



**ANNUAL REPORT – 2023
(ABRIDGED VERSION)**

WADEMOS
West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network

This report was produced by the Secretariat of the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS). WADEMOS is a non-partisan, independent civil society-led transnational democracy solidarity network. The WADEMOS Network consists of over 30 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) located in 15 countries in West Africa.

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WADEMOS Team

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AU	African Union
AC	Advisory Council
AU-ECOSOCC	African Union- Economic, Social and Cultural Council
AU-PSC	African Union-Peace and Security Council
CDD-Ghana	Ghana Center for Democratic Development
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPF	Conflict Prevention Framework
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DEMOS-Fund	Democracy Opportunity Support Fund
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMB	Election Management Body
EWA	Eye on West Africa
F24	Platform des Forces Vives de la Nation
HRDs	Human Rights Defenders
MFWA	Media Foundation for West Africa
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NETT4Peace	African Union Network of Think Thanks for Peace
NGI	Next Generation Initiative
OSF	Open Society Foundation
PMU	Project Management Unit
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
SC	Steering Committee
TLP	Tournons La Page
UCG	Unconstitutional Changes of Government
UN	United Nations
WA	West Africa
WADEMOS	West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network
WACSI	West Africa Civil Society Initiative
WAMECA	West Africa Media Excellence Conference and Awards

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2022, the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) officially launched the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) in Accra. Conceived as a regional democracy defense network with membership drawn from national and transnational civil society organizations in West Africa, WADEMOS seeks to build solidarity and mobilize collective action among its members and civil society generally, as well as engage and work constructively with regional intergovernmental actors, to counter threats to democracy and constitutionalism in the ECOWAS region.

At the inaugural meeting of the Network, members adopted the network by-laws and approved CDD-Ghana's role as convener, secretariat, and project management unit of the Network. Members also agreed on a set of strategic priorities for the Network for the next two years, ending December 31, 2024. This annual report presents the status of implementation of the WADEMOS Project for the year 2023, which was the Network's first full year of operation.

The report begins with a background on the formation of the Network and outlines the performance of the WADEMOS Project over the relevant period as measured against the agreed project indicators and objectives. The report highlights the progress and milestones achieved during the period under review and notes the institutional and programmatic challenges encountered and lessons learned from the experience.

The report also details adverse regional trends and developments such as the shifting or fluid geopolitical dynamics in the West Africa (WA) region, the growing crisis of popular democracy resulting from citizens' disillusionment with the weak "supply of democracy," the re-emergence of coups d'états, and the surge in disinformation and misinformation campaigns in the region.

The Network chalked some significant outcomes in 2023, including: Increased name recognition of WADEMOS and growing unsolicited request to be members of the Network; Recognition, acceptance, and endorsement of WADEMOS by leadership of the ECOWAS Commission and AU, and invitations to participate in dialogues, meetings, and other activities of the ECOWAS; Organization of regional convenings bringing together civil society and ECOWAS to deliberate on democracy trends in the sub-region and explore partnerships for solutions; Embarking on a campaign to institutionalize term limits and expedite revision of the ECOWAS Protocols; Commissioning expert country study reports on countries undergoing political transitions; Implementing the Next Generation Initiative to groom the next crop of leaders in West Africa; Operationalizing DEMOS-Fund; Publishing about 33 press releases / statements to amplify CSO voice and advocacy on sub-regional matters; Featuring in over 115 media interviews, engagements and articles on WADEMOS activities and witnessing significant growth of the Network on digital platforms.

During the third year of the project, WADEMOS will seek to consolidate the gains and progress made during the formative years of implementation.

1.0 INTRODUCTION: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

The West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) was established in response to emerging signs and evidence of democratic backsliding in West Africa.

Following the reversals from the third wave of democratization, civil society organizations started the conversation on how to build bridges of solidarity to embark on collective actions and responses to the decline of democracy in West Africa. In response to these challenges and in an effort to enhance resilience to counter the setback, over 30 civil society organizations from all 15 countries in West Africa and representatives from academia, ECOWAS, and other regional bodies converged in Accra to deliberate on and interrogate the drivers of democracy backsliding in West Africa. This led to the formation of WADEMOS, which was launched on the UN International Day for Democracy, September 15, as a regional CSO-led transnational collaborative platform against the wave of democracy backsliding in West Africa.

Following successful deliberations and consultations, members of the Network proposed five priority areas and programs covering human rights, civic space, political transitions, protection of Human Rights Defenders, and support for regional interventions on peace and security. With funding from Sida, WADEMOS in its first year of operation developed the organizational and foundational structures of the Network, in partnership with members, to enhance sustainability and ownership. WADEMOS dedicated the second (2023) and third years (2024) to deploying its strategic priorities. The Network is governed by a by-law and the project Steering Committee.

This report presents the performance of the Network in the second year of implementation based on the Result Framework approved by Sida and the emerging political environment in West Africa.

2.0 PROGRESS AND IMPLEMENTATION STATUS

Being the first full year of the Network's existence, numerous activities were undertaken in realization of the work plan and organizational objectives. This chapter provides an update on activities implemented during the reporting period (January – December 2023). The chapter is structured around the five interconnected objectives and complementary interventions of the project.

Objective One: Mobilize and strengthen cooperation among diverse pro-democracy civil society organizations and other civic actors in West Africa.

The key performance indicators under this objective are: to increase the Network membership, operationalize the DEMOS-Fund, ensure members' compliance with membership by-laws, set-up a functional Advisory Council and Steering Committee (SC), and above all ensure the active participation of members in the Network's activities through sustained collective action in defense and promotion of democracy in West Africa.

In 2023, WADEMOS held three Steering Committee meetings and also increased the number of members of the Steering Committee from 8 to 11 to ensure gender and language representation are fairly balanced. In relation to the Advisory Council, WADEMOS held consultations and meetings with very prominent and distinguished personalities in the region and beyond whose influence and recognition could be leveraged to intervene and support crisis mediation in West Africa. WADEMOS will deepen these consultations and advance the process towards the inauguration of the Council.



Figure 1: Group picture of participants at the WADEMOS 2nd Annual Members Conference in Accra, Ghana, November 2023

The Network members constitute the General Assembly of the organization. As a body with the highest oversight in determining the priorities of the Network, members are convened annually to deliberate on the performance of the Network and the state of democracy in West Africa. WADEMOS held the second Annual CSOs Convening in Accra, Ghana, on the theme “Amplifying CSO Response to Democratic Recession in West Africa”¹ from November 29–30, 2023. The guest speakers at the event were H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner, AU Political Affairs, Peace, and Security, and Mr. William Asiedu, Head of Democracy and Governance, ECOWAS. Currently, the WADEMOS Network is composed of about 38 organizations from different ECOWAS member states. Over 20 organizations have applied and are being considered to join the network.

INITIATIVES

Elections

WADEMOS in 2023 embarked on pre-election solidarity and assessment missions to Nigeria², Sierra Leone³, and Liberia⁴ during the presidential and legislative elections. The mission, comprising CSOs and election experts within the Network, promoted solidarity as the delegation leveraged individual and collective support to share experiences and insights during engagements with EMBs, independent constitutional bodies, civil society, the media, and development partners. Topics discussed largely focused on building trust in elections, enhancing peace and security during elections, countering disinformation and misinformation, and inclusive electoral processes, among others. The WADEMOS pre-election and election reports are available on the website⁵ of the Network.

Political Transitions Initiative

WADEMOS also commenced the Political Transitions Initiative. This initiative is to extend solidarity and coordinate efforts at regional level in support of the transition processes ongoing in West Africa, prioritize key issues, and implement national-level advocacy strategies with grant from WADEMOS’ flagship initiative, DEMOS-Fund. At the regional level, WADEMOS held two convenings in Abidjan, Cote D’Ivoire and Conakry, Guinea, to assemble experts and stakeholders, including ECOWAS, to deliberate on regional strategies and mechanisms aimed at contributing to the restoration of constitutional order in coup-affected countries. The meetings concluded with an outcome statement and communique and a plan of action for CSOs engagement in political transitions.

Democracy Support Fund

WADEMOS launched the Democracy Opportunity Support Fund (DEMOS-Fund)⁶ on June 1, 2023, along with guidelines. The Fund is aimed at fostering collective, national, and regional actions and responses to advance the five (5) pillars of the network by member organizations and partners. The Fund, under the reporting period, supported the West Africa Civil Society Week organized by our regional partner and member, WACSI, in Lagos, Nigeria; the West Africa Media Excellence Conference and Awards (WAMECA) organized by MFWA; a convening on Combating Disinformation for a Safe and Transparent Information Ecosystem for Democracy in West Africa; and Protection for Human Rights Defenders; others include a convening on Reversing the Shrinking Gender Political Space in Nigeria and the Democracy Project evaluating 30 years of democracy in Ghana. Additionally, DEMOS-Fund extended support to CSO advocacy and activism in support of the return to civilian rule in transition countries.

¹ Africa’s democracy is backsliding because leaders have failed to deliver’ | Ghana News Agency (gna.org.gh) <https://gna.org.gh/2023/11/africas-democracy-is-backsliding-because-leaders-have-failed-to-deliver/>

² WADEMOS Report on the 2023 Nigerian Elections - WADEMOS (wademosnetwork.org)

³ West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network commends Sierra Leone’s elections readiness - AYV Media Empire Sierra Leone, London, Ghana and Africa News Channel (ayvnews.com)

⁴ Report: WADEMOS Pre-Election Solidarity Mission to Liberia Ahead of the October 10 General Elections - WADEMOS (wademosnetwork.org)

⁵ <https://wademosnetwork.org/publications/>

⁶ DOSF - WADEMOS (wademosnetwork.org)

Objective Two: Produce knowledge to support evidence-driven pro-democracy advocacy and activism in the region.

The Knowledge Hub is a data support and analysis unit of the West Africa Democracy Solidarity (WADEMOS) Network that tracks developments in the democracy and governance space across the West African region. The role of the unit has been to produce knowledge to support evidence-driven pro-democracy advocacy and activism in the region.

The Eye on West Africa (EWA)⁷ serves as a flagship evidence production of WADEMOS, offering a weekly news update concerning governance and democratic developments across ECOWAS countries. In comparison to the previous year's production and dissemination of nine EWA knowledge pieces, the current reporting period has witnessed a significant increase, with 30 knowledge pieces produced and disseminated.

To enhance WADEMOS' interventions in countries under UCGs, the Secretariat initiated a comprehensive study aimed at evaluating the progress of ongoing political transitions in coup-affected states across West Africa. The studies examined the regional mediation systems and the general state of transitional governance, with particular attention to human rights, inclusion, and adherence to ECOWAS-coordinated timelines and frameworks in each country, including the patterns and gaps that might derail the return to civilian rule.

Twitter Spaces and webinars are two of the avenues used for advocacy on digital media. In 2023, we held three X spaces (Twitter) spaces focused on the Nigerian, Sierra Leonean, and Liberian elections. The essence of the discussions was to engage the public on thematic issues that had dominated discussions in the lead-up to the elections.



Figure 2: A report on Nigeria's 2023 elections

We held a high-level webinar with representatives from the National Democratic Institute, regional bodies, and the media, among others. The purpose was to distribute our full report on the Nigerian elections, the first of three national elections in 2023. There were proposals on how to improve the electoral processes in Nigeria and lessons that could be learnt by other countries in the sub-region.

One of the communications products to keep network members informed and engaged is the WADEMOS Quarterly Newsletter⁸. It highlights the milestones of the Network every quarter and also has columns for the publication of news from members.

⁷ Eye On West Africa (January 21 - January 27) (ENG) - WADEMOS (wademosnetwork.org)

⁸ WADEMOS Bulletin: 2023 Second Quarter Newsletter - WADEMOS (wademosnetwork.org)

We recorded over 115 media interviews, engagements, and articles about our activities and have witnessed significant growth on our social media platforms. The Network published 33 press releases. These include releases on election missions, releases after programs like conferences and events, and releases to announce our initiatives.

List of Press Releases and Statements (can be accessed at our website)

Objective Three: Promote awareness and compliance with the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance



FIGURE 3: CSO Convening on term limits in Abuja, Nigeria

Under this objective, WADEMOS, in partnership with TLP of Togo, and civil society across West Africa, launched a regional campaign for the review of the ECOWAS protocol including the standardization of term limit in West Africa. In addition, WADEMOS collaborated with ECOWAS and AU for the Annual Network Convening in Accra and the Regional Conference on Democracy Decline in West Africa. Specifically, WADEMOS embarked on a campaign against presidential term extension and the violation of human rights and freedom in Senegal and West Africa. The initiative was supported by the Open Society Foundations Regional Office. The overall objective of the project is to sustain a civic campaign against presidential term elongations and human rights abuse in West Africa and Senegal and the review of the ECOWAS supplementary protocol on Democracy and Good Governance

Objective Four: Mobilize and harness creative talents and creative resources to promote democratic norms and values within the region.

DemoCreatives is an initiative of the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS), which seeks to harness and mobilize the unique talents and influence of creatives—musicians, poets, actors, artists, comedians/satirists, cartoonists, social media influencers, etc.—and creative resources to promote and advocate for democratic principles and good governance practices within the sub-region. This intervention is part of a larger framework to overcome the problem of democratic backsliding.

WADEMOS held an online session in July, bringing together about 20 creatives from across the sub-region. The inception meeting was used to discuss the concept and strategy to integrate creatives as part of the mobilization to promote and defend democracy in West Africa. WADEMOS intends to engage creatives through a series of collaborative campaigns and public forums, among others, to speak up and demand pro-democracy values, practices, and attitudes from the government and citizens.

Objective Five: Next-Gen Initiative; Youth mentorship program to support the propagation of democratic values among young West Africans

Generally referred to as Next Gen, WADEMOS introduced the Next Generation Initiative (NGI) to empower young people as the current and next generation of democracy defenders, activists, and leaders to drive social change and innovation in West Africa.



FIGURE 4: Next Generation Initiative (NGI) to empower young

The Next Gen online application was officially launched in the first week of August. 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 six (6) males, nine (9) females, and one (1) person with a disability, representing a diverse group from 13 countries. The selected candidates hail from West African countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Niger, Togo, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Benin, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Guinea-Bissau.

3.0 COLLABORATION/ PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

WADEMOS collaborated with the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) to organize the 2022 Annual West Africa Media Excellence Conference and Awards (WAMECA), held in Accra. WAMECA is an initiative of the Media Foundation for West Africa to promote media excellence in the sub-region.

WADEMOS received funding from OSF for an 18-month (2023-2024) project to lead a regional campaign to address “Presidential Term Extension and Violation of Human Rights and Freedom in Senegal and West Africa.” The project also supported Senegal-based pro-democracy actors through the Platform des Forces Vives de la Nation (F24) with concurrent grants from OSF.

The Project Management Unit (PMU), in collaboration with the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), successfully secured a two-year grant from the National Endowment Fund, spanning from October 1, 2023, to November 2024. This grant aims to bolster civil society’s capacity to advance democratic transitions and counter malign authoritarian influence across the West and Central African regions.

WADEMOS participated in a two-day workshop to formalize the AU-ECOSOCC National Chapter in Ghana⁹ from August 9–10, 2023, to enhance civil society engagement and collaboration with the AU and its organs. Attendants at the event included an array of pro-democracy civil society organizations operating at all levels in the country. The Ghana national chapter of the AU ECOSOCC was formally revived, with WADEMOS serving as a foundation member of the platform.

From November 28-29 2023, WADEMOS participated in the launch of the most recent version of the Open Society Foundations’ Civil Society Guide to Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa, which took place in Johannesburg, South Africa. Attendees included representatives of all six regional economic communities in Africa, as well as a contingent of well-known academics and representatives from civil society organizations.

WADEMOS participated in an AU-PSC consultative meeting with representatives of CSOs from the five (5) regions in Africa, namely, Central Africa, North Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa, held on Thursday, July 6, 2023, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. WADEMOS delivered a statement on behalf of CSOs in West Africa.

Led by Prof. Prempeh, the Project Director, the Network presented the “WADEMOS model” to the African Union Network of Think Tanks for Peace on February 6, 2023. #NETT4Peace aims to strengthen partnerships between the AU and governance and peace-building institutions, practitioners, and experts.

⁹ ECOSOCC formalises Ghana National Chapter | African Union ECOSOCC (au.int)

4.0 CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

During the first two years of the Network, several initiatives have been implemented, notably election advocacy support, protection of HRDs, advocacy for opening up and protection of the civic space and freedoms, and support for ongoing political transitions in West Africa. While WADEMOS has successfully intervened in elections and is seeking to consolidate the gains in 2024, the interventions around civic space and HRDs, as well as the political transitions in countries under UCGs will require more work and support in the coming year.

Another observation is the growing decline in ECOWAS legitimacy and resistance to counter-democratic setbacks and challenges in the region. This is partly due to the rise in disinformation and misinformation campaigns as reported by the African Center for Strategic Studies¹⁰ and the lack of coherence in responding to emergency situations within the current normative instruments—the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the Conflict Prevention Framework (CPF). The call for the review of these instruments will be sustained.

Also, at various convening sessions, the absence of effective early warning and regional response mechanisms to monitor and counter democracy backsliding by ECOWAS was clearly noted. Additionally, ECOWAS is suffering low approval ratings from citizens. This is also partially due to concerns around the silence of ECOWAS and sometimes the delayed response when governments violate the rights of citizens and abuse constitutions to extend term limits.

Moreover, the resolution at the last ECOWAS extraordinary summit to lift the economic and social sanctions against the four countries, particularly Niger, which was undergoing a severe humanitarian crisis, offers inspiration for maintaining the integration of the ECOWAS community, despite the challenges.

The emergence and proliferation of new anti-democratic governance and development models in transition countries, coupled with misinformation, have led to reduced emphasis on the rule of law and accountability especially in countries undergoing transitions.

Finally, adherence to political transitions and respect for the transition charters governing the return to democratic rule have been hampered in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea.

¹⁰ Mapping a Surge of Disinformation in Africa – Africa Center for Strategic Studies / (<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mapping-a-surge-of-disinformation-in-africa/>)

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

The underlying assumptions and conditions prevalent for driving the democratic transformation process still remain valid, notwithstanding the challenges. Although we see a surge in coups, democracy continues to enjoy popular support and is the preferred form of government among citizens across the region, despite citizens' disillusionment with the supply and dividends of democracy. We continue to enjoy relative stability in the region, with transition agreements in place to restore countries under UCGs to civilian regimes despite the challenges.

At the regional level, WADEMOS has provided the architecture to galvanize civil society and activists to engage with regional and national governments, while ECOWAS has shown determination to review and enhance the resilience of the regional normative instruments.

The role of civil society through a transnational solidarity network like WADEMOS is even more demanding in the prevailing complex environment. WADEMOS has made considerable gains in mobilizing civic actors to respond to new forms of hurdles and threats in the region. The current architecture for WADEMOS provides inspiration for coordinating civil society responses and enhancing resilience.

In the final year, WADEMOS will prioritize the following:

- Draw experiences from our work on elections in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Senegal, and in partnership with ECOWAS and other election stakeholders' campaigns, monitor national and regional responses around electoral reforms in the sub-region.
- Additionally, we intend to go beyond the traditional civil society actors to support activists, social movements, and defenders who are deploying various tools and innovations to mobilize and defend democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and push back autocracy in the sub-region. In this regard, we will expand on our partnership with DemoCreatives and the first cohort of Next Generation young activists and democracy defenders.
- Sustain our work in transition countries and the Sahel and strengthen the impact of the DEMOS-Fund to respond to the complex and challenging political environment in West Africa. Priority will be given to the protection of HRDs, civic space and freedoms, governance reforms, including transition initiatives, countering disinformation and misinformation, and inclusion and participation.
- Prioritize our campaign for the revision of the ECOWAS protocol, including regional mobilization for the standardization of term limits. Our regional work will also involve promoting awareness and education on the key normative instruments.

- Harness the potential of CSOs and other actors for civic mobilization and collective action.
- Leverage the demand for membership to strengthen partnerships with think tanks, academia, social movements/activists, women/youth-led organizations, and creatives as regular, associate, or honorary members.
- Support learning and capacity building as well as knowledge exchange to promote the resilience of civil society, build solidarity, and consolidate the gains and impact. Most importantly, we will support joint civil society collective actions and collaborations, as well as campaigns at the national and regional level that align with the strategic priorities of the network.
- Prioritize the composition of the Advisory Council and eminent personalities who provide moderating voices and influence in the region.
- Finally, WADEMOS will begin to interrogate the increasing role of the military in politics and revisit the conversation around improving civil-military relations in Africa. We will also strengthen our observatory and monitoring of the civic space and political environment for early detection of human rights violations and abuse, especially in Burkina Faso and the Sahel, as well as countries facing fragilities and vulnerabilities, particularly countries, both new and old, with historical context for manipulating constitutions, term limits, and elections, which have been the pretext for violations and abuse of fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens.

PICTURES FROM OUR COLLABORATIONS



FIGURE 5:
CSO convening on
Transition Countries'
Initiative in Guinea

FFIGURE 6:
WADEMOS
Pre-election
delegation to
Nigeria in a
group picture
with the
Nigeria EC
Chairperson





FIGURE 7:
Group picture after
a panel discussion
at the francophone
Conference



FIGURE 8:
Representatives
of the Guinean junta
at the CSO
Convening in
Conakry



FIGURE 9:
WADEMOS
election day
mission to
Sierra Leone



FIGURE 10:

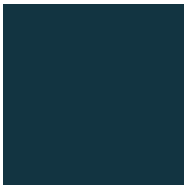


FIGURE 11:
Group picture after
a panel session
at the francophone
conference in
Abidjan,
Cote d'Ivoire

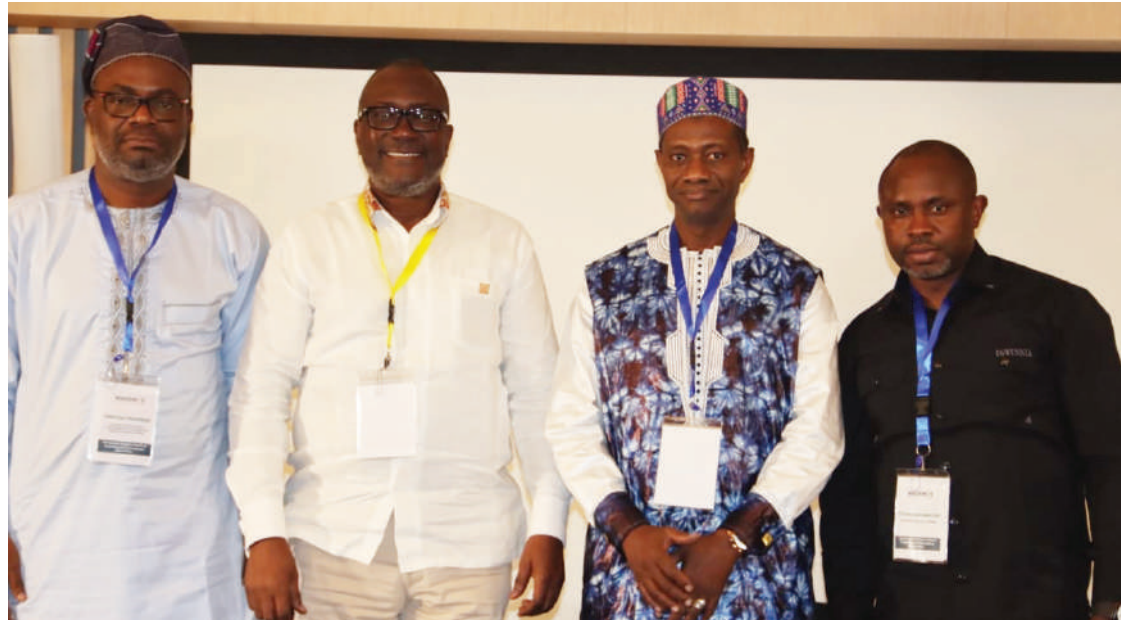


FIGURE 12:
Africivistes
Co-founder, Cheikh
Fall, contributing to
the discussion





FIGURE 13: Representatives of the Guinea Junta at the CSO convening in Guinea



