish a mechanism for the fight against crime and insecurity in West Africa, the research work examines the efforts made by the regional body ECOWAS and INTERPOL to combine the efforts of the security and law enforcement apparatus in the region. In order to combat insecurity and transnational organized crime, INTERPOL and ECOWAS get the member states' security agencies to work together as a team. Consequent



upon the regional security integration arrangement, individual nation-states adopt integrative behaviour because of expectations of joint and natural reward or penalties. Given the integrative and collaborative arrangements and behaviour of member states, it reflects the functionalist theory assertion and makes the theory a suitable guide for this research.

### **The Origins of the WAPIS**

The ECOWAS Member States expressed their concern about the rising tide of transnational organized crime and terrorism in the region, which led them to propose the establishment of a West African Police Information System (WAPIS). West Africa has become a hub for crimes like drug trafficking, human smuggling, and global terrorism due to security gaps at the national, regional, and international levels. No enforcement strategy can effectively address these threats without effective police information exchange within the region and between the region and the rest of the world. To assist ECOWAS Member States in their fight against transnational organized crime, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) published a protocol in 2005 to establish a Criminal Intelligence and Investigation Bureau (CIIB). During a symposium in Brussels in 2010 that was jointly organized by INTERPOL and the Belgian Presidency of the European Union, West African Chiefs of Police stated that countries needed automated police information systems that were connected at both the regional and global levels in order to meet the region's security challenges. The European Union decided to fund INTERPOL's development and implementation of a police information system for ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania in accordance with this consensus.

### ***The Filling System before the Advent of the WAPIS Programme in West Africa***

The West African Police Information System (WAPIS) makes it easier to collect, manage, share, and analyze information about the police that comes from all of the relevant national law enforcement agencies. Mali's system was installed in a national Data Collection and Registration Centre (DACORE), just like in each participating nation. General Sada Samaké Mali's Interior Minister, attended the WAPIS system's launch in Bamako and emphasized the system's "internal security role." At a meeting in 2010, the West African Police Chiefs expressed concern that West Africa would become a hub for terrorism, human smuggling, and drug trafficking, leading to establishing WAPIS. In this regard, Placide Azande, the Interior, Public Security, and Religious Affairs Minister of Benin, emphasized "the importance of sharing information via WAPIS against crime threats in West Africa" in Cotonou (Yansaneh, 2020).

At the national level, the WAPIS Programme enables participating nations to convert existing paper-based police data into digital format so that it can be easily shared among law enforcement agencies and incorporated into the national WAPIS system along with new police data. Hassoumi Massaoudou, the Minister of the Interior, Public Security, Decentralization, Customary and Religious Affairs of Niger, referred to the WAPIS program in Niamey as "a good example of cooperation" in the face of global threats that necessitate a regional response.

Under the guidance of ECOWAS, the next phase of the program will see the creation of a regional electronic platform for sharing police information across West Africa. According to Oliver Bertrand, Head of the WAPIS Programme at INTERPOL, "Police work requires knowledge and skills." He added that "the capacity of law enforcement agencies in West Africa to combat organized crime and



terrorism will significantly increase the daily creation of electronic police data and its central management. The connection of each DACORE to INTERPOL's secure global police communications system, I-24/7, global information sharing via INTERPOL channels will also be bolstered (Yansaneh, 2020).

The General Annual Assembly of the Western African Police Chiefs Committee (WAPCCO) approved the comprehensive implementation of the WAPIS Program in all 15 ECOWAS Member States in light of the WAPIS program's launch in Ghana on September 29 2015. The European Union decided to fund INTERPOL's development and implementation of a police information system for ECOWAS member states and Mauritania in accordance with this consensus. This capacity was built through the WAPIS Program. Its objective is to establish a regional data-sharing platform under the auspices of ECOWAS and centralize police databases at the national level in each of the 16 West African nations. Even though it is not a member of ECOWAS, Mauritania was invited to join the Programme. As a result, one of the pilot countries will be able to generate electronic criminal data. The remaining West African nations with the capacity to share electronic criminal data are Benin, Ghana, Mali, and Niger (Lombaerde & Langenhove, 2007).

The ability of law enforcement agencies in the West African region to routinely and effectively address the region's major security threats is crucial to developing West African states. A crucial component of developing this capacity is the WAPIS Programme's development of the national and regional police infrastructure.

#### ***Beneficiaries of the Programme***

The WAPIS Program focuses on all West Africa, including Mauritania and the 15 ECOWAS Member States. A WAPIS-like system is being implemented in Chad under the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to guarantee coherence and future cooperation among all G5 Sahel Member States. The overall objective of the WAPIS Programme is to increase the capacity of West African law enforcement authorities to combat transnational crime and terrorism through enhanced information sharing. In order to achieve the overall objective of the Programme, the following strategic objectives should be met:

- i. ECOWAS Member States have increased their capability to collect, centralize, manage, share and analyse its police data;
- ii. ECOWAS Member States have increased their capability to exchange their police data within the sub-region and beyond;
- iii. The West African law enforcement community is better connected to the global law enforcement community through enhanced global information sharing.

#### ***Levels of Operational Implementation***

The WAPIS System was conceived to intervene at three levels, i.e. national, regional and global. **National Level:** At the national level, it is to provide local law enforcement authorities with a national police data system allowing them to create, manage and share files on:

- i. Criminal cases and events; | Persons suspected of having committed or participated in a crime or offence, as well as victims and witnesses of crimes;
- ii. Legal proceedings associated to the crimes/suspects;



iii. Weapons and objects used to commit crimes; | Stolen vehicles and vehicles associated with a crime;

iv. Stolen identity documents and documents of persons associated with a crime.

The WAPIS Programme encourages national authorities to involve all relevant law enforcement agencies in the Programme and to facilitate inter-agency cooperation through a WAPIS National Committee (WANACO). The national WAPIS system is located in a Data Collection and Registration Centre (DACORE) within a designated law enforcement facility, ideally in the proximity of the INTERPOL National Central Bureau (NCB). The DACORE includes officers from authorized national law enforcement agencies responsible for:

- a Registering police data;
- b Performing data checks;
- c Controlling the validity of police data. Police data in paper format is difficult to access and share, yet it is very valuable.

It is therefore crucial that police data be converted to a digital format so it can be inserted into the national WAPIS system. To assist in this process, deploy scanning stations has been deployed to selected national law enforcement agencies to scan existing paper files and enter critical data in the national WAPIS system for quick and easy searching. The identification of criminals is considerably enhanced by fingerprint identification. This is particularly true in West Africa, where civil registry and quality of identity documents are very weak. To solve this issue, The WAPIS System integrates an Automated Fingerprint Identification Systems (AFIS) in parallel of the establishment of the WAPIS system to enhance law enforcement's capacity to identify criminals and terrorists and consequently ensure an immediate impact on the fight against transnational organized crime and terrorism across West Africa and beyond.

**Regional Level:** At the regional level, the national systems will be networked into a regional police information-sharing platform under the auspices of ECOWAS. The latter would allow the instant exchange of police data, including on persons, vehicles and ID documents, among region countries. Officers staffing a country's DACORE or in the field would therefore be able to:

- i. Quickly know if another country wants an individual;
- ii. Quickly determine if an ID document, a vehicle or a firearm is reported as stolen or associated to a crime by police in another country.
- iii. As such, police cooperation would be enhanced, as well as law enforcement agencies capacities to tackle transnational crime and terrorism.

**Global Level:** Finally, at the global level, each national WAPIS System is to be connected to the country's INTERPOL NCB in order to share authorized national data globally through INTERPOL's I-24/7 system. Conversely, linkage with the INTERPOL NCB and to I-24/7 would allow officers working on the WAPIS System, with the same query made on their country's WAPIS System, to perform checks against INTERPOL's databases. For example, an officer performing a name check on a national suspected of drug trafficking may learn that this individual, despite not being already wanted by national authorities or by any other country of the region, is wanted by a South American or European country for similar drug related criminal activities. The greater inclusion of West African law enforcement agencies within the international police community is crucial to effectively combat transnational organised crime and terrorism (Yansaneh, 2020).



### *Countries included in the WAPIS Scope*

WAPIS is planned to be used in all 15 ECOWAS nations and Mauritania as of right now. WAPIS exclusively focused on four pilot nations for Phase 2: Mali, Benin, Ghana, and Niger. Stage 3 will likewise incorporate the 11 other ECOWAS part States. After that, WAPIS will be updated based on the feedback from the pilot phase, and Phase 3 will see it expanded to the remaining 11 ECOWAS nations. As soon as the necessary infrastructure is set up and available, Phase 3 will also set up the Regional WAPIS to cover all countries with data. A parallel program based on an appropriate political dialogue to be developed with INTERPOL and the EU could be considered in the event that other African nations would be interested in adopting the WAPIS approach. Chad is now executing a WAPIS-like framework supported by the EU and carried out by INTERPOL (INTERPOL, 2017).

**Table 1. Member States involved in the WAPIS programme, official languages and their capital cities**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Capital City</b>	<b>Official Language</b>
<b>Benin</b>	Cotonou	French
<b>Burkina Fasso</b>	Ouagadougou	French
<b>Cape Verde</b>	Praia	Portuguese
<b>Cote d' Ivoire</b>	Abidjan	French
<b>Gambia</b>	Banjul	English
<b>Ghana</b>	Accra	English
<b>Guinea</b>	Conakry	French
<b>Guinea Bissau</b>	Bissau	Portuguese
<b>Liberia</b>	Monrovia	English
<b>Mali</b>	Bamako	French
<b>Mauritania</b>	Nouakchott	French
<b>Nigeria</b>	Abuja	English
<b>Niger</b>	Niamey	French
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	Freetown	English
<b>Senegal</b>	Dakar	English
<b>Togo</b>	Lome	English

Source: (Yansaneh, 2020)

### **The Importance of West African Police Information System in the Fight against Cross Border Offences**

The police in West Africa lack modern methods for collecting, centralized sharing and analyzing vital information about crime, particularly serious organized crime and drug trafficking. Only two countries in sub-Saharan Africa have developed a national, centralized database of police information, South Africa is the first, Benin is the second country, and it has begun implementing such a system with French technical assistance. The East African Police Chiefs' Committee called for the creation of AFRIPOL, similar to EUROPOL but for Africa because no African region had established a regional police data center.





As a result, criminal information, which is essential for effective modern policing, is not properly and certainly not in a coordinated and sustainable manner exchanged. As a result, police agencies harmed by a lack of crucial information cannot effectively respond to threats from terrorism, crime, and other forms of terrorism nationally or collectively. Unfortunate fundamental police and restricted traditional devices have all the earmarks of being the standard in the area. It is worth noting that in 2012;

1. the number of criminal records in West Africa only represents 0.035% of the data available in the INTERPOL system,
2. the number of searches originating from West Africa only represents 0.53% of the total number of searches and
3. the number of Red Notices for wanted persons in West Africa represents 88 on a total of 30.400, meaning 0.03% of all the Red Notices published worldwide.

In the meantime, close to 400 million people live there, or 5% of the world's population. This indicates that the region's level of criminal information and police cooperation is ten times lower than the global average (Yansaneh, 2020). INTERPOL has been tasked with laying the right foundation for effective police information systems, ensuring that police data can be collected, centralized (both within and outside a country), shared, and analyzed. If nothing is done now, police work could become inefficient in the coming years, when all police and judicial records and evidence would have vanished. As a result, it is crucial to begin developing a regional police data system through ECOWAS, which is the repository level of the police data regional hub, with a primary focus on the Sahel (Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) and two more advanced countries in terms of data collection and protection (Benin, Ghana).

As a response to the demands made by West African nations, the WAPIS project is being implemented. Following the political support of the ECOWAS Ministers' determination in 2012 and 2013, it is carried out through the cooperation agreement between ECOWAS and INTERPOL. The WAPIS deployment also takes into account the CIIB (Criminal Intelligence and Investigation Bureau) framework that was signed by the ECOWAS member States and pilot countries

#### ***The Programme Expectations in West African Sub-region***

WAPIS makes it possible for West African police officers to get useful information about people, vehicles, and identity documents in the course of their day-to-day work—from making arrests and conducting searches to conducting investigations and routine checks at border crossing points (BCPs). The contribution of the 194 states that make up INTERPOL will also enhance these requests. As a result, the police will be able to protect the people of the entire region better and will be the ideal countermeasure to free movement of people and goods in West Africa under the leadership of ECOWAS. The following topics are also covered in the program. Sharing police information will increase the European Union's awareness of criminal activity in the region and enable it to respond more quickly to crimes that originate in or pass through West Africa. This will also contribute to security beyond the region and within the European Union. It will also support the region's law enforcement agencies in their fight against the threat and provide the European Union with clear ideas for policymaking.



Globally, organized crime and terrorism exploit weak points. Terrorism and other forms of criminal activity have consolidated in West Africa. WAPIS will empower police to handle these dangers in a more successful and organized way. This would close the security void the region currently leaves for the rest of the world.

### **The Impact of the West African Police Information System on Policing in West Africa**

The WAPIS programme is a mutual effort from all the stakeholders, the European Union being the funding partner, INTERPOL implements the programme, while the ECOWAS Commission is the strategic partner. The WAPIS Programme is implemented for the benefit of the law enforcement agencies in West Africa. Initially all national police and security services from the pilot countries; Benin, Ghana, Mali and Niger, including services and forces such as customs, immigration were targeted. The Phase 3 foresees the roll out WAPIS in the 11 remaining member States of ECOWAS. The ECOWAS countries would manage the WAPIS system in cooperation with INTERPOL. The direct beneficiaries are; the countries in West Africa and their Law Enforcement Agencies (Police, Gendarmerie, Customs, Immigration, drug Law Enforcement Agencies etc). While downgrading the influence of organized crime, the citizens in the West African region will have the policing capacity enhanced through efficient exchange of police information, respecting human rights as well as international rules for processing of personal data (Yansaneh, 2020).

#### ***Programme scope and limitations***

The programme focuses on criminal information exchange within the region among law enforcement agencies. One of the national WAPIS administrators could grant the access (only for consultation and no data entry) to other profiles (for example a judge, a prosecutor, etc.) In such a case, the access would be granted under the complete responsibility of the country that would be accountable for enforcing the security and protection of personal data policies of the system.

During the pilot phase, it is recommended to set up the DACORE center in a central location with phone communication capability even with remote sites. Each country shall decide according to the available capacity, if the system could be deployed and operated automatically from a remote location.

**Operational and strategic analysis:** The initial version of the WAPIS system will not directly provide operational or strategic analysis tools. The first goal is always to gather police data in an automated way and increase the number of searches into the system. Thus, at first, only the facilities offered by the search engine service will be available and could serve for primary analysis if data population and search are used on an adequate level. The system could, if no additional costs are involved, be however designed, both functionally and technically, to facilitate the development of further analytical capacities on the national and regional level but it's not the prime goal of the programme. Nevertheless, it could be possible both nationally and regionally to complete some statistical analysis by will be filled in WAPIS and serving statistical and trends analysis.

**Investigation files management:** The WAPIS system is designed to offer only search services on police data related to criminal events and administrative data to facilitate the police work. The system will register cases with limited data such as offence type, date, location, individuals and other entities. The case will be the mandatory prime data to be registered in the system to which all the other entities will be linked. No entity (such as a person, or a vehicle, etc.) can be registered



within WAPIS without a case reference number.

**Reporting and data analysis tools:** WAPIS will integrate a reporting tool. This tool will enable the production of reports based on operational data. It will be available on both national and regional levels according to the phase implementation. The analysis of such reports will contribute to developing a regional crime picture. This will be beneficial to the ECOWAS Commission, especially when formulating policies on regional security matters. It will also guide the policy-makers on the need assessment for capacity building for the region's Law Enforcement Agencies.

**Legal framework requirements:** One of the paramount requirements to run such a WAPIS environment will be the definition and implementation of a specific legal framework. In order to prepare them ahead of WAPIS deployment, each pilot country will have to undertake the following actions:

- i. **To define and implement the operating framework of the WANACO:** The purpose of the WANACO will be to set up and monitor the mission of the DACORE within the country. It will be composed of all national agencies that contribute to the national public security. In addition, the WANACO is the entity responsible for setting up the National WAPIS System (including the DACORE) within the countries. Suppose the purpose of the WANACO is the same for every country. In that case, it will be up to each country to define on a national level both the governance and the organization including the number and designation of the staff members, their prerogatives as well as their relationship with the police and national security agencies. Each country will also have to determine a yearly budget requirement for the functioning of the WANACO and provide the funds.
- ii. **To issue and enforce the decree creating the DACORE:** The DACORE center is the national body that will operate the WAPIS system in cooperation with the national agencies, NCBs, and regional levels. Each country will have to define and set up its own DACORE (except for Benin that has one already). The point of the national regulation that needs to be issued is to determine precisely the missions, the governance and organization, the staffing and the future interactions of the DACORE with the other national law enforcement actors. A yearly budget requirement must also be established and funded by the country to guarantee WAPIS sustainability.

### ***WAPIS National System***

The National WAPIS will help law enforcement officers to report or investigate claims, and criminal events, occurring in their district and perform controls on the field (ID checks). The content of the database will be accessible to all security agencies as a joint effort. WAPIS will also assist the investigators during crime investigations, allowing query of the police data. At border control locations, like airports or harbors, WAPIS shall allow the check of people and documents with National, Regional and INTERPOL General Secretariat Headquarter databases all at once. (The system's performance should be kept in mind for Airport control activities). The technology should allow the use of WAPIS through any available networks (even wireless low speed) to interconnect with distant sites across the countries.

In the future, officers can search police data during a control session (known / with a notice) through dedicated workstations. Until the system is fully operational, using a specific call center located



within the Data Collection and Registration (DACORE) is acceptable. The DACORE Center is the name given to the country body in charge of collecting and processing the police data for all police and security services and operating the database. The technology should be installed in a location considering the security, access to 24/7 INTERPOL and the proximity to the current files location. As a grouping of the different national police forces representations, it acts as a coordination institution between national services and forces. The system shall be ready to integrate other data sources like national identity databases and Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) or vehicle plates (INTERPOL, 2017). The WAPIS national services could be structured to include the NCBs or be physically closely located.

### ***The Regional Level***

The role of the region should reflect the progressive buildup of WAPIS. During the pilot phase, the regional level will be solicited to facilitate the exchange and the sharing of information by addressing any blockage, misunderstanding or any deficiency. During phase 3, a capacity is to be setup to: operate the system, support the national services (training, managerial techniques) and develop a regional operational capacity for coordination. The Regional Agency benefits natively from the built-in WAPIS System national exchanges of police data. Regarding the regional system, the WAPIS system allows access to the data shared by the countries in order to perform statistics on the regional level.

### ***The INTERPOL Regional Bureau***

The INTERPOL Regional Bureau for West Africa in Abidjan is part of INTERPOL organization. Its operational role is to coordinate the actions of the police services and forces in the West African region through a close cooperation with the NCB. It has access to INTERPOL General Secretariat Headquarter databases and WAPIS Regional database in consultation for possible analysis and statistical purposes if confirmed by the legal framework to be set.

### **Challenges in the Implementation of the WAPIS Programme**

The following are the challenges of implementing the WAPIS Programme at various levels:

- 1 Framework agreements in IT procurement ( purchase order ) are often delayed
- 2 Institutional culture, moving away from typical police culture to project-oriented
- 3 Recruitment issues revolving the culture of INTERPOL often
- 4 Inadequate geopolitical understanding by the previous programme managers vis a vis the regional-political
- 5 Healthy mix, no suitable combination of Westerners and West Africans in the implementation of the WAPIS Programme
- 6 The WAPIS programme was initiated at the ECOWAS Commission on an ad hoc basis without due process of the ECOWAS Commission's protocol.
- 7 Lack of legal status for the implementation of the WAPIS programme in the pilot countries
- 8 Inadequate logistics



- 9 No incentive for the local staff
- 10 The problem of coordination among the Law Enforcement Agencies in the pilot countries

### Conclusion

The fear generated by transnational organized crime and terrorism has had a significant negative impact on the citizens of most of the countries in the West African region. It has resulted in significant property damage, displaced thousands of people, forced schools to close, and damaged medical infrastructure. We now know from these events that no nation in the region is immune to the scourge of cross-border crimes and cannot fight them alone.

However, in 2010, West African police chiefs were quick to recognize that collective security was the best strategy for resolving the region's most pressing security issues. In the absence of interconnected electronic criminal databases at the national and regional levels, organized crime will prevail in the region. Therefore, West Africa needed to convert her paper files to electronic format in order to eliminate the threat. The chiefs of police quickly approached INTERPOL to request the creation of an electronic criminal database for the West African law enforcement agencies with this plan in mind. In turn, INTERPOL sought funding from the European Union. The West African Police Information System (WAPIS), an electronic criminal database for the region, was graciously approved for funding by the European Union. In addition to being a marshal plan in the fight against all forms of transnational organized crime in the region, establishing a criminal database that is interconnected at the national and regional levels is anticipated to be a catalyst for regional security integration in West Africa and beyond. When the WAPIS Program is fully implemented, it is hoped that it will significantly enhance regional security integration and close security gaps in West Africa.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following policy recommendations are made;

- i. There shall be a proper regulatory mechanism for the implementation of the WAPIS programme
- ii. Develop Data protection laws in the concerned countries
- iii. Imbibe the culture of confidentiality, security of the system, integrity, protection and accuracy of data input
- iv. Re-enforce the capacity of officers working at the WAPIS center and create incentives for operators of the system
- v. Interpol should maintain a permanent bureau at the ECOWAS Commission to oversee the sustainability of WAPIS in the region after the implementation phases.

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