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Fragility, Violence and Criminality in the Gulf of Guinea

Rapid literature review
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About this report

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Key websites

- AFRICOM: <http://www.africom.mil/>
- AIRCOP: <https://www.unodc.org/ropan/en/BorderControl/AIRCOP/aircop.html>
- ECOWAS: <http://www.ecowas.int/>
- IMB: <https://icc-ccs.org/icc/imb>
- IMO: <http://www.imo.org/en/Pages/Default.aspx>
- OBP: <http://oceansbeyondpiracy.org/>
- OCIMF: <http://www.ocimf.org/>
- MTISCG-GoG: <http://www.mtiscg-gog.org/>
- SEACOP: <http://www.cocaineroute.eu/projects/seacop/>
- UNODC (West and Central Africa): <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/index.html>
- UNOWA: <http://unowa.unmissions.org/>

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Executive summary

Maritime security has become a key issue in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) following the increasing number of attacks off Nigeria's coast and spillover along the West African coast. While the GoG geographically stretches along 6000 km of coast from Senegal to Angola, this report focuses mostly on West Africa and in particular on the Nigeria/Cameroon axis and their West African neighbours, the area where the concentration of violence is the highest.¹ This report analyses the causes, dynamics and responses to **maritime security issues** in the region including piracy, oil bunkering, armed robbery at sea, oil spills and environmental damage, and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Illegal trafficking of arms, drugs and persons are analysed as issues interrelated in complex ways with maritime security problems.

Geostrategic stakes are high as the GoG is rich in both oil and gas, and is a major international trade route. In 2011, oil supply from the region² was equivalent to 40% of the 27 European Union (EU) member states supply, and 29% of total US petroleum consumption (Chatham House 2013, p. 1). Whilst oil wealth in the context of weak governance and under-development is creating tensions leading to criminality and violence, these geostrategic stakes provide incentives for national, regional and international actors to seek solutions.

Violence in the region is particularly concentrated in three areas:

- the Niger Delta
- the Bakassi peninsula
- the West African coast: from Nigeria to Cote d'Ivoire.

The Niger Delta appears to be the epicentre of violence from which criminality and violence is radiating to Nigeria's neighbours. Most criminal groups involved in piracy and oil bunkering throughout the region appear to be from the Niger Delta or are closely working with actors there. Nigeria is thus considered to be both the source and the solution to the problem.

A review of the literature on maritime security in the GoG shows that the many actors involved in, and enabling, criminality maintain complex relationships: militant groups demanding a greater share of oil wealth; transnational criminal groups who operate along the coast and in connection with global criminal networks; the local and national elite, state officials, and police and military officers who collude with these groups; oil companies and their employees.

The main structural **causes** driving maritime insecurity are very much related to the fragility of GoG states: weak governance and corruption, economic and socio-political exclusion, unemployment, and the centrality of oil in their economy. These factors interact with proximate causes such as weak law enforcement, transnational trafficking, environmental degradation, IUU fishing, etc. Further triggers are political crises and new oil discoveries along the coast. The analysis of the interactions between these different factors shows the self-reinforcing nexus between state fragility, criminality and violence. The nexus is particularly strong in the Niger Delta.

National, regional and international **responses** to tackle maritime security issues seek mainly to build the very weak law enforcement capacities of GoG states. Capacity building aims to enable states to react to piracy and armed robberies at sea by improving the patrolling and surveillance of their territorial waters,

¹ The West African part of the GoG includes Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, and Senegal.

² Including West and Central Africa.

as well as to arrest and prosecute criminals. The emphasis is also on developing regional cooperation and coordination among GoG countries to tackle the regionalised nature of maritime insecurity. However, this response tends to focus on the symptoms of maritime insecurity, leaving aside the root causes that created the incentives for actors to get involved in criminal activities. The maritime security agenda of the GoG tends to be driven by international partners protecting their oil and economic interests in the region. Their response is thus more security-oriented than connected with the challenges and needs of coastal communities.

Recommendations from the literature still include improving the law enforcement capacities of GoG states. The development of regional cooperation between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) is also one of the core recommendations. However, most analyses highlight that solutions to maritime insecurity have to take into account the root causes of the problem and therefore address governance and development problems on-shore. Programmes targeting these issues should not only involve national and international actors but also private actors and CSOs. CSOs in particular have been neglected and should be involved to bring bottom-up perspectives. Another key recommendation is that GoG countries should be driving the agenda on maritime security, and should clearly define their priorities and needs.

The literature base and gaps in the literature

This report reviews recent literature on maritime security in the GoG. It also includes literature on oil governance in West Africa, and on security, development and governance in the Niger Delta, which is presented as the origin of maritime security issues. The report reviews literature from academia, think tanks, and practitioners. The evidence is mostly based on qualitative research, largely interviews, document analyses and literature reviews.

The literature reviewed shows **significant gaps in research**, probably due to the fact that maritime security in the GoG is a recent problem. Moreover, the GoG region as defined in this literature is not a geographical entity that has often been studied. The main gaps are the following:

- The literature focuses on the geographical zone around Nigeria/Cameroon/Benin/Togo/Ghana, which is the most affected area, and as a result largely ignores **the secondary piracy 'hot spot'** around Guinea/Sierra Leone. An explanation could be that this area does not seem relevant compared to the concentration of violence in the main 'hot spot'. Further research is needed to understand if similar dynamics and causes of criminality and violence are affecting the two areas, and if criminal actors have or could develop connections.
- The links between maritime security issues and trafficking such as **narcotics, small arms and light weapons (SALW) and human trafficking** is not thoroughly researched or well-understood. The literature on maritime security in the GoG gives very little attention to transnational trafficking as the two problems appear to be approached as distinct issues with very different solutions. Conversely, trafficking is considered a more land-based issue (expert comment: Onuoha).
- There are very few attempts in the literature to identify the **capacities for peace and resilience** of local communities in the context of maritime insecurity. It focuses mostly on the problem, causes and potential (mostly security/military) responses.
- The literature does not analyse the action of **civil society organisations (CSOs)**.

- The literature on maritime security does not engage substantially with the debates on **oil industry governance** in West African countries, which is considered a core dimension of the problem.

1. Concentration of violence and criminality

1.1 The Niger Delta

The Niger Delta has been plagued by a conflict that arose in the early 1990s³ between a number of minority ethnic groups on the one side; and foreign oil companies and the Nigerian government on the other. The Niger Delta has thus been a theatre of oil theft, pipeline vandalism, and kidnappings for a long time. Violence escalated during the peak of the insurgency between 2006 and 2009, in particular in the states of Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers (International Crisis Group (ICG) 2012, p. 1; Market Development in the Niger Delta (MADE) 2013, p. 17). In spite of the amnesty granted by the Nigerian government to all Niger Delta militants in 2009, the scale of violence and criminality has, according to Chatham House (2013, p. 11), ‘grown beyond recognition as thousands of demobilised militants have turned to crime as a source of income’. However, while ongoing violence and criminality in the Niger Delta is consensually acknowledged, several analyses argue that violence in the Niger Delta has decreased since the beginning of the amnesty programme⁴ (Onuoha 2013, p. 276; UNODC 2013, p. 52). Illustratively, a DFID-commissioned analysis argues that the overall rate of violent events in the Niger Delta is relatively low which ‘challenges the popular narrative of the Delta as a region locked in chronically violent dysfunction’; and implies that this narrative could be used to legitimise military interventions by political and economic stakeholders (MADE 2013, p. 12). ICG (2012, p. 10) offers a middle-ground view by explaining that while attacks on oil installations and kidnapping of expatriated workers have fallen thanks to the amnesty programme, it has failed to decrease violence and criminality.

During the conflict, various militias demanding a better share of the wealth from oil production have emerged and engaged in a ‘campaign of theft and sabotage to undermine the oil industry’ (UNODC 2013, p. 45). As a result, oil production was cut by one-third, while bunkering led to USD\$1 billion revenue for the criminals each year (UNODC 2013, p. 45). This pattern of criminality, even if increasingly disconnected from political demands, has carried on with criminal groups attracted by the concentration of industries both on-shore and off-shore extracting oil and natural gas (ICG 2012, p. 6; p.10; Newsom 2011, p. 2). Criminality is particularly strong around Nembe in Bayelsa state and in the Delta’s waterways where gangs hold up passenger boats to steal all valuables and/or the boats. Commercial traffic and oil company supply vessels are targeted on estuaries and rivers, in particular on the Calabar River (ICG 2012, p. 10).

1.2 The Bakassi peninsula

The Bakassi peninsula situated in Cameroon next to the border with Nigeria has seen increasing violence. Following the territorial dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon, the peninsula was returned to Cameroon in 2007 by a ruling from the International Court of Justice (ICJ). According to ICG (2012, pp. 13-

³ Even though its roots can be traced back to before Nigeria’s independence and the discovery of oil in 1956.

⁴ The programme has offered vocational training and monthly stipends, guaranteed freedom from prosecution and a disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) process (Newsom 2011, p. 2). The disarmament happened in 2009, demobilisation was supposed to last for a period of six to 12 months, and reintegration for five years. A total of 26 358 militants participated in the programme (WANEP 2013, p. 1).

14), 'political gangsterism' spread to Bakassi from the Niger Delta after 2007 with an increase in the number of attacks off the Cameroonian coast (an estimated 150 acts of armed robbery at sea and piracy between 2007 and 2011).

1.3 A spillover of maritime insecurity along the West African coast

From the Nigerian coast to Cote d'Ivoire

Armed robbery at sea and piracy targeting commercial traffic in the waters off Nigeria is not new. However, the scale and geographical extension of these violent acts have expanded in recent years (Barrios 2013, p. 3). Linked to the Niger Delta insurgency, it started spreading along the West African coast to the rest of the Nigerian coast and to Nigeria's eastern neighbours. From 2011, Benin and other West African states have also experienced pirate attacks (ICG 2012, p. 1; UNODC 2013, p. 47).

Most attacks happen in the territorial waters of West African states and are therefore categorised as armed robbery at sea. There has also been an increase of attacks in the international sea, categorised as acts of piracy.⁵ However, most statistics take the two forms of attacks into account. Overall, attacks in the GoG have accounted for nearly 30% of the attacks in African waters between 2003 and 2011 (427 out of 1434), and this proportion is increasing (Chatham House 2013, p. 16).

Off-shore traffic along the West African coast is heavy and is an easy target for criminals: tankers transporting oil, liquefied gas and refined petroleum products⁶ stay in the ports while service and supply boats shuttle between the land and off-shore installations. Container ships also arrive with massive amounts of imported goods to supply GoG countries (ICG, 2012, p. 7).

In Nigeria, piracy attacks and armed robberies at sea happen mostly off the main ports, Lagos, Warry, Port Harcourt and Calabar. It has spread now to Benin and Togo (ICG, 2012, p. 7). Attacks suddenly peaked off the coast of Benin – from zero in 2010 to 20 in 2011 according to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). More recently the problem has also started to be a concern for Togo with 18 attacks between 2012 and 2013 (ICG 2012, p. 15; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 23; UNODC 2013, p. 47). The first pirate attack targeting a tanker happened off the coast of Cote d'Ivoire in October 2012 (Luntumbue 2012, p. 4).

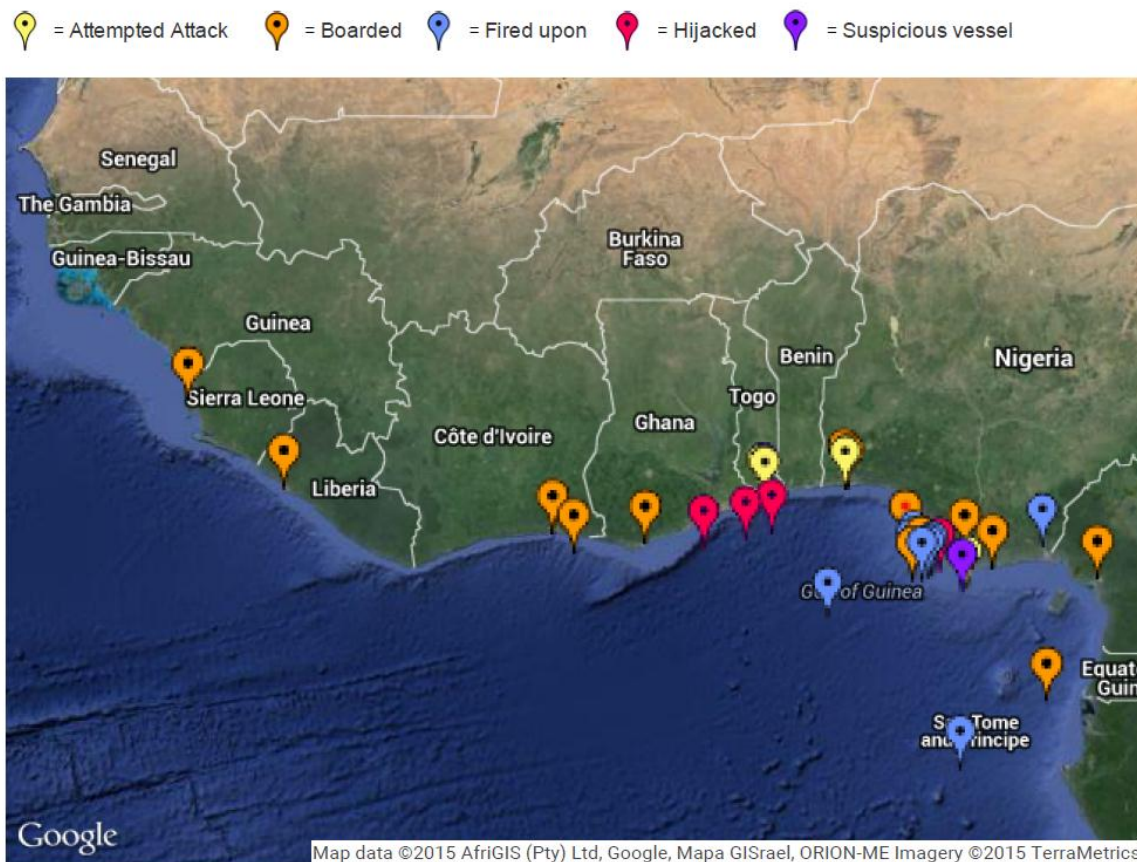
Criminal activities range from small scale robberies targeting cash, equipment, ships and crew's belongings, to well organised criminal gangs targeting cargos carrying fish, imported goods, oil and petroleum products. These more organised groups that hijack tankers with petroleum products tend to use a high level of violence (Barrios 2013, p. 3; ICG 2012, p. 6; Onuoha 2013, p. 268; UNODC 2013, p. 50). UNODC report (2013, p. 47) also emphasises an increasing number of more serious and violent attacks aimed at acquiring cargoes and refined petroleum products (See also Luntumbue 2012b, pp. 4-5; Onuoha 2013, p. 268).

⁵ There is no single definition of piracy accepted by the whole of the international community. However, according to the United States Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), piracy concerns 'any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and directed: (i) on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft.' The high seas lie beyond the 12 mile limit of the territorial waters of a coastal state (Onuoha 2013, p. 273).

⁶ For instance, large tankers carrying refined petroleum products enter Nigerian waters to supply the country and are major targets for criminals (ICG 2012, p. 7).

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) data indicates that out of 663 attacks (piracy and armed robbery) between 1991 to 2012 in West African countries and Cameroon, 335 of these happened in Nigeria (see Figure 1) (Onuoha 2013, pp. 274-275). The numbers of attacks are thought to be significantly under-reported as many victims are themselves involved in illicit activities making them less likely to report an attack. Similarly, fishing vessels usually do not report attacks (Barrios 2013, p. 2; ICG 2012, p. 8; Onuoha 2013, p. 276). Debates on the exact numbers are on-going between the different institutions measuring them. For instance, the Nigerian navy estimates the attacks to be between ten to 15 every month, whereas the IMO has recorded about 50 successful attacks annually for the entire region (UNODC 2013, p. 51).

Figure 1: Concentration of piracy and armed robbery



Source: IMB Piracy & Armed Robbery Map 2014 (ICC-CSS: <https://icc-ccs.org/piracy-reporting-centre/live-piracy-map/piracy-map-2014>).

Beyond the more specific acts of piracy, Ukeje & Mvomo Ela (2013, p. 21) highlight that **transnational organised crime** in general is on the rise since early 2000 in West Africa. Today the GoG is one of the key transit hubs in the global trade in narcotics. Nigerian ports together with Benin, Togo and Ghana have become strategic for the transit of large quantity of drugs from South America (and increasingly from Asia) to Europe, North America and Asian (see also Alemika 2013; Luntumbue 2012a, p. 2; p. 5; UNODC 2013, pp. 3-4; p. 11).

From Senegal to Sierra Leone

There seem to be another piracy 'hot spot' in West Africa off the coast of Guinea and Sierra Leone (Kamal-Deen 2015). With significantly less attacks than in the Nigerian-centred zone, it seems disconnected from those dynamics of violence and criminality. Considered only a secondary concern, it is mostly ignored by the literature of maritime security in the GoG and is therefore not analysed in this literature review. Additionally, the area including Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, and Senegal is one of the major hubs of drug trafficking in West Africa (Alemika 2013; UNODC 2013, p. 11).

2. Causes and dynamics of violence and criminality

2.1 Causes

Structural causes

Governance and corruption

Bad governance and corruption are acknowledged by the literature to be one of the most important structural causes for maritime security issues in the GoG. It is argued that maritime crimes should be seen as a symptom of wider problems ashore (Chatham House 2013, p. 16; p. 19). According to ICG (2012, p. 1), weak governance in the region 'has allowed illicit activities to flourish at sea and create an enabling environment for violent crime,'

States in the region are plagued by endemic corruption across all sectors. Evidence highlights that state structures, political leaders and security forces in the region are interwoven with the oil industry and criminal networks. GoG countries have established a centralised management system to tax oil revenues but the revenues are often confiscated by the central government and the national elite. This has enabled them to maintain informal political patronage links to remain in power (Barrios 2013, p. 3; MADE 2013, p. 8; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, pp. 14-17). Transparency about profits from oil is almost non-existent, enabling the ruling elite and foreign private companies to monopolise them (ICG 2012, p. , 4). Moreover, the elite are also involved with, and enable the criminal networks built around the oil industry.

In addition, corruption is pervasive in the navies, maritime administrations and law enforcement agencies of the GoG countries which limit their capacity to deal with criminality. It also diverts the allocation of funds from training and equipment (ICG 2012, p. 6; p. 8).

For example, **Nigeria** is the biggest oil producer in the region, and has one of the least transparent oil sectors in the world with all levels of authority – federal, state and local – struggling to increase their share of oil wealth. In the Niger Delta, the collusion between local authorities and criminal networks run in parallel with – and are enabled by – official structures (Barrios 2013, p. 8). Onuoha (2009, p. 249) explains how the governors of the core state of the Niger Delta (Bayelsa, Delta and River States) have strategically positioned themselves at the centre of the country's oil complex. In addition to their agreements with the elites at the federal government level, they have put in place a parallel structure that integrates local leaders and social pressure groups (feeding on ethnic emancipation claims and youth exclusion), and 'paves the way for the undocumented tapping and selling of crude oil' (Onuoha 2009, p. 249). However, while corruption is often emphasised in the case of the Niger Delta (Burdin Asuni 2009, p.3), it should be acknowledged that governance problems in the region are only a symptom of a

‘massive patronage economy that safeguards the dominance of existing Nigerian political elites in and outside of the Delta’ (Newsom 2011, p. 5).

Economic and socio-political exclusion

For Ukeje & Mvomo Ela (2013, p. 13; p. 19), the root causes of maritime insecurity are: the ‘truncated developmental aspirations’ for the vast majority of citizens in the GoG, and economic marginalisation often reinforced by political exclusion. A significant trend is that poverty levels are often higher on the coast than in hinterland communities which make them particularly vulnerable to incentives from criminal gangs. As stated by ICG (2012, p. 3) the ‘extent of piracy is an indicator of the radicalisation and willingness to turn to crime of frustrated populations.’

Strong evidence shows that the increase in piracy in the GoG is linked particularly to **local militias in the Niger Delta** who are protesting against marginalisation and the unequal distribution of oil revenues at the expense of the great majority of people living in extreme poverty (ICG 2012, p. 9; Onuoha 2013, p. 276). Social exclusion in the Niger Delta is particularly strong – the population has very little access to essential public services such as electricity, health care and education; while poor infrastructures and the difficult geography increase its remoteness (Burdin Asuni 2009, p. 3; ICG 2012, p. 9; MADE 2013, p. 8).⁷ Moreover, the concentration of oil industries in the area has raised the cost of living (wage and commodities inflation) which intensifies the experience of poverty (MADE 2013, p. 8). Socio-economic and political exclusion are inextricably linked; the Niger Delta has a long history of violence and political demands from minority ethnic groups that originated even before the discovery of oil in Bayelsa state in 1956, and was thereafter reinforced by oil wealth (Burdin Asuni 2009, p. 3). The first rebellion in 1966 saw the Delta Volunteer Service (DVS) rebellion challenge the Federal Government for the control of oil wells. This rebellion was led by an Ijaw leader, Isaac Boro, in a context of historical domination by the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo people). It exemplifies later conflict dynamics in the Niger Delta around ethnic identities, marginalisation and the control of oil (WANEP 2013, p. 1).

Unemployment

One of the root causes of piracy most often emphasised by analysts and scholars is the high level of youth unemployment rates in GoG countries. This incentivises criminal activities such as oil theft, armed robberies or trafficking as they can be the only sustainable financial opportunities available (Barrios 2013, p. 3; Chatham House 2013, p. 12; Onuoha 2013, p. 283). Moreover, participation in criminal gangs also provides a sense of ‘social belonging’ to the unemployed youth (Barrios 2013, p. 2).

The MADE (2013, p. 6) **Niger Delta** conflict analysis emphasises that unemployment is ‘*the*⁸ principal driver of crime and violence in the Delta’ (See also WANEP 2013, p. 1). While the Nigerian economy grew at a rate of 7% during the last decade, in the same period unemployment has doubled, rising from 23.9% to 27.4% between 2011 and 2012. A 2012 UN report asserted that Nigeria’s youth unemployment figures were the worst in Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) 2014, p. 5).

The NSRP (2014, p.5) offers a nuanced analysis of the role of unemployment. It stresses that youth unemployment does not directly cause violence; it does so only in addition to power structures that exclude and marginalise them.

⁷ The contrast with the oil revenues that Nigeria has drawn from the region in the last decade (around USD\$200 billion) is significant. Strikingly, state governments in the Niger Delta which are responsible for public services do have substantial resources (Newsom 2011, p. 5).

⁸ Emphasis in italics added by the author.

Natural resource-centred economies

This structural factor is linked to governance but focuses more specifically on the role of oil in GoG economies. According to Ukeje & Mvomo Ela (2013, p. 11), the rise in maritime insecurity is fostered by an 'acute fixation on an economy based on revenues from natural resources, particularly oil.' Countries in the region often make a major part of their national earnings through the oil and gas sectors. This has transformed several into rentier economies undermined by the Dutch disease mechanism that refers to the systematic destruction of an economic system which 'occurs through excessive reliance on rent from natural resources, corruption and waste of revenue' (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, pp. 14-17). This mechanism transforms these countries from manufacture or agriculture-led, to resource-extraction economies that are more vulnerable to commodity price changes and have a significantly lower number of jobs (Roll 2011, p. 10).

Hence, while being at the core of the economy in Nigeria (the oil sector is responsible for 90% of exports, 80% of government revenue and 40% of GDP), the oil industry provides employment to only two to three percent of the population. Oil dependency neither compensates local communities through increased livelihood opportunities, nor incentivises the state to invest in sectors offering more employment opportunities (MADE 2013, p. 8; WANEP 2013, p. 2).

Another negative mechanism characterising these economies is the 'rentier state' mechanism which explains the effect of the income from natural resources on politics. The governing elites tend to become more autonomous from their citizens because the state does not rely on their taxation. This has several potential effects such as: an increased authoritarianism of the political system, and turning politics into a rent-redistribution mechanism (Roll 2011, pp. 10-11).

However, in an edited study that analyses countries across West Africa, Roll (2011, p. 12) argues that these mechanisms are not deterministic and instead depend on two mediating factors: the quality of institutions before the natural resources are discovered and political coalitions. The economic effects of natural resources are therefore moderated by social and political factors (de Soysa 2011, p. 38). Nevertheless, GoG countries are often presented as the 'worst-case scenario' among resource wealthy states inasmuch as the politics of many of these states was already dysfunctional before oil discovery which has only 'exacerbated previous shortcomings and created new ones' (Soares de Oliveira in: Roll 2011, p. 13).

Proximate causes

Weak law enforcement

Weak law enforcement refers to three categories: 1) a weak legal sector, and the lack of clear legal provisions; 2) the lack of training and skills (patrolling, forensics or maintenance of equipment); 3) the lack of capabilities (expert comment: Bueger; see also Obasi 2011, p. 58). Overall, GoG states suffer from a deficit of capacity to protect and monitor their maritime domain with deficient coastguard services and very few patrols (Barrios 2012, pp. 2-3; Luntumbue 2012b, p. 5; Onuoha 2012, p. 9). Even Nigeria, the only country in the region that has significant naval or coastguard capability to tackle maritime crimes (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 10), leaves most of its distress calls unanswered (ICG 2012, p. 8).

While this can be partly traced back to corruption diverting funds from building maritime capabilities, a number of analyses point also to the GoG states' neglect of their maritime domain, and their lack of focus on maritime security (Chatham House 2013, p. 9; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 11).⁹

Porous borders and transnational trafficking

Analyses of maritime security in the GoG often point to the links between maritime security issues, SALW proliferation and other dimensions of transnational organised crime such as human and narcotics trafficking in the region (ICG 2012, p. 3; Luntumbue 2012b, p. 3; UNODC 2013). However, the mechanisms through which transnational crime in West Africa is specifically linked to maritime security issues has not been analysed in detail.

About eight to ten million illicit weapons are in circulation in West Africa facilitated by the extremely porous borders between West African states. This situation contributes to the availability of SALW to criminality including piracy (Onuoha 2012, p. 9). For instance, SALW are by now endemic in the Niger Delta which contributes to the frequency and intensity of criminality (Onuoha 2013, p. 284; Watts 2007, p. 640).

According to Onuoha (expert comment), those involved in drug trafficking do have 'loose' linkages with criminal elements involved in other crimes like piracy, militancy and armed smuggling. There are claims that the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) are involved in drugs smuggling at the same time as being involved in piracy, oil theft and weapons trafficking. Kyrou (2014) also argues that the ease with which Nigerian pirates infiltrate Benin and Togo suggests a level of coordination and collaboration between pirates and on-land transnational criminal groups.

Densely populated urban centres

Port cities along the GoG are among the most populated cities in the continent. Estimations are ten million inhabitants in Lagos, three million in Accra, two million in Calabar and Port Harcourt, and one million in Cotonou (ICG 2012, p. 3). These densely populated urban centres create the conditions for increased crime in a context of severe economic inequalities and tensions stemming from migration from the interior and political conflicts (ICG 2012, p. 3).

Environmental degradation

Oil extraction – and oil spilling – leads to a continuous degradation of the coastal environment which hampers fishing and agriculture by making land infertile, and thus threatens the traditional livelihoods of local populations. As a result local communities are increasingly tempted to engage in illegal activities to survive (Burdin Asuni 2009, p. 3; ICG 2012, p. 4; p. 9; WANEP 2013, p. 1). It is argued this is one reason why fishermen in the region have sold their boats to pirates or turned to piracy themselves (Onuoha 2013, p. 283).

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing

The fishing business is an important part of the national income for West African countries and provides over 50% of the edible protein consumed in the region (Chatham House 2013, p. 17; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 9). West African waters are estimated to have the highest levels of IUU fishing in the world, up to 40% of the region's catch. Most of this illegal fishing is done by foreign fishermen. The resulting depletion of fish stock is compromising the food security and livelihoods of coastal communities (International

⁹ Illustratively, Nigeria has an army of 62 000 while its navy only counts 8000 personnel; Cote d'Ivoire has an army of 6500 and a navy of only 900 (Onuoha 2012, p. 9).

Peace Institute (IPI) 2014, p. 3; Onuoha 2013, p. 271). As a result, local fishermen are abandoning their traditional activity and are more easily recruited by criminal groups who draw on their knowledge of coastal waters. This issue suffers from a lack of attention from government and regional actors (ICG 2012, p. 3).

Human rights issues

Human rights and social injustices in the context of resource extraction exacerbate tensions. National governments tend to neglect these concerns and are instead driven by the main goal of increasing the benefits from the oil industry. Nigeria, for instance, has a tendency to consider any disruption of oil production as a direct threat to its security (Onuoha 2009, p. 248), which can justify the use of disproportionate force by its security forces against internal groups such as in the Niger Delta (MADE 2013, p. 12). Human rights-related problems also include large scale expropriations of land justified by the expansion of the oil industry or by the building of ports and military bases on the coast (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 19).

Border disputes

Border disputes between GoG states have increased since oil discoveries. The risk is that the disputed areas become ungovernable, allowing illegal activities to proliferate. These disputed areas also hamper the already difficult cooperation between the security forces of the countries involved (ICG 2012, pp. 3-4). The two main disputes in the region are: between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi peninsula which was officially terminated in 2008; and between Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire over their maritime boundary after the discovery of oil in Ghana's territorial waters in 2010.

Scarcity of refined petroleum products

Paradoxically, there is a scarcity of refined petroleum products in the region. In Nigeria particularly, the lack of refineries –four which are not even working at their full level of capacity – turned the country into a net importer of refined petroleum products (Onuoha 2013, p. 283). This situation has fostered a growing black market for stolen oil; multiplication of illegal refineries; smuggling of subsidised fuel¹⁰ from Nigeria to neighbouring countries (ICG 2012, p. 7); increased incentives for pirates to attack tankers with refined petroleum products (ICG 2012, p. 7); and the poor maintenance of legal refineries has led to erratic supplies of petroleum products to communities in Nigeria, furthering social discontent (Obasi 2011, p. 55).

Triggers

Elections and political crises

Election periods and political crises are highlighted as triggers of increased violence and criminality in the GoG even though this link is not extensively studied across the region (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 11). Ukeje & Mvomo Ela (2013, p. 11) argue that maritime security worsened in Cote d'Ivoire after the disputed 2012 elections. Ghana, Togo and Benin are considered more vulnerable to maritime security problems during periods of political transitions. More specifically, Newsom (2011, p. 3) studies the cycles of violence and elections in the Niger Delta which are, according to him, inseparable and fuel each other through the instrumentalisation of youth by political actors.

¹⁰ The Nigerian government subsidises fuel imports keeping prices at around one-third of its price in neighbouring countries (UNODC 2013, p. 46).

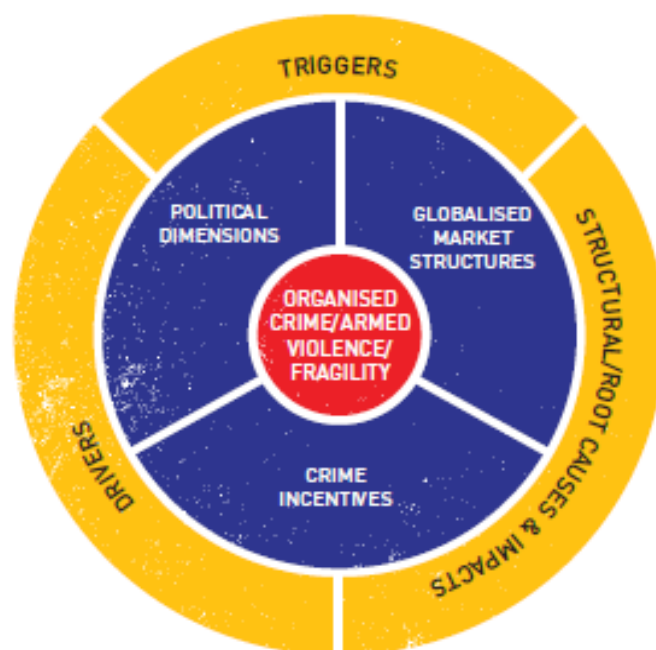
Oil discoveries

New oil discoveries in GoG countries can act as triggers of violence and criminality through different mechanisms: by creating or exacerbating conflicts between countries thereby hampering bilateral and regional cooperation to deal with maritime insecurity (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 18); the potential expansion of transnational groups along the coast following new opportunities and incentives (Luntumbue 2012b, p. 2); and damaging economic development and the quality of institutions through the rentier state and Dutch disease mechanisms (Basedau & Mahler 2011, p. 74).

2.2 Dynamics: the fragility, criminality and violence nexus

The dynamics of violence and criminality in the GoG can be conceptualised as a nexus between fragility,¹¹ criminality and violence. This nexus has been discussed by a recent International Alert report (Banfield 2014) which argues that it is fuelled by three sets of factors: 1) Political dimensions (in this case, governance and corruption); 2) crime incentives (exclusion, unemployment); 3) globalised market structures:

Figure 2: The inter-relationship between factors shaping the nexus



Source: Banfield 2014, p. 28.

This nexus between fragility, criminality and violence is particularly useful to understand how these factors negatively reinforce each other. Several mechanisms can be highlighted that draw on the list of structural and proximate causes:

- A capture of oil wealth by the national elite with poor redistribution in a context of high unemployment leads to exclusion of important parts of the population.

¹¹ The definition of fragility is taken from the OECD (2012, p. 15): 'A fragile region or state has weak capacity to carry out basic governance functions, and lacks the ability to develop mutually constructive relations with society.'

- Excluded groups (who can be minority ethnic groups) use violence against the state to make political demands. An alternative interpretation is that they use violence to take part in the network of corrupt distribution of oil wealth (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 23). The two are not mutually exclusive. In the MADE (2013, p. 8) conflict analysis, Newsom (2011, p. 4) and Obasi (2011, pp. 63-64) show that criminality in the Niger Delta has become more instrumental in nature. The aim is no longer to reconfigure the distribution of power. It is instead the opposite: to maximise the benefits without 'disturbing the acceptable bounds of an established economy of violence' in order not to trigger reprisals from the government (Newsom 2011, p. 4).
- This 'established economy of violence' is perpetuated as a large range of actors benefit from it: the national and local elite, security forces, oil industry workers, vessel owners, criminal groups, etc. (Onuoha 2013, p. 282; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 2). As a result, it becomes impossible to punish and prosecute criminals who are protected by public officials who are themselves involved (Onuoha 2013, p. 285; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, pp. 41-42).
- The expansion of Nigerian criminality towards its neighbours with similar poor governance practices, together with increased economic activity along the GoG coast, enables a general criminalisation of the GoG's economy (ICG 2013, p. 8).
- This enables a growing sophistication of the networks entangled with illegal global market structures (Burdin Asuni 2009, p. 4; ICG 2012, p. 6). According to the Chatham House report (2013, p. 11), criminal groups in the Niger Delta manage an 'international export business with tentacles across the globe.' Hence, the money created also funds other criminal structures and networks such as all sorts of illegal trafficking (Burdin Asuni 2009, p. 4; Chatham House 2013, p. 12) that lead to further state fragility.
- At the end, the oil profit economy enabled by state fragility 'does not stop at creating conflict and insecurity but also contributes to their sustenance' (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 14). It creates not only the frustrations and exclusions that lead populations to criminal activities, but also powerful financial incentives across the whole society.

3. Actors and current responses

3.1 The actors involved in violence and criminality

Militant groups: from militants to criminals?

Groups at the origin of these concentrations of violence are said to be militant groups located in the Niger Delta and the Bakassi peninsula. Their official goal has been to demand a larger share of oil wealth from the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments. Their action has involved kidnappings, pipeline vandalisms and sabotaging of oil companies installations. It appears that their mainly political goal has now shifted towards capturing economic benefits stemming from oil crimes and related trafficking. The main groups are from the Niger Delta and the Bakassi peninsula.

In **the Niger Delta**: militancy shifted from a non-violent movement in the 1960s to violence in response to the heavy military response of the Nigerian government. The emergence of the MEND in 2004 led the conflict to full insurgency (Oluwaniyi 2011). While the 2009 amnesty formally put an end to the conflict, the amnesty programme did not stop former militants continuing their activities linked to oil crime (Burdin Asunin 2009, p. 5).

In the **Bakassi peninsula**, the Bakassi Freedom Fighters (BFF)s followed the example of groups from the Niger Delta in terms of political demands and patterns of action. However, according to ICG (2012, pp. 13-14) their objective seems now to be to maintain control over oil and drug trafficking in Bakassi. The situation has become more complex with the militants splitting up between small violent groups (ICG 2012, pp. n13-14).

These actors are now considered to be overlapping with pirates and oil bunkerers inasmuch as the separation between militants and criminals has become extremely blurry. They have complex relationships with politicians, security agents, traditional institutions and oil industry companies and staff that enable them to carry on their criminal actions in almost complete impunity (expert comment: Onuoha).

Transnational criminal actors

A complex transnational network of actors is involved in maritime criminality at the regional and global levels. Evidence shows that **trans-regional criminal groups** are expanding from the Niger Delta. For example, ICG (2012, p. 17; p. 19) claims that some hijacked vessels off Cotonou ended up in the Niger Delta which suggests that criminal groups based in the region are involved or collaborating. The ICG report (2012, p. 17) also highlights that attacks on the coast west of Nigeria are very likely 'masterminded and executed' principally by Nigerians who 'have the intelligence network, boats, firepower and technical know-how for hijack and sell stolen fuel.' Onuoha (2013, p. 283) argues that some sophisticated oil piracy gangs have emerged, composed of people from Benin, Ghana, Togo and Nigerians among others, which enable them to overcome the challenges of language and geography.

The assumption is that attacks, in particular those against tankers, are orchestrated by **international actors** who can arrange and manage the attacks remotely (Chatham House 2013, p. 12; ICG 2012, p. 7). Burdin Asuni (2009, p. 5) points to actors in particular from Eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, Lebanon, the Netherland and France who play roles in financing, transporting and laundering money associated with oil crime.

3.2 National actors

National governments are both a contributing cause and part of the solution to criminality and violence in the GoG. Section 2.1 showed how the local and national elite, retired politicians and security forces are colluding with and enabling the criminal networks to function. The confiscation of oil wealth with poor redistribution to citizens also fosters frustrations and creates incentives for citizens to join criminal groups.

Nigeria

At the same time, Nigeria is both the country most affected by piracy and its main cause. It is estimated to lose ten percent of its daily production of oil, and billions of dollars every year, because of oil related crimes (IPI 2014, p. 5). Accordingly, it is one of the most active states in terms of initiatives to tackle the symptoms of maritime insecurity (Onuoha 2013, p. 290).

During the Niger Delta insurgency in the 2000s, alongside its heavy military response to suppress militancy, the federal government also made several efforts to counter the negative consequences of oil through several initiatives: the creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 with a constantly increasing budget, the creation of a Technical Committee on the Niger Delta (2008), and the

launch of an amnesty programme.¹² Moreover, the federal Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs has Nigeria's fifth biggest budget (USD\$472 million) (Newsom 2011, pp. 7-8; Obasi 2011, pp. 89-91; Oluwaniyi 2011). However, the results of these initiatives have been limited. Newsom (2011, pp. 7-8) points to the relatively high availability of funds in contrast to the poor quality of expenditure mainly directed at short term goals such as reinforcing patronage channels, political leverage or ensuring steady oil production. Obasi (2011, pp. 89-91) blames the simplistic approach taken by the local and federal governments which does not address the complex root causes of the conflict (e.g. the distorting impact of the oil industry on employment); the general weakness of political institutions; and the vested interests of all actors (security forces, politicians, oil companies, etc.).

In terms of a purely **security-oriented response** to deal with militancy in the Niger Delta and oil related crimes, the Nigerian government created the Joint Task Force (JTF) in 2004 including the army, navy, air force and mobile police (Chatham House 2013, p. 1; IPI 2014, p.4). It was later expanded into a maritime security force to tackle the whole range of maritime security issues (Onuoha 2013, p. 290). The Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) also has an important mandate to patrol petroleum pipelines, and to arrest thieves and hand them over to the police (Obasi 2011, p. 11). In parallel, attempts have been made to **clean up the oil industry** with the creation of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the preparation of a Petroleum Industry Bill, among other initiatives. Nevertheless, corruption is so pervasive that a complete overhaul of the sector would be needed (ICG 2012, p. 24; Newsom 2011, p. 11). Obasi (2011, p. 11) highlights that since the creation of the EFCC and the strengthened mandate of the NSDC, the number of persons arrested has increased. However, this has not had a deterrent effect as the real masterminds have neither been targeted nor arrested. There is still a major gap between the official anti-corruption discourse and the practice of fighting corruption.

A current problem undermining Nigeria's actions in the Niger Delta concerns its relatively low priority compared to the threat posed by **Boko Haram**¹³ in the eyes of Nigerian President Buhari and the region as a whole (Vines).¹⁴

Benin

Benin started to take into account maritime security when piracy attacks off its coast seriously damaged its economy: in 2011 the number of ships in the port of Cotonou decreased from 150 to 30 monthly.¹⁵ Because its weak navy was not able to handle the problem, President Yayi Boni asked Nigeria for help which led to Operation Prosperity (ICG 2012, pp. 16-17). According to ICG (2012, p. 17) the lack of coordination and leadership between the navy and government departments is hindering the progress towards a national maritime security strategy. Although IPI (2014, p. 5) recently highlighted that Benin has implemented a number of comprehensive measures which involve both government structures and civil society.

¹² The amnesty programme has been criticised for its limited impact due to several issues such as: the lack of proper planning for the DDR programme; a lack of consultation with militants on the ground; a focus on monthly stipends without creating the employment opportunities that will be necessary once the flow of money ceases (Oluwaniyi 2011; WANEP 2013).

¹³ Boko Haram is an Islamist sect based in the northeast of Nigeria, and also active in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon.

¹⁴ Comment from Alex Vines during the conference 'Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea – what has been done, what needs to be done?', Brussels, 30 June 2015.

¹⁵ The Port of Cotonou provides 65% of the country's income (IPI 2014, p. 5).

Togo

The Togolese navy is one of the weakest in the region. The recent pirate attacks off its coast triggered a response at the government level which is, according to ICG (2012, p. 17), more coordinated than in Benin as the navy and the transport ministry appear to work well together. Togo is implementing a French-inspired comprehensive strategy to cover all areas related to maritime affairs and has set up an inter-ministerial platform (Council for the Sea) bringing together all the public actors involved in maritime issues. It also set up a Maritime Prefecture and the National Organisation in Charge of the Action of the State at Sea (ONAEM) that coordinates all the concerned agencies and department (expert comment: EU Delegation in Togo; ODINAFRICA 2015).

Ghana

Ghana, worried by the protection of its recently discovered oil fields, has been quite active in terms of maritime security: it has established a national maritime security commission where 15 different agencies are represented, and conducted a regional seminar in partnership with IMO (Chatham House 2013, p. 19; p. 27). It also started building up its navy with two refurbished German warships and four Chinese ships to protect off-shore oil fields. It has increased the policing of its maritime domain and installed surveillance systems¹⁶ (ICG 2012, p. 19; Onuoha 2013, p. 290). However, ICG (2012, p. 14) indicates problems of coordination in particular between military and civilian actors.

Cameroon

Cameroon's coast suffered the highest number of attacks together with Nigeria. The Cameroonian government has thus been one of the most active countries in the GoG in terms of maritime security actions. Ukeje (2013, pp. 33-34) claims that Cameroon has shown real political will to integrate and prioritise maritime issues into its national security. Examples of this activism are: military deployment in the field combined with infiltration of the armed groups to respond to the increase of maritime insecurity; the use of Rapid Intervention Brigades (BIR); and a military surveillance programme off the coast and territorial waters using radar and radio with an operational centre in Douala (ICG 2012, p. 14).

Critical assessment of national action

Most West African states were ignoring their maritime domain and were therefore very much unprepared to deal with maritime security issues when they started to be affected by pirate attacks. This situation is changing but as yet few of them have allocated substantial resources to formulate maritime policies. Moreover, military navies still remain underdeveloped and poorly equipped with the relative exception of Nigeria (15 000) and Cameroon (2000). Response remains military-focused with few attempts to link it to development and governance problems on-shore (ICG 2012, p. 4; Ukeje 2013, p. 23). Finally, proliferation, competition and overlapping between agencies within each state in a context of scarcity of human and material resources, tends to limit the impact of their initiatives (Ukeje 2013, p. 36).

¹⁶ The Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA) is setting up a Vessel Traffic Management Information System (VTMIS) (ICG 2012, p. 19)

3.3 Regional institutional actors

Regional actors, in particular ECOWAS, have been playing an active role in West Africa to deal with security and development issues. While often criticised for their lack of capacity and their domination by regional hegemonies, they have been activated by national and international actors to drive the response to maritime insecurity. These institutional capacities for peace are key for the region.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS is the key West African regional organisation in the field of security.¹⁷ Since the 1990s, it has developed a peace and security architecture promoting regional approaches to conflict prevention, transnational crimes, peace building and enforcement.

It has only very recently put maritime security on its agenda: a maritime security strategy was discussed by the Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff in April 2010 (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 24). Reasons for that are said to be: a general West African distrust of Nigeria; the perception that maritime insecurity was a Nigerian problem only; and a fixation with security on land (Chatham House 2013, pp. 33-34; ICG 2012, p. 19; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 24). However, piracy attacks off the coast of Benin, Togo and Ghana forced ECOWAS to get involved (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, p. 24).

ECOWAS' response includes the establishment of a maritime security office, the adoption of a maritime security strategy and the planning of operational zones along the coast to patrol and monitor the West African maritime domain.¹⁸ The strategy focuses on information sharing, asset coordination and integration, as well as the need to improve oil and gas governance as a means to prevent conflict. In 2012, ECOWAS created its first operational zone E, a pilot zone including Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Niger. The plan is that each country will pool resources and take joint responsibility for their maritime security (ICG 2012, p. 19; Onuoha 2013, p. 290; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, p. 38). The regional centre CRESMAO has been set up in Abidjan, while the Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre for zone E opened in May in Cotonou (see Figure 3).

In spite of these recent developments, ECOWAS suffers from a **range of problems** emphasised by the literature: major capacity issues; lack of political will; lack of appreciation of the security and development nexus; a regional agenda influenced by international actors which focuses mostly on the military dimension of the problem; a lack of trust between the member states; and a lack of influence of the ECOWAS Commission on the member states' maritime policy and practices (Chatham House 2013, p. 34; expert comment: Bueger; ICG 2012, p. 20; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, p. 35).

The Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) and interregional cooperation

The GGC was founded in 1999 to foster peace, security and economic development in the region. It is the organisation with the largest mandate for dealing specifically with maritime security (Chatham House

¹⁷ Created in 1975, ECOWAS includes 15 member states: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo.

¹⁸ ECOWAS has replicated the model adopted by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) with three operational zones with a coordination centre in each zone. Zone D is the most active as it includes Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome e Principe where most attacks in Central Africa are taking place. ECCAS also created the Regional Coordination Centre for the Maritime Security of Central Africa (CRESMAC) (see Figure 3) (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, pp. 36-38).

2013, p. 5). It comprises Angola, Cameroon, DRC, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Nigeria, and Sao Tome e Principe, with membership open to all the relevant actors.

Struggling since its creation to be more than an empty shell since its creation,¹⁹ it has recently been reactivated to play a role of interregional coordination between ECOWAS and ECCAS. Indeed, the proximity and concentration of violence around Nigeria and Zone D (ECCAS) has raised the stakes of cooperation.

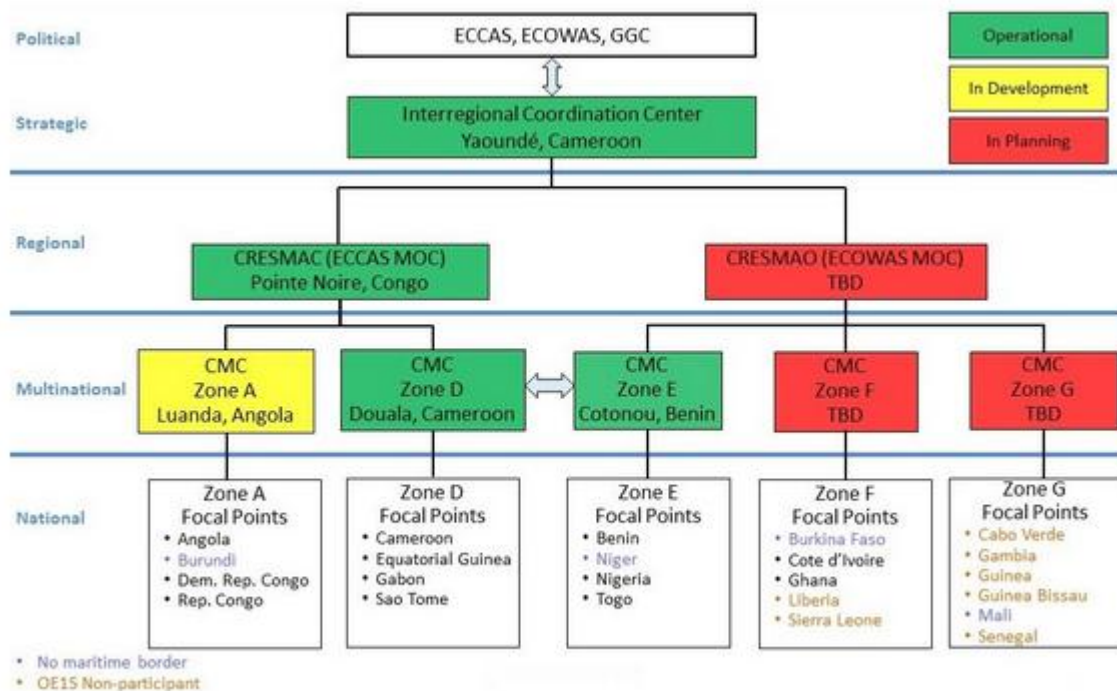
Hence, in March 2013 a ministerial conference on maritime security in the GoG was held in Cotonou, organised between ECOWAS, ECCAS and the GGC. This paved the way to the June 2013 summit in Yaoundé including 25 countries from the GoG. The result of this summit was the adoption of a Memorandum of Understanding between ECCAS, ECOWAS and the GGC planning for annual meetings and creating an Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) inaugurated in December 2014. It also led to the adoption of a Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCoC) concerning the prevention and repression of piracy, armed robbery against ships and illicit maritime activity in West and Central Africa (IPI 2014, p. 5; OBP 2015).

A **range of issues** plague the GGC's potential for a leadership role in maritime security issues: Central African countries' distrust of Nigeria; the small size of the secretariat, personnel and budget; and the lack of political will of its member states to implement the interregional framework (ICG 2012, p 21; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, p. 39). Bueger (expert comment) argues that cooperation at this level might be complicated as the GoG is a 'new' region that has emerged as a construct due to maritime security issues. Hence, it has no strong history or experience of cooperation and tends to compete with ECOWAS and ECCAS. However, it could play a vital role in the implementation of the YCoC by facilitating cooperation between ECOWAS and ECCAS.

In terms of **interregional cooperation** and implementation of the YCoC, Bueger (expert comment) highlights that cooperation between the national law enforcement agencies is increasingly working. However, the legal status of the YCoC remains ambiguous and there has been no significant move to incorporate the provisions into national law. Cooperation has so far focused on coast guards and navies but left aside other relevant actors (police, prosecutors, port authorities). Finally, the YCoC addresses an important cause of maritime crime (weak law enforcement) but does not impact on the root causes such as socio-economic exclusion, corruption and bad governance.

¹⁹ It has been blocked for a long period by Nigeria and Cameroon due to tensions about the Bakassi peninsula.

Figure 3: Interregional maritime framework



Source: Steffen (2015) (<http://cimsec.org/obangame-express-2015-two-steps-forward-one-step-back/16227>)

The Maritime Organisation of West and Central Africa (MOWCA)

MOWCA was launched in 1975 and institutionalised in 1999. Its ambition was to create an integrated coast guard network that coordinates inter-regional maritime security policies and actions, and interfaces with external actors such as the UN and IMO. It has been working since 2003 with IMO to establish this coast guard network but with little success (Chatham House 2013, p. 27; ICG 2012, p. 21). According to ICG (2012, p. 21), this failure is due to the fact that MOCWA works primarily with ministers of transport who are side-lined by the militaries afraid that the coast guards will reduce their own responsibilities and budgets. Ukeje & Mvomo Ela (2013, p. 34) adds that MOWCA has tried to move beyond traditional maritime security concerns to the areas of maritime finance. The aim was to build the capacities of local shippers and increase their competitiveness in order to increase their incentives to engage in legitimate shipping activities. This initiative was not enthusiastically supported by the member states reluctant to engage funds.

African Union (AU)

The AU has started to develop an approach to maritime security within its African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). In 2009 it adopted Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS), followed in 2012 by the 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy with the aim to: 1) foster increased wealth creation; and 2) ensure maritime safety and security and the protection of the marine environment (IPI 20147, p. 6; Ukeje

& Mvomo Ela, p. 29).²⁰ More concretely, the AU supports the coast guards network initiative launched by MOWCA (OBP 2015).

3.4 International actors

Geostrategic stakes are high as the GoG is rich in oil and gas, and is a major international trade route. This situation provides the incentives for international actors worried about their energy security to contribute to solutions to maritime insecurity in the GoG. This sub-section lists (in a non-exhaustive way) the activities of some of the key international actors present in the GoG.

The United Nations (UN) and its agencies

The UN has been actively involved in maritime security issues in the GoG. It mainly sought to influence governments' responses through two resolutions:

- *Resolution 2018 (October 2011)*: condemns all acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea and calls on the regional organisations and their member states to establish a comprehensive strategy to facilitate the prosecution of the perpetrators.
- *Resolution 2039 (February 2012)*: urges the GoG states with the support of the international community to develop and implement national maritime security strategies with a particular focus on the prevention and repression of piracy and armed robbery at sea; it also calls for a regional summit and the drafting of a regional strategy.

Following Resolution 2039, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) helped the preparation of the 2013 Yaoundé summit and the adoption of its key documents (IPI 2014, p. 6; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, p. 26). UNOWA and UNODC are, together with INTERPOL, implementing the West African Coast Initiative (WACI) which aims to build national and regional capacities in the areas of law enforcement, forensics, border management, anti-money laundering, criminal justice institutions, peacebuilding and security sector reforms (Chatham House 2013, p. 29; OBP 2015). IPI (2014, p. 8) highlights **several problems** with UN action: a lack of understanding of maritime security; a reluctance to address piracy in both national and international waters due to national interests; and a need to further integrate the work of its agencies.

European Union (EU)

The EU has been increasingly involved in West African security: first, through its support of the establishment and implementation of the ECOWAS peace and security architecture; then, through the adoption of a Strategy on the Gulf of Guinea (2014) and its Action Plan (2015) which led to a number of activities directly targeting maritime security issues. The Strategy aims at: capacity building; strengthening the rule of law; supporting prosperous economies, and assisting communities to build resilience and resist criminal activities; and strengthening regional cooperation. The EU is implementing the following activities (Barrios 2013, p. 3; Council of the EU 2015, ICG 2012, p. 22; Onuoha 2013, p. 291):

- *CRIMGO (Critical Maritime Route for the GoG)*: the project began in 2013 and aims to enhance information sharing, provide training and support cooperation at the regional level.

²⁰ A major summit on the implementation of the AIMS and its links to the Regional Economic Communities (ECOWAS and ECCAS) will take place in November this year.

- *SEACOP*: the Seaport Cooperation Project to build inter-agency Intelligence and control Units to control suspected shipments and encourage regional cooperation against illicit trafficking via sea routes.
- *AIRCOP*: the Airport Communication Project to set up interdiction task forces in selected airports and connect them to international law enforcement databases.
- *WAPIS*: the establishment of a West Africa Police Information System to set up national and regional databases to collect police information.
- *AML-WA*: a project to encourage Inter-Regional and International effort in anti-money laundering.
- *Support to the Maritime Transport sector in Africa programme*: it has three projects with a focus on West and Central Africa on maritime safety, port efficiency and control.
- A range of activities targeting IUU fishing.

G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Security Experts Group (G++FOGG)

The G7++FOGG was created in 2012²¹ with the purpose of improving coordination between international partners on capacity building initiatives, and avoid duplication of actions, to improve maritime security in the GoG. Actions include (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, pp. 27-28):

- Development of a web based platform by Ocean Beyond Piracy (OBP) that details all activities planned and undertaken by international partners (supported by France).
- A planned joint strategy to facilitate investigation and prosecution (US-led).
- Raising political awareness that initiatives tend to focus on piracy while side-lining wider criminal activity (armed robbery, IUU fishing, weapon, drug and human trafficking).

While the G7++ is the core international coordination mechanism in the area, it is criticised for not being inclusive enough and faces ownership problems. Indeed, according to Bueger (expert comment), it is perceived as external action and not as a cross-regional forum for networking and deliberation. Capacity building in particular illustrates these coordination problems, with the competition between bilateral, regional and multilateral initiatives and interests.

USA

US' interests in the GoG are considered to be mainly driven by the oil reserves.²² In 2002 the US established an African Oil Policy Initiative Group (including the US administration, Congress, State Department, oil companies) that recommends making the GoG a zone of vital interest for US military forces (ICG 2012, p. 3). According to Ukeje & Mvomo Ela (2013, p. 14) this new status of the GoG justified the establishment of an autonomous AFRICOM²³ in 2008. AFRICOM is implementing the following

²¹ The participants are: Germany, Canada, the US, Italy, Japan, the UK, France, Belgium, Brazil (observer), South Korea, Denmark, Spain, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland, the EU, UNODC and INTERPOL.

²² The National energy plan prepared by the US after 9/11 states that Africa would supply 25% of US oil needs by 2015 (ICG 2012, p. 3).

²³ AFRICOM stands for United States Africa Command, one of the nine unified Combatant Commands of the US Armed Forces, and responsible for the African continent with the exception of Egypt.

initiatives (Chatham House 2013, pp. 31-32; ICG 2012, p. 22; OBP 2015; Onuoha 2013, p. 291; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 29):

- *The Africa Partnership Station Initiative (APSI)*: builds national and regional capacities through training, exercises and operations. It aims to increase maritime domain awareness and facilitate regional integration.
- *Obangame Express*: exercise conducted by US Naval Forces Africa and designed to improve cooperation among participants.
- *Saharan Express*: annual maritime exercise facilitated by US Naval Forces off the coast of Dakar, in order to enhance the states' ability to monitor their maritime domain.
- *The African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership (AMLEP)*: help partners build maritime security capacities, improve management of their maritime environment, and support their enforcement of laws and treaties.
- *Donation of refurbished equipment* (five boats to Nigeria), upgrading radar and other facilities.

The US is one of the major actors in the GoG in both military presence and funding.

United Kingdom (UK)

The UK's involvement in maritime security in the GoG follows its oil and trade interests, as well as its former colonial links. While similar to those of the US, its activities are of a much smaller scale: capacity building of national navies,²⁴ and funding of some regional initiatives. For example, the UK funded an ECOWAS maritime security officer for two years and an ECOWAS maritime security seminar in 2012 (Chatham House 2013, p. 17; ICG 2012, p. 20; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 29). A notable difference from the activities of the US is the UK's attempts to involve and support private and community actors in dealing with maritime security issues (ICG 2012, p. 20; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 29).

France

France's presence in the GoG is driven by its oil and economic interests in the region, and its close links (including military) with former colonies. Its activities include (ICG 2012, p. 21; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 29):

- *Bilateral military support*: French military advisers; and patrols in international waters adjacent to its former colonies.
- *ASECMAR (Support for Maritime Security in the GoG)*: project to help Benin, Togo and Ghana to design maritime security strategies, train civilians and armed forces, and improve their coordination. It has been expanded to include Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea.
- *Operation Corymb*: since 1990, a French National Navy military operation destined to strengthen cooperation with some GoG countries and protect French interests and citizens.

²⁴ The Royal Navy has frequently visited the region.

Emerging powers

Emerging powers such as China, India, Brazil and other countries in South America have increasingly showed interest and invested in GoG countries, attracted by opportunities related to oil and gas (ICG 2012, p. 12; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, p. 11). With the GoG becoming a priority action zone for these countries, they have started to be concerned with maritime security issues and to participate in international actions. For example, China gave Benin 4 million euros to purchase a patrol boat (ICG 2012, p. 22). Brazil has reactivated its 1986 ZOPACAS (South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone) (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 29).

Critical assessment of the international action

While international actors have massively invested in the GoG in recent years to support national and regional initiatives concerned with maritime security, several criticisms are raised. A key problem highlighted is **coordination**. The multiplicity of actors and initiatives makes the overall action very fragmented, hinders synergies, and duplicates activities which limits the impact (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 36; ICG 2012, pp. 21-23). The ICG report (2012, pp. 21-23) also highlights the perverse effects of this fragmented international assistance: firstly, GoG states tend to not divulge information about other sources of support to get more funding which leads to incoherence and duplications; secondly, in a context of scarcity of resources, departments within state governments compete for international funding which hinders inter-agency cooperation.

Secondly, the multiplicity of partners makes **local ownership** of the activities difficult, in particular for the smaller states. Activities can be easily disconnected from governments and local communities' challenges (ICG 2012, pp. 21-23; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 10).

The national and regional agenda is driven by the **immediate interests of the major international actors** present in the region, which is primarily to protect their oil and economic interests in the region. As a result most of the initiatives and actions are military and security oriented including: capacity building of navies and maritime police forces, and providing training, and equipment. International actors tend to neglect human security and development actions as sustainable solutions to maritime insecurity. They treat piracy as a purely security problem at sea rather than as a symptom of governance problems on shore (ICG Report 2012, pp. 21-23; IPI 2014, p. 8; Obi 2011, p. 116; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 10; p. 25; p. 36).

Ukeje & Mvomo Ela (2013, p. 10; p. 25; p. 36; p. 41) also argues that these **military responses** appear to have worsened the security situation by increasing the risks of weapon proliferation and facilitating human rights abuses. GoG countries can use these measures as a pretext to act against domestic opposition in their coastal areas.

3.5 Civil society organisations (CSOs)

Civil society in West Africa includes non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as community-based organisations (CBOs), women and youth associations, traditional chiefs and ethnic interest groups (Ajayi-Mamattah 2014). CSOs - notably women's group - in West Africa have been involved in local peace-building initiatives, reconciliation processes, advocating for peace agreements and building capacities in peace education (Ekiyor 2008, p. 1). However, states and scholars have generally overlooked the role of civil

society as a partner to deal with criminality and maritime security in the GoG (expert comment: Ajayi-Mamattah).²⁵

Hence, while many CSOs are involved in West African security, very few are working directly with maritime security (expert comments: Ajayi-Mamattah, Onuoha; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 43).²⁶

Among these CSOs are:

- The Centre for Democracy and Development (Nigeria): working on dialogue, training, research and publications on diverse issues relating to governance, security and development.
- Civil Society legislative and Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) (Nigeria): working on maritime security, development of coastal communities and oil governance among other things.
- Environmental Rights Action (Nigeria): working on the development of coastal communities and oil governance, in particular in the Niger Delta.
- Campaign for Democracy and Good Governance (Sierra Leone): working on citizen participation in governance through advocacy, capacity building and civic education.
- Liberia National Law Enforcement Association: an NGO that working on research, advocacy, and training on security related issues
- Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA) (Ghana): working on weapons trafficking, and other security and development issues.
- The African Security Sector Network: a network of African experts working on security sector reform, transformation and governance.
- West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP): Instigator and manager of the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) mechanism.
- West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF): the official interface for civil society engagement with ECOWAS (includes a peace and security cluster).
- Institute for Security Studies: working on crisis reporting, capacity building for civil society and security sector institutions.
- The Gulf of Guinea Citizens Network: working on natural resources exploitation, management and accounting. It monitors the work of the GGC and campaigns against the militarisation of the region in relation to oil ventures (Obi 2011, p. 130).
- Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET): WANEP programme to strengthen women's capacity for peacebuilding.
- Women in Peace and Security Network-Africa (WIPSEN-Africa): working on women's strategic participation and leadership in peace and security governance in Africa.

CSOs appear more active in the specific area of **oil transparency**: they have been calling for full disclosure from the state on issues related to accounting for natural resource wealth revenues (expert comment: Onuoha). In Ghana for instance, the Africa Centre for Energy Policy and IMANI Ghana have been at the forefront of monitoring oil and governance. A civil society platform on oil and gas was also set up which

²⁵ Most of the literature mainly addresses maritime security responses from the point of view of official security responses or private actors (See Fiorelli 2014; ICG 2012; Osinowo 2015 among others).

²⁶ Onuoha (expert comment) adds that traditional actors and institutions could be key actors in improving coastal development and maritime security but there has not been any serious engagement of state institutions and maritime industry stakeholders with these traditional actors.

played a key role in lobbying for new legislation and publishing papers to raise awareness (expert comment: Onuoha; Nancy & Fiifi 2015).

Beyond annual and event reports by CSOs, **independent assessments** of their actions is almost non-existent. Even the best known groups such as WANEP only feature in the literature as passing examples. Only in the last few years have CSOs begun to recognise the need for self-assessment, partly in response to growing demands by donors for evidence of impact (expert comment: Ajayi-Mamattah).

Ajayi-Mamattah (expert comment) and Onuoha (expert comment) stress a range of **challenges for CSOs** in the region including: state-imposed legal and political constraints;²⁷ decrease of funding; their own capacity constraints (the small number of expert CSOs in this field make them frequently over-used by international development partners); disconnect between NGOs and communal organisations; problems of legitimacy, representation and accountability; governance deficit in GoG countries that hinder their action; and the absence of impact measurement.

3.6 Private sector actors

Oil Companies

Oil companies are important actors in maritime security in the GoG. In the same way as national governments they are both contributory actors and victims of criminality. Their increasing presence and the perverse socio-economic, political and environmental effects they create (expropriations, oil spilling, and collusion with government officials) have led to tense situations with local communities (Obi 2011, p. 102). However, to mitigate these effects and to protect their interests, they have launched several initiatives:

- Oil companies are now investing substantial resources in **development and governance activities** to improve their engagement with local communities. An example is Chevron with its five years USD\$50 million Niger Delta Partnership Initiative (Newsom 2011, p. 7). The Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) of Nigeria has launched a public campaign to raise awareness among politicians, media and other stakeholders about oil crimes (Chatham House 2013, p. 13). The SPDC has also funded a Community Health Insurance Scheme (CHIS) in Rivers state to promote access to affordable and quality medical care (expert comment: Onuoha).²⁸
- Oil companies have launched several **initiatives to protect their oil, installations and boats**. For instance, Shell laces its crude oil with synthetic tracers to identify stolen oil when it re-enters the legitimate market (Chatham House 2013, p. 14). Major oil companies in Nigeria employ private maritime security companies (PMSCs) to escort supply boats and patrol offshore installations (ICG 2012, p. 11).
- One of the most important initiatives is the **Maritime Trade Information Sharing Centre (MTISC)**, set up in Ghana by the Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF). It collects and disseminates information on security incidents in the whole of the GoG via a secure website (ICG 2012, p. 21). It is already equipped and manned, and will contribute to the implementation of the YCoC (SAMI 2014). However, Bueger (expert comment) raises some concerns about this initiative. The MTISC is currently performing the role that the regional centres are supposed to

²⁷ For example, Nigeria does not allow CSOs to use the word 'security' in their name.

²⁸ A study that evaluated the scheme confirmed that over 80% of the enrollees are satisfied with the CHIS (Ogbonna et al. 2013, p. 28).

perform but that they cannot deliver yet. This poses the question of the long term perspective: in particular, how to make sure that the region owns the MTISC and that its work is transferred to the regional centres? At the moment, according to Bueger, this is a short term fix that requires a long term strategy to ensure that its work can be continued by the regional actors.

Shipping and fishing companies

Shipping and fishing companies are very concerned by maritime insecurity in the GoG which endangers their business. International shipping associations (BIMCO, ICS, INTERCARGO, INTERTANKO) have developed a set of guidelines to ensure the protection of their members: the Interim Guidelines for Owners, Operators and Masters for Protection against Piracy in the GoG. This initiative has been supported by the NATO Shipping Centre (NRC) (OBP 2015). It is difficult to assess the initiatives of fishing companies as the literature engages poorly with this issue.

Finally, as most shipping and fishing companies are not owned by West African states, it is not likely that they would invest towards improving the development of coastal communities (expert comment: Onuoha).

4. Scenarios and recommendations from the literature

4.1 Scenarios

Three main scenarios are developed by the literature on maritime security in the GoG:

- An **increasing spillover of piracy** from Nigeria is plausible in the face of very weak national navies, and limited national and regional efforts to tackle the root causes: for example in Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia (ICG 2012, p. 17; p. 19; expert comment: Onuoha).
- Risk of a **renewed conflict in the Niger Delta**: the failures of the amnesty programme to reintegrate militants could trigger a 'new wave of violence' that 'would risk boosting the criminal economy and creating an environment more favourable to the funding, organisation and use of piracy by criminal gangs' (ICG 2012, p. 11; see also Oluwatoyin 2011, p. 53). According to Newsom (2011, p. 1) and MADE (2013, p. 20), incentives for violence have not fundamentally changed: the amnesty programme opened a door for stabilisation but did not reduce the long-term potential for violence. The growing threat of Boko Haram in the North could also precipitate renewed violence in the Niger Delta as some militants feel it is diverting the attention of the government from their problem. For example, the perpetrators of an attack on a gas pipeline in February 2012 said it was a 'reminder of our presence'. It is also limiting the Nigerian government's capacity to deal with violence in this region as part of its security forces who are currently deployed in the north of the country (ICG 2012, p. 11). This scenario is unlikely but possible.
- New oil discoveries and production in GoG countries will possibly bring **more of the same problems**: conflicts, corruption, weak governance, instability and increasingly fragile states (Obi 2011, p. 106). Basedau & Mahler (2011, pp. 85-86) highlight the risks in Ghana and Sierra Leone. While they acknowledge that in Ghana oil production may have a positive effect on development, they also warn that governance is less impressive than perceived and faces rampant corruption. There is also potential for conflict between identity groups within the

country. They argue that Sierra Leone is at risk because it is still recovering from a decade of civil war with extremely low levels of development and a high level of corruption.

4.2 Recommendations

A number of recommendations are emphasised in the literature:

Tackle the root causes of maritime insecurity

Part of the literature strongly recommends that policy response should go beyond tackling immediate needs (reactive military engagement against pirate attacks) to include long-term strategies involving governance and development projects (Barrios 2013, p. 24; Chatham House 2013, p. 3; ICG 2012, p. 23; Onuoha 2013, p. 292; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 11). Policies should target the root causes of piracy and thus aim at: the creation of alternative and sustainable livelihoods, especially for young men (including promoting artisanal fishing); improving economic development, access to public services (roads, electricity, water, health, education) and living standards along the coast; and improving the economic governance of industries (Chatham House 2013, p. 14; p. 27; ICG 2012, p. 19; p. 24; IPI 2004, p. 9). The ambition should be to eliminate incentives for criminality (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, pp. 43-44). Ukeje & Mvomo Ela (2013, p. 33) and ICG (2012, p. 24) emphasise that efforts should be reoriented towards local coastal communities and their interests which are currently marginalised from policy responses. Finally, authors recommend focusing efforts on Nigeria which remains the epicentre of violence and criminality. The Niger Delta in particular, where the drivers and incentives for violence have not changed, should be at the centre of policy responses (Burdin Asuni 2009, p. 10; expert comment: Bueger; ICG 2012, p. 23; Newsom 2011, p. 4).

Increase the involvement of civil society

The policy response to maritime security needs more input from civil society in order to take on board new bottom-up perspectives focusing on the root causes of criminality (Barrios 2013, p. 24; expert comments: Ajayii-Mamattah; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, pp. 43-44). In particular, Newsom (2011, p. 9; pp. 12-13) stresses in particular the need to involve civil society actors to devise a policy response to address problems in the Niger Delta in order to enable them to identify needs and priorities. International and regional actors should therefore support local CSOs, in particular the ones working on governance.

Increase regional coordination and cooperation

Most analyses stress that regional maritime security strategies should guide national actors to respond to the regionalised nature of criminality. The consensus in the literature is that there is a need for greater political will, regional coordination and cooperation: to patrol, to share information, to prosecute pirates and to dismantle their networks (Barrios 2013, p. 24; expert comment: Bueger; IPI 2004, p. 9; Onuoha 2013, p. 292; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, pp. 43-44). For ICG (2012, p. 25) this enhanced cooperation should be led by ECOWAS and ECCAS as the GGC is not considered effective nor inclusive enough (it excludes Togo and Benin and is perceived as being under the influence of Angola which hosts the headquarters) (ICG 2012, p. 25). However, the GGC could play a key role in the implementation of the YCoC as a facilitator between ECOWAS and ECCAS (expert comment: Bueger). Both ICG (2012, p. 25) and Chatham House (2013, p. 27) highlight the potential of MOWCA to support ECOWAS, ECCAS and the GGC

as a technical forum. Finally, discussions should be initiated at the ECOWAS level (and/or together with ECCAS and the GGC) on funding the regional maritime security strategy. A tax on hydrocarbon exports or a regional maritime tax could be used to fund joint security operations at sea (ICG 2012, p. 25).

Emphasise local ownership

GoG countries need to make further efforts to develop their own comprehensive maritime security strategies including the establishment of proper legal frameworks and targeting the root causes of the problem (ICG 2012, p. 23; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 19). This would enable them to set the agenda and the priorities on maritime security issues instead of allowing external actors to set it for them (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 19). The international community should be more sensitive to GoG countries' priorities and local agency (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, pp. 43-44). Regional maritime security strategies should provide the basis for international community support (Chatham House 2013, p. 16; ICG 2012, p. 23).

Improve law enforcement capacities and regulatory frameworks

There is a real need to improve this dimension in GoG countries (Burdin Asuni 2009, p. 12; Chatham House 2013, p. 27; ICG 2012, p. 23). GoG countries should prioritise: strengthening and professionalising naval forces, maritime law enforcement bodies, port authorities and maritime administrative agencies; building their capacities with the support of donors (transparent recruitment, training, purchase of equipment); and developing comprehensive maritime awareness (ICG 2012, p. 25). To be able to dissuade pirate attacks, GoG states should also be able to arrest, prosecute and imprison criminals and pirates. To do so, the states should improve: intelligence and police work on land and at sea; coordination between security forces and law enforcement agencies; their judicial capacity; and update existing legal instruments or create new and integrated legal regimes in line with best practices²⁹ (ICG 2012, p. 25; Onuoha 2013, p. 292; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 19). All these actions need to be driven by coherent integrated maritime security strategies at national and regional level (Ukeje & Mvomo Ela 2013, p. 19).

Improve coordination among international actors

Avoid the multiplication of processes and initiatives, and competition between of institutional agendas. Instead, mechanisms should be in place to identify a strategy where each institution can contribute based on its own comparative strengths and achieve a more effective coordination of international support (Chatham House 2013, p. 27; ICG 2012, p. 25). For example, ICG (2012, p. 28) proposes the formation of a multinational maritime affairs committee in each country which would decide with host states how to make their activities complementary.

Strengthen work with private actors

Firstly, coastal states should work with oil and gas companies to make sure that profits also directly benefit local communities through job creation, infrastructure projects and social welfare. They could create apprenticeships or provide entrepreneurial training (ICG 2012, p. 23). Secondly, Nigeria should pursue its work with major oil companies to investigate the possibility of fingerprinting oil to identify

²⁹ For example, adopt and integrate into national law all international legal instruments that outlaw piracy including the 1982 UNCLOS, and the 2005 Protocols to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation.

stolen oil (ICG 2012, p. 25). Thirdly, private actors (oil, shipping and fishing companies) should work with states to share information on maritime traffic (ICG 2012, p. 25). They should also share the financial burden of ensuring maritime security with states and international partners (Chatham 2013, p. 27). Finally, they should adopt defence systems for their vessels (ICG 2012, p. 25).

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