

**REPORT PRESENTED BY THE WADEMOS NETWORK  
COORDINATOR, PAUL OSEI-KUFFOUR**

**On the Occasion of the**

**WADEMOS ANNUAL NETWORK MEMBERS CONVENING**

**Alisa Hotel, Accra – Ghana**

**November 29-30, 2023**

Colleagues from **civil society, participants and the media**, Good Morning!

On behalf of the Project Director and the PMU, I present to you the annual report for the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network.

Before that, I wish to add my voice to welcome you to the **second annual convening of WADEMOS Network Members** and particularly to the second day of the conference.

Specifically, the network is profoundly grateful to all the speakers, panelist and participants whose insights and contributions have ensured the successful organization of this convening.

The Annual convening is designed to provide an opportunity for the Network to conduct a self-examination of our work and re-strategize to become more responsive to the emerging political environment in West Africa.

We therefore take this opportunity to present an update on our programs for the year 2023, so we can draw on **your feedback and experience** to inform our collective programming and agenda for the 2024 programme year, which is the final year for the first three-year phase of the WADEMOS Initiative.

## **BACKGROUND**

It's a little over a year and half, since we launched WADEMOS in September 2022, to provide a platform to enhance the mobilization of CSOs against democracy backsliding in WA.

The two-day conference and launch was preceded by a strategy formulation workshop.

At the end of the Workshop, and informed by the political environment at the time characterized by attack on HR Defenders, clampdown of the civic space, concerns around free and fair elections, rising insecurity and the resurgence of UCGs in the sub-region, the Network members concluded on five (5) priority areas and interventions for the next two years.

### **These include:**

- a. Support for credible electoral processes and systems
- b. Promotion and protection of the Civic Space
- c. Support for Human Rights Defenders and Activists at Risk
- d. Support for political transitions in West Africa
- e. Peace and security

**In addition, the under listed complementary and cross-cutting initiatives have been developed to anchor the five priority areas:**

- **Knowledge hub** to support advocacy and policy influencing activities of members at national and regional level
- **Political transitions initiatives** to enhance regional and national collective response to UCGs in WA
- **DEMOS-Fund** to provide timely mobilization and response to democracy relevant interventions in the sub-region
- **Next Generation initiatives** to empower young people and women as the next generation activist, defenders and leaders of civil society and government.

## **APPROACH / STRATEGY**

In terms of the approach to implementation, the PMU is guided mainly by the Network's shared values and commitments of **solidarity, collaboration, co-creation, coordination, facilitation and complementarity in program design and implementation.**

WADEMOS' interventions are implemented through working groups, convening, campaigns, solidarity missions, learning and knowledge exchange among network members and engagements with regional bodies and governments.

WADEMOS Update for 2023 Operational Year [I will report on the themes and initiatives that had activities for the year]

## **1.0 PRIORITY AREAS**

### **1.1 Elections**

Although elections do not equate with democracy, the holding of free and fair elections is recognized as a hallmark of accountability and a fundamental component of a functioning democracy (Lindberg, 2006). The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance ACDEG (African Union, 2007) reinforces this link and sets electoral standards for the continent.

Moreover, there has been concern that African elections are becoming increasingly contentious and marked by fear (Jenkins, 2020). In some cases,

elections have been little more than springboards for leaders who, once in office, subvert democratic institutions to consolidate their position (Onyulo, 2017).

This informed our interventions and support on elections especially when WA was preparing for three major elections for the year

## **Interventions**

Three pre-election missions were deployed to Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia in collaboration with WAEON. The mission sought to promote solidarity and knowledge exchange among countries preparing for election in 2023.

Again, it sought to promote interest and awareness among WA citizens on elections happening in the sub-region. To achieve this, a number of roundtable discussion and dialogues as well as sensitization were held online with participants from WA and beyond and in-person in Sierra Leone and Liberia with the media and CSOs.

The pre-election activities in particular engaged very important stakeholders and organizations including the EMBs in the three countries, peacebuilding institutions, human right institutions, media, civil society organizations and local election observation networks, regional bodies, and Development Partners.

Our work on elections contributed in developing policy relevant reports, briefs and perspectives on elections in the sub-region. This include the publication of a report on the Nigeria Election, the production of pre-election assessment reports on Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. WADEMOS plan to share further insights and perspectives on elections drawing comparative experiences from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria including the increasing role of the courts in elections in Africa.

## **1.2 Political Transitions**

WADEMOS extended solidarity to countries in francophone West Africa with a special focus on countries undergoing transition to constitutional order.

The Network commissioned a study to assess ongoing political transitions in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea. At the time of the study, Niger was stable and had not experienced an overthrow of the government. Following the production of the draft reports produced with the support of some Network members, WADEMOS organized a conference bringing on board ECOWAS and experts on political

transitions in Abidjan to discuss the findings of the report and draw relevance for programming and advocacy.

Francophone WA was of special focus following recent AB data that shows disproportionate levels of decline on key democracy relevant indicators, norms and values in French-speaking countries and the resurgence of Unconstitutional Change of Government (UCG). The conference produced an outcome document which among others **proposed the design and implementation of a coordinated national level strategies for CSOs in transition countries with the objective of creating opportunities for solidarity and experience sharing**

WADEMOS subsequently created a **working group on political transitions** and facilitated online meetings at national level leading to the production of Country-level Enhanced CSO coordinated programs on engagement with the transition processes in their respective countries. A **regional consultative and validation meeting** was held in Guinea, Conakry to review the draft strategies. In attendance was some ministers from the TG and experts from IFES and OSF on democratic transitions in WA. *[The delegation also paid courtesy call on the president of the Transitional Council, Mr Dansah Koromah where he pledged his commitment to the Transition process.]*

WADEMOS will work with members of the WG on Political Transitions to enhance CSOs engagement at the national level and provide the platform for regular meetings and experience sharing. We will also prioritize the implementation of the full outcome document on the Abidjan conference.

### **1.3 Next Generation Initiative**

Listening to the conversation yesterday, the point was made about **how to secure democracy in the next generational span** (NEXT GEN) including the role of young people. WADEMOS launched the NEXT Gen initiative in August 2023 to empower young people as Next Generation activists, defenders and leaders of civil society and government.

A total of 168 enthusiastic young people applied for the initiative. Following a thorough review, 48 applicants were shortlisted for interviews. After a rigorous selection process, 15 outstanding candidates were chosen, comprising 7 males, 8 females, and one Person with Disability, representing a diverse group from 13 countries.

The selected candidates are from West Africa countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Niger, Togo, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Benin, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Guinea Bissau.

The NGI Virtual Class officially commenced on November 8, 2023, featuring intensive lectures designed to equip participants with skills and knowledge around a broad spectrum of topics on democracy, human rights, rule of law, peace and security, regional normative frameworks, leadership, advocacy strategies, and networking among others. This virtual class spanned a period of three weeks, with an average of three hours of lessons conducted each day.

### **Next Steps**

- The cohorts will embark on a mentoring program with their mentors in their respective countries and return to Ghana for a culmination meeting to reflect on the learnings and discuss interventions and initiatives they intend to champion in their individual countries.
- WADEMOS will continue to integrate the group and sustain the **Next Generation Fellows** as an initiative under the Network. Some of them were able to join us online to participate in the conference.
- Also, the idea of an Annual convening with the **Next Generation Fellows** either online or in person will be explored in the coming year.

### **1.4 DEMOS-Fund**

As part of WADEMOS key initiatives for the year 2023, **the Democracy Opportunity Support Fund (DOSF)** was launched in June. The DEMOS-Fund is one of the strategic anchors driving the WADEMOS priority areas and strategies to counter democracy backsliding in WA. The fund provides timely resources to Civil society to mobilize in solidarity to respond **to democratic openings, opportunities and threats at regional and national level.**

The Fund has two windows - **competitive and an unsolicited or co-created intervention between Network members and the PMU. All grants are approved by the Fund Management Committee, a sub-committee of the SC.** Thirty-One (31) applications were received from different countries across the West African region for the competitive window, mainly from Anglophone and Francophone States. Among the 31, 12 were shortlisted and recommended to the Evaluation Committee, a subcommittee of the SC.

**Seven projects have so far been funded comprising:**

- a. GENCED - Strengthening Protection for Human Rights Defenders
- b. MFWA - Promoting democratic restoration and consolidation in West Africa: the role of the media and key stakeholders
- c. CDG LIBERIA - Legal education for political parties and independent candidates to mitigate electoral violence during the 2023 elections in Liberia
- d. WACSI - West Africa Civil Society Week 2023 (in Lagos, Nigeria)
- e. WOMEN IN POLITICS FORUM - Reversing the Shrinking Gender Political Space in Nigeria
- f. Study on Building Partnership Between WADEMOS and Communications Regulators to Combat Disinformation for a Safe and Transparent Information Ecosystem for Democracy in West Africa. This is in response to the rise in Disinformation and Misinformation in the region
- g. A pilot project on West Africa Governance Risk Assessment – Identifying & Addressing Signs of Retrogression in Governance to inform advocacy campaign and early warnings about democracy and development in WA.

**NB – We are in the process of funding CSOs in the Transition Working Group with members from Mali, BF, Guinea and Niger**

### **1.5 DemoCreatives**

WADEMOS held an online session in July, bringing together about 20 creatives from the sub-region to deliberate on opportunities for DemoCreatives in promoting democratic values in the region.

An in-person convening is planned to take place in Senegal next year working in partnership with Africtiviste. This is part of the strategy to leverage on the talents and skills of creative actors in the region. A similar conversation will be held with social movements in the sub-region next year.

### **1.6 Term Limit Campaign**

We received funding from OSF Africa to amplify the Term Limit Campaign in West Africa. There is a Francophone advocacy group that has reached out to WADEMOS to facilitate the participation of an Anglophone group and as an

immediate activity **launch the Term Limit Campaign in Abuja Next Week ahead of the ECOWAS Heads of State Summit in Abuja on December 10.**

The meeting will also decide on other activities to embark on as part of the campaign to push the Regional bodies and governments to adopt term limit in the normative instruments and constitutions in West Africa. Currently, we have some countries like **Togo, Cote D Ivoire and Gambia** have term limits modified or eliminated or limit not yet met by any presidents. It's also important to target countries in political transitions who are drafting New Constitutions into the conversation. *[Some of you have been contacted to send delegation to Abuja. [We look forward to seeing you soon]*

### **1.7 Eye on West Africa and Other Publications**

27 knowledge pieces have been developed and disseminated within the year 2023. Some of our target audience includes HE. Bankole Adeoye of AU PAPS, Dr. Amb. Fatau Musah, and other ECOWAS officials, Network members, international partners, and other stakeholders.

We have a draft Alert that maps trends and observations in countries undergoing political transitions and will be published in the first quarter.

We would also publish the study on the transition processes in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea in the Next Quarter. We plan to release a Quarterly Regional Democracy Watch publication in the coming year to enhance our monitoring of the WA political environment. The Knowledge hub will reach out to you to provide regular updates from your individual countries

## **2.0 PROJECT STRUCTURES AND MANAGEMENT**

- ✓ Three (3) meetings of the Steering Committee were held for the 2023 operational year. The third meeting was held yesterday with 10 out of 11 members in attendance.
- ✓ **Network Membership** - There are currently 38 Network Members. About 27 additional organizations have applied to join the Network. The draft guidelines for evaluating applications was discussed at the SC and the PMU will carry forward the recommendations proposed
- ✓ **Steering Committee Members (SC)** - The membership of the SC has remained 11 with two co-chairs. [commend the co-chairs]



- ✓ **Advisory Council (AC)** – Redefine the TOR for the council and work towards its inauguration. Currently, there are four members who have agreed to serve on the council. There are others who are yet to be reached to have the full composition of the council which is between 5-7 members.
- ✓ Two functional working groups on elections and political transitions are operational. At the PMU, we have recruited the Bilingual Project Assistant and a number of interns and National service persons are at post.

### **3.0 SUSTAINABILITY**

- Tackling Presidential Term Extension and Violation of Human Rights and Freedoms in Senegal and West Africa funded by OSF Africa Office.
- Enhance civil society capacity to advance democratic transitions and counter malign authoritarian influence in the region funded by NED.

### **4.0 PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKING**

- ECOWAS invited WADEMOS to the Election Observation Mission in Liberia for the October election and the presidential run-off.
- The Network Coordinator represented CSOs in West Africa at the AU-PSC engagement with CSOs from the five regions in WA to share insights on the peace and security situation and political environment in the sub-region.
- The Project Director participated in a regional workshop on UCG held in the Gambia early this year.
- WADEMOS participated in the Civil Society Week organized by WACSI and partners including WADEMOS.
- WADEMOS participated in the West Africa Media Excellence and Conference (WAMECA) organized by MFWA.
- ECOWAS Parliament Regional Convening in Winneba, Accra.
- WADEMOS participated in a meeting with the delegation from the National Transition Council held at CDD Office in Accra.

## 5.0 LEARNING

### ❖ Positives:

- Withdrawal of Term Limit by Macky Sall in Senegal. Lessons must be drawn on how the resistance capacity of the people of Senegal especially young people and social movements in providing deterrence to Macky Sall.
- Successful election held in Liberia with the incumbent conceding defeat.
- **Promulgation of a constitution in Mali - although not the best, we consider constitutions as a living document which can be reformed and improved.**
- **Democracy remains the preferred form of governance according to the Afrobarometer Survey**

### ❖ Challenges and Threats:

#### ✓ Countries undergoing political Transitions

- Growing alliance among countries under UCG and signing of the mutual defense pact in Bamako by coup affected countries to strengthen military cooperation and solidarity.
- Transition process has stalled in Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger despite progress in Mali. These countries are gradually shifting the focus and priorities from transition to governance. The junta is hanging on and exploiting the negative messaging and rhetoric against democracy.
  - For Guinea and Burkina Faso, the priority is not on the transition. The TG is calling on ECOWAS to finance the budget for the transition. Surprisingly, the TG is investing heavily in infrastructure as a populist approach to hang on to power with support from the citizenry
  - Burkina Faso's TG is using the deteriorating security situation as pretext to hang on to power.
  - A transition timeline and framework are yet to be agreed upon between ECOWAS and the Transition Government in Niger
- Humanitarian Crisis in Niger allegedly due to ECOWAS Sanctions
- Decline in rejection of the military over time according to AB survey

✓ **Civic Space**

- Threats to HRD and the civic space and freedoms – in countries such as Senegal, Gambia, and in countries undergoing political transitions

✓ **Security**

- Withdrawal of MINUSMA and concerns around the declining resistant capacity of regional bodies to provide the necessary deterrence against UCG and security in the Sahel.
- Reimagining the role of CSOs and empowering social movements

✓ **Democracy and Election**


- How to secure democracy or build resilience for democracy in the next generational span (NEXT GEN) focusing on the role of young people.
- Election Dispute Mediation and the role of the courts especially as the courts are facing trust deficits [ The SP of Ghana yesterday held a press conference to express his disillusion and criticism of the courts in what he describes as “**a trend of regressive and dismissive judicial decisions in respect of cases involving the OSP with troubling consequences.**”
- **Threats to election observers** – We need to reflect on the protections and guarantees provided by the regional normative instruments and the constitution.

## CONCLUSION

### Rethinking Priority Areas

 **Elections**

- a. Senegal and Ghana (Invitation to countries under Political Transitions to observe the Ghana election)
- b. Election Dispute Mediation including the role of the courts
- c. Enhance learning and Knowledge Exchange to engender reforms

 **Political Transitions** – support the transition process including CSOs, constitutions and elections

- ✚ Term Limit Campaign and Assessment of the ECOWAS Protocol
- ✚ Human Rights Defenders
- ✚ Next Gen
- ✚ Strengthening national and regional level solidarity - Recapturing Democratic spaces and actors - targeting young people, social movements, creatives, institutions, etc.
- ✚ Democracy Scorecard (Risk Assessment) with ECOWAS to enhance early warning for Civil Society