

Evaluation of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

02 May 2024

IED-24-008



INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluated the relevance, effectiveness, and coherence of the United Nations Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

The Missions have been responsive to regional priorities by responding to Member States' requests and engaging during elections, which were identified as critical periods that posed high risks of violence. They have effectively leveraged their comparative advantages, including: the ability to conduct cross-border political analyses; facilitate exchanges of knowledge, experience, and good practices; engage with a wide range of stakeholders; and successfully convene parties to conflict.

The Missions contributed to positive outcomes related to conflict prevention both in their good offices and regional functions. At country level, Mission good offices have contributed to increased inclusion and enhanced political dialogue during electoral periods and to peacefully conducted elections. At regional level, the Missions have contributed to the development of regional action plans and strategies and have supported capacity building of regional partners on key thematic areas. Additionally, UNOCA and UNOWAS have effectively advocated for consideration of women in conflict prevention and of environment, but effective advocacy on youth, human rights, and disability inclusion was less evident.

While both UNOCA and UNOWAS effectively partnered with internal and external stakeholders, there were gaps to strategic planning on joint conflict prevention initiatives with the larger United Nations system and broader inclusion of national stakeholders. There was an overall lack of synergy amongst the United Nations entities stemming from the absence of joint workplans, lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities, lack of communication around Missions' political strategy and lack of alignment to United Nations country-level programming. Furthermore, when engaging with national stakeholders, the Missions engaged systematically with national authorities and main opposition parties but to a lesser extent with other stakeholder groups.

While operating in a challenging political environment, the Missions have effectively addressed the high priorities for peace and security of Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel, representing the international community in the regions, conducting high-level political advocacy and mediation, and promoting cross-border initiatives. Nevertheless, opportunities remain for both Missions to further leverage their comparative advantages, including their convening power, and unique role as regional special political missions. By more meaningfully including broader segments of society into political dialogue, more proactively promoting accountability and transparency in political processes, and reinforcing linkages to other United Nations political presences in the region, the Missions will be able to better contribute to the long-term goal of sustainable peace in the regions.

OIOS makes three important recommendations to the Missions to:

- a) develop a strategy for broadening the range of external groups included in good offices engagements;
- b) strengthen the use of political analyses to identify additional opportunities for advocacy around good governance; and
- c) further clarify mutual roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for enhanced collaboration around conflict prevention, including through the establishment of Memoranda of Understanding.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, and coherence of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). This is the first OIOS evaluation of both Missions.
2. The evaluation conforms with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System. Management comments from UNOWAS and UNOCA were sought on the draft report and have been included in the annex.

Mandate

3. The UNOCA was established in January 2011¹. It covers the following eleven Member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS):
 - Angola
 - Burundi
 - Cameroon
 - Central African Republic
 - Chad
 - Congo
 - Democratic Republic of the Congo
 - Equatorial Guinea
 - Gabon
 - Rwanda and
 - Sao Tome and Principe.
4. As the third regional office instituted by the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), UNOCA is mandated to strengthen the role of the United Nations in the promotion of peace and security in Central Africa through 31 August 2024².
5. The main objectives of the current UNOCA mandate include:
 - Carrying out good offices³;
 - Enhancing subregional capacities for conflict prevention and mediation;
 - Supporting United Nations efforts in the subregion as well as regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security; and
 - Enhancing coherence and coordination in the work of the United Nations in the subregion on peace and security.

¹ S/2009/697 and S/2010/457.

² S/2021/719 and S/2021/720.

³ Good offices are conducted by the Special Representatives of the Secretary General heading UNOCA and UNOWAS when they “undertake both private and public initiatives or develop appropriate mechanisms to prevent the eruption of crises, limit the scope of crises that have already erupted or prevent an existing dispute from turning into an open conflict. The Special Representative(s) initiate diplomatic and political actions in the countries concerned to encourage various stakeholders to engage in dialogue in order to find concerted and lasting solutions to their problems. [GOOD OFFICES, PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY AND MEDIATION | UNOCA \(unmissions.org\)](https://www.unmissions.org/good-offices-preventive-diplomacy-and-mediation).

6. The UNOWAS was established through the merger of the former United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel (OSES) in 2016. It covers 16 Member States:

- Benin
- Burkina Faso
- Cabo Verde
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Gambia
- Ghana
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau
- Liberia
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Senegal
- Sierra Leone, and
- Togo.

7. UNOWAS is responsible for preventive diplomacy, good offices and political mediation and facilitation efforts in West Africa and the Sahel. It also works to prevent conflict and election and transition related tensions, sustain peace, and consolidate peacebuilding efforts and political stability. The mandate of UNOWAS was established in 2017⁴ and renewed in 2023⁵.

8. The main objectives of the current UNOWAS mandate include:

- Monitoring political developments in West Africa and the Sahel;
- Carrying out good offices and special assignments;
- Enhancing regional and subregional partnerships to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security;
- Supporting through political advocacy and playing a convening role in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel; and
- Promoting good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and the mainstreaming of gender in conflict prevention, management and resolution initiatives.

Leadership structure and roles

9. The DPPA is responsible for the overall management of UNOCA and UNOWAS. As UNOCA and UNOWAS are regional special political missions, they are backstopped respectively by the regional divisions for Central and Southern Africa and Western Africa under a shared management structure of the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and of Peace Operations (DPPA/DPO).

10. The UNOCA and UNOWAS are each headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). At UNOWAS, the SRSG is supported by a Deputy Special Representative⁶. At both missions, staff comprise political advisers, programmatic and administrative staff working across

⁴ S/2016/88 and S/2016/89, S/2016/1128 and S/2016/1129, and S/2019/1009 and S/2020/85), as well as Security Council resolution 2349 (2017).

⁵ S/2023/17.

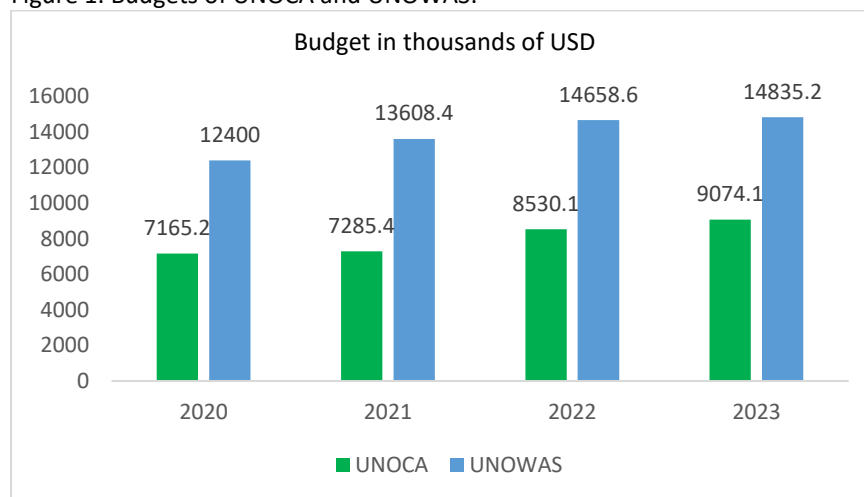
⁶ At UNOWAS, the SRSG also serves as the head of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC).

specialized units that focus on specific areas such as political affairs, strategic communications and public information, as well as staff dedicated to gender mainstreaming and human rights.

Resources

11. Figures 1 and 2 below present the budget and personnel breakdown for both UNOCA and UNOWAS over the past four years.⁷ The UNOCA budget witnessed a steady increase in the past four years from 7.17 million USD in 2020 to 9.07 million USD in 2023. The UNOWAS budget exhibited a similar trend of growth, increasing from 12.40 million USD in 2020 to 14.84 million USD in 2023.

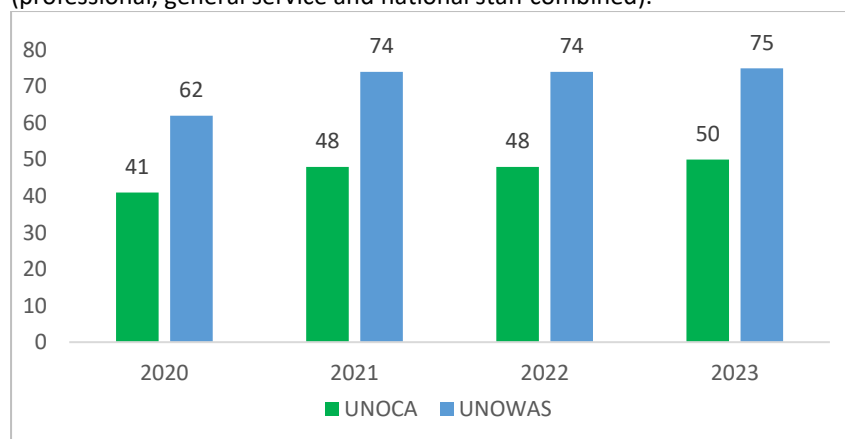
Figure 1. Budgets of UNOCA and UNOWAS.



Source: Proposed programme budget 2020-2023.

12. The human resources dedicated to UNOCA and UNOWAS reflected increases over the past four years. In 2020, UNOCA had 41 staff posts, which increased to 50 by 2023. Similarly, UNOWAS had 62 staff posts in 2020 and 75 in 2023.

Figure 2. Personnel of UNOCA and UNOWAS (professional, general service and national staff combined).



Source: Proposed programme budget 2020-2023.

⁷ A/77/6 (Sect. 3)/Add.4, A/76/6 (Sect. 3)/Add.4, A/75/6 (Sect. 3)/Add.4, A/74/6 (Sect. 3)/Add.4

II. Scope and Methodology

13. The evaluation covered the period from January 2019 to January 2024 and focused on the following two Mission functions:

- (a) Preventive diplomacy and mediation efforts, in particular, good offices related to electoral processes, in order to reduce tensions, violence, and support transition processes; and
- (b) Partnerships with regional institutions, in order to address cross-border peace and security threats.

14. The methodology included the following qualitative and quantitative methods:

- (a) Interviews with 153 UNOWAS (95) and UNOCA (58) mission staff and stakeholders (68 per cent male and 32 per cent female) comprising: Mission staff; national authorities; United Nations partners; regional partners; Member States, including members of the Security Council; and representatives of civil society;
- (b) Five case studies, selected in consultation with the Missions, for in-depth assessment of the outcomes across the two areas of thematic focus:
 - In-person country-level case studies of election-related good offices interventions for **Nigeria and Guinea-Bissau for UNOWAS** and **Chad for UNOCA**;
 - Hybrid in-person and remote regional case studies of approaches to cross-border threats to peace and security, focusing on the thematic areas of both Missions: i) maritime security in the **Gulf of Guinea**; and ii) peace and security in the **Lake Chad Basin (LCB)** region;
- (c) Document review of Secretary-General reports⁸, code cables⁹, programme plans¹⁰, reports of the Peacebuilding Commission, audit reports¹¹ and relevant policy and guidance documents;
- (d) Three surveys of: 1) Resident Coordinators (RCs) in the two regions; 2) United Nations Country Team (UNCT) members in the two regions;¹² and 3) DPPA HQ desk officer staff and Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) for each of the respective countries in both regions¹³;

⁸ United Nations, Reports of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (2019 – 2023): S/2019/549, S/2019/1005, S/2020/585, S/2020/1293, S/2021/612, S/2021/1091, S/2022/521, S/2022/1019, S/2023/490, S/2023/1075; Reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (2019 – 2023): S/2019/430, S/2019/913, S/2020/463, S/2020/1154, S/2021/517, S/2021/975, S/2022/436, S/2022/896, S/2023/389, S/2023/934.

⁹ 74 code cables sent between 2019 and 2023 from UNOCA and UNOWAS to DPPA upon completion of good offices visits to 20 countries (7 for UNOCA and 13 for UNOWAS).

¹⁰ [https://undocs.org/en/A/78/6\(Sect.3\)/Add.1](https://undocs.org/en/A/78/6(Sect.3)/Add.1)

¹¹ United Nations, Office of Internal Oversight Services/Internal Audit Division, [Audit of United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel](#) (2023/038), 14 September 2023; United Nations, Office of Internal Oversight Services/Internal Audit Division, [Audit of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa](#), (forthcoming).

¹² The RC and UNCT surveys were conducted as part of another OIOS evaluation of the RC system in 2023. The RC survey achieved a response rate of 76 per cent (n=96) and the UNCT survey achieved a response rate of 50 per cent (n=969).

¹³ The DPPA HQ staff and PDA survey received a response rate of 15.8 per cent (n=38).

- (e) Analysis of secondary data contained in the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)¹⁴; and
- (f) Remote observation of recorded Security Council meetings on *Peace consolidation in West Africa and Central Africa* between 2021 to 2023.

Limitations

15. There were limitations to the assessment of good offices due to limited outcome reporting by the Missions themselves. In addition, a survey of DPPA HQ staff and PDAs yielded a low response rate (15.8%) and therefore survey data was consistently triangulated with other data sources when supporting the evaluation results.

III. Evaluation Results

- A. Both UNOCA and UNOWAS have been responsive to the highest priorities in the two regions and have leveraged their comparative advantages when conducting their activities

The Missions have responded in relevant manner to Member State priorities in the two regions

16. Both UNOCA and UNOWAS systematically aligned their work with the high priority needs of Member States, as identified in the written statements of the Peacebuilding Commission¹⁵ to the Security Council between 2019 to 2023 and shown in Figure 3. In Security Council meetings on West Africa¹⁶ and Central Africa¹⁷, Member States stressed¹⁸ the prioritization of specific programmatic areas - such as youth and women in decision-making and maritime security - in the respective regions, and the Missions developed their workplans to provide full coverage of these programmatic areas as requested. In addition to thematic work prioritization, both Missions formulated objectives¹⁹ for engaging with regional institutions and addressed the needs expressed by the Peacebuilding Commission for building capacity of key partner regional organizations and regional knowledge sharing.

¹⁴ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) mapping violence trends between 2015 and 2023 (included: battles, explosions/ remote violence, protests, riots and violence against civilians; excluded: peaceful protests and strategic developments). Data extracted on 6 December 2023 from: <https://acleddata.com/> for the countries within the mandates of the Missions.

¹⁵ Statements of the Peacebuilding Commission on Central Africa and West Africa, Lake Chad Basin and Gulf of Guinea (2019-23) <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/documents>

¹⁶https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbc_advice_on_unowas_july_2023_-_approved.pdf,

https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/unowas_pbc_written_adv_ice_-_approved.pdf,

https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/chairs_summary_of_pbc_meeting_on_covid-19_in_west_africa_and_the_sahel_22_april_2020_-_final.pdf

¹⁷https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/chairs_summary_of_pbc_meeting_on_central_africa_-_final.pdf,

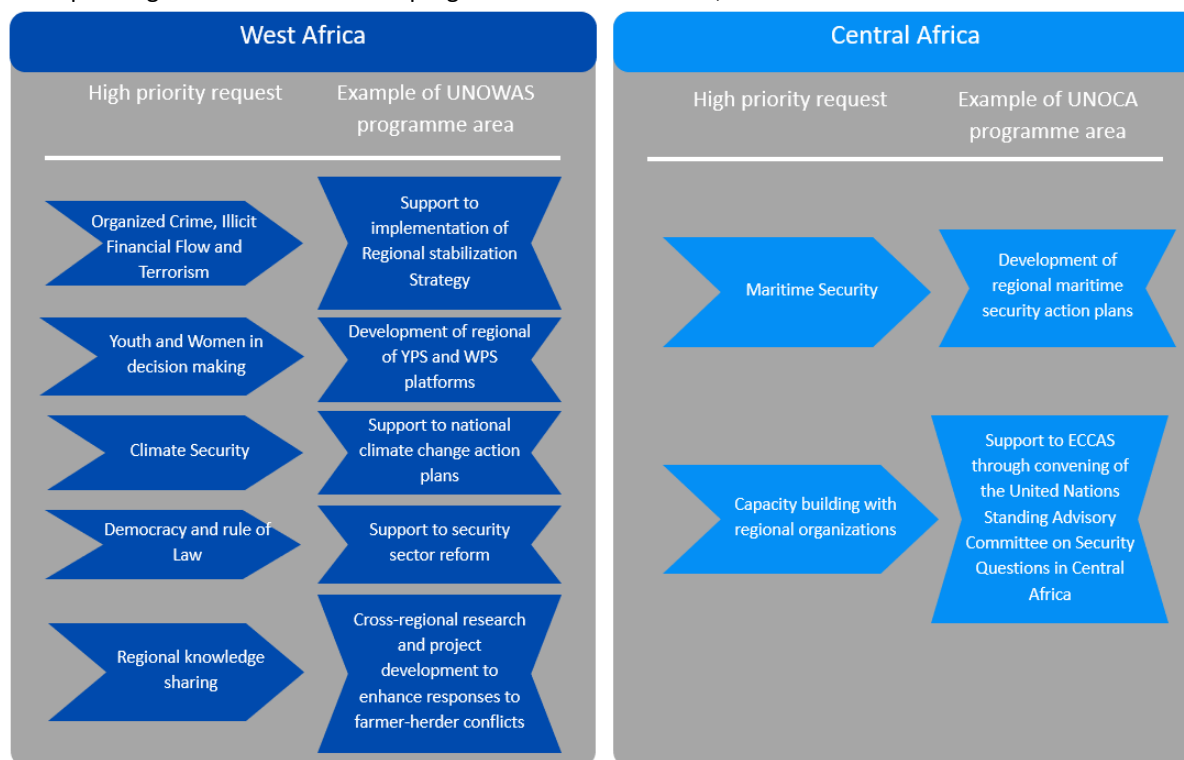
https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/chairs_summary_piracy_in_the_gulf_of_guinea_mtg.pdf,

https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/chairs_summary_on_the_pbc_meeting_on_the_gulf_of_guinea_5_june.pdf

¹⁸ Language used for definition of high priority requests was: 'must, should, shall, stressed, or reiterated' for the purpose of analysis.

¹⁹ A/77/6 (Sect. 3)/Add.4

Figure 3. Peacebuilding Commission statements on high priority requests to the Security Council and corresponding UNOCA and UNOWAS programmatic areas of work, 2019-23



Source: Written Advice of the Peacebuilding Commission to the Security Council.

17. Security Council members interviewed provided highly positive feedback on the relevance of Mission efforts to address the diverse and complex needs of the regions and also noted that the Missions had leveraged their comparative advantage as regional entities. Stakeholders at national and global levels interviewed also recognized that the UNOCA and UNOWAS mandates as regional political missions uniquely positioned them to support countries in addressing transnational challenges such as maritime security, farmer-herder conflicts and trafficking.

The Missions correctly identified elections as periods that posed high risk of violence and correspondingly aligned their work programmes to engage with Member States, particularly during critical pre-electoral periods

18. The Missions have appropriately aligned their activities to intensively engage in good offices during elections, which have been typically characterized as periods of increased tension and violence (the results of these activities are discussed below in Result B). Data on violence trends²⁰ in both regions between 2015 and 2023 showed an increase of violence in 80 per cent of electoral periods and an increase in fatalities in 52 per cent of electoral periods. Over two-thirds of all interviewees also identified elections as creating high-risk environments, thus confirming that election-related engagements were the right high-priority focus for the missions.

“Elections are becoming more violent ...The last 10-15 years, I think we’ve seen a lot of things happening in the region that have contributed to violent elections. [...] When elections come, they become extremely high stake.”
- Mission staff

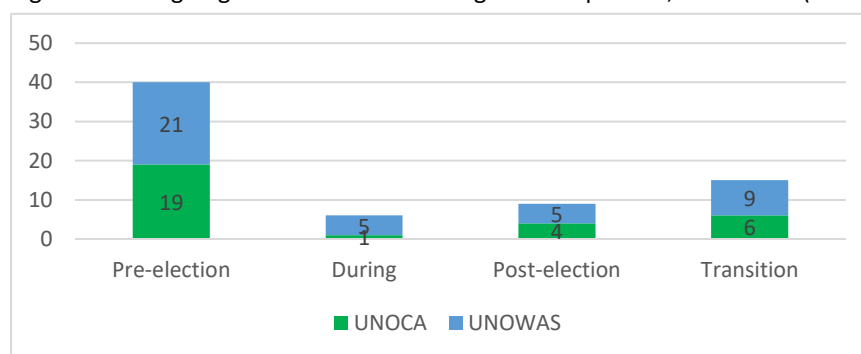
²⁰ ACLED data mapping 71 presidential and legislative electoral periods in Central Africa and West Africa between 2015 and 2023 against violence trends.

19. As shown in Figure 4, out of a total of 74 UNOCA and UNOWAS good offices visits during election periods between 2019 to 2023, a majority (40) took place during the pre-election timeframes. This emphasis on the pre-election period enabled the Missions to focus on preventive action to mitigate risk of election-related violence and conduct monitoring and analysis of the situation in each country. Between 2019 and 2023, UNOCA and UNOWAS had conducted at least one election-related good office visit to most countries within their respective regions, supporting and advocating for national political dialogue and promoting commitment to peaceful elections; UNOCA conducted between one to eight²¹ good offices visits to most countries during that time period, and UNOWAS conducted between one and four visits²². Exceptions to this included Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for UNOCA and Mali for UNOWAS, since other United Nations presences existed in these countries and exercised good offices functions during the election periods and the Missions did not want to duplicate efforts. Also, Rwanda had no elections during the period under assessment.

“In 2019, the elections were postponed, and this was a significant crisis moment and the reason to this not developing into a full-blown national crisis is because the SRSG was in the country and going to the president and telling him to calm things down”.

- United Nations partner

Figure 4. Timing of good offices visits during election periods, 2019-2023 (n=74)



“... elections are always a moment of tension, and it can always escalate, so if we manage to keep the tensions low, then we are successful.”

- Mission staff

Source: Secretary General reports.

20. Staff and all stakeholder groups interviewed provided positive feedback on the Missions’ identification of tension points in the electoral context, and the subsequent planned timing of the Missions’ good offices, specifically the utilization of both pre- and post-election good offices interventions. Stakeholders stated that pre-election good offices were crucial in building a bridge amongst political opponents to engage in political dialogue leading up to the election. These interviewees also noted that post-election good offices were essential to reduce tensions and violence and keep the situation calm after the elections. In addition to electoral periods, the Missions had a substantial involvement in transitional contexts²³ during the period under assessment, demonstrating that they strategically planned their involvement in areas where they could contribute the most value through their good offices.

Stakeholders also appreciated the Missions’ comparative advantages in conducting useful analyses and exercising their convening power

21. United Nations partners and Member States interviewed additionally placed importance on the cross-border political analyses produced by both Missions. They praised the quality of the

²¹ Sao Tome. (SG reports and code cables).

²² Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Sierra Leone. (SG reports and code cables).

²³ [Priorities: Supporting nations in transition | United Nations Secretary-General](#). For the purpose of this report, a transitional context is one, in which a country is in the process of restoring constitutional order.

analyses and appreciated the sharing of information across national, regional and global levels. The regional analyses in particular were said to “connect the dots” on similar issues or challenges faced by countries in the regions. The Missions also facilitated exchanges of knowledge, experience and good practices from other countries. Their presence in the regions was seen to serve as antennae for analyzing and monitoring the situations at country and regional levels.

22. Stakeholders interviewed further indicated that the neutrality and credibility of the United Nations as exercised through UNOCA and UNOWAS was a key added value of the Missions’ political mediation and leadership, as it evoked respect and confidence of stakeholders and facilitated their will to engage. National stakeholders interviewed noted that impartiality was a key difference between the Missions and other regional organizations, and elicited trust in the Missions as neutral and honest brokers. For example, one representative of a Member State suggested that the neutrality of UNOWAS played a critical role in being able to provide humanitarian assistance in one country in the region after it had undergone a coup d’état. Other interviewees speaking about UNOCA mentioned that the SRSB manages to be in direct contact with more marginalized stakeholders because of the trust they place into the institution.

“As the representation of the UN in the region, UNOCA is respected and listened to.”

– National authority

“The presence of UNOWAS instils confidence.”

– United Nations partner

23. The particular convening power of both UNOCA and UNOWAS has also contributed to bringing together parties to conflict. More specifically in this regard, the convening power of the Missions was instrumental in unifying UN agencies around the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-Affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region (RSS). The Missions additionally had a critical added value in convening national stakeholders, as exemplified in the assessment of a UN partner in one country who stated “as soon as SRSB was in town, we were able to mobilize all stakeholders, political, development, civil society organizations (CSOs), humanitarian, other stakeholders. Something I was trying to do, but added value from SRSB was key to gathering all of them.”

B. Both Missions contributed to positive outcomes related to conflict prevention in their good offices and regional functions

Good offices of UNOCA and UNOWAS have contributed to several country level outcomes, including increased inclusion and political dialogue during electoral periods and to peacefully conducted elections

24. Data from the interviews and OIOS document review of code cables demonstrated contributions of Mission good offices to various conflict prevention outcomes. When good offices were employed specifically in electoral and transition contexts, as discussed above, Mission-led advocacy and mediation contributed to promoting greater inclusion of relevant stakeholders and supporting processes related to national dialogue and pre-electoral and post-electoral political dialogue. As a result, in at least seven countries in both regions, these engagements contributed to the signing of peace accords or codes of conducts for elections, which subsequently led to a commitment to non-violence and reduction in hate speech and at the same time served as accountability mechanisms for election candidates.

25. In some countries, the engagement of the Missions has also contributed to an increased inclusion in dialogue of opposition and under-represented political groups. Such inclusion has led to increased participation in national political processes; for example, in one country, members of opposition agreed to return from exile to participate in national dialogue and in three countries

opposition parties decided not to boycott elections. When Missions effectively supported dialogue and inclusion in transition contexts, for example, in Chad, this helped to keep the transition on track.

26. Furthermore, in nine countries the good offices of UNOCA and UNOWAS contributed to more peaceful elections. More specifically, in four countries this resulted in more credible elections, and in three countries the Missions' work helped to ensure the acceptance of election results or the use of legal means to contest those results when there was disagreement. Finally, in both electoral and transition contexts in six countries, Mission good offices have significantly contributed to preventing an escalation into violence and to ensuring stability.

27. The Missions have additionally developed specific approaches in their good offices engagements which worked well in electoral and transition contexts, as illustrated in the following examples:

- In Nigeria, the support of UNOWAS to stakeholder fora at national and state-levels – in partnership with the UNCT and national civil society organizations – were seen as useful tools in encouraging election candidates to make commitments to good conduct during their electoral campaigns.
- In Chad, UNOCA worked closely alongside ECCAS to assist the facilitator involved in the mediation between the transitional authorities and the opposition leaders in exile in support of the transition process. In addition, UNOCA contributed to discussions on a joint engagement strategy for the international community (International Group of Partners for Support to the Transition in Chad)²⁴, which helped unify messaging.
- In Burkina Faso and Niger, UNOWAS mediated between the transitional governments and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to promote a mutual re-engagement.
- In Sao Tome and Principe, the SRSB and Head of UNOCA appealed to international donors to support the mobilization of resources necessary for the organization and conduct of national dialogue and elections.

UNOCA and UNOWAS have further contributed to the development of regional action plans and strategies and have supported capacity building of regional partners on a variety of key thematic areas, including participation of women and youth

28. Data from interviews and an OIOS document review of Secretary-General reports identified further UNOCA and UNOWAS contributions to regional initiatives addressing a wide variety of peace and security challenges, as shown in Figure 5. The main types of outcomes achieved with the Missions' support included:

- Creation of a regional mechanism and/or strategy, such as “regional network of practitioners and civil society organizations on farmer-herder conflicts” in West Africa;²⁵
- Institutional capacity building, such as “updated ... governance frameworks” for the Coalition of Civil Society Organizations for Peace and Conflict Prevention in Central Africa;²⁶

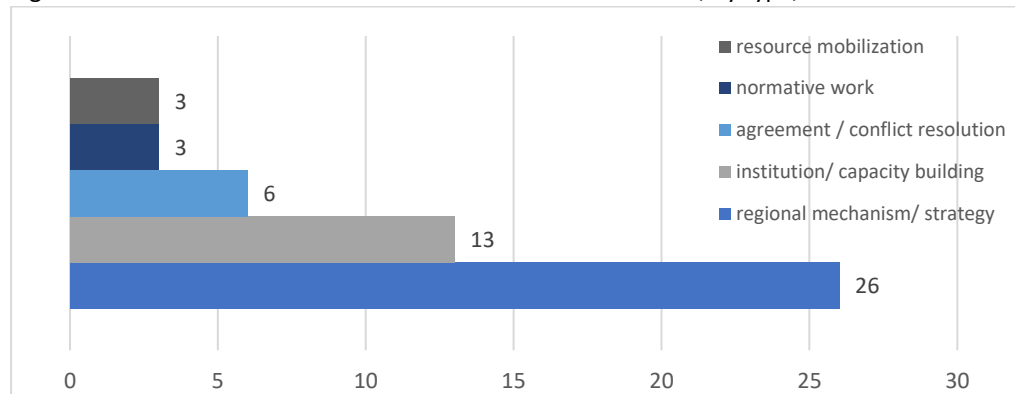
²⁴ S/2022/436, para 53.

²⁵ S/2020/585.

²⁶ S/2023/934

- Conflict resolution, such as the mediation in the Yenga border dispute between Guinea and Sierra Leone which resulted in exchanges between the two countries at the ministerial level and led to the reopening of the border;²⁷
- Normative work, such as “revised protocol relating to the strategy for the safety and security of vital interests at sea and in continental waters of ECCAS Member States”;²⁸ and
- Resource mobilization, such as approval by the Peacebuilding Fund of “a new cross-border project between Gabon, Chad and Cameroon to support the involvement of over 1,800 young people in early warning mechanisms”²⁹.

Figure 5. Outcomes to which UNOCA and UNOWAS contributed, by type, 2019-2023



Source: Secretary-General Reports.

29. The above outcomes have been produced in a wide variety of thematic areas, including:

- peace & security in the Sahel
- border security
- counter-terrorism
- civil society
- farmer-herder conflicts
- gender equality
- hate speech
- humanitarian issues
- arms control
- climate security
- maritime security
- democracy, governance and human rights
- organized crime
- youth

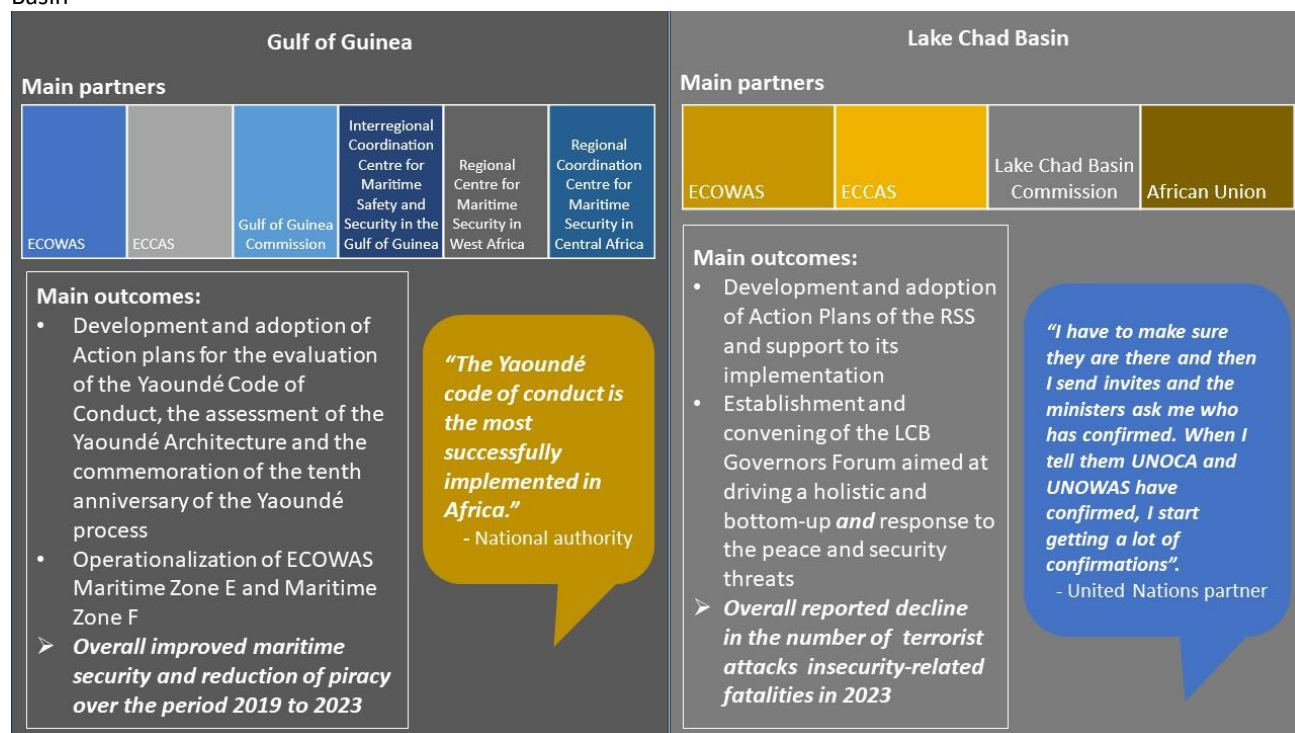
30. Case studies of the work of the two Missions on the maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea (GG) and on peace and security in Lake Chad Basin illustrated their contributions to various peace and security outcomes, as shown in Figure 6. However, some United Nations partners interviewed also suggested that regional engagements at times lacked a strategic approach and called for a stronger focus on interventions where the Missions have an added value, such as on high-level advocacy, convening and mobilization of international support.

²⁷ S/2021/612

²⁸ S/2023/389

²⁹ S/2020/1154

Figure 6. Case studies on 1) Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and 2) Peace and Security in the Lake Chad Basin



Source: Secretary General reports

These contributions to outcomes were both enabled and hampered by several critical issues

31. Tables 1 and 2 outline the key enablers and challenges, as well as their impacts on, the Missions' work, as identified by interviewees from all stakeholder groups. Both the enablers and challenges are presented in the order of their prevalence according to frequency of citations by staff and stakeholders interviewed.

Table 1. Key enabling factors

Enabling Factors	Benefits
SRSB political leadership	Ability to gain access to national authorities and to authoritatively convey messages of the Secretary-General, including sensitive messages
United Nations brand	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring trust, neutrality, credibility, and legitimacy Signal the international community's presence and attention
Convening power	Ability to bring various stakeholders together and to promote inclusive dialogues
Regional expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of the political dynamics Provision of high-quality analysis Application of lessons learned from one country to another
SRSB regional origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of the SRSB as a respected "elder" Greater attention to and acceptability for their statements on African democracy

Source: OIOS analysis of interviews

Table 2. Key challenges

Challenges	Implications
Subsidiarity principle³⁰	Difficult to follow the subsidiarity principle when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is a divergence in the approach or in the actions of the regional organizations and the United Nations in responding to a conflict • the regional organization is politically weakened • the regional organization lacks the political will to act
Travel conditions (for UNOCA)	Extensive travel times, frequent delays and flight cancellations and closure of airports for commercial travel in case of emergencies presented a risk to the ability of the SRSG to engage in timely manner
Lack of resources	Challenge in covering a large number of countries especially when rapid reactions to crises are needed
Polarized political environment in the Security Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support for the Missions • Lack of consensus on conflict prevention • Lack of national authorities' openness to interventions
Great magnitude of conflict	Inability of the SRSGs to establish a dialogue inclusive of most stakeholders, despite extensive mediation efforts
Measuring good offices	Inability to establish how a situation would have looked in absence of good offices interventions

Source: OIOS analysis of interviews

C. UNOCA and UNOWAS have effectively advocated for consideration of women in conflict prevention and environment, but effective advocacy on youth, human rights, and disability inclusion was less evident

32. Both Missions consistently mainstreamed gender equality and environmental considerations in their work. An OIOS review of code cables reporting on the good offices showed that the SRSGs systematically met with women's groups and discussed ways to increase women's participation and confidence in election processes³¹. This progress in mainstreaming gender was also acknowledged in recent OIOS audits of UNOCA and UNOWAS³² and confirmed by a review of Secretary-General reports. However, the longer-term results of these engagements have been mixed, with interviewees observing that increased confidence and participation of women have not necessarily led to increased representation in governments. The Missions have also worked on issues related to the environment through, for example, the establishment of regional climate security coordination mechanisms and risk assessments.

"UNOWAS has been championing the youth and women inclusion in the implementation of the [...] RSS [Regional Stabilization Strategy], the strategy has been adjusted to have youth as a separate pillar".
- United Nations partner

33. The focus on other cross-cutting issues of youth, human rights and disability inclusion was less evident. For example, during election-related good offices visits, references to youth were made only in a few meetings, and a reference to persons with disabilities was noted in one

³⁰ The subsidiarity principle suggests that UNOCA and UNOWAS whenever possible, consider following the lead of respective regional organizations ECCAS and ECOWAS, as well as the continental AU in matters related to the maintenance of peace and security.

³¹ OIOS analysis of code cables.

³² OIOS audits of UNOCA and UNOWAS, see FN7.

meeting³³. The OIOS audit of UNOWAS also noted a “slow advancement” in progressing the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda. Some stakeholders further mentioned that human rights issues have not been sufficiently reflected in the good offices’ agenda due the sensitivity of this topic in some contexts, although UNOCA noted that it has focused on strengthening the capacities of regional and national organizations.

34. A few selected examples of mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues into regional initiatives are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Examples of mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues in UNOCA and UNOWAS

Cross-cutting issue	Example of mainstreaming of a cross-cutting issue (Mission and year reported)
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of gender-sensitive civil society platforms for early warning and mediation. (UNOCA, 2021) Establishment of a regional mechanism, jointly with ECOWAS, to follow up on legal reforms and facilitate experience-sharing and advocacy on the representation and participation of women in elections. (UNOWAS, 2020)
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization of the first meeting of the working group for the establishment of the Youth, Peace and Security Coalition in Central Africa in collaboration with ECCAS. (UNOCA, 2022) Support to the launch of digital campaigns and the adoption of declarations on peaceful elections in Benin and Cote d’Ivoire. (UNOWAS, 2021)
Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiative to improve the protection of journalists in countries facing political crises or armed conflicts. (UNOCA, 2020) Endorsement of a draft proposal for the establishment of a regional platform of Ministers of Justice of the ECOWAS region. (UNOWAS, 2022)
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration with ECCAS on the development of a conflict-sensitive regional strategy on climate change and resilient development, and a regional protocol on transhumance. (UNOCA, 2023) Joint efforts with ECOWAS to build synergies around the Dakar Call to Action, and to support national climate change adaptation plans in West Africa. (UNOWAS, 2023)

Source: Secretary General reports.

D. While both UNOCA and UNOWAS effectively partnered with internal and external stakeholders, there were gaps to strategic planning on joint conflict prevention initiatives with the larger United Nations system and broader inclusion of national stakeholders

There have been positive examples of effective coordination at the global, regional and country levels within the United Nations system, although strategic joint engagement on conflict prevention was lacking

35. At the global level, the Missions most frequently coordinated with the regional desks at Headquarters and indicated overall satisfaction with the support provided by DPPA to the preventive diplomacy efforts in the two regions. Staff and stakeholders interviewed cited examples of the positive working level relationships between the Missions and DPPA regional desks at headquarters and indicated sufficient coordination mechanisms - such as regularized monthly reporting, code cables, coordination meetings, and thematic level working groups - were in place for on-going collaborative engagement. Additionally, Mission staff reported that they consistently engaged other parts of the system on electoral processes. Lastly, interviewees shared positive views

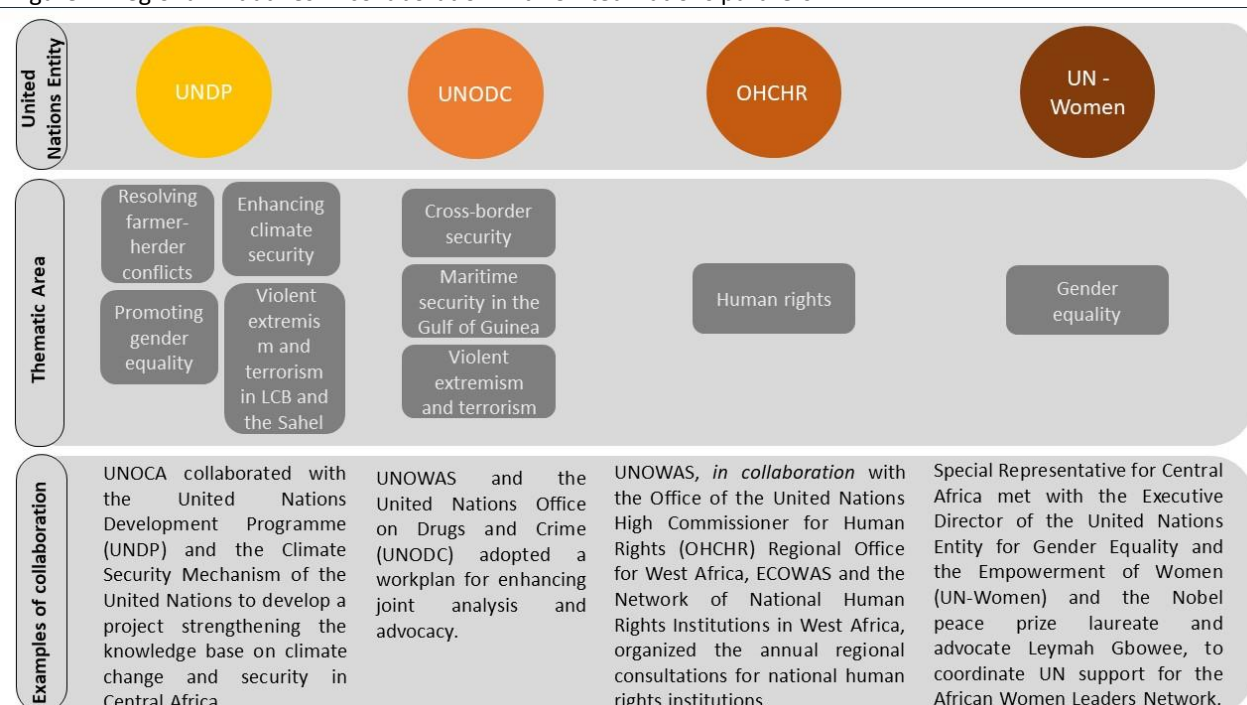
³³ OIOS analysis of code cables.

of support provided at the global level for the Missions’ bi-annual engagements and regular briefings to the Security Council to inform on emerging peace and security threats.

36. However, there were specific coordination gaps within the United Nations system at the global level regarding the organization’s wider regional conflict prevention strategies. In this regard, an example was cited of a conflict prevention initiative in one region that was decided at the global level but was not aligned to the realities on the ground nor the Mission’s preferred political approach. Staff interviewed also expressed the need for greater clarity on the strategic roles and responsibilities of DPPA leadership engagement with the SRSGs.

37. At the regional level, significant efforts have been made to improve coordination with other United Nations presences in both regions, and UNOCA and UNOWAS coordinated various regional initiatives with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as shown in Figure 7. The Missions also reported regular meetings with Peacekeeping operations, Special Envoys, and the Special Coordinator for the Sahel in the regions.

Figure 7: Regional initiatives in collaboration with United Nations partners



Source: Secretary-General reports

38. Nevertheless, strategic-level gaps at the regional level were also present. Staff interviewed indicated that there was an overall lack of synergy amongst the United Nations entities, including the absence of joint strategies or workplans for regional conflict prevention and lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities. In addition, there was recognition from staff and stakeholders interviewed of the heightened importance and added responsibility of the regional special political missions especially in the current context of the drawdown of multiple peacekeeping operations. To that end, a United Nations regional presences coordination initiative, which consisted of regularly scheduled bi-annual meetings with the objective of furthering collaboration and information sharing with all SRSGs of the region, was spearheaded by the SRSG of UNOCA in 2022. Furthermore, UNOCA has recently collaborated with RCOs on a regional strategy of conflict prevention.

39. At the country level, Missions coordinated most frequently with RCs in the two regions, and feedback from RCs surveyed was highly positive, with over 75 per cent strongly or somewhat

agreeing that the Missions had effectively supported their needs. The Missions also coordinated with UNCT members, who were less favorable in their ratings; 57 per cent of those surveyed strongly or somewhat agreed that the Missions effectively supported their needs. There were positive examples reported in documents³⁴ and interviews on collaboration with the RCs and UNCTs in both regions. UNOWAS collaborated to promote the integration of young women and men into conflict prevention, electoral and peace processes in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, the Niger and Togo. UNOCA coordinated to promote the political participation of women in Angola, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe, which led to partnerships with women's civil society organizations, parliamentarians and women's political party leagues. The Missions also collaborated with the UN system on cross-border issues; one United Nations partner interviewed offered an example of this by stating "On cross-border, for Cameroon-Nigeria border, [UNOWAS] coordinated the work of the two UNCTs; there is value added from a regional body for this, they were guiding the country teams." Nonetheless, some UNCT members raised concerns regarding the Missions' lack of communication around political strategy and the alignment to United Nations country-level programming.

Good offices have engaged systematically with national authorities and main opposition parties but to a lesser extent with other stakeholder groups

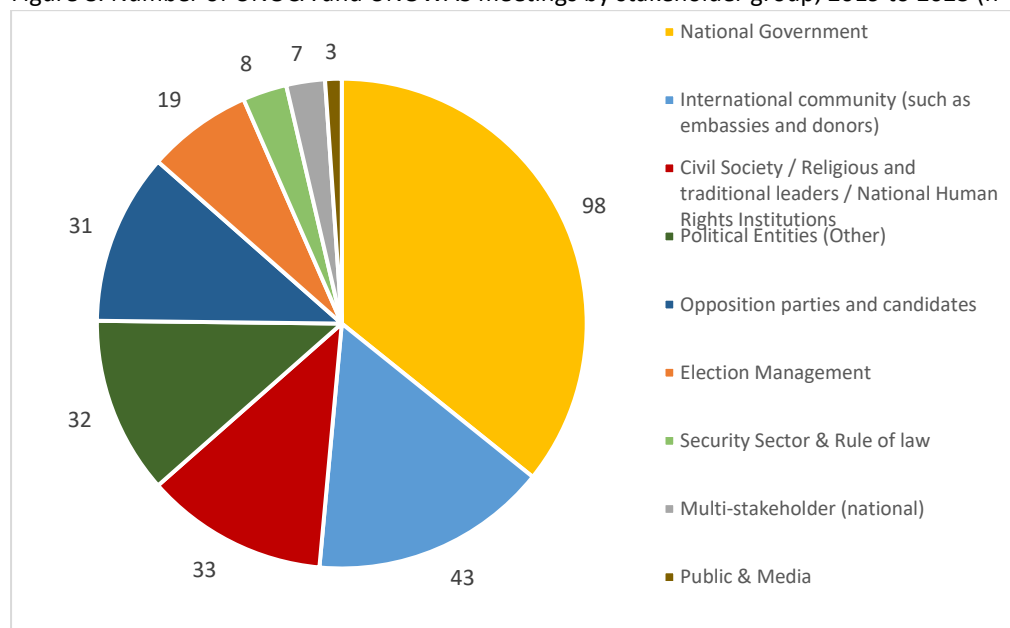
40. National authorities interviewed in the two regions responded mostly positively on their collaboration with the Missions' good offices; these host government partners appreciated that the Missions were comprehensive in convening the participation of all principal national-level political actors.

*"They support ongoing national efforts, because the core rests with national institutions; their collaboration is fundamental to reaching out to these constituencies."
- Mission staff*

41. Further, as shown in Figure 8, an OIOS review of code cables reporting on the good offices demonstrated that the Missions primarily engaged with national authorities and main political parties, which represented 60 per cent of the meetings conducted over the past five years. This resulted in other stakeholder groups feeling less included. Civil society representatives interviewed reported on what they perceived as their inadequate representation in national political dialogues and a lack of information sharing on the outcomes of the good office engagements that took place. They also questioned the efficacy of 'silent diplomacy' where grievances from the broader segments of the population were not publicly acknowledged or heard. Several interviewees further observed that gaps in inclusivity might have led to the avoidance of dialogue on the issues of discrimination, bad governance, and corruption.

³⁴ UNOWAS: S/2021/61/2 and UNOCA:S/2022/43/6

Figure 8. Number of UNOCA and UNOWAS meetings by stakeholder group, 2019 to 2023 (n=274)



Source: OIOS analysis of code cables

The Missions made efforts to systematically engage with their key regional partners but the lack of formalized relationships, limited partner capacity and structural challenges have hindered more strategic coordination

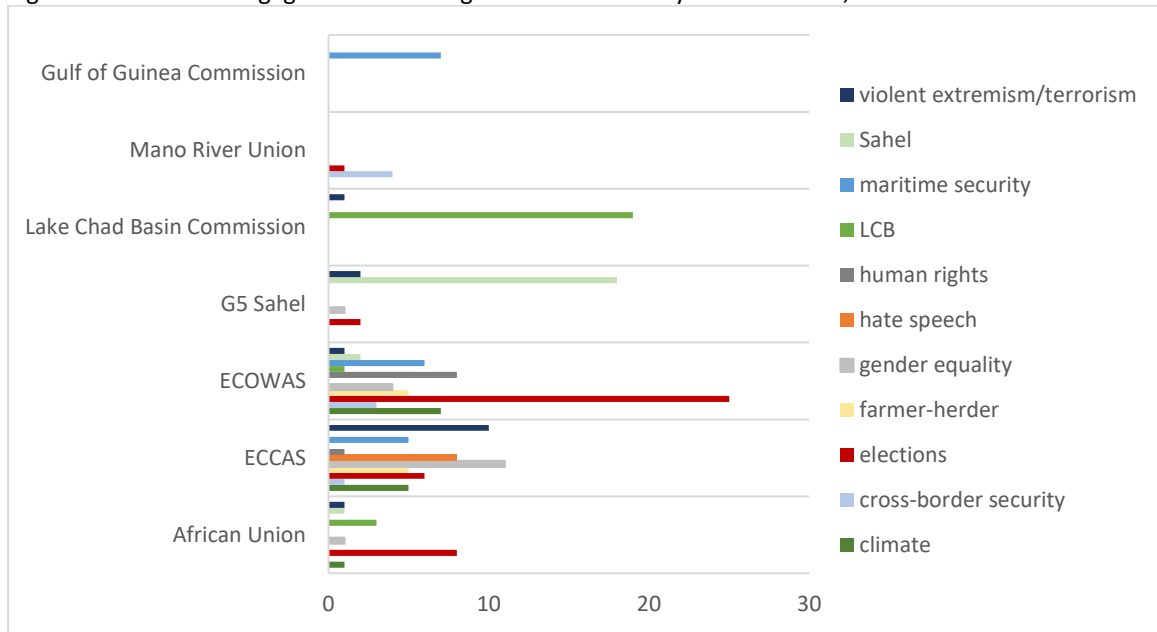
42. The Missions worked with regional partners on conflict prevention, management, resolution, and mediation through their good offices in supporting regional solutions to cross-cutting threats to peace and security, as shown in Figure 9. Both Missions also collaborated extensively with ECOWAS and ECCAS on addressing cross-cutting issues³⁵ and regional peace and security challenges, such as maritime security, violent extremism and terrorism and cross-border security.

43. Examples of joint collaboration with key regional partners included:

- West Africa: Elections in Nigeria and Gambia and the transition in Burkina Faso where ECOWAS-UNOWAS-AU undertook successful joint high-level fact-finding missions. National authorities and Member States interviewed stated that unification of the entities' messaging sent the signals to political parties of the attention and oversight of the international community and applied pressure to the political actors.
- Central Africa: The SRSB and Head of UNOCA and the President of ECCAS worked closely together in Chad to support the transition process; joint good offices were also deployed to facilitate dialogue with all prominent Chadian opposition figures, including in coordination with the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as mediator for ECCAS in the Chad process.

³⁵ See Table 3.

Figure 9. Number of engagements with regional institutions by thematic area, 2019-2023



Source: Secretary-General reports

44. Despite the coordination described above, however, there were significant challenges to the Missions' collaboration with their regional organization partners, including lack of formalized relationships, as well as the lack of resources, technical expertise, and structural challenges within the partner organizations. Recent OIOS audits³⁶ of both Missions also indicated an absence of formal joint Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), agreements or work plans with their key regional partners of ECCAS, ECOWAS³⁷ and the AU. Staff and stakeholders interviewed also highlighted the very limited human and financial resources and challenging internal dynamics of regional partners which ultimately hindered the capacity of these organizations to engage with the Missions, as well as the limited capacity of subregional partners that the Missions collaborated with on a range of cross-border thematic areas. For example, comprehensive coordination on maritime security was hindered due to insufficient human, technical, logistical, financial and material resources within regional partners.³⁸ Nevertheless, the Missions have tried to mitigate these challenges through diversification of engagements with subregional organizations, and by partnering with other actors, such as national governments³⁹, CSOs⁴⁰ and international partners⁴¹ on joint initiatives addressing a range of regional threats to peace and security and cross-cutting issues.

IV. Conclusion

45. As both regions face a continued cycle of violence and "a recent wave of attempts and coup d'états"⁴², the continued relevance of both UNOCA and UNOWAS remains unquestionable. In a very

³⁶ OIOS Audits of UNOCA and UNOWAS, see FN7.

³⁷ In February 2024 UNOWAS signed an MOU with ECOWAS that covers all aspects of its collaboration with the regional bloc

³⁸ S/2022/818, para 54.

³⁹ For example, with the governments of Gambia, the Republic of the Congo and Senegal etc.

⁴⁰ For example, with the West African Human Rights Defenders Network, the African Centre for Democracy, Youth Climate Network, Norwegian Refugee Council etc.

⁴¹ For example, with the EU, Group of Seven Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea etc.

⁴² <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1109452>

challenging political environment, the Missions have addressed the high priorities for peace and security of Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel, effectively representing the international community in the regions, successfully conducting high-level political advocacy and mediation, and promoting cross-border initiatives.

46. Nevertheless, opportunities remain for both Missions to continue to strengthen their important role in sustaining peace in the regions. In doing so, they should further leverage those comparative advantages that no other entity can utilize, solidifying their unique role as regional special political missions, increasing their focus on cross-border issues where their activities add the most value and harnessing their invaluable convening power to seek solutions where there is risk of conflict. A clearer definition and communication of the Missions' vision and role vis-à-vis regional organizations will also enhance their advocacy for United Nations principles and values in the regions. Lastly, by more meaningfully including broader segments of society into political dialogue and more proactively promoting accountability and transparency in political processes, as well as reinforcing linkages to other United Nations political presences in the region with the goal of a joint strategy for conflict prevention, the Missions will be able to better contribute to the long-term goal of sustainable peace in the regions.

V. Recommendations

47. OIOS makes three important recommendations.

Recommendation 1 (Results B and C):

48. To promote increased inclusivity in national dialogue, UNOWAS and UNOCA should develop a strategy for broadening the range of external groups included in good offices engagements. In doing so, the Missions should consider the following:

- increasing the number and types of civil society organizations that are meaningfully engaged in good offices;
- engaging traditional and religious leadership of communities;
- strengthening advocacy for the adoption of quotas to increase the representation of women and young people in institutions;
- strengthening advocacy for the participation of persons with disabilities, including possibly a mapping of relevant associations and organizations.

Indicator of achievement: presence of a strategy on improving inclusivity of good offices and meaningful participation by the relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation 2 (Results B and C):

49. To further promote the principles of good governance within their respective good offices functions, UNOWAS and UNOCA should strengthen the use of political analyses to identify additional opportunities for advocacy in particular on issues of accountability and transparency.

Indicator of achievement: evidence of consideration of opportunities for increased advocacy on good governance in good offices engagements.

Recommendation 3 (Result D):

50. To strengthen partnerships with regional organizations, UNOWAS and UNOCA should further clarify mutual roles, responsibilities and opportunities for enhanced collaboration around conflict

prevention, including through the establishment of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). In doing so, the Missions should consider the following:

- how to effectively navigate the subsidiarity principle;
- how to support capacity building and assist resource mobilization.

Indicator of achievement: establishment of MoUs or other coordination mechanisms with regional organizations, addressing roles and responsibilities and possible joint workplans and/or other shared activities.

ANNEX 1: Management Response

Comments Received by email from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

I acknowledge receipt of the memo on the draft report from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of our regional office. I have also taken good note of the report and its pertinent recommendations. This evaluation will be of great use to us in planning and implementing our activities.

We fully accept the findings and recommendations. The recommendation action will be sent out in the next few days.

Kind regards,
SRSG Abarry



MEMORANDUM



UNOWAS/OSRSG/24/980

Date: 25 April 2024

To: Eddie-Yee Woo Guo
Director Inspection and Evaluation Division,
Office of Internal Oversight Services

Through: Fatoumata Ndiaye
Under-Secretary-General
Office of Internal Oversight Services

Info: Abdou A Barry
SRSG for Central Africa and Head of UNOCA

From: Leonardo Santos Simão  
SRSG for West Africa & the Sahel and Head of UNOWAS

Subject: **Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of UNOWAS and UNOCA - Management Response to Evaluation Results and Recommendations**

1. I would like to thank you for your Draft Report on the Evaluation of UNOWAS and UNOCA. We have taken note of the Evaluation Results and Recommendations.
2. We accept all three recommendations highlighted in the report and have attached our plan of action and associated timetable indicating how we plan to implement each of the recommendations.
3. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the comprehensive evaluation which your Office has conducted and for the excellent collaboration enjoyed between our respective focal points during the conduct of this important exercise.
4. Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact my Office.

CC:

- *Mr. Benjamin Swanson, OIOS*
- *Mr. David Nyskohus, OIOS*
- *Mr. Boubacar Issoufou, UNOCA*
- *Mr. El Hadji Diene, UNOCA*
- *Ms. Cherrie-Anne Vincent, UNOWAS*