



**FINAL REPORT**

# **Sub-regional conference for enhanced involvement of university actors in collective security: the case of the universities of The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal**

14 - 15 July 2022

Ziguinchor, Senegal

## **Imprint**

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Layout: Green Eyez Design SARL,  
[www.greeneyzdesign.com](http://www.greeneyzdesign.com)

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## Context

The African continent, and West Africa in particular, continues to experience serious forms of violence as well as hybrid, diffuse and dynamic security threats that undermine national stability.

The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal are connected through their history, their peoples, and their borders. Indeed, this closeness has led to the coining of the expression 'brotherly peoples'. Thus, when we examine the relationships between these three countries from a geographical and security point of view, it soon becomes apparent that, in addition to the natural region of Casamance, where a conflict has been raging for close to 35 years, various other security issues and threats also exist and interact. These include drug trafficking, cross-border crime, the proliferation of small arms, a criminalised economy, political instability, and more. There is a growing insecurity in the cross-border areas, which clearly needs to be identified and controlled to prevent the development of chronic instability, which would destabilise these three countries, adding to the already problematic security situation in the West African sub-region. The communities living in these areas do not always pay attention to national boundaries, as the same communities and families live on both sides of the same border. The ease of movement of the populations in these three countries reflects the porous nature of their borders and contributes to facilitating movements of armed groups from one country to another and the establishment of rear bases in these countries. The ability to move so easily across a border is a real asset and an ideal breeding ground for the development of insecurity and cross-border crime.

Although these three countries have not yet experienced open conflicts linked to violent

extremism or radicalism, they remain at risk, owing to their porous borders) the risk of recruitment of young people by terrorist groups, illegal migration, illicit trafficking (in human beings, arms and drugs), cattle rustling, but above all the resurgence of communal conflicts. Indeed, from a social viewpoint, the closeness between the communities creates a sort of 'communicating vessel' so that, when one country experiences a conflict or crisis, its neighbours feel and experience it as well.

As these security threats tend to assume sub-regional and transnational dimensions, cooperation between the three states in the area a necessary and unavoidable part of the response. These multidimensional forms of insecurity require new approaches based on the involvement and collaboration of all actors, including those from the academic world.

It is within this context that the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Peace and Security Competence Centre Sub-Saharan Africa (FES PSCC) in Dakar organised a two-day conference to examine the role and involvement of academia in the search for solutions to the security challenges shared by Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. The objective of this meeting was to promote an inclusive approach by integrating Gambian, Bissau-Guinean and Senegalese academics in a collective dynamic of reflection and responses to common security challenges with a view to achieving lasting peace and stability in the sub-region.

The main aims of this meeting, which brought together some twenty professors and teachers from universities in The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal, were to:

- Develop partnerships between the FES PSCC and the universities,
- Democratise the search for solutions to security challenges and conflicts in West Africa,
- Identify common security challenges in the three countries (Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau) with a view to formulating political and strategic proposals for prevention and resilience, for submission to the political decision-makers of the countries concerned, and
- Define avenues of collaboration between researchers from universities in The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal on security issues.

To this end, the following themes were addressed and discussed by the panels:

**Panel 1:** Overview of the situation and summary of the security challenges common to The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Senegal.

**Panel 2:** Role and contribution of academic actors to collective security in the sub-region: The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal.

**Panel 3:** How to involve the academic world in the search for sustainable solutions to cross-border security challenges: the case of The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal?

**Panel 4:** Identifying avenues for collaboration between researchers from the universities of The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal on security issues.



# I. Summary of the key findings

The sub-regional conference for enhanced involvement of academic actors in collective security allowed academics from The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal to discuss in depth the issue of their participation in collective security while

contextualising the security challenge in these three countries. The initiative was unanimously lauded by the participants, whose discussions, relevant ideas, and recommendations are recorded below.

## Panel 01.

### Overview of the situation and summary of the security challenges common to The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal

There can be no doubt that while the three countries (Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, and The Gambia) share similar security challenges, each has its own unique circumstances. In this panel, the various speakers in turn emphasised the security issues and the common history of the countries by highlighting the cultural and religious ties and connections that bind them. An analysis of the security challenges facing these countries would not be complete without a general review of the history of the countries and, above all, of their peoples. Their common past must be examined from the perspective of their traditions and cultures. The discussions revealed that the security challenges common to all three countries are manifold and dynamic. The participants cited, *inter alia*, the challenges of nation building, porous borders, social inequalities, free movement of people and goods in border areas, organised crime (drug trafficking, timber trafficking, illegal sale and circulation of small arms and light weapons), non-respect of human rights, radicalism and religious fundamentalism, the environmental challenge related to the problem of irregular exploitation of natural resources, poverty, electoral conflicts, and political violence.

- The matter of nation building was examined in detail. According to the panellists, our states have mostly been designed in the image of Western states. A paradigm shift is therefore imperative. The countries of Senegambia should not be viewed as separate states, but rather as integrated states, even though the borders inherited from colonisation cannot be erased. Certain practices must be seen, not as trafficking, but rather as normal consequences of the countries' shared past, arising from the incomplete building of the nation-state in these three countries. The countries we inherited from colonisation are sources of disconnect between imported rules and our own socio-cultural realities. The same applies to questions of land management (for example, the national domain act which is said to be one of the causes of the conflict in Casamance). The borders inherited from colonisation are artificial and were drawn without taking historical realities into account. The colonisers created those borders in total ignorance of the history, languages, and relationships between the peoples, thus leading to conflicts between the

different countries. While the border issue has not posed too many difficulties between Senegal and The Gambia, between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, it led to two symmetrical conflicts in 1989 and 1991. In the opinion of the academics, this conception of the state inherited from colonisation forms a real obstacle to nation building in the countries of Senegambia and a barrier to the search for an identity of their own, even though states did exist in Africa. The question of the nation-state is the main cause of the disappearance of cultural boundaries between the peoples of Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia and Senegal. This leads to the challenge of crystallisation of identity, which they described as a veritable time bomb that could explode at any moment. Borders in the sub-region were created without considering the objective human factors that guarantee cultural and ethnic harmony.

- The environmental challenge: the participants focused on the 'three Ds': deforestation, soil degradation and desertification. This phenomenon drives the population to mobility, migrating massively from the north to the south in search of pastures and fertile land. This situation is a source of tension between indigenous populations and migrants, who are subject to conflicts. Climate change is believed to be the cause of population migration from one area to another and a key factor in the development of insecurity. It is a constraint on development prospects, and it is also seen as a factor of food insecurity that can lead to violence between communities in different areas of the zone. This is exacerbated by natural resources exploitation and timber trafficking. The exploitation of natural resources is said

to be a source of internal insecurity, often leading to instability and tensions between bordering countries following the discovery of natural resources in the border areas between the three countries (e.g., the conflicts between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau in 1989 and 1991). The trafficking of timber from Casamance has emerged as one of the causes that prevent the Casamance conflict from ending. The Gambia, which borders Senegal on the Casamance side, is at the heart of this traffic.

- The challenge of horizontal inequalities: Harmful inequalities are central to the frustrations experienced by the populations. This is largely a consequence of colonial development policies, which focused on geographical considerations and created a certain degree of injustice between different areas of each country in terms of infrastructure. Indeed, in virtually all the countries (The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal), the colonisers made arbitrary choices to invest in certain areas, which they considered useful (the urban centres) and left those they deemed less useful (the peripheries) in extreme poverty. Thus, Jacobinism is one of the real causes of the divisions within the three countries. The people living in disadvantaged areas are susceptible to factionalism. This gives rise to frustrations that can be exploited by the elites, leading to conflicts, as we can see in many African countries. According to the researchers, this situation leads to growing insecurity and terrorism. Insecurity due to the extreme poverty of the population was described as harmful and hinders the chances of curbing terrorism, which is on the rise on the continent and is gaining ground significantly in West Africa.





- Organised cross-border crime: on this issue, the participants mentioned the 'Boffa Bayotte' affair, as well as 'timber exploitation' in Casamance. It should be noted that timber trafficking is becoming an increasingly problematic issue in the Casamance conflict and is a bone of contention between Senegal and its Gambian neighbour. This situation calls for a real forestry policy that includes surveillance infrastructure, awareness-raising, and training. According to the panellists, timber trafficking is one of the scourges of the war in Casamance. The practice is a serious threat to peace and security. Drug trafficking is also a key factor in insecurity in the sub-region, with Guinea-Bissau (often referred to as a narco-state) acting as a hub for drug trafficking, which, according to the participants, is increasingly widespread in the three bordering countries. It was also observed that there was trafficking in other types of drugs such as Indian hemp or 'Yamba', primarily in Casamance and The Gambia. The drug is mostly grown in Casamance and then transported through The Gambia. This traffic has become a real scourge in the area, emerging as a significant source of insecurity for the sub-region, which is difficult to control due to the porous land and sea borders between the countries. Cross-border crime is therefore at the heart of the common challenges facing these three nations. The lack of effective border surveillance only serves to exponentially increase arms trafficking. This traffic fuels internal conflicts in the countries concerned, with a real risk of creating factionalist regions within the countries.
- Internal conflicts in the three countries: it should be noted that these conflicts can vary from one country to another, although they are not without consequences for the neighbouring countries. This is true of the war refugees found in the different countries. However, it has been noted that the peoples of these three countries very often blame each other for the internal conflicts in any given country. This is the case with the conflict in Casamance, which many Senegalese have blamed on the Gambian government, and the Guinean people who also often blame the Senegalese government for interfering in their internal conflicts. Rightly or wrongly, the entanglements that can exist on both sides are not always free of the involvement of neighbouring countries, even if the true causes often lie in internal social distortions.
- Radicalism and fundamentalism: the participants unanimously agreed that none of the three countries was immune to the threat of extremism. Although radicalism and fundamentalism have not yet reached extreme proportions in The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal, it is clear that there is a growing extremist threat in the West African region. This security threat is both existing and existential. It can be fuelled by social frustrations arising from recurrent human and fundamental rights violations, electoral conflicts and ongoing political violence in Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau.

## Panel 02.

### Role and contribution of academic actors to collective security in the sub-region: The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal

Universities are at the heart of the social agenda (as demonstrated by the First International Conference of Ministers and University Presidents of Southern Senegambia jointly organised in Ziguinchor, in April 2022, by the AUF and Assane Seck University of Ziguinchor to identify opportunities for partnership between higher education institutions in the region and to forge cooperative links to address common challenges). The issue of academic involvement in collective security efforts in the sub-region is therefore not new, but not very old. On the contrary, it is timely, germane, and necessary in several respects. It will allow the academic community to become involved in debating, researching, and proposing solutions to the security challenges affecting the sub-region. Academics can play a role in the eradication of violence because universities are cosmopolitan spaces *par excellence* that promote discussions of ideas to find appropriate solutions for societal issues. Universities are also called upon to train moral individuals to promote respect for humanism because, as Rabelais said, 'Science without conscience is but the ruin of the soul'. The role of academics is primarily centred on research and teaching with a view to addressing the socio-economic and cultural problems of society. Thus, academics are key players. Indeed, the participants unanimously recognised that peace remained a prerequisite for the sustainability of community living. As there is no development without research, there is no development without security. Consequently, academics need to gain a better understanding of security challenges as a basis for informing security policies.

The role of academic actors in security research is indisputable, yet non-state actors also have a

vital role to play in finding solutions to security challenges. Such research must focus on and above all be centred on a humanitarian perspective. This would allow tensions to be prevented and thereby avoid their escalation. To this end, horizontal and vertical inequalities need to be addressed and reduced. Research is key to achieving this, and academic actors are the guarantors of such security research.

Universities embody democratic values which are themselves considered to be values of peace. Peace is not the sole preserve of politicians and diplomats, although they play a role in its practice and implementation. To the extent that peace is an eminently scientific issue, it should be a matter for scientists (indeed, the sciences englobe all disciplines and are characterized by an object, a method, and a nomenclature). Today, it is imperative for academics to take a broad view of the security problems of the three countries. In this task of defining security problems, the perceptions of the actors involved and the means used to combat them must be considered. The purpose of a university is to generate scientific knowledge, disseminate it and apply it in order to find solutions to the problems of society. To achieve this goal, teachers and researchers need to work in an environment where freedom remains a fundamental value.

Universities are institutions of peace. The salvation of humanity can be achieved through education by means of research, training and documentation activities aimed at education for peace and peaceful conflict resolution, human rights, democracy, and tolerance. Universities need to develop conflict-prevention programmes



and facilitate the synergy of researchers in this context.

In addition, for some time now, CAMES has required teacher-researchers to implement community service programmes (awareness raising, information, advocacy, and training for the population). Community service has thus become one of the tasks of the universities, which can no longer confine themselves to their primary task of

teaching and producing knowledge. Universities and academics must take an active role in social issues to contribute to the social, economic, and political dynamics of their communities.

In order to capitalise on the involvement of academics in collective security issues in the sub-region, their research needs to be embraced by state actors and the general public.

## Panel 03.

### How to involve the academic world in the search for sustainable solutions to cross-border security challenges: the case of The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal

As Kofi Annan said in March 2005, 'Our guiding light must be the needs and hopes of peoples everywhere. [...] Progress in the areas of development, security and human rights must go hand in hand. [...] [W]e will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed.' Based on the foregoing considerations, it is clear that the issue of security relates above all to the vision of a community, of a collectivity. A personal feeling shared by its members. It lies in a certain faith in living together, in peace, and, above all, a sense of justice and fairness.

Even if it is unanimously allowed that, traditionally, security remains the prerogative of government, it is clear from the various contributions that the traditional actors are no longer able to consolidate peace and stability in the face of the new dynamics of security threats. Indeed, faced with continuing insecurity and the security threats that currently prevail in the Senegambian zone, the traditional actors are struggling to implement appropriate solutions to prevent, combat, and resolve these security challenges in the long term. It is therefore imperative to introduce a different approach by diversifying and involving new, non-traditional actors in conflict management, such as the academic world. The role of academia in the search for a solution is therefore becoming an inescapable and undeniable necessity. The universities could play a decisive role in the quest for stability in the sub-region. University research is sought because we believe in scientific data.

However, the sole purpose of scientific production should not be to defend one political faction on matters of public interest.

Scientific research must serve as a compass for responsible and effective policy decisions for the good of the people. This should be the role of science in the quest for solutions to society's problems. In the field of security, science could help rationalise decisions, define research questions, structure public debate, propose solutions and contribute to their implementation, and finally evaluate the results and, if necessary, redirect them. The academic world is called upon to participate in the entire cycle of public policies, whether in the field of 'hard security', i.e., military security, or 'soft security', i.e., human security. Universities must be at the centre of public policy and at the service of the community.

Faced with the failure of the many solutions that have been put forward so far, innovation is imperative, hence the role of citizen participation, but what citizens are we referring to? Educated citizens, informed citizens, knowledgeable citizens. Academics, who themselves are citizens, must participate in the training of our citizens through colloquiums, scientific councils, the publication of endogenous scientific journals, and discussions with a societal impact. Academics must be reflections of their students, and their communities. They must move towards the development of internal knowledge and research capacities within or on the periphery of the institutions responsible for public policies. Dialogue with politicians is a



necessity. Programmes and institutions need to be created. There is also a need to work towards improving the external influence of scientific institutions on strategic orientations. The separation of the world of research from the sphere of political and public action has produced results and solutions that are ill-suited to the security, economic and socio-political challenges faced by most of the states in Senegambia. Academic

research must be brought to bear on practice. There is therefore a need for co-construction between politicians and academics, particularly in the field of security. Scientists, like citizens, must be able to contribute to public policy. Co-construction should be implemented through joint security research between The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal.

## Panel 04.

### Identifying avenues for collaboration between researchers from the universities of The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal on security issues

There is a need for collaboration between the various universities in Senegambia and for direct involvement of university actors in security issues in the sub-region. In this logic, it is necessary to move towards the definition of programmes and achievable objectives. In the opinion of the participants, universities must not be an ivory tower. They cannot remain confined to their traditional missions without taking an active role in societal issues. Academics are therefore called upon to focus their research more on anticipating security problems and advocating in the interest of the people, as the number of hotbeds of tension is on the rise.

The discussions between the academics led to the following pragmatic proposals for collaboration in order to contain or curb insecurity in the three countries.

- Develop research programmes (dissertations/theses) and set up joint degree programmes.
- Promote collaboration between research centres in sub-regional universities (Assane Seck University of Ziguinchor - University of The Gambia - University of Bissau).
- Develop South-South cooperation between universities in the three countries through exchanges of professors, twinning, and sharing of curricula and experiences.
- Create a framework for internal reflection in the different universities of the sub-region. Proposals will be made by academics from each university and shared with other colleagues in a much broader discussion framework.
- Set up an institute, think tank or research centre bringing together academics from Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau to reflect and advise policy makers on the most appropriate solutions to the security challenges facing the different countries.
- Create master's programmes and certificates specialising in security issues to draw the interest of students and teacher-researchers by financing research studies, theses, etc. They will act as relays within the different communities in the countries. Our universities must cultivate the values of peace, democracy, freedom, human rights, and tolerance, which have the potential to positively change society.
- Create a consortium of universities in Senegambia to seek funding from donors and financial partners.



## II. Recommendations

The participants made the following recommendations.

- Lift taboos on insecurity issues in the sub-region. The silence of our academics is a danger; they have a duty to engage in solving sociological problems using a forward-looking approach. The participants drew attention to the taboos surrounding the conflict in Casamance and the threats they pose to reflection on that conflict.
- There is also a need to reflect on the concept of the nation-state: It is important to move beyond the traditional concept inherited from colonisation. According to the panellists, the concept of the nation-state plays a harmful role and hinders the development of the states of Senegambia. It is a source of security problems and, above all, identity problems in the sub-region.
- Create master's programmes and certificates specialising in security issues to draw the interest of students and teacher-researchers by financing research studies, theses, etc. They will act as relays within the different communities in the countries.
- Collaborate with and provide useful advice to decision makers: Concerted efforts are required between the various actors, including academics, politicians, members of civil society and the general population. These consultations should lead to concrete and pragmatic solutions.
- Strengthen the relationship between the state and academics: In addition to publications, it is essential to raise awareness among the people and, above all, the leadership.
- Organise this sub-regional meeting annually to pursue discussions on security issues and include the universities of Guinea-Conakry and Mauritania. Annual university conferences should be made permanent, with an obligation to evaluate the actions taken on security research on a yearly basis.
- The creation of forums involving state and non-state actors: There was also talk of the creation of broader forums with both state and non-state actors. This will allow for more complete and concrete consultations with all the actors concerned.
- Promote women and youth participation on security issues.
- Organise forums to raise popular awareness on the need to get involved in an endogenous search for solutions to the security challenges affecting the countries, on the need to accept others and live together.
- Demilitarise and democratise security issues, which must not be left solely to the defence and security forces.
- Remedy the weaknesses of the actors involved in security issues, for example, by involving community radio stations and grassroots associations and promoting twinning with local governments.

### III. Concluding note

The sub-regional conference of academic actors analysed the security question in Africa and particularly the security issue in the three bordering states of Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. Discussions on the meeting theme focused on three essential points. Firstly, the contextualisation of the security issue in the three countries, secondly, the role of academics in the pursuit of security, and thirdly, the quest for solutions to the security challenges faced by the three countries. The African continent, and West Africa in particular, is experiencing serious forms of violence and diffuse and dynamic hybrid security threats that undermine stability. These security challenges can be seen in The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal. These three states are experiencing hybrid forms of insecurity and diverse threats that can be observed in the border areas. These threats range from piracy in the Gulf of Guinea to the illegal extraction of natural resources, cybercrime, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, trafficking in human beings, money laundering and illegal immigration. It should be noted that these threats spread from one country to another due to the weakness of the local political and security systems. In addition, there is the growing threat of violent extremism, which is increasingly spreading to the coastal areas.

The recurrent crises in southern Senegambia have manifested themselves through a twofold dynamic of unification and fragmentation. Thus, despite attempts at integration, Senegambia has always oscillated between homogeneity and heterogeneity, between discontinuity and continuity, between adjustments and disjunctions. The risk of radicalism, democratic pathology, porous borders, and poverty are among the situations linked to insecurity in these three countries.

In the light of these considerations, can these countries meet the security challenge individually, when the threats of contagion of human insecurity and political destabilisation are very real? It is evident that a synergy of the political and diplomatic forces of these three countries will be needed to find solutions to the prevailing security challenges.

The universities will play a decisive role in the search for stability in the sub-region. University research is sought because we believe in scientific data. Thus, the role of science is to contribute to the search for solutions to the problems of society.





