

REPORT ON WADEMOS ANNUAL NETWORK MEMBERS CONVENING 2023

DATE: 29 – 30 NOVEMBER, 2023

DAY I

1.0 H.E. Amb. Bankole Adeoye Commissioner - Political Affairs, Peace and Security, AUC

- He expressed the readiness of the Union to work with the Network to find lasting solutions to the challenges faced on the continent; governance, security, or achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as well as Agenda 2063.
- He mentioned that our weekly newsletter, "Eye on West Africa," serves as rich updates and an early warning system for policy interventions at the African Union Commission.
- He expressed that the WADEMOS model stands as an intriguing concept, a framework they believe will serve as an inspiring example for other regions on the continent.
- He stressed that the AU has initiated an African Network of Think Tanks, focusing on peace and democracy. Launched in February this year, the network has been actively engaged in the nexus between peace, security, governance, and sustainable development. He added that it is necessary to expand and create an enabling environment in the inter-governmental diplomatic space for networks such as WADEMOS.
- He assured the Network of AU's continued support as the Network moves towards its 2024 plan of action.
- He hinted that in 2024, the Commission plans to revamp the implementation of the Accra Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Government. A multi-stakeholder approach will be necessary to build resistance against the onslaught of unconstitutional changes of government.
- The African Union has several normative frameworks, and shared values in strengthening democracy, and promoting constitutionalism and rule of law, and the only way it can be done is to partner with civil society.
- He again announced that the AUC has established a network called the Pan African Network of Civil Society for political affairs, peace, and security in their (PAPS) department. They have a knowledge platform that works with all regions through what is called the Inter-Regional Knowledge Exchange on Early Warning and Conflict Prevention.

- He sees a lot of commonality working with WADEMOS and assured that the Union will scale up their engagement with the Network and will be ready to ensure that the network can interface, and inspire the rest of the regions to be able to make Africa a better place.

1.1 Marcella Samba

- Civil society must be capacitated, organized, and positioned as pro-democracy actors promoting democratic principles for progress. According to Marcella, CSOs are currently ill-prepared and ill-equipped to confront the challenges of de-democratization or in essence defend democracy.
- Institute a peer review mechanism to check the excesses of our Network members.
- Engage in a rigorous democracy education to counter the rise of anti-democracy narratives.
- Have a strategy for effective partnership with ECOWAS and the African Union.
- Address the division within CSOs. She indicated that some CSOs have become enablers of authoritarianism. To tackle this, we must foster open dialogues and workshops among CSOs to promote unity and shared goals. Encourage a reaffirmation of democratic values within CSOs through joint initiatives and commitments.

2.0 Panel I: Threats to Democracy in West Africa: 2024 Outlook

- Enforce legal instruments and standards outlined in our national constitutions, and adherence to the frameworks established by regional bodies like ECOWAS and the AU.
- ECOWAS has historically condemned unconstitutional changes to democratic backsliding and unconstitutional changes through its Deterrence Factor, but over time, its effectiveness has waned. Instead, many countries have sought solidarity support from entities like WAGNER and other anti-democratic entities. According to him, it is imperative for an external or supranational deterrence mechanism to deal with the current issues.
- Harness the influence wielded by the burgeoning youth population and the new media to form a unified force (pressure group). By actively engaging the youth demographic – known for its dynamism, tech-savviness, and social consciousness – alongside the expansive reach and communicative prowess of the new media, a collective front can be formed to safeguard democratic values and institutions.
- Review the national constitutions and international frameworks, to ascertain their responsiveness to the evolving needs and aspirations of young people. Advocate for political party reforms to respond to the needs of the youth bulge, as many function akin to authoritarian regimes.
- Foster solidarity among CSOs, address unhealthy competition, and the disconnection between elitist CSOs and community-based organizations (CBOs).
- In dealing with the issue of sustainability and restricted funding, it was suggested that CSOs need to develop a long-term sustainability plan encompassing diverse funding strategies and foster strategic partnerships and alliances with the private sector and African philanthropists.
- Sustain the momentum of Social movements in pushing for democratic advancements.
- Minimize the emphasis on linguistic divisions like Francophones and Lusophones that separate us as West Africans.
- Pay attention to threats that stem from geopolitical developments, notably the emergence of right-wing movements in Europe, evident in India, and the US under Trump's administration, the growing popularity of leaders like Kagame in Rwanda, and similar trends in Turkey, and Brazil. Many of these leaders and their administrations beginning to serve as models for African leaders.

- Pay attention to the apparent irrelevance or weakened state of multilateral institutions. Institutions like the AU and UN have exhibited significant weaknesses in addressing threats to democracy. Many of these institutions have seen a decline in their moral authority.

2.1 Panel 2: Assessing the Effectiveness of Regional Normative Instruments – The Case of the 2001 ECOWAS Protocol on Dem. and Good Governance

- Development of Prof Prempeh’s ECOWAS Traffic Light and Police Patrol Concept as a model to operationalize and enforce compliance with the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.
- Publicize the ECOWAS supplementary protocol more on democracy and good governance so that citizens themselves can police their government behavior.
- In responding to the security situation in the Sahel, ECOWAS should assist states facing exceptional fragility issues. Failure to do this provides room for military intrusion in democratic governance. ECOWAS should assist in preserving these states.
- ECOWAS must move from the clubish attitude in addressing its legitimacy crisis. The Commission needs to transparently communicate its actions and efforts to citizens to citizens in order to restore trust.

DAY 2

3.0 Feedback from Paul's Presentation on WADEMOS' Year 1 Achievements:

- There was a call for WADEMOS to increase its efforts, although the organization had already achieved significant milestones within its first year of establishment.
- As part of next year's programming on elections, a proposal was made for WADEMOS to begin collaborations with political parties and early discussions on post-electoral reforms, especially focusing on countries that held elections in 2023.
- There was a proposal to extend the duration of the mentoring program for the Next-Gen fellows. It was also suggested that the fellowship program should not just be a one-time event.
- To preserve our investment in the NEXT-GEN fellows, it's important to integrate them into the WADEMOS program and familiarize them with the work of Network members. This exposure will allow them to put their learning into practice, and prevent any truncation of their growth and development.
- Members were urged to propose names or personalities for the recruitment or constitution of the WADEMOS Advisory Council.
- Regarding the administration of the demos-fund, a suggestion was made for the PMU to share reports, including financial updates, on the fund's progress to members.
- We need to prioritize countries undergoing political transitions and allocate more resources to support civil society advocacy and activism.
- It was proposed that we prioritize investments in capacity building, education on democracy, and regional normative frameworks so they remain relevant in the space.
- It was suggested that we increase vigilance regarding term limits in Senegal. A participant from Senegal hinted that with only two months to the elections, uncertainty remains as to who would be Macky Sall's next successor, despite throwing in the towel on his third term bid. Relying entirely on his assurances might be misleading.
- It was proposed that WADEMOS undertake a solidarity visit and an early pre-election assessment mission.
- It was emphasized that the idea of WADEMOS is not to become a CSO organization and compete with members but rather to function as a resource hub and service to amplify

their efforts. Its goal is to facilitate and drive collective action and solidarity. The Project Director asked for more support and deeper collaboration from members to enhance its performance.

3.1 Panel 3: Entry points for CSOs and WADEMOS in countering threats to democratic backsliding in West Africa

- Mr Asiedu indicated that the existence of WADEMOS has already created an entry into ECOWAS. He mentioned that due to the Network's early involvement with ECOWAS, the Commission has consistently supported and assisted the Network in its endeavors.
- According to him the knowledge production and early warnings shared from the PMU have always contributed to the Commission's reports and proposals to member states.

However, he mentioned that two ways are available for WADEMOS's further entry into the Commission:

1. The need to develop a democracy and governance scorecard to monitor and assess governance across member states. Agreement on initial indicators is essential to initiate this process. WADEMOS can present this to the Mediation and Security Council at least at the Ambassadorial level of ECOWAS as a contribution from CSOs. He hinted that discussion recommendations at this level find their way to the Ministerial Council and subsequently to the HOD level.
2. WADEMOS should position itself to leverage the upcoming establishment of the ECOWAS' ECOSOC.

Cheikh Fall made some useful recommendations:

3. Redefine the role of CSOs. Previously, our focus centered on institutions like ECOWAS, and state bodies. However, considering the present trend of democratic decline, our efforts should lean toward a citizen-centered approach. He emphasized that the new mission of CSOs should prioritize the people over institutions.
4. Integrate cyber approaches into our work. The internet serves as a powerful tool to enhance public understanding of democracy. Given our connected population online,

utilizing the internet becomes important in educating and advancing democratic values among people.

5. There's a need to foster patriotism and citizenship, especially among the youth, promoting their active engagement and commitment to their respective countries. This must be done through cyber citizenship to avoid manipulation and anti-democracy narratives championed on social media.
6. We should explore innovative funding avenues. We must establish a new African fund supported by African philanthropists and millionaires. Engage the AfDB to facilitate this to ensure the sustainability of our projects.
7. CSOs need to nurture and build the capacity of media outlets to counter anti-democracy narratives and propaganda. In essence, we should use the media and technology to consolidate and strengthen democracy.
8. Create more mentorship programs to empower young women and facilitate their engagement in decision-making processes. Create avenues where young individuals can apply their knowledge, interact, and collectively enhance their understanding of democracy and governance. Drawing inspiration from initiatives like Young Women in Politics Forum—a campaign school that fosters women and youth's participation from grassroots to national levels—offers a notable example, Madam Ebere said. According to her, Nigeria's youngest MP was nurtured through this campaign school, highlighting its effectiveness in cultivating emerging leaders.
9. Harness the power of new media to influence decision-making as it was done with ENDSARS and FixTheCountry.
10. Establish and enforce strong response mechanisms tailored to combat democratic backsliding. Developing transparent, accountable systems that actively address signs of backsliding is important to foster trust in governance.
11. There is the need to build positive anger agencies among the people so they will ensure that the elected leaders deliver their mandate in a way that enhances the aspirations of the people.
12. CSOs should establish a resilient network driven by data, amplifying their voice on critical issues.

Discussions – ALL

- We should reintegrate traditional CSO models like the Medical Association and trade unions, which still exist but have become less involved. This reengagement should be achieved through solidarity efforts to revive their voices and unique contributions, aligning them with the projects we are pursuing for mutual benefit.
- We have segmented a number of civil society, especially the youth-based ones. There is considerable value in building cross-generational coalitions. The potential for collaboration across generations is huge.
- We need to harness the potential of the creative sector. We must leverage the creative resources of the creative industry to push democratic advancements.
- We should strategically advocate for increased decentralization, beginning at the grassroots or local level. Localizing our democracies will ensure a lot more collective action at that level.
- There was a suggestion to harness the momentum of social movements since CSOs have typically exhibited a more diplomatic and slow approach to addressing issues.
- CSOs must establish self-regulation mechanisms to ensure accountability.
- Promote mutual support for ourselves and cease unhealthy competition that undermines each other.

Prof. Gyimah made some useful recommendations that should feed into our planning for 2024:

- WADEMOS should prioritize initiatives that cultivate and safeguard an environment conducive to effective CSO operation. This will involve a much more focus on mentoring, peer learning, and skill-building in advocacy for CSOs.
- Identify essential technical capacities necessary for CSO effectiveness and navigating the often hyper-partisan political landscapes in our societies.
- Identify the core norms and institutions of democracy around which we seek to rally solidarity. Identifying these core elements is essential, as they form the foundation without which we cannot operate effectively.