Securitization of Insecurity and its Effects on Sustainable Development in West Africa – A review

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Abstract

The recent insecurity trend in West Africa necessitate securitization as an immediate response to save lives and protect properties. While the approach promotes peace and security which are crucial for the attainment of the sustainable development goals as outlined under goal 16 of the 2030 agenda, the extent to which the approaches contribute to the attainment of the 2030 agenda in the region remains questionable. Using a systematic review and meta-analysis approaches, this paper presents the consequence of selected securitized insecurity events of recent years to sustainable development in the West African region. The review revealed that the securitized events include coups, terrorism, farmer-herder conflict and violent conflicts amongst others. Although securitizing the events have contributed to protect lives and properties, the frequent occurrences of the events are negatively impeding the progress of the sub-region towards achieving the 2030 agenda. Some of the consequences of the trends, coupled with other factors include increase in the prevalence of poverty in the sub-region, which hitherto declined from the 1990s headcounts. Other consequences such as school enrolment, under five mortality, maternal mortality, inequality, government investments on health and education amongst others, are observed to be worsening in the sub-region. The implications of these are that the attainment and sustenance of the Sustainable Development Goals is under threat in the sub-region. The paper recommends the adoption of proactive measures, including improving on security and inter-country collaboration on counter terrorism to help reverse the decline in development parameters in the sub-region.

Keywords: Insecurity, Securitization, Sustainable development, violence, West Africa

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1.0 Introduction

Achieving sustainable development requires peaceful cooperation with effective and efficient governance and responsive institutions (UN, 2021; Sachs *et. al,* 2022). As such, peace, security and stability became one of the fundamental themes for development when the United Nations Member States adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015 (Milante, 2017; Sachs *et. al*, 2020; Sachs *et. al*, 2021; UN, 2021; UN, 2022; Sachs *et. al*, 2022). This is further anchored by the sixteenth goal (SDG 16), advancing peace, just and inclusive society to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. However, the progress of this goal is still a mirage as hundreds of millions of people live in fragile and conflict-affected regions, requiring securitization of the situation. In 2021, about one in every 88 (89.3 million) people were displaced due to conflicts, persecution, violence and human rights violations globally (UNHCR, 2022). The high insecurity coupled with other challenges disrupts the functioning of governments, weakens and sometimes even shatters countries' systems of rights and protection (UN, 2021), leaving securitization as the only option as a response to the situation. In West Africa, varied dimensions of insecurity have threatened the progress of the 2030 agenda, resulting in the securitization of the events. The insecurity situations go beyond geographic boundaries as the case of terrorism in the sub-region, implying there could be a broader effect to the SDGs globally. Using a systematic review approach, this paper assesses the effects of selected securitized insecurity dimensions to the SDGs in West Africa. Recommendations are provided to help improve on the progress of sustainable development in the region.

2.0 Materials and Methods

This review adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) as espoused by Moher et al. (2009). The search for relevant studies was conducted in large electronic databases, search engines and published Books including Scopus, ScienceDirect,

Google Scholar, web of science, JSTOR, SpringerLink, World Cat and Wiley Online Library, in addition to older references and project reports. This was to ensure a comprehensive synthesis of studies published and in pursuit of insecurity and sustainable development in the West African region.

2.1 Search Approach and Selection Criteria

Relevant articles and studies were retrieved from a broad range of study designs, specifically, from quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods using keywords as important inclusion criteria. Keywords arising from the review objective of insecurity and sustainable development guided the online search as well as the electronic databases search. Grey literature was obtained using web search engines to access reports from non-governmental and organizational sites. Further search was conducted from the reference lists of all papers that met the inclusion criteria and were successfully retrieved. However, the exclusion criteria in the search process included: studies not published in English Language; and studies unrelated to the keywords. Although more demanding, the vast search criteria saved the risk of missing relevant studies in the study field.

2.2 Selection of Studies

Searches from the sources resulted in a large quantity of articles (over 200) to start with the initial screening. Using Boolean operators to enable precision, recall and reproducibility resulted in the exclusion of 115 articles. A precise list of 100 articles was further examined on the relevance of the topics and abstracts in relation to topics related to insecurity and sustainable development in West Africa. This resulted in further exclusion of 75 articles. A critical search through the reference lists of the remaining articles resulted in the identification and inclusion of 10 relevant articles. Hence, a total of 35 articles passed the eligibility criteria and were subjected to the full text review. Those articles were then read with particular focus on insecurity and sustainable development in West Africa. Factors and supporting evidence related to the topic were

diligently summarized into codes and themes to unravel meaningful patterns. Development of the codes and themes evolved from the researcher's synthesis of the available materials (inductively) and in some cases, the researcher relied on existing concepts as themes (deductively).

2.3 Linkages Between Security and Sustainable Development

The broad objective of the 2030 Agenda encompasses improvement in economic growth, social inclusion, peace, justice, good governance, job opportunities and environmental protection, while also recognising the importance of incorporating long-term considerations into decision-making. (Milante, 2017; UN, 2021; UN & Folke, 2021; UN, 2022). The achievement of the above objective depends largely on the peace and security situation globally. In the absence of peace and security, crimes would be perpetuated and access to both social and economic services reduced (UN & Folke, 2021) thereby affecting investments for improvement, which invariably leads to sustained poverty. A path towards achieving the SDGs requires security foresight, anticipating the nature and consequence of major security concerns and planning proactively. High prevalence of insecurity aggravates the challenges of eradicating poverty as economic development can be stagnated or reversed. Insecurity limits potentials and opportunities, thereby trapping individuals and communities in a vicious cycle of poverty, deprivation and further widening the inequality gap. Poverty reduction initiatives do not yield positive and sustained outcomes under such circumstances. This presupposes that insecurity puts additional pressure on strained resources and challenges policies aimed to reduce poverty and reduce inequalities.

Peace and security are indispensable for the effective functioning of global food systems, which, in turn, is critical to the attainment of the Zero Hunger goal. Instances where insecurity is high, such as violent conflict and terrorism resulting in loss of lives and unsafe environment for humans, food systems get affected negatively. Farmers' access to their farms is often compromised, resulting in reduced agricultural

productivity. At the same time, intermediaries are unable to access farming communities or transport produce to market centres, thereby disrupting food supply chains and reducing the availability of food for urban consumers. This, coupled with other factors would lead to food crisis thereby increasing the number of people who cannot meet their daily food dietary needs.

For inclusive and equitable quality education to be achieved at all levels, security is a key determinant. Secured environment promotes access to learning opportunities, invariably increasing access to acquisition of knowledge and skills needed for sustained development. Achieving the full implementation of the Maputo Protocol and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 can only be achieved and sustained in a more peaceful and secured environment. This is because violence against women as well as other parameters for gender equality require more inclusive, participatory and broader approaches. High insecurity either derails progress of the parameters of development or directly affects the implementation processes thereby affecting the expected outcomes of development in a negative manner.

2.4 Securitized Events and Consequences In the Region

There are several dimensions of insecurity with varied magnitudes which were securitized across the WA sub-region. Some of these dimensions and their consequence on SD are discussed below.

3.0 Coups

In recent times, the re-emergence of both attempted and successful coups in West Africa necessitated securitizing affected areas. These coups and attempted coups became endemic leading to the sub-region being described as the "coup belt". Although bad governance has often been cited as the reasons for these coups, it has also been established that the coups are both the causes and the consequence of bad governance (Chilaka & Oyinmiebi, 2022). Although there is an assertion that military

coups could be due to the failure of democracy to effectively consolidate gains, in certain instances, the military regimes rather deepen the socioeconomic and political crisis of the affected countries. Some military regimes are characterized by increased risk of democratic stagnation due to the suspension of the constitution, the dissolution of parliaments and prevention of participation of the civil society, thus collapsing efforts of democratic progress made in the past (Chilaka & Oyinmiebi, 2022). This implies that the coups do not only disrupt democratic progress, but also economic and social development. Other scholars, including McBride (2004), contend that military coups are often motivated by the military's pursuit of political power and the attendant control over state resources. Between 2010 and 2020, West Africa has had 14 (both successful and unsuccessful) coups. In 2021 and 2022, the sub-continent experienced seven coups representing 50% of the coups that occurred between 2010 and 2020. More interestingly, some of the coups occurred in less than a year in the same country while others were in countries that transitioned from military to civilian rule and then back to a military regime. In some West African countries, coups seem to have replaced the democratic process of leadership transition as military officers engaged in coups to oust military leaders as was the case of Mali in 2012, 2020 and 2021 and Burkina Faso in 2022.

The unfavourable trend of military coups observed in recent times in West Africa is not new; however, there are some differences between the recent ones and those that occurred in the past. In several West African countries, modest economic performance has coincided with attempts by constitutionally elected presidents to amend constitutional provisions in ways perceived to entrench their tenure in office, thereby creating political conditions that have increased the likelihood of military intervention and the unconstitutional seizure of power. In Guinea, for instance, the September 2021 military coup followed a year of widespread and often violent protests against constitutional amendments that enabled the incumbent president to seek a third term, as well as against an election

that was widely alleged to have been marred by electoral fraud. Although the international community as well as regional and sub-regional blocs are mandated to address some of these manipulations, these bodies are not able to effectively deal with, and hold various leaders accountable. This weakness motivates the military to takeover power.

The consequences of these coups on the SDGs are numerous including, negative effects on productivity and poverty reduction efforts among others. For instance, the poverty headcount ratio at 1.90 per day as a percentage of the entire population in Guinea increased from 27.8 per cent in 2021 to 38.7 per cent in 2022, a period that coincided with a coup in that country. The increase in poverty, together with its associated consequences, is likely to increase the number of people experiencing hunger, thereby undermining the nutritional well-being of the population. Poor nutrition affects health in general, including high prevalence of malnutrition and mortality. Coups also affect school enrolment and participation as pupils are not able to attend school during the time of coups. This implies that human capital formation is affected as a result. For instance, Mali and Niger who experienced coups in recent times are among the countries with the highest percentages of youth of secondary school going age but with the lowest upper and lower secondary education completion rates (Sachs *et al*, 2022). Besides, coups do not promote peaceful and inclusive societies as many people are often arrested and detained without trial as happened to Alpha Conde in 2021. Coups also destroy justice and institutional set ups in countries due to the suspension of constitutions, the arms of government and political representation. These consequences affect the progress and sustenance of the sustainable development agenda.

3.1 Violent Conflicts and Extremism

West Africa has witnessed diverse forms of violent conflict and violent extremism, prompting the adoption of securitisation measures to address and mitigate these security challenges. The conflicts range from ethnic

disputes to large-scale armed violence, resulting in significant loss of life and the destruction of property. Although the sub-region has witnessed a decline in large-scale armed conflicts over the past decade, incidents of ethnic violence and insurgency have been on the rise. For instance, there has been an increase in terrorist attacks in the sub-region affecting development negatively (Gilmour, 2012; IEP, 2022). The emergence and escalation of terrorist activities in the sub-region hinges on religion, social and economic deprivation, intensifying security threats in the sub-region. Since the emergence of terrorist groups in the sub-region, several lives have been lost, many displaced and properties destroyed (Walker, 2012). Four of the topmost ten countries with high prevalence of terrorist attacks in 2021 were in West Africa (IEP, 2022). These countries are Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mali and Niger. Although Nigeria experienced a significant reduction in the number of attacks in 2021, the Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) experienced an increase in incidence due to the expansion of the Islamic State (IS) affiliates. Deaths due to terrorist attacks in the Sahel have risen by over one thousand per cent between 2007 and 2021 (IEP, 2022).

The underlying drivers of both terrorist attacks and violent conflicts in the sub-region are complex and systemic, including poor access to potable water, high prevalence of food insecurity, high malnutrition rate, high youth unemployment, human rights violation, weak governments and corruption (Annan, 2014; IEP, 2022). Most of the terrorist activities occur along borders where government control is weak (IEP, 2022). Besides, the high prevalence of ethnic marginalization, chieftaincy disputes, land ownership rights, proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the sub-region continue to serve as triggers and drivers of violent conflicts (Annan, 2014). In addition, the presence of natural resources like oil and minerals on the continent has scaled up the insecurity situation as that has also resulted in conflicts. Insurgent groups also engage in the kidnapping of expatriates and local citizens, while their increasing use of

sophisticated weaponry further exacerbates insecurity across the sub-region (Ejibunu, 2007).

The consequence of these violent activities impacts negatively on sustainable development in the sub-region. For instance, Burkina Faso, which is one of the countries in the sub-region with high prevalence of violent attacks of recent times, experienced the largest deterioration in peacefulness in the region in 2021 and 2022 (IEP, 2021; IEP, 2022). Other factors including the government's decision to fund and arm civilian auxiliary groups in its fight against insurgents, which led to an increase in the ease of access to small arms, worsened perceptions of criminality, and increased the intensity of internal conflicts (IEP, 2021). These cumulatively contributed to the 2022 coups as well as so many displacements within the same period. In countries such as Mali, the increasing prevalence of violent extremist activities has had profound consequences for educational outcomes. School attendance and completion rates have declined markedly, with only about one in eight pupils completing upper secondary education and approximately three in ten completing lower secondary education in 2020. Also, in Niger school completion rates stood at 10 per cent and 2.5 per cent for lower secondary education and upper secondary level in 2020 respectively (UN, 2022). The implications are that human capital formation is affected negatively, which means the future of the continent is bleak, especially in those countries. Conflict and violent extremism also affect the mobilization of resources as this is evidenced with a drop in government revenue (excluding grants) in Mali from 17.4 per cent of its GDP in 2017 to 15.4 per cent of its GDP in 2019 (Sachs *et al*, 2020; Sachs *et al*, 2021; Sachs *et al*, 2022). This implies that unless more efforts in investment in education, health and research are embarked on in the sub-region, the sub-region will perform poorly in meeting the targets of the SDGs partly because of these insecurity issues that divert scarce resources from investment to peacekeeping.

4.0 Maritime insecurity

Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea has become a major concern in recent times. The Gulf of Guinea is a major resource provider and one of the primary conduits of international trade. Due to its economic resource potential, various maritime crimes including illegal oil bunkering, piracy, Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, hostage-taking, human trafficking, narcotics and firearms smuggling coupled with other insecurity related issues with the tendency of destabilizing the peace of the sub-region have become major concerns (Uadiale, 2012; Temitope & Mohammed, 2020). The major causes of this increased insecurity have been attributed to poor leadership and governance, corruption, deficiency in social and economic developments, and unhealthy competition for the control of the marine resources by the states in the region (Temitope & Mohammed, 2020).

Globalization resulting in the booming in export including oil and the accompanying imports of various goods, such as processed food, cars and electronics, saw a sharp rise in the numbers of foreign commercial vessels in the Gulf of Guinea. Although with the boom in both export and import by countries around the Gulf of Guinea, infrastructural capacities in these ports are inadequate resulting in long delays of vessels in and around the harbours. These delays combined with lax-security in port areas and onboard ships create ample opportunity for theft and robbery perpetrated by local gangs against foreign-vessels (Uadiale, 2012).

The insecurity at sea and ports affects bilateral and multilateral relationships between countries, with direct effect on partnership for sustainable development. This is because both imports and exports of goods and services that generate revenue and create employment are affected. Many of the countries in West Africa generate a lot of revenue through import and export duties. Although exports from developing countries, including countries in the Gulf of Guinea, have benefited from preferential treatment by developed countries under various development

partnerships, increasing maritime insecurity poses a significant threat to both export volumes and the revenues generated from trade. The resulting decline in economic activity could undermine productivity, contribute to rising unemployment, and ultimately impede progress towards economic sustainability.

5.0 Election Related Violence

Elections have facilitated the emergence of democratic governance and transfer of power from one political leadership to another (IPI, 2011). In West Africa, this process has led to comparatively, more stable societies than the past where coups, counter coups and aborted coups were adopted to transfer power from one regime to another. However, in some instances elections come with election related violence, disputes and conflicts resulting in deaths and destruction of properties. In many instances, these processes result in the use of security apparatuses to prevent clashes and protect property. Election-related violence has far-reaching consequences for international partnerships and economic development, with potential implications for long-term economic growth, institutional stability, and the effectiveness of governance systems. Election related violence is mostly eminent during transition from authoritarian regimes to multi-party regimes due to perceived prevalence of corruption, weak democratic institutions and other state structures, inadequate power sharing arrangement and high economic inequality (Annan, 2014; Mohammed, 2016). The causes of this violence are often multifaceted and the common ones across the sub-region are usually the push for self-interest by leaders, including electoral manipulations, manipulation of the constitution, high uncertainty about the outcome of elections, zero sum politics of the opposition and, ethnic polarization (Mohammed, 2016; Bintu & Vamo, 2020).

Election-related violence poses a serious threat to the stability of the West African region, with potential spillover effects that could translate into cross-border conflicts. Besides, election-related violence can erode

previous gains, and mostly affect the implementation of poverty reduction strategies and sustainable development. Again, although elections are not inherently a source of violence, they can exacerbate political, ethnic, regional, and religious tensions which affect sustainable development.

6.0 Farmer-Herder Conflict

Limited access to common pool resources coupled with poor land tenure security due to increased land commodification has exacerbated a bitter relationship between herders and farmers (Amannor, 2010; Kukpega & Aboagye, 2021) across the West African sub-region. Although farmers and herders lived and had symbiotic relationship for a long time, of recent times, their relationship has taken a more one-sided effect affecting SD negatively. The increase in both farmer and herder populations, coupled with declining vegetation cover, has intensified demand for land and water resources for agricultural and pastoral activities, thereby increasing competition and tensions between farmers and herders. (Kukpega & Aboagye, 2021). The competition has degenerated to disputes and conflicts among these groups in some farming communities (Turner, 2004; Shettima & Tar, 2008; Jabik, 2024). Furthermore, the migratory practices of pastoralist communities, combined with the encroachment and appropriation of fixed land resources through land grabbing, have contributed to the depletion of common-pool resources and increased pressure on shared ecosystems (White *et al.,* 2012; Scoones *et al.,* 2013; Boamah, 2014).

The conflicts affect the production of food, which directly affect the food security situation in the sub-region (Jabik, 2024). Data from the World Development Report 2022 revealed an average output of cereals per hectare of land in West Africa was 1.24375 tonnes in 2018, which is far below the global average. Although the low output was not solely due to the farmer-herder conflict, the conflict could have played a role. The low yield of agricultural output will result in increased hunger and malnutrition across the continent, thereby undermining the achievement

of Goal Two of the SDGs. The decline in output will also imply that poverty levels among farmers cannot be reduced in either the short or long term. Internal displacement, coupled with the loss of livestock, will also negatively affect the income levels of herders and the nutritional status of inhabitants in the sub-region.

7.0 Climate-induced Insecurity

Climatic condition in West Africa has been varying overtime. Two main rainfall patterns have been observed in the sub-region since 1950, which occur in the form of a cycle commonly referred to as inter-decadal and intra-decadal variabilities (Owusu, 2018; Jabik *et al*, 2022). The sub-region has also experienced an increase in temperature of more than 1 °C since the 1970s (IPCC, 2014). The consequence of the climatic variabilities is displacement in varied forms, placing pervasive threat to peacefulness. Climate change adversely influences resource availability and access. In Sub-Saharan Africa, about 122 million people are at varied levels of risk with high exposure to climate hazards such as flood, high temperature, storm, drought and sea rise among others. In the Gulf of Guinea, the phenomenon is so pervasive that people lose their lives and livelihoods which further aggravate the insecurity situation in the sub-region. Climate-induced hazards continue to put pressure on fragile communities resulting in displacement while the required resources to respond to the needs of displaced persons continues to lag behind. In the sub region, coping capacity measures are weak and have the potential to escalate and exacerbate climate-related violent conflicts.

Climate change amplifies weather-related disasters and destabilizes food and water supply systems, further weakening fragile states and increasing the risk of violent conflicts and accelerating human displacement and migration. Climate-related disasters often threaten people's stability, reduce access to resources and affect crop yields (Jabik, 2024). In farming communities, the effects amplify migration for greener pastures, mostly to urban areas. Due to high cost of living in urban areas, the fresh migrants

cannot afford but get accommodated in urban slums which are built in locations vulnerable to floods, landslides and other effects of climate change. This, in turn, increases risks and insecurity in urban slums and can further lead to cross border or international migration. This is so because the region is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, especially in already fragile drylands and along exposed coastlines. Given that agriculture, which is almost entirely rain-fed, accounts for a substantial share of employment in the sub-region, the effects of climate change are likely to exacerbate unemployment.

8.0 Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID 19)

The outbreak of Corona Virus (COVID 19) in 2019 and its subsequent spread to the sub-region in 2020, coupled with other devastating insecurity related issues have exacerbated the economic challenges in the sub-region. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is primarily a public health crisis, it has indirectly intensified the security challenges in West Africa. Its socioeconomic consequences have disrupted many economies, resulting in increased poverty and erasing more than four years of development gains. Prior to the pandemic, poverty was declining in the sub-region. In 2020, for the first time in two decades, the proportion of the poor living below the extreme poverty line in the sub-region increased, and further increased to 30.16 per cent of the sub-region's population in 2022 (Sachs *et al*, 2022). This means that the number of people living on less than $1.90 a day increased and erased more than four years of steady gains (UN, 2022). This was so because many lost their jobs while others had their income reduced due to the adoption of safety protocols implemented by all countries to curtail the spread of the virus.

The impact of the pandemic coupled with other challenges resulted in unprecedented shift in employment status and affected labour productivity. Prior to 2020, the average unemployment rate in West Africa stood at 5.175 per cent of the active labour force in 2019. This average increased to 6.2533 in 2022 attributable to the pandemic (Sachs

et al, 2022) and other challenges in the sub-region. This is largely because the sub-region's economies are dominated by small-scale enterprises and a sizeable informal sector, characterised by low-paid and vulnerable workers who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic-related lockdowns. The resulting decline in economic activity reduced productivity across the sub-region and diminished household incomes, thereby contributing to an increase in child labour. As household vulnerability deepened, many children were compelled to engage in economic activities, often in hazardous forms of labour that jeopardised their health, safety, and moral development.

9.0 Implications of the Dimensions on the Sustainable Development Goals

The insecurity dimensions in the sub-region threaten the security and stability in the sub-region with negative consequences on the sustainable development agenda. As revealed under the various dimensions, the consequences are contributing to increased insecurity and poverty prevalence in varied forms in the sub-region. Increased insecurity intensifies the effects and widens the inequality gap in the sub-region. Spillovers of the insecurity dimensions in some countries affect the progress in the achievement of the SDGs in other countries. Two spillovers standing out include environmental and social spillovers. Environmental spillovers are reflected in flooding and drought that affect productivity in the sub-region. Social spillovers had both positive and negative connotation. Negative social spillovers, such as displacement, compel people to migrate beyond borders, while the positive social spillovers are in the form of support in investments in conflict prevention and peacekeeping, mostly by regional bodies like ECOWAS and AU and in bilateral relations. Also, people displaced as a result of drought or floods must migrate to other areas contributing to increase competition for resources as well as employment which further affect the sustainability of the progress of the SDGs. Migration also increases the chance of cross border crime and insecurity. The implication of these

crimes to regional bodies like ECOWAS and AU cannot be underestimated as more resources must be devoted for humanitarian interventions like peacekeeping to the detriment of other developmental issues.

The insecurity threats also affect school enrolment and attendance leading to low human capital development in the sub-region. This is because poor enrolment and attendance discourage investment in education and learning, affecting the technological development in the sub-region. Furthermore, insecurity, particularly in the form of maritime attacks, discourages foreign direct investment and undermines investor confidence in the sub-region. This constrains economic growth, limits employment opportunities, and contributes to rising unemployment. The resulting loss of household income increases dependency, suppresses productivity, and exacerbates poverty at the household level. These dynamics underscore the centrality of security to sustainable development. Persistent insecurity not only impedes economic and social progress but also undermines multiple dimensions of development, compounds socioeconomic hardship, and hinders the attainment of the SDGs.

10.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

Sustainable development is of no relevance in a highly securitized environment due to existential security threats. This probably explains why fragile states are homes to high poverty prevalence and other development challenges. States spend more to provide for security instead of providing basic necessities to uplift the poor out of poverty. As revealed above, the multiple occurrences of the security threats in the sub-region have contributed significantly to poor performance towards the progress of the SDGs in West Africa. Although poverty levels in the sub-region declined steadily from the 1990s, this trend has since reversed, resulting in an increase in the poverty headcount across the sub-region. Closely associated with the rising incidence of poverty is an increase in

the number of people experiencing hunger, while key health indicators, including maternal and under-five mortality rates, remain above the global averages. These outcomes underscore the interconnected nature of the SDGs and the indispensable role of peace and security in achieving them. Without peace, progress towards the other SDGs is unlikely to be sustained. Peace fosters security, which safeguards individuals and states, facilitates access to essential social services, and enables the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. Conversely, insecurity disrupts food systems, exacerbates food insecurity, and undermines sustainable development. The foregoing analysis demonstrates that security is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development. With the exception of election-related violence, all the dimensions of insecurity examined in this study exert adverse effects on the attainment of the seventeen SDGs. To help improve progress of the SDGs, a number of recommendations are suggested. First of them is increasing the awareness of citizens as well as strengthening the capacities of institutions responsible for promoting SD in the sub-region to respond appropriately to the challenges of security. Capacities in areas of identifying early warning and raising concerns professionally for appropriate institutions to respond would reduce the chances of escalating insecurity. Related to the above is initiating broader collaboration between partners and stakeholders in the sub-region for increased capacities of actors for sustainable development.

The regional bodies and individual countries in the sub-region must also see the need to promote the five pillars of Security Council Resolution 2250 (UN, 2022). This is so because the youth constitute the majority of the sub-region's population and often play key roles in either promoting peace or escalating insecurity in the sub-region. The sub-region should also promote the culture of tolerance and intercultural dialogue, as well as develop participatory peacebuilding strategies that can help invest in the youth affected by armed conflict through employment opportunities, inclusive labour policies and education.

It is also recommended that states in the sub-region engage in extensive reforms in the area of security systems in order to create a conducive environment for development, poverty reduction and democracy. A secure environment is predicated on minimising citizens' vulnerabilities and designing comprehensive policy instruments that effectively address security threats and promote societal well-being. (OECD, 2014). This requires broadening security policy focus to include the well-being of citizens and human rights; mainstreaming security as a public policy and a governance issue; and frequently evaluating State and non-state institutions like traditional authorities providing security in the society.

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