

The effect of Peace processes and diplomacy on Sense of belonging

Effect: Positive (ECOWAS succeeded in Sierra Leone by meeting critical needs and establishing peace, which garnered popular support and legitimacy despite challenges)

Confidence in study findings: Low (one study, low confidence)

Short Summary

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervention in the Sierra Leone civil war was widely viewed as legitimate and effective in achieving peace. The deployment of ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) troops was crucial in deterring rebel violence and establishing a secure environment. These efforts transform negative attitudes into positive ones, instill confidence, and contribute to a renewed sense of dignity, making people feel secure and connected to their nation.

Long summary

The intervention

Deployment of a peacekeeping force by the ECOWAS to Sierra Leone during the civil war (1991-2002). This force, known as the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), was tasked with restoring peace and stability in the country.

How is the intervention expected to work

ECOWAS interventions aimed to resolve conflicts through a multi-faceted approach, combining military and non-military tools. This involved deployment of troops, like ECOMOG, to establish security and deter violence, alongside extensive diplomatic efforts to negotiate peace agreements. This also encompassed addressing humanitarian needs through aid and providing economic support for recovery. To foster a sense of belonging, ECOWAS recognized diverse identities, thus promoting acceptance, and fulfilling fundamental community needs such as housing, education, and healthcare. This comprehensive strategy helped in shifting negative societal attitudes and instill confidence, hence contributing to lasting stability and a renewed sense of dignity within the affected population.

The evidence base

There is one qualitative study assessing the effect of **peace processes and diplomacy on the sense of belonging in Sierra Leone**. This study is by Touray, M. (2019). *The Role of the Economic Community of West African States in Counterinsurgency and Conflict Resolution* (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University). All references are from that study.

The evidence

Evidence for how peace processes and diplomacy impact a population's sense of belonging comes mainly from studying ECOWAS's strategic tools in Sierra Leone. The research specifically examined how these tools fostered lasting peace by addressing the community's needs for identity, security, and stability, directly influencing participants' perceptions and overall belonging

- 1) Participants highlighted how ECOWAS's interventions directly addressed material and economic needs, such as providing clothes, food, medicines, shelters, and rehabilitating schools and hospitals. This material support was seen as securing "stability and goodwill towards the organization" (p.105), which created a foundation for people to feel secure and part of a functioning community. This aligns with the broader understanding that fulfilling basic needs is crucial for sustainable peace (p.105-106).
- 2) ECOMOG's military operations against the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) were crucial in creating a more stable environment where diplomatic efforts could be effective. The presence of a robust peacekeeping force also deterred further violence and provided a sense of security.
- 3) ECOWAS/ECOMOG helped instil "a sense of recognition and acceptance of one's identity and dignity, while also addressing an understanding of others" (p.107). Participants reported gaining "peace of mind ... (and) confidence in their own country" (p.107-108) due to the interventions. They noted changes in "attitudes from negative to positive" (p.108) and a newfound hope. Programs like disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) for combatants also contributed to unifying the Sierra Leonean identity. ECOWAS's broader goal of reconciling "multiplicities of identities" (p.108-109) through capacity-building workshops further supported the outcome.
- 4) ECOWAS's role as a mediator and facilitator of peace talks between the Sierra Leone government and the RUF culminated in the signing of the Lome Peace Accord in 1999, which provided a framework for ending the conflict. The peace accord included provisions for a ceasefire, disarmament, demobilisation, and the reintegration of former combatants. The ceasefire led to a significant reduction in violence (p.104). All participants (100%) in the study affirmed their support for ECOWAS/ECOMOG, with 90% recognizing its legitimacy. This overwhelming backing stemmed from ECOWAS's commitment to fighting for Sierra Leone and its success in restoring peace, which was seen as a necessary response to the atrocities (p.127-128).

Confidence assessment

Overall confidence: Low Confidence Qualitative Study (It is unclear whether the study uses an established small n approach)