

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 10 December 2010 from the Secretary-General  
to the President of the Security Council**

I wish to recall the Security Council consultations on the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) on 12 January and 13 July 2010, during which the Council requested an independent study of UNOWA.

I have the honour to submit to the members of the Council the independent study on UNOWA, which was conducted by the Center on International Cooperation of New York University (see annex). The study reviews UNOWA activities and performance in the implementation of its current mandate, and assesses the appropriateness of the Office's current mandate in light of the evolving subregional peace and security landscape as well as UNOWA capacity. It also makes proposals for its future mandate for consideration by the Council.

I should be most grateful if you would bring the study to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* **BAN** Ki-moon



**Annex**

**Independent review of the United Nations Office for West Africa**

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**Submitted by the New York University Center on International Cooperation  
to the Department of Political Affairs on 2 December 2010**

*(Academic peer review pending)*

**Contents**

|   | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| Executive summary . . . . .   | 3           |
| Strategic context of the United Nations Office for West Africa. . . . . | 6           |
| Mandate review . . . . .  | 10          |
| Conclusion and recommendations . . . . .                                | 20          |

## **Executive summary**

### **Report background**

This independent review of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) has been carried out at the request of the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. Its aim is to inform discussions on the renewal of the mandate of UNOWA. It is based on research in West Africa by two consultants (Michael McGovern and Sara Batmanglich) for the Center on International Cooperation of New York University.

The consultants' research included interviews with UNOWA personnel and stakeholders from inside and outside the United Nations system in West Africa. The consultants also conducted interviews with diplomats and United Nations officials in New York. All discussions were private.

The goal of the study is to assess UNOWA's performance relative to (a) the changing strategic context in West Africa, and (b) the Office's existing mandate. It begins with an overview of the strategic context, before analysing UNOWA's performance against its current mandated objectives in more detail. It concludes with recommendations on options for UNOWA's future.

The review is not meant to give an encyclopaedic account of UNOWA activities. Instead, it highlights those areas of the mandate where the Office has been most active, or where there are particularly obvious gaps. As the review makes clear, parts of the mandate are either redundant or of marginal value. These receive less attention than the Office's core tasks.

### **Strategic context and choices**

Since UNOWA was launched in 2002, the strategic context in West Africa has changed significantly. While the subregion was destabilized by interlinked wars in the period 2000 to 2002, the primary challenge in recent years has been a series of coups and unconstitutional changes of government.

The structural causes of instability in West Africa remain the same, however. Poverty and slow economic growth create the conditions for insurgencies and organized crime. Many Governments can provide only meagre services to their peoples, with a potential risk of violence.

The subregional organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has evolved to address the current security environment. Whereas ECOWAS previously focused on peace imposition and peacekeeping after civil wars, it now prioritizes conflict prevention and resolution and responding to unconstitutional changes of government. ECOWAS has taken the important normative step of treating national leaders' adherence to constitutional rules as one key to the subregion's security.

UNOWA's role inevitably involves supporting and backstopping ECOWAS. In this fluid strategic context, one of the primary questions facing UNOWA is whether it should follow (a) a detailed but fixed mandate, or (b) the judgements and strengths of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Dakar.

### **Mandate and priorities of the United Nations Office for West Africa**

At present, UNOWA is “entrusted with the overall mandate of enhancing the contribution of the United Nations towards the achievement of peace and security priorities in West Africa” (see S/2007/753, annex). The mandate is bloated, involving 33 activities across a variety of objectives.

This review focuses on the higher-level objectives and functions defined in the mandate. Broadly speaking, these fall into three categories: (a) “harmonizing” the United Nations family’s work in West Africa; (b) good offices diplomacy, typically in conjunction with ECOWAS; and (c) strategic analysis of the politics of the subregion for other elements of the United Nations system.

UNOWA’s efforts to harmonize United Nations activities in West Africa involve (a) a convening and facilitating role vis-à-vis other United Nations entities, and (b) raising awareness of subregional challenges and concerns. Representatives from across the United Nations system argue that UNOWA should be uniquely well-placed to carry out these functions. Its value was shown in its work to highlight the growing threat of drug trafficking in the region in recent years, in tandem with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

However, it is clear that with fewer than 30 staff, UNOWA cannot seriously hope to “harmonize” all United Nations activities across West Africa. If it plays a harmonizing role, it is likely to be through linking up efforts on discrete policy areas — and it has played this role in security sector reform. Meanwhile, United Nations stakeholders express concern that UNOWA’s consultations with other United Nations entities are ad hoc and weakly prioritized (although some noted recent improvements).

UNOWA’s engagement in good offices and preventive diplomacy has been the central characteristic of its work under the current Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Saïd Djinnit. The Special Representative and his team have been very active in shuttle diplomacy alongside ECOWAS and African Union officials during crises in (inter alia) Benin, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, the Niger and Togo. UNOWA plays a particularly useful role where United Nations country teams and resident coordinators have limited political leverage.

This diplomacy has involved very close relations with ECOWAS, although these have tended to be at the top level and could be supplemented by enhanced working level contacts. Nonetheless, UNOWA has played a significant role in backstopping ECOWAS on many occasions — the fluid nature of West Africa’s challenges means this support is often ad hoc.

UNOWA also has significant potential to play a pivotal role in developing and promoting knowledge and awareness of emerging challenges in West Africa, especially through effective political reporting. It is not living up to this potential. There is a need for an improved culture of information-sharing with other United Nations entities, and information-sharing within UNOWA is sometimes problematic. Other United Nations entities, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, currently seem more successful at regional analysis. United Nations stakeholders state that they would like to see UNOWA play a stronger analytical role, but this may not be feasible given the size of the Office.

UNOWA's mandate also refers to a number of areas in which it appears to have only a marginal impact at present, again reflecting capacity constraints. These include taking measures to help curb corruption and assisting ECOWAS on good governance and development initiatives. The presence of these objectives in the mandate is often more distracting than useful for UNOWA.

Overall, it is clear that UNOWA's greatest direct impact on peace and security in West Africa in recent years has been through good offices diplomacy, and its greatest indirect role has been through support to ECOWAS. These precedents should inform thinking on UNOWA's future.

### **Options and recommendations**

In spite of UNOWA's capacity constraints, no one interviewed by the consultants advocated increasing the size of the staff or budget of the Office. Instead, interviewees focused on the need to narrow UNOWA's mandate. Three models for the Office's future have credibility:

- (a) Reorienting UNOWA towards analysis and coordinating the responses of the United Nations to transnational threats in West Africa, and reducing its good offices diplomacy;
- (b) Shrinking UNOWA to an envoy and small team focused solely on good offices;
- (c) Creating a "hybrid" office, largely focused on good offices but with a strategic analysis component capable of framing and informing diplomacy by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

The consultants recognize that there are good arguments for all these options. However, it seems unlikely that UNOWA would retain real traction with other United Nations entities or ECOWAS if it retreated from good offices. Conversely, it is hard to see how a regional envoy can be fully effective without focused political analysis to guide him or her through complex crises.

The consultants recommend that UNOWA adopt the third, hybrid model. This would require staff with significant experience of (a) the United Nations and (b) ECOWAS and the African Union doctrine to help to guide the interventions by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Substantive staff could be as few as four or five, if they have regular and substantive contacts with other United Nations and ECOWAS personnel.

Adopting this model would also require: (a) giving the Special Representative of the Secretary-General a sufficiently flexible mandate to address new challenges; (b) requesting UNOWA to further strengthen its institutional relations with ECOWAS; (c) ensuring that substantive staff are fully trained in effective political reporting and strategic analysis; (d) reinforcing UNOWA's relations with other elements of the United Nations system by, for example, co-locating it with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs or other United Nations offices in Dakar; (e) ensuring that other parts of the United Nations system take up those issues UNOWA deprioritizes; and (f) giving UNOWA the budget to hold briefings, etc., on emerging crises.

## **Section 1**

### **Strategic context of the United Nations Office for West Africa**

1. The United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), located in Dakar, was established in 2002 pursuant to an inter-agency mission to West Africa in March 2001. Headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General, it was charged with (a) representing the United Nations in the ongoing negotiations between Cameroon and Nigeria over the contested Bakassi Peninsula, and (b) harmonizing and focusing the activities of United Nations agencies and peacekeeping operations in West Africa. It has maintained the same broad mandate until the present, although numerous detailed responsibilities have been added in the intervening years, often in an ad hoc manner and in reaction to the demands of specific countries.

#### **1.1 Regional trends**

2. The political context in West Africa at the time of UNOWA's founding was significantly different from today's situation. The second civil war in Liberia was ongoing. In late 2000 and early 2001, the then President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, and his Revolutionary United Front allies in Sierra Leone had attacked Guinea, attempting to export the war to one of the countries that supported his enemies. In 2002, the war in Sierra Leone drew to a close, and an uncertain period of post-conflict rebuilding and the initiation of a transitional justice process began. Later that year, civil conflict began in Côte d'Ivoire, fuelled in part by Mr. Taylor.

3. By October 2003, Charles Taylor had been ousted and the United Nations was overseeing major peacekeeping operations in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone, although each country remained highly unstable. Meanwhile, Guinea limped forward, with most Guineans and subregional actors preferring to wait for the departure of its ailing President, Lansana Conté, before addressing the country's deep political and economic problems. Guinea-Bissau also teetered on the verge of collapse, with the causes of its civil war in 1998 and 1999 still unresolved.

4. Today, the wars in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone are history and post-conflict rebuilding has made significant strides in each country. Elections have been conducted peacefully and fairly in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. Both countries have released truth and reconciliation reports, and Sierra Leone's hybrid war crimes court has completed all its cases, except for that of Charles Taylor. In 2010, elections were held in Côte d'Ivoire.

5. The situation in Guinea has fluctuated since UNOWA's founding, but the situation has improved (a process that has involved UNOWA, discussed below). Guinea-Bissau remains fragile, with international drug trafficking and limited civilian control of the military featuring as continuing problems. Still, the situation in both Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone has sufficiently improved, to permit United Nations programming to shift towards long-term peacebuilding. The situation in the Bakassi Peninsula has also seen significant progress.

6. In spite of these many improvements, the structural causes of West Africa's instability remain the same. Along with Central Africa, this is one of the poorest regions on Earth, with all its nations except Cape Verde among the bottom 40 spots on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development index. This has a plethora of direct and indirect political consequences. Limited

food security means that failed crops immediately threaten to give rise to famine and starvation.

7. Slow economic growth leads to rates of unemployment among young people of an estimated 80 per cent or more, making a return to regional mercenary activity potentially attractive to former combatants. The relative lack of local economic activity means that resource-starved Governments like that of Guinea-Bissau become attractive targets for international drug trafficking syndicates, who control more revenue than the country's entire gross domestic product. Similarly, in other West African countries, including Mali, Nigeria and Senegal, separatist and insurgent movements use violent means both to make a living and to challenge central governments whose legitimacy has been eroded by the meagre services they have provided to their populations in contested regions. Consequently, though the region is relatively more peaceful than when UNOWA was founded, the underlying sources of instability remain significant and worrying.

## **1.2 The United Nations Office for West Africa and the evolution of the Economic Community of West African States**

8. UNOWA's role has always been one of supporting and accompanying that of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS too has evolved over the past eight years. At the time of UNOWA's founding, ECOWAS was already the most functional subregional political body in Africa. It had made its reputation with peace imposition and peacekeeping operations in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Its approach to proactive conflict-averting or conflict-resolution activities was, however, not that well developed in 2002. ECOWAS has engaged more in these activities as the wars in the region have died down, and it has become clear that political instability and violence in countries like Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau are intimately related to issues of governance, equity and the insufficient legitimacy of elections and other political processes.

9. ECOWAS has thus emerged as an international leader in utilizing tools such as regional sanctions against regimes that have come to power through unconstitutional succession. Revisiting the principle of non-interference by linking the subregion's security and economic interests to national leaders' adherence to their own constitutions, ECOWAS has taken a more active role in condemning and intervening in situations such as the recent coups in Guinea (2008) and the Niger (2010). UNOWA has been an active partner in this process.

10. There can be no question that both ECOWAS and UNOWA deserve credit for helping to avert the worst outcomes in Guinea, especially after the massacres and rapes of unarmed civilians in Conakry in 2009. This said, one cannot be as sanguine about UNOWA's involvement in the coup situation in Mauritania in 2008, in which international involvement led to a kind of electoral rubber-stamping of the illegal seizure of power by Colonel Ould Aziz.

11. Similarly, one would have hoped that the active intervention strategy in Guinea might have started earlier — perhaps after the massacres of civilians in January 2007, which were even worse than those in September 2009. The various ups and downs of the electoral cycle in Guinea in 2010 suggest that although many international actors were quick to claim credit for the peaceful first round of

elections, it is in fact Guineans who have been determined not to let their country dissolve into war despite many factors pushing them towards conflict.

### **1.3 Strategic choices**

12. In light of this fluid strategic context, one of the primary questions concerning UNOWA is to what extent the Office's activities should be based on a detailed but fixed mandate and to what extent it can be adapted to reflect the political judgements, priorities and strengths of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Dakar.

13. The present mandate is bloated and unrealistic, given the size of the UNOWA office (see box) and budget. No one consulted in the course of the independent review suggested that the solution was to increase either staff or funds. Instead, interviewees highlighted the need to provide greater focus in the Office's mandate.

14. To date, UNOWA has mainly dealt with three rather different types of work. Firstly, it has tried to provide the impetus for harmonizing and discussing shared concerns and activities across peacekeeping operations and among the various United Nations entities in West Africa. Secondly, it has provided good offices diplomacy where and as needed in the region, typically in conjunction with ECOWAS. Lastly, it has provided strategic analysis of the politics of the subregion for United Nations country teams, the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat and others.

15. Most stakeholders consulted for this review agreed that the harmonization role had become far less important in recent years, and is likely to grow even less prominent as more peacekeeping operations draw down. Some respondents did emphasize the importance of UNOWA's ability to convene a wide range of development, peacekeeping and peacebuilding stakeholders. But this prerogative has been used only sparingly in recent years. Most respondents agreed that under the current Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Saïd Djinnit, the emphasis of the Office had shifted strongly towards good offices and away from the provision of strategic analysis.

16. Opinions about the future balance of UNOWA's priorities differ widely. This said, the evidence gathered in the course of this review suggests that the Office could operate more efficiently if strategic planning and analysis were coordinated better with the good offices activities. Another plausible option would be to turn the Office into that of a Special Envoy with a small support staff of three to four people to organize the envoy's communications and logistics. These options are discussed at greater length in the final section of this paper.

### UNOWA personnel and budget

As at 31 March 2010, UNOWA had 27 staff, including 13 international civilian staff, 10 local civilian staff and 4 military advisers. In personnel terms, this made it the eleventh largest of the 17 ongoing special political missions of the United Nations. Its financial requirements of \$6,966,100 for 2010 are the twelfth highest among those missions.

In light of some of the recommendations in this review concerning possible future staffing models for UNOWA, it is worth comparing aspects of its staff structure with other special political missions. The table below shows the numbers of (a) international civilian staff; (b) international political affairs officers; and (c) international human rights officer in five current missions.

In addition to UNOWA, we highlight the figures for the United Nations political missions in Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone (United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau and United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone) and regional comparators. We also show figures for the office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the staff of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus. The office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon is a useful comparator as an office with both political and coordination functions. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus may provide a model for a lighter alternative to UNOWA, focused on special envoy and good offices functions.

| <i>Special political missions</i> | <i>Staff</i>         |                  |                     |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|                                   | <i>International</i> | <i>Political</i> | <i>Human rights</i> |
| <b>West Africa</b>                |                      |                  |                     |
| UNIOGBIS (Guinea-Bissau)          | 18                   | 4                | 1                   |
| UNIPSIL (Sierra Leone)            | 27                   | 2                | 1                   |
| UNOWA                             | 13                   | 6                | —                   |
| <b>Elsewhere</b>                  |                      |                  |                     |
| UNSCOL (Lebanon)                  | 15                   | 9                | 1                   |
| Special Adviser, Cyprus           | 12                   | 6                | —                   |

*Note:* All figures are for 31 March 2010 and are taken from *Review of Political Missions 2010*.

## Section 2 Mandate review

### 2.1 Overarching questions

17. The current mandate for UNOWA has been in place for nearly three years, a relatively long time for that of a political mission. Despite numerous changes in that time, many of the issues put forth in a 2006 review of the Office and its practices (undertaken to inform the previous mandate renewal process) still resonate. The earlier study looked at the activities and performance of UNOWA under its previous mandate, specifically “the choice of strategic priorities by UNOWA and the interaction between the activities it chose to implement and the strategy it chose to follow.”<sup>1</sup> In light of the upcoming mandate renewal, several of the findings from this earlier report are worth reiterating:

(a) An office like UNOWA, whose main responsibilities are in the sphere of political affairs and conflict prevention, must keep its strategy flexible enough to respond to emerging circumstances and unforeseen situations in a manner that is opportunistic, rapid and sensitive. This is particularly true with respect to its good offices function;<sup>2</sup>

(b) As a regional office UNOWA “adds a new and interesting dimension as a decentralized capacity located in the subregion”, with the potential to fill the gap between United Nations country-level capacity and United Nations Headquarters attention and intervention. Furthermore, its proximate and yet neutral location in the subregion allows it to have greater political manoeuvrability and a different perspective than United Nations country teams and missions located in the countries themselves. Thus, it can provide these teams with access to advice and wisdom on the aspects of their work that are political, conflict-related, or subregional/cross-border in nature;<sup>3</sup>

(c) The previous review cautions that: “UNOWA is not an operational entity, nor should it try to become something for which it does not have the capacity. Part of its additionality lies in the intelligent use of advocacy analysis, its ability to raise issues and place them, in a coherent and actionable form, on the agendas of agencies that implement programmes, as well as those that think about them. There is a tension between the demands of launching issues and the temptation to go too far down the path of implementation. UNOWA needs to manage this tension carefully. Future reviews of UNOWA need to examine this wisely.”<sup>4</sup>

18. In addition to these observations, it is also useful to highlight two questions that recur throughout the analysis that follows:

- How are UNOWA’s primary strategic partners prioritized?

19. In undertaking the tasks mandated by the Security Council, UNOWA has multiple strategic partners. These include ECOWAS and its member States, United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies; and the Department of

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations; document S/2007/294, annex, para. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., paras. 6 and 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., footnote 13.

Political Affairs and other parts of the United Nations Secretariat. Which of these strategic relationships are most important to UNOWA's work?

- In which areas can UNOWA have the greatest impact with its current capacity?

20. Does experience suggest that UNOWA has the demonstrable highest impact through exercising its good offices, or through coordination or other activities?

21. We will return to potential answers to these questions at the start of our conclusion.

## **2.2 Current mandate and functions of the United Nations Office for West Africa**

22. This section goes through the objectives and functions laid out in UNOWA's existing mandate (S/2007/753, annex) to assess its performance against the Security Council's intentions. According to the mandate, UNOWA is "entrusted with the overall mandate of enhancing the contribution of the United Nations towards the achievement of peace and security priorities in West Africa".

23. The mandate breaks this overall task down into three objectives and describes specific functions related to meeting these goals. Under each designated function, a variety of associated "activities" are also listed (33 in total), presumably to provide further specificity to the vague wording of many of the functions. In some cases, however, the addition of specific activities detracts from the overall clarity of the mandate. These have either been abbreviated or omitted here to permit a strategic analysis of UNOWA's work.

### **Objective 1**

#### **Enhance capability within West Africa towards a harmonized subregional approach to peace and security**

##### **Function 1.1**

Facilitate systematic and regular linkages in the work of the United Nations in the subregion for defining and harmonizing national and subregional policies and strategies, with due regard to specific mandates of United Nations organizations, as well as peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding support offices.

24. The activities listed under this function fall into two categories, both of which relate to UNOWA's position with respect to the other United Nations entities active in the subregion. These are (a) the roles of convener and facilitator; and (b) the tasks of awareness/profile-raising.<sup>5</sup>

25. Both categories speak to the potential comparative advantages of UNOWA as a subregional political mission. Interviews with representatives of other United Nations entities in West Africa confirm that UNOWA is seen as unique in having a sufficiently broad political, subregional and thematic mandate to be able to bring together all the various components (political, development, security, etc.) of any given issue. This also allows UNOWA to call upon policy, technical and operational expertise from across the wider United Nations system as necessary.

26. It is through this convening power that UNOWA can potentially have the greatest impact on other areas of its mandate, such as backstopping the region's peace operations and ensuring a degree of coherence on human rights and gender issues. Leveraging and connecting the diverse capacities of different United Nations entities is far more likely to have a significant effect than tasking UNOWA's small staff to tackle these complex issues alone.

27. Yet the mandate's concept of "harmonizing" United Nations activities is fraught with difficulties, not only in terms of how it should be interpreted, but also how it would be achieved considering the disparate assortment of United Nations entities in the region, each with their own strategies and activities.

28. It is unrealistic to expect UNOWA to harmonize all United Nations policies and strategies in West Africa, given its limited size and the sheer range of activities involved. However, UNOWA can create harmonies (or at least linkages between parallel policy initiatives) if its efforts are confined to a particular thematic area, as we will note in the case of security sector reform.

29. In terms of raising awareness, UNOWA does indeed have considerable leverage and access to political and strategic networks. The profile of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and his high-level contacts, the staff's frequency of travel throughout the subregion, and the Office's direct reporting to the

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<sup>5</sup> The specific activities associated with this function break down into two categories, as follows:

**Convening and facilitating**

- Facilitating inter-mission and inter-agency cooperation among United Nations missions in the subregion and the political, military and expert levels
- Regular consultations of heads of United Nations regional agencies to develop common strategies
- Establishing and conducting activities of subregional working groups within the United Nations system
- Reinforcing cooperation on cross-cutting issues, including the rule of law, economic issues, human rights and gender

**Awareness and profile-raising**

- Identifying and raising awareness on emerging threats to peace and security
- Identifying positive trends and promoting activities in consultation with and the participation of the private sector to raise awareness of subregional issues and United Nations approaches
- Making use of UNOWA's leverage and political and strategic network to rally international support to subregional efforts to tackle cross-cutting threats to human security and peace in the subregion.

Security Council and the Secretariat are seen as valuable by United Nations partners.

30. For example, when the full scale of the threat posed by an upsurge in drug trafficking in the region began to emerge, UNOWA was the logical actor to spread this message, in concert with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. This involved communicating not only with Governments in the region (a delicate task given the sensitivity of the issue and the suspected complicity of some government officials in the trade) but also with diplomats based in Dakar and other regional capitals. UNOWA's decision to give the trafficking issue primary placement in the reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council also helped to give the problem prominence.

31. However, to have this sort of impact, UNOWA needs to ensure that it consistently and thoroughly consults with other United Nations actors on a systematic basis. United Nations stakeholders expressed concern that UNOWA's consultations tended to be ad hoc and poorly prioritized, although feedback varied slightly depending upon the entity asked — and some noted recent improvements.<sup>6</sup> By definition, close cooperation with the United Nations specialized agencies that have expertise on specific topics will be the only way UNOWA can maximize the added value it can provide, both in terms of convening or facilitating and raising awareness.

#### **Function 1.2**

Liase with and assist, as appropriate, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Mano River Union and other key partners in their promotion of peace and stability in the subregion.

32. Although this aspect of the Office's mandate — the strengthening of the region's own mechanisms — is considered to be one of its most fundamental, it is also one of its most time-consuming and complex, as well as being the most difficult to describe and to quantify.<sup>7</sup>

33. UNOWA's approach to this function is that ECOWAS, as the region's own locus for peace and security initiatives, naturally enjoys greater local legitimacy when it comes to addressing these issues and therefore should take the lead in all

<sup>6</sup> Where communication between UNOWA and other United Nations partners was seen to be adequate, it either depended upon personal relationships between staff members, or had a specific focus (security sector reform, mediation). Otherwise, partners felt that they only received piecemeal information and generally lacked sufficient understanding of UNOWA's overall strategic direction and the activities the Office was going to undertake in order to work towards this (i.e., a workplan). So while they were provided with a snapshot, it was often difficult to determine where their activities fit in among UNOWA's and, even more so, to systematize cooperation moving forward.

<sup>7</sup> Among the more recent statements of the importance of regional approaches to conflict prevention, see United Nations press release SC/9840, "Security Council to promote closer, more operational cooperation between United Nations, regional organizations in early warning, peacekeeping, peacebuilding", and United Nations press release GA/10848 "General Assembly adopts resolution stressing critical need for regional approach to conflict prevention in Africa".

joint initiatives. UNOWA provides support where it can and is requested to. However, supporting ECOWAS has proved to be challenging to plan for. The types of assistance ECOWAS requires are frequently hard to foresee and are often informal, administrative and ad hoc, meaning that UNOWA often has to improvise.<sup>8</sup>

34. Nonetheless, UNOWA's value in this category comes from its ability to serve as a bridge between the wider United Nations system and ECOWAS, strengthening inter-institutional coordination mechanisms and protocols already in place.<sup>9</sup> As a "privileged interlocutor" with the organization, UNOWA can target backstopping, support and extra capacity and technical expertise precisely where needed. It can serve as an entry point for the rest of the United Nations system to ECOWAS, so that a more effective partnership between the two organizations can be managed. This was recently reiterated during a meeting of United Nations resident coordinators and regional directors, discussing the challenges in the Sahel, where the "pivotal role of UNOWA as the interface between the United Nations system and ECOWAS" was reiterated.<sup>10</sup>

35. While the partnership between UNOWA and ECOWAS has gone from strength to strength during the current mandate period, in large part this has been due to the good relationships between the upper echelons of both organizations. For this partnership to be fully functional and sustainable, collaboration needs to extend throughout the two organizations — most importantly at the working level — and must be formalized in the ECOWAS-UNOWA workplan so that working methods and lines of communication are systematized and become part of their established institutional cultures.

36. In comparison to collaboration with ECOWAS, work with the Mano River Union is underdeveloped. At the time of drafting, however, a joint framework was being developed to identify areas for further cooperation, such as security sector reform, drug trafficking, promoting violence-free elections and implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).<sup>11</sup>

### **Function 1.3**

Perform good offices role in countries of the subregion on conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts.

37. Given the political tensions in the subregion since the last mandate renewal, especially the frequency with which political crises have erupted, this function

<sup>8</sup> The support that UNOWA provides to ECOWAS runs the gamut from undertaking joint missions (assessment, diplomatic and otherwise); advising on strengthening capacity (for example on mediation), assisting in the development of new frameworks and action plans (for example security sector reform); collecting background research and information; and organizing joint workshops and forums for discussion.

<sup>9</sup> Such as those that exist on conflict prevention, democracy and good governance, drug trafficking and organized crime, and the one on security sector reform that is currently being developed.

<sup>10</sup> See report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office for West Africa (S/2010/324), para. 27.

<sup>11</sup> S/2010/324, para. 35.

within UNOWA's mandate has been increasingly in demand and successfully pursued by the current Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

38. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General has frequently pursued shuttle diplomacy to address emerging crises, frequently accompanied by his counterparts from ECOWAS, and often the African Union. This has been UNOWA's main direct preventive mechanism in recent years. Examples of the engagement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General include his work in Benin, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, the Niger and Togo.

39. Details of the diplomatic engagement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in these crises are inevitably sensitive and often confidential. However, the case of Guinea provides a useful example of how his personal diplomacy, relations with ECOWAS and contacts with other United Nations entities can be combined. After the coup in Guinea in December 2008, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General not only played a direct role in mediation between the military and the opposition, but also put UNOWA's technical expertise in security sector reform to good use, as described in the Center on International Cooperation's *Review of Political Missions* as follows:

Throughout the mediation process, led by ECOWAS and its chosen facilitator, Burkina Faso's President Blaise Compaoré, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General was actively engaged in high-level negotiations. As one of a core group of advisers to the facilitator — as well as representing the United Nations at the International Contact Group on Guinea — he strongly encouraged a prompt return to constitutional order. Concurrently, UNOWA worked closely with the United Nations country team in Guinea to develop programmes that address key areas of conflict prevention in order to prepare for elections. UNOWA has also, at ECOWAS's request, been providing advice as to how security sector reform can be included in the facilitation process and addressed during the transitional period.<sup>12</sup>

40. This shows how UNOWA can play an important role in facilitating political processes. While the United Nations does not have an official policy on unconstitutional changes of government, the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the tripartite United Nations-African Union-ECOWAS relationship is one of support to the regional frameworks that do include such principles. In coup situations, the Special Representative has typically been a very strong voice on behalf of the international community, encouraging as swift a return to constitutional order as possible. His contribution has frequently included providing suggestions of how that transition can be handled most peacefully and rapidly.

41. The good offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General have been especially useful in those countries of the subregion where the United Nations country team cannot engage with politically sensitive situations or where there is a political component to the activities of other agencies. In this respect, United Nations resident coordinators have found UNOWA's involvement useful, particularly where the Special Representative of the Secretary-General is able to

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<sup>12</sup> Center on International Cooperation, *Review of Political Missions 2010* (New York, 2010), p. 49. Sara Batmanglich, one of the authors of this paper, also wrote the West Africa section of the *Review*.

provide the political cover and diplomatic leverage to ensure that the work of the rest of the United Nations can continue without becoming mired in political disputes.

42. While good offices have certainly been successful thus far, two questions moving forward will be whether the Office's mandate should be shifted so that this is the primary focus, and what that would mean for other important issues UNOWA is supposed to address. In this scenario, the structure of the Office and its human resources would have to be adjusted to the specific needs of backstopping the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the performance of good offices.

### **Objective 2**

**Enhance efforts towards addressing cross-border issues, including good governance practices and measures; mainstreaming security sector reform into development strategies; formulating a meaningful, effective and integrated subregional approach that encompasses priorities and concerns related to humanitarian, human rights and gender issues; curbing corruption, youth unemployment, rapid urbanization, transitional justice and cross-border illicit activities**

#### **Function 2.1**

Promote good governance practices and confidence-building measures, including curbing corruption and improving electoral processes.

43. Good governance practices are a built-in component of much of the work of the United Nations, but it is ambitious to assume that UNOWA can have a demonstrable impact with respect to very broad subregional goals, such as curbing corruption, other than through assisting ECOWAS in the implementation of its own peacebuilding initiatives and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in the pursuit of anti-corruption activities (which are listed elsewhere in the mandate).

44. In terms of improving electoral processes, much of UNOWA's work does seek to create conditions where free and fair elections can take place. This is achieved through the good offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and by his encouraging respect for following the constitution or the rule of law, as well as through provision of direct support to political processes, such as deploying a dedicated mediation expert to Guinea before and after both rounds of elections. UNOWA has also focused on the prevention of election-related violence. In addition to producing an issue paper on security during electoral processes, entitled "Ballots not bullets", it has organized training events and workshops so as to share best practices.

**Function 2.2**

Integrated approach to security sector reform as part of economic development strategies.

45. As we have noted with regard to function 1.1 above, UNOWA is most likely to have significant added value in thematic areas that are narrowly defined — and where there is no other regional United Nations presence taking the lead on the issue. Security sector reform falls into this category and external feedback on UNOWA's work in this particular area was positive.

46. In the case of security sector reform, UNOWA has contributed to a more integrated approach by (a) mapping who is doing what and where (an exercise that had become increasingly necessary in a field that had multiple actors with multiple programmes and was suffering from incoherence), (b) suggesting where links and synergies exist between the various initiatives at both the subregional and country level, and most importantly, (c) by supporting ECOWAS's own processes, including assisting them with the development of a draft regional action plan for security sector governance and reform. As part of these efforts, a joint ECOWAS/African Union/United Nations security sector reform assessment mission was deployed to Guinea. From the United Nations side this included involvement by the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery of UNDP, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations country team.

47. It is important to note that these security sector reform activities have been undertaken with a strict understanding that UNOWA is not there to build national capacities in its own right.

48. Instead, UNOWA can facilitate moving forward in security sector reform in a more coherent fashion, including by recommending a regional forum of practitioners and experts to create space for increased dialogue and experience-sharing. Once again though, it must be emphasized that UNOWA will only be able to have a similar impact in discrete areas that are either not being facilitated at a subregional level by other actors or where there is a distinctly political angle.<sup>13</sup>

**Function 2.3**

Develop and promote better knowledge and awareness of subregional problems confronting West Africa.

49. This function potentially capitalizes on two of UNOWA's comparative advantages: (a) its subregional positioning and "hub-like" vantage point, and (b) access to local, regional and international networks. UNOWA has the scope and

<sup>13</sup> Also, as described above, UNOWA's integrated approach to security sector reform has not been restricted only to integration "as part of economic development strategies". While the vague wording throughout the mandate is problematic, this is an example of overly specific wording being just as counterproductive in its restrictiveness.

mandate to develop and promote knowledge and awareness of regional challenges through effective political reporting.

50. UNOWA is currently not living up to its potential in this regard. There is a need for an improved culture of consultation and information-sharing between UNOWA and other United Nations entities, many of which produce their own internal situation reports. The consultants also noted some cases in which information-sharing within UNOWA was weak. By contrast, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs office in West Africa is reported to be doing more regional analysis than UNOWA, and doing it well. Whereas as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs previously maintained a desk officer based in UNOWA, this practice has been discontinued, reducing information exchange.

51. The consultants found that representatives of other United Nations entities in West Africa remain keen to work with UNOWA in the area of analysis. However, in order to provide consistent, detailed and useful analysis, more staff time would have to be dedicated solely to serving this function. Unless the Office's capacity is increased for this specific purpose, this would mean diverting manpower from supporting the good offices and country missions of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

#### **Function 2.4**

Strengthen cooperation with the ECOWAS Commission and with representatives of ECOWAS member States at ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja, focusing on governance and development issues.

52. The consultants encountered general agreement that this function was not a useful part of UNOWA's mandate as (a) other actors, notably UNDP and the World Bank, have significant presences in West Africa and are more obvious leaders on development issues; and (b) UNOWA's governance work with ECOWAS is rooted in function 1.2, discussed above.

53. Function 1.2 refers to cooperation with ECOWAS on "peace and stability" in the subregion, but ECOWAS itself has drawn the link between regional stability and good governance. This means that function 2.4 largely duplicates the strategic goal of function 1.2.

#### **Objective 3**

**Carry out additional tasks assigned by the Secretary-General and the Security Council**

##### **Function 3.1**

Facilitate the implementation of the International Court of Justice ruling of 10 October 2002 on the land and maritime boundary dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria.

54. The intention of this objective is presumably to provide flexibility within the mandate in order to allow greater responsiveness to wide-ranging issues as they might arise, but thus far it has been predominantly utilized in carrying out the activities of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission. Since May 2009, the UNOWA Special Representative of the Secretary-General has served as the Chair of the Mixed Commission.<sup>14</sup> As the Commission successfully concludes its work, either function 3.1 will have to be dropped or replaced, or objective 3 should be deleted entirely (with the understanding that UNOWA will naturally carry out additional tasks when necessary, as assigned or requested by the Secretary-General and the Security Council).

### 2.3 Summarizing the current focus of the United Nations Office for West Africa

55. In opening this section, we set out three guiding questions concerning UNOWA's strategic purpose. Further to our analysis, we can briefly conclude by offering answers to them.

- How are UNOWA's primary strategic partners prioritized?

56. Our analysis has underlined that UNOWA currently prioritizes its relationship with ECOWAS — this was a recurrent theme among our interviewees. However, we should underline our previous observation that this relationship is currently shaped by, and dependent on, good top-level political links between the two entities. There is room to strengthen and institutionalize the relationship further. Meanwhile there are evidently gaps, as around information-sharing, in relations between UNOWA and other United Nations entities in West Africa — although these have been overcome in certain pressing cases, as with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The overall goal of “harmonizing” United Nations efforts in the region through UNOWA is unfulfilled.

- In which areas can UNOWA have the greatest impact with its current capacity?

57. It is clear that UNOWA's main investment in recent years has been in good offices, and this is where the highest direct impact is observable (in terms of direct effects on crises in the region). In most other areas of the mandate, UNOWA's efforts have either had negligible impacts (as on development cooperation with ECOWAS) or been limited by capacity constraints (as in the Office's efforts to develop and promote strategic analysis).

58. In indirect terms, UNOWA does appear to have had some impact in terms of coordinating security sector reform efforts in the subregion. However, UNOWA's main impact in terms of facilitating other institutions' performance remains its support to ECOWAS. This is, however, difficult to quantify because of the ad hoc and often crisis-driven nature of the cooperation involved.

59. More strategically, it can be argued that — both directly and indirectly — UNOWA's primary impact tends to be in areas relating to conflict prevention and crisis management. Its performance with respect to other areas, such as anti-corruption initiatives and good governance — is far more patchy, supporting the case for a narrower focus on crisis diplomacy as the top priority.

<sup>14</sup> See *Review of Political Missions*, p. 51. The Mixed Commission has been located with UNOWA in Dakar.

## Section 3

### Conclusion and recommendations

60. It is clear from all of the authors' discussions with the various UNOWA stakeholders that the institution needs to be focused considerably in order for it to function as well as it might, and also to insulate it from being pulled in too many directions at once. Throughout the mandate, the language oscillates between ambiguous and precise. There is an important balance to be found between maintaining some degree of flexibility surrounding the interpretation of how UNOWA can go about achieving its functions, while still ensuring that its core functions are cogently articulated. As a process issue, we suggest that future mandates seek a "middle ground" with respect to detailing UNOWA's responsibilities.

#### 3.1 Strategic choices

61. In conducting this review, the consultants noted that there have been a number of competing visions for UNOWA's role since its founding. In the past, some senior staff argued that the Office should become a sort of regional strategic think-tank with a limited operational role. This is very far from the view of the current Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and we found very little support for it in our interviews. Three models for UNOWA's future seem more credible:

1. UNOWA as a regional hub for coordination and information exchange across United Nations entities in West Africa, focused on transnational threats rather than good offices.

2. UNOWA as a special envoy's office with a much-reduced staff and strictly ad hoc good offices activities as its responsibility, working closely with ECOWAS.

3. UNOWA as an organization where strategic analysis guides the choice of which good offices activities the Special Representative of the Secretary-General undertakes — and the needs of the Special Representative drive the analytical agenda as necessary — but where good offices are in fact the primary added value of the operation. Again, close ties to ECOWAS are a sine qua non here.

62. UNOWA currently operates to a large extent according to model 2 (a source of both most of the Office's successes and of the dissatisfactions of various stakeholders). The recommendation of this report is that the Office move towards model 3 as outlined below.

#### 3.2 Strategic logic

63. As we have noted in section 2.3 above, our overall assessment of UNOWA's performance is that (a) its relationship with ECOWAS has had high utility while its relationship with other elements of the United Nations system has had mixed utility; and (b) UNOWA's efforts to harmonize United Nations activities in West Africa have fallen off, except in some specific cases like security sector reform, while its role as a hub for strategic analysis has failed to meet the hopes of some of its partners.

64. One option in this context would be to re-emphasize UNOWA's work as a truly regional office (as opposed to a special envoy working on a country-by-country basis). This would mean focusing its work on cross-border dynamics affecting

multiple countries, supporting the subregional institution (ECOWAS), and addressing cross-cutting issues like human rights and gender mainstreaming. Such an office would make good offices a secondary focus.

65. However, this option does not reflect the constraints imposed by UNOWA's size, as well as many of the contextual factors we have noted. At present, there are other parts of the United Nations system capable of producing good thematic analysis about West Africa, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. While United Nations stakeholders would like to improve analytical contacts with UNOWA, our interviews showed that most prioritize the political access and leverage the UNOWA Special Representative of the Secretary-General can bring to bear in dealing with individual Governments in the region and ECOWAS. This requires the Special Representative to have the standing and political contacts associated with a high-profile envoy. Similarly, ECOWAS clearly appreciates UNOWA's support and good offices too.

66. In this context, reducing the good offices and political work of UNOWA could be counterproductive. It might be more productive to hand off some of the Office's analytical tasks to others, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and accept that UNOWA can play only a light or problem-specific coordinating role, rather than attempting to "harmonize" subregional United Nations activities.

67. This leads us to the two other options laid out previously: a small special envoy's team with limited analytical capacity or an envoy with continued, but focused, analytical back-up. In either case, a special envoy would work on individual nation States with emerging problems, and would support the Department of Political Affairs, resident coordinators, ECOWAS and the African Union in addressing these problems in a systematic and consistent way, productively bridging the United Nations Secretariat and United Nations country teams.

68. It is hard to see how this work can be undertaken successfully without being backed by significant policy analysis. One example of the way in which the absence of strategic planning became a problem for UNOWA is the way that UNOWA's approval of the quasi-legal situation in Mauritania in 2008 became a liability in Guinea (noted in section 1 above).

69. To be fully effective in supporting an envoy focused on good offices, therefore, UNOWA needs a hybrid analytical/good offices centre. This would require a greater percentage of its operating budget to be dedicated to meetings, research and reports, and would take full advantage of its ability to convene a wide range of stakeholders for political consultations.

70. Depending on circumstances, this analytical work could (a) frame priorities and options for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General/envoy in preparing for future crises; and (b) support the Special Representative of the Secretary-General during unfolding crises by ensuring he or she has access to fresh information and options on diplomatic options.

71. Although more focused than the current set-up, this would require the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to exercise significant leadership in charting the course of the Office's activities, and also in keeping members of the Security Council and General Assembly apprised of dynamics on the ground in West Africa, as well as bringing a sharp sense of priorities back to the region from New York.

### 3.3 Strategic recommendations

72. In light of the foregoing analysis, the consultants recommend that UNOWA, the Department of Political Affairs and member States come to a consensus on the future emphasis of the Office (good-offices specific or regional) and pare down UNOWA's mandate accordingly. Non-essential taskings should be removed from the mandate, giving UNOWA a clearer strategic focus.

73. Although we recognize that there are arguments for the first and second models outlined above (an office with a regional coordination focus and a small envoy-support team), the consultants conclude that the "hybrid" option of an office with (a) a focus on good offices and (b) political analysis capabilities best fits the current strategic context in West Africa.

74. Consequently, the consultants' overarching strategic recommendation is that UNOWA be recalibrated to focus on good offices and supporting analysis. This would require staff with significant experience of (a) the United Nations and (b) ECOWAS and African Union doctrine and principles and of prior best practices to help to guide the interventions of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The precise number of substantive staff could be as few as four or five — if they have regular and substantive contacts with other United Nations and ECOWAS personnel (although note the comparative figures in the table above).

75. To make this proposed office work effectively, we would also recommend:

(a) Ensuring that the mandate gives the Special Representative of the Secretary-General the flexibility to address new challenges;

(b) Underlining UNOWA's political relationship with ECOWAS as its key relationship, and requesting UNOWA to further strengthen its institutional relations with ECOWAS, in addition to maintaining high-level political contacts;

(c) Ensuring that substantive staff members are fully trained in effective political reporting and strategic analysis to add value to the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General;

(d) Reinforcing UNOWA's relations with other elements of the United Nations system by, for example, relocating it with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs or other United Nations offices in Dakar. This could permit improved information-sharing, while also reducing "back room" costs;

(e) Ensuring that other parts of the United Nations system in West Africa (such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, etc.) take up those issues UNOWA deprioritizes, such as development;

(f) Giving UNOWA the budget to hold briefings, etc., on emerging crises as necessary.

76. UNOWA has already adapted to West Africa's changing political landscape, and the Office has shown its relevance in recent crises such as the one in Guinea. If UNOWA reorients itself to cooperate closely with its strategic partners, especially ECOWAS, it will continue to play a significant role — one that other elements of the United Nations cannot play in West Africa.