

# THE WEST AFRICAN POLICE INFORMATION SYSTEM (WAPIS) A CATALYST TO REGIONAL SECURITY INTEGRATION IN WEST AFRICA

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**Abstract:** This article examines the efforts made by three most important organizations: The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union (EU) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) in the establishment of electronic criminal databases for Law Enforcement Agencies and the consolidation of regional security integration in West Africa. The paper provides a brief background to each of the above-mentioned organizations. In addition, outlined how they have worked in collaboration over the years to make the ECOWAS region a safer place to live. Its further describes the situation of criminal data management in the region prior to the establishment of the WAPIS programme. Moreover, the paper analyzes the importance of WAPIS to the law enforcement agencies in West Africa and beyond. The article stresses on the advantages of the WAPIS Programme and concludes with some recommendations.

**Keywords:** West African; Police Information System; Regional Security Integration.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this section, we shall review the backgrounds of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, the European Union (EU) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL). We shall however end up with the Conclusion of the literature review, statement of problem and methodology used in this research work.

### **Brief background of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**

The Economic Community of West African States, also known as ECOWAS, is a regional political and economic union of fifteen countries located in West Africa. Collectively, these countries comprise an area of 5,114,162 km<sup>2</sup> (1,974,589 sq mi), and in 2015 had an estimated population of over 349 million inhabitants.

The union was established on 28 May 1975, with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos, with its stated mission to promote economic integration across the region. A revised version of the treaty was agreed and signed on 24 July 1993 in Cotonou. Considered one of the pillars of the regional blocs of the continent-wide African Economic Community (AEC), the stated goal of ECOWAS is to achieve "collective self-sufficiency" for its member states by creating a single large trade bloc by building a full economic and trading union.

ECOWAS also serves as a peacekeeping force in the region, with member states occasionally sending joint military forces to intervene in the bloc's member countries at times of political instability and unrest. In recent years, these included interventions in Liberia in 1989 and 2003, Sierra Leone in 1989, in Ivory Coast in 2003, , Guinea-Bissau in 2012, Mali in 2013, and the Gambia in 2017.

### **ECOWAS includes two sub-regional blocs:**

The West African Economic and Monetary Union (also known by its French-language acronym UEMOA) is an organization of eight, mainly French-speaking, states within the ECOWAS, which share a customs union and currency union. Established in 1994 and intended to counterbalance the dominance of English-speaking economies in the bloc (such as Nigeria and Ghana), members of UEMOA are mostly former territories of French West Africa. The currency they all use is the CFA franc, which is pegged to the euro.

The West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ), established in 2000, comprises six mainly English-speaking countries within ECOWAS, which plan to work towards adopting their own common currency, the eco.

In addition, ECOWAS includes the following Institutions: ECOWAS Commission, Community Court of Justice, Community Parliament, ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), West African Health Organization (WAHO), The Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing in West Africa (GIABA).

ECOWAS operates in three co-official languages—French, English, and Portuguese, and consists of two institutions to implement policies: the ECOWAS Commission and the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), formerly known as the Fund for Cooperation until it was renamed in 2001. In 1976, Cape Verde joined ECOWAS, and in December 2000, Mauritania withdrew, having announced its intention to do so in December 1999.

In 2011, ECOWAS adopted its development blueprint for the next decade. Vision 2020, and, to accompany it, a Policy on Science and Technology (ECOPOST).

As of February 2017, ECOWAS has 15 member states; eight of these are French speaking, five are English-speaking, and two Portuguese-speaking. All current members joined the community as founding members in May 1975, except Cape Verde, which joined in 1977. The only former member of ECOWAS is Arabic-speaking Mauritania, which was also one of the founding members in 1975 and decided to withdraw in December 2000. Mauritania recently signed a new associate-membership agreement in August 2017. Morocco officially requested to join ECOWAS in February 2017. The application was endorsed at the summit of heads of state in June 2017.

### **Brief background of European Union**

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 28 member states that are located primarily in Europe. It has an area of 4,475,757 km<sup>2</sup> (1,728,099 sq mi) and an estimated population of about 513 million. The EU has developed an internal single market through a standardized system of laws that apply in all member states in those matters, and only those matters, where members have agreed to act as one. EU policies aim to ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the internal market, enact legislation in justice and home affairs and maintain common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries and regional development for travel within the Schengen Area, passport controls have been abolished. A monetary union was established in 1999, came into full force in 2002, and is composed of 19 EU member states, which use the euro currency.

The EU and European citizenship were established when the Maastricht Treaty came into force in 1993. The EU traces its origins to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC), established, respectively, by the 1951 Treaty of Paris and 1957 Treaty of Rome. The original members of what came to be known as the European Communities were the Inner Six : Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany. The Communities and their successors have grown in size by the accession of new member states and in power by the addition of policy areas to their remit. The latest major amendment to the constitutional basis of the EU, the Treaty of Lisbon, came into force in 2009. No member state has left the EU or its antecedent organizations. (Greenland, an autonomous country within Denmark, left the Communities in 1985). However, the United Kingdom signified its intention to leave after a membership referendum in June 2016. In 2019, the UK official left the European Union.

Containing 7.3% of the world population, the EU in 2017 generated a nominal gross domestic product (GDP) of 19.670 trillion US dollars, constituting approximately 24.6% of global nominal GDP. Additionally, all 28 now 27 EU countries have a very high Human Development Index, according to the United Nations Development Programme. In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Through the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the EU has developed a role in

external relations and defence. The union maintains permanent diplomatic missions throughout the world and represents itself at the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the G7 and the G20. Because of its global influence, the European Union was described in 2006 as an emerging superpower.

### **Brief background of INTERPOL**

The International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO-INTERPOL; French: Organization internationale de police criminelle), more commonly known as INTERPOL is an international organization that facilitates worldwide police cooperation and crime control. Headquartered in Lyon, France, it was founded in 1923 as the International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC); the name INTERPOL served as the agency's telegraphic address in 1946, and was chosen as its common name in 1956.

INTERPOL provides investigative support, expertise, and training to law enforcement worldwide in battling three major areas of transnational crime: terrorism, cybercrime, and organized crime. Its broad mandate covers virtually every kind of crime, including crimes against humanity, child pornography, drug trafficking and production, political corruption, copyright infringement, and white-collar crime. The agency also helps coordinate cooperation among the world's law enforcement institutions through criminal databases and communications networks.

INTERPOL has an annual budget of over €113 million, most of which is provided through annual contributions by its membership of police forces in 194 countries. Its day-to-day operations are carried out by the General Secretariat, which is staffed by both police and civilians and led by the Secretary General, currently Mr. Jürgen Stock, former deputy head of Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office. As of 2013, the General Secretariat employed a staff of over 756, representing 100 member countries. The General Assembly, composed of all member countries, is the governing body, electing the Executive Committee and its President currently is Kim Jong Yang of South Korea who supervises the implementation of INTERPOL's policies and administration.

INTERPOL seeks to remain as politically neutral as possible so as to fulfill its mandate; hence its charter bars the organization from undertaking interventions or activities of a political, military, religious, or racial nature or involving itself in disputes over such matters.

### **Conclusion of the Literature Review, Statement of Problem and Methodology used in this Research Work.**

This research work adopts the functionalist theory, the choice of functionalism in this research is borne out of the fact that the subject under review is predicated on Regional Security Integration, and functionalist theory can best explain the concept of regionalism. The research work attempts to examine and analyze efforts made by the regional bodies ECOWAS and the European Union and the global police organization, INTERPOL in an attempt to bring together the security and law enforcement agencies in the region together with a view to put in place a mechanism to fight criminality and insecurity in West Africa. As postulated by regional integration theorists, "individual nation-states adopt integrative behavior because of expectations of joint and natural reward or penalties". This assertion is very true in functionalist theory, hence the need to adopt it in this research work. The absence of electronic criminal databases that is interconnected at national and regional levels respectively was a very big gap in the fight against all forms of transnational crime in West Africa. However, It is on this backdrop that the problem of this research is stated as follows: That criminals tend to run away from developed countries with well-established Security networks and found West Africa a safe haven. Because of the fact that the criminal files in West Africa are in hard copies, which is difficult to be shared among the Law Enforcement Agencies. This is so because, the West African Countries have not been able to have a common security platform to pro-actively protect their societies by sharing criminal data among themselves. It is upon this background that this work set out to assess the role of WAPIS in filling this security gap among the West African countries. Due to the peculiar nature of this study, the research design adopted is the descriptive survey design where information were collected and collated. This implies that historical and descriptive method was used. This study also adopted a qualitative investigative approach. This approach involved the use of scientific literature. The literature is not intended to provide a priori theories that could be tested, but rather to stimulate fruitful guiding questions. This is done by the extensive use of secondary sources. Data were collected from textbooks, journals, official publications. Others are policy documents. These include ECOWAS library in Abuja. While some materials were gotten in hard copy, others were gotten via website. The reason why the researcher visited the library is to gather up-to-date relevant materials on the topic under review.

### Situation of criminal data management and the trend of Crime

In the last decade, West Africa has found itself caught in some of the world's major criminal/ terrorist phenomena, which include cocaine trafficking, trans-Saharan terrorist activity, South-North human trafficking, vehicle theft and arms trafficking. Yet, the region is striving to pursue its development under the umbrella of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), that is working towards the creation of a free movement zone, an initiative that is a central component of the region's integration and development strategy.

In this complex context of threatened development, it is important for the law enforcement authorities across West Africa to efficiently cooperate with each other and with the European and global law enforcement community. One key element in building this capacity is the ability of the law enforcement agencies to electronically collect, store, analyze and share critical data, including on wanted persons, drug trafficking, stolen and lost travel documents, stolen motor vehicles and firearms. Without this basic law enforcement tool, efficiently combating maritime crime, trans-border criminal networks and terrorism is unrealistic.

In 2005, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) agreed on a protocol for the establishment of a Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Bureau (CIIB) in order to support ECOWAS Member States in their fight against transnational organized crime. In 2010, during a symposium in Brussels jointly organized by INTERPOL and the Belgian Presidency of the European Union, the West African Chiefs of Police declared that, in order to meet the challenges faced by the region, countries needed an automated police information system connected at both regional and global levels.

### THE FILING SYSTEM BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE WAPIS PROGRAMME IN WEST AFRICA



### SENSITIVE DATA IN PAPER FILES





## PROCESSESSING OF CRIMINAL DATA



Following this common position, the European Union decided to grant funding to INTERPOL for the development and implementation of a police information system for ECOWAS member states and Mauritania. The WAPIS Programme was born.

The WAPIS Programme aims at building this capacity. Its aim is to create centralized police databases at national level in each of the 16 West African countries and to link them together in a regional data-sharing platform under the aegis of ECOWAS. Mauritania despite not being a member of ECOWAS is invited to join the Programme. The WAPIS Programme will thus allow for the routinely creation of electronic criminal data, a part of the pilot countries: Benin, Ghana, Mali and Niger there is virtually none in the remaining West African countries with capacity of sharing electronic criminal data.

The development of West African States depends on the ability of the region's law enforcement agencies to commonly and efficiently address its major security threats. The national and regional police infrastructure being develop by the WAPIS Programme is a key element to developing this capacity.

## PHASES OF THE WAPIS PROGRAMME

The first phase of the WAPIS Programme started from September 2012 to September 2013, and was devoted to scoping, training and planning of the WAPIS Programme, in which several consultative meetings/ workshops were held in Member States, the Programme started its field implementation in October 2013 under the funding of instrument for stability. As of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015, the second phase of the Programme had achieved the following.

- Facilitated the creation of WAPIS National Committee for inter- agency cooperation in the four pilot countries (Benin, Ghana Mali and Niger);
- Procured, installed and provided training for the digitization and field-based insertion of paper-based police data into an electronic system for the purpose of data preservation and future insertion into national WAPIS database;
- Defined the technical specifications for and developed the software of the national WAPIS databases.
- Ensured support of and partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

By October 2015, the WAPIS Programme had further achieved:

- The setting up of the WAPIS data centers in the four pilot countries;
- Provided training including on personal data protection and installed the national WAPIS databases in the four pilot countries:
- Inaugurate the national WAPIS database in Accra, Bamako, Cotonou and Niamey.
- Setup the WAPIS Strategic Orientation Committee

## International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 7, Issue 4, pp: (16-28), Month: July - August 2020, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

The second phase of the WAPIS Programme was funded under the TRUST FUND, and established national police databases in four pilot countries in order to develop an implementation strategy for full roll-out of the Programme in the region's 15+1 States. Following the upcoming completion of this proof of concept phase, the third phase of the WAPIS Programme will:

1. Consolidate and expand the use of the national police databases created in the four pilot countries;
2. Create similar national police databases in the eleven other ECOWAS Member States, by providing the legal, operational and technical support and training;
3. Develop and establish, in cooperation with ECOWAS and its Member States, the regional police data-sharing platform, including through the provision of legal, operational and technical support and training;
4. Foster ownership of the WAPIS infrastructure at national and regional levels and hand it over to national authorities and the ECOWAS Commission.

In light of the above, it is clear that the third phase of the WAPIS Programme is the core of the Program's implementation. Once completed it is expected that:

1. ECOWAS Member States will increase their capacity to collect, centralize, manage, share and analyze its police data;
2. ECOWAS Member States will increase their capacity to exchange their police data within the region and beyond;
3. ECOWAS would have acquired a better understanding of criminal and terrorist threats affecting the region;
4. The West African law enforcement community would be better connected to the global law enforcement community through enhanced global information sharing.

It should be noted that on the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2017, INTERPOL hosted representatives of Law Enforcement Agencies from the following countries in West Africa: Cote d' Ivoire, Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal at its Headquarters in Lyon. The objectives of the meeting was to further brief them on the IT infrastructure used by Interpol in sharing criminal data and for them to agree on which platform they wish to use for the WAPIS programme.

Further to the above, the meeting of the ECOWAS Experts, extended to Mauritania, on the West African Police Information System (WAPIS) was held in Abidjan, Republic of Cote d' Ivoire, from 20 to 21 April 2017, to discuss and endorse the future implementation, by INTERPOL, of the third phase of the WAPIS Project in West Africa. Under the Regional Indicative Programme/11<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund (RIP/11<sup>th</sup> EDF). Representatives of the Police and Gendermerie attended this meeting from the region. Also in attendance were representatives from the ECOWAS Commission, UEMOA Commission, European Union and INTERPOL. However, a report was done and signed by the chair of the meeting which was presented to the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council for endorsement. This important meeting therefore, initiated the process leading to the signature of the Funding Agreement between the European Commission and the ECOWAS Commission, which took place in July 2017, which allow the Programme to launch its third phase in October 2017 from INTERPOL Regional Bureau for West Africa in Abidjan.

### Countries included in the WAPIS Scope

As of today, WAPIS is intended to be deployed in the 15 ECOWAS countries plus Mauritania. For Phase 2 WAPIS focused exclusively on four pilot countries: Benin, Ghana, Mali and Niger. Phase 3 will also include the 11 other ECOWAS member States. WAPIS will then be updated according to the return of experience of the pilot phase and then roll out to the other 11 countries of ECOWAS during Phase 3. Phase 3 will also set up the Regional WAPIS to its full coverage with data fed by countries as soon as the required infrastructure will be set up and available. In a situation where other African countries would be interested in WAPIS approach, their adoption of this programmatic approach could be considered afterwards or in a parallel programme based on an appropriate political dialogue to be developed with INTERPOL and the EU. Chad is already implementing a WAPIS like system funded by EU and implemented by INTERPOL.

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Vol. 7, Issue 4, pp: (16-28), Month: July - August 2020, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

### Member States involve in the WAPIS programme, official languages and their capital cities

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

### Theoretical Framework: Functionalist theory

According to Sheriff and Nwokedi (2016) in their book “Regional Integration in Africa and beyond”, functionalist theory and neo-functionalism are both off-shoot of the school of liberalism. Liberalism allows for free trade, cooperation and interdependence among nations for its incalculable benefits, and give no formal conditions for regional integration. The functionalist emphasize more on the technical or functional collaboration cutting across international frontiers and the challenges of democratic political institutions as a result of growing complexity of the task facing them. The technician is favored more than political actors in functionalist approach. Functionalism, therefore, is based on the proposition that National loyalties can be diffused and redirected into a framework for international cooperation in place of national competition and war. Fabian socialism at the international scale is an indication of functionalism. It further argued that the growing importance of welfare demand upon the state and given its adequacy to solve many problems due to the interdependent nature at the modern world means that the answer lies in international organizations.

The proponents of the functionalist theory are : David Mitrany. Karl Duetsch, Donald Puchala, Amitan Etzioni etc ( Mitrany, 1966). Mitrany was one of the earliest writers on functionalism and the interactive process. He wrote during the inter-war period that : “The growing complexity of the governmental system had increased greatly the essentially technical, non- political task facing government”. He further stressed that:

*Demand for highly trained specialist at the national level also contributes to essentially technical problems at the international level whose solution lies in the collaboration among technicians rather than political elites ( Mitrany, 1966).*

Mitrany talked about the doctrine of ramification whereby the development of collaboration in one field leads to collaboration in other technical fields. Functional collaboration in one sector results from felt need and generates a felt need for functional collaboration in another sector. For better exemplification, it is considerable, the effort by nation-states to create a common market, giving rise to pressure for further collaboration on pricing, investment, transport, insurance, tax, wage, social security, banking and monetary policies ( Mitrany, 1966). Functionalism is opposed to realist theory, which emphasizes on competition and conflict as a principal or dominant “gradual creation of a transnational way of economic and social organization should be geared towards remolding of attitude and allegiances to make the mass of the people more amenable to international integration.

Functionalism, for Mitrany (1966), is reconcilable with democratic liberal philosophy, which leaves the individuals free to enter into a variety of relationships such as religious, political, professional, social and cultural. Including international range, functionalism is therefore, “linked to the conceptualization of global politics based upon growing levels of interdependence among actors whose interest and activities are not coincidental with state frontiers” ( Nduba. 1998).

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Amitan Etzioni, on his own part, conceives integration as a condition for political unification. Unification strengthens or increases the bond among the units which form a system. Functionalism is related inextricably to the growth of non-state actors with transnational relationships that by definition lies often outside the traditional purview of the national state. Charles Pentland is of the opinion that: "International political integration is frequently identified with the circumvention, reduction or abolition of sovereign power of modern nation-state" ( Nduba). While Donald Puchala, another prominent regional integration theorist views integration as:

*A set of process that produce system at the international level that is an "international system wherein actors find it possible consistently to harmonize their interest, compromise their differences and reap mutual rewards from their interactions (Puchala: 1971).*

Karl W. Deutsch, one of the leading writers of political integration refers to regional integration as a process that may lead to condition which a group of people has "attained within a territory. A sense of community and institutions and practices strong enough and wide spread enough to assure, for a long dependable expectations of peaceful change among its population" ( Nduba, 1998).

By this, integration can create a feeling of identity and self-awareness. From the foregoing, writers of regional integration are concerned with the process by which loyalty is shifted from one center to a more overwhelming and all-encompassing center. They stress the importance of communication. Deutsch points out that the kind of sense of community that is relevant for regional integration is:

*Turned out to be rather a matter of mutual sympathy and loyalties of we feeling: trust and mutual consideration: of partial identification in terms of self-images and interest: of mutual successful predictions of behavior ...In short, a matter of a perpetual dynamic process of mutual attention, communication, perception of needs and responsiveness in the process of decision making ( Deutsch: 1968).*

Furthermore, regional integration theorists are unanimous in the agreement that individual nation-states adopt integrative behavior because of expectations of joint and natural reward or penalties. It also follows, that the success of regional integration depends on the ability of the nation-states to internalize the integrative process. However, early functionalism has been accused of separating economic and social tasks from the political. So far, nation-states have repeatedly shown unwillingness to handover their sovereign power and right to the international authorities no matter the gains in regional integration. Contrary to their postulation that certain economic and social tasks can cause spillover into political sectors, empirical experiences have not confirmed that. Functionalists failed to appreciate functional integration in economic and social sectors as necessary launching pads to political integration. In the end, functionalism as a means of ensuring regionalism seems Utopian to be believable ( Nduba, 1998).

Like any other theory, the functionalist school also suffered criticism. Starting with John Pinder, who rejected the dominance of the contemporary behaviorist views of industrial society and welfarism in the functional model ( Pinder, 1986).

*The assumption that an unelected body such as the European commission will readily overcome opposition to integration process to members units and also the under estimation of states ability "to stop or to slow down the building of a central political system" and the national civil servants "to resist the transfer of power to the new central one" (Stanley, 1982).*

More so, the assumption of the functionalist school of continuum between the economics and political sectors of state-allowing functionalist integration to spill over. From welfare area into the domain of Gross politics in an automatic fashion, and eventually bring forth a new regional unit raises a lot of questions about the possibility of political integration made possible by the indirect generation of politics by way of the economics.

Furthermore, the arguments put forward by the functionalist school are considered in some quarters as Euro-Centric because of its European setting, and because of this, it is considered by many as being almost irrelevant to integration process in less developed countries ( Adetula, 1996:14). The idea is that the politic of integration can be better understood within the framework of a theory designed to fit conditions in those regions ( Avline, 1977).



Nevertheless, this research work adopts the functionalist theory, the choice of functionalism in this research is borne out of the fact that the subject under review is predicated on Regional Security Integration, and functionalist theory can best explain the concept of regionalism. The research work attempts to examine and analyze efforts made by the regional body ECOWAS and INTERPOL with a view to combine the efforts of the security and law enforcement apparatus in the region together in an attempt to put in place a mechanism for the fight against crime and insecurity in West Africa. In doing so, INTERPOL and ECOWAS engage the security agencies in the member States to work as a single unit in the fight against insecurity and transnational organized criminal activities. As postulated by regional integration theorists, “individual nation-states adopt integrative behavior because of expectations of joint and natural reward or penalties”. This assertion is very true in functionalist theory, hence the need to adopt it in this research work.

## 2. DISCUSSIONS

### **The Importance of West African Police Information System in the fight against cross border offences**

West African police is lacking modern ways to collect, centralize, share and analyze crucial police information related to crime, especially serious organized crime and drug trafficking. As of today, in sub-Saharan Africa, only two countries have developed a national centralized police information database. The first one is South Africa. The second one is Benin that has begun to deploy such a system with the support of French technical cooperation. Because no African region has developed a regional police data center, the East African Police Chiefs’ Committee called for the creation of AFRIPOL like the EUROPOL but for Africa.

The outcome is a situation where criminal information as the key element of efficient modern policing is not properly exchanged and certainly not in a coordinated and sustainable way. Therefore police organizations penalized by the lack of crucial information cannot act in an effective way at a national level or together in a coordinated manner against the threats arising from crime, terrorism etc. Poor basic police and limited customs tools appear to be the rule in the region.

It is worth noting that in 2012;

- (i) the number of criminal records of West Africa only represents 0.035% of the data available in the INTERPOL system,
- (ii) the number of searches originating from West Africa only represents 0.53% of the total number of searches and (iii) the number of Red Notices for wanted persons in West Africa represents 88 on a total of 30.400, meaning 0.03% of all the Red Notices published in the world.

In the meantime, the region counts close to 400 million inhabitants representing 5% of the world population. This means that the region is at a level ten times below the world average in the fields of criminal information and police cooperation. The mandate received by INTERPOL consists in setting up the correct foundation for efficient police information systems guaranteeing how to collect, centralize (inside and outside any individual country), share, and analyze police information. Not acting today could cause inefficient police work for the coming years when all police and judicial records or evidence would have disappeared. Thus it is crucial to start the creation of a regional police data system focused first on Sahel (Mali, Mauritania and Niger) and two more advanced countries in data collection and protection (Benin, Ghana) through ECOWAS (depository level of the police data regional hub).

The WAPIS project is being deployed as an answer to the needs expressed by the West African countries. It is implemented through the cooperation agreement signed between ECOWAS and INTERPOL in accordance with the political support of the ECOWAS Ministers determination in 2012 as well as 2013. The CIIB (Criminal Intelligence and Investigation Bureau) framework signed by the ECOWAS member States and pilot countries is also taken into account by the WAPIS deployment.

### **The programme expectations In West African sub-region**

WAPIS will allow West African police officers in their daily work ranging from arrests and searches through investigation to regular checks at border crossing points (BCPs) — to obtain useful information about people, vehicles and identity documents. Those requests will also be enriched with INTERPOL’s 194-member States contribution and thus will help the police to better protect the people of the whole region and be the perfect counter measure to free movement of people and things in West Africa under the ECOWAS leadership. The programme also covers the following areas.

**For the European Union**

Sharing police information will provide greater awareness of criminal activities in the region and allow greater responsiveness to crime originating in or coming through West Africa, thus also contributing to security beyond the region, including within the European Union. It will also provide clear idea to the European Union on policy formulation and support to the region's law enforcement agencies to tackle the menace.

**In the world**

Organized crime and terrorism exploit weak links globally. West Africa has become a hub for crimes such as drug and human trafficking as well as terrorism. WAPIS will enable police to tackle these threats in a more effective and structured manner. This would fill the security gap the region currently presents to the world.

**The Impact of the West African Police Information System on policing in West Africa.**

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

**Programme scope and limitations**

The programme focuses on criminal information exchange within the region among law enforcement agencies. One of the national WAPIS administrators could grant the access (only for consultation and no data entry) to other profiles (for example a judge, a prosecutor, etc.) In such a case, the access would be granted under the complete responsibility of the country that would be accountable for enforcing the security and protection of personal data policies of the system. During the pilot phase, it is recommended to set up the DACORE center in a central location with phone communication capability even with remote sites. Each country shall decide according to the available capacity, if the system could be deployed and operated automatically from a remote location.

**Operational and strategic analysis**

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

**Investigation files management**

The WAPIS system is designed to offer only search services on police data related to criminal events and administrative data to facilitate the police work. The system will register cases with limited data such as offence type, date, location, individuals and other entities. The case will be the prime mandatory data to be registered in the system to which all the other entities will be linked. No entity (such as a person, or a vehicle, etc.) can be registered within WAPIS without a case reference number.

**Reporting and data analysis tools**

WAPIS will integrate a reporting tool. This tool will enable the production of reports based on operational data. It will be available on both national and regional levels according to the phase implementation. The analysis of such reports will

contribute to the development of a regional crime picture. This will be beneficial to the ECOWAS Commission especially when formulating policies on regional security matters. It will also guide the policy makers on the need assessment for capacity building for the region's Law Enforcement Agencies.

### **Legal framework requirements**

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

#### **To define and implement the operating framework of the WANACO**

The purpose of the WANACO will be to set up and monitor the mission of the DACORE within the country. It will be composed of all national agencies that contribute to the national public security. In addition, the WANACO is the entity responsible for setting up the National WAPIS System (including the DACORE) within the countries.

If the purpose of the WANACO is the same for every country, it will be up to each country to define on a national level both the governance and the organization including the number and designation of the staff members, their prerogatives as well as their relationship with the police and national security agencies. Each country will also have to determine a yearly budget requirement for the functioning of the WANACO and provide the funds.

#### **To issue and enforce the decree creating the DACORE**

The DACORE center is the national body that will operate the WAPIS system in cooperation with the national agencies involved, the NCBs, and the regional level. Each country will have to define and set up its own DACORE (except for Benin that has one already). The point of the national regulation that needs to be issued is to determine precisely the missions, the governance and organization, the staffing and the future interactions of the DACORE with the other national law enforcement actors. A yearly budget requirement will also have to be established and funded by the country to guarantee WAPIS sustainability.

### **WAPIS National System**

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

In the future, officers shall be able to search police data during a control session (known / with a notice) through dedicated workstations. Until the system is fully operational, it is acceptable to use a specific call center located within the Data Collection and Registration (DACORE). The DACORE Center is the name given to the country body in charge of collecting and processing the police data for all police and security services and operating the database. The technology should be installed in a location considering the security, access to i24/7 INTERPOL and moreover, the proximity with the current files location. As a grouping of the different national police forces representations, it acts as a coordination institution between national services and forces. The system shall be ready to integrate other data sources like national identity databases and Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) or vehicles plates. The WAPIS national services could be structured in order to include the NCBs or be physically closely located.

### **The regional level**

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

## International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 7, Issue 4, pp: (16-28), Month: July - August 2020, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

### The INTERPOL Regional Bureau

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

### Challenges in the Implementation of the WAPIS Programme

#### At the level of Interpol General Secretariat: Management and administrative challenges

- Framework agreement in IT procurement ( purchase order ) often delayed
- Institutional culture, moving away from typical police culture to project oriented management
- Recruitment issues revolving the culture of INTERPOL often delayed
- Inadequate geopolitical understanding by the previous programme managers vis a vis the regional- political dynamics
- Healthy mix, no suitable combination of Westerners and West Africans in the implementation of the WAPIS Programme

#### At the Level of Interpol Special Representative to the EU in Brussels

- The project originated from the office of INTERPOL Special representative to the European Union and setting the context for implementation of the WAPIS programme was mainly based on informal arrangement between the office of INTERPOL Special Representative to the European Union and the ECOWAS Commission

#### At the Regional level ECOWAS Commission

- The WAPIS programme was initiated at the ECOWAS Commission on ad hoc basis without due process of the ECOWAS Commission's protocol.

#### At the level of the pilot countries – field officers

- Lack of legal status for the implementation of the WAPIS programme in the pilot countries
- Inadequate logistics
- No incentive for the local staff
- Problem of coordination among the Law Enforcement Agencies in the pilot countries
- Lack of information sharing culture among the Law Enforcement Agencies
- Lack of personnel to work in the Data Collection and Registration Centre
- Absence of Personal Data Protection Law in most of the beneficiary countries
- Frequent changes of focal points and WAPIS local staff
- Challenges in customs clearance of WAPIS donated equipment
- Inadequate support to the country officers by the pilot countries

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

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



#### 4. CONCLUSION

Transnational organized crime and terrorism and the fear they create have taken a huge toll on the citizens of most of the countries in the region, causing significant property damage, displacing thousands of people across the region, causing schools to close, and damaging medical infrastructure. The phenomena have proved to us that no single country in our region today is immune from the scourge of cross-border offences, and therefore no one country can fight them alone. However, in 2010, chiefs of police from countries in West Africa were quick enough to accept the fact that collective security is the way forward to address the main security challenges in West Africa. The absence of electronic criminal databases that is inter-connected at both the national and regional level is a recipe for organize criminality to triumph in the region. Therefore, in order to suppress the menace, there was a need for West Africa to convert her paper files into electronic format. With this roadmap in mind, the chiefs of Police wasted no time to approach INTERPOL for the creation of an electronic criminal database for the Law Enforcement Agencies in West Africa. INTERPOL in turn approached the European Union for funding. Graciously, the European Union accepted to fund the establishment of an electronic criminal database for the region, which is known as the West African Police Information System-WAPIS.

The establishment of a criminal database that is inter-connected at national and regional level is believe to be a catalyst to regional security integration in West Africa and beyond, it is also expected to be a marshal plan in the fight against all forms of trans-national organize crime in the region. It is hoped that when the WAPIS Programme is fully implemented, it will fill the gaps in the security system in West Africa with a huge sense of regional security integration.

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