The Role of the IMO in Strengthening Maritime Security in West and Central Africa

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Introduction

Sub-Saharan African economies are growing faster than those in Western Europe but this is largely based on the export of raw commodities with little value added, and with consequential missed opportunities to create jobs and develop wealth in the community. The promotion of seaborne trade with African countries, the development of intra-African trade by sea, well managed and protected fisheries, and secure offshore energy production are fundamentally important to sustainable economic growth, prosperity, employment and stability throughout Africa. This is echoed in the African Union's 2050 Integrated Maritime Strategy, adopted in January 2014, which states that maritime development should be placed at a high position in the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

Generating revenue from a well-managed, protected and sustainable "blue economy" – including vibrant port, shipping and fishing sectors, is the key to unlocking West and Central Africa's potential. The reduction of poverty and unrest through better management, proper investment and the rule of law will allow local industries and tourism to flourish, with even greater revenue generation as a result. Preservation of the marine environment and the prevention of illegal dumping at sea will contribute to sustainability.

The creation of a secure maritime environment is essential to underpin the development of Africa's blue economy - this is the focus of IMO's role in strengthening maritime security in West and Central Africa.

States in West and Central Africa face major challenges including illegal activities such as piracy and armed robbery against ships; illegal oil bunkering and theft of crude oil; threats to offshore oil and gas production; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; arms, drug and human trafficking; environmental damage caused by dumping of toxic waste and discharge of oil and other pollutants; and general threats to navigational safety. Although these challenges may at first sight seem both diverse and daunting, there are a number of common factors which, if addressed holistically, will enable progress to be made.

IMO is the United Nations specialized agency responsible for safe, secure and efficient shipping and the prevention of pollution from ships. As such, IMO has a robust technical cooperation programme helping Member States to build capacity and capability to perform those tasks mandated by the various international maritime Conventions to which they are parties.

Within this context, in 2006, IMO and the 25 countries of the Maritime Association of West and Central Africa (MOWCA) initiated a process that led to the signing by 16 States of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Establishment of a Sub-Regional Integrated Coast Guard Function Network (the IMO/MOWCA MoU). In this context, the generic term "coast guard functions" includes all aspects of maritime security, maritime law enforcement safety and protection of the marine environment. The aim was not to build new Coast Guards per se, but rather to perform maritime law enforcement with the national assets which are available, including vessels of the navy. IMO promotes inter agency cooperation, including civil-military cooperation.

The Code of Conduct

Since 2006, IMO has been conducting capacity and capability building activities in the region. More recently, IMO's initiatives have taken place within the wider context of United Nations Security Council resolutions 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012); the maritime strategies of the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), MOWCA and, in particular, the Code of Conduct concerning the repression of piracy, armed robbery against ships and illicit maritime activity in West and Central Africa.

This Code of Conduct, which was developed taking into account the lessons learned from the IMO initiative for the western Indian Ocean known as the Djibouti Code of Conduct, was adopted formally in Yaoundé in June 2013 by Heads of State or their representatives from 25 West and Central African countries, including 13 Presidents. The fact that maritime issues were discussed at such a high level signaled a new focus on maritime matters and represents a major step forward in the development of maritime safety and security in the region.

To reinforce these initiatives, the 28th session of the IMO Assembly in December 2013 unanimously adopted resolution A1069 (28) on prevention and suppression of piracy, armed robbery against ships and illicit maritime activity in the Gulf of Guinea. The resolution, inter alia, calls upon Governments, in cooperation with the Organization and as may be requested by Governments of the region, to assist these efforts and to consider making financial contributions to the recently created IMO West and Central Africa Maritime Security Trust Fund.

Current Initiatives

IMO is working with States in West and Central Africa and development partners to implement all of the key areas identified in the Code of Conduct and the IMO/MOWCA MoU. The IMO West and Central Africa Maritime Security Trust Fund support IMO's engagement to achieve these goals; however the intensity of support will depend upon the funding available. In general terms, the aim is for the IMO Member States in West and Central Africa to put in place national legislation to criminalize piracy, attacks against ships, and other illicit maritime activities; coordinate structures and procedures; and have in place well-trained operational, technical and logistical personnel to effectively discharge their responsibilities in all aspects of maritime safety, security and marine environmental protection, thereby also enhancing regional trade by sea. This initiative complements the Organizations 2014 World Maritime Day theme: "IMO Conventions: effective implementation".

IMO's programme of table top exercises in West and Central African coastal States is proving successful. The expected outputs from these exercises are the development of national maritime strategies, national maritime security strategies, national maritime security committees and national maritime security implementation plans and procedures. The exercises have raised awareness of the importance of the maritime domain, and have helped stimulate an appetite for increased inter-agency cooperation and capability development in the countries visited. They have also helped States to identify their needs including implementation strategies, and thus IMO (and development partners) will be able to offer technical assistance to meet those needs. It is important to stress that such support is at the request of the Member State and is firmly premised on the principle of 'pull rather than push'. Some 14 table top exercises have been conducted to date, with more planned.

IMO has also conducted regional and sub-regional training activities with a view to exchanging best practices, confidence building and nurturing cross-border cooperation on issues of relevance. For example, in July 2013, more than 60 participants from the 20 coastal Member States of the Port Management Association of West and Central Africa (PMAWCA) joined international experts for a seminar on maritime and port security, held in Cotonou, Benin, organized by IMO and PMAWCA. The seminar afforded participants an opportunity to exchange best practices and highlighted the importance of cross border cooperation.

More recently, a regional seminar on best practices to curb the number of stowaways took take place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in March 2014 with the participation of port security and border control officers from more than 12 ports in West and Central Africa. This seminar focused on promoting wider national and regional efforts to strengthen implementation of the provisions of SOLAS chapter XI-2, the ISPS Code and the Organization's guidance related to prevention of stowaways.

Pull not Push

The table top exercises and the seminars have demonstrated that a number of countries will require tailored assistance, such as legal reviews to ensure that national legislation, practices and procedures meet the countries' obligations and aspirations to manage their maritime domains. IMO provides a range of training but can also conduct needs assessments and act as an 'honest broker' with appropriate international development partners to provide specific expertise outside of IMO's direct remit. For example, IMO will continue the successful partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and other development partners to help States to review and develop frameworks for the prosecution of pirates and other offenders. This may include Africa-to-Africa cooperation whereby national judges, lawyers and law enforcement officers from signatory States to the Djibouti Code of Conduct will share their countries' experiences with their counterparts from West and Central Africa.

The IMO Secretariat makes a point of emphasizing the need for sovereign States to determine their own capacity building needs in support of their national objectives as this will lead to the most efficient coordination of efforts, a better match between needs and offers, and

national ownership of the process. In IMO's experience, the latter element is key to ensuring success and sustainability.

In order to help the thorough identification of needs and implementation of requirements at the national level, IMO envisages embedding carefully selected experts in a number of countries that have requested longer-term assistance in developing their maritime strategies. Such experts will have the opportunity to maintain a close, confidential dialogue with national officials to establish assistance needs and help establish cooperative mechanisms, both nationally and regionally.

Based on the recommendation of these experts and upon request from member countries, IMO will offer tailored technical expertise on ship and port facility security, maritime situational awareness, harmonized maritime security control and compliance and port State control inspections (in line with the work undertaken by the Abuja MoU), information sharing, mutual support, contingency planning, joint operations and response, based wherever practicable on existing infrastructure and procedures, including the IMO-developed maritime rescue co-ordination centre (MRCC) networks and oil spill response programmes.

An Inter-Agency Approach

In every initiative, IMO is working in close cooperation and coordination with other UN bodies, particularly UNODC, FAO, UNHCR and the regional offices of UNOCA and UNOWA; ECCAS, ECOWAS and the GGC; other international partners such as Interpol and WCO, and development partners such as China, France, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and others.

IMO is also supporting the maritime trade information sharing centre (MTISC) in Accra, Ghana, a facility providing situational awareness to merchant shipping in the region, developed as an initiative by the Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF) and supported by the Government of Ghana, States in the region and Interpol. The MTISC will complement the strategic directing offered by the recently opened Interregional Coordination Centre in Yaoundé, Cameroon, established pursuant to the aforementioned Heads of State meeting held in Yaoundé in June 2013.

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