



Centre for Alternative
Politics & Security
West Africa

Centre pour les Politiques
Alternatives & la Sécurité
Afrique de l'Ouest

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Rethinking, Partnering and Working for Sustainable Security in West Africa:

A Stakeholders' Introduction to CAPS-WA



This document introduces the Centre for Alternative Politics & Security, West Africa (CAPS-WA). It presents the background of the Centre, its vision and mission, the pillars on which it stands, including its approach to tackling West Africa's complex security issues. Importantly, it outlines why the Centre complements others, and invites all stakeholders to support its mission through partnership, collaboration and impact.

West Africa is at a critical juncture. The sub-region continues to face the dual pressures of internal conflicts and external interventions. Its security landscape is marked by political instability, ethnic and religious tensions, economic inequality, environmental degradation, and the rise of violent extremism. In recent years, West Africa has seen the rise and rise of militant groups that challenge the state, and win the hearts and minds of several communities. Responses and responders seem helpless, as the state continues to cede to militancy and authoritarianism, with devastating human security consequences.

Today, militant groups that started in individual countries such as Nigeria and Mali have become regional, engulfing neighbouring countries, and affiliating themselves with groups like al Qaeda and ISIS. West Africa has also recently experienced six successful coups and about four attempted ones. Meanwhile, climatic pressures, food insecurity and displacement continue to unsettle the people and communities of the sub-region.

Traditional approaches to these security issues have often focused narrowly on military and state-centric strategies, overlooking the deep-rooted socio-political, economic, and cultural dimensions that fuel insecurity across the region. As a result, many of these strategies have failed to address the underlying causes of conflict and instability, leading to persistent cycles of violence, poverty, and marginalisation.

Worse, the region's security challenges have worsened despite the existence of several national, regional and global actors and programs purporting to address them spanning over two decades.

The need for alternative approaches to security has therefore become more urgent than ever. The good news is that the sub-region has lived and historical experiences, traditions, cultural mores, and local knowledge systems that offer such alternatives to augment other approaches.

The Centre for Alternative Politics & Security, West Africa (CAPS-WA) is a critical response to the complex and evolving security challenges West Africa faces in the 21st century. It advocates for a more holistic and sustainable approach to security that draws on those lived experiences knowledge systems. An approach to security that is attuned to the unique realities of West Africa.

What CAPS-WA Is (Not)

CAPS-WA is not just another think tank or research institute. It is also a movement in humanity. It is a non-partisan and not-for-profit organisation that fosters a new way of thinking about and practising security in West Africa.

Through its research, advocacy, training, and advisory services, CAPS-WA aims to inspire a shift in the region's security paradigm—one that prioritises the well-being of all people and recognises the importance of inclusive, participatory, and sustainable solutions.

Our Values

Our core values of Humanity, Purpose, Courage, Responsibility, Diversity, and Collaboration guide our efforts to redefine security in West Africa to ensure that initiatives are practical but also ethical, inclusive, and aligned with the needs and aspirations of the people, communities and countries of the region. By adhering to these values, CAPS-WA is committed to making a meaningful and lasting impact on the security landscape of West Africa and contribute to a future where all people can live in peace, dignity, and prosperity.

Vision and Mission

CAPS-WA's vision is a secure and sustainable West Africa where individuals, communities, and states coexist and flourish in an environment of peace, understanding, and mutual respect.

To achieve this vision, CAPS-WA's mission is to promote alternative and sustainable ways of being and feeling secure through multi-faceted programs that include research, training, advocacy, and advisory services. Through these activities, CAPS-WA aspires to be a catalyst in transforming West Africa into a region where security is comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable, laying the foundation for long-term peace and prosperity. The centre is committed to aligning its efforts with relevant national, continental, and global legal frameworks and development agendas, including the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The CAPS-WA Approach

CAPS-WA's approach is grounded in the belief that security is not merely the absence of conflict or protecting state borders. It is a multidimensional concept encompassing the well-being of individuals, communities, and states. CAPS-WA's work is hinged on three pillars:

- **Indigeneity:** we recognise the vital role that Indigenous knowledge, traditions, and systems play in ensuring sustainable peace and security in West Africa. By embracing the perspectives and practices of local communities, CAPS-WA seeks to empower Indigenous groups to contribute to decision-making processes, governance, and conflict resolution.
- **The Science of Politics:** we acknowledge, highlight, and analyse power relations, interests, and conflicts and how they shape the struggles over power, resources, and representation that are deeply embedded in the political fabric of West African societies.
- **Human Security:** we prioritise the protection of individuals and communities from a wide range of threats to their well-being, including physical safety and economic, social, environmental, and cultural security.

To see through politics and work for human security, CAPS-WA follows a four-tier scale of understanding the issues:

- **Looking Clearly:** we emphasise a comprehensive identification and understanding of the remote and proximate political enablers of insecurity. All security challenges have underlying political dimensions.
- **Looking Back:** we underscore the importance of historical context in shaping current security dynamics, which enables us benefit from a past experiences of conflict and cooperation, including traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, peacebuilding practices, and communal harmony.
- **Looking Again:** we call for an iterative and reflective approach to understanding the hidden dimensions of insecurity, involving constantly re-evaluating assumptions and strategies to ensure they remain relevant in changing circumstances.
- **Looking Ahead:** we focus on the future. This involves making informed projections based on history and presenting innovative and forward-thinking approaches to securing the region.

What We Do

CAPS-WA has seven program domains: State-Society Relations, Economic Security, Environmental Security, Youth and Women, Security and Technology, Maritime Security, and Indigenous Knowledges. Our research, training, advocacy and advisory activities and engagements focus on latent security, empowering local and indigenous practices, utilising existing research and experiences, involving local communities, youth, women and students, and highlighting development aspirations like the SDGs and the AU Agenda 2063.

Flagship Initiatives:

- **The Africa Network of Critical Security Scholars (ANeCS):** We recognise that security in West Africa is interlinked with broader security challenges of the continent. Our flagship initiative, ANeCS, promotes research that puts forward alternative perspectives by creating a family of critical scholars interested in African solutions to African security. The inaugural Executive Director of ANeCS is Dr Shirley Gabriella Achieng'.
- **Mentoring Peace:** Mentoring Peace is a flagship project designed to build resilience, foster security awareness, and promote peace among the next generation of West Africans. The initiative emphasises a grassroots approach to peacebuilding, working directly with schools and training institutions to cultivate a culture of dialogue, understanding, and security from an early age. To this end, each member of our team is either a mentor, a mentee, or both.
- **“Beyond Electocracy” Webinar/Seminar Series:** emphasizes that democracy goes beyond elections. Strategically held a month before national elections in West African countries to ask, “What happens beyond the upcoming elections?” and a year after to evaluate, “What has changed since the last election?” the series fosters critical discussions on people-centred governance and strengthening the social contract. The inaugural session on November 22, 2024, explored Ghana’s 2024 elections.

Future Initiatives/Activities:

- Parenting Peace (Training parents on imbuing ethics and peace and resilience in early childhood and young adulthood)
- WriteRight (Nurturing young West African human security and resilience writers)
- Alternatives Now! (Podcast and Quarterly Newsletter)

Research and Advocacy Streams

Our work is grouped under seven thematic research and advocacy streams:

1. **Alternative Knowledges:** Under this stream, CAPS-WA integrates Indigenous wisdom and overlooked perspectives into security and governance solutions. It helps to promote innovative approaches tailored to West Africa’s unique challenges.
2. **State-Citizen/Society Relations:** We work to strengthen trust and accountability between states and citizens to foster inclusive governance and real citizen participation for sustainable peace and stability in West Africa.
3. **Environmental Security:** CAPS-WA addresses climate change and resource management issues, and promotes sustainable practices to mitigate environmental risks and enhance human and state security in the region.
4. **Youth and Gender:** CAPS-WA empowers youth and women as key agents of change in security and peacebuilding, combating gender-based violence and fostering inclusive decision-making processes.
5. **Economic Security:** CAPS-WA tackles the root causes of economic insecurity and poverty. It champions the need for equitable resource allocation and economic stability.
6. **Technology and Security:** This stream explores the intersection of technology and security. It addresses cyber threats while advocating for ethical practices and digital rights to enhance regional security.
7. **Maritime Security:** CAPS-WA is also dedicated to combating piracy, illegal fishing, and maritime crime through regional collaboration and sustainable practices to secure West Africa’s waters and enhance economic resilience.



PROFESSOR KWESI ANING
PATRON & BOARD OF ADVISORS CHAIR

Following a lifetime of dedication to African-driven solutions, I am happy that my mentorship of young scholars and researchers has led to the creation of innovative organizations like CAPS-WA. I look forward to providing further guidance to empower West Africa to re-imagine its security landscape through indigenous wisdom and global collaboration.

Call to Action

The Centre for Alternative Politics & Security, West Africa (CAPS-WA) is dedicated to fostering a more secure and sustainable future for West Africa. However, achieving this vision requires the active participation and support of a wide range of stakeholders. CAPS-WA invites governments, regional organisations, international institutions, civil society groups, academic institutions, and other key actors to join our mission to redefine security in West Africa for a more resilient and flourishing region.

Why Your Support Matters

The security challenges facing West Africa are complex and multifaceted, requiring innovative and collaborative solutions. CAPS-WA's approach, grounded in the principles of human security, the science of politics, and a commitment to alternative and sustainable strategies, offers a new pathway towards lasting peace and stability in the region. However, the success of CAPS-WA's initiatives depends on the support and cooperation of stakeholders like you. Your expertise, resources, and influence are crucial in helping us achieve our objectives and make a meaningful impact on the security landscape of West Africa.



DR MUHAMMAD DAN SULEIMAN
FOUNDER & MENTOR

At CAPS-WA, we are redefining security by re-centering the voices of our people, restoring indigenous wisdom, and charting new paths for a SECURE and RESILIENT West Africa

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