Inter-Regional Coordination Centre:

Negotiating Resource Challenges to Improve Maritime Governance in the Gulf of Guinea

Kwesi Aning

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Abstract

In June 2013, Heads of State and Government (HSG) comprising the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) met in Yaoundé, Cameroon, establish a common multilateral framework and regional strategy to respond to maritime insecurity. It sought to prevent and prosecute illicit activities in the waters of the Gulf of Guinea comprising seventeen coastal and seven landlocked states. Three instruments were approved: The Yaoundé Code of Conduct; the Heads of States Declaration; and the Memorandum of Understanding between regional organisations. The collective intentions inherent in these instruments comprise the Yaoundé Architecture, namely: the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC), the coordination and information-sharing structure which connects the Regional Maritime Security Centre for Central Africa (CRESMAC) and the Regional Maritime Security Centre for West Africa (CRESMAO). The coastal space is divided into 5 operational maritime zones where activities are coordinated by five Maritime Multinational Coordination Centers (MMCC). This paper assesses one component of the structure, namely the ICC in terms of its performance since its establishment. It examines the extent to which the assessed contributions essential for the performance of the ICC have been attained by those who made them; the impact or otherwise of its challenges on its operational performance, its achievements to date and options for the future.

Keywords: Yaoundé Architecture, ECOWAS, ECCAS, GGC, ICC, EU

Introduction

The Gulf of Guinea (GoG), which has been used as a transnational sea route for centuries continues to be an essential sea lane extending across the West African coast, a definitional issue which has expanded over time. Though the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), which was established in 2001 extends from Nigeria to Angola, its geographical expanse has increased since United Nations Security Council (UNSC) re-defined the GoG as comprising the coastal states of both the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as those in the GGC. (UNSC, 2011)[2]. This broader definition has since been adopted by the GGC, ECOWAS and ECCAS and subsequently became the working geographical definition of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (Yaoundé Code of Conduct, 2013).

This paper assesses one component of the Yaoundé Architecture, namely the ICC in terms of performance since its establishment. It examines the extent to which the assessed needed resources have been redeemed by those who made them; the impact or otherwise of its challenges on its operational performance, its achievements to date and options for the future

Background

Available data from the Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS), shows that between 1995 and 2014, the incidences of maritime insecurity in the GoG area was not only disturbing the peaceful exploitation of the seas resources and opportunities, but these activities posed a threat to member states and the livelihoods of their citizens. As the situation worsened between 1995 onwards and as demonstrated by Table 1 below, it produced a situation in which several observers characterised these developments as posing an existential threat to the GoG states. As a result, this led to a narrative of seeking appropriate response mechanisms to these threats. Two strains of approaches became fashionable: a securitisation narrative and its attendant application of extraordinary measures outside the norms of regular politics;[3] the second, was to explore opportunities and avenues for more extensive state and multilateral cooperation among Africa's coastal states.

It is within this context of the varied crimes taking place in the GoG, not least the transnational nature of these crimes and their potential threats the regions emerging blue economies backed by the realisation of the efficacy of international cooperation to tackle and resolve common crimes that the idea for and about the Yaoundé Process was conceived.[4] The Yaoundé Agreement was an attempt

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[2]. One can argue that, a shift to a more concerned approach to maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea started with the report of the Secretary-General's assessment mission on piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, which was dispatched to the region from 7 to 24 November 2011; See also S/RES/2039 (2012) Adopted by the Security Council at its 6727th meeting, on 29 February 2012, which among other things: (a) stated the primary responsibility of the States of the Gulf of Guinea to counter piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea and in this context urges them through ECCAS, ECOWAS and the GGC to work towards the convening of the planned joint Summit of Gulf of Guinea States to develop a regional anti-piracy strategy, in cooperation with the African Union; (b) Encourages the States of the Gulf of Guinea, ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC, to develop and implement transnational and transregional maritime security coordination centers covering the whole region of the Gulf of Guinea; (c) for the enhancement of their capabilities to counter piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea, including their capacity to conduct regional patrols, to establish and maintain joint coordination centers and joint information-sharing centers, and for the effective implementation of the regional strategy; and, when finally established, to (d) mobiliz[e] resources *following the creation of the regional strategy to assist in building national and regional capacities in close consultation with States and regional and extra regional organizations* . (my emphasis). Other critical UN documentation include: Resolutions 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012), and its presidential statement S/PRST/2016/4, on piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as its presidential statement S/PRST/2021/15 on maritime security

[3]Maurice Beseng & James A. Malcolm (2021) 'Maritime security and the securitization of fisheries in the Gulf of Guinea: experiences from Cameroon', Conflict, Security & Development, 21:5, DOI: 10.1080/14678802.2021.1985848; Aning, Kwesi & Frimpong, Ruth. (2022). 'Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea during an era of pandemics', *KAIPTC Occasional Paper;* Okechukwu Iheduru. 2023. 'Hybrid Maritime Security Governance and Limited Statehood in the Gulf of Guinea: A Nigerian Case *Study', Journal of Military and Strategic Studies (JMSS),* Vol. 22, No.3

[4]Although this is not a conceptual paper, ideas around the functionality of regimes and international organisations can be useful in understanding the optimism, hope and expectations that underpinned the drive to establish the Yaoundé Architecture. See for example,

to create a collective regime approach to responding to commonly defined and expanding threats and challenges that were so interwoven that it would be impossible for any one member state to respond to the threats that was developing. This agreement and its subsequent architecture was for the ICC to tackle what was characterised as 'solving the small problems'.[5]

This negotiated process eventually succeeded in unifying ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC countries towards a common purpose and to agree to a common goal: establishing an interregional maritime security structure; namely: The Yaoundé Architecture. As in all regimes and international cooperation arrangements, it sought to "... [establish] capacity to conduct regional patrols, to establish and maintain joint coordination centres and joint information-sharing centres, and for the effective implementation of the regional strategy".[6] Characteristic of the tradition of the establishment of international institutions and pledging meetings, the establishment of the Yaoundé Architecture resulted in pledges and agreements concerning its functioning. A decade after these pledges were made with much fanfare, the paper assesses how much has been disbursed, the extent to which member states have been willing and able to redeem their pledges and the impact of such failure, if any, on the ICC's overall performance.

Assessing political rhetoric with operational realities

At its establishment, the ICC according to its establishment Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on implementation, in its Article 5 section 1(b), urged member states to 'provide for national funding mechanisms for policies to combat piracy, armed robbery and other illicit activities committed at sea.'[7] Under the objectives of this MoU, the Yaoundé architecture's cooperative arrangements aimed for "...a synergy of actions through pooling and interoperability of Community resources"[8]. While Article 5 enjoined the ICC to '...ensure the implementation of the regional strategy for maritime safety and security',[9] an Additional Protocol focusing on Resources specifically envisaged the ICC's resources derived from a panoply of sources, namely from: 'member states, partners and third-party contributions, stakeholders in the maritime economy, grants, donations and bequests of any kind, income from assets and income from paid services'.[10] A discursive analyses of the contents of available official documents and their contents depict an institutional collaborative framework where member states were enjoined and encouraged to provide the requisite resources for the smooth running of the ICC. In the aftermath of the establishment of the ICC, it defined its role as:

> "build[ing] the capacities of the civilian and military personnel of the regions in maritime law enforcement; coordinate training and practices; facilitate information exchange among the navies of the Member States; promote the harmonisation of texts on maritime law enforcement including those relating to the fight against piracy, armed robbery, other illicit acts committed at sea, sea pollution and ensure the protection of the environment." (Interregional Coordination Centre, 2021).

This role, which is captured under the four (4) Pillars of the ICC's operational engagements will be disaggregated to appreciate the extent to which these operational aspirations have been achieved.

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[5]Interview, Yaoundé, 3 May 2023
[6].See UNSC 2012
[7]Memorandum of Understanding, Between the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) on Safety and Security in the Maritime Area of Central and West Africa, 25 June 2013, Yaoundé, Cameroon.
[8]See Article 2 of MOU.
[9]. Financing of ICC with Reference to the prescriptions of the Texts in force, p.1
[10]. Ibid, Additional Protocol, Article 19: Resources

From the MoU, it is evident that financial issues (broadly understood as resources) were recognised as critical to the success of the entire Yaoundé Architecture and its ICC. According to Article 19 of the Additional Protocol, ECOWAS and ECCAS are designated as the lead institutions responsible for funding the ICC's operations. Furthermore, two specific main sources of funding were identified, namely: (a) funding by member institutions of the Annual Meeting from member states; and (b) though technical and strategic partners, and other economic players in the maritime sector.[11] The disbursement of budgetary allocations to be made to ICC were 60 per cent and 40 per cent respectively to ECOWAS and ECCAS. And herein lies the major challenge of the ICC: that the political rhetoric about the existential threat posed to the GoG countries by maritime insecurity and threats, have not been backed by the financial, human and logistical wherewithal for the ICC to deliver on its mandate and its promise. The Report on the Work of the Experts argued for a funding variant from member states, via community institutions, as well as resorting to technical and strategic partners and other actors in the maritime sector. Specifically, this Report recommended a funding model that proposed the following distribution of charges:

> 40 per cent to be mobilised by member states (15 ECOWAS and 10 ECCAS) [with each institution distribut[ing] its contributions between States according to its own rules, ...60 per cent to be mobilised by the technical and strategic partners (30 per cent of this amount) as well as by other players in the maritime sector (70 per cent)[12]

From all indications and from the budgetary figures available, Member States commitment to funding the ICC has been more on the rhetorical side than a real, practical political commitment and demonstration of concerted action to fund and strengthen its institutions. Tables 2 – 4, which shows the actual disbursements, and more importantly, the historical rates of exchange from the CFA to the USD is the crux of the paper. In disaggregating the figures, several questions are raised about the levels of actual commitment that states have to supporting the institutions that they have voluntarily established to respond to identified threats. First, is the need to elaborate on the Tables below and provide some analysis on how the shortfalls impact the functioning of the ICC. This will be subsequently below; and second, what explains the differences between ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC in terms of meeting their financial commitments to the ICC?

Table 2:
Disaggregated table and USD equivalents using the following historical rates:

The figures below, show the historical rates of exchange that allows us to compare the actual year-on-year disbursements and their value.

Exchange Rates Used

2017: 1 CFA = 0.0017 USD
2018: 1 CFA = 0.0018 USD
2019: 1 CFA = 0.0017 USD
2020: 1 CFA = 0.0017 USD
2021: 1 CFA = 0.0018 USD
2022: 1 CFA = 0.0016 USD

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[11]. See the Extraordinary Session of the Annual Meeting of Senior Officers of the Interregional Centre of Coordination, *Report on the Work of the Experts*, Yaoundé, Hilton Hotel, 08-11 February 2016, section 1.4
[12].*Report on the Work of the Experts,* Sources and Modalities of Funding Variant 1

Table 3: Schedule of Budget Contributions from 23/2/2017 to 30/4/2023

ECCAS Contributions   ECOWAS Contributions

Date	Budget in millions of CFA	Actual Paid	Variance	Budget	Actual Paid	Variance
2017	340,313,750.00	Fully paid	-	546,004,845.00	546,004,845.00	-
2018	409,200,000.00	409,200,010.00	10.00	613,800.00.00	613,603,215.00	(196,785.00)
2019	409,200,000.00	409,200,000.00	-	613,800.000.00	613,800,000.00	-
2020	409,200,000.00	25,000,000.00	(384,200,000.00)	613,8000,000.00	-	(613,800,000.00)
2021	409,2000,000.00		(409,000,000.00)	613,800.000.00	460,349,999.00	(153,411,111.00)
2022	409,200,000.00		(409,000,000.00)	613,800.000.00		(613,800,000.00)
Total Contributions	3,954,231,500.00	2,,498,681,520.00	(793,399,990.00)	6,002,409,690.00	4,007,166,119.00	(1,227,796,785.00)
Total Outstanding budget			(1,177,599,980.00)			

Table 4:
ECCAS Contributions

Date	Budget (CFA)	Budget (USD)	Actual Paid (CFA)	Actual Paid (USD)	Variance (CFA)	Variance (USD)
2017	340,313,750.00	578,533.38	340,313,750.00	578,533.38	-	-
2018	409,200,000.00	736,560.00	409,200,010.00	736,560.02	10.00	0.018
2019	409,200,000.00	695,640.00	409,200,000.00	695,640.00	-	-
2020	409,200,000.00	695,640.00	25,000,000.00	42,500.00	-384,200,000.00	-652,560.00
2021	409,200,000.00	736,560.00	0	-	-409,200,000.00	-736,560.00
2022	409,200,000.00	654,720.00	0	-	-409,200,000.00	-654,720.00
Total Contributions	2,386,313,750.00	4,097,653.38	1,183,713,760.00	2,053,233.40	1,202,599,990.00	2,044,419.98

Table 5:
ECOWAS Contributions

Date	Budget (CFA)	Budget (USD)	Actual Paid (CFA)	Actual Paid (USD)	Variance (CFA)	Variance (USD)
2017	546,004,845.00	928,208.24	546,004,845.00	928,208.24	-196,785.00	-354.21
2018	613,800,000.00	1,104,840.00	613,603,215.00	1,104,485.79	-	-
2019	613,800,000.00	1,044,460.00	613,800,000.00	1,044,460.00	-613,800,000.00	-1,044,460.00
2020	613,800,000.00	1,044,460.00		-	-	-153,450,001.00	-276,210.01
2021	613,800,000.00	1,104,840.00	460,349,999.00	828,629.99	-613,800,000.00	-982,080.00
2022	613,800,000.00	982,080.00		-	-	-	-

Total Contributions	3,615,004,845.00	6,208,888.24	2,233,758,059.00	3,905,784.02	1,381,246,786.00	2,303,104.22

During this period under consideration, the GGC made two payments of 21,461,116 and 63,690,407 CFA in August and September 2021 respectively. In terms of functionality of the ICC, though the above data appears to demonstrate that the disbursement of budgetary allocations to be made to ICC had little or no room for the GGC, this is far from the case. Several reasons were given for this development. First, was the tacit acknowledgement that the GGC is a duplication; second, that the contributions made by the GGC were mainly for 'political showcasing' and third, that human resource constraints and domestic power play at the heart of nominating states reduced and eventually undermined the influence of the GGC.

A disaggregation of the available figures over the years as demonstrated above, show gross disparities in the assessed budgetary contributions and what is actually disbursed. There are several implications from this and reflects a pattern of critical numbers of member states of African multilateral agencies unable and sometimes unwilling to pay. The notion of free riders is embedded in these organisations and ultimately raises questions about the motives for cooperation.

Yet, another component of the resource expectations as captured in Article 19 of the Additional Protocol was the anticipatory expectations of what partner institutions and organisations could bring in terms of resources. And herein lies a possible bone of contention that needs further discussion among the different stakeholders, namely:

- How are the financial and logistical needs of the ICC determined to enable it perform its functions?
- Who and how are these resource needs determined?
- What are the procedures for transfer of technologies?

These questions and their answers are pertinent as they there are divergent narratives about and understandings relating to the nature of resource transfer. From diverse interviews and available documents, several multilateral and bilateral agencies are active in the GoG creating a traffic jam of interventions and efforts that always do not inure to the benefit of the recipients. The European Union (EU), for example, has multiple intervention schemes[15] , but for the purposes of this discussion will focus on two programme interventions, namely: Yaoundé Architecture Regional Information Sharing network (YARIS)[16] and the Gulf of Guinea Interregional Network (GOGIN)[17]. Though these two specific projects also come under the broader EU-funded projects, prior to the detailed discussion, it will be necessary to have an overview of the extent of EU-funded initiatives in the GoG.

EU Programs and Projects in the Gulf of Guinea

The EU is a critical partner to the ICC particularly in terms of how the YARIS project complements the larger framework of the Yaoundé Architecture and the EU's own multiplicity of engagements within the GoG. Below, I present a quick overview of the EU's projects in the GoG, and to locate that within the broader question of resource provision, disbursement and impact on such interventions on the GoG.

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[15].For an overview of the 25 or so different programs with different GoG actors, see https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-maritime-security-factsheet-gulf-guinea_en;   The main partners of the GoGIN project https://www.gogin.eu/en/partners/ . These are mainly the European Union and Expertise France.

[16].YARIS, system for maritime surveillance and information sharing (gogin.eu). The team comprises: The GoGIN+ Core Team; Yaoundé Architecture's trainers; and GoGIN+'s trainers (https://www.gogin.eu/en/team/)

[17]The European Union updates its maritime security strategy (gogin.eu). Though the paper provides an overview of EU-funded programmes, the broader discussion of resource provisions and their impact on interventions in the GoG in not the focus of the study, and the extent to which EU funding make up the shortfall of ICC funding requirements will not be discussed.

(a) Critical Maritime Routes Monitoring, Support and Evaluation Mechanism (CRIMSON)[18];
(b) The Gulf of Guinea Inter-Regional Network (GoGIN);
(c) Support to West Africa Integrated Maritime Security (SWAIMS)[19];
(d) Support Programme to the Maritime Security Strategy in Central Africa (PASSMAR)[20];
(e) Improved regional fisheries governance in western Africa (PESCAO)[21];
(f) West and Central Africa Port Security (WeCAPS)[22]
(g) Improvement of Ports' Customs and Operations Efficiency in African ports (IPCOEA)[23],
(h) Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP)[24],
(i) Strengthening Criminal Investigation and criminal justice cooperation along drug trafficking routes (CRIMJUST)[25], and the
(j) EU – UNODC Cooperation on Maritime Security and Surveillance in the Gulf of Guinea[26]

It is within this context, that the paper focuses particularly on the YARIS , a project launched under GoGIN in October 2016 and operational since September 2020. This is a €9.3 million project, which seeks to improve safety and maritime security in 19 countries of the region, mainly by supporting training and the establishment of the Yaoundé Architecture Regional Information Sharing network - YARIS - which will help enhance maritime domain awareness. Denmark is co-financing the project with a contribution of €1.8 million.

Staffing

Consistent with the ICC's defined mandate and its programmatic engagement outlined under the Four Pillars, a Panel of Experts conducted an assessment and recommended two options for the recruitment of staff. In Option A, the Experts recommended that, ' option A ...complies with the texts in force, in particular the Additional Protocol to the Memorandum of Understanding'[27] between ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC and argued that, ICC needed a compliment of twenty-six (26) full staff which was approved by the oversight bodies, namely ECOWAS and ECCAS. These staff were to function under the five designated divisions, namely the Divisions of:

- Political Affairs and International Cooperation;
- Information Management and Communications;
- Training and Practice;

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[18].Thus is an overarching €2 million project connecting and promoting understanding of all the components of the Critical Maritime Routes Programme currently implemented in the Gulf of Guinea and in the Indian Ocean. It provides coherence, visibility and communications, monitoring and evaluation, policy analysis and expert recommendations for projects covered under this umbrella programme

[19].Started in 2019 with €28 million aims to support the implementation of the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy and improve maritime security and safety in the Gulf of Guinea, with particular attention to improving law enforcement and governance frameworks, capacity and implementation

[20]launched in 2019 will provide €10 million of support to the Central Africa region by reinforcing the institutional, legal and operational framework for cross-border maritime cooperation including with the private sector and civil society.

[21]Launched in 2018 with a budget of €15 million aims to strengthen the regional approach to the sustainable use and management of fishery resources, including combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing). Overall management is with ECOWAS working closely with the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) and the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC), and involves support from the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA).

[22]Started in 2019, for €8.5 million aims to improve port security in targeted partner countries in West and Central Africa. It will address vulnerabilities related to port security through assistance to comply with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) standards and through support to increase resilience and preparedness in the case of crises such as attacks or explosions.

[23]Started in 2019 with a budget of €1.88 million with the objective of improving the efficiency of customs, goods clearance, and administrative processes in the ports of the ECOWAS region through the implementation of a Single Window System, providing all services in one space. At the moment the project covers Cape Verde, Côte d 'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

[24]Started in 2015, for €6 million seeks to build capacities and strengthen cooperation against maritime illicit trafficking in countries and associated criminal networks on the trans-Atlantic cocaine route. The project aims to reinforce capacities in seaports by supporting the setup of Joint Maritime Control Units (JMCUs) in selected countries in West Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. A further SEACOP programme is being prepared for 2021-23.

[25]Taking place from 2016, is a €12 million project implemented by UNODC which aims to enhance the capacities and integrity of criminal justice institutions for regional and interregional cooperation to tackle drug trafficking and transnational organised crime in West Africa, among other regions.

[26]The UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP) has supported several maritime exercises that have made use of EU Copernicus Program's satellite products. Through the technology provided by EU Copernicus, and implemented by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), support has been lent to a number of maritime law enforcement agencies contributing to an increase in their operational maritime law enforcement capacity. Satellite imageries has been made use of in training exercises with Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Togo, Cape Verde

[27]. The MoU was signed on June 5, 2014 in Yaoundé, Cameroon

- Legal Affairs and Judicial Cooperation; and
- Division of Administration and Finance.

These were to be made up of 15 (fifteen) international staff and 11 (eleven) local staff. After these initial approvals, 7 (seven) international positions were filled. For such international appointments, the procedures for these recruitments are undertaken by both ECOWAS and ECCAS that distribute the positions among the two institutions. For ECOWAS, recruitment and appointments go through stringent open processes. ECCAS on the other hand, selects particular states and awards the positions for specific states to select a national to occupy the position. During this process, institutional cultural differences become manifest in the recruitment processes leading to issues bordering on competence and effectiveness.

Table 3: Status of Statutory International Staffing Positions

Designation	Approved	Appointed	At Post as at May 2023
Director	1	1	0[28]
Deputy Director	1	1	Now Ag Director
Head of Division: Information and Communication	1	1	At Post
Head of Division: Training and Practice	1	1	0[29]
Head of Division: Legal and Judicial Cooperation	1	1	0[30]
Head of Division: Political Affairs and International Cooperation	1	1	0[31]
Head of Division: Finance and Administration	1	1	At Post[32]

Sources: Interviews at ICC Headquarters, Yaoundé, 3-6 May 2023

These delays in replacing officers who have left their post and inability of the overarching multilateral organisations to complete the recruitment of statutory appointments create 'a sense of abandonment' of the organisation and the remaining staff[33].

Success and Challenges

Until the Yaoundé process, along with its associated architecture, institutional mechanisms, and processes, many of the successes listed below would not have been possible:

- Prior to the ICC's establishment, information-sharing among the centres of the Yaoundé architecture was limited;
- Furthermore, the comprehensive extent of legal reforms in some GoG states attests to the successful intervention by the ICC. Such legal reforms deal with: (a) the promulgation, revision of anti-piracy laws in several GoG states; and (b) supplementary agreement on the transfer of pirates[34]; and
- Training is a component of the ICC's mandate where some successes have been attained. ISMI, in La Cote d'Ivoire was specifically created to support the Yaounde Architecture, The ICC functions as part of the Strategic leadership of ISMI, with MoUs with the Regional Maritime Universities in Ghana, La Cote d'Ivoire and Cape Verde. Though there has not been a substantive Head of Training Head at ICC, a training matrix has been developed with a software, where all trainings are captured depicting who has participated, and at what level.

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28. The substantive Director resigned and returned home to occupy a ministerial position after 2 years in February 2019, but has not been replaced yet.
29. Training Director departed in February 2019 after his three-year service and has not as yet been replaced.
30. Legal died in December 2021 and not yet replaced
31. Has been sick since 2019 and has surpassed the statutory six months' period for humanitarian support.
32. Though at post, the Head resigned in 2019 due to financial challenges. This occurred together with the Head of Training
33. Interview, Yaoundé, 5 May 2023.

Though these successes have been achieved, there are several existing challenges that hamper the full functioning and effective execution of its mandate. Among these are:

- Trust-building challenges among several of the stakeholders that results in incidents first being reported to institutions outside the region before it is transferred to the ICC;
- Financial challenges have resulted in the non-replacement of critical international staff who have vacated their posts since 2019 by ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC, thus hampering the effective performance of the organisation. Although this was classified as an 'internal matter'[35], there is no doubt that such internal delays are negatively impacting on the output of the ICC;
- Such limited staff working extra hours and taking on extra responsibilities that may not necessarily be within the remit of their technical and professional competencies places undue stress and creates an unhealthy work environment with its consequent issues leading to a high level of staff demoralisation;
- There are historical trust deficits that partners have experienced elsewhere, but informs their behaviour with respect to the implementation of programs.

Way forward and Recommendations

Although the above narrative creates a sense of an organisation in the throes of financial meltdown, there is a more nuanced picture that emerges of institutional adaptability and adeptness at making do with little financial, human and logistical resources. However, all is not doom and gloom. There are flickers of optimism; that were the financial challenges resolved and new frameworks for partner engagement designed, the ICC could still manage to attain the optimism created at its establishment. As aptly captured during discussions, the ICC is still 'a baby learning how to walk'.[36]

According to several people interviewed, the critical financing partners for the ICC's work are the ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC. However, there seems to be several hurdles in creating what was characterised as 'good relations' with these three overarching organisations.[37] This is demonstrably clear when 'letters, note verbales from the ICC are hardly acknowledged'[38] by these institutions. To circumvent what was aptly characterised as 'communication bottlenecks and chock points'[39], there is the urgent need for the appointment of Focal Points in each organisation who handles and ensures the smooth flow of communication between the ICC and the respective organisations.[40]
There was a clear recognition and admission of the utility of partner engagement with the ICC. However, since the ICC's establishment, projects are designed by partners with little or no technical input by ICC staff. To circumvent the misunderstanding and build trust, Technical expertise by partners can be located in the ICC to improve consultations in project design and management. Since the ultimate vision of such projects are to make the ICC and the larger Yaoundé Architecture the beneficiaries of the projects, co-locating such Technical expertise creates a win-win situation for all parties.

To ensure institutional efficacy, sustainability and credibility, reviving the nearly defunct Annual Heads of organisations meeting, where annual activity plans and budgets are deliberated, revised, and ultimately approved, is crucial. This assembly has not convened since 2019. Additionally, it's imperative to streamline the often prolonged responses from oversight institutions to routine requests, facilitating smoother progress in organisational processes. For example, 'documents relating to projections for 2023 activities sent in 2022 have received no responses', thus stifling initiative, implementation plans and demotivating staff.[41] Such lack of improved and coordinated communication also manifests in the limited diplomatic support for the ICC's work from its oversight multilateral institutions.[42]

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[34]Between 2017 and 2019, the ICC drafted a project on Maritime Reform
[35]Interview, Yaoundé, 4/5/23
[36].Interview, Yaoundé, 3 May 2023
[37]. Interview, Yaoundé, 3 May 2023
[38]Interview, Yaoundé, 4 May 2023
[39]. Interview, Yaoundé, 3 May 2023
[40]Interview, Yaoundé, 4 May 2023
[41]. Interview, Yaoundé, 5 May 2023
[42]. Multiple interviews in Yaoundé from 3-6 May

To improve the speed and efficiency with which political buy in and support for projects can be expedited, instead of getting approvals for projects with external partners from all three organisations, namely ECOWAS, GGC and ECCAS, it could be a considered idea to get a single approval from the Chair of the Organisations and the others kept in copy.

There is no doubt that after the first decade of festivities have settled, of the necessity for a larger 10-year assessment on the Yaoundé Architecture and its ancillary institutions to evaluate their effectiveness in addressing maritime security challenges, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring sustained regional cooperation and capacity-building efforts.