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Operational Conflict Management Process between Military Peacekeepers and Humanitarian NGOs in West Africa

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Abstract:

The face of peacekeeping activities across the globe has changed from traditional into wider peacekeeping since the end of the cold war. Hitherto, the task of peacemaking and peacekeeping was considered a purview of the military because of the complex task involved in persuading belligerent armed groups to lay down arms for peaceful negotiation to take place. Thus, during the cold war era, the activities of the United Nations Peacekeepers loomed largely in conflict zones across the world. However, there has been a remarkable increase in the involvement of regional organisations in spearheading peacekeeping and peace enforcement with mandates and support from the UN. There has also been a remarkable increase in the participation of non-state voluntary groups and organisations who contribute to relief activities and peace-building efforts in conflict zones as complements to military operations to mitigate the effects of armed conflicts.

Keywords: *Conflict management, Humanitarian NGOs, Military peacekeepers*

1. Introduction

In the contemporary peacekeeping, the role of military peacekeepers is increasingly seen as that of creating the right environment where other non-state groups, especially humanitarian organisations can undertake the task of conflict resolution and peace building (Bellamy, Williams and Griffins, 2004). Such organisations are also forming coalitions for efficiency in the management of scarce resources in order to avoid duplication of efforts in the numerous conflict locations where aid supports are urgently needed. For instance, about 75% of aids and relief materials are being distributed to conflict zones across the world by twenty largest American and European Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), most especially those in the International Council of Voluntary Agencies and Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies, (Duffield, 2001:53-57). This trend is in contrast with the traditional peacekeeping trend where the International Red Cross, and later Red Crescent, and few other humanitarian organisations were the dominant relief organisations in armed conflict zones. Humanitarian NGOs have cumulatively assumed increasing responsibilities in conflict mitigation and peace building in conflict zones in the last two decades as attested by several examples. Over 200 NGOs operated in Rwanda during the genocide crisis between 1994 and 1996. Within a period of seven months in 1993, the number of humanitarian NGOs operating in Yugoslavia increased from 65 to 127 (Rambostham and Woodhouse, 1999:176).

Besides the humanitarian NGOs, there has been a sporadic increase in the number of other non-state actors in conflict zones. Trans-national corporations, private military corporations and contractors, individual mercenaries and other fortune seekers with vested interests in countries that are experiencing conflicts had given additional responsibilities to peacekeeping forces, who have had to ensure that non-state actors did not contribute significantly to conflict escalation and conflict

proliferation in areas where relative peace have been achieved.[1] Managing and monitoring the activities of non-state actors involved in conflict zones has become part of the contemporary challenges encountered by peacekeepers in sub-Saharan Africa. Some of the extant literatures have however acknowledged that in West Africa, the ECOMOG (the peacekeeping military force of the Economic Community of West Africa) appears to have achieved some success in containing non-state actors in countries where they have carried out peacekeeping missions. The collaboration between ECOMOG military peacekeeping force and the humanitarian NGOs involved in refugee rehabilitation, disarmament and re-integration of former combatants, and other peace building activities were said to be so successful that the United Nations appointed a special representative to help facilitate the works of NGOs in Sierra Leone, for example (Bellamy, Williams and Griffins, 2004: 193). Similar experience was also recorded in East Timor.

Beyond providing material reliefs to alleviate the sufferings of victims and vulnerable groups in conflict zones in Africa, humanitarian NGOs have also assumed the responsibilities of monitoring the extent to which the human rights of the vulnerable segments of the population are respected by belligerent armed groups and peacekeepers in countries where peacekeeping activities are taking place.[2] They also make significant contributions to political transition activities and post-conflict peace building efforts, such as election monitoring, strengthening of political parties, establishment and monitoring of structures and institutions which support confidence building among populations that have been caught in cross-fires and who have lost confidence in the political and economic structures that sustain conflicts on the continent. However, in the process of such interventions, there have been accusations that some of the NGOs sometimes take sides in local politics, thus putting military peacekeepers into much more difficult situation in their operations to ensure cease fire and conducive atmosphere for peace negotiation and peace building. Often times, humanitarian NGOs refuse to co-operate with peacekeepers because of differing operating templates and procedures which clash with those of military peacekeepers. There is no doubt that one essential requirement that sustain humanitarians is their responsibility to donors who nourish their resource base. In the quest to maintain their credibility, neutrality and accountability to donors, NGOs sometimes engage in altercations with peacekeepers in the operation field where military exigencies sometimes demand unusual practices. Those unusual operational practices to curtail armed groups and to quickly bring peace into conflict environments are often sources of disagreements between military commanders and humanitarian leaders.

The increasing presence of humanitarian NGOs in conflict zones has raised the issue of cooperation and coordination between them and military peacekeepers. Management of this trend ultimately determines the success or otherwise of contemporary peacekeeping missions. Usually, military peacekeepers are concerned with peace enforcement activities and ultimately, institution of negative peace in conflict zones. This process, even though will lay the foundation for conflict resolution and peace building, should take shorter period of time and peacekeepers always want to get it done quickly. Contrarily, humanitarian NGOs are often engaged in peace building activities which involve

1 It is on record for example, that the scrambling for blood diamond and other treasures contributed largely to the escalation and prolongation of the civil wars in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where non-state individuals and business entities benefited from uncontrolled exploitation of such valuable mineral resources which provided the financial resources to acquire weapons that nourished the conflicts.

2 The works of human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch in exposing abuses of human rights of vulnerable groups in conflict zones across the world has been widely acknowledged, even though such efforts may not be a stabilizing one in some conflict zones since they antagonizes military peacekeepers who tramples on human rights of people in the process of peace enforcement and sometimes condemn the humanitarian NGOs, whose contributions, rather than de-escalating conflicts sometimes contribute to conflicts escalation. See Francis Kofi Abiew and Tom Keating (1999). NGOs and UN Peacekeeping Operations: Strange Bedfellows. *International Peacekeeping*, 7: 1, 121-141.

aids and relief materials distribution, health care issues, counselling services, refugee resettlement, building of political and social institutions and capacity building for the citizens of conflict zones, all of which take longer time to achieve. These varied objectives sometimes lead to conflictual operational procedures and traditions which prevent military peacekeepers from cooperating and collaborating with the humanitarian NGOs in operation fields. In essence, while the military often stick strictly to military operational plans, targets, objectives and procedures dictated by the UN mandate or mandates from regional organisations, NGOs are pre-occupied with accountability, humanitarian concerns and operational integrity which stretch beyond the immediate operational zone. Such lack of coordination and cooperation has been identified as a major operational constraint and part of the reasons for failure in several peacekeeping operations across the world (Duffield, 1999; Slim, 2001). Such development has accounted for the prolongation of the Somalia conflict, where uncoordinated activities between military and humanitarian NGOs have benefited and sustained local warlords (Mackinlay, 2000; Anderson,1999), and have militated against the successes of several other interventions of the United Nations in armed conflicts across the world (Bellamy, Williams and Griffins, 2004: 144). Such failures were also recorded in Rwanda and Srebrenica among other peace missions.

This paper is aimed at examining the operational conflict management processes among military peacekeepers and humanitarian NGOs in areas where peacekeeping activities has taken place in West Africa, specifically in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Guinea. In these countries, recent peacekeeping operations have led to somehow successful political transitions and relative peace. The paper attempts to examine and interrogate the conflict management and conflict handling procedures between military peacekeepers and humanitarian NGOs whereby the UN has pointed to peacekeeping operations in West Africa as a reference point that could enhance improvement in peacekeeping activities across the globe (Bellamy *et al*, 2004). The insight gained from this effort will enable one to proffer some suggestions for policy evolution that could lead to sustainable partnership in operational modes between military peacekeepers and humanitarian NGOs staff for successful future peacekeeping missions.

The paper draws from existing literatures and discussions with former commanders of ECOMOG military contingents and staff of humanitarian NGOs and the United Nations to provide some insights into the various dimensions of operational conflicts involving military personnel and civilian humanitarians during the various peace support operations. Thus, the work is capable of contributing into enriching training materials and academic resources for peacekeepers and humanitarian NGOs in relevant military and civilian training institutions.

In order to be systematic in the discussion process, the paper is guided by five research questions which will enable one to have a better insight into the subject matter. These include:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between military peacekeeping contingents and humanitarian NGOs during peacekeeping/peace enforcement operations in West Africa?
2. What are the peculiar operational challenges that militate against co-operation between military peacekeepers and staff of humanitarian NGOs during peacekeeping operations in West Africa?
3. What are the conflict management strategies and specific tools adopted by peacekeeping military commanders and heads of humanitarian NGOs in resolving operational conflicts, in order to nurture and sustain better relationship between military and humanitarian services contingents during peacekeeping missions especially in Sierra Leone and Liberia?
4. How far did the conflict management strategies adopted contribute to successful peacekeeping and peace building operations in the operational zones where the military and humanitarian NGOs had worked together to achieve conflict de-escalation and political transitions?
5. How can the positive aspects of the relationship between military peacekeepers and humanitarian NGOs be strengthened to benefit policy making for better peace operation planning and packaging by states, regional organisations and the United Nations?

2. Emergence of ECOMOG and Intervention of Humanitarian NGOs in West Africa

Economic integration of the countries of West Africa was the initial primary motivation for the establishment of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) in 1975. Even though the maintainance of peace, co-operation and prosperity of member states was part of the objectives of the regional body, for over one decade after its establishment, ECOWAS adhered strictly to the principle of non-interference into the internal political affairs of its members. This idea was sustained during the cold war period and was supported by the existence of the bi-polar global structure which deterred countries from interfering in the affairs of others as a result of the pervasive influence of the two major super powers especially in Africa. The colonial antecedents of each of the countries of West Africa, which encouraged each member state to lean towards various former colonial masters, further reinforced this tendency for non-interference in the internal affairs of other members among the ECOWAS states.

With the recession of the cold war, a number of security issues emerged within certain individual countries, which threatened human security in West African sub-region. Therefore, ECOWAS had to review its non-interference stance by engaging in conflict management and security maintenance in the region as a collective responsibility to ensure human security and to prevent humanitarian disaster in the region. Of course, it was apparent that if the ECOWAS did not engage in security matters as a collective, individual member states would have to contend with refugee problems, proliferation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons which would be spilling into neighbouring states from countries that were witnessing serious conflicts. The organisation therefore had to establish a framework for security maintenance and embark on building its capacity for peace support intervention in the region.[3]

The first major engagement of ECOWAS in conflict management and peacekeeping occurred as a result of the outbreak of the civil war in Liberia, the ferociousness of which was tending towards humanitarian disaster in that country. The desire to put an end to the carnage and destruction going on among the various armed groups in Liberia, the killing of civilians and displacement of large number of vulnerable members of her population necessitated the formation and deployment of ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Most of the resources and soldiers that constituted the force were provided by Nigeria because of the obvious inability of other ECOWAS countries to provide all the necessary requirements for the formation of the peacekeeping group. However, the first commander of the peacekeeping force was a Ghanaian. Subsequently, the operation of the peacekeeping force was extended into Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast with the breaking out of conflicts in all of those countries.

The ECOMOG became the first regional military peacekeeping group to be deployed to undertake a major peacekeeping activity in Africa and the first to collaborate with the United Nations after the cold war to address a complex emergency[4]. The ECOMOG was established in a situation where the regional body did not have the resources to launch a force which would reflect a representation of all the members of ECOWAS, so the burden of sustaining the force fell on the regional power, Nigeria, which had to provide most of the soldiers and civilian peacekeeping contingents and the resources to sustain them. The military contingent was formed without prior experience in such mission, save the

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[3] Pamella Aall (2000) explained that even though about 118 countries across the world, including many African countries, have contributed to UN peacekeeping missions since 1948, few of them had devoted significant resources to training for peacekeeping missions. Therefore, many of the West African countries who contributed to initial ECOMOG forces did not really prepare their soldiers for the scenario which they met in Liberia and other conflict zones in West Africa.

[4] In Olonisakin, F. (2011). ECOWAS: From Economic Integration to Peace-building; in Thomas Jaye, Dauda Garuba and Stella Amadi, *ECOWAS and the dynamics of Conflict and Peace-building*. Dakar: CODESRIA , pp11-27, the transformation of the ECOWAS from a body for economic integration to conflict management and peace-building is discussed in more details.

participation of some of its commanders in international peacekeeping efforts initiated by the United Nations across the world[5]. Furthermore, even if the regional body and the dominant regional power could initiate and assemble a peacekeeping contingent, they were not able to muster the resources for peace-building activities which must accompany peacekeeping and which must be sustained when armed violence subsides in a conflict zone. This responsibility therefore fell on the international humanitarian NGOs who were motivated to intervene in conflict areas of West Africa to mitigate the impending humanitarian disaster among the civilian population and initiate programmes that would ensure that the violent conflicts did not resurge and spread to other areas.

For many of the humanitarian organisations, it was the first time they were involved in humanitarian activities of large magnitude in West Africa. They were neither familiar with the conflict environment nor with the military peacekeepers that was newly formed because the United Nations was not involved at the initial stage of ECOMOG field mission. Consequently, both the military contingents and humanitarian NGOs had to learn to relate for the first time on the field and had to adjust to situations as they emerge if a successful mission would occur in the sub-region. This situation proved very difficult at the initial stage because of the varying perceptions of the two groups. Moreover, even though the international humanitarian organisations had experiences elsewhere in the world and possessed some resources to engage in humanitarian interventions in West Africa, they lacked adequate knowledge of the immediate operating environment and therefore had to engage and collaborate with local NGOs and civil society groups in implementing their activities. This also raised the problem of trust and confidence building between the local NGOs, foreign NGOs and ECOMOG military contingents, especially at a time when the military were becoming suspicious of local collaborators of the humanitarian NGOs who they thought were taking sides with the various armed groups involved in the Liberian conflicts.

Many of the international NGOs operating in other parts of the world experiencing armed conflicts also operated during the complex emergencies in Liberia, Sierra Leone and in other conflict spots in West Africa. They include the Red Cross and Red Crescent, USAID, Norwegian Refugee Council, *Medecin San Frontiers*, Action Aids, Oxfam, GTZ and many of the UN aids agencies such as UNICEF, WHO, FAO, among others. There was also a strong presence of the UNDP and the European Union in the various countries, especially at the post-conflict period. The range of activities of the humanitarian NGOs included provision of medical services for citizens of the countries in conflict and refugees, refugee camp support in form of environmental sanitation, provision of water, food and aid materials, provision of counselling services to address the trauma experienced by refugees as a result of the violent conflicts, and re-construction of infrastructures. Some NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International were involved in human rights monitoring during the various wars, campaigning against abuses of the rights of the vulnerable groups by the various warring factions and military peacekeepers. They alerted the international community of these abuses as they were happening while calling for the operators in the conflict theatres to desist from infringing on the rights of the population of the conflict zones. Specifically, some of the NGOs were monitoring the extent to which soldiers and fighters in armed groups were inflicting sexual violence on the vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly and the physically incapacitated segment of the population. They were also involved in monitoring the recruitment of child soldiers, which was a peculiar trend especially in the Liberian and Sierra Leone war[6], and with illegal exploitation and abuses of natural resources to further perpetrate the wars. The UNDP was mostly involved in capacity

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[5] Subsequently, the United Nations intervened in both the Liberian and the Sierra Leone civil wars with the establishment of the United Nations Observer Mission to Liberia (UNOMIL) and the United Nations Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Other UN peacekeeping missions took place in Cote d'voire and Guinea.

[6] It has been estimated that over 20,000 child soldiers were involved in the civil war in Liberia, while an estimated 10,000 were involved in the Sierra Leone war (Sesay, A. and O. Ismail (2003). *Civil Wars, Child Soldiers and Post Conflict Peace Building in West Africa*. Ibadan: College Press.)

building activities for the local population, for civil society groups and for local NGOs in the conflict zones as part of the peace-building activities during and after the complex emergencies with the aim of preventing a relapse back into violent conflicts.

It was easier for western countries to provide resources for peace-building activities through the international humanitarian organisations working in West Africa without involving directly in the conflicts. Many of the NGOs and UN agencies brought in materials from Europe and America, but as neutral bodies, they were not seen as representing the interests of any western power by warring parties, which to a large extent shielded the western powers who were not willing to be directly involved in the conflicts in West Africa, even though their historic intervention on the continent had been part of the root causes of the conflicts which engulfed the sub-region.[7]

3. Peculiar Conflicts involving Humanitarian NGOs and Peacekeepers in West Africa

As earlier pointed out, differing perception and ignorance of the organisational and operational procedures of each other was often at the root of frictions and misunderstanding between military peacekeepers and humanitarian NGOs during complex emergencies and peace operations in West Africa. While the military operate strictly hierarchical operational procedures, often the NGOs are less hierarchical and more flexible. In line with military tradition, soldiers follow orders strictly passed from the top in the commanding hierarchy even in peace support scenarios, but NGOs are flexible in their activities and their field staff can take initiatives to suit operations on the field without necessarily referring to their headquarters or to superior officers all the time. This situation has both advantages and disadvantages. The NGOs can mobilize resources quickly to be deployed to emergency areas to address human sufferings without unnecessary encumbrances or seeking prolonged authorisations. However, they can also demobilize quickly from a hostile environment if they think that such environment is no more conducive for their operation, thus leaving victims of emergences to fend for themselves[8]. This tends to influence the perception of military contingents that NGOs staffs are less disciplined and could not be trusted with certain information or be involved in some sensitive operations.

On the other hand, the NGOs perceive the military as too rigid and less amenable to conducting certain humanitarian services to support efforts in conflict mitigation, especially where there are critical humanitarian emergencies. Ordinarily, the performance of both contingents ought to complement each other during complex emergencies if there is effective co-ordination of efforts. NGOs could exploit its flexibility in decision making by moving swiftly to address humanitarian crises when they happen and draw the attention of the global community to where helps are needed in conflict zones, while the military could plan meticulously to mobilize equipment and soldiers to enforce peace. This initial problem of lack of co-ordination led to operational difficulties at the initial stage of peace support operations involving the ECOMOG.[9]

Other disagreements between the peacekeepers and personnel of the humanitarian NGOs were around security issues and the deployment of relief materials to victims and vulnerable groups during field operations. While the military peacekeepers were often guided by the UN and ECOWAS mandates in

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[7] See for instance Collier, P. and Hoefler, A (2001). *Greed and Grievance in Civil Wars*, US/UK: World Bank (www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers.htm) and Ekeh, P.P. (1983) *Colonialism and Social Structure: An Inaugural Lecture*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, for a more detail explanation of how the west had contributed to breaking out of civil war in Africa.

[8] Such engagements and sudden disengagements of NGOs were witnessed in Sudan, Rwanda, Somalia, Liberia and other complex emergency zones across Africa during the peak of the crises in each of those countries.

[9] Kayode Jacobs, a colonel and former battalion commander with ECOMOG described these initial difficulties between the two groups as leading to wastages and loss of resources that could have enhanced quick conclusion of initial peace operations if there had been effective coordination.

carrying out their field operations, NGOs were stimulated by humanitarian concerns to mitigate the effects of conflicts on the suffering population. Even though there were Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) for both civilian and military personnel operating in hot zones, on several occasions, these standards were breached by zealous staff and officials of NGOs in the quest to provide services to alleviate suffering of people especially in remote areas where securities were not guaranteed or where hot exchanges of fire was taking place among belligerent factions. To military officials, the non-adherence to MOSS by staff of humanitarian bodies was a sign of indiscipline, especially when casualties are recorded among them, which they believed made operation difficult for the military. On the other hand, there were also allegations of high-handedness of the military by the NGOs during such situations. In January 1998 for instance, ten Sierra Leonean aid workers working for the International Red Cross and other humanitarian bodies were arrested and detained by ECOMOG forces when they were accused of co-operating with rebel forces. There was however no evidence to substantiate the allegation by the military except that the NGO staffs were operating in forbidden areas. Eventually, the civilian NGO staff were released after official interventions.

Humanitarians working in the area of human rights monitoring also alleged on several occasions that the peacekeeping troops exhibited some excesses at road checkpoints in volatile areas in the disguise of maintaining security. They were accused of monetary extortion of the civilians, beating and manhandling of the innocents and abuse and raping of women. The military often deny involvement in these practices claiming that their men are too disciplined to engage in such practices, even though there were evidences that such incidents happen. Nevertheless, some of the commanders of the ECOMOG forces were found to be involved in illegal diamond business in concert with some rebel commanders in Sierra Leone, which nearly ruined the image of the peacekeepers[10]. There was also an accusation on a particular occassion that while they were escorting foods and relief materials meant for internally displaced persons and refugees, some ECOMOG soldiers snatched these relief materials and sold them at profits in Liberia.[11] These are some of the myriads of accusations levied by NGOs against ECOMOG personells on peace missions in West Africa.

Another sore conflict point during peace missions in West Africa was the problem of logistic sharing between the humanitarian personnel and the military. Evidently, the military had logistic superiority over the humanitarians, but sometimes, they were unwilling to share such logistics with the staff of humanitarians, even when there was urgent need for this. When they were willing, the portion of logistics allotted to the humanitarians was perceived as grossly inadequate to support the operations of the humanitarians. For instance, in the area of transportation of men and materials to emergency zones, by the time the military embark on airlifting or transporting their personnel and equipment to emergency locations for operations, there was little room to accommodate relief materials and staff of humanitarian bodies who could support in the mitigation of the effects of military operations on suffering populations. Sometimes also, when there was need to conduct emergency evacuations, the military were sometimes unable to include the staff of humanitarians who could be stranded and exposed to dangers in emergency zones. Such trends caused altercations and exchange of blames between military officials and NGO officials. Invariably, the military themselves are sometimes limited in their capacity to conduct such emergency evacuations, but NGO staffs often saw this as unwillingness by the military to support their efforts in providing humanitarian services. In-adequate or faulty communication processes further aggravated these incidents, which was common when mechanisms to provide appropriate information was yet to be established at the beginning of the various peace missions.

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[10] See *The Guardian* Newspaper, Saturday, September 9, 2000.

[11] See also Terry, F. (2002). *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 39-40. Similar incidences of hijacking of relief materials by soldiers were described in Deborah, M (1990). *Development, Relief, Aid and Creating Peace: Humanitarian Aid in Liberia's War of 1990*. Accra: KAIPTC.

The problem of information sharing was another sore conflict point between the military peacekeepers and humanitarians in West Africa, especially when it involved sensitive or classified information about operations on the field. In order to sustain operations, the military spent enormous time and energies to gather intelligence about situations in the operation theatres. Many times, however, the military were unwilling to share sensitive security information on the activities of belligerent groups and other actors in the conflict zones with NGO personnels because of its implication on operational effectiveness.   The humanitarians saw this unwillingness to share information as sometimes putting their security and those of relief materials at risk especially when they were hijacked or ambushed by armed groups which sometimes led to loss of lives of their staff. At the root of such incidents was absence of sufficient confidence building measures between the two groups, which deterred them from sharing important security information. Sometimes invariably, however, some of the information being hoarded by the military eventually got to the knowledge of the humanitarian staff who used personal channels and connections to obtain such information.[12]

Disagreement over the issue of handling child soldiers caught in the web of armed violence was a big conflict point between military peacekeepers and humanitarians in West Africa. Many soldiers of the peacekeeping contingents were killed in Liberia and Sierra Leone by child soldiers recruited and armed by belligerent armed factions. The menace of the boy soldiers were even deadlier on the vulnerable segment of the population because the boys were in the habit of decapitating the limbs of women, children and men perceived as being part of the opposition side during the war. Very often, military peacekeepers were in dilemma with regard to how to handle such children caught during cross fires. While the military would love to find quick solutions to resolve the dilemma involved in the treatment of the child soldiers, the humanitarians, especially those involved in human rights monitoring during conflicts would not want bad treatments for the children even when their menaces were becoming very dangerous to the peacekeepers. Despite the fact that several peacekeepers were killed by these deadly armed boys, the humanitarians were often at the vanguard of advocacy to extricate the boys from punishments that should follow their actions through legal instruments. This did not please military commanders who sometimes had to voice their displeasure to officials of the humanitarian bodies.

4. Strategies for Ventilating Disputes between the Military and Humanitarians during Peacekeeping Operations

The intervention of the United Nations into peacekeeping in West Africa contributed largely to conflict resolution between military contingents and humanitarian bodies. Before the UN intervention the role of military commanders in managing conflicts was very crucial. However, it was difficult for the influence of commanders to permeate down to the entire operational areas. Troop commanders also played important roles in managing such conflicts, but such influences were limited and constrained by the operational terms of reference for various military assignments. The intervention of the UN brought about the establishment and institutionalisation of humanitarian coordination meetings which took place at least once every month between ECOMOG, UNOMIL, UNAMSIL and the humanitarian representatives. Such meetings involved all heads of the major humanitarian bodies operating in the conflict zones, military commanders and UN field officials. At these meetings, important operational and security information were shared while participants brought out their grouses for settlement. Initially, the heads of humanitarians were sceptical about these meetings because of the wrong perception and misunderstanding of the intention of the military. Many of them initially thought the meeting was meant for the military to bark out orders, but as time went on, they saw the sincerity with which the UN officials and military commanders carried on at the meetings and gradually, the meeting became a forum for mutual interaction which helped in consensus building and in mending sour relationships.

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[12] Remi Aibinu, a UN field staff shared his experiences with the author in relation to this issue while he was serving on a peacekeeping mission in West Africa.

The office of Resident Humanitarian Coordinators appointed by the UN played very important and crucial role in resolving conflicts involving military peacekeepers and the humanitarians during the West African peacekeeping activities. The heads of the humanitarian organisations were encouraged to lodge complaints involving their field activities to the humanitarian coordinators. The co-ordinators facilitated meetings to discuss conflicting operational issues and provided assistance to the humanitarians in understanding the operational modes of the military. They also intervened by contacting military commanders to provide necessary assistance to the humanitarians to complement their activities in such areas as logistic supports and information sharing. They ensure that the heads of the humanitarians were involved in the regular security briefings by the military to the UN field staff and encouraged the staff of NGOs to conform with security instructions in the field while carrying out their activities.

5. Conclusion

Contemporary and future peace support operations will require high level of co-operation between military peacekeepers and humanitarian organisations on the field. Diminishing operational resources available for peacekeeping operations will necessitate the need for complementarities in the efforts of the military and humanitarian contingents to accomplish the goals of peacekeeping missions. While military activities could ensure relative stability in conflict environments and bring about negative peace, peace-building activities carried on by humanitarians will assure that conflict environments do not relapsed back into chaos. It is therefore important that in packaging peacekeeping missions, the issue of relationship management between military and civilian contingents should be factored in and considered very important at the policy level. Now that regional bodies are being involved in global peacekeeping efforts, it is important that they must follow the footsteps of the UN by establishing offices of humanitarian co-ordinators to support peacekeeping missions.

It is quite comforting that humanitarian NGOs operating in conflict zones are beginning to address some of the dilemmas they face on the field by forming a coalition to establish a code of conduct to support their operations. This effort must have been as a result of soul-searching by some of them to determine ways in which their activities have hampered peace operation efforts unknowingly. This process must be a continuous effort which must receive encouragement from the UN and other regional bodies. The activities of the humanitarians must be a stabilizing one in conflict environment rather than harming the fabric of efforts towards conflict de-escalation to provide conducive environment for peace-building activities by the military. They should strive more to understand the changes that are taking place globally towards re-orienting the military to respect the rights of civilians during field operations and provide adequate support to military peacekeepers towards accomplishing this task during peace support operations.

Author's Biography

Dr Olusola O. Isola is a Research Fellow on the Peace and Conflict Studies Program, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. He is also a Senior Fellow of the French Research Institute for Africa (IFRA). He has authored several books, monographs and articles in international journals. He has also presented papers at many local and international conferences on subjects of peace building and conflicts across four continents.

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