



COMMUNIQUÉ

REGIONAL PARTNERS MEETING

“Promoting the Ratification and Domestication of International Legal and Policy Frameworks to Guarantee Rights-Based, Pro-Poor, Governance in West Africa”
Abuja, Nigeria from Tuesday 17 to Wednesday 18 March, 2015

PREAMBLE

A two-day Regional Partners Meeting which focused on ‘Promoting the Ratification and Domestication of International Legal and Policy Frameworks to Guarantee Rights-based, Pro-poor, Governance in West Africa’ was organised by the West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSO) with the support of Oxfam, and held at the Nicon Luxury Hotel in Abuja, Nigeria on Tuesday, March 17 and Wednesday, March 18, 2015

The meeting, which also focused on Oxfam’s Regional Good Governance Programme for West Africa (RGGP), was well-attended by over 50 delegates and participants drawn from civil society, the academia, legislature, government officials and the media.

The forum had participants from 11 West African countries, international donors and partners including Oxfam, Ford Foundation, Commonwealth Foundation, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), Open Society Justice Initiative, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and representatives from ECOWAS. Several presentations were made by experts, while the welcome address was read by the Acting General Secretary of WACSO, Auwal Musa (Rafsanjani).

There was also group work and exhaustive deliberations on topical issues including the ECOWAS Vision 2020; good governance; security, and health, with plenary sessions and panel discussions. A study conducted by WACSO on Strengthening Governance based on human rights and poverty reduction through the ratification and domestication of international instruments, and a project website were also unveiled at the Abuja meeting.

After exhaustive deliberations and discussions over the two days of the WACSO regional meeting, various key observations and recommendations were made by the participants, with focus on each of the four sub-themes (ECOWAS Vision 2020, Good Governance, Security, and Health).

Participants made the following observations:

* The West Africa region has been faced with persistent developmental challenges such as inequality and violence;

- * WACSOF, with support from Oxfam, has been implementing a project to assess the status of ratified ECOWAS protocols, and other international instruments, by member states, and ensure their effective implementation to maximally benefit the citizens;
- * Generally, African states are faced with deficiency as to the ratification, domestication and implementation of international legal instruments;
- * Lack of readiness by ECOWAS member state to fully comply with Vision 2020 agenda has posed a threat to realistic realisation of the agenda within the slated period;
- * Persistent conflicts, autocratic rule, sit-tight governments, undemocratic process towards tenure elongation across the region have threatened compliance by member states to various treaties and conventions, which guarantee citizens' rights, equality and development;
- * Over-concentration of ECOWAS intervention largely in conflict resolution rather than conflict prevention and peace-building in the region;
- * Poor political will by leaders across member states for effective implementation of the ratified ECOWAS treaties and conventions;
- * Neglect by ECOWAS towards achieving regional integration, for conflict prevention and management has paved ways for poor governance in the region.
- * Present achievements disclosed by the ECOWAS Commission do not articulate its readiness towards achieving the proposed Vision 2020;
- * There is lack of collaboration between ECOWAS Commission and Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) towards ensuring effective domestication and implementation of treaties and conventions;
- * There is unequal access to land, resources and power for women. This has discouraged women political leadership and altered efforts at achieving citizenry equality and regional integration.
- * There is deep-rooted ethnic divide as the main issue rather than the election, which serves as a trigger to instability; and political parties are largely to blame for playing up the ethnic card during elections;
- * National institutions have not been put in place to address lapses in the electoral process in the region; and there is need for permanence of electoral institutions e.g. INEC in Nigeria, beyond the periodic election period;
- * There is a need for peace and stability in the region; and that the democratic process is at learning stage; whether in stable countries like Cape Verde or in fragile democracies like Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire;

- * The organisation of election can also cause instability among the population if elections are not well-managed, leading to refugees; and there is a need to focus on issues of peace and security and the offshoots of war and armed conflict should be taken into consideration;
- * Corruption is also a tool to subvert democracy, which can also trigger regional insecurity and criminal activities across borders; and that social inequality is based on discrimination;
- * The issue of election funding, which is largely borne by international donors, should be examined in the long term;
- * The issue of conflict arising from electoral processes is already known through the ECOWAS-WANEP early-warning system, although there is little response to this development;
- * There is a huge gap in terms of capacity and mediation on election and insecurity issues, while every stakeholder has a role to play, from government to civil society; and that there is a need for a paradigm shift and institutionalisation to enable civil society properly engage government;
- * Civil society need to be more proactive especially in terms of funds and resource mobilisation for national activities especially from national platforms that are skilled in chosen thematic issues;
- * There is basic knowledge of Ebola Virus Disease and that information dissemination on Ebola response from macro to micro levels will allow all voices to be heard;
- * Health systems are not just working, in the case of HIV before and now Ebola; that poor sanitation and poor orientation help fan the virus especially among the rural populace; and that transport systems for affected persons are quite challenging and in most cases non-existent;
- * Lack of preparation and inefficient systems were major challenges in Ebola and cholera response; that the dead can be buried and honoured without adverse effects on the living;
- * Access to information and stigmatisation of affected victims are issues, and that Ebola has affected women more as care-givers and also children.

Participants also made the following recommendations

1. Prompt and effective implementation of the ECOWAS protocols to concretize respect for citizen's rights, foster human dignity and true democracy.

2. Creation of dynamism with ECOWAS to institute and document a periodical filing/report of the level of implementation of ratified treaties and convention by member states.
3. Strengthening ECOWAS-WACSOF collaboration towards ensuring workable domestication and implementation of ratified treaties and protocols.
4. Effective mobilization of resources by WACSOF to support, advocate and concretize the integration agenda of ECOWAS; and continuous WACSOF-Oxfam collaboration to promote sustainable advocacy for citizenry development.
5. Realistic assessment and monitoring of the ECOWAS Vision 2020, taking cognisance of the current level of compliance by member states and practical measures to realise the Vision agenda.
6. Proactive efforts by ECOWAS to institute enabling mechanism for conflict prevention and peace-building across the region.
7. Increased transparency and accountability by regional leaders and adequate political-will towards implementing the ratified ECOWAS protocols.
8. Bottom-up approach to regional development through prioritised effort towards grassroots empowerment.
9. Enforcing sanctions and punishment by ECOWAS court to re-install justice and dignity in the regional democratic system, and strengthen ECOWAS commission.
10. Conducting assessment to strengthen the present instituted mechanism by ECOWAS Commission to concretise the implementation of the ECOWAS protocols and conventions.
11. Proper synergy between ECOWAS and Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA), with formulation of well-defined frameworks for achieving regional integration; and comprehensive institutional reform by ECOWAS to achieve bottom-up approach to regional development.
12. Enhanced synergy between ECOWAS Commission and WACSOF through creation of Annual Forum to articulate, deliberate and review level of implementation of various treaties and protocols.
13. Equal access to land, resources and power for women; adequate implementation of Affirmative Action by member states to promote gender inclusion; encouraged women political leadership; and elimination of violence against women through enforcement of existing laws.
14. Institutions which focus on conflict resolution and international instruments should be embraced and employed, while election observation should be redefined with proper use of allocated funds;

15. Donor partners should consider long-term processes rather than short ad hoc interventions; election funding should be examined in the long term; and maximum inclusion of other actors like women and youths in the engagement process;
16. ECOWAS should be more involved in the democratic processes of member-countries; fire-brigade approach should be eschewed, and the political situation in the region should be carefully assessed by electoral bodies, civil society organisations and the ECOWAS Commission in a bid to ensure regional stability;
17. Permanent electoral commissions like the one in Ghana should be established, instead of the current approach where electoral commissions are only mobilised during election periods; and electoral bodies should be strong and independent;
18. ECOWAS should take into consideration the position of WACSOF at the regional level; while national platforms should become autonomous in terms of funds mobilisation;
19. Civil society groups should enlighten the populace and citizenry on voting patterns, processes and preferences, while the issues of ethnicity and religious sentiments should be minimised using an institutional approach;
20. ECOWAS Commission should fund the mechanism to engage member-states on various instruments at regional and national levels; while there should be engagement on relevant charters so that governments of member-countries who signed onto those charters also domesticate and implement them at national and local levels;

Closing Remarks

In his closing remarks, Rafsanjani disclosed that this is the first time WACSOF is bringing groups together for this venture, adding that the Commonwealth Foundation has agreed to build capacity for all groups and the Executive committee for effective work. Rafsanjani called on other partners to join WACSOF on West Africa projects that will lift the region. All national platform members and donor agencies were urged to put in their best to enhance advocacy and awareness on relevant issues in the region.

Participants commended WACSOF and Oxfam for the meeting and the progress made in addressing issues of common interest for the development of the West African region.



Auwal Musa (Rafsanjani)

Acting General Secretary