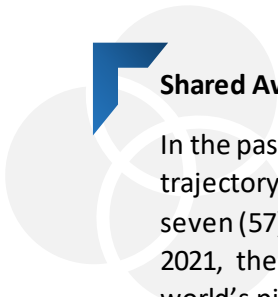




STRENGTHENING COUNTER-PIRACY RESPONSES: THE GULF OF GUINEA MARITIME COLLABORATION FORUM - SHADE

AN ARTICLE BY THE GULF OF GUINEA MARITIME INSTITUTE





Shared Awareness – A Starting Point

In the past decade, the world has witnessed an evolution of the Gulf of Guinea's maritime security threat trajectory – an evolution that rendered the region the most dangerous for seafarers. In 2020, all fifty-seven (57) incidents of kidnapping-for-ransom worldwide occurred in the Gulf; and in the first quarter of 2021, the region accounted for nearly half of all reported piracy incidents worldwide, leaving it as the world's piracy hotspot, [according to the International Maritime Bureau \(IMB\)](#).

What remained clear during this period was that the region presented a unique convolution of enablers for piratical activities, with an inadequate framework for effective maritime regulation and enforcement. In particular, few mechanisms existed for operative dissemination and sharing of information across the broad range of actors involved – a prerequisite to fostering coordinated responses to piracy in the region. Recognising this, the Government of Nigeria and the Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC), which represents twenty-one (21) countries in the Gulf of Guinea, signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a regionally owned forum, aimed at fostering shared awareness and military de-confliction.

[The Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum and Shared Awareness and De-confliction \(GoG-MCF/SHADE\)](#) seeks to create a viable platform for navies, industry partners and other relevant stakeholders from across the Gulf of Guinea and beyond to harmonise counter-piracy efforts and communication in the region under the existing information sharing architecture provided by both the [Yaoundé Code of Conduct \(YCOC\)](#) and the [Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security off the Coast of West Africa \(BMP-WA\)](#).



Modus Operandi

The GoG-MCF/SHADE functions primarily through plenary sessions, each intended to generate dialogue and result in tangible action steps necessary to foster operational coordination between regional navies and stakeholders within the Gulf of Guinea's maritime industry.

The SHADE Model has already demonstrated its ability to support the exchange of information between regional and non-regional military forces in countering Somali piracy in the Horn of Africa.

Giulia Nicoloso
Critical Maritime Routes Programme

The initiative's three (3) Working Groups (WG) were formed during the first plenary session across the following thematic areas: Cooperation at Sea (operations), Reporting and Information Sharing and Air De-confliction.

The primary purpose of the WG is to identify viable areas for the enhancement of cooperation and de-confliction and to make salient recommendations for each plenary to adopt. To facilitate this, each Working Group includes a subject-matter expert and is chaired by a regional representative. The chart below highlights the major objectives of each of the Working Groups.

Figure 1: Thematic Working Groups



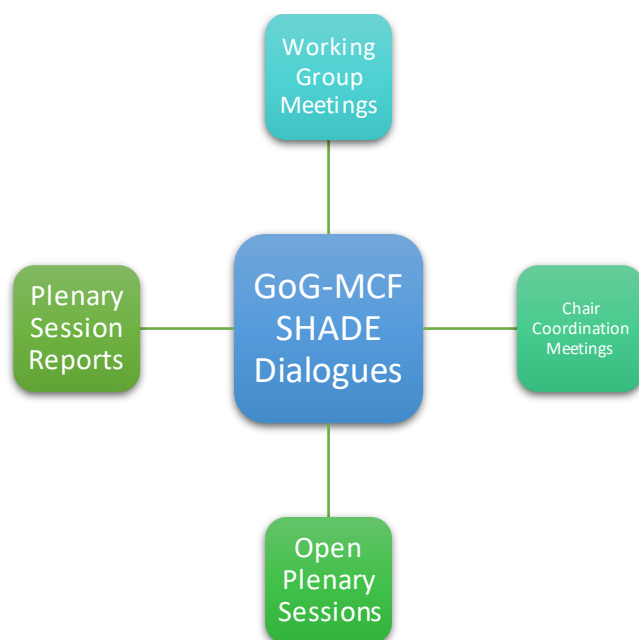
Complementarities

The GoG-MCF/SHADE model was designed to work complementarily with existing information sharing architectures and initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea region, such as the YCOC, BMP-WA and G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (FoGG).

Past Plenaries

Since its establishment, the GoG-MCF/SHADE has held five plenary sessions, each complemented by technical Working Group meetings, Working Group chair coordination meetings and plenary session reports. The first four plenaries were held on a bi-monthly cycle; however, a decision has been made to host the plenaries on a tri-monthly cycle going forward.

Figure 2: Functional Sessions of the SHADE Model



1st Plenary

14th July 2021

Virtual

2nd Plenary

14th September 2021

Virtual

3rd Plenary

16th November 2021

Virtual

4th Plenary

19th January 2022

Virtual

5th Plenary

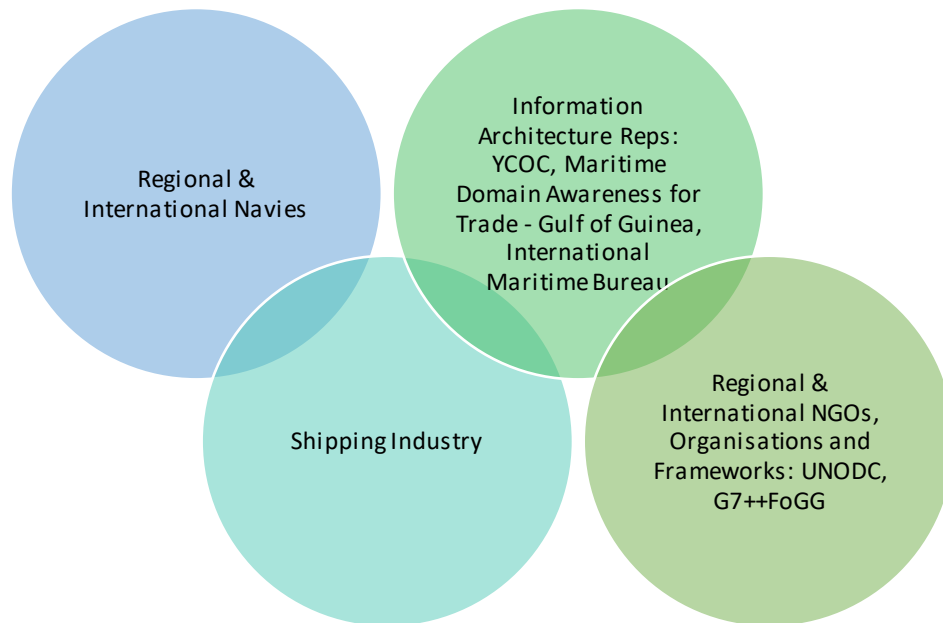
10th and 11th May 2022

Abuja, Nigeria

The Fifth Plenary: A Closer Look

The fifth plenary presented the first opportunity for the GoG-MCF/SHADE Forum to be convened in-person, facilitating a more active engagement amongst the stakeholders present. The plenary had the theme *Sustainability of Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea* and provided an opportunity for [maritime stakeholders to advocate the need for effective collaboration in the battle against maritime criminality in the region](#). In attendance were ninety (90) representatives from the sub-region and beyond, making it one of the largest platforms for galvanizing the efforts of stakeholders in operational responses to piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea.

Figure 3: Range of Participants: 5th Plenary Session



The plenary highlighted, amongst other things, the crucial support of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the G7++ FoGG in advancing the objectives of the forum and facilitating positive interactions.

The shipping industry also called for more effective information sharing and interaction between navies operating in the Gulf of Guinea to enhance visibility in the region's piracy hotspots. The need for such information sharing had to be carefully juxtaposed against a delineation of the roles and responsibilities of different national agencies, while recognising complementarities to avoid a duplication of efforts.


Some of the key recommendations resulting from the plenary are indicated below:

The key challenge in the Gulf of Guinea is to effectively integrate all initiatives to address piracy, armed robbery and all maritime criminality into a focused and coordinated effort through the Yaoundé Code of Conduct framework.

IMO will continue to play a significant role in facilitating this integration, by maintaining our unstinting support for the Yaoundé Code of Conduct architecture and strengthening capability and capacity.

Secretary-General Kitack Lim
International Maritime Organisation

- There is the need for national stakeholders to review and upgrade Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) infrastructure and systems to improve MDA in the Gulf of Guinea. Other relevant stakeholders must also consider the integration of national air assets in enhancing MDA and regional counter-piracy responses.
- The forum must develop a regular threat assessment for the Gulf of Guinea to facilitate regional naval awareness and industry risk assessment.
- The GoG-MCF/SHADE should be effectively used to facilitate the joint strategic communications needed to demonstrate regional progress in effectively addressing piracy and armed robbery at sea.
- Actors at the national level must continue to improve national legislations to ensure a legal finish to piracy prosecutions.



Towards Effective Counter-piracy Responses

The Gulf of Guinea is characterised by a complex set of maritime security interventions and initiatives, each aimed at addressing pertinent maritime criminalities such as piracy and armed robbery at sea. The GoG-MCF/SHADE presents a practical opportunity to coordinate efforts by the broad range of stakeholders in the region towards the shared goal of enhancing maritime security. More specifically the SHADE forum has led to the following notable benefits:

- Facilitation of operational dialogue across the clear-cut thematic areas of the WPs (Air De-confliction, Cooperation at Sea and Information Sharing) resulting in more targeted dialogues across groups with shared maritime security priorities
- Catalysation of active external stakeholder initiation of effective maritime regulation and enforcement operations, intended to complement other efforts across the region
- Establishment of operable best practices and mechanisms for reporting incidents across regional navies, such as a replication of the Mercury communication platform used within the Indian Ocean through SOLARTA.

Of course, the model can only be successful with the full and active participation of regional and international navies, as well as other relevant stakeholders within the Gulf of Guinea in particular, and across the globe at large. As more plenaries are held, it is imperative that action items are effectively implemented and assessed against intended goals, so that lessons learnt can continually feed into a more effective functioning of GoG-MCF/SHADE.

...The establishment of...SHADE has enabled working-level stakeholders from the GoG region and outside...to connect and discuss how best to tackle piracy in the area...this has been a catalyst for non-regional stakeholders to step up and initiate effective maritime law enforcement operations...

Dr. Bashir Jamoh
*Director-General, Nigerian Maritime
Administration and Safety Agency*
5th May, 2022

[SOLARTA] has gone online, is being used...and has proved to be effective in preventing attacks becoming hostage situations...And that is a big accomplishment in the space of six months.

Simon Church
Special Adviser to Forum Co-chairs
7th February, 2022



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